

JUSTIN KING

Pro-Chancellor,

Justin King is the Chief Executive Officer of J Sainsbury plc, the prominent supermarket chain and provider of financial services. Appointed in 2004, when the company was facing severe challenges, he launched and led a restructuring and recovery programme which has proved remarkably successful. Last month Sainsbury's was able to announce its 11th consecutive quarterly sales growth, a massive achievement amidst the characteristic peaks and troughs of trading in the retail industry. He has also held senior executive appointments in other leading companies.

Sainsbury's first heard of Justin King when, as a sixth-former at Solihull, he applied for a shelf-stacker's job and was rejected. Quite unfazed, he went on to take a degree in Business Administration at the University of Bath. This course included a sandwich year which led to sponsorship by Lucas and persuaded him of the value of work-based learning placements. Having graduated, he obtained a traineeship at Mars.

This graduate training scheme, widely regarded as the best of its kind at the time, was a very challenging 'sink or swim' experience: thus, in his second week Justin found himself responsible for the Galaxy production line. He thrived and prospered in this dynamic environment, working at a level above the normal expectations of a graduate entrant and moving from manufacturing to buying and then sales where he handled major accounts.

Justin next spent a short time with Pepsi International, who sent him to Egypt as Sales and Marketing Director. Here his skill in developing a regional business plan for the Middle East brought him to the attention of Häagen Dazs, who appointed him Managing Director UK and gave him the challenge of breaking into a new market. Häagen Dazs, at that time, was almost unknown here. Only Harrods stocked it; so, at his interview Justin bought a pot and stick and sampled it on the pavement in Knightsbridge. From that point onwards, taste was the key, and his marketing of Häagen Dazs in the world of pleasure, rather than food, established the brand in Britain.

In 1993 Justin joined ASDA which was then, in its Chief Executive's own words, 'a basket case'. Here he took a number of senior roles, in human resources, trading and retail management, finishing as Managing Director, Hypermarkets. He was part of a team of rising stars who, like himself, went on to lead major retail businesses. Then he moved on to Marks and Spencer, as Executive Director, Food, during the early stages of their recovery from hard times. M and S wanted to create a modern food business, and Justin became, in effect, a mini-chief executive, with much freedom and his own label with which to innovate and be distinctive. He is chiefly remembered for driving the creation of the widely respected 'Simply Food' format.

Thus, by 2004, when Sainsbury's chose him as their Chief Executive, Justin King had built a formidable reputation in the world of retail management, as a man with the drive and capacity to break new ground and reverse decline. He also knew the food business intimately, and had a record of success both at the quality and the value ends of the market. A commentator at the time described him as Sainsbury's 'last chance'. Indeed, the company had lost much of its food-store market share, and its future independence was in question. In his first six months, Justin experienced (as he puts it) 'everything a Chief Executive never wants - except being fired'. Far-reaching changes were made, with the entire Board replaced in little over three years. Sainsbury's listened to its customers and employees, and acted on what it heard. Prices were cut, the supply chain was improved, and unsuccessful non-food stock written off. Everyone, at all levels, worked towards the same goals and performance targets. Under Justin's highly visible and approachable leadership, Sainsbury's made a notable recovery and is now moving onwards into growth and expansion.

When asked about the attributes of leadership which make for high-profile success of this kind, Justin emphasises the simple virtues of self-belief on the one hand, and self-awareness, humility and willingness to learn on the other. These, with his immense skills and insights, have made him one of the most successful business leaders of our time, and his international reputation continues to rise with his recent appointment to a non-executive directorship of Staples in the USA.

Pro-Chancellor, I have the honour to present Justin King, and ask you to confer upon him the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.