

Take the **lead** and make things **happen**



French Foreign Trade Advisors (Conseillers du Commerce Extérieur, or CCEs) are appointed by the French government to contribute their expertise in supporting French trade, assisting French SMEs, mentoring young French professionals and welcoming high-ranking visitors from France. CCE Frederic Guiral de Haas, from Aigle International, reveals how leadership functions in this organisation of volunteers.

When asked to write an article on leadership, four questions came to mind: Why ask me? What is leadership? What does it mean to me? What does it mean to a CCE in Hong Kong?

A quick search on Google reveals the following definition: “Leadership – a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task”. It’s a good explanation. But how does leadership function when that leader is a volunteer trying to balance all kinds of responsibilities in this busy city?

This question led me to muse over what we’ve accomplished as a group with no permanent structure over the past few years:

- There have been plenty of frank discussions among us and also with the French Consul, The French Trade Commission and high-ranking visitors, about what makes France competitive... or not; what makes France welcoming... or not; and what serves France’s image. This work goes on quietly but consistently.
- The CCEs and the French Trade Commission, with the support of the French Chamber, have led to more visible initiatives:
 - Three editions of “Prix VIE” to date have recognised around 30 young French professionals in Hong Kong. This award offers them visibility and a clear point of differentiation in

any job interview. Watch out for the next edition, taking place later this year.

- In November 2014, the exhibition “So French So Innovative” focused the city’s attention on French technology: thousands of visitors walked through images or interactive displays on complex infrastructure and smart transport companies, high-tech centres in the security, health and food industries, and new solutions in image processing. All the companies were French, and all stemmed from a solid tradition of French innovation in science and technology. Stay tuned for the second version of this exhibition, which will be even more ambitious.

These events were made possible because the CCEs took the lead and showed that as a group, with no means other than our grey matter, hard work and goodwill, we can make big things happen.

All of these successes were achieved through clear goals, firm yet friendly persuasion, a sense of humour, and active involvement in the project at hand: in other words, through leadership.

And that’s the same reason that you have this article to read: I was asked to contribute and decided to roll up my sleeves and get to work. In the end, I achieved much more than I had thought I could – and even enjoyed myself! **E**