

THE CHALLENGE OF CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Gottlieb GUNTERN

Helmut MAUCHER

Former Chairman of Nestlé Corporation, Switzerland

Introduction by Dr. Guntern

Mr. Helmut Maucher is chairman and member of the Board of Directors of Nestlé, a large Swiss company and one of the world's major corporations. He is responsible for insuring that this colossal firm, so impressive from the outside through its sheer size, does not fall into inner inertia, but remains an agile organization that can adapt rapidly to the constantly changing conditions of the business environment.

Anybody in such a position knows that as a rule there are plenty of people in broader circles of society who know exactly how things should be done properly. This is understandable because at the end of the day none of these unsolicited advisors has to produce evidence that the formula he is advocating actually works.

The French poet Alfred de Musset once wrote: "Qui s'élève, s'isole" - (he who rises isolates himself). Similarly the German poet, Rainer Maria Rilke, who at the time was secretary to the sculptor Auguste Rodin, spoke of the "circle of loneliness" that surrounds the sculpture on its pedestal. Individuals in a hierarchical top position are sometimes compared to figures who stand high on a pedestal in solipsistic contemplation, their heads almost in the clouds, aloof from the mundane cares of everyday life. It is my view, however, that anybody who really does justice to his outstanding position in top leadership is more like the ridge of a roof: together with the walls it supports the roof that affords everybody living in the house protection against the elements. The function that goes hand in hand with this structure implies a finely-balanced integration of autonomy and uniqueness on the one hand and dependency within the framework of solidarity-based cooperation on the other.

Mr. Helmut Maucher was born in a village in the Allgäu (southwestern Germany), that gave him a specific upbringing and shaped his relationship with reality. A down-to-earth attitude and a sharp sense of observation, coupled with good intuition and sound common sense, have forged in him a personality and management style that is by no means pretentious, dramatic or pompous.

In discussing with him, one soon notices that he listens attentively and expresses himself clearly. Above all he is accurately informed about whatever he is talking about. He is up-to-date on important conceptual developments and findings in behaviorism, communication theory and cybernetics. He is interested in biological and anthropological interrelationships.



What is less well-known is that he is a born musician. In his youth he spent as many as three or four hours a day on music; he played several instruments and conducted choirs. Accordingly, he knows from long experience how an ensemble whose elements often tend to drift apart dissonantly has to be orchestrated and conducted so as to play in harmony.

Helmut Maucher also has a sense of humor. When, for example, he noticed that suddenly everyone in the business world was beginning to discover ethics and produce a lot of rhetoric and phrasemongering in the process, he remarked dryly: "It's astonishing; today we are living in a world of verbal inflation and conceptual deflation."

He will now discuss the factors that foster or inhibit creative processes in business life.

Maucher: I should like to begin with a simple remark. As the Nestlé Group, we are naturally interested in fostering creativity in order to achieve greater success. We are not interested in creativity *per se* if it yields no benefit for our company. But success or, as the case may be, long-term development and earnings optimization do not depend solely on creativity. They involve many other factors, e.g., product quality, brand image, know-how, organization, cost structure, quality of management and employees, etc. Today the promptness with which a company predicts trends and takes and implements decisions is also playing an increasingly important role in its success. (It is no longer so much the big fish that swallow the small fry as the swift ones that gobble up the slowpokes.)

Nestlé probably has an average position when it comes to creativity; this is shown by the expansion of our company and by our success. But it could be much better. My philosophy is that a boss must attend to things that are not yet adequately developed in a company. What is more, creativity is important not only in research and development of new products but in all areas of a company's activities.

