

## Antonia's story

### The family company

"There is something very special about a family company. In a family company the dreams, the commitment and the determination of the family and entrepreneur go hand-in-hand with professionalism, rationality and objectivity. I believe that this is a combination that guarantees persistence and the ability to do business on a long term perspective – and, with a touch of passion.

In our family company the businesses have changed shape over our more than 130-year history. It all began in Jönköping in the middle of the 19th century, with the birth of my great-grandfather, Axel Johnson, who was the son of a saddle maker.

He became an entrepreneur at an early age. He made his way to Stockholm, where he took employment with a firm of silk drapers, and when he was 29 years old he started his own company, A. Johnson & Co. That was in 1873.

If the first generation was characterized by the word "entrepreneurship", I would say that the second Johnson generation was characterized by "industrialism". My grandfather took over from my great-grandfather and during his years, from 1910 to 1958, he built a large industrial group with interests ranging from shipping and stainless steel to engineering companies.

My grandfather, the industrialist, was eventually followed by the third generation Axel Johnson. I would like to call my father's generation, and my father, the internationalists, who built up the family company outside Sweden with operations in more than 50 countries.

### The women

I have often thought about the women in this story of three generations of men. All three women were foreigners – my great grandmother was German, my grandmother was English-American born in Shanghai and my mother was Brazilian. I think that they played an extremely important role. They brought an international dimension, with discussions that took the business out into other countries.

### Driving forces

I have often thought about the driving forces that lay behind these three generations of family

businessmen. I have found some basic values. I would like to call the first one pleasure. The pleasure and joy – and lust - of creating, developing and changing. Then there was also a long term perspective as a key ideology – perseverance and willingness to stick to the business even if it took a long time to build. There was also a very strong interest in people and a conviction of abilities and capacities.

And finally, in these three generations I can see a high standard of business ethics. My father once said to me that with a Johnson a handshake is enough.

### My turn to take over the family business

With this story of three generations of family business entrepreneurs behind me, I took over the helm from my father when I was just thirty-something.

We soon decided that trade should be our task. I was fascinated by the direct, magical meeting with customers. And so we started a transformation, once again, of the old family company, which took shape when we acquired the Saba group of companies in 1988. This was to become the platform for a new era in the Axel Johnson Group.

### Why we do business

I have often thought about why we do business. Are profits and financial values the main driving forces or are there other dimensions behind the scene that are not immediately obvious?

My conclusion is that companies are the greatest force for change in society. What we do and the products and services that we sell take a place in the everyday lives of many, many people. What responsibility should we take for our products? What should our attitude to quality be? Our commitment to health? How do we view the environment? How do we see the intrinsic values of what we are selling?

And this way of viewing business, as a vehicle of change, is what makes up our basic values and defines all our business in the Axel Johnson Group".

