

Photo: The Mydtskov House

Unforgettable: Leaders who have participated in Siegfried Andersen's courses don't forget it right away. They have something in common.

DENMARKs Mr. LEADERSHIP

He moves people

By Vibe Hyltoft.

Siegfried W Andersen's specialist subject is Leadership development. More than 10,000 managers from large corporations in Denmark and overseas have taken his courses in Leadership. And they never forget them. The reports back from many of his corporate customers on his courses, is that they affect their bottom-line positively. But who is Siegfried W Andersen? And what is capable of?

It was never foreseen that Siegfried Andersen would become a management consultant with A.P. Moller – Maersk Group as his main client. Nor was it foreseen that he would become a course provider and occasional top advisor for dozens of other large corporates in Denmark and overseas.

Actually, it stems from the beginning of his career with Jutland Telephone Company as a project manager, followed by Grindsted Products (Danisco Ingredients), Danish Employers Confederation and finally, now, with his business (IC&T Group) winning over company after company.

His familial background placed him in the lower echelons of the class system but Siegfried Andersen likes to break down barriers and pull apart rules, regulations and thought processes imposed by habit alone, all of which lead to people fencing themselves and their lives in.

Siegfried Andersen can move people. From one place to another. Mentally. It is all about conviction.

"It all takes place in the mind", he says.

But it's not just about moving people. By getting managers to move, he can get companies to move. As the earlier CEO Erik Sprunk-Jansen, at Lundbeck a drugs company, who hired him, says:

"His philosophy is based on a deep understanding of what pulls a company ahead."

Siegfried Andersen understands people. Not because he is a psychologist. Apart from an HD [a 4 year business degree] in Leadership and Organisational Behaviour, he is self-taught. He has sucked in the information. Used his eyes. Observed the effects of human mechanisms. Finally, allowing him to focus sharply.

"I realised early in my career that I couldn't learn about management by looking at how one should not do it. It was necessary to understand what gets managers to function as managers of other people", he says.

But Siegfried Andersen also understands business. He has had his fingers in different pies over a period of 12 years – amongst others as being in charge of the budget covering 300 employees for Jutland Telephone Company.

It is this mix of the human and the business side, which in its combination with the longer term effects of his courses make him in demand. He does not advertise. More often than not, his entry into the companies is forgotten in the mists by those who have used his skills.

Typically the response is; "I think it was someone in HR,

who had heard about him from someone in A.P. Moller – Maersk Group".

Leaders and managers

Siegfried Andersen is especially famous for one specific course. You never forget it, say earlier delegates. And when the small talk kicks off you find yourself drawn together by an unseen camaraderie.

"Ah, have you also been on one of Siegfried's courses! Was it the 'Personal Leadership' course? Right, so we have something in common. That's how it works", says 35 year old Jan N. Lauridsen, who was on the course seven or eight years ago, during the A.P. Moller years. Now he is the managing director for Inchcape Shipping Services' Asia region.

The great thing about these courses is that they focus on the person behind the manager, says another earlier A. P Moller man. 43 year old Klaus Nyborg is now the deputy CEO for the Hong Kong based shipping company, Pacific Basin. He took the course more than 10 years ago and has instigated Siegfried Andersen courses for talented middle management on their way up at both Pacific Basin and prior to that at the shipping company Torm.

"It was a catalyst for me, when I began to be given management duties. There are a lot of bog-standard courses for managers but Siegfrieds courses are based on the manager as a human and on the role one has as a manager. It is hard to reconcile but it is just one of those things he can do because he has fire, insight and wisdom in this respect. He has the ability to raise enthusiasm and pull his delegates with him. That is why I have used it ever since, as it's often something that is missing in companies," says Klaus Nyborg.

Siegfried Andersen works with the human behind the leader, manager or director. He holds these attributes in front of himself and the delegate. And gets them to move in new directions.

He tries to get the manager to lovingly coax the leader out. As according to Siegfried Andersen leaders are people that one would like to be led by. Managers plan and control for stability and order, whilst leaders create change and lead with their personality and take people from where they are, to places they have never been before. Leaders are rare but according to Siegfried Andersen, leadership skills can be lovingly coaxed out. Even by managers.

On the leaders course, he has noticed, strong, positive human values that automatically attract others. That is why he gives his backing to messages that suggest showing respect for other people. By believing in others and showing trust in them. By giving credit where credit is due rather than taking the credit for one's self. Or being large enough to admit that, as a leader or a manager it is one's own fault if the year's results are not as good as anticipated and because of that one is sadly going to

have to make 100 people redundant.

