



# IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT LIMITS

WITHIN BOARDROOMS AND MANAGEMENT MEETINGS, FISO (FIT IN, STAND OUT) LEADERS QUESTION HOW WELL THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEADERS WILL ADAPT TO THE GLOBAL BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT.

BY BLYTHE J. MCGARVIE

**O**n one end of the spectrum, some people see a limited world with few options and often become critical of how few opportunities exist for their particular talent. I call this first type *one-eyed wonders* because they have closed off their peripheral vision and wonder why business isn't as successful for them as for others. Perhaps success came easily to them early in life, but somewhere along the road, they got off the bus and were stuck in the same spot. They may think the only options are local and not realize the broad choices available in other regions or countries. They may be an expert in one subject but don't know how to "fit in" and tailor their talents to different opportunities.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, some people have a vision of a world with many options and imagine how to apply their particular talents to a wide array of opportunities. I call this second type *full-vision adventurers*. For simplicity think of these two extreme types: one wears blinders and the other sees the big picture. In the course of my research on leaders, many people are in the middle, but gravitate to one of the two attitudes when considering job opportunities. One of the most important steps to career success is to know your own natural proclivity. At one point or another, we have blinders to the global opportunities. If you have blinders, seek out advice and consider the world platform for at least ideas to expand your outlook. Artificial boundaries may seem real and constraining unless the leader reflects on how and where to seek knowledge and experiences.

## One-eyed Wonders

Recently, a prominent business leader running a multi-national company asked me to counsel a woman who had been a chief financial officer at a major company and at two Internet technology companies. Prior to that, she had worked for a couple of large companies in different financial roles and practiced as a Certified Public Accountant. Now, as she approached 50 years of age, she had left her position and was searching for a new career opportunity. She believed "unqualified people were in positions of

responsibility" and felt "offended" by the greed and mishandling of certain business situations we have all been reading about in the newspapers.

I asked her what she wanted to do. Her response didn't answer the question. Instead, she cited what she did *not* want to do. She clearly stated she did "not want to go back to a CFO role and to day-to-day grunt work" and believed that most of those jobs "limited her ability to be strategic". She wanted to bring value and integrity in a new job, perhaps helping board members understand the "practical issues CFOs must deal with". She ruled out that path as she felt "law firms have it locked up".

The discussion felt like a tennis ball being bounced back and forth, or more like off the backboard, because eventually, she realized being a CFO was the exact role for her but in a broader environment. In other words, the secret to her happiness and knowing her strengths lay within herself, to be discovered with active listening questions. She had just defined her options too narrowly in thinking her training and experience could only lead to a typical CFO job and she felt constrained by this option. I suggested several alternatives including serving as an interim CFO, a role growing in popularity over the last decade. Other suggestions included tapping into her private equity contacts from her Internet days, aligning with one of the law firms that worked with her to deliver her skills to clients and board of directors, collaborating with a Big 4 accounting firm that valued her talents, or even creating her own company to give her flexibility. The key message in my advice: know what you want and push beyond the boundaries of limited choices. This will help you **stand out** and tap into your own incredible possibilities.

As I counseled her, it struck me that she was the one-eyed wonder who reached an impasse in her career because she had not looked beyond the typical routes. I think in time she will consider how her natural financial skills could help her stand out in a totally different environment, one that would give her the challenge she seeks. A FISO Factor leader takes off the blinders and grasps the broad range of opportunities.

## Full-vision Adventurers

Let's now look at someone who is a full-vision adventurer. Tennis champion Martina Navratilova won 59 Grand Slam titles in singles, doubles and mixed doubles, including a record nine singles championships at Wimbledon. Recently featured in *USA Today*, Navratilova never finished high school, started to play tennis on the world circuit as a teenager who spoke little English, defected from her country of Czechoslovakia, and relied on her natural talent to succeed. After her coach pointed out to her as an athlete in her mid-twenties that time was running out for her tennis career, Navratilova said "I had a 'eureka!' moment. I didn't realize that I was coasting so much."

Sometimes it takes straight-talk from someone you respect to move the boundaries you set for yourself. In the case of this tennis champion, advice and the recognition that more effort and an integrated approach to her career, health and life would lead to longer term success came at a receptive moment.

Navratilova explains, "Whatever your limitations might be, don't let them define you", recalling the skepticism she faced from her own father when she entered her first tournament. "I was just going to keep going until I got everything out of myself." Even at age 50, she competed in the latest US Open where she won mixed doubles. This adventurer decided her goal and focused her determination to become one of the best, healthiest and sustainable success stories in her field. No one can determine what boundaries you have placed on yourself. Everyone has a story of how he or she overcame a difficult time to create the success desired and often inspiring others. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Do not be too timid and squeamish about your actions. All life is an experiment." ■

*Blythe McGarvie is President of Leadership for International Finance (www.LIFgroup.com), a unique firm offering a global perspective for clients to achieve profitable growth. She is author of "Fit in Stand Out".*