

20 years to the Start Line

Interview with President of ACE International Consultants. Mr Antonio Bonet.

To recap from part II (ACE—Present)...

After discussing the founding of ACE, Antonio delivered a very enthusiastic pitch on how the company is currently shaped.

The trials and tribulation of ACE's initial experiences, has actually benefited ACE and positioned it into a more hardened company willing to take the

nock and bruises needed to survive in this very competitive sector. He also passionately spoke about the new breed of young dedicated professionals arriving to ACE from all over the world, with different background and experience ready to shape ACE for the future.

This brings us onto the final chapter where Antonio discusses the future and how it is now the right time for his promising young and energetic staff to fulfill their potential and take ACE forward.

SC: Moving onto the future of ACE. I'm assuming you're here 20 years later, in a much better position than you were 10 years ago, and much better position than you were 5 years previous to that. Now what are the immediate plans for ACE, not just this year, but the next few years? And where would you like to be?

AB: Growing by diversifying into other fields such as social, health, education, comparative gender, minorities, public finance, statistics and other microeconomic issues. We also want to grow and diver-

sify geographically. We're present in most countries through the framework contract, but we want to increase our

AB: We're a bit late in terms of growth. Why? Because there are very few contracts, contracts are normally large, and time to market is very long. For example it normally requires about a year and a half to prepare the company and position it to win contracts that may come up in the future. So you need to identify the right people, train them, let them work and let them achieve, the whole process takes a lot of time.

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SC: So there's a lot of prior investment and planning ahead?

presence in some areas, where we are not present that much. For instance Asia and the Far East are areas where we've done a few projects, but we're not really strong there.

AB: Yes. And in any case I think that we are on track in terms of procedures, systems, IT and people, and now we have wait to for the results, which will come.

"What would you want to be your legacy..."

"I would like to be remembered both as a person and as a consultant.

The person to learn, and the person whom many people have learnt from.

We want to grow there, we want to grow in Central Asia, and we want to grow in the areas in which we are working in now, such as the ACP, Latin America, Africa and Mediterranean countries. So we plan to grow on two fronts.

SC:

And you are very confident of that?

AB: Yes. I'm sure of it.

SC: Where do you plan ACE to be in 20 years from now?

AB: Well I plan to be retired! (Laugh)

SC: Now going back to strategic plan, how do you think you are doing? Are you on target to achieve your strategic plan?

SC: Really?

AB: Well not totally...

- SC No I can't imagine that could ever happen. So in the next 20 years what would you want to leave as your legacy?
- AB I would like to be remembered both as a person and as a consultant. *The person to learn, and the person whom many people have learnt from.* How to deliver, how to achieve results, in terms of aid development, and in terms of company's delivery,
- SC Well your legacy is evident and secure in Central Europe with export promotion. And I'm sure that legacy in time will suffice to deliver, but in terms of where you want ACE, would you want it to grow into a multinational company? Or would you prefer what it is right now, a company that is on the ground helping small firms?
- AB No, No. I think we need to grow more, as set in our strategic plan. I would like us to be much bigger than what we are, with much more local presence than what we have, and to have more local presence, you have to be much larger. My objective, my view is that ACE will be one of the main players in this field in terms of size and sectoral coverage, so there's still a lot to do.

And with that phrase, the interview was concluded. It was evident that even after 20 years, the passion and drive is still there. There is also a new breed of young energised and motivated staff bringing fresh ideas, who are passionate about ACE's ideology in providing assistance to developing countries and its business principles in delivering results. Not so much in taking the baton from the company elders, but working in unison whilst being guided by their wisdom and experience.

The interview became not just a rallying call but a manifesto of where the company was going to be in the next 20 years and the message from the very top, is very clear!

"we are just getting started!"

So it seems there are still big things to come from ACE, and it truly has taken them "20 years to get to the Start Line".

"Hot Rock" Question:

SC ACEs speciality is export promotion, and it's what ACE can make a difference in better than any other company.

"If you had a choice where you could implement your export promotion strategy in a country that desperately needed it, or you had another project that had a much higher profit margin, which would you go for?"

AB I think that ACE is not a company looking at only profits, I mean we're a company, so if there's no profit there's no survival, but our aim is not to maximise profit. We have to make decent profit, but it is not our aim.

SC Yes but in term of answering your question, which one would you go for? If you had a project that gave much more assistance, but very little profit say €100,000 and the other had a €1 million, which would you go for?

AB If the profit of the project falls within our standard, and threshold, I think we will go for more into the type of the work and the results, than pure profit. In fact I'm sure of that.
Again I must add if there's not profit there's no company

SC So the old saying you can't help the poor if you're one of them.

AB Yes. We have to be selective in term of what we do, and we have to enjoy what we do. If we do not enjoy what we do, we will not do it right.