



Bob Aubrey

BY VICTOR FIC

Bob Aubrey (bob.aubrey.com) is a global consultant, entrepreneur and author. He earned a BA at the University of California, then a Ph.D. in philosophy and an MBA in Europe. For the past 10 years, he has been based in Beijing and now Singapore. In 2002, Bob founded Metizo, a personal development company, to deliver consulting ideas and individuals to create economic value in organizations. Metizo operates in Europe, China, Singapore, Australia and Brazil. He is also Professor of Personal Development at European and Asian schools. Bob has authored 7 books published in 7 languages on learning within companies, personal entrepreneurship, education and management, most recently 'Managing Your Aspirations: Developing Personal Enterprise in the Global Workplace.'

Bob gave this exclusive interview to Victor Fic, our special correspondent for Economics and Politics.

Talent development sounds like show biz...what does it mean in a national or the global economy?

Talent development is a glamorous word lacking precision. Sometimes it means the best and brightest people where you build an elite to lead your company or country. Or companies are warring to recruit the best talent for competitive advantage. Now there is a lot of criticism about the elites because if your company spends time to recruit and train people well, then everyone has talent that contributes. So you must enlarge your investment in people through training, mentoring and job mobility for most employees.

Whether you take an elitist or broader view, it is not about innate qualities. You must develop people to make them talented. Just like in sports or the arts, people have potential but training and experience makes a star. What is new is that in today's world, we find talented people around the world and we employ them that way. So the training, mentoring and work experience must foster talent internationally.

But to develop talent, you must first have much if it too. So what qualifies you to be a developer?

No, because not all star athletes make great coaches. And great people developers may lack the personal talent to be a successful business leader. Some companies shift a good operational manager into the top human resources (HR) position because "they have the experience" but discover that different skills and knowledge are needed.

Yes because there is no substitute for experience so a strong people development program requires a mentor who is a senior manager with experience plus professional human development experts inside or outside the company. But experience is not enough! A mentor must focus on others and understand individual differences. Mentors must look critically at their own development and not produce clones; they must master the concepts, tools and methods of effective personal development.

As for me personally, I have the rare combination of having created talent systems for companies and business schools as a consultant and the experience of creating and developing my own company.

Bob, discuss factors such as your research over four continents and thousands of MBA types.

My focus on talent is on the personal development dimension. I'm not an expert in all areas of talent management, such as,



for example recruitment. And although I studied a lot of psychology at university, I believe that the psychometric tests used to assess talent are limited.

My approach came from working with young entrepreneurs. Fifteen years ago, a business school in France wanted to help young people start companies by giving them access to a team of experts for a week. The school had finance experts and marketing experts but they needed an expert for the entrepreneurs partly to help them write a business plan. I discovered that asking questions related to personal enterprise succeeded. You must answer tough questions to create a Personal Enterprise Plan. What is my identity? What do I want it to be in the future? What are my strengths and what must I learn and develop? How can aspirations become a feasible and flexible strategy? And above all, why do I want this dream to materialize?

Our readers will benefit because you are a pioneer. Describe the personal development certification for colleges and corporate leaders that you started.

When I started Metizo in 2002, another French business school asked me to design a personal development program to take all students in the different degree programs through a unique education experience and certify their learning. So I developed this Personal Enterprise methodology with the rigor for academic accreditation for two thousand students yearly. That dream was the starting point of personal enterprise.

There was little existing research on ba-

sics like whether all students had dreams or if these dreams are consistent as they move into careers. So I researched it. Youth do dream but are unsure which ones to invest in. Several dreams may clash. Also, an individual usually doesn't jump from dream to action. Time and learning make the dream an aspiration, which I define as a future that the individual intends to realize. We researched across cultures and age groups and created processes and tools for the personal development process. That led to the Personal Enterprise Plan, the equivalent of an individual's business plan. After eight years of research and testing, I put it into a book.

Tell us more about your role in Asia's first MBA for talent professionals.

Once the program was running in the Euromed Management School in Marseille, France, I realized our innovation in creating the first personal development program ending in certification. This was recognized as a best practice in 2005 by the European Foundation of Management Development, which audits the quality of business schools and delivers EQUIS accreditation. When we won that, we had already developed certification of managers in mentoring in companies, starting in China in 2004. So we could certify the competencies needed to develop one's self and the others.

But what about developing whole company?

My consulting exposed that new professionals called "talent managers" in companies lacked solid knowledge and skills. Many came from human resources and had an HR approach or they were from marketing functions and focused on employer branding without knowing how to develop people. And a third kind was an operational manager - often ready for retirement, and shifted into a new position without understanding.

