

MOMENTUM

CAREER INSIGHTS FROM FIVE TOP GLOBAL EXECUTIVES

Jonathan Shopley,

Executive Director, The CarbonNeutral Company in London

“When I left South Africa in 1982, I motorcycled through Africa and saw firsthand the impact of desertification in the sub-Sahara, civil war in Sudan, and the ravages of AIDS. I saw a beautiful environment and remarkable people facing huge social and environmental issues. I didn’t see aid or philanthropy making much of an impact, but I did see enterprises blossoming in the most unlikely places, and it made me hugely optimistic about the power of business to make the difference.

After my arrival in the UK, I advised companies on environmental management and sustainable development. Just when I felt the need to change from consulting to something hands-on, I was contacted by The CarbonNeutral Company, which was looking for a CEO. I was captivated by this start-up applying marketing and commerce to the toughest challenge of our time — climate change. It was so strongly aligned to my interests that I didn’t worry about the obvious risks, and the shareholders and founders seemed willing to overlook my patent lack of management experience.

We help major corporations decouple their top- and bottom-line growth from their greenhouse gas emissions. As a business leader, my challenge is to harness and focus our company’s passion and expertise to fit the pace and demands of the market. Incidentally, I still ride that same motorcycle — a Yamaha XT550 — on a more sedate route, from home to the rail station in East Grinstead.” >>>



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Kai Wang, ▶

Shanghai-based President and General Manager, Asia, Freescale

"I entered college when I was still 15. When I was of the age to take the national exam for college, universities had stopped the formal admissions process because of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. I was pretty lucky to get into college since there were many competitors who had been waiting for more than 10 years.

I think being younger in college helped me quite a bit. When you are younger than most of your classmates, you have to spend more time learning how to make friends and developing relationships. Now, as a manager, that ability is useful as I help teams of people work together effectively.

People management is the No. 1 issue. Selecting the right people for the right job is the most important task for management. Once you have the right person in the right job, empowerment is critical. My own philosophy is to promote fairness — to focus on this as much as on operational and strategic matters. When you have people who can do a job and are empowered to do it well, you need to reward them fairly when they achieve desired results. That way, they'll keep thinking of ways to improve. And they'll be committed to your organization."



María Cristina Mejía, Bogotá, Colombia-based Partner of CTPartners ▶

"After studying law and political science in Paris, I became Vice Minister of communications during a very important period of growth in Colombia's telecom sector, which included expansion of the cultural television network to offer national coverage. I never was prepared to pursue any certain career path, but when I found new opportunities interesting — whether leading the national association of daily newspapers, founding and directing a journalism postgraduate program for professionals with nonjournalistic backgrounds, or spearheading the creation of a digital cellular telephone network in Colombia — I always thought, why not?"

Throughout my career, I always hired people with emotional intelligence who would be committed to the company and enthusiastic. Passion helps people be successful in any job. As an executive search consultant, I look for that in any prospective candidate.

One of my own passions is social responsibility for companies. Along with a dozen other business leaders, I'm on the board of Granitos de Paz (Grains of Peace), which provides more than 1,600 impoverished families in Cartagena with nutritional, medical, back-to-work, and day care programs, as well as guidance in self-sufficiency farming. It's a model that works well in the poorest areas and one that we hope to copy in other cities."





Taylor W. Lawrence, Ph.D., ▲
Waltham, MA-based Vice President, Corporate
Engineering, Technology & Mission Assurance, Raytheon

"My undergraduate education was pretty well-balanced. I spent two years at the United States Naval Academy, where, among other things, I learned about building good teams and how to perform under continuous pressure. I followed that with two years at California Institute of Technology, which really taught me creative thinking.

This background has helped me, as head of engineering and operations for a \$20 billion corporation, quickly assess and respond to all kinds of challenges. It's interesting. I've had a general career plan, but I could not have planned most opportunities that have presented themselves to me. I never would have expected, for example, a tour of duty at the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. When an opportunity presents itself, I talk it over with a number of mentors.

When I hire people, on paper I look for a solid education and increasing responsibility and leadership at various places. But in person I look at how candidates think. You want good people with analytical, management, and communication skills, especially in the higher ranks of management — men and women who will be able to identify, advocate, and promote ideas that will deliver real value to our organization."



Michele Coleman Mayes, ▲
Northbrook, IL-based Vice President and General Counsel, The Allstate Corporation, effective
November 2007; former Senior Vice President and General Counsel, Pitney Bowes

"Particularly during transformation, you constantly need to do things faster, better. Pitney Bowes' 87-year-old business model has been extremely successful. Yet, we knew we had to embrace change and create a different future. That causes uncertainty. In such an environment, it's even more important that you work to listen well and ask questions. When I turn off that silent voice in my head and lock into what a person is saying, I am amazed at how much I can learn. Thinking, 'I've done this; I'll teach her or him,' simply gets in the way. No matter how senior you are, you can't let power, position, or hubris blind you. I read a quote once that says most people pretend to listen when what they are really doing is rearranging their prejudices. That message stuck with me.

There is one story that illustrates what being open is about. I collect African art. When I was rearranging my office several years ago, I thought I had no place to hang one mask, so I would just store it. Then a mover came into my office and noticing my quandary said, 'Wouldn't that mask make a nice paperweight?' I saw it as an object that had to be hung; he saw it as a paperweight, and that's what it's been ever since. Good ideas can come from anyone, if you invite input and are open to receiving it."