

## A Discussion with Visa's Bill Ingham

Boyden's *Leadership Series* presents discussions with business and thought leaders from organizations across the globe. The series focuses on topical issues that offer executives, political leaders and the media insight into current trends in business and talent management in the global marketplace.

This issue features Bill Ingham, Vice President, Global Human Resources of Visa. In the interview, he discusses Visa as both a financial services and a technology company, global competition and the battle against cash, memorable M&A experiences, how he hires, and the challenge of becoming an authentic leader.



**Bill Ingham**

In his current role, Ingham sets the people and talent strategy to drive business for a number of Visa's strategic functions for employees worldwide. He sits on the executive leadership teams and partners in the management of the Visa brand, communication and sponsorship assets, global strategy and government relations, and legal and compliance functions.

Prior to Visa, Ingham led international HR for the Banana Republic brand at Gap Inc. Before joining Gap, he spent eight years with the Clorox Company, where he led people and talent strategies for a multibillion-dollar global business unit.

Earlier in his career, Ingham was with PeopleSoft, where he built the strategy for the company's Human Resources Business Process Outsourcing (HRBPO) division in addition to leading a global staffing team which hired as many as 4,000 people per year. He started his career at Oracle as the company's first compensation analyst.

As a co-author of *The Rise of HR*, which has been distributed to over two million HR professionals, Ingham is a frequent speaker at business and talent conferences. He is also active in diversity and inclusion efforts, particularly those dedicated to gender equality.

Ingham attended the University of Western Ontario (UWO) in Ontario, Canada and Evangel University in Springfield, MO, and holds degrees in communications and psychology.

**Boyden:** You joined Visa last year as VP of Global Human Resources. How would you describe your role?

**Ingham:** I describe myself as the head of talent, as I support a number of functions. My responsibilities include marketing and communications, strategy and government relations, as well as legal and compliance. But if I could be really succinct, my job is all about leadership team effectiveness and driving business through talent, which has to do with both individual and collective success.

Another way to describe my job is through four quadrants: The first quadrant is helping with talent management, organizational design and strategy architecture. The second involves operational execution, which includes systems and processes.

The third is around being a credible professional, a business ally, and developing good relationships. Then finally, the fourth quadrant has to do with being a culture and change steward.

**For the BOYDEN VIEW on the essential qualities of an HR executive, continue to page 5.**

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**Boyden:** What attracted you to the role? Were there one or two points about this opportunity that really stood out?

**Ingham:** Yes. What attracted me wasn't just the role, but also where payments technology, Visa and HR are in their lifecycles. I would describe this as an industry that's in dramatic transformation, and very rarely can one join a company of this size and scope that is going through such change. Those aspects were probably the things that attracted me the most because I love environments that are fast-moving and very dynamic.

**Boyden:** You've served at a number of very interesting, successful companies, in industries including financial services, tech, retail and consumer. Is that typical for an HR professional and how would you describe that journey?

**Ingham:** I feel like I've been fortunate. Looking at retail, when I worked at Gap, they had 130,000 employees and an extended global workforce of over one million. If you think about that compared to being in a technology company – I was with Oracle and PeopleSoft and now

Visa – all the employee bases for those three companies were around the same, about 10,000 to 12,000 employees when I was working there.

The work that you do from an HR perspective is very different. In retail, for example, when you think about workforce planning, it's very transactional work. If you're gearing up for a holiday season, it's about bringing in a massive amount of people. Whereas if you think about workforce planning in a technology company, it's more around a capabilities-

based workforce plan – what capabilities do you have, where do you have gaps, and how do you close them.

**Boyden:** Would you say you have to be more strategic at a financial services company?

**Ingham:** That's certainly what I find. When you're head of international HR for a retail company, you have your people that are focused on employee relations and transactional issues in the stores. Certainly, I didn't deal with those a lot. But at a technology company or in a more professional work environment, you're dealing with more diverse issues. You get involved in issues that revolve around organizational design and whether you have the capabilities you need to expand the business to other countries.

**Boyden:** Looking back on your career, what were the companies, situations or experiences that stand out or are the most memorable?

**Ingham:** I've found M&A really fun and interesting. When I was at Clorox, we acquired Burt's Bees. If you think about Clorox wanting to get into the natural personal care space as an adjacency, the acquisition of Burt's Bees was an interesting project to work on, especially in terms of how you integrate that workforce and convince them that they're not being acquired by a "chemical company."

