



# Keys to the future of auto

## Mary Barra: Chair and CEO General Motors

When Mary Barra became leader of General Motors ten years ago, the first woman ever to sit in the driving seat of a major car company, she signalled a victory for women in the male dominated auto industry.

Born Mary Makela in the suburbs of 1960s Detroit, car capital of the USA, she was the daughter of a blue-collar General Motors employee. Goal-orientated from an early age, at 18 she took the opportunity to work at the GM car plant whilst studying for a degree in engineering. Over the decades, her roles at the automaker have been many and varied, ranging from stints on the assembly line to head of global product development, and her final appointment as CEO in 2013.

It has not been an easy ride. There have been times when being in the spotlight has been gruelling and career hardships include the safety scandal in 2014 when GM had to recall millions of vehicles because of faulty ignition switches linked to a number of deaths.

One of the world's most watched business leaders, she continues to be charged with responsibility for engineering, design and quality control of a product that needs to reinvent itself continuously to meet

the needs of the consumer. At the moment that means greener, more technologically advanced and more affordable.

In response to those challenges, she embraces a pragmatic and progressive approach to leadership of a legacy company. "In today's world, it is crucial to build a culture of innovation," she says. "To be able to succeed and survive, we need to continuously work fast, try new ideas – sometimes fail – and try again."

Barra has pivoted towards the pillars of fuel efficiency and sustainability. Some of her bold moves include launching the ride service Maven and investing \$600 million in ride-sharing app Lyft. GM under Barra believes in alternatives to the internal combustion engine and is working to develop both hydrogen fuel cells and EV battery technology. By being at the forefront of change within the automotive industry, GM avoids the risk of being left behind. What does she want her legacy to be? Barra pictures a world without crashes and congestion; a world of beautiful cars with zero emissions.

@mtbarra ■

*“As leaders in business, government, nonprofits, NGOs, or wherever your career takes you, you have a responsibility to help change the relationship and the reputation our institutions have with society.”*

*Mary Barra*

# Virgin territory

## Richard Branson: Virgin Group Founder

On one of his last days at boarding school, Richard Branson's headmaster savvily predicted the teenager's future: "You will either go to prison or become a millionaire." It may have come as no surprise to him that Branson had achieved the latter by the time he was 19 with his first venture, the magazine *Student*; or that he achieved billionaire status by the age of 41.

Throughout his career, the businessman has been driven by curiosity and optimism. His quest for success exists alongside a knack for identifying areas where he believes he can make a difference, be that the music business, financial services or air travel. Branson followed his 1967 magazine venture with a mail-order record business and the establishment of the Virgin Records brand in 1971.

He has made his career out of audacious choices, such as his 1984 idea to start an airline, Virgin Atlantic, with only one second-hand Boeing-747. That reputation for risk taking was cemented in the eighties when he attempted personal challenges such as a daredevil powerboat crossing of the Atlantic in record time, and the first ever transatlantic flight in a hot air balloon.

As his entrepreneurial drive developed, Branson launched businesses in air travel, money,

beauty, soft drinks, telecoms and more. Many have come and gone. The Virgin brand name is now associated with a 40-strong conglomerate of businesses operating across 35 countries.

Virgin's personality is youthful. Its values centre around quality, value for money, innovation and superior customer service exemplified in names such as Virgin Atlantic, Virgin Holidays, Virgin Active gyms and Australian airline Virgin Blue. Branson's brands not only reflect the market's willingness to pay for great customer service but say plenty about his own lifestyle. He and his wife Joan famously own and live on a private island paradise in the Caribbean.

Fittingly, for a legend of modern business, he received a knighthood in 1999 for his contribution to entrepreneurship. Age has not dented his ambitions and in 2021 Branson took an intrepid flight with Virgin Galactic. With this private space tourism enterprise, which aims to bring space tourism within reach of the public, he continues to reach for the stars.

@richardbranson ■



*“I was dyslexic, I had no understanding of schoolwork whatsoever. I certainly would have failed IQ tests. And it was one of the reasons I left school when I was 15 years old. And if I – if I’m not interested in something, I don’t grasp it.”*

*Richard Branson*