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**DIRECTIVOS  
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## **Leading in positive**

Interview with Daniel Carreño

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# “To succeed in this new environment, it is essential that leaders become an inspirational, close and committed point of reference that reinforces the role of teams”



**Daniel Carreño** | Chairman and CEO of General Electric Spain and Portugal

Daniel Carreño has led General Electric Spain and Portugal for six years. In this executive's opinion, we are at an unprecedented moment in history which requires new competencies and qualities on the part of both professionals and companies. In this context of uncertainty, disruption and opportunity, in which teams must get used to receiving unclear instructions and being required to continuously adapt to innovation-led change, leading by example and through commitment is crucial.

## Since you began leading large teams, how do you feel that the leader's figure has evolved? What qualities do leaders need now that they did not need a few years ago?

I believe we are living in a unique era due to the confluence of a series of enormously disruptive dynamics that are shaping a completely new reality. A reality which is also deeply contradictory since, although we have more information available to us than ever before, we are required to make decisions with a unprecedented level of uncertainty. We are witnessing change at a phenomenal speed and this new reality calls for new professionals and, consequently, new leaders.

In the case of professionals, they will have to overcome their innate human resistance to change, convince themselves of the need for ongoing learning and greater relevance of team work, and accept that receiving clear instructions for their day-to-day activities is a thing of the past. Managers will also be forced to change and evolve from managers into leaders. Both must work within a reality in which professionals have greater autonomy and leaders become an inspirational, close and committed point of reference that somehow strengthens the role performed by teams. I feel this is absolutely vital in order to be able to succeed in this new environment.

“In a highly demanding environment, commitment —rather than pressure— can inspire your team to achieve optimal performance”

**Is there a leader you especially admire? Could you explain why?**

I have been extremely fortunate because I have had the opportunity to work at two important centres of leadership, namely General Electric and Hewlett Packard, and I can identify a leader I admire at each of them. First of all I would mention Juan Soto; working with him was a privilege. On a daily basis, he provided formal and informal training in areas such as priority management and the importance of team development. The second would be Miguel Eslava, who taught me how, even in a highly demanding environment, commitment -rather than pressure- and acting with the courage of your convictions can inspire your team to achieve optimal performance.

**If you could draw up a profile of the ideal leader, which three qualities would you choose?**

That is a very tricky question. In the current climate, I would prize a leader able to communicate effectively and go beyond merely furnishing information. A leader should also be humble. We are moving towards a business environment in which mistakes will be made more often and nobody will have the magic formula, and we must get used to acknowledging such lack of knowledge the mistakes made more often than we currently do. The third quality would be commitment. We need to show passion, commitment and proximity in order to be the source of inspiration we mentioned earlier.

**In today's ever-changing environment, what message would you give to a young person who had just finished their academic preparation and was about to enter the labour market?**

I would tell them that they have not completed their training and they never will. We should always remember that. In all likelihood, throughout their career that young person will perform tasks that they currently cannot even imagine. If the aim is to guarantee optimum performance, they will have to develop capabilities of

the utmost personal interest that they currently do not consider or that they will discover over time. My only recommendation would be to keep an open mind and maintain full commitment to ongoing learning.

**How must a leader assume their company's good governance and corporate responsibility?**

I think good governance is crucial, and not only for ethical and moral reasons. Any company that seeks sustainable success and undertakes long-term commitment has to have an unwavering commitment to integrity. I insist that this is not only for ethical and moral reasons, but also for economic reasons since it has been shown that the societies with the greatest transparency are also those with highest income per capita. This also applies directly to companies. With regard to social responsibility, you cannot achieve sustainable success in an area to which you are not committed.

**What are your leadership principles and which do you consider are fundamental to positive leadership?**

As I said, I feel that the current climate will be extremely uncertain. I underlined the importance of being an effective communicator, but I also believe that communication is worth nothing if not accompanied by example. Not only what we do is not only important, but also what we say. The strength and impact of what we say and what we do is greater than the sum of the parts.

**In your more than 15 years of experience, how does someone prepare to be the leader of a business? What have been the key factors in your career?**

I feel that preparing yourself for leadership is exactly the same as preparing for any other activity. You must aim to develop or maintain those areas that may be most relevant to the task you are going to undertake, those in which you feel strongest and most capable and, in addition, identify any capabilities or weaknesses you need to work on. Ultimately, the aim is to enhance your

# “Sharing projects with your team, and making them feel participant, is crucial to get them to believe in what they do”

worth every day, both professionally and personally. In my case, I consider commitment passion, to be one of my particular strengths and you have to be convinced of what you are doing to maintain that level of passion. You cannot achieve optimum performance if you do not enjoy what you do. I have always tried to choose those areas that appeal to me most and, if at any point my enthusiasm were to wane, I would attempt to leave what I was doing and change before circumstances compelled me to.

## **Within the sphere of activity of a leader, how do you maintain a team's trust in the organisation in an environment of cutbacks such as that suffered as a result of the recent crisis?**

I think this is a time for believers. It will be impossible to show either a way forward in the coming years or other key aspects such as professional development with the clarity of vision to which we have become accustomed. For this reason I think it is absolutely crucial to share this task, ensure that all team members feel they have a part to play and show them, with your proximity and commitment on a daily basis, that we are all in the same boat, in the good times and the bad.

## **Moving on now to training, what are a leader's main training needs? What technical and emotional aspects must executive training emphasise nowadays?**

I would highlight two areas. On the one hand, if we prioritise aspects such as ongoing learning, the humility to recognise mistakes or the capacity to adapt to living in a climate of uncertainty, we can advance towards a future in which attitudinal aspects will be much more important than skills-based aspects. This is because technical training will continue to be essential, but continuous innovation means that training will quickly become outdated and it will be necessary to go one step further. In this regard, I would attempt foster

qualities such as the ability to work in a team, flexibility, adaptation to more mistakes being made and maybe even question the concept of mistakes itself. With respect to more technical skills, perhaps the more transversal skills should be strengthened, in particular everything relating to the implementation of the new digital reality and programming capabilities. Because, whether you are a lawyer or an economist carrying out tasks in the accounting department, you will achieve much greater success if you are aware of the scope of your decisions.

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