

SAM GHOSH, Group CEO, Reliance Capital

A leader should lead by example

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Each employee is empowered to think, work and perform like an entrepreneur, says Sam Ghosh, group chief executive officer of Reliance Capital. In an interview with *HT*, he says the key role of a leader is to quickly understand new rules and adapt to perform in a new environment. Excerpts:



How do you define a leader?

At an individual level, a leader is a person who helps people grow — in accountability, responsibility, stature and encourages them to lead.

What are the three most important traits of a leader?

A leader should instill confidence in the team, lead by example, and help people realise their potential. I seek a lot of inspiration in the words of Dhirubhai Ambani that said, "If you can dream it, you can achieve it."

As a leader of your group, how do you cultivate leaders?

An important trait for any leader is to groom new leaders. "You are the force" is our motto that sums up our philosophy towards our employees. Each employee is empowered to think, work and perform like an entrepreneur.

Can leadership be learnt? In other words, how can a manager become a leader?

Everyone can become a leader. Good guidance and training are key ingredients for a good leader. A leader must have conviction about the vision and ensure the team follows.

What is the role of a

professional leader in a promoter-driven company?

A professional leader in a promoter-driven company is the most important conduit connecting the promoter's ambition with executable results. On one hand, the professional leader manages the expectations of the promoter, while on the other hand, he or she leads the performance of the team with clear direction to achieve that ambition.

Since September 2008, the world has fallen into a maelstrom of serial crises. What is the role of a leader in these times?

Every crisis changes the environment and impacts the business. It also changes the rules of the game. The key role of the leader is to quickly understand the new rules and adapt to perform in the new environment. You will find different types of leaders during boom times but during tough times, leaders require different traits. What is important for a leader to succeed under all conditions is to learn those different traits. What has been the biggest leadership challenge you've faced? Facing the 2008 slowdown and navigating through those times, was the biggest challenge. Overnight, the entire environment changed and we had to evolve ourselves swiftly and steadily. We had to learn, analyse, react and think and rethink every move as it impacted people and business. We also had to keep our teams motivated. It was a great learning as well as the biggest leadership challenge.

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Do you think the role of business leaders has come under cloud – globally and domestically – of late?

Domestically, we are still an emerging economy where the businesses, regulators and the consumers are evolving and learning as we grow. The regulators have become customer focused, customers have become more informed and the businesses have become more competitive. This has meant rethinking our priorities in business. The challenge is to maintain high growth.

Leaders have to often carry the cross of other's wrongdoings and inefficiencies, the global banking sector today, for instance. What role can good leadership play to counterbalance this image?

Integrity and customer focus are the key elements to counter these images. The enterprise has to follow the regulations not only in letter but also in spirit.

What is your one-line leadership mantra?

Wealth creation for all stakeholders and leadership in the businesses we operate in.

Who are the global leaders who have inspired you?

I like the management philosophy of Jack Welch. I subscribe to his view that if you pick right people, give them opportunity, delegate authority and compensate them adequately, then your job is almost done.

Who is a leader in the industry whom you respect?

I take a lot of learning and inspiration from Anil D Ambani — especially on how to face challenges undaunted and find opportunity in adversity. If I were to name one company, it would be LIC — a company that I respect immensely. It is a phenomenal company on all counts — trust, brand, reach, products, customer focus and entrepreneurship, among others.

What is the biggest leadership lesson that you have learnt?

When we partnered with Nippon Life Insurance, they asked us about our 50-year plan. We struggled to respond and it changed our approach. Top down, the entire Nippon organisation is focused on customer and customer satisfaction. So much so, that in case of recent tsunami each agent called upon each customers without waiting for them to call, to check their well-being and, wherever applicable, ensure they get the maximum insurance as per their policy. It's remarkable that while the company thinks 50 years ahead, it continues to be the largest private insurer in Japan.