

# CEOs basking in past glories can create stagnation

## Head to head

NIGEL LYNN

*Nigel Lynn, managing director of Barclay Meade, provides more answers on business leadership*

### Are new business leaders emerging as the economy recovers?

At the very top there seems to be a lot of the same names moving around – it's a bit like footballers just moving from one Premier League team to another. But if you look at medium-sized enterprises, we are seeing a lot of change as new

people move into leadership roles. People who have been running a business in the downturn are likely to have built up their business armoury and acquired a lot more skills than in normal circumstances. People will come through a downturn with very different skill sets and have a better understanding of how to lead a business through difficult times, and they will naturally want to take up those leadership roles as we move forward.

### Is there an optimum time for a leader to stay in place?

It probably takes about 18 months

for a new leader to find their feet and it's likely an organisation will get its best out of them during the following two to five-year period. There is a natural growth cycle and there is clearly a period when a chief executive is at their best and on top of their game. There are some CEOs who decide to leave after they have reached a certain point because they want more challenges or have taken their role as far as they feel they can. There are some who decide to stay and sit on the work they have done, but that might not be best for innovation.

A five-year window is about right.

After that there is a natural tendency to want to move on to something new, or as far as the employer is concerned they may see that the leader is not taking things further forward.

### And a team?

The key to a strong team is the core. A good analogy is to think about how a tree grows and becomes stronger. The core of the team should remain the same while different branches grow off it. But once you start to lose people from the core of the team, which is natural after a few years, it changes

the strength of the team and ultimately weakens it.

Again I would expect a team to be together, certainly in terms of its core members, for no more than five years.

### How can the transition from one leader to another best be handled?

The transition process is going to be entirely dependent on the individual organisations, their own culture and what they need in terms of placing people in those senior leadership roles. For some, bringing in somebody from outside to take the business in a new direction may be

exactly what they need and are looking for. Some CEOs like to bring in people of their own as well and that transition can be quite a challenge if it changes the existing culture in the company.

In other organisations it can be a very natural step for somebody to move into a top job from within. It may be good for staff in that company to see a progression path is open. It is more likely in private enterprises where businesses are looking for steady growth. It's quite common in the public sector to make a point of bringing in someone new to shake things up.

# Two false starts led to the right career path

## Interview

Ian Thwaites

Jessica Twentyman speaks to a man who now views his 'quarter-life crises' as constructive experiences

Even the best-planned career path is likely to involve some unexpected twists and turns. But when you are just starting out, the sudden realisation you are in the wrong job can be a big blow to your confidence and sense of progress.

It happened twice to Ian Thwaites during his 20s – but he has never let career setbacks get him down.

Research presented at the British Psychological Association's annual conference in May claimed that many of the UK's 20-somethings suffer from a "quarter-life crisis" when their lives don't go according to plan, and educated young professionals on fast-track careers are more likely to suffer.

Mr Thwaites, by contrast, prefers to see these early false starts as constructive experiences in which he developed the skills and awareness that have allowed him to forge the right career for himself.

For the past four years, Mr Thwaites, 30, has been a consultant at The Foundation, a growth and innovation consultancy, working on customer strategies for big brands including HSBC and Marks and Spencer. In the next few weeks he will be moving on to become UK director at Decode, a Canadian company just setting up in the UK and that focuses on customer strategies for young consumers

between the ages of 15 and 30.

Getting to this point has been "quite a journey", he says. Growing up in Cambridge in an academic family (his parents are both PhD engineers at the university) meant he had little grasp of – or particular interest in – business issues. It was only at Bath University, where he studied sports science, that friends studying business administration "opened my eyes to a world I barely knew existed", he recalls.

On graduation, he decided to pursue a career in banking. Fifty applications for internships reaped just two interviews, and two offers, from Barclays Capital and Lazard Frères. He opted for Lazard's and his eight-week internship in 2003 turned into a full-time job offer, deferred for one year while he went travelling.

