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Leading in positive

Interview with Josep Piqué

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“Those unable to adapt and who show no curiosity for continuous learning can never be leaders”



Josep Piqué | former minister, economist and entrepreneur

Collaborative leadership, innovation, commitment and corporate responsibility are just some of the aspects reflected upon by Josep Piqué, former minister, economist and entrepreneur, when talking about the contemporary concept of leadership. Piqué re-examines the role of the leader, based on the premise that the need to adapt and curiosity are essential qualities in a world -in both business and political spheres- that is undergoing continual change.

How do you think your experience has influenced your career, what have you learned about leadership?

International experience is something I would recommend to everyone. It is truly enriching, and I don't mean only in the sense of the cliché that it helps you understand different cultures and manage diversity better, but rather that you see that human beings are more similar than we think, despite living in different cultures.

At team level, everyone likes to be treated the same and wants to feel like they belong, that they're

doing something transformational and can take responsibilities on and be empowered. For me, those were the most important lessons I learned from my international experience.

In your business and political experience, how does someone prepare to be a leader?

Preparing yourself to be a leader is very complicated. Leadership is based on intuition, common sense and the ability to adapt to real-world changes. These key qualities are applicable in the business world and in politics, and those unable to adapt and who show no curiosity for continuous learning will never become leaders.

“I don't believe in leadership based on the strengths of the leader; I believe in leadership that shares”

In an environment of change such as the current one, in which everything seems to have a significant public impact, what messages or thoughts would you share with young people who hope to lead projects, companies, political parties, etc.?

The main message would be to never stop learning, to listen and to work as a team. It is important to realise that you are not self-sufficient and to be conscious of the fact that we are living in an increasingly collaborative world in which sharing is a necessity. I don't believe in leadership based on the strengths of the leader; I believe in leadership that shares, collaborates, cooperates, that builds teams, creates confidence and projects a shared commitment.

In the context of corporate responsibility, how must a leader assume the good governance and corporate responsibility of his/her company?

Corporate social responsibility is fundamental. The commitment to regulatory compliance, risk management and ethical conduct, and the desire to give to society beyond the bounds of corporate activity have to be transmitted from the top down. If the company as a whole fails to grasp the total and absolute commitment of the person at the organisation's helm, it will not believe in the company's overall commitment. Those who think they can act in an unethical and socially irresponsible manner are very

mistaken and the market will end up demonstrating that to them.

Within the sphere of activity of a leader, how do you maintain a team's trust in the organisation in an environment of structural cutbacks resulting from the recent crisis?

The key words are honesty and transparency. There are times when it is necessary to explain why certain decisions have been taken, and to do so in a serious, thorough and honest manner. From then on, involving the team and the organisation as a whole is crucial. Implementing decisions vertically without any explanation will not be efficient. By far the most effective and productive method of doing so is to explain the circumstances clearly and transparently so that the organisation as a whole can understand that it is the best decision.

Innovation has become one of the major levers of growth, but how can we innovate in the area of leadership and people management?

We currently find ourselves in a global and competitive world. We are experiencing a technological revolution that is much more profound than ever before, and unless we innovate continuously we won't survive. The word innovation describes how we adapt to the dizzying changes we are experiencing; those who fail to innovate will disappear.

“It is relatively easy to become a leader but it is also very easy to cease being one”

Since you began your career in politics and business, how do you feel that the role of leader has evolved? What qualities do leaders need now that they did not need a few years ago?

Leadership has always involved having visionary traits, being able to look beyond the immediate impact and work in that direction; having vision is considered an enduring characteristic of a leader. In an analogue environment, when we talked about leadership we referred to traits closely linked with authority and the ability to transmit certain objectives that were taken on board by the organisation. By contrast, in a digital environment, leadership needs to go beyond that. Nowadays we find that it is relatively easy to become a leader but it is also very easy to cease being one; those who fail to understand this will never manage to achieve a leadership that is consistent and sustainable over time.

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

In terms of his leadership traits and capacity for reinvention, one of Spain's best examples of historical leadership is Ferdinand "the Catholic". It should be remembered that Ferdinand "the Catholic", king of Aragon and regent of the Kingdom of Castile, was the first modern leader. His achievements included the projection of the Spanish Kingdom, its role in Europe as a whole, and its influence throughout the Mediterranean and in the Americas.

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