

What we believe

A manifesto

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1. Business is technicoloured, business is exciting, contagious, energy-charged

An era has drawn to a close. Business was dreary, boring, grey. Business was dominated by columns of figures. By calculating people and tough negotiators. By unbending administrators and stoical power politicians. Of course, we still encounter the relics of this epoch everywhere we go: small-minded control freaks and bean-counters, frozen faces, emotionless, backward-looking, slow. They smother every spark of energy. They only see values they can touch. And they only see them in the rear-view mirror. We're wired differently. We'd rather look forward.

A new era has begun. Business is technicoloured, business is exciting, contagious, energy-charged. It's founded on talent, inspiration, ideas. It's driven by passion, enthusiasm, fun. The rewards are fulfilment, joy, meaning. And no, we don't mean just non-profit organizations or the free-of-charge culture of Wikipedia & Co. We are talking about damn successful companies in which damn successful people earn lots of money. Just like that, without torturing themselves day by day.

These companies have a shared passion and a meaning that unites their co-workers. Their employees have fun and a sense of making things happen. Everyone, really everyone can make a contribution. No one is scared to open his mouth. Such companies leave marks instead of just churning up dust.

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But watch out! If you get involved in this new-style business, prepare to be drawn into an upward spiral of passion, enthusiasm, colour and emotion. Without a parachute, at that. Not because you enjoy taking falls, unavoidable though they may sometimes be. But because you love success. That's what we believe in.

2. Everyone has the option: lead actor or mere bystander

None of us is a victim of circumstance. None of us! We don't accept that sort of excuse. Moaning is nothing but a diversionary tactic. Every one of us has the option of discovering his talents and doing something with them – or dozing his way through life, as part of the scenery on someone else's stage. The keyword is: responsibility. We have the right and the obligation to take responsibility for our own lives. We owe it to ourselves.

In his inauguration speech as President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela said: "We are all meant to shine. Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us."

If you want to play a leading role, don't be afraid of the limelight. Success makes us visible. We are children of the light. All of us.

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3. You will only defeat mediocrity if you aim high

It is a sheer waste of time to do anything mediocre. A pure waste of energy. It is our destiny to surpass ourselves. Reaching for the stars is not megalomania, but realism.

It is our convictions that determine the upper limit of our potential. If a company is firmly convinced that it will grow by a maximum of 0.2 percent, then it will grow by 0.2 percent – and not a single percentage point more. Winners think differently. At the 2006 soccer World Cup in Germany, three teams explicitly set out to become world champions. They ended up in the top three positions. The same applies in business. There's no way around it: you have to think big and raise the bar of your personal goals as high as possible.

Take Whole Foods Market, for example. The supermarket chain specializes in high-quality, organically grown foods. Its claim: "Change the way America eats." Stop right there for a moment. Not: "Become the market leader". Not "Increase profits by 34.6 percent". Not "Quality leadership". No. This company plans in all seriousness to change the eating habits of an entire nation. And at the same time, it has been extremely successful. We are thrilled when we see organizations like that.

Another example is Better Place, the project founded by former SAP wunderkind Shai Agassi. He wants nothing less than to help electric cars to finally make their breakthrough. And by 2010, if possible. If that isn't visionary enough for you, listen to Agassi's prediction about his company's prospects of success: "If what I'm saying is right, this would be the largest economic dislocation in the history of capitalism." Now, we don't know whether this man's idea will be successful. Afterwards, everyone claims they knew it all along. But Agassi has a goal that most of us consider to be unattainable. And that gives him a real chance of transforming his delusion into reality. We take our hat off to him.

He has already convinced his investors. You can only applaud them, too: give your money to the delusional people! They will take it and change the world.

4. Passion is the driving force behind every major goal

We are infected with a virus. And we're thriving on it. We first came into contact with it in the late 1990s. We were infected by people like Richard Branson of Virgin, Anita Roddick of The Body Shop, Niklas Hayek of Swatch and others. The virus is called passion.

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We started to surround ourselves with people just like that, passionate people. Their companies not only enrich their owners, but the world as well. Such personalities leave a life's work as their legacy. They love what they do. And they never forget how to laugh at themselves. These people's enthusiasm for success grabbed us and has never let go.

That's why we gave up our old jobs. That's why we travel the world, scanning all five continents to track down the winning strategies of people who are a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g but ordinarily successful and of really cool companies. And we already know that they have one thing in common: passion.

Passion transforms intentions into achievements. Passion refuses to give up. Passion transforms the actions of individuals into mass movements. Passion can accomplish anything.