One's title – whether one is a director, manager or leader – does not detract from the responsibility of being what he calls 'a decent human being'.

Siegfried Andersen: "As a leader you have the responsibility to ensure that your co-workers can have the best life that they possibly can with the talents and abilities that they have. The ability to be able to see how fantastic other people are is a leadership method, which I practice with these managers, because that is how they are able to push energy forward automatically".

One of his methods is to question the delegates sharply, for example: Why should anyone be led by you? According to Siegfried Andersen the answer from the manager on the course is often:

"That's a good question," after which Siegfried Andersen retorts:

"Well, when am I going to get an answer?"

Long silent pause.

"Can I let you know tomorrow?" says the delegate, who is swiftly thrown back by Siegfried Andersen:

"It's totally pathetic that you as a leader can't immediately answer why your co-workers should be led by you". Siegfried Andersen heard the 'correct answer' to this question once, when he worked at Jutland Telephone Company. It came from Richard V. Relsted, the CEO:

"It's very simple; 'If people want to be part of putting Jutland Telephone Company on the world map in terms of telephony, then they will have to work for me.'"

"It was great fun working for a person with such cause," says Siegfried Andersen

Pull out the pole

According to Siegfried Andersen being a leader also means striving for the ultimate within the area that one works and not letting oneself be held back by believing only in what one thinks one is capable of – or not capable of. To illustrate this Siegfried Andersen uses the following anecdote as an eye-opener:

The story is about an Indian elephant-handler who has 10 elephants. They carry heavy pieces of building material all day, every day and when the sun goes down, they are taken home and tied to their own little pole with a comparatively thin piece of rope. One day the elephant-handler's son asks: "Daddy, why don't the elephants just break the rope or pull out the pole and just run away?"

"It's because they know that they can't. When they were young they were allowed to run around but as they ran farther away I tied them to the poles that they stand by. They tried and tried for 3 weeks to free themselves and by the end they had learned that they couldn't. They still remember that and that's why they never try to break free", the father answers.

"That's when I ask: 'Do you have an imaginary pole outside your parents' home that you are tied to with an imaginary piece of rope?' From more people than not, the answer tends to be: "Yes". Then I say to them: "Pull out the pole, undo the rope and get out and live your own life," says Siegfried Andersen.

Siegfried Andersen pulled out his imaginary pole years ago. It was pretty solid. His mother was a German and

his father an unemployed Dane, who during the war was forced to head south to work for the German arms industry during WW2.

"We starved after the war. My father did what he could to get us to Denmark but we lived in the East zone and the Stasi tried to get something on him. Two thirds of the other weapons factory-workers were shot or killed in another way by Gestapo but my father survived," Siegfried Andersen explains.

As a 5-year old in 1948, Siegfried came to Denmark with his mother, father, big sister and little brother. The only language they spoke was German.

"That language wasn't too modern at that time, so whenever I and my siblings were playing in the sand-pit, all the other children were pulled out," he remembers.

His father got a job as a waiter, but didn't just leave it to serving others. He managed to get through a case of beer a day himself.

"That meant that there was never much to go around. However, we had a mother, who had high hopes and great ideals and managed to push us in the right direction: 'We may be poor but you shall be a decent human being. You must behave etc etc. So when I meet grown people on my course, who say: 'Yes but my school teacher...', I ask them: 'Do you still speak with him?' 'No, he died thirty years ago'. That is what I mean by saying you are tied to an imaginary pole somewhere in your past. Getting away from that pole, anything is possible," says Siegfried Andersen. "Read impossible as I'm possible".

Right there where it hurts

That anything is possible has been proven by him. One of his points is: But if 'anything' is possible, do you have to be goal-oriented?

"Many young people have very strange ideas about what is important to them. I remember a young woman on one of my courses, who wanted to become CEO for the large corporation that she was working for. That's when I said: 'I can help you but how much are you willing to give up for that job?' She became very distant and said: 'What do you mean by give up?' 'You have to prove yourself. Do the right things over many years – at the expense of things that you like. But you are the one, who has to decide that these sacrifices are worth the prize. You have to practice and practice and practice.'"

Jan N. Lauridsen, the managing director for Inchcape Shipping Services Asia region, had to acknowledge this too. He was among the stubborn sceptics that Siegfried Andersen usually manages to convert.

With arms folded stubbornly, Jan N. Lauridsen listened to Siegfried Andersen informing him that he was wasting his time believing that he was capable of being the best at everything. It was about making a choice about what he really wanted to do. Prioritise. Become the best at one thing. And not mediocre at many.

