

Young CEOs Rise to the Challenge

Creative thinking and willingness to go beyond the expected help young leaders scale new highs, say **Rica Bhattacharyya & Anumeha Chaturvedi**

Steering the Growth Wheel

What Young CEOs Look For

-  An entrepreneurial environment
-  Clearly defined boundaries for decision-making
-  Opportunities to experiment
-  Visibility to move higher up the corporate ladder
-  Challenging assignments



"Young CEOs look for challenges that set them apart and where they get an opportunity to make a difference to the new business, to scale up, accelerate and turn around the business or category"

HARSH MARIWALA, CMD, Marico



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ARUN DAS MAHAPATRA
Managing partner, Heidrick & Struggles

Last year, a young CEO in his mid-40s of a large global company in the consumer sector, with an exceptional track record, had to all of a sudden face a flip in his stint. The economy started behaving indifferently, sales did not grow, and added to that was a barrage of questions from board members and pressure to perform.

However, the CEO responded with innovation and got permission from the global headquarters for a first-of-its-kind brand extension, launching new products and also coming up with India-suited pricing and positioning of products to attract more customers to the store, says Anil Sachdev, who is the founder and CEO of the School of Inspired Leadership, who has coached this CEO.

"It is the entrepreneurial zeal for innovation, risk-taking and passion that helps in creating a new dimension for businesses and that is what young CEOs who are at the top of their game look for," says Sachdev.

Several companies in recent times, including the Tatas, Godrej and Marico, among others, have brought in young CEOs to head their businesses, as they bring to the table their entrepreneurial zeal. And the CEOs on their part are quite candid about their expectations from their employer, looking for a platform to be able to make the maximum impact, an environment where they are trusted and they have a clarity on the extent of freedom they have in decision-making, where they get the maximum visibility to move higher up the corporate ladder and an organisation that gives wing to their entrepreneurial ambition.

"Leading an Indian emerging market consumer packaged goods MNC provides me with a high degree of adrenaline rush since the assignment is challenging with immense learning and opportunities to make a difference. For someone who has an entrepreneurial DNA and hunger for growth, this as-

signment provides a great platform to hone leadership skills," says Saugata Gupta, 44, CEO of Marico.

Gupta says in each of the companies that he has worked in, be it Cadbury's in formative years, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance during the early leadership phase and now Marico, he has been provided with numerous challenging opportunities for taking on game-changing work.

Sachdev says: "Young CEOs look for an opportunity to make the maximum impact, to leave their legacy behind, significant amount of challenges, clearly defined boundaries for decision-making and a feeling of empowerment without being micromanaged by the board."

A case in point is Naveen Gupta, 40, who leads Godrej Consumer Products' largest international business, PT Megasari Makmur in Indonesia, and has been an integral part of the group through his

various business and leadership roles. He is a key member of the group's FMCG portfolio cell and he led M&A for Godrej Consumer Products and personally drove the Megasari acquisition. "When we were thinking of the team required to run Megasari, our first major M&A, Naveen willingly took on the challenge and agreed to move his family to Jakarta at short notice," says Sumit Mitra, head - group HR and corporate services, Godrej Industries. He was 37 when he took on the assignment. In my opinion, young CEOs enjoy and even push for challenging assignments. The bigger the challenge, the more rewarding it is to achieve," he says.

However, the buck doesn't stop at one big win as each role is a stepping-stone towards something bigger. "After hav-

ing a grasp over the business and team, young CEOs have subsequent aspirations of growing to larger business roles and geographic arenas," says Arun Das Mahapatra, managing partner, Heidrick & Struggles. He says 70% of the MD-level hires he made last year were business unit heads in their early 40s, who were all looking for a larger platform to demonstrate their leadership skills, an environment where they will have the freedom to demonstrate their business acumen and achieve success. "They want to go beyond being the CEO," says Kamal Karanth, managing director of Kelly Services, an executive search firm.

Another such example is that of R Anand, who started his career with Godrej as a sales manager in India. He then moved to the UK, where he first handled sales and marketing for Godrej UK and then went on to become CEO of the business. He was 39 when he took over as MD of Godrej UK in 2011. Under his leadership, the business doubled in size over three years in spite of challenging macro-economic environment. Anand recently took on the additional responsibility of leading Godrej Argentina as well.

"They (young CEOs) look for challenges that set them apart and where they get an opportunity to make a difference to the new business, to scale up, accelerate and turn around the business or category. This calls for a high level of autonomy, empowerment and freedom to challenge existing paradigms. In particular, CEOs want to better their own benchmark and raise the bar for themselves and the organisation. Their fulfillment and motivation come from both the organisation's success and personal achievement. So, it is important to provide new challenges, a vast landscape and autonomy to them," says Harsh Mariwala, chairman and managing director, Marico.

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