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

Interview with Helena Herrero

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# "Leaders are people with an idea, who convey it to their teams and inspire them to bring it to fruition"



**Helena Herrero** | CEO of HP for Spain and Portugal

Helena Herrero is one of Spain's most influential businesswomen. She graduated in chemistry from Universidad Complutense de Madrid and completed business management postgraduate courses at INSEAD and IESE, going on to join HP in 1982. After thirty years of service, she was appointed President and CEO of HP for Spain and Portugal, where she has successfully maintained the consumer division's leadership in the market. In this interview she discusses the cornerstones of leadership and the key challenges facing a society that is undergoing constant change.

## **Which qualities do you believe define leaders in the present moment?**

Leaders are people who have an idea, are capable of conveying it, and surround themselves with great teams whom they inspire to bring their idea to fruition. In my view, they need to have vision and be capable of swaying people by explaining their idea and serving as an example to their team. Then, of course, they have to have the grit to make that vision a reality. In other words, vision, inspiration and execution. At the same time, they can't lose sight of what, for me, are the essentials: values and consistency, what sets them apart and makes them unique.

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**How do you think leaders will evolve in our rapidly changing world?**

In a situation that we define as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous), the key is to put people front and centre. Leaders must be able to adapt to constant change, to be flexible. They must also understand the language of tech, something I see as make-or-break. That doesn't mean they have to be tech experts, just that they must understand what technology can bring to the table. They have to know the right questions, because technology has the answers they need. Lastly, they must have a sense of purpose, of transcendence, we could say. For example, they should concern themselves with the challenges facing society, and especially young people: the future of the planet, sustainability, the social impact of their decisions. In other words, they must break out of the silo mentality and embrace a broader, global vision.

**What is the role of female executives in Spain?**

In recent years, Spain has led the field in bringing women into the workplace. I believe that this is one of the reasons for the upsurge in our GDP. There's still much to do, however. More and more women are sitting on corporate boards, but we are still at eleventh or twelfth place in executive teams and nineteenth in boards of directors among the IBEX 35 companies.

I believe that education from day one is key, both at school and in on-the-job training. At a cultural level, we need to look at how we use language in both business and social environments. We must also shift paradigms and create new opportunities at companies. Until

now, most female executives have been in marketing, human resources or finance departments and, while these are important areas, we need women to be present in business departments as well. We need to understand that, if more than 50% of women graduate from university, there can't be such a low ratio of women at companies. It isn't just about rights, it's also, to put it in business terms, about competitiveness; in such a diverse world, it is vital that we build more inclusive teams. Diversity is the bedrock of innovation, competitiveness and creativity, so inclusion should be a key element of companies' corporate culture.

**Are there any leadership approaches that you especially admire?**

Most of the time, leadership is somewhat circumstantial and is a product of its context. A fusion of heart and mind is vital. As I was saying before, in today's world leadership must be anchored in purpose, people and diversity in order to meet the complex challenges that we face each day. I believe that combining technology with a people-focused approach is key. In other words, focusing on customers and what motivates them, at the same time as getting the best out of each person and each team and leveraging technology to do so. That would be the best approach in my opinion. I would add to that what Americans call walking your talk, i.e. being consistent. Consistency is fundamental because we lead by example, so in today's world it's important to follow through on our words. I admire people who are consistent and, likewise, I have enormous respect for those who have a goal beyond just hitting targets.

**What do you think the relationship is between innovation and talent in the tech sector?**

It's like yin and yang; they're two sides of the same coin. Technology and talent lead to the other "t": transformation, which is what today's world and every company in it are working towards. We are reinventing ourselves in a way. In this endeavour to innovate, identify new products and services, understand the needs of our customers and of society in general, as well as the challenges we face, the combination of innovation and talent is perfect. In short, as I was saying before, it's people who ask questions, who transform, and it's technology that helps us make that transformation a reality. The combination of the two, in my opinion, has enormous potential.

**Lastly, do you have any advice or recommendations for young people who aspire to be leaders?**

Well, it's good advice for anyone, I would say: think big, dream, be curious, and by curious I mean continue to learn every day. The world we live in is one in which we need to learn continuously; lifelong learning is a must. Second, I would say work hard, keep your nose to the grindstone and be tough. You have to fall and learn from your failures, which in reality aren't failures but mistakes. They teach us a lot and help us to find our strengths. Then, I would say to put all your passion into what you believe in and to make your own choices. Lastly, be proud of yourself when all is said and done. At the end of the day, when you look in the mirror you will see whether you are really consistent and whether your choices really make an impact and contribute to building a better world.

Consistency and the fusion of heart and mind is vital for leadership.

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