"He wasn't going to decide that", I thought. But then Siegfried Andersen asks you a few questions that make your mouth dry. He talks and talks until it hurts. He puts people through exercises that make them think about their life and what they want to do with it. It's amazingly emotional", Jan N. Lauridsen explains at the same time

as giving Siegfried Andersen most of the credit for the fact that he has gone so far in his career at such a young age.

The bottom line

The delegates think it works. If you ask them, they feel that they have become better managers. And the companies, where they work, feel the same. A.P. Moller – Maersk Group has used Siegfried Andersen since the start of the 1980's. And since then, companies like F.L Smidth, Lundbeck, Bestseller, DHL, Neptune Orient Line, SCS, DSV, Novo Nordisk and Nokia have sent their managers and aspiring managers off for the Siegfried Andersen touch. More than 10,000 people, over the last 25 years have attended his courses.

Haldor Topsøe is one of the newer clients in his 'shop'. It started with courses for managers in the research and development division. The courses inspired Chief Executive R&D Bjerne S Clausen, and this inspiration rubbed off on the rest of the Haldor Topsøe Company, so much so that over the last 18 months more than 100 managers from the higher management structure, apart from the CEO has participated.

"The purpose was to create better managers who could lead their co-workers and our managers have quite simply become better leaders – not just better managers or book-keepers. We have also become much better at working together and I mean, we have found more effective ways to work....This sort of thing is always hard to measure but what he has done, I believe, affects the bottom line. I am utterly convinced it has," says Bjerne S. Clausen.

Ib Fruergaard, another earlier A.P. Moller – Maersk Group leader, who turned A.P. Moller Singapore into Singapore's largest shipping company and also into one of A.P. Moller – Maersk Group's largest shipping company's operating under a foreign flag, believes that Siegfried Andersen's talents affect the bottom line.

"I used Siegfried for management development – while I was helping to build the container business in the USA on the terminals side and since then in Japan and Singapore. He is just brilliant at it. He makes people open up, so that they start to recognise themselves and understand how others are affected by their signals. It just ensures that they work together in a much better way after the course. It has without a doubt helped the shipping companies' performances," says Ib Fruergaard.

After 30 years with A.P. Moller – Maersk Group, Ib Fruergaard left for the Singapore based shipping company Titan Ocean, where he acted as CEO for a year and a half. Nowadays, he is on the board. In all his years at A.P. Moller – Maersk Group he used Siegfried Andersen as his personal mentor.

"I started sailing at the age of 15, so I don't have a great big education behind me but I have life-experiences that I have learned from. Once in a while, you run into a problem and that's when, on many occasions, I have contacted Siegfried and asked, how do we deal with this? I always had my own ideas or suggestions but I've always run them by Siegfried first," says Ib Fruergaard.

Forget the weak side

Another of Siegfried Andersen's great ideas with regard to leadership is that everyone is capable of doing double the amount that they do, as long as they are allowed to work with and in areas that interest them. It is his opinion that it is a total waste of time and resources focussing on co-workers' personal or everyday weak points. In this way, leaders are able to re-educate the good co-worker, who may have been hired, in his time, as the best out of a hundred.

"It is task of management to possibly remove three areas from the co-workers duties, where he or she is under performing or that he or she does not enjoy. The whole point is to show that if you work with something that you enjoy, your work ethic and zeal grows so much that you automatically take on more and therefore do not have time to concentrate on your weaker points, which in turn no longer have a negative effect," he says.

He, himself, intensely cultivates the strong and positive sides. He maintains that he only sees wonderful people everywhere. But Siegfried Andersen is no more than a human being, so he does make mistakes sometimes. But only for short periods of time if his wife Inge-Lise Skovsgaard has anything to do with it. And she normally does, as she is always along for the ride during business trips. "She mercilessly enforces what I told her when we met, which was: that I strived to become a decent human being".

Use your head

At home in Helgenæs, on the southernmost point of Mols [Denmark], you will find a viking ship, built at the Vikingship Museum's shipyard in Roskilde [Denmark]. It belongs to Siegfried Andersen. He sails around in it once in a while. His goal is to sail single-handedly around Hjelm, an island 10 km from there, once in his life.

"I want to do this when I am really, really old to demonstrate to young people that everything in life is possible. It might be the last thing that I ever do when I'm 94 but then I never want to hear that something is impossible. It is for my own sake but also for the sake of others, who waste time saying: 'But I can't do that, I don't have the right education'. Or 'how could I ever become a good leader?' Or 'if you only knew what my childhood was like...' I don't want or need to listen to this. It's all in your mind. Get off those starting blocks".