



“For me, Team Spirit is ...
Andreas Hedinger

Living up to Life

Leica
MICROSYSTEMS

Andreas Hedinger and Leica go back a long way. After completing his engineering degree and spending two years as an application engineer in special technology, he joined the Swiss Leica Microsystems selling unit (SU) as an executive assistant, was made sales manager for microscopy, and finally spent ten years managing the SU. He has been Managing Director of the Industry Division of Leica Microsystems (Switzerland) Ltd. since January 2007.



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but integrating our customers as well.
That's the key.”

Mr. Hedinger, before we talk about the personal significance that team spirit has for you, could you briefly tell us how long you have been with Leica Microsystems and the positions you have held?

Well, I've been with Leica Microsystems for nearly twenty years. My first job after getting my engineering degree was as an application engineer in special technology. I then joined the Swiss Leica Microsystems selling unit as an executive assistant, was soon promoted to sales manager for microscopy, and finally managed the SU for ten years. I became Sales Manager Industry Europe during the restructuring of the European sales organization and have been in charge of the Industry Division since 1 January 2007.

One doesn't become the Managing Director of the Industry Division of Leica Microsystems (Switzerland) Ltd. by accident. Were you already fascinated by physics and optics as a child? Was there perhaps even a specific event that prompted you to join Leica Microsystems?

I was already seriously into mathematics and physics – and especially optics – in school. My reason for joining WILD Heerbrugg back in the day was my desire to take part in international business. The big, wide world was calling! (laughs)

Team Spirit – the ability to attain top performance working in a group – is not only an important part of Leica Microsystems’ identity, it is also an important criterion in hiring and management. What warrants your special attention when hiring new employees?

Are the candidates open-minded? Do they want to develop their skills and advance, to fight the good fight? Do they have stamina? Do they have a strong team and goal orientation? I try to get to the bottom of all of these questions in personal interviews with a mixture of relevant questions and the people skills I’ve acquired over the years.

Do you have a secret recipe for effective, successful teamwork – for arousing that spirit that delivers results that are more than the sum of the individual contributions? Or is that something that arises naturally in daily interaction?

Do we use a “special sauce”? No. It’s just a matter of working – both on our shared objectives and our individual development. Creating clarity is important. Everyone has to understand the common goal and actively work toward it. We always focus on our shared success and each contribute toward it. It’s essential that our cooperation is marked by trust and shared responsibility. Naturally, frank but fair communication – a culture of feedback – is also a big part of it. You can’t create that with forms or bureaucracy. You need one-on-one communication. You have to talk. That’s my experience, at any rate.



“Creating clarity is important.”

Sooner or later, every team needs to make decisions about its future direction. How do you reach a consensus without endless circular discussions? How much leadership does a team need?

Well, a minimum of leadership is essential. The leader has to state the common goal again and again – not by nagging, but with enough firmness to move the necessary decision-making process forward. Anyone who takes part in competitive sports knows that teams need a coach and that talent needs direction. Creating a certain amount of freedom is important to ensure that team dynamics and team spirit have the necessary room to develop naturally. It's also essential to have an eye for the strengths of individuals – to foster them and put them into the service of the team as a whole.

In your experience, do employees with advanced scientific qualifications tend more toward pronounced individuality or a natural team culture? Does such a culture perhaps even call for a specific set of character traits?

(smiles) Overall, such employees tend to be individualists, but individualism plays an important role in teams. The job of the team manager is to handle the members appropriately and ensure that they can put their skills to the best use – including their individual viewpoints and foibles.

“Our users are members of our team. It’s as if they’re sitting at the table with us.”

Over one hundred years ago, the stated objective of Ernst Leitz was to be active ‘with the user, for the user’. How can team spirit help realize that claim?

That’s simple: we see our users as members of our team! It’s as if they’re sitting at the table with us. The team listens carefully to what they have to say and considers their message to be an order. ‘Customers talk – we listen’. If we succeed in that, then we can serve the user. I should also add that while our field force relays customer wishes to our teams, other instruments such as our ‘Voice of the Customer’ program, Desk Research and regular workshops with our customers also ensure that they can communicate their current and future needs to us unfiltered. Users truly sit at our table – sometimes even physically. Team spirit, if you will, is not limited to our teams – it includes our customers. That’s the key.

“That’s also a part of it –
those who work hard
should also play hard!”

Teams need to be handled with care. A thousand details need attention to ensure their optimal performance. What kind of working environment is necessary to inspire creative, successful teamwork?

It’s a bit like coaching a professional sports team. Respect is an important element. A healthy group atmosphere calls for mutual esteem, both personally and professionally. Open and fair communication. You have to be able to talk about anything. You need open doors, both figuratively and literally. Failures are also a part of the process, and you need to analyze them jointly and accept their lessons – without pointing fingers, of course. And it goes without saying that we don’t hold back when it comes to celebrating team successes. The whole R&D team gets together in the company with their spouses, we look back on our accomplishments and raise a glass to our success, and later we go out on the town together. Such evenings can go on into the wee hours. That’s also a part of it – those who work hard should also play hard.



“My vision is that the Industry Division will be the vendor of first choice – worldwide.”

What are your next projects? What are your goals and where do you personally see a need for action? Where is your journey taking you?

My vision is that the Industry Division will become the vendor of first choice for our customers in industry, forensics and education – worldwide. In the management team, we defined our strategy until 2010 and are now tackling its implementation. First and foremost, we naturally want to reach our growth targets. To that end, we are extending our sales structures in North America, China and Japan. We are also broadening our product portfolio with application solutions for microtechnology and refreshing our stereomicroscopy line. I think we’re also on the right track there, thanks to our healthy team spirit.



You seem to invest all of your energy into the further development of the company that's close to your heart. Do you still have time for a personal life? Do you have a hobby? How do you unwind?

I devote my personal life and leisure time to my family. We're also a team, taking part in outdoor activities together such as hiking in the mountains, skiing or cross-country snowshoe treks. I use whatever leisure time that remains to keep up with current events, watching the news and reading books. But I relax best when I'm physically active in the great outdoors. And while I can do it alone, I really do prefer being in a team ...