A year later, he found himself in a well-paid first job in the City, working on high-value mergers and acquisitions transactions. But doubts soon crept in. He found the 80-hour working weeks hard, he says, and as a junior, the number-crunching work he was doing was "too theoretical" for his tastes.

"I wasn't having strategic conversations with business leaders and I knew I was at least seven-plus years away from even starting to do that," he says. "I never felt I was working on real-life situations. I was just juggling spreadsheets."

While the money was good, the work was not: "I walked away in under a year, feeling very jaded about the world of banking."

But he also left with a good understanding of basic accounting, a stack of financial modelling skills and a grasp of "which numbers on a balance sheet business people really care about".



Ian Thwaites: 'I never felt I was working on real-life situations. I was just juggling spreadsheets'

Daniel Lynch

His next stop was St Andrews University, where he took a masters degree in marketing. With that under his belt, he was taken on by Danone Waters (producers of Evian and Volvic) as an assistant brand manager for new product development. "It was the dream job for someone from my masters course. I was going to be almost entirely responsible for taking a product from initial concept right through to supermarket shelves."

Six weeks into the job at Danone, the budget for that new product was scrapped. Mr Thwaites stayed on and spent the next six months learning the ropes in almost every different department in the company: marketing, HR, finance, IT, sales and logistics. "I saw for the first time the organisational complexity that supports a big brand – how all the parts of a business work together to put a product into a customer's hands."

But with no secure toe-hold at Danone, Mr Thwaites found himself once again wrestling with a mounting sense of dissatisfaction. "I felt I was capable of answering bigger questions and earning more money."

Finally, a job offer from The Foundation gave him the chance that he'd been looking for: "Here was a job that,

right from day one, was both analytical and creative, that focused on innovation and execution," he says.

Big companies, he explains, tend to see the world in fairly narrow terms, looking from the inside at the outside world. "That means they often have a very warped perception of their customers' worlds and how customers experience their brand," he says.

The Foundation's mission is to help clients see things from the customer's point of view, whether that is an international hotel chain looking to understand how customers book rooms online or a high-street fashion

retailer that wants to explore how different customers put together their own, individual summer look.

The company also works with smaller organisations, including Comic Relief and the British Dental Association. For Mr Thwaites, that has meant plenty of variety, "in the least hierarchical and most supportive environment I have experienced".

In fact, for the first time in his career, he is sorry to be leaving a job – but is excited about the challenges that lie ahead at Decode. "It's a chance to do something more entrepreneurial at a firm that's just start-

ing out in the UK and to continue my focus on customer strategies, but for a very specific demographic."

He has few, if any, regrets. "I was either quite lucky or quite smart to realise so quickly that neither Lazard nor Danone were going to be my natural home. Rather than banging my head against a wall, trying to fit in and becoming dispirited, I cut my losses and left," he says.

"And it's totally paid off. It's been an amazing thing for me to see how good the right job, in the right company, can be; how natural and comfortable it feels."

## Recruitment News Peter Whitehead

### Finance jobs

Healthy – but not explosive – growth in demand in investment banking and hedge funds meant 6,650 City jobs were created in May, an 18 month high, says Astbury Marsden, a financial services recruitment firm. This is a 7 per cent rise on May 2010 – although there might be an explanation. Mark Cameron, Astbury Marsden chief operating officer, says: "The Royal wedding and the abnormal number of public holidays definitely slowed hiring decisions, so some of May's new jobs would have been created in April."



### Non-execs

The FT Non-Executive Directors' Club continues its series of events with a networking seminar on Thursday June 16 – "So you want to be a Non-Executive Director?". Register at [www.non-execs.com](http://www.non-execs.com)

### UK jobs

There were fewer UK job opportunities in May than in April – but more than in May 2010, according to the monthly Reed Job Index. The private sector is responsible for this overall rise – public sector jobs remain close to half their level of December 2009, when the index's baseline was set. Some job sectors have done better than others: consumer-facing sectors – perhaps fuelled by the pound's low value – have risen most, led by retail, leisure and tourism. Job demand has also increased in business services sectors such as strategy, consultancy, transport and logistics.

