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**DIRECTIVOS  
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# Liderando en positivo

## Interview

### Antonio Garrigues

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# “Optimism is a force of life. Generating optimism generates action”

Antonio Garrigues Walker, chairman of Garrigues Abogados y Asesores Tributarios

Unquestionably considered to be one of the most prestigious Spanish lawyers, Antonio Garrigues Walker has a brilliant and extensive CV, is chairman of Garrigues Abogados y Asesores Tributarios and member of numerous boards of trustees as well as holding honorary doctorates from several Spanish and international universities. In the current situation faced by Spain, he believes that dialogue between institutions is necessary to overcome the crisis and that the right to pessimism is the most questionable right there is.

**I imagine that you have had to overcome various bad patches and situations such as those that we are experiencing today. Are you someone who knows how to be a positive leader?**

The most wonderful thing in life is to never feel that you have achieved everything because if you do you come to a standstill immediately. My challenge at the moment, therefore, is to reinvent myself, to work out how I can

help Garrigues Abogados y Asesores Tributarios. We have more than two thousand professionals. I no longer manage the firm but I still collaborate and try to help out. I still have a long way to go, I hope, and there are still quite a few things that I want to do. I would like to write good papers on specific topics, such as the need for global law in the world. In fact, we have a chair of global law at the University of Navarre and I would like to dedicate a lot of my time to that. I would also like to get to know other countries better: I have travelled a lot in my life but always far too quickly. I would like to get to know Japan and India better but, above all, at the moment I am fascinated by China, an emerging country where really amazing sociological and political changes are going to occur.

**Where does this constant motivation to do things and to learn come from?**

I imagine that it is part of the nature of each individual. In the Latin world we are far too used to loving what is ours and seeing it as the best and unique, yet all cultures are fascinating. Learning more about Indian culture, Chinese culture or Russian culture brings pleasure, satisfaction and happiness. I would even say that knowing that there are other cultures which, as well as being important, are even older than ours results in peace of mind. We have to live off our intellectual curiosity and live vitally. I believe that this is a necessity and this is what we are seeing now: how Spanish society itself is changing. People are starting to realise that a lifetime is a long time and that you have to be



ready to live for we are living for longer and longer. People are retiring earlier and earlier. Either we learn to live in an enjoyable way for ourselves and for others or we are going to have a very bad time.

**You have always had a very optimistic attitude to life and work. Is this the attitude needed at the moment, in this new era?**

The right to pessimism is the most questionable right there is. People who embrace this right are dangerous. There are people who really do have a right to pessimism but there is a large part of Spanish society that does not. It upsets me when I see people in wonderful position complaining about their situation, who talk in a dramatic or alarmist fashion about things. I think that optimism is a life force and that generating optimism generates action where problems are accepted and resolved.

I question the right to pessimism; I think that it is a right that we have to use only in very specific instances and that in most cases it is more appropriate to do the opposite. I have always believed that crises are there to be overcome, that humanity has overcome them perfectly well and will continue to overcome them. We will continue to have crises and we will be able to resolve them. The human condition needs periods of growth and then periods of reflection, more negative periods, that is how the human condition works. We need leaders who can say to us "there are solutions", "there are ways", "there will be difficulties but we will overcome them".

We can do this and we have done it. It's nonsense to believe that this crisis is the end of the world, what matters is that we do things properly. You can't emerge from a crisis if you do everything wrong. We can't get out of the crisis if we close all the channels of communication. I see cooperation and dialogue as

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**“I have always believed that crises are there to be overcome”.**

compulsory. In Spain there really is no social dialogue, there is no economic dialogue, there is no dialogue about education, there is no dialogue about anything, yet even so we manage to do things reasonably well. If there were dialogue in Spain the country would make a huge leap forwards. We have many deficits, an educational deficit, a technological deficit and many others, but they can be overcome, no doubt about it. What we must maintain is a climate of dialogue and this does not exclude businessmen or trade unions. Everyone must contribute and everyone must set store by the idea of constructive dialogue. The political classes throughout the world greatly resemble those in Spain at the moment. Spain is worse off than other European countries and we have a greater need for this dialogue and this comprehension.

**Should we begin to encourage dialogue at school amongst pupils and teachers and amongst families?**

Making everyone understand that dialogue is the base, that no one can be completely right is a wonderful idea. We built democracy upon dialogue, we built economic development upon dialogue and, therefore, no one can tell us that we are incompetent or incapable of doing that. We have a special competence and a special ability for dialogue.

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# “We have a special competence and a special ability for dialogue”.

**There are many entrepreneurs and businessmen who started out with nothing and have built up empires. Should we encourage, promote and help entrepreneurs with ideas, as they do in other countries?**

Spain is a very clever country, it's a country full of people who have overcome tremendous difficulties. I would be delighted if, little by little, young people, people who show an aptitude for business, began to be properly rewarded. We should look further into business education. At the moment I'm not envious of any other European country. I think that we have a weaker infrastructure with perhaps more marked problems but our ability to overcome difficulties is, in my opinion, far greater than that of Italy and France. I think that Spain is once again in an ideal position to deal seriously with its real problems and I also think that we are coming to a point when Spaniards are beginning to realise that these problems call for attention and, perhaps, for sacrifices. Spaniards understand the matter perfectly and are aware of the sacrifices that need to be made. All that we need now is for political and other leaders to be a little bit more positive, serious, honest and pleasant about the situation

**What can we learn from the United States?**

The United States is currently undergoing three basic reforms. There is the healthcare reform because there are more than forty million people without any form of healthcare cover. The reform of the immigration law is being studied, to deal with big problems such as

those that exist throughout Europe, and the reform of the financial industry is also being studied. The United States fascinates me because it is approaching the reforms energetically and I think that we must learn from this attitude. I think that the United States is the only country that will emerge from the crisis full of energy and full of strength because civil society there is very dynamic. Each citizen knows that he has his own responsibilities as a citizen. I was recently in the United States and no one talks of crisis. The word 'crisis' is no longer in the language, it has disappeared. I love this attitude. In Europe we are looking at the crisis from so many intellectual, sociological and literary angles that it is beginning to grate a little.

**What does being a member of the Senate of the Spanish Confederation of Directors and Executives (CEDE) involve?**

We consider the outlook for the future, what opportunities there are, what can be done internationally, and what we can do to improve confidence. I have never attended a CEDE meeting where we talked about the crisis. We talk about how situations can be resolved, why it is worth dealing with difficult situations and how then can even be refreshing for organisations, how organisations renew themselves and how people learn new things and new ideas. That is why I enjoy it and I sincerely believe that CEDE has made a mammoth effort to coordinate the work of directors and executives in Spain, a huge task that was well overdue.

**If you were not a lawyer what would you be?**

A poet or a playwright. We are all multi-faceted and we are all interdisciplinary: that is just the way we have to be since we are not one-dimensional. We must all learn from all the arts. I think that somebody who doesn't try to show their other talents is someone who doesn't do themselves justice. I don't know anyone who wouldn't like to do something creative because everyone is aware that it is a very healthy and psychologically balanced thing to do.

## Contact

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