Executive Profile: Giles Platford – President, Emerging Markets, Takeda



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Takeda's President of Emerging Markets Business Unit, Giles Platford, speaks about his assignments across various global markets, his leadership philosophy, as well as the impressive international growth of the company.

Spanning all the countries you've worked in, which one has left the most lasting impression? Which of your various assignments has helped you develop most as a leader?

I have had the good fortune to work in different countries across multiple continents alongside a wealth of cultures, which has provided me with a better understanding of how to operate with a level of empathy and agility in those very different environments. I also had the great opportunity to learn from the various market archetypes and differing healthcare systems around the world, which offered me a broad perspective on how to maneuver in a diverse and dynamic region

Who do you look up to as your role models? And how have they ultimately shaped your own leadership style and management philosophy?

As a self-motivated individual, it is not a necessity for me to work for an inspirational leader. However, there have been a number of people throughout my career who have inspired me and shaped my own thinking around leadership – most recently, our Global CEO, Christophe Weber. He made a bold leap in globalizing Takeda, with it being a 235-year-old Japanese company. Currently, the company boasts a presence in 70 countries, spearheaded by a truly international leadership team with innovative product launches on a global scale and a strong corporate culture, especially regarding patient-centricity, ethics and access to medicines.

What do you identify as the biggest challenge facing pharma leaders like you today?

One of the biggest challenges in the industry today is making sure we balance the need to build a sustainable R&D model, at the same time making the innovative medicines we develop broadly accessible to patients, which is a particular challenge in emerging markets with evolving healthcare systems.

Also, people development is always a critical aspect when it comes to attracting, retaining and nurturing the best talent. This is something we put a tremendous amount of focus on, and the recognition Takeda is receiving as a Top Employer across the emerging markets is something I feel very proud of.

Front and center for most companies today is the agenda of ethics and compliance. For over 235 years Takeda has consistently held integrity at its core, and our decision-making model, which puts patients first, is gaining the trust of society, and reinforcing the reputation of the company. You can feel it alive in the organization and this becomes an important differentiator for our stakeholders across EM.

Given the breadth and scope of your responsibilities, as well as the disparate nature of the portfolio that you oversee, how do you allocate your time and energy on a typical workday?

There is no typical workday. Getting out there to meet people is very important, and of course given the size of EM, it is necessary to embrace a certain amount of travel, and my family has been supportive of that. I like spending time meeting with customers, government officials, physicians and of course our teams to ensure there is progress and alignment with our strategy across the organization.

In your current role overseeing Takeda's Emerging Markets, what sort of issues keep you up at night?

I feel a strong sense of responsibility and obligation working for a company that has potentially life-saving and life-transforming medicines, especially in areas like oncology and specialty GI, to address the access challenge. I am very proud of Takeda's Access to Medicine program as it delivers on one of the most meaningful and impactful aspects of our jobs.

I also think about the robustness of the compliance programs we have put in place, as there is an important industry discussion around ethics. At Takeda we set the bar very high, to not only do what is asked of us, but what we think is necessary to be the industry benchmark and to do the right thing for the patient.

With all the experience that you've now accumulated, what is one piece of advice you'd pass on to your younger self?

Always learn from your mistakes because that is the essential source for learning. I have always embraced the lessons from areas where I might have taken a slightly different course.

It is also important not to forget why we chose this career path. Most of us who work in the pharmaceutical industry work there for a reason – knowing that we have a value proposition that impacts peoples' lives, which I take very seriously. At the same time, it is important that we also remember we are doing this for our families, therefore finding the work-life balance and ensuring that we spend enough time with them is important.

Throughout the course of your career, what are you most proud of having achieved?

When I think about accomplishments in any context, I always think about my family first – I'm proud of the three children that I have and the family I have raised.

Professionally speaking, it's a true privilege working in emerging markets and it makes me incredibly proud to think of what Takeda has accomplished so far in the region, anchored on a strong focus on patients, our people, as well as ethics and innovation.

What professional ambitions and aspirations have you still yet to attain?

I truly enjoy my role in emerging markets – there are still so many unmet patient needs in the region and our company has a strong pipeline of potentially life-saving medicines yet to come. Of course for the future I will be interested in any professional step that provides interesting leadership challenges and the opportunity to make a difference and impact people’s lives!

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