Another thing that I really enjoyed when I was at Clorox was having the responsibility of building diversity and inclusion. Leading the company, including the executive team and the board of directors, to focus on the fact that diversity is around talent, supplier diversity, and also around marketing was hugely rewarding.

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More recently, the thing that's been most engaging is being here at Visa for the last 10 months as we searched for a new CMO. Working with the team responsible for the fifth most valuable brand on the planet has been an interesting exercise.

My role has been much more around helping that team enable themselves, partner together and fill the leadership void, while focusing together on the right issues.

**Boyden:** [Have there been other challenging moments at Visa compared to your previous experiences?](#)

**Ingham:** The challenge at Visa has to do with where the company is in its lifecycle. Again, we're in an industry that's dramatically transforming. If you think about traditional payment technology, historically it's been about a card. The card isn't the only way to pay now as new form factors are dramatically on the rise. You have this massive migration to the phone and other methods of payment.

We're also starting to look at clothing and cars and other form factors as payment methods. For example, your car could be wired for payment as you pull into a parking spot. You wouldn't have to get out and pay; you just park, drive away and get charged. The methods and modes of payment are just dramatically changing all over the world from a technology perspective.

The other thing that's richly rewarding and very challenging here is the breadth of what you're dealing with on a regular basis. One moment you can be discussing new forms of payment technologies, the next you can be discussing global sponsorships

and the next you're discussing how we're going to increase financial literacy in Myanmar.

**Boyden:** [Visa won the business of Costco last year. Looking at that, where are the biggest battles in the business these days and how does that affect HR?](#)

**Ingham:** One of our battles is making sure that we're staying ahead of other companies from a technology perspective in terms of the Visa network and how we expand it. Partnerships are also key in terms of how we expand into different adjacencies including adopting different payment form factors that increase traffic across the Visa network.

Another battle is against cash and checks. When the company went public about eight years ago, there was about \$7 trillion in cash that could be converted to electronic commerce. That number is now approximately \$11 trillion.

We are constantly looking for ways to make payment transactions safer and more secure. And the primary way we're going to do that is by increasing personal consumption or converting cash to electronic commerce. That's where the biggest battle is and it takes place in very different ways depending on what country you're talking about around the world.

We're a partner with Square, for example, and we're involved with Stripe, but we're constantly looking at new technologies. I would say that as the market changes, our focus in certain areas dramatically changes. HR is impacted in this battle because in order for us to achieve those business objectives, we must make sure that we are focused on structuring the organization in a way that makes sense.

## A Discussion with Visa's Bill Ingham *(con't)*

**Boyden:** You've previously discussed how executives must take care of themselves and become authentic people in order to be effective leaders. Can you elaborate on that and what it means?

**Ingham:** This is something I'm actually very passionate about. I discussed it in a promotional clip for a book called *The Rise of HR*. My chapter is about how you take care of yourself first so that you can take care of others. Really that's the journey to authenticity. This idea stemmed out of a book by Bill George called *True North*, in which he talks about how we go through crucible experiences in life and how they're often very painful experiences. It can be a death. It can be a divorce. It can be a personal tragedy of some other nature that causes people to take a step back and revisit what really are priorities in life.

A couple of years ago, I went through a personal crucible experience of my own. Going through that I discovered how critical it is to take care of myself physically, emotionally, relationally, financially and spiritually, and how critical it is to do that first so that I can help others be successful. My personal life mission is being a king/queen maker. That's the way I describe it. I'm wired to help others be successful.

And what I've realized through this personal crucible experience is that I first need to become a king in order to be a king maker. With that has come an intense focus on how I can best take care of myself. Not by taking advantage of anyone, but first by taking care of myself in order to take care of others.

**Boyden:** How would you describe your leadership style?

**Ingham:** I love talking about my leadership style and probably was most informed

about the topic by a CEO that I worked with at Clorox, Don Knauss, who's now retired. From a leadership perspective, there's "the what" and there's "the how." From a "what" perspective, I focus on four things – strategy, execution, managing people, and then leading within a matrix environment. In terms of the "how," I have a number of personal cultural traits that I try to nurture. Passion and curiosity is one area. Humility and integrity is the second. Compassion and optimism is another, and finally courage is the fourth area.

