

Leadership lessons nurtured through travel

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23 Aug 2017

There are many reasons why people travel: some cite relaxation, needing to get away from home, or wanting to experience different cultures, while others are in pursuit of a hobby. There are also psychological needs that drive individuals to travel, including gaining knowledge and enhancing self-esteem. But, have you ever considered that travel could also serve to nurture leadership skills?



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Last year I completed my MBA and throughout the programme, I started to recognise synergies between what my passion for travel had exposed me to and what I believe are indispensable characteristics to not only complete an MBA but hone in on positive leadership traits.

Travel has always been in my blood. I've fostered my interest in exploring and experiencing different cultures from an early age, and it's shaped my life and career to the extent that I now head up World Leisure Holidays, specialising in luxury Indian Ocean Island resorts.

I believe that travel builds character and interestingly, I've identified corresponding behaviours and skills that are developed through travel that can serve you well as a business leader:

Your boarding pass to a worldly view

In my mind, cultural diversity is one of the most exciting aspects of travel. Immersing yourself in another culture can open your mind, and afford you great insight into why people think and behave the way they do. Knowing and understanding how to accept and manage different cultures within your business, will help you get the best out of them - an essential aptitude to master when in a leadership role.

Be mindful of the carry-on luggage restrictions

There's only so much luggage that you can take with you when travelling, particularly when flying. While some have a knack for cramming more into their suitcase than others, all travellers have limited resources. The same parallels can be drawn for business, and more specifically those operating in tough economic times, as South African companies are currently facing. Travelling encourages individuals to think smart about how to stretch their resources and adapt

accordingly. Mirroring this mindset will make for a conscious and practical business leader.

But, that's not on the itinerary: The plan vs. reality

Travel can sometimes be quite stressful, because there is a lot that can go wrong, such as delayed flights, lost luggage or accommodation that doesn't meet your expectations. Depending on how and where you travel to, it can push you out of your comfort zone. Albeit upsetting, these scenarios force travellers to practice patience and thus apply logical problem-solving tactics. The lesson for business is that things can and will go wrong, so keep calm, keep an open mind, become agile and flexible.

Choosing which excursions to embark on

Critical to establishing yourself as a respected leader is to make good decisions quickly. And sometimes this may mean relying on your gut. Travelling to foreign destinations can expose you, making you more vulnerable, intensified by poor decision making. Whatever the potential outcome, travel does cultivate decisiveness and a reliance on instinct, qualities that admired leaders possess.

En-route to a destination where creativity and innovation meet

I once heard the saying, *the more you see, the more ideas you have*, and this ties—in so beautifully with travel. Seeing new places and becoming aware of how things operate differently in other destinations can inspire creative and innovative possibilities locally. Applying your experiences to shape your world back home is the real magic of travel.

English not an official language: Networking and communication

Visiting a new destination, especially where the native language is not English can make you more cognisant of how you're communicating to be understood more easily. Travel can help you acquire better networking skills either by forcing or encouraging you to engage and interact with people you don't know, and maybe otherwise wouldn't necessarily talk to. And since communication is not always verbal, travel may even heighten your appreciation of your own body language, and how this can be interpreted.

Mastering networking and communication abilities as a business leader build the foundation for support through influence. As the saying goes: *Of all the books in the world, the best stories are found between the pages of a passport*. Travel experiences or stories definitely make for an interesting topic of discussion around business dinner tables.

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