Interview with Alberto Aleotti, Chairman & CEO, Menarini

13.06.2010

Tags: Menarini

After 67 years in the pharmaceutical industry, of which 45 at the head of Menarini, what would you say have been your personal keys to success?

Most of my life, I worked three shifts. Meaning arriving at the office at 8:30am, come back home at 1pm, back to work at 3pm until 7:30, and start again from 10 or 12pm until 3:30 the next morning. Such an unusual rhythm initially came from a necessity. Coming from a very modest family, I never had the financial resources to follow prestigious studies, and did not even know I would have been able to get an Economy degree. Therefore, I studied Commerce, Latin and then Accountancy- the first important step to a successful administrative career. But during all those years, not only did I have to get the highest grades in University in order to be exempted from paying the high fees that I could not afford; I was also working during the day at the “Farmacie Comunali Riunite di Reggio Emilia”, and only had the night left to study, from 8pm at 8:30am.At the time, I was living alone with my mother and would work in the kitchen, opening the windows to stay awake. I liked to stare and think for long moments, which sometimes led to important moments of discovery… and sometimes just resulted in me falling asleep.I consider this ability to work long hours as a critical success factor in the leadership of Menarini. Having looked at Multinationals all my life, I always felt I had to do more than them in order to reach their level. For this reason, in times when it was not that easy to communicate, I would answer to my correspondence at night, so that the letters would leave the next morning, enabling my ideas to be spread faster and get quicker responses, without

being over passed in the meantime.

Do you consider yourself as born an entrepreneur, or is it a skill you developed throughout the years?

I believe in entrepreneurial seed, and wanted since childhood to become an accountant in order to build a career. I have been the only one from my school in Reggio Emilia to fight and go to Bologna University. On my first year, I decided to take the two most difficult exams without having attended any lesson during the year- since I was working during the day. Of course, my examiner noticed that he had never seen be before and was extremely disdainful from the very beginning, as he could not imagine that I would be able to answer his question. Luckily, I gave him an answer which was following completely different methods than the one he taught during his class, but was leading to a satisfying result.Not only this courageous attempt enabled me to get the A-grade for this exam- it also gave me enough courage for the rest of my life to always give a try to what seems impossible and keep following my entrepreneurial ambitions.

Overall, what is the best lesson you learned from you career in the pharmaceutical industry?

I believe one never invents anything alone, but always learns from others. And the person from who I learned the most was the former President of the “Farmacie Comunali Riunite di Reggio Emilia”, in which I used to work before joining Menarini. As a great organizer, he had the revolutionary idea to aggregate the region’s small producers of Parmiggiano Reggiano, so that they could put their effort together and reach the necessary critical mass to benefit from advantageous bank loans. I followed a similar path to his, 20 years later, as he also studied hard at night to become an accountant. Therefore, eight days after I graduated, he offered me to become General Director of the company. Being only 22 years old at the time, and lacking chemical or pharmacist background, I did not feel ready for such an assignment. But he gave me a most important lesson by telling me that even tough I did not spend the previous 10 years working as a pharmacist, I did give everything I could in this timeframe- and that I had to be humble enough to accept his offer, as humility is the main quality Manager’s must have. In addition, he advised me to personally and individually choose the best talents, without delegating the selection to anyone else. Therefore –even though I probably should not due to my age- I personally examine each new employees of Menarini. From 180 people in 1964, of which 10% holding a Univeristy degree, Menarini’s headcount now reaches 12 500collaborators, of which 91% are graduates.

Having built such a strong framework, which legacy do you want to leave behind you, for the next generation which will take the reins of Menarini?

The DNA of Menarini, which will remain in the company, is the constant valorisation of merit, excellence and hard work. A winning strategy has to focus on over passing bigger players in terms of quality but also the quantity of working hours.

See more interviews