

Does the brightest CEO make for the best CEO? Marc Barber speaks to the boffins and the self-made millionaires to find out whether an exceptionally high IQ gives you the extra edge in business

Endless qualifications and a Mensa membership don't impress Askar Sheibani, the CEO of IT and telecoms repair service company Comtek.

'A high IQ doesn't make for a competent leader,' he says. 'Einstein would not have been a good businessman. If you meet professors of business at Harvard or Oxford, they know about the theory but they cannot run a business.'

Some of Britain's most successful entrepreneurs make a point of their lack of formal education. Richard Branson and Philip Green left school with barely an O-Level between them, let alone an MBA, and yet that didn't hinder their ability to become billionaires.

For Michael Richards, who quit university and went on to build up and sell his software company, Snowdrop Systems, to Sage UK in 2007 for £17 million, there are plenty of examples of chief executives who aren't "clever" in the conventional sense.

'What qualifications demonstrate is that a certain level of ability has been acquired,' says Richards, who now runs 2nd Head, a business consultancy. 'I'm not someone who would dismiss qualifications as they can demonstrate character in a person as well. It's easy to quit something because you don't like it. To be successful you need determination and resilience.'

SWOTS

There is a tendency for self-made billionaires to wear their lack of education like a badge of honour. The more prosaic truth, however, is that the majority of entrepreneurs do come from conventional backgrounds and have been to university.

'I don't believe that having a degree or PhD will make the slightest difference to how you run a business'

Daniel Lowe, the CEO of data centre specialist UK Solutions, started his first business when he was 17 and ran the company while completing a degree in mechanical engineering. On a practical level, his degree furnished him with the necessary expertise in his chosen field (he went on to complete a computer science degree), while also giving him a layer of protection should his foray into entrepreneurship fail.

'University degrees give an entrepreneur a different set of things,' says Lowe, who is only 31. 'It's important to have that experience of what learning is like, but I needed a safety net too.'

Daniel Woolman is another fresh-faced entrepreneur. At 26, he's already won a number of contracts with UK supermarkets for his "odour control" company Binifresh. Woolman freely admits that the degree he studied at university, modern history, had nothing to do with the world of business. 'It isn't directly related, but it does teach you to be resourceful – to do research, studying periodicals and journals so that you can think for yourself.'

Similarly, further education beyond the standard BA or BSc can't be seen as a hindrance. Peter Gradwell, the MD of internet telephony business Gradwell, recently completed a PhD in computer science at the University of Bath. He admits to being a 'numbers guy' and a bit of 'a geek'.

The company, which he also established at university back in 1998, has been through a growth phase in the past year, with 20 new staff having been hired, bringing the total to 45. He says that his technical expertise has only been good for the business, whereas the real focus for him has been on hiring the right managers and getting the best out of people.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

There is a sense among many in the business community that the knowledge taught in classrooms is too far removed from what's required in the real world. Robert Terry, who was previously the chief executive of the

