

Interview with Thierry Carcel, CEO of REDEN¹

Thierry Carcel (Vienne, 1967) is an optimistic, positive, and grateful leader. During our conversation, we talked about leadership, the role of the CEO regarding innovation, as well as a wide range of subjects such as the importance of values and happiness.



[ANTONIO NÚÑEZ MARTÍN](#)



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1) What is your conception of leadership and what are the qualities of a good leader?

It is very difficult to define leadership in a few words. An attempt to summarise it, to me, would be: "the ability to organise and mobilise means and people for the purpose of achieving a comprehended and shared objective".

Going into a little more detail, I would like to highlight the following characteristics as the main qualities to be a good leader:

¹ Spanish article source: [Entrevista a Thierry Carcel, Director General de REDEN | El Líder ante el espejo | Cinco Días \(elpais.com\)](#)

- **Strategic vision**, in other words:
 - o Comprehending the situation (market, competition, etc.).
 - o Identifying key success factors (resources, actions, etc.).
 - o Establishing an action plan and ambitious but achievable targets.

- **Ability to deliver and pragmatism:**
 - o Ensuring that financial and operational resources are available so that the team can correctly carry out the tasks necessary for success.
 - o Recruiting, organising, and motivating the team needed to develop success factors.

- **External and internal communication:**
 - o Promoting the company's reputation so that stakeholders (suppliers, candidates, customers, etc.) know about the Group, like it and want to work with it.
 - o Communicating regularly within the Group (Intranet, annual meetings with all employees, etc.) to share information with the whole team (objectives, achievements, actions in progress, etc.), create a corporate spirit and strengthen the feeling of belonging to the Group.

- **Leadership by example:**
 - o Having an irreproachable attitude in terms of respect for the company's values and the highest ethical standards.
 - o Having the necessary closeness and empathy with employees on a day-to-day basis and avoiding creating an artificial barrier that isolates the manager from the rest of the Group.

2) What do you value most when hiring a close collaborator?

For us, human values are the predominant criteria. In fact, when assessing a candidate, we always refer to the Group's 4 core values, which are:

- Benevolence
- Commitment
- Ethics
- Professionalism

We have understood and noticed for many years that a candidate with talent but without real commitment, will not integrate him/herself successfully into the team and will not give the best of him/herself. In addition, these profiles do not tend to stay for a long time in the same company, which means wear and tear and a waste of time for us. We therefore focus more on the candidate's personality, motivation, and desire to make a career in our organisation.

3) To you, how important are the values of the corporate culture and the example set by the leader?

These are fundamental, if not the most important. In an increasingly competitive world, with a workforce that is more and more likely to move and change jobs quickly, the values of the company and the example of the leader are the foundations ensuring better employee well-being. It is the reason why people stay for long and what allows the strategic plan to be built and developed under the best possible conditions.

The entire management team and I, guided by the Human Resources department, work hard every day to apply and disseminate our Group's values and corporate culture. The origin of this approach is to be found in the fact that the Group was created in 2008 in a small city in south-west France, where it was difficult to attract talents. What made us so successful were our values and our corporate culture. Now that we are well established and present in 9 countries, we nevertheless continue to put our corporate values and culture at the heart of our human resources policy, accordingly maintaining a very high level of benevolence and commitment throughout the Group.

4) How do you understand innovation?

For me, innovation is a state of mind. It must be global and continuous.

Many people often limit innovation to a purely technical aspect. In our company, this aspect is of little importance and depends more on the material suppliers.

On the contrary, we believe that innovation should be developed in all aspects of our daily tasks and at all hierarchical levels of the company. Innovation must take the form of both improvements to day-to-day activities (task optimization, new work organization, etc.) and the definition of new horizons in terms of activity and objectives (new markets, new products, new working methods, etc.).

5) Which role does the CEO play in innovation?

