

## **“Growth alone will lead to ruin”**

**What does a sustainable economic model look like? That is what we wanted to know from the entrepreneur Rosmarie Michel. Her answer: If you want to be successful, you need to focus on more sustainability and less selfishness.**



Rosmarie Michel, Swiss entrepreneur and leadership manager

*How sensible is the current economic paradigm "We are only doing well thanks to profitable growth in turnover and sales"?*

That is definitely over! Growth alone will get us nowhere - and if it does, it will only lead to ruin. It's like the worldwide population trend: growth is not really desirable. What we need is qualitative progress, not quantitative.

*Are "better" and "more" mutually exclusive?*

No. But we have focused on the "more" for far too long. That's why we've wasted an incredible amount of resources - raw materials, but also human resources. To focus on growth alone is deeply unsocial: I am certainly not a Green and I am not in the SP. By anti-social I mean above all the fact that we were primarily looking after our own interests, i.e. more turnover and more profit, but not the interests of our environment. Our current economic system works too selfishly.

*Is there another economic paradigm that could work?*

In the future we will have to ask the question more often: What will help solve our problems? And less: What helps us to grow further? What can my company do for society, the environment, shareholders, employees and customers? This will lead to a better understanding of needs and - I am convinced - also to more marketable products. It is important to work much more participatively right from the development phase of new products. We involve those who have something to contribute, those who don't, those who don't. Because the broader and more diverse the needs covered, the better the product quality as a whole. The more versatile the product is, the more it can be used - and that in turn conserves resources, promotes viability and the value of life.

*And how do we get there?*

Perhaps the Corona crisis will help us here, because it is precisely this crisis that shows us the limits of the previous "growth at any price" approach. It also shows us that solidarity is more useful than selfishness. Think, for example, of the oversized steamers that, until recently, trudged through Venice's canals and ruined the fabric of the city's buildings.

*David against Goliath - but Goliath wins...*

This must stop, these colossuses are not fit for the future. They only have the comfort of the passengers in mind, not the well-being of the inhabitants of Venice, not the cleanliness of the air and water. This selfish point of view has had its day, we have to pay more attention: to the needs of customers, the environment, the competition. I have no problem with big economic steamers - as long as there is a management on the bridge that is committed to sustainable and human values.

*And how do we get the steamships out of Venice's canals - to stick with that image?*

I'm not a clairvoyant, but I think it takes three things. First, we need to fix the new values and live them in our own company. Secondly, we need role models to show: it works, and it is profitable! And thirdly, we need to support projects and start-ups where the direction is right. Then it will be quieter in Venice's canals, and the water and air will be cleaner.

*Rosmarie Michel (\* 1931, in Zurich) is a Swiss entrepreneur and leadership manager who is committed to the advancement of women in business and management positions. Over the past four decades, the Zurich-based entrepreneur (mostly as first and only woman) has held various board memberships, including at ZFV-Unternehmungen, Valora and Credit Suisse. She is still active today in the Female Shift think tank ([www.femaleshift.org](http://www.femaleshift.org)).*

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