

No.3 - Florin Popa - Transitioning to a GM Role in a Family Business

This is the third interview - part of a series - investigating the challenges and joys of transitioning to a CEO role. Florin Popa, GM Star Brands Algeria, has been kind enough to answer our questions. Previously, Florin Popa was [CBD Director Balkans](#) for P&G.

All interviews are moderated by Radu Manolescu, Founder and Managing Partner, K.M.Trust and lead of the Values Driven Exponential Leadership Programme.

How was it before and during transition? What were the challenges?

As always, when facing something new, I was preparing myself in advance for the new role both from business and cultural (moving on a different continent) point of view. I have started by understanding more about:

- the GM role in a different business set-up (from a large, global multinational company to a local family Algerian company)
- what are the most important 2-3 things for the owner – I have met and talked with another GM with long experience in such a role for a better understanding and perspective on this matter
- what are the key challenges in the non-commercial departments and finally,
- how to deal with people from a different culture and religion.

This preparation helped me a lot during the transition as I was able to absorb better and easier the news and specifics of the business' and the cultural differences.

The key challenges were to adapt to the complexity of the new role and to understand and to learn fast the areas outside of my previous expertise (internal financial and IT systems, the modus operandi in the country, mainly the legal, importation and financial set-up and frames).

Another challenge was to learn fast the new departments heads, their capabilities and profile, their personality and leadership style and their responsibilities and business.

How did you feel?

Overall I felt good being relatively prepared for the transition but also overwhelmed by the level of information, new internal operating system and especially by the new names and faces of our employees.

Also a great feeling is realizing that now you have the ultimate accountability!

What were the aspects that brought you most satisfactions?

The areas that brought the main satisfaction were:

- gaining fast the trust of the majority of the department heads (defining a clear and crisp Business Plan, genuinely sharing my expectations, while also asking their ones),
- identifying the key interventions I have to made in order to improve the organization – structure, behavior at Lead team level for executing well the business plan and delivering the yearly objectives.

What were the mistakes you would have avoided looking back?

A mistake was assuming that the cultural differences could be overcome fast by the business acumen and earlier preparation. It was not the case as this is a complex process that requires time and self-exposure to the real life in the respective culture, environment, for a good learning and understanding.

What have you learned from this experience, what have been the key insights?

The main learning is the importance of being open to listen to understand and not to rush into conclusions. Also having a dual transition with the GM that you replace and respective together with the old GM reviewing each department with the respective manager of the department is of a great help.

If you would mentor now someone, what would you say to him/her?

Be prepared for coping with the increased complexity of a GM role, be open to listen and observe, be curious, put good questions, don't judge and put fast labels, be a role model but stay genuine (you will be scrutinized and judged by everyone you'll interact). Be clear and crisp on the vision; be bold on objectives, secure efficient follow-up systems, while managing people with care, from the heart! In parallel be ready of working through people and processes to make good decisions and potentially implement change. Now you have the final accountability!

Now, over to you: what do you think of Florin's' experience? Is there anything in it that you found particularly useful? Enlightening? We'd love to hear from you!