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# Dr. Iris Good's Leadership Lessons | ExCo Insights

February 10, 2025

In this series, we explore some of the most important lessons and insights from our executive coaches and mentors.

Dr. Iris Good, an executive coach and mentor at The ExCo Group, board chair at Good Relations India, and former chair of the Imperial College Seed Fund UK, shares her leadership lessons. These include the importance of inspiring and empowering people to buy into your dream and not fearing hiring people who are better than you.

## KEY LEADERSHIP LESSONS

One lesson is that it's all about people. When I was younger, I was very focused on results. But once I changed to focus more on people, the results became even better. When you inspire others to perform and you bring people into your dream, then you boost their motivation.

I learned that when I was an employee in a medical device company. The culture was all about results, and it was quite stressful. I then went to India, representing our small startup from Israel, and I wanted to work with the top surgeons and internal medicine doctors on our device. I couldn't offer them money because resources were tight. But I could offer them my dream. I wanted to connect with the top surgeon in the entire country, and he agreed to meet me one Sunday and share his insights

with me. We built a team in India to run clinical trials. The work was difficult, and I went out of my way to tell everyone how much I appreciated their work. Every one of them said to me. “I’m so appreciative that I’m a part of this.”

From that point on, I focused much more on figuring out the best way to empower people and get them to buy into the dream we were pursuing. What do they need? Each person needs something different, and I found this with the doctors, too. Some wanted to help because they wanted to be better doctors. Some wanted to write a paper, perhaps, or give a lecture about improvements in medicine. Some of them wanted to make more money. So you learn to read people.

The second lesson was about always hiring people who are better than you. I’ve come across a lot of people who are reluctant to build a team that could perhaps overshadow them. We’ve all been more insecure earlier in our careers. But you just have to surround yourself with stars and let them lift the company. As the leader, you have the whole picture, so you shouldn’t feel threatened by anyone.

I’ve seen this dynamic play out many times over my career. And it’s understandable. Hiring someone below your skill level can provide a level of comfort and calm. There’s less confrontation if someone sticks to their role and is not looking to have a bigger impact on the team. But as you grow as a leader, you realize that everything is not black and white and that there is a lot more gray. There are different ways to get from point A to B, and you need to hire people who are going to challenge your thinking in constructive ways.

## **WHEN I COACH CLIENTS, WE OFTEN TALK ABOUT...**

One theme is insecurity, which I see a lot, including in very senior leaders. You might think that people would have developed plenty of self-confidence by the time they reach high-level positions. But the way organizations operate doesn’t necessarily help people build confidence. With constant reorganizations, there can be a lack of transparency and understanding of the strategy, which can lead people to doubt themselves because they have to do a lot of guessing. So my advice to them is often to seek out an additional role, perhaps as a director, at another company. Doing that will likely give them the external feedback that will help remind them of their strengths.

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The second theme that often comes up is the importance of aligning your work as a senior leader with the company’s overall strategy. I was surprised that more people don’t put in more effort, such as reading the annual report and listening carefully to town halls, to figure out how their role relates to the strategy. So, one of the first questions I always ask the people I’m coaching is, “How does your job align with the company’s strategy?”

Leaders have to make sure they are communicating as clearly as possible so that the people below them know how their work fits into the overall picture. Because it’s just human nature that people often hear what they want and take things in different ways. So, you have to ask for a lot of feedback from people about what they heard to make sure that the message is landing the way you intend.