The CEO's role in innovation is crucial, and at least twofold:

- He must ensure that an innovative spirit lives on and develops within the Group. To illustrate the importance that I attach to this as CEO, I'll tell you what I've had written on the wall of the Group's boardroom. I had the following phrase penned in large letters: "Think out of the Box". It is a reminder to every director in the room that innovation is vital to the Group's development and survival, that we can't be complacent about routine, but that we must on the contrary always be thinking about how to improve our working methods.

- The CEO must moreover be a constant source of new ideas and proposals. Many managers, particularly when they are new to the position, believe that they must first directly produce themselves. However, it is more important that they take the time and step back to think about their business and how to do it well. This applies to all areas, of course, but particularly to the following two key points:
 - o Firstly, the Group's strategy (new markets, new products, etc.).
 - o Secondly, the human resources as well as the social and environmental responsibility.

6) How has the COVID crisis affected your sector and your company?

Working in photovoltaic energy production, the COVID crisis hasn't affected us much in terms of turnover or financial results. Of course, it has generated logistical problems, changes in the price of materials, and other difficulties of this type, but the real and lasting change has been perceptible in our work organisation.

Like many people, we had a very traditional way of organising our work, with most of the working hours at the office. Having had to telework for a long time during the COVID crisis and no longer being able to travel to other countries, we realised that travelling and physical presence were probably not vital, or even necessary, for carrying out our work.

This change in mentality has remained since the crisis, and today we have a much more flexible organisation, with a better balance between teleworking and physical presence. We have also limited travels between countries to what is strictly necessary, which benefits our employees and limits our carbon footprint.

However, I would like to stress here that it is important to maintain a balance and not give up on the physical presence in companies. Indeed, to maintain the corporate culture and to spread and share the company's fundamental values, physical encounters, both formal (meetings, etc.) and informal (exchanges over a coffee, a meal, 'corridor' conversations, etc.), are essential. The art of good management, in this case, is to find the optimum organisation.

7) And in your life?

When it comes to organising my work, I haven't changed my daily routine very much. I am still physically present at the office every day. The pandemic has made me think more about the need to travel constantly to other countries, and I now make much more use of videoconferencing instead of flying without a very good reason.

On a personal level, we were lucky enough not to have any victim of the pandemic in our family and, from that point of view, the consequences can be considered minor for us.

This crisis has changed my view of our society in terms of its vulnerability to this kind of disaster and regarding the type of reactions our governments are capable (or incapable) of ... but these are my thoughts and opinions, which I prefer to keep to myself.

8) How can we put the customer at the centre? How can we improve the customer's experience?

We produce and sell photovoltaic electricity. At the start of this activity just under 20 years ago, in almost all countries we sold directly to the state, with very simple and guaranteed contracts. The notion of "customer" was accordingly not very important; what mattered was developing production capacity. Today, the market has become more professional and we have several types of customers, mainly of them in the private sector.

This change, combined with increasing competitive tension in the market, means that we can no longer sell solely on the basis of what has been produced. We must listen to our customers' needs and satisfy not only their wishes in terms of competitive price, but also in terms of expected services (production in line with their consumption, a rapid response in the event of a breakdown, etc.).

The solution to putting the customers at the centre and enhancing their experience is therefore to work with them from the outset, designing and building a project tailored to their needs. For example, the photovoltaic greenhouses we have designed and developed with farmers in France have variants that allow them to be adapted to the specific production of each farmer.

9) What is happiness?

I find it very difficult to define in a few words a concept as vast, important, and complex as happiness. We could write a very long list on the subject.

However, if I were to try summing it up, I could say that, for me, happiness is "loving and feeling loved, and being satisfied and grateful for what we have".

10) What's the next chapter in your life?

I have no doubt that there are still many chapters to come in my life, in all areas. However, I am not planning any radical change for the time being either, as I'm quite happy with my current life. Nevertheless, to try answering your question, I'd say that:

- Professionally, I want to continue having a full and interesting job. However, I now want to be less involved in the day-to-day operational side of things and concentrate more on innovation and passing on what I've learnt over my 35 years of professional experience.
- On a personal level, I want to get more and more involved in social causes that make me feel alive, useful, and happy.