

## Blythe McGarvie '78 'shakes the globe' to make an impact

Courage and curiosity among the leadership skills required to win in the global economy, says Kellogg School graduate in her new book

BY AMY TRANG

While travelling the world to speak to business executives about her first book, *Fit In, Stand Out: Mastering the FISO Factor*, **Blythe McGarvie '78** encountered questions from her audience on the topics of global citizenship and leading a global business.

In the Kellogg School graduate's second book, *Shaking the Globe: Courageous Decision-Making in a Changing World* (John Wiley & Sons, 2009), McGarvie provides the answers to those questions and details six issues that successful leaders need to contemplate before taking their organizations to the international stage.

McGarvie is founder and president of Leadership for International Finance, a firm that provides strategic and financial advice and counsel to international businesses. In her 30-plus year career, she has served as executive vice president and CFO of BIC Group, senior vice-president and CFO of Hanaford Bros. Co. and chief administrative officer of Sara Lee Corp. (Pacific Rim). She also sits on the boards of Accenture, Pepsi Bottling Group, The Travelers Companies Inc., Viacom and Wawa.

*Shaking the Globe* explores concerns that leaders need to master in order to compete in the world economy, including considerations of cultural norms, entrepreneurship and differences in laws and accounting procedures. McGarvie explains how today's executives are embracing the tools of interconnectivity, and she outlines the attributes those leaders need to make the right decisions to lead their organizations in the 21st century.

**Amy Trang:** Why did you entitle your book *Shaking the Globe*? What were you trying to evoke with this image?

**Blythe McGarvie:** The use of "shaking" is a metaphor both for recognizing that what happens in one part of the world influences business activity in another, much like an earthquake in one part of the world will affect business in another part of the world and that tomorrow's influential leaders must "shake things up" by challenging old practices, attitudes and assumptions. I wanted to explain that the world is becoming increasingly interconnected.

The world is changing. It's going to change with or without you, so you might as well shape it into a better world and be a positive force in the global community. Tomorrow's leaders must be active in creating bridges with people through global citizenship.

**AT:** What countries do you think are leading the way in the global economy?

**McGarvie:** It is not countries but people who are acting, although the line between public and private sector activity is becoming dangerously blurred. I think the Dutch have always been global because they needed to leave their small country to explore. They were the first explorers in Indonesia and they had to learn languages because so few people spoke Dutch. The Chinese also have a bird's eye view of going global because they are in the midst of a Diaspora; it's like having homes in many different ports. I also think there are a group



Blythe McGarvie '78

of Europeans and Americans who are well-positioned. These are people who have opened their eyes. It's not so much a country that is well-positioned as the people within that country who possess a sense of curiosity, a sensitivity to other cultures and a competitive desire to prosper.

**AT:** In your book, you devised a "Courage Quotient" assessment tool to measure courageous leadership characteristics, using the traits of competence, curiosity, caring and perseverance. Do you think courage is inherent or it is something that can be learned?

**McGarvie:** Courage is definitely something that can be learned and the more you exercise it, the easier and more courageous you become. I devised the tool to see if any attributes that really drove courage are shared by successful leaders. I found that courage is defined by competence, curiosity, caring, and perseverance. Curiosity compels one to keep asking questions, meeting new people, developing new ideas and trying to progress. Rousseau recognized man's innate curiosity as distinguishing him from other animals; and the reward of innovation rooted in curiosity is at the root of free enterprise capitalism. Caring is the emotion. Business depends upon and serves people. Today business activity serves people all over the world. Our leaders must care enough about others needs and values to be able to address them. Perseverance is key because every leader has failed or been stymied at one time or another. Those who refuse to be defeated show courage.

**AT:** I found it interesting that you discovered that the highest courage scores came from women who were born between 1975-1985. Do you predict that women are going to be the ones who increasingly shake the globe?

**McGarvie:** You know what? It's already happening. Women, out of necessity and enjoyment, are doing it. And I think a lot of men are more comfortable with how the world has been as a result. Seventy percent of all microloans are given to women and women pay back their loans. All they need is the opportunity and some capital and women will amaze the rest of the world by what they can do. I'm convinced of that.

Both men and women who take action and make fast decisions succeed. If Bill Gates waited until he was 50 to start Microsoft and delayed thinking about it, he wouldn't have accomplished what he has. Force yourself to take chances or make informed decisions; some fail, some succeed. The more decisions you make, the more successes you have and the better you get at making decisions.

**AT:** What advice would you give to a business leader who is thinking about going global but who has to overcome his or her uneasiness about the risks associated with venturing into another culture?

**McGarvie:** He needs to prepare. You can become involved with groups like the Council on Foreign Relations or the Chicago Council on Global Affairs to learn about business and cultural differences. You can seek help from other global citizens, even consultants who specialize in this area. The beauty of living in the U.S. is that there are many opportunities to get prepared to be a global citizen.

You also have to develop your own confidence in the goods or service you offer or you can't have the confidence and courage to deliver it to the second derivative, which is outside your home country.

**AT:** When you were starting your career, did you find that you had to learn how to be a global citizen or had to overcome certain cultural fears?

**McGarvie:** Just as I was not born an accountant, I was not born a global citizen. But early in life, I was curious about people I met from different countries. I actually was frustrated that I always worked in a domestic business. I worked at Kraft Foods, but I worked in its U.S. location.

I left Kraft in 1991 for a job at Sara Lee for the very reason that it wanted to expand outside the U.S. and believed I could help in doing so. That's when I turbocharged and started learning different cultures. I started on a Monday and on a Thursday I was in Europe with the company president deciding what companies we wanted to acquire.

The encouraging word I would give to someone who may not be a global citizen today is that picking up my book indicates a desire to learn more about what one must do to succeed in international business. Becoming a global citizen is the first step. One of my mantras is that you prepare yourself for an opportunity so that you are ready when somebody comes knocking.

Going global requires the mental as well as the physical capacity to travel. You need the mental capacity to synthesize what is happening and to be able to handle tough situations, whenever and wherever they occur.

**AT:** What do you think that top-tier business schools, like Kellogg, should be doing to educate and prepare such future leaders so that they acquire this mentality?

**McGarvie:** Kellogg is aware of the importance of cultivating a global perspective. The school's faculty and administration cultivate the global brand and develop meaningful relationships around the world. If I were going back to Kellogg today, I would take advantage of the *Global Initiatives in Management* course. I also would take advantage of meeting all the people from other countries currently attending school. These people are going to be friends for life. I think of it as a Kellogg Diaspora out there. When I moved to France, one of my best friends was the president of the Kellogg Alumni Club of Paris. Getting to know people at Kellogg who are not like you is one of the successful steps toward being a global citizen. You are really laying the track for future success. You are starting to shake the globe by being part of the Kellogg network.