

Leaders in London International Summit - November 2006

Review of the event by ReSource Editor **Christine Miller**

What Counts in Leadership

Top Leaders Stand Up for Diversity



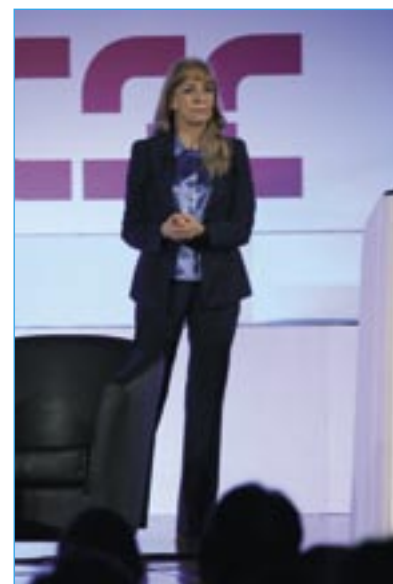
Dan Pink and Ricardo Semler are stimulating, innovative thought leaders featured elsewhere in this edition of ReSource; Baroness Susan Greenfield, Sir Richard Branson, Sir Alan Sugar, Sir Bob Geldof, Colonel Tim Collins and General Colin Powell are just a selection of the other outstanding leaders and innovators drawn from business, scientific and political arenas who spoke at the 2006 'Leaders in London' International Summit in November. Chaired by Rene Carayol, MBE, the two day event attracted over 1200 attendees, who gathered to hear the latest in novel ideas and proven practices to apply to their own leadership roles.

Sir Bob Geldof gave the opening address, describing his personal style as that of a "chaotic character", someone who had certainly never envisaged himself as a leader - even of himself. His success in mustering such phenomenal support for the Live Aid project stemmed from his own outrage at the economic absurdity and moral repulsiveness of the

situation, combined with his natural ability to gain media exposure and position the event in a way that caused people to gather around and participate in an outlet which allowed them to articulate their rage about such inequities.

He attributed his leadership success to his ability to construct a world into which he fits, where he can articulate ideas and control the agenda, combined with the humility to step aside and acknowledge when he personally can't take a project any further, and hand it to the enablers who can. He reinforced the importance of delegation and recognising where one makes effective contributions. Although Sir Bob has around eight offices in London, he told the audience that he is not particularly welcomed in any of them - his staff prefers him to stay out of the way and let them get on with implementing the ideas, rather than creating chaos with his presence!

Baroness Susan Greenfield, Neuroscientist and international expert on the brain, spoke about



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the impact of scientific and technological advances on the brain, envisaging “organisations focusing on doing only what they are best at, outsourcing the rest and networking synergistically with other small companies.” Speaking of the plasticity of the brain and its ability to generate new connections, she pointed out that new technologies of the future may themselves create change.

One example is that of London cab drivers; as a result of their extensive studies when doing “The Knowledge” (they are required to assimilate and recall detailed information about London’s streets) an area of the brain known as the Hippocampus enlarges to be bigger than that of the normal population. I shared this nugget with my cab driver as I crossed London after the event – he thanked me and said he would be sharing this fact next time he was down at the pub with his mates.

Sir Richard Branson, asked about his leadership abilities, told how he came from a loving family which sought opportunities to praise rather than criticise, and always looked for the best in everyone. He has adopted this approach in his businesses, and often promotes people way beyond what they would expect, citing an example of the cleaner of Manor Recording Studios in Oxford who ended up running fifteen studios.

The main quality he looks for in leaders is: “People who are good with people. If the person at the top cares about the person cleaning the floor and the people on the switchboard, then everyone comes alive. If the people at the top are not good with people, then it ricochets down and the culture of that

organization is miserable for everyone.”

Sir Alan Sugar gave a fast-paced question and answer session. Asked about the aggressive leadership style shown in “The Apprentice”, he replied, not unexpectedly, that we shouldn’t believe all we see on TV since the editing is extensive, emphasising that within his core organisation of 80 or 90 people, some have been with him for thirty years, and would not stay if they didn’t like being around him.

He mentioned the increasing negativity he sees in business in the past ten years, telling

Sir Richard Branson on the Leadership qualities he values:

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us that he keeps a mental baseball bat to hit away any negative ideas people put in front of him; of mistakes, he said:

“Have I made mistakes? The people in this room could live contentedly for the rest of their lives on a smallish percentage of what I have lost in the past.”

Colonel Tim Collins OBE, who earned worldwide fame for his speech to his troops on the eve of the Iraq war, spoke about the leadership lessons business leaders can learn about building unflinching loyalty and motivation, and in contrast, Ricardo Semler, renowned Brazilian entrepreneur and maverick re-creator of SEMCO, one of the world’s most unusual workplaces, described his approach to management

by (O)Mission, unleashing employee potential and letting talent find its place.

General Colin Powell, the former US Secretary of State who established a new paradigm for leadership excellence, gave the closing presentation. He asserted that

“The performance of the organisation is the ultimate measure of the leader” and told the audience:

“The essence of leadership is to be trusted. Even if they don’t know how you will achieve something, they trust you enough to follow you.”

Ending on a lighter, very human note, when asked what he most missed about his job, Colin Powell replied, “My plane.”!!

This is an event I would highly recommend to anyone involved in leadership roles, whether as a developer of leaders or themselves leading an organization; in the two years I’ve been attending I’ve learned a great deal and the quality of organization, speakers and attendees is superb.

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Clockwise from top right:

Sir Bob Geldorf, Sir Alan Sugar, Gen. Colin Powell (Ret), Ricardo Semler (See page 24), Colonel Tim Collins, Baroness Susan Greenfield. - Dan Pink (see page 14)

