

Professor John Santantoniou is a Mentor for Young Talents

The biggest challenge young talents face when they have a big idea is how to create a business strategy and execute a viable project. Often big ideas fail when confronted with reality, despite their potential. This is when fresh minds with ambitious goals encounter senior executives 'with the unique ability to shape an entire business program'.

A former CEO at service of several multinationals such as HP, Energizer and Invensys, Professor John Santantoniou is well-known by the students of the *International University in Geneva* for his engaging Marketing classes. Recently Professor Santantoniou has taken over the role of mentor for young talents to guide scientific PHDs and young entrepreneurs to develop business plans, realise their dream and execute their big ideas.

Professor Santantoniou, why did you decide to put your extensive experience in top management at service of young talents and start-up projects?

During my experience as CEO I have been managing all aspects of the business mix with responsibility for more than 2'000 employees and multiple factories. The generated turnover exceeded 500 Mio Euros p.a. Today I can say to have successfully reached all the goals that I had set for my professional life. Now I wish to contribute and share some of my experience by becoming a mentor for young managers and entrepreneurs who have strong ideas and talent. The offered mentoring is completely free of charge and has the objective to guide the newcomers in the complex creation of a business. Mentorees bring a very specialized technical know-how in the equation; my role is to add the business experience to develop the business idea, help identify the end benefit and find the right customer.

Can you tell us a bit more about the project you are currently mentoring?

My current mentoree, Dr. Juan Mario Michan, has a PHD in Physics and has previous research experience with CERN. He is now working on the beta test phase of his big idea under the financial and technical support of the Ecole Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne (EPFL). His project, 'Daphne Technology', has the purpose of commercializing an innovative air emissions control technology for relatively old cargos. By offering a specially conceived filter the cost of adapting cargos to the new environment protection laws is drastically reduced. For ships with a remaining lifetime of 15 to 20 years, the NanoScrub TM aims at becoming the most cost-efficient solution under the new regulations going in effect in 2020. The payback is relatively short within a time-frame of 2-3 years.

What would you define as the success criteria for a start-up?

First of all, you need to identify the market needs and wants that are not properly covered today. You need to develop a thorough knowledge of your target and its potential. Once the landscape has been assessed, you can work on identifying a whitespace opportunity with a unique technology. Furthermore, start-ups need to ensure that what they are offering has a clear differentiated positioning with a strong communication strategy targeted to their audience.

With your extensive experience you have certainly many tricks-of-the-trade to share. What would you advise to young talents wishing to pursue the road to entrepreneurship?

My number one advice is to be curious: explore the business opportunities and tackle the different environments and markets where these opportunities lie. Then, be very specific in the areas you want to develop: in-depth research and attention to details in planning and execution make the difference. Last but not least, be pragmatic and invest your time wisely. Keeping an eye on the big picture often helps avoid pitfalls and discouragement. Stamina, business sense and a good plan will make the rest.



John Santantoniou, Marketing Professor at *International University in Geneva*, has worked as General Manager and CEO for several multinationals such as HP, Energizer and Invensys, and he has been President for ten years of the London Business School Alumni Association Geneva Chapter. He can count on strong general management, sales, marketing and engineering experience, coupled with good financial skills, gained through international exposure in the consumer and technology goods industries.

High energy individual with excellent strategic and leadership skills, solid, adaptable, efficient, exposed in both high growth and cost constrained environments, thus allowing him the unique ability to shape an entire business program, in complex environments, including major restructurings and change programs.