

I've been very fortunate to meet some of the world's greatest business leaders. If there is one thing that joins such remarkable people, it is their belief in values and principles: how you treat people and how you live your life.

"We must all aspire to be, not just the best in the world, but the best **for** the world."

Lord Bilimoria offered his audience this as "almost a definition of 'entrepreneurship':"

- "Come up with an idea.
- Have all the odds stacked against you.
- You want to get somewhere with your idea.
- You get out there and make it happen.

I believe that if you believe in yourself, believe in your idea, then the sky is the limit..."

He also put forward this recipe for a successful British business brew:

- Everything must be different in some way and everything must be better in some way.
- We must understand our Mission – to brew the finest ever Indian beer and to make it a global beer brand – and then we can measure our progress.
- Most important of all is the Vision: To aspire and achieve against all odds with integrity.
- Do things right – but do the right thing.

The feedback

"A brilliantly organised event. The talk about Lord Bilimoria was excellent"

Zoeb Bhujwalla, American Muffin Co. Ltd

"I found the networking very useful and the talk was inspirational"

Ruichita Kalra, The Elite Flower Company

We're here to help

At ABi, we provide practical help for SME businesses through innovative solutions and pioneering programmes. Our aim is to successfully enable communities to achieve their full economic potential. Our support can come through networking, training, information, mentoring, providing access to resources and more. And our expertise will always be delivered on time, with passion, understanding and a high level of customer service.

ABi Associates Limited

The Grange
Neasden Lane
London
England NW10 1QB

T 0208 438 4550
F 0208 438 4551
E info@abi.co.uk
W www.abi.co.uk

ABi
Your business. Our passion

Special Events Report

ABi
Your business. Our passion

An Audience with

Lord Karan Bilimoria

Founder and Chief Executive of Cobra Beer



Karan Bilimoria graduated in Law from Cambridge University and qualified as a Chartered Accountant with Ernst & Young.

He came up with the idea for Cobra Beer while still a student and started his business just six months after leaving. It has taken only fifteen years for Cobra Beer to become one of the fastest growing beer brands in the UK. With a current retail value turnover of £96 million, it is sold widely throughout the UK and has been exported to 50 countries.

In June 2006, Karan was appointed Lord Bilimoria of Chelsea.

Britain and India

"When I first told my family and friends in India that I was coming to Britain, they told me that I would never reach the top, because...there would be a glass ceiling. And 25 years ago they were right.

...Among the 'Big 8' accountancy firms then, there were no more than a handful of Asian partners.

But all that has changed. Today, Britain is a true meritocracy with opportunity for all regardless of race. And the Asian community in Britain provides a great illustration of this change. The Asian community makes up less than 4% of the population of this country – yet we contribute more than double that to the economy... Today's big accountancy practices each have several Asian partners.

And as we Asians are succeeding, so is Britain...

Nowadays the government supports and encourages enterprise and seeks to be a catalyst for business.

So... Britain has a relatively enviable performance:

- Steady growth
- A decade of low interest rates and low inflation
- The most flexible labour market in Europe

Britain is now a role model for Europe and is one of the largest economies in the world.

India, meanwhile, has gone from being the land of spices and cheap labour to being world-renowned for IT, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals.

In 1991 the IMP put together a rescue package for India... They embarked on a liberalisation process but, 15 years ago, ...who would have had the foresight to imagine that India would be where it is today?

- Perceived as the second most attractive destination for foreign direct investment, eclipsing even the United States
- One of the fastest growing economies in the world, with growth around 8%
- Almost \$200bn of foreign exchange.

The challenge now is to look ahead, and it really is a challenge because India is progressing so rapidly.

The Legend of the Parsis arriving in Gujarat

There is a famous legend about my community, the Parsis, as refugees and immigrants landing on the shore of Gujarat. The local King asked "How can I take you, when I have no space for you?"

The legend is that the leader of the Parsis asked for a full glass of milk and a spoonful of sugar. He carefully added the sugar without spilling a drop of milk. He said, "We will be like the sugar in the milk. We will sweeten the milk but we will not let it spill over".

And thanks to the hospitality and kindness of the Gujaratis, the Parsis were ... given a home ... I tell this legend because there are ... parallels with Britain, today. People have come from many countries and communities... and become successful contributors.

Cobra Beer

...I came up with the idea for Cobra Beer when I was still a student.

Like most business ideas, each time I was disappointed with a product or service, I kept thinking that I could do it better and do it differently: I could change the marketplace forever. In my case, I hated fizzy lagers. A good friend of mine introduced me to real ale... but I soon discovered that real ale and Indian food don't go together.

So my dream... was to brew the finest ever Indian beer and bring it here – and make it a global beer brand. It would have all the refreshing qualities of a lager and accompany Indian food – and appeal to ale drinkers.

On the other hand, there was good fortune and people's kindness:

- The Asian newsagent who let us use the basement of his shop so we didn't have to carry the one ton loads of beer up three flights of stairs
- The people of Britain were turning into a nation of curry-holics
- We remain very thankful to Indian restaurants
- Our mentor introduced us to banks, to successful entrepreneurs and to the brewery where we met the finest brewmaster in India

A simple business idea – in fact, most business ideas are so simple that we look back on them and say, "Why didn't someone think of that before?"

When I started Cobra the odds were stacked against me:

- I had £20,000 in student debt
- I was starting a beer brand from scratch in the world's most competitive market
- I had no experience in the brewing industry
- I was up against brewing giants with millions of pounds in their marketing budgets
- When the first consignment arrived in June 1990, Britain was mired in the worst recession since the war...
- I had little family support because they thought I was just into the import-export business
- We only had a Citron 2CV (named Albert) as a delivery vehicle: you could see the road through the floor!

And today:

- Cobra is one of Britain's fastest growing beer brands.
- It is on its way to becoming a global brand...
- In the UK alone, it is sold in over 6,000 restaurants and over 6,000 bars, pubs and clubs.
- Cobra is available in all major supermarkets and off-licences.

I feel we have only just started and we are sure that India will be a big part of our future.

Of course, none of this would have been possible if I had ...not followed my dream. My father's advice to me when I started working was to not only do my best in whatever I did, but to do that little bit more than expected. Take initiative. Be innovative. Be creative. Go the extra mile. When given a task to do, the first thing is to do it. The second thing is to do a bit extra.