Seven years passed from the mentor certification's start to the launch of a third level of personal development. That was when Euromed Management School let me create a new track in their joint venture MBA program with Jiaotong's Antai Business School in Shanghai. How perfect, as Chinese companies urgently must develop managers into global leaders if they take over foreign companies. This new track is a specialization within the existing MBA and welcomes outside professionals as an executive program if they do not want or need the MBA education. It is the first of its kind

My focus on talent is on the personal development dimension.

in Asia. I am excited to design and manage this program.

Were you smart to relocate to China - if so, why?

Yes, no doubt. I was publishing books in China in the 1990s and was convinced that the economic opening would create a global shift. That became irreversible in 2002 with China's entry in the World Trade Organization. What if I had stayed in France? Professionals who don't know Asia - what a handicap! For the company, it was a great business move starting with the rational choice of going to the market. And it immediately gave my little company the presence to work with multinational clients.

Your book says a professional might break from routine to ask, "Am I reaching my dreams? Am I the person I want to be?" Is this a turning point?

The question of how your present job and lifestyle match your dreams is a key dimension in today's career management. It used to be called the midlife crisis, the term invented by Daniel Levinson in 1978. He first studied how young adults project themselves into the future using the language of dreams and he was the first to study life stages as a sociologist. He observed that at around the age of 40, adults ask themselves questions. This led him to formulate the idea of a life choice - go for the dream or security or simply inertia? In Levinson's time, the norm was to stick to one career until retirement. Today we have career changes as the norm. So the question is not a crisis but a normal part of career development. Sometimes it means breaking off, but often it is a more controlled transition. And parallel careers are normal. For a dual career couple, realizing dreams is part of the marriage. An individual can have a portfolio approach to work where his aim is money but investment in work to help others without remuneration. That is a good for preparing a career shift, especially if the volunteer work is strongly linked to a dream that could become a future career.

Now you claim to have a black bag containing special tools... please tell us more, for instance, about mentoring.

It was a black bag, or the intellectual property of Metizo. But the book publicized many of the key tools, especially the full description of the Personal Enterprise Plan, with explanations and examples of each component.

I will fully describe mentoring in my next book about developing others, entitled, 'Aspirational Leadership for the End of 2011'.

Briefly, mentoring is a tool of aspirational leadership. When leaders develop people by understanding their aspirations, then they can tap into this deep motivational energy



of dreams. But they must be mentors to develop those dreams as partners. The leader must change his or her understanding of the relationship with employees. Avoid creating dependency or manipulating employees to be loyal or engaged. Forge a relationship of trust while matching company and personal goals.

Many managers cannot change to this new perspective, so mentoring programs must be structured with training at the beginning, and with a toolkit for mentors and certification of competency at the end.

You claim to help give value and meaning to people's lives and careers, but isn't this something that top performers personally do?

A consultant or a leader does not give value and meaning. Each role requires understanding people's values. Yes, you can develop value and meaning. But you don't give it to people. Understand and leverage what they bring to you so for an organization-person win-win outcome. Do top performers do that? Some people manage their own development within a job framework that measures performance. But it isn't automatic.

A famous tool in any management training program is Maslow's pyramid of needs. The bottom has the basics for survival like food and shelter. The top has what Maslow called "self-actualization". That picture is used 40 years after Maslow published it. But he believed that maybe 1% or 2% of employees are self-actualizers. Today, our aspirational world and need to manage our careers for years demands everyone must self-actualize. We must balance our career's value and meaning with life. It is

almost never a perfect match, so we must strategize it. That is why I use the expression 'personal enterprise'.

So a top performer may have that match at a particular career stage in a company that gives meaning and value to that specific job. But life changes and he must competently rematch at different career stages and companies.

You assert that it is better for the person to leave the firm to achieve his dream and that the latter should help. Please elaborate.

That is a misunderstanding. If you are a leader, assume that people will take responsibility for realizing their dreams. You have a moral contract based on a temporary partnership that change requires you to renew. So you must know that person's life direction and help them analyze priorities. Or they will knock on your door on Friday saying that on Monday they are going to follow their dream elsewhere.

We can't manipulate people through a mentality of loyalty to the company these days. Famous firms like HP and IBM formerly codified that they would never fire an employee. Nobody says that today. So you can't have a one-way relationship where employees are dependent but the company can be bought tomorrow or make massive layoffs in a downturn.

And what to do if a worker is not performing or if no job in your company allows that person to develop a career? Here you must create a win-win exit to help your employee with the next step outside the company. But it is also required that your employee identifies and trains a successor for the job.