

Model Behaviour

*Every organisation needs people who you can look up to and learn from. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** examines why role models in the workplace are making a difference*

Media-friendly entrepreneurs or Silicon Valley tech gurus typically spring to mind when discussing role models in business, yet it's often an entirely different breed who really inspire or rouse ambition in others.

The best role models are emblematic of what's good about an organisation and show that with the right skills and values, people from all backgrounds can rise to success. **Michelle Scrimgeour**, who is currently Chief Risk Officer at M&G Investments, recalls how, in the early stages of her career, the asset management company she worked for had a number of high-profile, successful women – including the

CEO. "It was important at that point in my career to see that," she says.

"If you're in a minority, at all levels in the firm, it's good for there to be role models... If you're a woman and you're looking across an organisation and you just don't see women at the senior or middle tier and rising ranks, I think it's probably quite soul destroying."

Phillippa Crookes, Relationship Manager at Criticaleye, agrees: "Role models are incredibly important in helping you define who you want to be in business, and inspiring you to achieve those goals throughout your career. For me, seeing successful

women in senior leadership roles is vital in motivating career ambitions."

That said, the ability to raise aspirations goes beyond ethnicity and gender. **Liz Bingham** OBE, Managing Partner of Talent for UK & Ireland at professional services firm EY, explains how the first Partner to manage her nurtured both her confidence and ambition.

"Technically, he was very able, had great client relationships and was very effective at leading and inspiring teams. In particular, he was a role model for me because he came from a very ordinary working class background, as had I," **Liz** says. ▶

“That is quite unusual in professional services – he’d left school at 16, whereas I left school at 18. That meant neither of us went to university. He worked his way up through an environment that is quite tough for people from that background, without coming from either a public school or, certainly, having a university background. He was incredibly inspirational in terms of showing what could be achieved.”

For **Stephen Chu**, philanthropist and former CEO of the Hong Kong-based Hui Xian Real Estate Investment Trust, finding a role model is down to a mix of “happenstance and chemistry”. He met his, Dr. Li Ka-Shing, founder and Chairman of Cheung Kong Holdings, while working at the company. It’s a similar story of effort over education.

“He started out his career as a plastic flower salesman with very little formal education and through hard work, determination and business savvy became the richest man in Asia with an estimated net worth of \$34 billion.”

The responsibilities of leaders are multiplying. Not only should they inspire individuals, they also have a duty to reflect societal values and the company ethos.

Paul McNamara, Group Chief Executive of financial services concern IFG Group, comments: “Everyone is a role model and should see themselves as such – they can be a good role model or a bad one depending on whether their behaviours live up to the desired values of a business, team, or even society.”

To this end, it’s crucial that leaders instil good standards and ideals. **Stephen** says: “It is paramount that role models and leaders reflect the core values of

“*Role models and leaders reflect the core values of the company*”

the company, and society as well. Often these people are the ‘face’ of the company and they are responsible for its image.”

Adam Chamberlain, Sales Director at Mercedes-Benz Cars, confirms that role models can be found at all levels: “One of the things you try to do is identify best practice in a different context. In my past job, I had a peer who was particularly good at certain aspects of their position, so I think you can [learn] various things from different people.”

It is up to the CEO and senior executive team to set the right example, which means demonstrating behaviours that don’t simply emphasise targets and profits but promote a wider understanding of how business should be done.

“The reality is, the more senior you get, the more you are a role model – whether you like it or not,” says **Michelle**. For this reason, leaders should stay mindful that not only are they being watched, they are possibly being mirrored.

From a CEO’s perspective, role models ought to support succession planning by finding and enabling those with potential. So, it is important that companies have a diverse mix of people

who are able to coach, mentor and inspire others, regardless of background.

Michelle adds: “Part of the leadership role is to nurture the pipeline and help develop the people who are going to be the future of the company, who are going to come up with fresh ideas and innovations – who are going to work together to solve problems.”

It’s something that should be ongoing. As **Stephen** puts it: “The best role models are constantly trying to improve the performance of the company and their colleagues.” ■

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