## UK job vacancies

3-month average ('000)



Source: Thomson Reuters Datastream

The number of UK job vacancies fell to a low in 2009 but has been rising sporadically since

Churn threat Staff leaving their jobs is seen by many HR decision-makers as a serious threat to business growth over the next year. Research from Taleo Corporation, a provider of on-demand talent management solutions, finds 22 per cent of HR bosses expect an increase in voluntary churn in 2011, as employees seek better salaries or opportunities elsewhere.

# The rise in responsible careers

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morals now that this issue has been mainstreamed."

Forum for the Future works with corporate clients such as eBay and O2 to think up sustainable development plans that could help them.

Despite the recession, Mr Bent has found that companies are maintaining their interest in sustainability, even those suffering budget cuts.

Trained as an accountant, he moved to the company after realising that his former profession did not yield sufficient interest for him.

"At university I'd been heavily involved in what is now called sustainability, but what was then called development and green issues.

"I did think about having a career in that field but I didn't think there would be a career path in it. This was in 1998 when the idea of corporate social responsibility was barely mentioned."

Now, he says, there is such a plethora of masters courses in the sector that it is becoming harder for entrants to gain work without a formal qualification.

And although the business is significantly smaller than his previous employer, Mr Bent says the scale of the company and the industry suits him.

As others have found, within smaller businesses there are opportunities to take on more responsibility: "Sustainability is still a young, imma-


ture field, which means you can move faster," he says.

For mid-career executives with a strong portfolio in marketing, accounting or other professions, the area might still seem small. But, he says, there is reason to believe that it will continue to grow.

"Sustainability will become embedded in all functions and across companies and I imagine that in the future every department will have a sustainability team member," Mr Bent adds.

The potential for professionals who decide they want to bring all of themselves to their work is blossoming.

**NEXT WEEK: Is charity work becoming a must on executive CVs?**



**World Trade Organization**

The World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva is seeking to fill a position in the **Human Resources Division** as follows:

**Head of Staff Administrative Services**  
Fixed-term for two years with possibility of extension

The job holder will lead the Staff Administrative Services (SAS) section. Specific accountabilities will include:

- Lead the team to provide professional administrative services to management and staff according to specified timeframes and policy standards as set out in the WTO Staff Rules and Regulations. Develop and implement a client-focused service delivery model.
- Manage the implementation and the operational decision-making and procedures related to the administration of benefits and entitlements, and supporting payroll and salary distribution.
- Manage human resource contracts, and contract renewals, as well as contract elements and policies related to transfers, mobility, secondments, special leave and separations from service. Manage the WTO Health Insurance contract.
- Manage human resource and employee-related data, information and reporting requirements, and the production of high quality statistical reports. Manage and maintain the human resource-related information technology requirements.
- Deputise for the Director of HRD as required. Support the Director of HRD in the development of HR strategy. Represent the HR Division and the WTO externally. Ensure that HR skills and knowledge are maintained and developed among the staff in SAS.

**Required qualifications:** An advanced university degree with a focus on Human Resources Management (HRM), Public Administration or other relevant field. A recognised professional qualification in HRM would be an advantage. Excellent knowledge of English, and a good working knowledge of either French or Spanish are required. Good working knowledge of the third language will be an advantage.

**Required experience and competencies:** At least eight years' relevant experience, including in the area of HRM, preferably in both the private and public sector. Excellent, up to date knowledge of HRM practice in a broad range of HR areas. Solid administrative operational experience. Strong leadership and management skills in a multicultural team. Good judgement and decision-making ability. Able to take initiative, innovate, implement change. Solid financial and analytical skills. Good communication and presentation skills and an ability to interact with stakeholders at different levels. Experience in results-based management and process redesign would be an advantage.

To apply to this position and for **more details** (including salary and other benefits) please refer to the WTO website [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org), e-recruitment under Vacancy Notice EXT/F/11-20.

Applications should be received by 21 June 2011.