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Interview with Yuri Korchagin

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“If a diplomat wants to be successful, they must understand their country's national interests”



Yuri Korchagin | Russian Ambassador to Spain

With extensive experience as a diplomat, in this interview the Russian Ambassador to Spain, Yuri Korchagin, discusses the characteristics that an international leader must have, as well as the keys to being successful in a field as complex as diplomacy. Conflict management, sharing experiences and knowledge with new generations, values and leading by example are some of the challenges faced by the ambassador in his daily life.

What are the keys to leadership in the diplomatic world? What characteristics must a leader have to face challenges in such a complex global environment?

If a diplomat wants to be successful, they must understand their country's national interests. Diplomacy is an instrument, a profession, whose aim is to create favourable conditions for the country's internal development. In order to perform this work, it is important to understand what national interests are, what things must be defended and to do this, a person who calls themselves a diplomat must be patriotic, have a sense of patriotism that matches national interests. You must love your homeland, you must love your country and your people to do your job better. If you do not understand your country's national interests, your work will not be fruitful or effective.

How do you think companies and large businesses should understand leadership today?

Firstly, a company must define its objectives clearly. Earlier, we talked about a country's national interests, which defend and promote diplomacy, but in a small or

large company, executives must know and understand the objectives of that company: what it wants to achieve, where it must locate itself in the business world, what products it is going to produce, and what the strategy is going to be in the long- and medium-term.

What are the universal values that every leader should have? Regardless of the country or the position they hold.

A leader must be honest. There is a famous expression, which refers more to politicians or to the world of politics: a statesman thinks of the next generation and a politician thinks of the next election. The same goes for a business leader who does not only think about the company or their own benefit, but also thinks about the staff and the company as a team.

What are the keys to dealing with and managing conflicts? Whether in the diplomatic or business world.

First of all, it is necessary to define the nature of the conflict. Conflicts may be interstate, personal, objective

“If you do not understand your country’s national interests, if you do not see your country as your homeland, your work will not be fruitful or effective”

or subjective, labour or ecological. But conflict itself is a type of engine for the development of society because there is no life without conflict. A leader, an entrepreneur, an executive, must know how to define the origin or nature of the conflict and then be able to resolve it for the benefit of the parties involved and damaging the company or entity they lead as little as possible. There's a whole field of science called conflictology.

People in leadership roles must resolve the conflict in such a way that both parties are satisfied, even though this is not always possible. For example, when there is a conflict in our diplomatic world, we joke and say that both parties are guilty.

What advice would you give to a young person who is now entering the labour market in a world as globalised as ours today?

I started diplomatic service 43 years ago and I have always thought that you must educate yourself and then educate yourself after university, never stop reading or you will move backwards, and listen to those who have more experience than you. Listening to authority and making your own deductions is very important. I have never refused to listen to people who have more experience than I do or to people who have less experience. I am currently running an embassy, most of the diplomats under me are young people and I learn from them too, because I am interested in how new generations think, how they see things.

What technical and emotional training should future leaders have?

Several hundred years ago, knowing how to read was enough and that made you different to others. Nowadays, having a special highly advanced education is not enough to become a leader. There are new challenges, for example, a leader of a large company must be very environmentally aware, when before nobody gave it a second thought. A factory manager used to throw waste into the river, and neither the community wondered why this occurred, nor did the leader or the manager. This is now impossible. They must now also include the environmental factor in their company's strategy. It is an example of new factors that have always existed, but there was no human influence to slow them down or speed them up.

In terms of people and team management, what are the qualities that a good leader must have to be an example?

You must represent what you are demanding from your colleagues, your staff or your subordinates. You cannot tell them that they must always wear a tie when you do not wear one and you are the boss of the company. It is an example, but the essence is there. Only then can you tell your team to follow this pattern; never by saying "I am the good guy, I am the best", but instead by being someone they want to imitate

Contact

CONFEDERACIÓN ESPAÑOLA DE DIRECTIVOS Y EJECUTIVOS - CEDE

World Trade Center
Moll de Barcelona, s/n Edificio Sur 3ª planta
08039 Barcelona (Spain)
Tel. +34 93 508 83 20
Fax. +34 93 508 83 21
e-mail: info@directivoscede.com