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Leading in positive

Jose Luis Bonet

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“The quest for continuous improvement is inherent to the human condition and good leaders must transmit that need to their teams”



Jose Luis Bonet | Chairman of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce, Chairman of Freixenet and member of the Senate of CEDE.

José Luis Bonet, born in Barcelona in 1941, has dedicated his life to the academic world and business enterprise. Since being appointed Sales Director of Freixenet in 1966, he has participated directly in the growth and expansion of the family business before becoming the chairman of the Group in 1999. He is currently honorary chairman of the Group, combining this position with his role as the chairman of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce and his participation as a member of the Senate of CEDE, the Spanish Confederation of Executives. With a PhD in Law cum laude with honours from Universidad de Barcelona, for 49 years José Luis Bonet has been a lecturer of Political Economics and Public Finance while leading several organisations the purpose of which is to help with, and raise awareness of the importance of, increasing the presence of Spanish brands in foreign markets.

What does leadership mean to you?

Leadership is an individual's ability to be a guide, someone who is capable of crystallising peoples' desires, a person with the potential to point towards where others should go in order to achieve their specific objectives. A leader is someone who convinces others to join them to achieve the goals that they believe in.

Based on your experience in business and economics, what do you believe is the winning formula for an ideal leadership model?

I think we should see it more as a question of the two "As". Aptitude and Attitude. Aptitude calls for

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consistency as regards an individual's core values. It also requires a personal capacity to navigate through life; an example of this would be empathy. Professional competence is also very important: you have to be qualified in terms of knowledge to be able to advance professionally. Attitude is associated with healthy ambition, with a desire to achieve success, commitment and hard work. Of course, we should also mention a desire to serve, an idea of service, and it is necessary to understand how very important this actually is when we talk about political, social and economic leaders.

Throughout your career you have combined your business facets with your academic activities, how do you think training can contribute to the development of good leaders?

With regard to the relationship between training and leadership, I would mention interlinkage, integration, osmosis and interpenetration. Indeed, I have sometimes suggested, and acted upon, the idea that entrepreneurs should work for a time as unpaid university lecturers in their specific areas of expertise. Likewise, university lecturers should spend some time in private business, since this convergence between theory and practice brings immense gains.

In times such as these, characterised by volatility and uncertainty for companies and individuals alike, what attitude and management approach should a good leader adopt to emerge from this situation stronger?

First, don't be ambiguous, speak clearly. In exceptional circumstances, it is important to think and reflect upon what one considers is occurring and identify potential solutions, and to talk and discuss matters with your team. And that means being resilient, having the ability to withstand and overcome difficulties. However, one must always try to turn a crisis into an opportunity and, in this regard, aim to improve. In my opinion that is the attitude a leader must communicate.

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Innovation and talent have become some of the major levers of growth for companies, but how do you think we can innovate in the area of leadership and people management?

The quest for continuous improvement is clearly inherent to the human condition. One cannot stand still, the risk being that, as the saying suggests: “*A sleeping prawn will be whisked away by the current*”. It is important to pass that idea on to the individuals in the team, communicate the need to go one step further, to never stop searching for ways to move forward outside your comfort zone.

Lastly, what is the legacy you would like to pass on?

I would like to help an institution as important as the Chamber of Commerce in Spain to advance, because it is a public instrument that is inextricably intertwined with the common interest and serves businesses and society alike, and must therefore be consolidated within the system. There are 85 territorial chambers of commerce in Spain and 45 official Spanish chambers of commerce abroad.

I would also like to help strengthen civil society, because chambers of commerce are public institutions founded on civil society, which is extremely important in a democracy as to some extent they guide the public policy agenda and may help ensure that politicians go about their business in an exemplary fashion.

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