

# Positive leadership

## Interview with Rosa García

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# “: Professionals are only able to blossom when we let them choose to do what they really enjoy”

Rosa García, President of Siemens

A graduate in Mathematics from Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Ms García has spent more than 20 years working in the IT industry. Throughout her career she worked in various positions for Microsoft Ibérica before becoming Director of Corporate Strategic Projects, working directly with the CEO and Chairman, Steve Balmer. In 2002, she took on the most senior position as President of the company. On 1 October 2011, she joined Siemens as President and CEO for Spain. Since then she has implemented a new strategy focused on establishing the company as one of the best companies to work for, building a closer relationship with customers, achieving cutting-edge innovation in the search for new business lines, simplifying procedures and improving the company's reputation. On 30 September 2013, she was appointed to the Board of Directors of Acerinox as an Independent Director and is on the Board of Directors of Bolsas y Mercados Españoles (BME). Ms García was also on the Board of Directors of Banesto until its merger with Banco Santander in April 2013.



Rosa García, President of Siemens

**Throughout Ms García's professional career she has had the chance to lead multicultural teams in different benchmark companies in the technology industry. Based on your experience, what are the main challenges leaders face in this current environment of constant change and rapidly developing new technologies?**

The main challenge we have to face is being able to surround ourselves with the right team, the best team. Nowadays, faced with ever changing developments and manifold complexities, one leader alone can't hold all the answers and he or she must be able to lead through asking questions. To achieve effective leadership, it is vital to be surrounded by the most talented team possible and be part of a culture in which telling the truth and being prepared to take risks are seen as virtues. We must be allowed to make mistakes; instead of hiding them, we must hold them up to the light and study them so as not to make the same mistake again.

For the second consecutive year, Siemens has been named the most sustainable capital goods company in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI). How do you see Spain's position in terms of sustainability and sustainable consumption? What can institutional leaders do to improve this situation?

The term "sustainability" goes beyond the ecological concept of the word or the attempt to merely leave less of a carbon footprint. It is about lasting economic stability; it is about social sustainability, which is knowing what to do and how to act in order to make the society we form around us healthier and more balanced; and it is about environmental sustainability, which is aimed at leaving a better, less polluted world for our children. With regard to economic sustainability, we must focus on customers and provide real value, so that they are willing to pay for that value. Perseverance in getting to know our customers well is very important and, based on this premise, we must adapt to their exigencies in order to move forward and bring more value to the business. It is young people who will become a clear representation of what society is. Although it may not be the most effective tactic when it comes to your income statement, recognising the value of young people in terms of employment is what a business must do in order to help redress the ills of society and encourage its future success. Environmental sustainability also depends on businesses themselves. An industrial business should have the lowest energy costs possible, even if the motivation is purely economic. A kilowatt costs the same to everyone and its advantages are lower energy costs and a subsequently smaller carbon footprint. It is the cleanest and most profitable type of energy.

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**Innovation is key to the development of ecological and sustainable technologies. What should business leaders do to avoid the temptation of reducing their R&D budgets, given today's economic context?**

Any business that stops investing has its days numbered. Information technology has seen the economy become a more cut-throat environment in terms of consumer choices. Nowadays consumers are able to identify functionality and price and decide which is the best product for them with a margin of error of practically zero. Coupled with transparency, this means that not only does every customer talk about you, but they also talk about your customer service and the long-term quality of your products. In order to keep moving forward in this context, you must be the best at something, the fastest, the cheapest or the most technologically advanced. Being the best at something means that you have to be innovating constantly, because your competitors study you and within a few months they'll be able copy what you're doing today. You must always be thinking of how to launch a product today and how to do something that will still leave you a step ahead of the competition in three or four months' time.

**Beyond technology, management of human capital and of professionals' innovative ability is key to a company's future. How can we encourage an environment that might provide fertile ground for new ideas?**

As bosses, we have generally been educated to think that we are right, in the same way that when team mates or employees join a business, they are taught that the right way to work is to say "yes" all the time. Encouraging a fertile environment for new ideas is the most complicated part because this way of working does not lead to innovation; the reality is much more complicated than a manager merely knowing how to read. We have to create an environment in which our co-workers are welcome to bring new ideas to the table and know how to tell you, with the utmost respect, that what you just said was a massive mistake. The second thing we have to do is to get rid of the fear of making mistakes. Only two out of every ten innovative ideas are actually good. With that fear hovering over them, people won't take risks, because they know that they only have a 20% chance of success. However, that way you don't evolve. We must spread the philosophy that making mistakes is not a problem. You must know when to stop in order to minimise the risk and you must learn from your mistake so that you don't do the same thing again

**Another key area for corporate leadership is the continuous training of its professionals. How should management of a company run the training of its staff? What role does training have at Siemens?**

The person who must set the example with regards to the culture of continuous training is the leader. Personally, when something is worrying me, I turn to my library and consult the latest books on leadership and change, and I underline passages and bookmark pages, much the same as how I ask for coaching when I need it in order to keep developing as a manager.

The second thing a leader must do is to analyse needs that may arise in the future and the personal abilities of the staff in his or her team. A leader must also look for gaps and use them to find out, either internally or in the market, which are the best courses to help us close that gap. Lastly, we should dedicate time to our employees and make them feel important, letting them know that we appreciate that extra effort.

**On various occasions you have been awarded Spain's Female Executive of the Year award. Do you think that women's role in the executive environment is still at a stage of development? How can that situation be improved?**

The main problem women experience in businesses nowadays is that there are still people who don't realise that they should have diverse teams in order to be successful. The basis of a smooth operation lies in knowing that, economically, diversity is important, because in order to make products that have an impact on society, our team must be a reflection of society itself: including people with disabilities, comprising over 50% women and even having people of different nationalities. Realising that having women in your team benefits the company is the first step to having a clear perspective and allows you to focus on the person's talent and not on their gender or appearance. Today's generation of women are joining the labour market just as quickly as men. If new executives constantly search for diversity with that clear perspective, the executive environment will become a level playing field.

Spain's future leaders are being trained right at this moment in Spain's top universities all over the country. What message would you like to send to young leaders who are trying to make their way in Spain today?

I would say that you should work in something you are passionate about. Professionals are only able to blossom when we let them choose to do what they really enjoy, because people in general like doing what they are good at. The most difficult part is finding what it is that really drives them and, starting from there, they have to be very keen, put in the hours and show a lot of dedication. Success doesn't come for free; it requires a huge amount of effort. I would advise them to take risks, be honest and make the most of what they enjoy doing.

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The most complicated part is fostering a fertile environment for new ideas

## Contact

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