5. You can only create something really new if you challenge authority

Society rewards people who „fit in“. In kindergarten, in school, at university, in corporate life, in politics, in the media and in public. That sickens us. It sickens us totally. Because fitting in is the natural enemy of standing out.

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People who strive to fit in have never changed the world. Yes-men don't make anything happen. Yes-but men carry every good idea to the grave. Know-it-alls always know all about making life difficult for anything new. Those who fit in, who adapt climb the ladder. The quiet men sneak their way into power. The people who live in the past form alliances with the retrogressive ones, bring the good old days back to life and hold fast to anything that's already tried and tested.

Innovators are impertinent without being impudent. They have sharp, rough edges but don't injure others. They challenge conventional wisdom. They dismiss all dogma. They have ideas that seem odd at first glance. Because they have a unique sense of what the future holds.

Successful executives are aware of that. They disregard the retrogressive people and the ones that never left the past in the first place. They bar the way of the quiet sneaks. They confront the adaptable ones. They ignore the yes-buts. They throw the yes-men out.

And they leave their playground to the crazy ones.

6. The biggest stumbling-blocks lurk on old paths, not new ones

Courage means having the drive and persistence to transform out-of-the-ordinary things into reality. Without a safety-net. Courage opens doors. You will only encounter challenges if you have the courage to leave your comfort zone. And it's only through challenges that we can grow.

Courage comes from inside, not outside. The man from the lottery won't come and ring your doorbell and produce a boldness licence from his briefcase.

Courage leads to a new life.

To a different life.
To a better life.

As your own master, you bear your own risk. But we mean real courage and real risk. Courage doesn't mean wearing a bright yellow tie and a rainbow coloured handkerchief with a mousy grey suit or a bizarre pair of Elton John-style glasses. Courage means challenging yourself and your company with every day that passes, constantly reinventing yourself at the height of your success – just when things are going well.

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7. Innovation grows out of encounters with the unusual

Over time, we become like the people we hang out with every day. If you surround yourself with boring people, you'll become boring. If you accept challenges, you'll discover new sides to your personality. If you want to progress, surround yourself with people who are different from yourself. Accept friction. Seek contrast. Welcome confrontation.

This is what we think: we get bored in the company of like-minded people. We don't play golf on Sundays to listen to the same old things on the green that we heard last Thursday in the corridors of some major corporation. If we want to learn something new that will benefit our business, we talk with people who think differently. With artists, architects, film-makers, musicians. We try to surround ourselves continually with new people who are wired differently. We need the oddballs.

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As the head of a technicoloured company you need technicoloured employees. Critical minds. Sounding-boards. Productive unconventionalists. Cultured anarchists. People who will throw buckets of paint at the wall. The others are just painting by numbers.

8. Meaning!

Yesterday, if you wanted to found a company you would ask yourself: What do we want to do? Tomorrow, the question will be different. Tomorrow, it will be: Who do we want to be?

Who
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want to be?

Our friend Ken works as a venture capitalist in Silicon Valley in California. We asked him about his selection criteria for funding start-ups. “Very simple,” he said. “We ask people why they believe in their business idea. If the answer is something like ‘We want to make so much money that we can sell the place in five years’ time and enjoy an early retirement in the Bahamas,’ that’s the biggest turnoff imaginable for us. We are looking for people whose business idea is born out of passion. In the long run, those are the companies with the greatest chance of success.”

Great teams have one thing in common: Meaning! A meaning that unites them. A meaning-based horizon. That’s what drives individuals and entire companies. Money? Money can never be this compelling cause. Financial success is never the reason for meaning, but only ever a consequence of it. The difference between average and excellent lies in the fact that there is a genuine compelling cause for every truly excellent achievement.

9. A brand is the sum of their talents

Entirely irrespective of whether you manage a gang of cleaners, lead a sales team or gather a team of top consultants around you: the brand is the sum of their talents. A company's image isn't about the logo or the background colour on its website, but about the things that radiate from every individual employee. Top talent attracts top talent – mediocrity only attracts mediocrity. And not every talent fits every company. That's why it is part of a leader's job to create scope for the right talents to develop.

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If the Head of R&D in his white lab coat is the only genius in the company, he's fighting a losing battle. Every employee has to be able to contribute what he personally can do best. In a well-performing company, every employee has precisely the talent he needs for his job. That makes him part of the brand.

At the conference hotel Schindlerhof in Nuremberg, for example, all the employees have unique talents that they invest in their jobs. This investment is reflected in the increased value of the Schindlerhof brand, which in turn benefits all parties. The model works so well that the Schindlerhof has won the competition to find Germany's best conference hotel six times. Not long ago, it was the only hotel to be honoured as one of Europe's 20 best employers in the Great Place to Work Institute's rankings. And please note: we're not talking here about a joint stock company offering millions in bonuses and big, fat company cars. We're talking about a hotel with perfectly normal guests and not much room for crazy ideas. We're talking about a company where every individual is passionate about his job because it matches his talents. Because talent always wins.

