

Look to the Future with Optimism

For this Weekly Brief, we're happy to hand the pen to Hans-Paul Bürkner, who led BCG from 2004 through 2012 and is retiring this month after a remarkable 43-year career. As BCG's CEO, Hans-Paul brought enormous drive, a belief in the power of great teams, and a relentless focus on delivering impact. BCG tripled during his tenure, became a truly global firm, and developed a strong foundation for our sustained growth. Throughout his career, he also advised many CEOs and supported BCG's teams around the world—reshaping strategies and organizations and driving major global expansion and change programs. We are so appreciative of all he has done to transform BCG, our clients, and the world. Thank you, Hans-Paul!

—Christoph & Rich

As I reflect on my 43 years at BCG, I'm struck by how the world—and the business landscape—has transformed. But one thing has remained constant: the need for leaders to embrace the future with optimism and the determination to adapt and change.

When I first joined the firm in 1981, I had no idea what consulting was and had never heard of BCG. I'd found the job listing in a newspaper and thought it sounded interesting. I went through two interviews in the first round and eight or nine in the second. Much later, I discovered my recruiting grades were well below average. I was lucky to get an offer.

That lucky break launched a career that allowed me to see profound global changes firsthand—many ups and downs, but a powerfully positive trajectory overall. Now, as I step down from the firm, the global community faces many challenges and divisions, as well as talk of polycrisis and even permacrisis in the air. Many of us may find ourselves in a cloud of pessimism.

In my view, that's a mistake. It will get us nowhere if we imagine a future based solely on current events. It's better to stand back, consider the bigger picture, and take a long-term view. And this is certainly true in business, [as I wrote earlier this year](#). Decide what you want your company to look like in five or even ten years, and make that a point on the horizon. Next, prepare a roadmap to reach that destination, including how to enable your organization to quickly recover from setbacks and jump on new opportunities.

Here's how you, as a leader, can help make your company future-ready:

- **Be decisive and unsentimental** about your corporate portfolio. Too often, leaders keep businesses for historical or sentimental reasons. To build a successful future, your focus can't be on the past.
- **Be experimental and ambitious**, pushing for breakthrough innovation, rethinking global supply chains, improving sustainability, and integrating technology. AI and other advancements must be central, but it's the mindset here that matters—expansive thinking and a readiness for change.
- **Be prudent** with capital and liquidity requirements. Evaluate your company's funding needs and run risk models continuously. Ensure there's a financial cushion for any bumps in the road so you can shape—rather than be a victim of—future events.
- **Be patient** as you build teams and manage talent. Your top priority is recruiting, developing, and retaining strong people. Every business is a people's business, so the quality of your team is the difference between top performance and mediocrity.
- **Be persistent**, ready to take on the obstacles to come. It's the only way you can achieve any of the four points above.

The Choice Is Yours

Of course, we don't know what tomorrow will hold, but a mood of doom and gloom can become self-fulfilling. I find it so interesting that, as the *Financial Times* has reported, the use of terms about progress and innovation increased just before the industrial revolution in England.

Over the past 60 years, according to the *FT*, we've seen a drop in the use of those kinds of positive terms about the future, coinciding

with a shift toward a culture of “caution, worry, and risk-aversion” and slower economic growth. (John Burn-Murdoch, “Is the West Talking Itself into Decline?” *Financial Times*, January 5, 2024.)

In many ways, the future is a state of mind. The most successful business leaders begin each new day with a sense of optimism. You talk up your company’s chances and, if things go well, you keep going. If they don’t go well—and there will be times when they don’t—then you course-correct and move ahead.

With the right leadership, companies can break free from the constraints of their time, chart their own course, and deliver sustainable and profitable growth that sets them apart from the competition. To a very large degree, you and the actions you take will determine what tomorrow is like. You really do hold much of your own destiny in your hands—and your company’s as well.

Warm regards,



Hans-Paul Bürkner
Managing Director & Global Chair Emeritus

Further Insights



For CEOs, the Future Is a State of Mind

Pessimism may rule the day. But business leaders who look to the future with optimism can guide their companies toward long-term success.

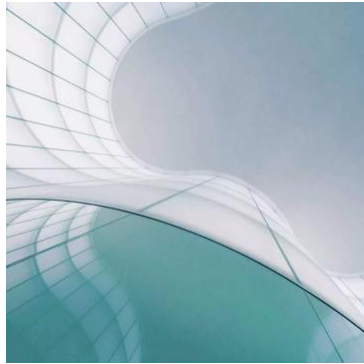
[STEP INTO THE FUTURE](#)



Leadership Conversations: Inside the C-Suite

A good conversation can illuminate problems, find solutions, and uncover opportunities. To understand how business leaders approach today's critical issues—from AI to sustainability—explore candid conversations with those at the heart of it all.

CONVERSATIONS THAT MATTER



Good Vibrations: The CEO's Practical Guide to Create and Amplify Energy

Energy is a two-way current that travels throughout an organization. Starting with the CEO, it reaches all the way to the frontline—and beyond.

TURN ENERGY INTO IMPACT