

# Positive leadership

## Interview with José Luis Bonet

November 2015  
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# “Something very important for Spain in the future, which SMEs learned during the crisis, is that the only way out of this is to move forward”

José Luis Bonet. Chairman of Freixenet and of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce

Based on his professional experience at the helm of Freixenet and the Spanish Chamber of Commerce, and his in-depth knowledge of the Spanish industrial framework, in this interview José Luis Bonet analyses the profile of Spanish leaders, the importance of internationalisation for SMEs, and explains the basic values and attitudes an entrepreneur needs to succeed.



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## **How do you prepare to be lead a high-profile company like Freixenet?**

In a family business like Freixenet it's a fairly natural process because when the family decides you're the one who is going to lead, you lead. In fact, you have a huge amount of knowledge because for many years you've lived with and you've accompanied the leader of the legendary Freixenet, my uncle José Ferrer Sala, so you've learned a lot. I've always said that my uncle was my business teacher, José Luis Urea was my academic teacher, and Jauma Tomás was my trade fair teacher, because I joined the Barcelona Trade Fair thanks to him, I learned a lot from him and then I replaced him.

## **What do you consider to be the key qualities of a good leader?**

First of all you have to be a good person; that's really important in any human organisation and in a company too. Secondly, you need a degree of healthy ambition, this differs in each case because, in the case of Freixenet, healthy ambition means ensuring Freixenet is the world leader, being the best at doing things, conquering markets. From an academic perspective, the question is having greater knowledge, more criteria, in relation to academic problems which arise, although they may also be related to real-world knowledge. And

on the other hand, at trade fairs there's a real collective service element, because you're trying to help the country to progress, and therefore help people to do better.

**From your perspective as Chairman of the Spanish Chamber of Commerce, how does the international community perceive Spanish leaders?**

I think they perceive our leaders as people with a healthy sense of ambition, a desire to serve, always ready to go further, to progress to improve people's welfare. After that there are all those issues involved in getting a team to progress, in the sense that you've got to motivate people, get people to excel and to realise their potential. And of course, to ensure that they adapt to the requirements of the framework in which we operate, in this case globalisation, which means internationalisation and undoubtedly competing in the "Champions League".

**Do you see any differences or common features between Spanish leaders and other world leaders?**

I think leadership is something universal, it's inherent to the human condition that some people go up front and pull the cart; that's what I believe being a leader is. Leaders obviously have to have certain degree of expertise, attitudes and ambitions and should know how to communicate these to their team to achieve the proposed goals and, if possible, exceed them.

**What do you consider is essential in a professional's roadmap to become the leader of a company?**

Effort. I believe it's important to follow the three T's model: talent, which is partly innate but may be acquired by striving to learn which in turn is connected to travail and tenacity. If you've got that, there's a good chance you'll achieve and improve things.

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“Leadership is a part of human nature based on people who go ahead and lead the way”

**What's the most difficult thing faced by an executive on a daily basis?**

The most difficult thing is overcoming difficulties which arise. If you do this in good faith, with healthy ambition, putting passion into what you do and ultimately with a desire to serve, you have a good chance of being successful, by being successful I mean making things better for people.

**What lessons have you learned about leadership in your professional career?**

I've seen how my uncle José Ferrer, who is one of those "born entrepreneurs" people talk about, kept going until he became the world leader in his sector. From José Luis Urea I learned the importance of intelligent discipline; how to explore problems in greater depth to find solutions. From Jauma Tomás, I learned how to be generous in the service of others and how to be dynamic when building teams and motivating people, especially in the case of the companies attending the corresponding trade fairs, which ultimately helps the Spanish productive framework to innovate and internationalise.

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“The entrepreneur has to be inspired by what they want to do, carefully plan, have in mind a clear strategy of where they are headed and at the same time be prepared to work hard”

**Freixenet is a clear-cut example of a mature company in the process of internationalisation, as it exports 80% of its production. What role does internationalisation play in Spanish companies?**

Internationalisation is crucial because we operate within the globalisation framework so if you don't adapt to globalisation you're excluded and Spanish companies need to adapt to this. Obviously, Spain is lucky in that there are already 2,500 Spanish multinational companies and 500 of them are world leaders. Secondly, between 5,000 and 10,000 companies are trademarks with high internationalisation potential, i.e. they are already on that path. Something very important for Spain in the future, and Catalonia is leading the way in this sense, is that SMEs have learned during the crisis that the only way out of this is to move forward. This means they have to pull through no matter what, and therefore institutions like the Spanish Chamber of Commerce can play a decisive role in helping them pull through and that is what we should endeavour to do.

**At a time when entrepreneurship is on the rise, from a leadership point of view, what advice would you give to someone who decides to launch a business project?**

They should be enthusiastic about what they want to do, prepare a clear plan, try to take into account a certain degree of in-depth strategic analysis of where they are starting from and then give it their all once they get going and motivate their team to share their enthusiasm.. It's also important to be rigorous in the execution and control of the plan. The process is difficult, but not impossible.

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