



**Russel Ashcraft**  
Financial Services Industry

At the time of this interview, Russell Ashcraft was the Managing Director of ING Barings. Russell also has worked for J.P Morgan. Outside of work, Russell enjoys running, swimming, and travel. He and his wife, Dace, have three children, Alexander, Caroline, and Carter.

## professional

### **What are the 2-3 most valuable lessons you learned in your career?**

You need to always be aware of the people around you. It does not work, in the long run, to be cut throat. You can be decisive and opinionated and make some strong stands, but you don't bring harm to the people around you. You don't look for ways to make someone else fail, to make you look good because that will always come back to hurt you. You work hard. You work really hard. You put in the long hours ... and that's not to be a slave, but that should come with a degree of wanting to be a better person, yourself. Not just because a job is going to require to become this next level. You need to work hard. You need to be willing to put in the time. There is a point where you can draw the line in the sand and say, "I've given", but when you're first starting out, when you've been in business 15 years, if the job requires it, you've got to put in the time. And that's basically it. And you've got to put in the time. You've got to work hard, you've got to keep trying. When you hit a speed bump ... I refuse to call them "brick walls" ... but when you hit a speed bump that makes you alter your course ... slow down a little bit ... you can't let that throw you. You've got to readjust and take that as an opportunity to reassess maybe your priorities, maybe reassess what is it that you actually want. Where am I supposed to be going? Is this not the route I'm supposed to take? If it is, fine, let me reassess and if not, let me look for something else.

### **How did you get involved in the career you are in?**

The choice of career kind of evolved. I went to a liberal arts college ... a small college in Missouri. I had struggled in college about whether or not to go into the ministry, as a Christian or should I be behind the pulpit. Should I be a missionary or should I be a businessman? And it weighed on me for the first two years of college. Finally, it was as clear as a bell that the Lord just spoke and said, "Don't create a call for yourself for the pulpit. I need Christian businessmen, in the business world, seeing people who never may never enter the door of a church or that may be the mission field for you." I fell in love with the idea of Wall Street and when I got to New York and didn't have a job, I knew that's where I wanted to be. Just walking around there, I knew. I knew that that was it. And even when I went back home before getting a job, it burned in me that I was supposed to be here. And so I got a job at a bank and it evolved into a position. One thing led to another and now I'm in Latin American work. The debt capital market group at ING. It's a job where I felt I could put my natural talents to work. It's something I've grown to enjoy.

## personal

### **How do you define success? How has your definition evolved?**

Success is fleeting...no...success is when you know that you're doing what you're supposed to be doing and you're giving it your all. It's not based on an outcome. I think you're successful when you're enjoying what you're doing, you're finding fulfillment in what you're doing, regardless of outcome, regardless of pay, regardless of title. I know a lot of successful people, according to a worldly standard of corner office, nice car, and they're miserable people. I know some people who are every day, plugging along and they are as happy and feel as successful and blessed as everyone else. So to me, a success is much more linked to contentment. It has to be based on a contentment that you

feel, otherwise you're going to be constantly driven to something you'll never achieve. So a success factor is something that you have achieved already. When you know that you're doing what you're supposed to be doing, you're happy and content with your own work. The issue of success does depend on what you're capable of doing. You've got to be happy with what you're doing. But it's not something you're going to achieve at some point. Because every place you go and everything you achieve, there's always going to be something else. So you have to be content where you are.

s p i r i t u a l

### **How does your faith help you in your professional life?**

To maximize yourself, to maximize your talents, I think that it involves daily ... and then that's hard ... but as close to daily as you can get ... time with the Lord. Where you learn about the character of God that is going to carry you through. And that doesn't just mean a super solemn, sober image of a God. That's someone who enjoys laughter and that enjoys the skills to close a deal. But I think that's who I am and I think I was created to be that way, so why not enjoy it? So if I'm supposed to be the best that Russell can be, I have to believe that that's doing what God wants me to do. And if I'm keeping that relationship with him in check on a daily basis, I'm not going to be doing something that's going to hurt that relationship. I'll be maximizing the fruits of that relationship.

### **How much faith can you put in yourself versus faith in the eternal?**

I clearly believe that it's got to be a faith, externally. And to me that is a faith in God. God is a creator and if I look at God as a creator and as someone who has redeemed me into a relationship with Him, through His Son, then it takes a tremendous burden off of me to make it look like ... or to act like I'm a success. Because I've got a relationship and a foundation that is just rock solid that nothing is going to move. I can have a terrible year on Wall Street and it does not effect who I am. It does not affect my ability to continue as a person because that's not where I'm coming from. You've got to have a degree of faith and confidence in yourself, because that's when you meet people. That's in your day-to-day activities. You've got to have a faith and confidence in your abilities and in your talents. But even then that, there's a recognition of where those came from and you were created for a purpose and so if you look at it in every aspect ... look at the untapped potential that we have, as believers in the work force to make an impact on a whole range of issues, whole range of interest, whole range of skill sets. And if we've got a faith and relationship with a creator, think of how we can maximize all of that.

### **How important is faith to career success?**

To me one of the reasons why I think faith is so important from the day that you start to 15 years later to 45 years later is work can be exciting and work can take you on many, many adventures, both in the office and out of the office. But you've got to have a reason for doing it. And if you don't have a deep seeded belief that you are here for a reason, that you are doing something for a greater cause ... as strange as that may sound ... a lot of it you feel for naught. Because you can work and work and work and at the end of the day, you've got to believe that there's a bigger picture. You have to have faith in a God that you know is the Creator, that has a purpose every step along the way, who has the big picture and you know you're a piece of it, a part of it. That's where your value is. It's not in all the little achievements or the little or big failures. But it certainly makes you able to walk through any of them. Good and bad times. Confident of where you're supposed to be, it erases a lot of the doubt. When you're in an industry that is constantly pushing you to be better ... the flip side of that is also making you question almost every other step. Because if it's not making you better or if that's not the success, then it must be the failure. And so it's a lot of black and white. And it's funny. People go up against Christians sometimes and say we're too black and white. The issue of success on Wall Street is black and white. Either you are or you aren't. And that's an incredibly difficult burden to carry alone. And if you don't have a deep seeded faith, that leaves you unwavering or not doubting who you are, you're going to be tossed back and forth about what is black and white. It changes from person, to boss, to whomever it may be. That standard changes. If you've got a faith in a standard that does not change ... you're starting out and you're looking at 100 hours work weeks that you've got to do in three days, or you can lighten up a little bit. If you don't have that faith that gets you away from the



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Developing Leaders from the Inside Out

worldly black and white view of success, you're going to have a hard time. So the issue of faith is central to you being a success on Wall Street, on Main Street or wherever you are. Because that's going to be your definition of who you are and a definition of success, from the people around you, to yourself, not your day-to-day achievements