



# 'Never stop Learning'



Sander van 't Noordende

"If you run a \$12B business, you can look at the end of the month where \$1-2 million went missing, or you can start thinking about where the next billion should come from. Define the big themes for the coming years, develop a point of view and search for the client who might be willing to launch a first value proposition with you. The magic happens if you are among the first to define an opportunity, when your client is just struggling to deal with that challenge."

**In the spotlight is the fast-thinking board member and non-executive director Sander van 't Noordende via camera from Miami. He was Group Chief Executive for Products for six years during his 32-year tenure at Accenture.**

According to Sander, Commercial Excellence is all about focus on clients and their needs. Both as a business and as a person in front of you. Before the end of the meeting, he sends me my own DISC profile based on a Crystalknows internet search. "I know when I have got you in front of me, that you are assertive and bold. You like to be challenged by a competitor's benchmark and are quick to decide. So, I would bear that in mind in a C-suite conversation. That is something different than just being personal. Some people like to be personal, others less so". Right now, in America it is risky to talk politics for instance. I rather do my personal and business homework well: know what your business challenges are, how we can offer our point of view on these challenges and how you are most likely to take that in."

At Accenture the executive team defined the themes for the next five years ahead. At the time it was Cloud, Internet of Things, Security and Digital Transformation. They invested in leadership, capabilities to realize these opportunities, thought leadership and acquisitions. "The best situation to close a commercial contract is when there is time pressure and ambitious goals. Then there is risk involved. Many people start to think about the risk of what might go wrong and how it can be organized. The question is: can you turn around the mindset and help the client think how it will succeed and how the risks can be monitored and addressed?"

Van 't Noordende has a realistic view on the attention for a triple bottom line. It moves with the economic tide. The power of money is enormous and when markets decline, CEO's focus more on the bottom line. Over a larger timeframe, stakes beyond the shareholder move at glacial speed, whether it is diversity at the top or triple bottom line. This means that companies have to keep pushing these agendas forward all the time. That is the only way to make real progress.

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Internally, a commercial mindset grows by distributing large responsibilities and creating a spirit of entrepreneurship. Giving people tasks and responsibilities bigger than they would ask for themselves. "It forces people to think differently and think further ahead. And if you do so, you have got to accept that other people will do it differently than you would have done it yourself. Spending time together to learn from each other through training and client challenges, creates that spirit of growth and learning. It is never a waste of time. Some eight things out of ten may not make an impression, that means there are always two things I have picked up on. Never stop learning." •