

A case for global leadership The Kai Bendix Story

----- a review by Jeremy Comfort

This latest product from WorldWork gives trainers and consultants a powerful resource in their efforts to develop international leaders.

So far, I have only seen the DVD in which the story unfolds. I believe there will be additional trainer resource material with the final product. In any case, I am sure the film is the centrepiece. It tells the story of Kai Bendix, a German executive with Beiersdorf. The author of the case, Nigel Ewington, tracks Kai's experiences principally in India where he is sent to set up a team who will take control of and drive forward Beiersdorf's business in the sub-continent. Here he is faced with two dilemmas: one concerns an employee who has bribed a customs official; the other an accusation from their distributor that his own sales people are siphoning off some products from stock.

The film shows us how Kai reaches a decision about these two cases. It takes us back to his first foreign assignment in Bulgaria where he has also faced a dilemma with a distributor. We explore some of the context for his leadership role in Bulgaria. As we hear from the members of the team he took over, we understand more about Kai's own leadership style. In the terms of WorldWork's own intercultural competence model (The International Profiler), he combines a strong sense of inner purpose (one of the consultants interviewed calls this an internal compass) with a high emphasis on openness. This latter quality he puts to good effect in both Bulgaria and India where he spends time getting to know his team in one-to-one sessions with no fixed agenda.

The cultural contexts are commented on by two local leadership consultants. In both cases, there is potential resistance to the outsider coming in. Kai understands this and spends time understanding the people and the place. He sees the challenge as balancing the strong values of Beiersdorf with local values and behaviours. His job is to build a culture, which respects both sets of values and gives the team a strong sense of involvement and direction.

We see Kai make his decision in both cases. But, more importantly we also see how Kai is building his high-performing team. Together they identify a set of "blue and red behaviours" which ground the

culture in very concrete actions – what you do and don't do, what you say and don't say. There is even a moment for the consultants to reflect on Kai's further development as he moves back to Germany. Does he leave his team with the competence to run the show without him? How will he adapt to returning home after experiencing two very different cultures?

The film is very well edited, so it has pace and a sense of purpose. It is, to my knowledge, a unique resource in showing a real case. It highlights the challenge of leading ethically in a culturally diverse world but also shows us the everyday challenges of communicating with and leading a team effectively.