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**DEFINE YOUR  
VALUES AND  
APPLY THEM  
DAILY.**  
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THE GROUP CEO OF IBL LTD, **ARNAUD LAGESSE**, SHARES HOW HE MANAGES SUCH A DIVERSE COMPANY AND HIS AMBITIOUS GOALS TO SUSTAINABLY REDUCE POVERTY IN MAURITIUS.

INTERVIEW **HO YUN KUAN** • IMAGES **IBL GROUP**

**C**aring deeply about his island nation home of Mauritius, Arnaud Lagesse is a man on a mission to give back to his local country. He found his calling in business at a young age, influenced by his family of business owners, in particular, his father, Cyril Lagesse. After starting his career in finance in Paris, Arnaud joined the family company in 1993. Twelve years later he became CEO of the company that was launched by his grandfather in 1939. Known at the time as GML Group, Arnaud steered it successfully through a merger to become IBL Ltd three years ago in 2016.

As Group CEO of IBL Ltd, the largest business group on the island of Mauritius, Arnaud is one of the Mauritian private sector's most prominent leaders. He tells *The CEO Magazine* that he strives to drive the Group “with innovative and challenging undertakings”. »

IBL's story is one of entrepreneurship, transformation and growth. It is also the story of the many people who have shaped the Group over the past century, asserts Arnaud.

From its origins in Mauritius' historic shipping and sugar industries in the 1830s, IBL has become one of the region's largest diversified groups and today works across nine clusters in 25 countries worldwide.

Describing himself as a business entrepreneur and a proud father, Arnaud Lagesse spoke to *The CEO Magazine* about everything from giving back, to growth in business.

**The CEO Magazine: IBL has a history very much bigger than a single founder or leader. It is tied to your family. What is it like to lead such a large business that you also care about on a personal level?**

Arnaud Lagesse: I am grateful to have been born into a business-owning family and to have had access to the appropriate education to pursue my ambitions. I can say that I had a privileged view of the Mauritian business world via my father, Cyril Lagesse. From a very young age, I found my true calling in entrepreneurship and the creation of new business ventures.

Three years ago, I initiated the merger of GML Investissement Ltée, the family business, and Ireland Blyth Limited, its main subsidiary company. This was the start of IBL Ltd, and the creation both of a successful Group and of substantial shareholder value for all stakeholders since the Group's introduction onto the local stock market.

Passion is a driving force in my day-to-day work and the key to achieve my goals. I feel passionate about the Group I lead and have tremendous respect for the leaders and talents that bring their best, every day, to help me achieve our strategic goals and pursue excellence. And I balance that with judgement, discipline, and rigour to bring results that can be accurately measured.

We are proud business owners, innovative business enablers, and specialists in the fields in which we operate. A solid Group with an agile mind where people are at the centre.

**What do you enjoy most about your work?**

I am first and foremost a Mauritian business entrepreneur and a proud father. As a businessman and son of visionary entrepreneurs, I enjoy the challenge of finding new business possibilities, innovating, and staying ahead of the game in the business arena, where competition is fierce, particularly in a small market like Mauritius. It requires astute business acumen and provocative, courageous and forward-thinking undertakings to maintain leadership.

**25,750**  
the number of IBL  
team members,  
making it one of  
Mauritius' largest  
private employers.



**“CULTURE ISN'T ONLY A SET OF VALUES WE PUT UP IN THE LOBBY; IT'S EVERY DECISION YOU MAKE. IT'S THE EXAMPLE YOU SET. EVERY DAY IS A CHANCE TO FURTHER SHAPE OUR WORK CULTURE.”**

I like the thrill that good teamwork stirs up. It's a fine line between endangering ourselves enough to push beyond our limits and weighing the risks as we remain accountable for the people we serve.

As a father, I am concerned to do business in a sustainable way, finding disruptive and working solutions for the future of our planet.

Entrepreneurial visionaries from Andrew Carnegie to Bill Gates teach us that philanthropy should be a cornerstone of every company. Via the foundation, Fondation Joseph Lagesse, that I created in 2005 and have chaired since 2012, I dedicate part of my time and resources and contribute in solving one of Mauritius' most acute problems: poverty.

As you were saying earlier, the story of IBL is not that of a single founder or leader. At home or in business, people are my greatest asset. It's never an issue to wake up in the morning and make it happen, because I have benefited from extraordinary support from them over the years. I feel grateful for that.

**IBL has interests in many different industries. What are some of the challenges of managing such diversity?**

Diversity brings complexity. There is no one-size-fits-all and we have to make sure that we understand the realities of each activity, each sector, and their markets. To meet these challenges, IBL's strategy is deployed at three levels: the Mauritian heart, the regional footprint and the global expertise.

Our Group's aim is to consolidate and develop the Mauritian activities with continued support and attention. We also believe that our region holds opportunities for growth and expansion. Investing in the region has proved successful in numerous endeavours and difficult in others. We opened a regional office in Nairobi and refined our expansion process to ensure there was smooth growth.

