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Interviews

The human sustainability of Cucinelli

The Umbrian entrepreneur whose namesake company earned a profit of over € 50 million in 2017 has always based everything on the value of life. Which translates into good benefits and a creative work environment. “With the Foundation I want to continue to take care of the community,” he explained to *MFF*. – **Fabio Gibellino**

The creation of a successful company while keeping an eye on sustainability. Not just environmental, but human as well. This is what has been accomplished by **Brunello Cucinelli** in 40 years of activity. Today the Umbrian brand is recognized for the quality of its products and its industrial and financial performance, which in 2017 translated into over € 50 million in profits and a share value which, from the time of its IPO in 2012, has risen from 7.75 to over 37 euro.

What does sustainability mean for Brunello Cucinelli?

First of all I would like to talk about human sustainability. Because the first factor of life is how and where a person works and in what conditions: moral, economic, human, and aesthetic.

Where did everything start?

From the experiences of my father and brothers, who worked in conditions that were aesthetically difficult, in cold or extremely hot environments, and for pay that was considered normal. So I became concerned, from the very start, with wanting to accomplish the right profits, in balance, and with workers working in normal human and economic conditions, in the contemporary sense.

And how does all this manifest itself?

People should work in places where there's light, where, when they look up toward the sky, they can see what the weather's like, because, as **Rousseau** said, the human being is creative when everything around him is at peace with creation. Because esteem generates responsibility and responsibility generates creativity. My life goal is to find the right balance between profit and gift.

Do you think you've reached this balance from the human standpoint?

Honestly, I think I succeeded when we began 40 years ago, even if we were only myself and two employees. It's obvious that the larger a company is, the greater the risk that all this may become diluted. But we all come in at 8 in the morning, there's no timecard to punch, we all leave at 5:30, and there's a long lunch break from 1 to 2:30. But during the day we have to be

fast. I say, “Good morning” at 7:59, and not later, but only to avoid wasting time and making others waste it.

And in company terms?

I think so, in the sense that the employees earn something more, they work in a slightly better place, and the company earns the right amount, just like the investors, bank, and outside consultants.

Are there rules for human sustainability?

The rules, like in any enterprise, aren’t written. Every three months we hold a meeting on the state of things, on what feelings are being felt, on how we see the future. Of course, only I talk, but I try to understand the small operational aspects that can improve everyone’s wellbeing, from the restaurant to the temperature of the rooms.

How much sustainability is there in beauty?

I believe that in this, too, the Internet has brought about numerous changes. When I buy something, I inform myself about how it was made, how those who made it behave, and if they earned the right amount or too much, unless it’s a unique product. And then in the luxury sector, all the more so: the attention paid is different.

Is human sustainability measurable in material terms (of value and productivity) for a company listed on the Stock Exchange?

To tell the truth, many companies have asked me to transform it into numbers, into values, but I have always refused. I don’t like the idea of this wonderful normality becoming a number. I would only like to transmit the value of our work.

And to what extent should customers be involved?

They shouldn’t be, because in reality the customer wants to be free of everything.

What role has Solomeo played?

It has played an extremely important role, because it’s obvious that if the company had been in an industrial zone it would have been much less necessary to take care of a village, the vineyard, the olive grove, and the outskirts. Realizing that this, for me, is the ordinary state of things, was very easy; it was sufficient for me to look into the eyes of my father and brothers who, when they worked in the fields, were of course tired, but they were serene.

Is there something else you can do?

With the company, I’d like to continue working along these lines, while with the foundation I want to continue taking care of humanity which, in our own small way, means beautifying it.
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