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### Interview With a Leader: Glenn Llopis

I am currently taking a business consulting class here at Chapman University, and we have been assigned a semester long project as consultants for an entrepreneur named Glenn Llopis. Mr. Llopis is putting together a summit here at Chapman on January 23, 2010 called the Center for Innovation and Humanity. This summit will bring together some of the brightest entrepreneurial minds in industry, academics, non-profit and government sectors. There will be over 35 different speakers from around the world. The objective of the summit is to teach, guide, and embrace one another's ideas and ideals in order to discover and renew the ways we must think and act to propel positive social change through ethical innovation. In addition, Mr. Llopis is holding the summit here at Chapman because he believes this university can be a top 5 entrepreneurial school in the country. So after meeting with Mr. Llopis a few times and getting to know him, I thought that he would be the perfect candidate for me to conduct my interview with.

I started the interview off by asking Mr. Llopis how he got involved in dealing with business ethics. He responded by saying, "I first started dealing with business ethics when I personally started to experience distrust and greed in the workplace. I became very passionate about learning how businesses could be run profitably by being responsible and accountable". He continued by saying, "I took a position on ethics when I realized that greed and leverage was only a short-term strategy exercised by many, and I felt it was important for me to pursue ethics once I realized that what society longed for was sustainability". After listening to why Mr. Llopis initially got into the line of business that he was in, I instantly saw why he is considered a leader. He saw something wrong with the direction that society was going in, and now he is trying to make a change. He claims that we must change our fundamental view of how to think and operate in these difficult economic times by stating that "we must all be entrepreneurs". And by this he means that everybody should be constantly thinking about ways to enhance our lives and prosper in an ethical way.

To me, the next question I asked Mr. Llopis was the most important question. I asked him what his definition of leadership was. At first he paused, telling me that he thought this was a very interesting question. But after a few moments he responded by saying, "Leadership to me is about finding the miraculous in the common. It's about how you can propel growth, as well as personal and professional development in people. Leadership is not about finding ways to further empower yourself or about giving yourself more attention or notoriety. True leadership is about helping others propel positively forward, knowing how to utilize your special traits and characteristics that lie within each of us". Mr. Llopis continues by saying, "A true leader has a tremendous amount of resistance to temptation. It's so easy once you have power, to leverage that power, but a true leader knows his or her boundaries". He expands on his answer and states, "True leadership is all about having moral courage and having that ability to stand up for the things that you believe in that helps you more with advancing others more than yourself. It's a very selfless form of leadership". Mr. Llopis shows just how much of a leader he is by explaining what his definition of leadership is. His claim that today's leaders must be selfless is an approach that I believe can make a huge difference. A lot of today's leaders are egotistical and very much selfish, which can very well be a cancer to an organization. I fully agree with how Mr. Llopis views leadership.

Once Mr. Llopis finished explaining what his view of leadership was, I asked him how he has taken this definition of leadership and applied it to his business and life. Mr. Llopis explains that his views and theories on what leadership should be have become an essential part of his ethos. He notes that he has written a book about it as well as created the Center for Hispanic Leadership and the Center for Innovation and Humanity. Mr. Llopis claims that he has taken a position where he is living his life and creating a legacy to help change the way people think about leadership, innovation, and humanity. He wants to get people to start thinking more about how to serve a cause, and from that, people can make a good living and make good money. Mr. Llopis declares that when you really practice what you preach, it is a major commitment, but it is necessary.

Seeing how Mr. Llopis possessed all the qualities of a true leader, I wanted to know if he thought that one is merely born a leader, or if anybody can

become one. He responded by saying, “ I don’t believe that there is a cookie-cutter approach to leadership and I don’t believe that just because somebody is confident or has experience that they are entitled to leadership. I believe that leadership is a very special quality. I think that all forms of leadership in today’s world should be about ethics. It’s a type of leadership that you are born into. I believe that it is very difficult to teach the leadership that is required right now, unless you are an individual that has those natural leadership attributes that are required today. In simple terms, I believe leadership is something you are born with”. Mr. Llopis goes on to say that he believes that you can train people to become managers, but believes that leadership is something that is part of your DNA. He says that “in the past, we thought that we could breed leaders, but in reality we were just breeding robots. We were breeding people that were essentially doing what they were told based on the training program. But there is a much deeper quality that is required, and that is having that instinct, that know-how, that understanding of what makes people tick and ignites people to do things that are unimaginable”. I think that Mr. Llopis’s understanding and recognition that the way things were done in the past are just not working in today’s society, and it shows that he has a deep and advanced understanding of who leaders are and how they should be chosen.

Mr. Llopis maintains that “At the end of the day, in terms of leadership and ethics, when you have the moral courage to live the brand that you are and can trust yourself enough to live the things that you truly believe in that represent your strengths and your beliefs, you essentially put yourself in the position to where you know that diversity is transparent”. In other words, Mr. Llopis doesn’t care what your background is or what you look like; at the end of the day we all want the same things. He states, “There is a certain type of person that knows how to lift you up, and a leader has that ability. Real leaders really invest in people. They really invest in understanding how people think and what drives people to do things and gets them to do it ethically”. Mr. Llopis believes that leadership lost its meaning when money started to define how we act and innovate, and that’s when it went in the wrong direction. That is why Mr. Llopis believes it is so important that we think, act, and innovate as leaders so that we can create new products and services that have a direct connection to how we are going to make the world a better place. He asks the rhetorical question, “How

are we going to advance people and societies and communities? It's not just about the bottom line".

I finished up the interview by asking Mr. Llopis what kind of leadership style he thought that he possessed. I gave him four styles: directing, coaching, supportive, and delegating. He started off by saying that he thought it was a combination of all four. He states, "The new form of enlightened leader needs to be all of them. He can't just be one or the other because, for example, not everybody wants to be coached and not everybody wants to be directed, but everybody wants to be led in a certain way. So you have to be a little bit of all of them. But what happens is that people are taught to be a certain type of leader, and that's ok, but that's why I say that you can train people how to be managers, but to truly be a leader, that's something you are just born with".

After concluding the interview, I thanked Mr. Llopis for his time and for all of his wonderful insights into what it truly means to be a leader. I don't know if I could have found a more appropriate person to interview because in my opinion, Glenn Llopis is the consummate leader and entrepreneur. I am thankful that I got a chance to pick his brain and see what it takes to not only be successful in today's world, but to be successful while doing it the right way.