

CEO MAGAZINE

CEO as a woman

"I have a strong personality, but I am happy that the family task sharing is nowadays more developed"

CEO skills

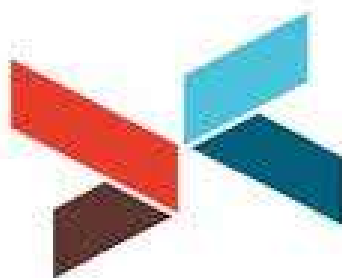
"A lot of common sense, charisma, energy and most importantly, a vision"

The plastic industry in 10 years

In which direction will the industry evolve ?

Catherine Stillemans

"There is no success if no one gives it a try"



EXTRUCO
BY STILLEMANS

THE INGREDIENTS OF LEADERSHIP ACCORDING TO A WOMAN CEO

Catherine Stillemans

In a world where ecological considerations are only increasing, the plastic industry keeps a rather negative image in the eyes of most consumers. Extruco, which specializes in the manufacture of extruded plastic profiles, is a major player in this sector in Belgium. We had the chance to speak with Catherine Stillemans, currently CEO of this company, to find out what it is like to be a leader and what the challenges are.

Born on November 18, 1962, she grew up alongside her brother in a family where the father had a very strong personality and ran the family business created by his grandfather. The company was originally called Stillemans and focused on the manufacture of lead for stained glass. Today, Stillemans is called Extruco because of a partnership with two new partners. This association was possible thanks to the move, 3 years ago, to a new production site which allowed them to automate their production much more. The two partners in question were, on the one hand, a company manufacturing parquet and wall panels and, on the other hand, a company focused on the marketing of products. This partnership had two main objectives: to diversify the business and to share power (diversity in the board of directors). It turned out that this idea was a disaster for various reasons and Catherine Stillemans, who was already in charge at the time, bought out the shares of the other two partners. She made it clear that it is not always easy to evolve, but if you don't try anything, you won't fail either. The most important thing is to be able to reflect and understand why it did not work.

Catherine Stillemans followed an academic path first in Latin-sciences and then in commercial engineering at the ULB. She graduated in the class of 1985, when there were only 8 women out of 80. After her studies, her ambition was not to take over the family business

CEO SKILLS IN FEW WORDS

"A lot of common sense, charisma, energy and most importantly, a vision"



CATHERINE STILLEMANS (CEO)

« If you want your company to grow and evolve, you have to think outside the box »

immediately. She did internships in the financial world in London, in a big 4 in New York and in an industrial company in Belgium. This allowed her to make connections and to keep them for her professional life. She believes that it is better to learn elsewhere before jumping into the family business. During a difficult period for Stillemans when her father became ill, she was obliged to stay for 6 months in the company to help them and since then, she has never left. Catherine Stillemans has been married since 1986 and has 3 children between the ages of 28 and 32 who have all followed the same academic path as their mother of their own free will. She defines herself as hard-working, persevering, curious and very demanding: for her, one can always do better.

CEO as a woman : The masculine environment of the plastic industry

Since her arrival in the industrial environment, which is rather masculine, she explains that she has not really felt any difficulty in finding her place. She also explains it by the fact that she is of such a nature as not to be taken advantage of. Her biggest challenge was the organization of family life combined with the management of the company. Indeed, the sharing of domestic tasks was less equitable at the time

and the involvement of a nanny to manage the children was essential. "It's a choice, not a simple one, but easier now than it used to be." she explains.

A strategic vision along 3 pillars

Extruco's vision is to continue to provide quality products, while responding to new market demands and consumer habits. This requires a spirit of adaptation and rapid and effective innovation, which is an integral part of the company's 3 core values: circular economy, innovation, and safety. To achieve this mission, Catherine Stillemans articulates the strategic vision of her company along these 3 pillars.

Innovation is at the heart of all the company's decisions. New products are constantly being developed and the company does not shy away from any challenge. The innovation is, for the time being, translated into the development of IOT to make their profiles more intelligent. Catherine Stillemans makes a point of trial and error and continuous questioning. She wants her company to evolve with the market, which is not possible without innovation and without an "out of the box thinker".

Sustainable development is a necessity today, especially in this sector, which is perceived very negatively by public opinion. Extruco works as much as possible in the circular economy, which is also an economic advantage in view of the increase of raw materials due to the current crisis climate. Other measures are implemented such as the installation of solar panels or the transition to more ecological raw materials.

Quality is one of Extruco's priorities. Evolving in a sustainable way is one objective but keeping a high-quality product is even more crucial. For this reason, a quality management system is in place within the company and the company is certified according to ISO 9001.

In addition to this strategy, new

EXTRUCO, ALWAYS FOCUS ON 'PROBLEM SOLVING'

Extruco is a company with about 50 employees of 17 different nationalities and has an annual turnover of 7M€. The company is based in Anderlecht and exports 90% of its production worldwide. Their production runs 24 hours a day and their customers are exclusively B2B.

The company's main competitors are GMP and Injextru in Belgium, CF Kunststoffe in the Netherlands, and Polimor in Italy. Catherine Stillemans wants to distinguish herself from them mainly by "problem solving". Indeed, they analyze the projects of each customer and propose solutions that

limit costs and ensure a high degree of flexibility. They analyze the problem from A to Z, even if the product sold is only a small part of the project. Although their prices are far from being the most competitive in the market, the company ensures a high quality and finish of their products.



The Chinese market also includes many of the company's competitors. However, the CEO believes that these competitors are becoming less of a threat. Indeed, new ways of thinking will, according to her, slow down the phenomenon of massive imports. However, there is still an important competitive advantage, the price, which will make some big brands like Brico or LeroyMerlin not yet ready to produce locally.



EXTRUCO MISSION

"We search for excellence and want to be your empowered partner, for all thermoplastics solutions".

management methods have been introduced, which also allow Extruco to evolve quickly and efficiently. Catherine Stillemans has introduced agile methods in the company, which she believes are essential to the

realization of their strategic vision. She also relied on a more horizontal hierarchy, which she believes offers more speed and efficiency.

Any advices for the CEOs of tomorrow ?

Extruco is a company that is aware of the new market issues and puts innovation at the center of its priorities in order to achieve its short and long term vision. Moreover, being led by a woman, it emphasizes the importance of evolving with society. However, Catherine Stillemans has not felt the constraining effects. According to her, the qualities required to be a good entrepreneur do not change according to gender: organization, common sense, charisma, curiosity, energy, hard work and a good world view are essential qualities for a CEO. If she could give a single piece of advice to a young entrepreneur, it would be, "Never be afraid to try, but never be satisfied with yourself, we can always do better!"