10. Power is an inner attitude

Every individual is much more powerful than he thinks.

When we speak to groups, we are often told afterwards: “All-very-fine-and-nice-would-love-to-could-imagine-in-a-different-company-if-I-had-a-different-boss-the-structures-were-different-I-had-the-tools-in-a-different-position-the-opportunity-to-implement-some-of-it-well-then-I-really-would-like-to-do-it.”

How much power lay in the hands of some people who changed the world? People like Mahatma Gandhi. Vaclav Havel. Martin Luther King. Mother Teresa. None. No position. No formal authority. No fancy business cards. No mammoth organization. No capital. What they had was a mission. They knew exactly what they wanted. They started their mission with nothing but their personality. With extraordinary integrity. With the conviction that grows out of great passion. And with the persistence that drives people who know they are on the right track. They had no formal power. Their power came from within.

“You are the storyteller of your own life,” Isabel Allende once said. “And you can create your own legend or not.”

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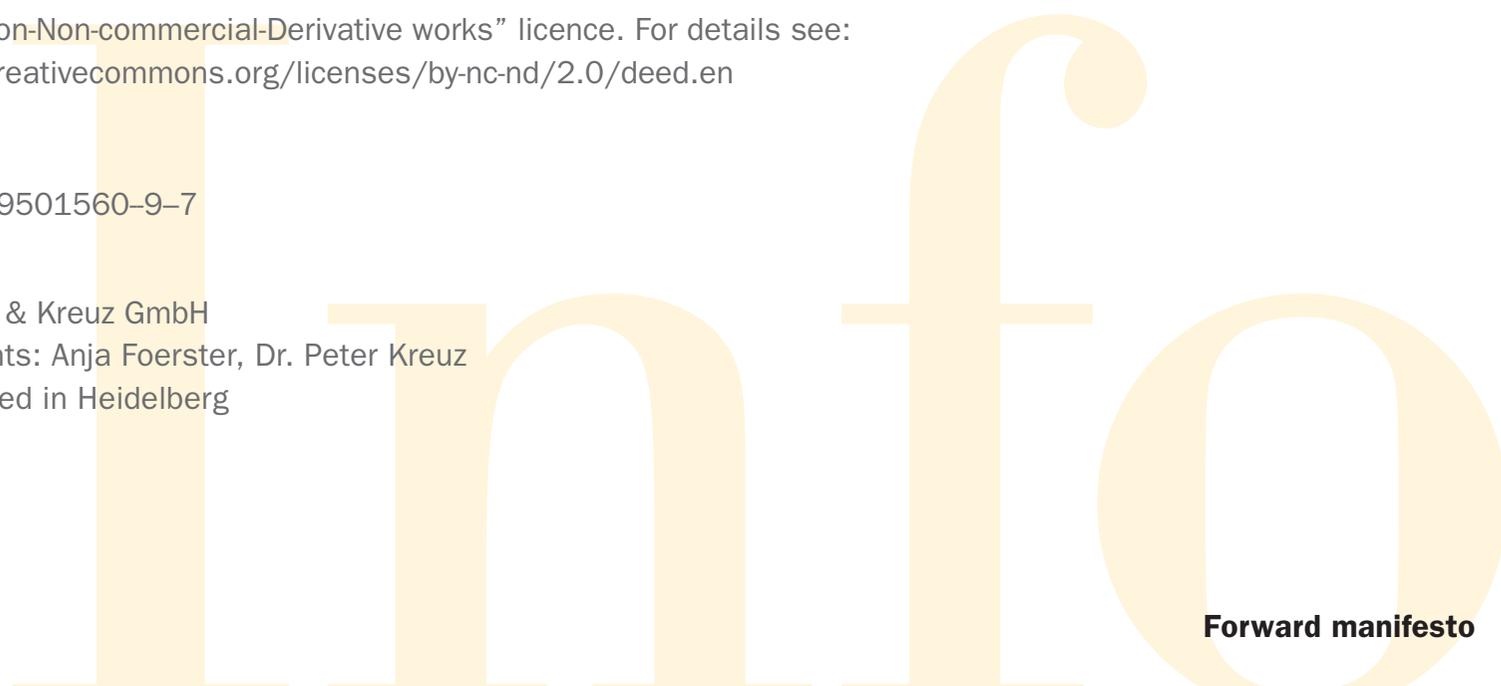
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