



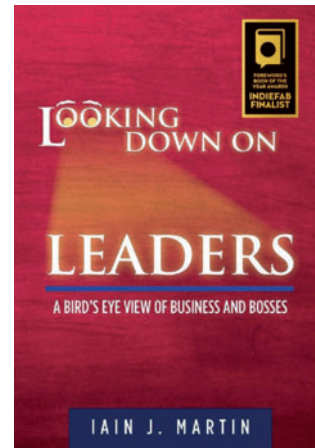
Learning by laughing

In his book *Looking Down on Leaders - a bird's eye view of business and bosses*, Scots-born Executive Coach Iain Martin takes a humorous approach to how successful leaders are made. Here, he explains why this works.

TEXT: SONJA IRANI | PHOTOS: I.J. MARTIN & CO LTD

What was the idea behind your book?
I wanted to write the most entertaining book ever to be chargeable to business expenses. 'Learning the light-hearted way' for busy businesspeople was my objective. I also wanted to introduce novel organisational concepts like 'Influencing Inside the Cube' and 'The Morale Curve'. These serious counterpoints are often summarised in the book by my 'alter ego' MacMentor. Besides, I've been nagged for years by clients and colleagues to write a book about my experiences in the global business jungle. This is the result!

When looking back at your own experience as a business executive, which were the funniest situations you found yourself in?
In China, my local colleague called me one Tuesday to say: "I need to cancel our Thursday meeting. I forgot that I'm getting married". Another story concerned my CEO days in Germany. In the midst of tense negotiations, the police came to arrest the trade union rep for non-payment of alimony. I bailed him out on condition that he became more cooperative. He didn't, but he was so



Portrait: Iain J. Martin, author and executive coach
Above: MacMentor - the author's alter ego (left)
Finalist in a major business book competition (right)

nervous that that he messed up his arguments and we signed the deal that day.

Is there a role for humour in business?

I recently wrote an article called *laughing out loud for leadership*. Well-timed humour humanises the boss and defuses tensions. Stressed people think of problems. Relaxed employees have great ideas.

In your opinion, what are the key qualities of a leader?

Looking at history's best leaders, three things stand out. An energising vision, communicating it repeatedly and influencing events where they had no direct authority. A leader without a vision is just a manager. I call those Excel Leaders.

What do readers like about your book?

The funny stories, which everyone can relate to. The self-contained chapters that let you open it anywhere when you have a few minutes. People take it on vacation, because it's 'learning by laughing'.

What would you like your readers to take with them?

Twenty copies of my book for their colleagues. Seriously though, my key take-aways are the power of visionary leadership and understanding that we share more across cultures than we think.

www.ijmartin.com