

Seize THE DAY

Author and leadership guru Robin Sharma urges leaders to motivate themselves so they can turn problems into opportunities

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With his shaved head and practiced air of humility, author and business consultant Robin Sharma looks and sounds like a guru. Indeed, the only thing that attests to his status as an adviser to global companies such as Microsoft and IBM as well as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (which engages in space exploration and aeronautics research), is his shiny suit and the presence of his right-hand man and Sharma Leadership International chief executive Jason Axmith.

Sharma never intended to become a business guru, having once been a high-powered lawyer with a Harvard background. “People told me if I became a successful lawyer I’d become a successful person. But that didn’t happen — I became really successful but very empty.”

His way out of this unfulfilling existence came in 1998 when he self-published, with the aid of his parents, a lightly fictionalised self-help book, *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*. “We started off with just a few hundred copies and people started reading it and telling others about it, and it just grew from there.”





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So Sharma knows a thing or two about change, which is “right up there at the top of the list of leadership issues”, he says, particularly with the financial and economic crises. “Two years ago we knew a lot of the answers to our biggest questions, now we don’t know what tomorrow’s going to bring. We’re living in a period of incredible uncertainty, incredible change, incredible stress – everything has shifted. A lot of people go to work every day as if the rug has been pulled out from under them, and they’re just trying to survive. Obviously there are lay-offs, there’s more pressure on people, they’re expected to do more with less.”

The skilfully orchestrated rhythms and cadences of Sharma’s patter, it is fair to say, have probably had even more to do with his success as a consultant than his written output.

“So what should a business person do?” he continues hypnotically. “We really need to lead rather than just follow. Understand the title ‘leader’, and show leadership. Rather than blaming the environment and cursing the crisis, ask yourself what’s the opportunity? That sounds like a really cheesy question, but there are incredible opportunities to grow your career and your business right now.”

Crisis, he says, breeds opportunity. “One opportunity is to learn how to be more positive in a world where everyone’s negative. Another opportunity is leverage-learning: start reading a lot of books and getting on the Internet, finding out what the best managers are doing and what the best businesses are doing. Number three: now people are cutting back on innovation, now’s the time to innovate more. Number four: isn’t business ultimately about relationships? People do business with people they like. So rather than play ostrich in the office, get out there and build better relationships – listen to your customers.”

Ultimately, Sharma reckons, leadership in business starts with leading in one’s own life, and he is eager to stress the benefits of both physical and mental fitness for coping with an ever-evolving global business landscape. Once this is achieved, he believes that giving one’s best – or 110 per cent – is the next challenge.

“How can you keep your job in these difficult times? A very powerful idea is, do more than you’re paid to do. Under-promise and over-deliver. Go to work every day, and rather than just coasting along, give more value, innovate faster, be more positive, be more excellent, work harder.”

He cautions that resisting change is counterproductive. “A leader that tries to fight change will probably not be around for very long. I think right now it’s important to understand that change is a very good thing, it feels painful but ultimately the storm will clear. And the people and companies that will be left standing are those who’ve asked themselves, how can we leverage change to make things better?” ▲