
Three Conditions for a Successful Life



By L. Felipe Monteiro , INSEAD Affiliate Professor of Strategy

“The only success that is valid is the success that comes at the end.” - Jean-Claude Biver

Last week Jean-Claude Biver, president of the LVMH Watch Division (Hublot, TAG Heuer and Zenith), announced that he would be stepping down from daily running of the brands. I’ve worked with Biver, sharing his lessons about innovation and leadership with my students, and can attest that he is a rock star of the watch world. His vision transcends the world of luxury goods and can be applied across innovative industries.

When he was visiting our Europe campus to speak about “The TAG Heuer Carrera Connected Watch” case study, Biver offered extraordinary insights about his own personal leadership lessons and path to success.

When asked to give career advice to soon-to-graduate MBA candidates, Biver described three essential conditions for a successful life, both at work and at home.

Don’t work

The first condition, especially for professional success, seems a little counterintuitive. “The best way for success is to not work,” he said. “If passion is your daily job, you will succeed.”

“If you work, you will need holidays and weekends and sleep. The less you work, the less you need holidays, sleep, weekends.”

“Honestly, to work is not fun,” Biver said. From the hippy generation, he credits The Beatles with illuminating the importance of passion in daily life. “While I was a hippy, we rejected work. We found the best way not to work is to bring your job into your passion.” Since Biver was fascinated with steam machines, he started viewing watches as a similar type of mechanism and from that day on, he “never worked”.

Biver encourages others, including **his family**, to share their passions with him. This has led to experiments like TAG Heuer advertising on PlayStation’s Gran Turismo. With more than 168,000 followers on **Instagram**, Biver shares his brand enthusiasm, passion for the outdoors and love for his family.

He rises very early, often with excitement about a particular work-related idea. Anyone who has seen a child Christmas morning has witnessed the enthusiasm that passionate people can exude. The sheer excitement of waking up to a new day with new possibilities and then sharing that passion is part of the first condition of success.

Hire people who are better than you

For Biver, the second condition concerns teams. He describes how important it is to be surrounded with strong, talented colleagues. CEOs need to recruit executives who can surpass them. “Weak people can never help strong people. All the people who work for me are better than me. And they know it, even though I’m the boss,” he said. These people should have diverse skills: “You must have someone better than you in finance...in industry, in marketing.”

Once you have assembled a team of strong, passionate people, then what? For success, the team must be – and stay – united. “How can you keep the team together? By sharing,” Biver explained. “You must share success with the team. But you must never share failure with the team – failure is always you. You are the boss so the failure is yours. The success is theirs.”

The idea of “**Fail. Learn. Succeed.**” is a natural precondition for start-ups, like BlaBlaCar. It is, however, very unusual to meet a leader of Biver’s age and stature who embraces failure as a teacher.

Biver practises what he preaches. Because he was able to create a participative, entrepreneurial culture when he became president of TAG Heuer, encouraging innovation was a natural by-product. He gave Guy Sémon, who was managing director of TAG Heuer at the time, the autonomy to develop the TAG Heuer Connected Watch. Sémon, for Biver, embodied the avant-garde mentality needed to change the staid watchmakers’ mindset. When lauded for the connected watch, Biver always acknowledged Sémon as the engineering brain behind it.

Another way to keep the executive team together is to respect the team members and forgive them when they make mistakes. This strengthens bonds: “The longer the team is with you, the more you work in synergy,” Biver said.

The importance of ethics

According to Biver, the final, and perhaps most important, condition of long-term success is honesty: “If you’re honest in life, you get the results in the long term. We are not educated to get results in the long term, we are educated to get immediate results because this life is driven by the short term. The stock market – short term. Honesty brings you success in the long term. And the only success that is valid is the success that comes at the end.”

This view of the long term is a hallmark of Swiss watchmakers. “No luxury brand can be built on short-term policies,” he said in a 2016 [interview](#). Zenith’s short-term view of markets – especially its dependence on China as a [robust market](#) (60 percent of sales) – contributed to the problems before Biver took a more hands-on approach to the brand.

“Success has a danger: Once you have success, don’t fall into a comfort zone,” Biver warned. “Stay with the start-up mentality and stay humble,” he added. “Say thank you.”

I’ve seen this first-hand. Recently Biver had been invited to visit our campus but couldn’t because he wasn’t well. Students wrote to him instead and I sent the packet of goodwill notes off to Switzerland. Biver was overjoyed with

the messages, posting a photo of them on social media with the caption: “Nothing better to help my recovery!” He walks the talk.

Biver spoke about how this type of attitude – one of honesty and gratitude – is hard to find in the corporate world. But without it, the other conditions for success can hardly be met. His message has had an impressive impact on those who have heard it. One CEO called it “the kind of seed we need to stimulate the new capitalism”. I encourage you to watch this video and to hear Biver’s words of advice yourself.

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