



## Leading Through Disruption

Powerful conversations with prominent leaders on navigating this era of relentless change

# To Make Decisions, Don't Rely Only On Rationality. You Should Trust Your Gut.

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Sergio Dompé (photo credit: Gianmarco Chierгато)



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***Sergio Dompé, executive president of Dompé, a global biopharmaceutical company, shared key leadership lessons with me and my colleague Adam Bryant, managing director of The ExCo Group, in our latest "Leading Through Disruption" interview. Subscribe [here](#) to receive future interviews.***

**Lauterbach: What do you think is the hardest part of leadership?**

Dompé: The hardest part is that sometimes you have to abandon the idea that everybody has to like you, because sometimes you have to make unpopular decisions. I always try to explain everyone my decisions, because every worker in the company has the right to have an explanation.

Also, sometimes you are not successful on a particular project, and when you are not successful, you have to acknowledge that to yourself and to other people. I would like to make everyone happy, but this is not always possible in business.

**Bryant: What is the most common coaching advice you give to other senior leaders?**

Dompé: I tell them to rely more on their gut feeling. They have the same possibilities to be wrong using the head or the gut. Of course, I hope that they work hard to verify personally every element of a decision. And when you don't have a clear solution, ask for advice.

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If you need to take a big decision, I believe you shouldn't rely exclusively on your rationality. Use your gut. The chances of making mistakes are slightly lower. You also have to acknowledge that managers have the right to be wrong. They need to be empowered to test the limit, and sometimes testing the limit may also mean crashing. But of course, if crashing becomes the norm, that's a problem.

**Lauterbach: What is your philosophy of leadership, especially for leading the highly skilled scientists at your company?**

Dompé: It's very simple: passion. First, I don't consider it my own company. I have a very humble position toward it. I'm just the driver of something much bigger than myself. I have a lot of passion and I think that Europe has incredible competencies for science. I feel very proud to be European, and to be Italian, because we have a very dedicated sense of public service. One of Italians' best traits is that we put our heart in what we do.

My father was my first teacher. My father died 20 years ago, and every day I remember the lessons he taught me. Something that I learned early on was that if you have great passion and you are ambitious on one side but humble on the other side, and you try to learn and you push through, then success will come. I don't actually think of myself

as a leader but rather as somebody who is able to work with people.

**Bryant: There was so much disruption over the last two years with the pandemic. Can you share with us how your leadership style changed or evolved?**

Dompé: The company was, in a certain sense, helped by this disruption. It taught us that crisis brings change, and with problems also come opportunities. We built a company that is very agile and very quick to change what we are doing, and we immediately understood that the pandemic was both a great problem and a great opportunity. It drove us to increase the competitiveness of the company.

**Lauterbach: In a lot of industries, ecosystems are essential, and you can't succeed on your own. You need people who partner well. How do you hire people for this skill?**

Dompé: We need people with specific skills, but the attitude of people is even more important. We try to understand how well they are able to work with other people. For me, partnership was everything early on because I was always the weaker half of the partnership, and it helped me to understand immediately that if I am going to be an important partner for you, I need to understand the work that you think is important for you and to help with that. So we are looking at people with the same profile.

**Bryant: How do you discuss succession planning with your directors, particularly bringing in someone from the outside?**

Dompé: Everyone knows that if we are going to hire someone, they have to make a difference. A more challenging part is making sure that the talent we are hiring matches where we are as a company, both in terms of size or innovation.

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If you are leading a soccer team, you can have the best goalkeeper in history, but if the rest of the team is not good enough to play at his level, even hiring the best player would be the wrong decision. At the same time, the labour market has become very competitive and we always strive try to make a strong case to interest the right people.

### **Lauterbach: Final leadership advice?**

Dompé: Being a leader is difficult. You have to be 100 percent authentic. And one of the mistakes leaders often make is seeing the world the way they like, instead of the way it is. That's why I try to be very direct, very clear. A great manager gave me an incredible lesson in terms of a written message on his desk. It read: "Are you here with a solution or are you part of the problem?"

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