



Mentorship, women and diversity

A conversation with John Montalbano, CEO of RBC Global Asset Management

BY JENNIFER SCHAEFFERS

John Montalbano, CEO of **RBC Global Asset Management**, recently sat down with **Jennifer Schaeffers**, communications co-chair of **The Vancouver Board of Trade's Women's Leadership Circle**, for an interview on women in business, diversity, inclusiveness and mentorship.

In November 2013, Montalbano personally gifted \$2 million to UBC's **Sauder School of Business** to establish the **Montalbano Professorship in Leadership Studies: Women and Diversity**. Professor **Jennifer Berdahl** joined the **Sauder School of Business** last month, with a goal of making the school a centre of excellence for the study of leadership diversity within the corporate world. She will also guide the development of curriculum and programming at the school and take on an external role to influence practice in Canada and around the world.

Below is Montalbano's interview with *Sounding Board*.

Q: You have been both a mentor and mentee. What has resonated with you the most in those relationships? What are the most important things about being a mentor or a sponsor?

A: Being a mentor means being accessible, engaged and meaningful in the advice you provide. My mentors understood

that young professionals were the future of the firm, so they chose to own my success alongside me. Sponsorship is different from mentorship. It is a level higher than mentorship. Sponsorship is something the mentee must earn through his or her actions. Sponsors go to bat for you and uncover opportunities.

Q: Women have often commented on feeling "excluded" in the workplace, especially in male-dominated industries. What advice would you give to people who feel excluded?

A: "Exclusion" is the silent killer of corporate culture and meritocracy. Both managers and employees own the outcome of exclusion. Great managers foster an environment of inclusion, so the employee must build the courage to take advantage of an open door. I suggest a solutions-based dialogue, which doesn't shame the manager. That said, sometimes managers are not naturally approachable and in such cases, it is useful to develop a relationship with someone who has the manager's ear. If that doesn't work then leave, they don't deserve you.

Q: What was the motivation behind the \$2-million gift to establish the Sauder School of Business Professorship in Leadership Studies?

A: Trying to improve my own company's diversity initiatives, it



John Montalbano

became clear that there was an abundance of research highlighting the fact that corporate leadership in North America lacked diversity, but there was precious little research on how to solve for this problem once identified. The intent is to provide solutions.

There was a very personal element to this gift as well. The gift is in honor of my parents. My parents were uneducated

immigrants yet they had strongly held beliefs that through education, nothing would get in our way. They were almost right! In the early 1990s, I was asked to become partner at **Phillips, Hager & North Investment Management** (purchased by **RBC** in 2008). Unfortunately, I was the first partner to be refused a loan from our bankers of 30 years. I remember feeling stunned

when the banker, with a double-barreled last name, asked if I was "an equal opportunity hire" being the only non-Anglo-Saxon partner in the firm. Because I was of Italian descent he actually thought my income was subsidized! Thankfully, PH&N then switched banking to RBC, which welcomed all. Also, my mother strongly believed in a woman's right for self-dependence and worked as I was growing up, even though it was seemingly frowned upon during that time – so this gift is also a tribute to her resolve.

Q: What do you hope will be the outcome of the Professorship in Leadership Studies, led by Jennifer Berdahl?

A: I hope that Jennifer's research will help us better identify the institutional norms in our workplace that put up barriers to true meritocracy – and most importantly, how to bring those barriers down.

Canada's multi-cultural society is a competitive advantage in an increasingly global world. Without leadership that is gender and culturally diverse, we are grossly handicapping our ability to best serve our diverse customer base and better understand how to access to key trading markets.

To learn more about the *Montalbano Professorship in Leadership: Women and Diversity*, visit www.sauder.ubc.ca.

How to become the next Richard Branson

BY LISA MARTIN

When I think of daring people, I think of **Richard Branson**, **Sheryl Sandberg**, **Mark Zuckerberg**, or **Arianna Huffington**.

These are people who are unafraid to carry out ideas that raise eyebrows. They know when they've latched on to something beyond what others can currently perceive.

Daring big is having the guts to not only have a wild idea, but to believe in yourself enough to say it aloud, handle the skeptics, and keep moving forward.

So, where do you stand today... are you dreaming big enough? Are you sufficiently daring?

Big ideas aren't necessarily complex or expensive. Sometimes a phenomenal, business-changing idea is actually incredibly simple to implement.

Big ideas are impactful. They're game-changing. When a big idea has succeeded, the company is clearly in a better position afterward.

Whenever an idea sparks, ask yourself these questions to measure the impact of it:

- How does your idea move the company closer to its five-year or 10-year vision?
- Will it improve the company's financial position?
- Will it improve the company's market position?
- Does your idea involve one department or collaboration among departments?
- Is a competitor already doing something similar?

To wrap up this article, I'll leave you with one final personal query to ponder.

Leading question: Will you dare to be more daring?

Lisa Martin has made it her mission to help companies keep and cultivate rising leaders. She is a member of The Vancouver Board of Trade Women's Leadership Circle Advisory Council, the creator of the Lead + Live Better™ programs, a leadership coach, speaker, and a bestselling author. In the coming months, Martin will share a series of articles in Sounding Board about maximizing performance as an executive, to help further the WLC's mandate to elevate women in business. For more info, visit LisaMartinInternational.com/programs.



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