

Visionary Leadership and the Case of Dilmah

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Abstract

Merrill J. Fernando, the founder of Dilmah tea, is an icon in the global tea industry. He is a man who revolutionized the industry which was dominated by multinationals, by bringing in quality and integrity into tea. An ordinary man of humble beginnings, his passion and vision for tea remains unchanged to date. He is a visionary who wanted to market his own brand of tea nearly four decades ago, when branding and marketing were dominated by the multinationals. Today, Dilmah has put Sri Lanka back on the global map as a destination, which grows the finest tea on earth, Pure Ceylon Tea.

Dilmah is one of the eight global brands in the Medinge Group's top brands with a conscience. Merrill Fernando pioneered the concept of single origin tea and incidentally is the world's first genuinely Ethical Tea. The company remains Sri Lanka's number one manufacturer and exporter of tea bags, accounting for over 21% of the country's total export of tea in bags. Dilmah is also the world's first producer - owned tea brand.

At 78 years, Merrill Fernando is a legend in the tea industry with a wealth of knowledge gained through a career spanning 58 years. A visionary leader, he built his company on family values, ethics and the knowledge he gained of the industry. Even to date, these philosophies remain in the Fernando family and he assures, will continue to be so in the generations to come.

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This management case study is based on the story of Merrill J. Fernando. Through his vision he has changed the lives of many estate workers and the poor while building a widely regarded fully owned Sri Lankan brand. With Dilmah celebrating just over 20 years of business, Merrill Fernando could proudly look back on a very tough mission; a mission accomplished.

Key Words : Vision, Leadership, Values, Ethics