INTERVIEW WITH
PAU GARCIA-MILÀ

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You're a keynote speaker at the next CNO Panel in Bern which will take place in November. What will your speech be about?

I'll be talking about something I consider is key for any organization: Fast Innovation, or the need of being innovative… and also fast. Any organization today must understand that it's competing with small, recently founded start-ups. It doesn't matter that their company has been around for more than 100 years and they are more than 50.000 employees: if they do not see as real competitors the rising start-ups in their markets, they'll be preparing their own tomb.

You founded EyeOS, your first company, when you were 17 years old. Have you always had an entrepreneurial spirit?

Would love to answer a big "YES", but I can't. My biggest dream when I was 12 was to manage and present a radio show. In fact, when my parent asked for my 14th birthday if I wanted a radio antenna or Internet connection at home I chose the radio antenna. And 3 years later I was starting an Internet company.

Who or what were your early influences?

I've been influenced by many people. My father and my mother are probably on the top of all of them. One of my earliest memories, from when I was 5, is seeing my parents (who are architects) opening a Pizza restaurant. There was an economic crisis and they decided to do something else. To me, seeing them changing completely their work stream to protect the family was something I understood as "normal", until I grew up and saw that there was a big effort on that. A few years after that moment, they went back to being Architects and were successful.

EyeOS was a virtual desktop startup. You lost control over it when you sold the company to Telefónica. What was that like for you?

It was with no doubt a happy moment. I did not "lose" control, but "lease" control to someone I completely trusted (and trust) and in the best possible hands: the ones from a big corporation who was looking to continue our project.

In 2011 MIT Technology Review placed you on the "35 Innovators Under 35" list. You said that you had to ignore the judgments of other people to get there. What did you mean by that?

I remember very well that day. It was very special as I was starting to date my girlfriend, who is today my partner and wife. And I remember the thank you

speech, where I mentioned that when you start something new, it's very common to see people acting as "Innovation judges", this is, judging what you're trying to do and telling "you will fail on this, I have no doubts". I believe this kind of behaviors are just killing a lot of potential innovations and should be ignored.

Entrepreneurs like yourself are often seen as fighters, self-confident and positive thinkers. Do you agree? Is that how you see yourself?

I definitely try to fight, be self-confident and positive thinker myself. However, that's not always possible. Starting a project, a company, requires lots of efforts but also sacrifices and sometimes pain, and that's something that can weaken the strongest mind.

Technology evolves so quickly that no one can predict what it will be like in 5 or 10 years. It seems to me that randomness and uncertainty play increasingly greater roles in determining the fate of companies. How should they deal with that uncertainty?

In fact, I believe that the biggest enemy for any company pursuing innovation is uncertainty: we can be prepared to fail, or even to be successful, but the periods in the middle where we just don't know what will happen are the ones that can cause more pain.

In this field, I wish it could exist an easy solution for uncertainty, but I'm afraid there is no cure. Just some vitamins we can take to reduce the pain: working together with a team we can trust and we can be transparent with. Get surrounded by people who can deal with pressure. Try to have many small innovation projects instead of a big one… However, on the top of everything else, learning to deal with pressure is key.

You wrote four books about innovation, ideas and communication. That makes me wonder whether people can actually learn to have great ideas and be innovative. If yes, how?

I believe that creativity and ideas generation is something similar to have a great 6-pack on your belly. You won't have it if you just try for 1 hour, one day. But after 3 years working hard on a gym, you'll have it. Something similar happens with idea generation or creativity. After some "exercise", periodicity and being constant among all other things, no one will beat you on those fields.

We live in a culture of innovation. Especially in IT it seems that if you're not innovative, you're no one. But how do you define something as innovating, if everything's innovative? And what happened to "tested and proven"?

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We could say that in a world where everyone innovates, the one not doing it would be the only one innovating. However, I believe that there are so many fields to apply innovation to, so many markets and topics… that we could all be innovating that we would just make the world a better place – without getting bored!

You advocate the culture of failure as a key part of success. In Switzerland many people are very afraid to fail. Why is that and how can we overcome our fear of failure?

I would say it's not something specific in Switzerland. It happens all around the world, and like uncertainty it is something really hard to deal with. It's not just "my own fear to fail", but also the fear to be seen failing. I'm sure that a lot of people who is afraid of failing would not be afraid if they went out to live to another country for some months. And there is just one reason for that: no one would know them there.

Also, if we're talking on entrepreneurship and innovation, there is not much we can do about it: we will fail. Not failing is not being very good but very lucky, as failing is part of almost every single process. We just need to be prepared for that, or at least, to accept that that will happen.

What's your advice for Swiss companies that want to foster innovation?

That's an easy one. Let us help them! We founded Ideafoster 3 years ago just with one purpose: Help mid to large corporations innovate like start-ups do. We build their projects using a network of 40+ start-ups we've been building this years, and once the project is materialized, we help them integrate it in their business and processes. www.ideafoster.com.

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2 CNO Netzwerk – The Interchange of New Ideas

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Ein jährlicher Kongress, das CNO Panel, ist die Schweizer Plattform für das Top-Management mit Schwerpunktreferaten, Workshops und viel Raum für persönliches Networking.

Mit Chief Networking Officer (CNO) ist jene Person gemeint, die im Top-Management die Verantwortung für die Vernetzung des Unternehmens mit Kunden, Lieferanten und Partnern übernimmt. Der oder die CNO unterstützt unternehmensinterne und betriebsübergreifende Geschäftsprozesse mit Informatik und Telekommunikation, damit die beteiligten Mitarbeiter/innen effizient und effektiv zusammenarbeiten können, damit neue Geschäftsfelder erschlossen und die Wertschöpfung im Unternehmen oder in der Verwaltung gesteigert werden kann.

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