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Leading in positive

Interview with Marieta del Rivero

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“A leader must lead by example with their actions”



Marieta del Rivero |

Independent Director of Cellnex Telecom and Gestamp Automoción. Partner of Seeliger and Conde

Marieta del Rivero has 25 years of experience and leadership in the world of technology, mobility and the digital environment, being one of the most prominent profiles of the sector in Spain. She has developed her professional career in companies such as Telefónica, as World Marketing Director; Nokia Iberia, as CEO; Amena, Nefitel and Ericsson.

She is currently an Independent Director of Cellnex Telecom and Gestamp, and is a Partner of Seeliger & Conde. It is part of the advisory council of Made in Möbile and the Mutuality de la Advocacia. Marieta is Vice-President of International Women's Forum Spain and a member of Women Corporate Directors.

She has a degree in Economics and Business Administration from the Autonomous University of Madrid (UAM), AMP from IESE and EP from Singularity University California.

What qualities do you think a leader needs and that define him or her? Is there a formula for being a leader?

From my point of view, a leader must first and foremost have vision, they must set a goal with which teams feel identified and committed. They must also transmit credibility, i.e., they must practice what they preach, since consistency generates trust between professionals. Lastly, they must be great communicators who are able to share their vision with the stakeholders so that everyone has a point of reference and knows what he or she must do.

In your case and considering your professional career, how would you define your leadership model? Has there ever been a turning point in your career where you have said "now I am leading"?

I have always adapted my leadership style to the times in which each company finds itself. Leading a company that is involved in Chapter Eleven insolvency proceedings is not the same as leading a company that has reached maturity where the timing and ways in which decisions are taken are different.

For example, at Amena, which was a start-up, the third operator in Spain, efficacy was all. The teams

were made up of very young professionals with little experience, so my leadership style there was more to guide them and encourage things to happen. However, at companies such as Telefónica, where the maturity and momentum of the business were different, the leadership model was more of a coaching role.

How is the role of women in Spanish companies changing as far as executive positions are concerned?

In Spain we have managed to make a lot of progress, although we sometimes have the feeling that changes are taking place slowly. Women have started their careers later than men, which means that it will take longer to achieve this goal. It is true that in Spain only 27% of executive positions are held by women. If we want this process to speed up, bearing in mind that we make up 50% of a company's workforce, it is important for the CEO, the chairman and the management committee to have the conviction that initiatives and plans must be put in place to promote this change right from the bottom up to the company's executives.

Although there is a lot of talk about how important it is for women to sit on boards of directors, where we have not yet reached the 30% recommendation by 2020, I

think boosting women's access to executive positions is more urgent, because it is essential to have held a managerial position before becoming a director.

Is there a leader or leadership model that you especially admire?

In Spain there are many leaders who inspire me; we don't have to go to California or Silicon Valley to find inspirational leaders. I am especially inspired by leaders who have had a vision and have been able to implement it. For example, Francisco Riveras, Executive Chairman of Gestamp. Also, Amancio Ortega, since he is a clear example of a leader who has shown himself capable of putting his vision into practice and creating the Inditex group, a worldwide benchmark in the retail industry. He is also a professional who has learned from his mistakes and who has demonstrated his generosity and understanding of when it was time to hand over the reins to another great professional to lead the company. He is also an example of a leader who wants to give back to society part of what he has received by creating a foundation that does tremendous social and educational work, which I find very inspiring.

What advice would you give to today's executives and to young people that are just entering the labour market?

I would give them various pieces of advice. The first is what I tell my children every day: "the more I work, the luckier I am". In other words, the value of effort must always be present and even more so in those who are beginning their professional career. It is also crucial that they understand how important teamwork is and to put common goals before their own. Additionally, the richness of diversity; surround yourself with different people in order to grow as a professional. Lastly, values, they must never think that the "what" is more important than the "how" or that the end justifies the means.

As for the great ethical values that a good leader of today and tomorrow should have, which ones do you consider indispensable?

A leader must lead by example, through their actions. With regard to ethical principles, I consider honesty to be essential, as well as transparency, humility and also being very clear about which lines must never be crossed. Values are acquired in the family environment, from your parents, from the people around you. Therefore, there are times when we are surprised by attitudes that do not correspond to those values.

This year the Spanish Executives Association published a code of principles and values for executives. The aim of this document is to serve as a reference in times of doubt, when we are considering whether something is correct, as well as a guide on issues relating to personnel management, transparency, the use of information, professionalism and sustainability. I think that it is an exceptional piece of work that leaders can use as a yardstick for their conduct.

"In Spain, only 27% of executive positions are held by women. If we want this process to speed up, management committees must implement plans to promote women's access to executive positions"

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