Lastly, our Group has developed unique expertise over the years placing IBL on the international scene. In the hospitality sector, our brand LUX\* helps people celebrate life by delivering consistently on the promise of a different kind of luxury; hospitality that is lighter, brighter.

**12,700**  
the number of IBL  
shareholders.

**In which industry is the company currently seeing the biggest growth and why?**

IBL should see its biggest growth in financial services, beverages and construction this year. The sectors of activities that are dependent on the local market, such as retail, beverages and construction are performing well currently, while our exportation activities such as sugar and tourism, are affected by international fluctuations. We are hedging country, currency and markets' risks. Overall, we expect to end the financial year with a good performance.

In construction, we have experienced growth dynamics in the sector. IBL is present in aggregates (United Basalt Products Ltd) and contracting (Manser Saxon). Projections for the year to come are very encouraging.

**Sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are big parts of your business. Why is it important to give back?**

As a Mauritian group, we are aware of our responsibility to engage effectively in creating and implementing sustainable ways of doing business. With the help of Gunter Pauli, author of *The Blue Economy*, we are exploring Blue Economy projects, shifting towards a competitive business model that favours local production, allows producers to offer the best at the lowest prices by introducing innovations that generate multiple benefits. AfrAsia Bank, in collaboration with IBL and the UN, will hold its second Sustainability Summit this October ([sustainabilitysummit.afrasiabank.com](http://sustainabilitysummit.afrasiabank.com)). It will be an opportunity to explore the topic of Blue Economy and to drive the UN Sustainable Development Goals to the next level with over 200 participants from Mauritius and around the world.

IBL's CSR work is also a key part of IBL's wider sustainability engagement. It is a crucial component of our commitment towards our stakeholders and towards the communities we work with. The Group is also engaged in poverty alleviation, community empowerment and sustainability through its foundation, Fondation Joseph Lagesse ([fondationjosephlagesse.org](http://fondationjosephlagesse.org)), a social crowdfunding online platform Small Step Matters ([smallstepmatters.org](http://smallstepmatters.org)), and also local initiatives led by IBL clusters and partners

including Projets Sourire, Projets de Proximité and Les Cuisines Solidaires. The Group is also aiming at setting up a stronger partnership with AfrAsia Foundation and our partners' own CSR initiatives, and to launch a community service scheme allowing for volunteering for community service throughout the year. Giving back is not all about fundraising; It is also about giving back time. It is just as valuable as money. Our people have responded by



volunteering for annual initiatives such as IBL On the Move and are eager for more opportunities to contribute to philanthropic activities within the Group because our mission is to create a 'brighter future for all'. That's something we are working hard on to achieve.

**One of the company's aims is to create a not-for-profit that seeks to eradicate poverty in Mauritius. That is an ambitious aim. How does the company intend to achieve this?**

Fondation Joseph Lagesse is a not-for-profit organisation, focusing its actions on improving access to education, enhancing youth's development, promoting social justice and human dignity, and empowering communities with the aim of reducing poverty in a sustainable way.

It is an ambitious plan and it also requires a constant caring presence. The causes of poverty are diverse and often complex, yet we have identified that a great part of the precarious conditions that Mauritian people live in comes from their inability to find and secure stability in their life. The main difficulty remains the accessibility to education, training and employment.

We are confident that we have adopted the best approach, relying on evidence-based and impact-measured interventions, a collaborative and empowering approach with communities, and long-term commitment. Since 2005, the team is active at a grassroots, community level, and has a spectacular track record of long-term social support of vulnerable families and children.

Furthermore, its new programme of research and evaluation, geared by Dr. Randy J. Koch of the Virginia Commonwealth University, has also recently been acknowledged in the newsletter of the US National Institute of Drug Abuse.

**How would you describe your leadership style? How do you keep your employees inspired and motivated?**

A great part of effective leadership is supporting and valuing the people in your organisation and treating them with kindness, respect, fairness and integrity. It is just as important to recognise and reward positive behaviours and results than to express and address what is not going right. It's in the spirit of entrepreneurship: failure and success are part of the story, and we have to learn to deal with both in the pursuit of excellence.

The other important part of leadership is to define your values and to apply them daily. The real company values, as opposed to the nice-sounding values, are shown by how your team performs. Culture isn't only a set of values we put up in the lobby; it's every decision we make. It's the example we set. Every day is a chance to shape our work culture.

**What has been your most memorable moment in your time with IBL?**

In 2016, at the time of the merger and creation of IBL Group. Clearly, it was the start of a new era. It was a thrilling experience, with mixed, powerful emotions. It was also the reward of an amazing collaboration from all stakeholders after intense months of preparation. What is past is our precious inheritance, but it will be worth nothing if we do not focus on excellent execution in the present and disruptive innovation in the future. ■