

# Give people a chance to get to the top

**Eileen Lian**

Companies must identify and develop leaders among their own employees in the face of an



**Robert Cook:** offer coaching



**Roger Lee:** develop people



**Clifton Chua:** engage the workforce

increasingly tough business environment.

"To beat the competition, you have to have better people,"

said Robert Cook, senior executive vice-president and general manager for Asia at Manulife Financial.

Roger Lee, director at garment maker TAL Apparel said: "If we don't develop our people, we can't maintain our lead in the industry.

Developing leaders is a subset of developing people."

According to Clifton Chua, managing director Hong Kong,

Macau and the Philippines at FedEx Express, a leader needs to chart the direction

for the company, articulate where the organisation is going, create alignment and engage the workforce, and manage change and overcome challenges.

"One of the core competencies required in becoming a great leader in today's dynamic business climate is the ability to listen to and understand your customers' challenges, and to then deliver the solutions that enhance their competitiveness," he said.

Besides delivering an executable strategy, good leaders need the trust and respect of their people.

Mr Lee said: "It is more effective when people buy into what you want to do. A leader needs to earn people's hearts. If they don't buy into your strategy, they may give it lip service but won't execute it well."

Getting managers at all levels to realise how necessary it is to develop their staff is a critical part of developing leadership in an organisation.

Mr Lee said that this was sometimes difficult because workers were occupied with day-to-day work and business issues. "Developing

## LEADERSHIP TRAINING

people takes time out of their day-to-day jobs. You need patience and time. People say that we don't need to do this. What we need is a top-down approach. You need to get people to realise that it is a top priority."

Mr Chua said: "When you develop employees to their highest potential up through top management and laterally into new areas, they will help drive your business forward.

"We think it is important to take care of our employees so that they will take care of our customers and eventually the profit of the company."

Mr Lee emphasised that developing people, and in turn developing leaders, was not a human resources function, but rather the responsibility of every manager.

He said that HR only facilitated the process, supported it and provided the coaching that it required.

Not everyone, however, is cut out to be a leader. Mr Lee said: "Sometimes you see people who you know will be great leaders - these are born leaders. It is harder to find gems in some other people. They may not stand out at first glance, and you need to nurture them to get them to come out of their shell."

Still, when someone is destined for great leadership, they will eventually shine through.

Mr Cook said: "You don't grow great leaders. They develop themselves. You give them the opportunities. Then you get out of the way while offering coaching and feedback." And there is a surefire way to create a leadership culture in your organisation. "Be a good role model. Live up to your values. Hire great people. Actively manage your talent," Mr Cook said.