

IN CONVERSATION Deb Dutta

Deb Dutta is a senior technology executive with twenty four years in business and operations in Asia Pacific and Japan, including stints in multi-national companies and local start-ups. As an integral member of impactful executive teams, Deb builds successful businesses, go-to-market models and high performance multinational teams. He has an enviable track record of leading two very successful start-up global companies in Asia Pacific through dramatic growth in revenue, footprint and infrastructure i.e. McAfee (1997 - 2001) and Brocade Communications (2001 - 2012).

Between January 2004 to January 2012, Deb was the *Asia Pacific Vice President* for the now 2.1 billion dollar networking leader, Brocade Communications. Having joined the company in 2001, Deb was promoted twice to this position. Deb and his team grew the Asia operation faster than the market, competition and rest of the company. While doing so, Deb and the Brocade's



senior leadership team made the company one of Fortune magazine's "100 Best Companies to Work For" in 2009 and 2010.

An avid sportsperson and natural competitor, Deb has a true passion for mentoring people and organizations on workplace readiness, leadership development and personal branding. He is a prolific blogger, a frequent contributor at business and educational forums as a speaker and writes regularly in regional business and technology publications. He resides in Singapore with his wife Mousumi and daughters Airashi and Aria.

Leadership Advisory Inc. recently caught up with Mr. Dutta

Leadership Advisory: Why did you decide to leave Brocade?

Deb Dutta: My sentiments with Brocade are deep rooted. We shared a symbiotic relationship - many successes and some failures over almost 11 years. However, there does come a time when all good things need to wean off each other and write the next chapter of destiny and growth. Brocade and I are no different!

Leadership Advisory: What have you been doing since?

Deb Dutta: For years I have craved for a sabbatical but did not know what to do with the expanse of empty freedom nor could afford the time. Actually, the former was more the cause than the latter. This was my chance and I figured I would find a way to use it well ... so I grabbed it!

Things turned out very well ... it took me far less effort to figure out productive pursuits that filled my time and my senses while providing the experiences that were evading me in the pace of life that I was accustomed to.

Leadership Advisory: What drives or motivates you now?

Deb Dutta: My triggers have not changed much. I am still driven to build sustainable growth, a credible brand, a first class team, challenging status quo by treading new paths and building infrastructure that supports revenue growth.

I am also driven by candor, transparency and integrity. Creating value for my team and my organization and basking in its reflected glory motivates me!

Leadership Advisory: How has the role of *Asia Chief Executive* evolved over the last few years, especially during these times of economic uncertainty?

Deb Dutta: Be connected with what's happening in the company... Accountability 101. While this seems like a given, but just take a look at all that have happened in the CEOs office at JP Morgan & Barclays in the last six months and you will see what I mean!

Be realistic. Every organization's means are limited by today's economics. Leadership's responsibility is to execute based on organizational, operational and shareholder deliverables and communicate these clearly to the employee. Misguided egos and impractical expectations unfortunately come coupled like *burgers and fries* in the disconnected leader. I am sure you have seen the outcome. I certainly have.

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Leadership Advisory: How do you manage leadership succession so that the next generation leaders are prepared for their challenges?

Deb Dutta: Do not try to implement a 'succession planning' exercise for anyone for whom you do not have a 'progression plan' in place. Which part of an individual's wisdom will goad him to actively seek and develop a successor, if his own progression or future position is unclear or suspect? Now, this sounds terribly elementary, but I see many management teams failing to empathize and recognize this basic human need for 'self-security and sustenance', which transcends all organizational objectives.

However, if you have an executive who is unable to scale or does not want to progress for whatever reason nor wants to support a succession planning exercise – then deal with it firmly. One deadwood or even a 'capable bottleneck' can bring down a team of top performers who perceive their progress restricted.

Leadership Advisory: What is next for you?

Deb Dutta: I am 49 now and have planted my interests in three discrete priorities, which are intertwined and add value to each other.

- First, *BUILD* technology businesses ... build & grow organizations to size, scale & value.
- Second, *EDUCATE* with an interface into Academia. The cross pollination of the elements of academics and business is a powerful concoction.
- Third, *INVEST* via board advisory and funds to help nurture and grow organizations and a non-profit humanitarian cause.

I am also impressed by *Make a Wish Foundation's* activities worldwide and in Singapore granting wishes for terminally ill children. My wife and I had adopted it as 'our cause' some time ago – our involvement with the Foundation will grow further over time.

Leadership Advisory: Is there anything about you that your friends may not know?

Deb Dutta: I grew up in India in the 80s. A restricted & unexposed India, insulated from the outside world. Very different from the global presence it exudes today. The absence of Internet or global media limited information access. But I had books and I devoured them! Archer, Ludlum, Crichton, Hailey, Brown, Cook ...etc. These books and autobiographies gave me a vivid, sometime surreal visualization of how successful people lived, worked and performed. Some, from very humble beginnings. I played out the scenes over and over again in my mind. Uncannily, many of those situations played out in my own life, and in the years that followed.

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