**Boyden:** How do you hire for your direct reports?

**Ingham:** The number one way that I hire for my direct reports is my network. If I can manage and maintain a personal network of relationships, then I have a ready bench. Certainly the last few people that I've hired have either been people that have worked for me in the past or have worked with people that I've worked with in the past. Those are the people that have the highest capability and highest possibility of success.

I also look to hire people who are skilled in an area where I'm not and who are very different from me in terms of how they approach things. I believe that the more diverse a team, the more effective, innovative and successful it'll be.

**Boyden:** For Visa as a company, where are the challenges for talent, function and geography?

**Ingham:** Honestly, our challenges are very broad and depend on the country and function. I would say that technology for Visa is absolutely critical, not only in maintaining the security and safety of the Visa network, which is paramount, but even more so as we begin to open up that

## THE BOYDEN VIEW: The Essential HR Executive

Daniel Grassi is the Managing Partner of Boyden Atlanta.

**Boyden:** What defines a great HR executive today?

**Grassi:** A great HR executive is a proven confidante to the C-suite and brings a business perspective to the function. He or she has a “seat at the table,” and helps develop and implement key strategic initiatives for the company.

**Boyden:** What do you find is the difference between a good HR executive and a great HR executive?

**Grassi:** The great HR executive not only brings the HR experience, but also an understanding of the organization’s business, how it works, and what it needs to be successful from both talent and business perspectives.

**Boyden:** Where do you see the biggest challenges for HR leaders or what’s the hardest part of their job?

**Grassi:** One of the biggest challenges facing HR leaders is the ability to match the talent demanded by the various hiring executives and the cultural sensitivities of the corporation. Relevant experience is obviously important, but cultural chemistry is imperative.

network to developers around the world through an open innovation platform. The migration to digital commerce all across the world makes product, marketing and M&A also so critical to us. Those are some of the talent challenges that we have, but technology is at the core.

**Boyden:** Can you describe the technology function at Visa and what it’s most focused on today?

**Ingham:** A large number of Visa’s employees are engineers. And that population is going to continue to grow. We process a massive number of transactions per second. If you think about the volume of transactions running across the network, it’s massive, and it’s only going to grow.

For example, say somebody is in Sao Paulo, Brazil. The moment they insert their card into a machine, there’s a signal that goes from there to one of three data centers, where we evaluate the transaction. We’ll route it to a financial services provider, and that provider will verify the card is in good standing and send a transaction back to our data center. Then we’ll route it back to that tiny merchant in Sao Paulo, all within less time than it takes to tap or click the payment form.

The speed and precision of these transactions is truly remarkable, not to mention the information that allows us to provide solid data to merchants and financial services institutions to help them make better business decisions.

**Boyden:** Would you classify Visa as a technology company mixed with financial services?

**Ingham:** Yes, exactly. It is absolutely a technology company that happens to be in the payments technology space. So both the technology and the brand are critically valuable to us.

It’s becoming more and more common for people to use different form factors like Apple Pay or Samsung Pay. Visa is at the heart of many of these partnerships enabling new payment forms.

**Boyden:** Looking at executive search firms, how do you use them and how do you see their role this year?

**Ingham:** I’ve always considered search firms as the best way to manage my external bench. I think of them as “market mapping match makers” – the 4 M’s. When I’m working with executive search firms, I want them to continually map the market for critical skillsets for me. Then I want them to make those matches happen and make them happen in a timely and efficient fashion.

I think search firm partnerships will always be around because search firms do a better job of maintaining an external network than I do. For example, when we look at the M&A space, even though we have a deep network, we don’t necessarily know who the five best people in the world are for this and if they would be a good fit at Visa. That’s what I rely on search firms for.

**Boyden:** In addition to allowing yourself to become an authentic person, what would be your advice for executives looking to move up the ranks?

**Ingham:** I tend to find quotes or quips that work for me. There’s one quote from the CEO of Microsoft, Satya Nadella.

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He said, "Great leaders should create clarity and energy where none exists." That to me summarizes what I look for in great leaders. Then there's another colleague, Jeremy Nichols, on our marketing team. He says, "Surround yourself with energy givers and not energy takers." And finally, I would tell people this: Be yourself. Be fearless. Take care of yourself. Focus on your strengths. And hire others to complement your weaknesses and expand opportunities.

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*The views and opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of Boyden; only those of Mr. Ingham.*