

## AN ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY

### **Introduction**

After twenty-five years as a dental technician, I felt a need to change profession. It was a difficult and even painful decision, as I took great joy from the artistic aspects of my work, and there was a certain degree of security that went with what I had already achieved in that field. At the same time, dental technology did not offer a lot of advancement. My true dream was of a business that had the world as its market, and I was ready to sacrifice anything to achieve it. Furthermore, and not least of all, I had the desire to create a better future for my family and to create a new business direction, and these things pulled me towards change.

Change means facing many unknowns: dental technology is not fluid dynamics, physics or engineering; and change is always traumatic. I was perfectly aware of this, but it did not stop me. I think it is a vocation, a drive that comes from within. As in sports, I felt the fascination of a challenge more difficult than the first, and therefore even more interesting.

The decision ended with a compromise, the less risky route, and for a few years I have carried out two jobs simultaneously.

### **The new company**

The start was no more difficult than I had envisaged. I was already known in the world of dentistry and the sixties, in some respects, was an easier period than the present: in the dental industry demand was still greater than supply, and therefore competition was less aggressive.

The administrative management of the new company remained artisan: once an initial amount was allocated, subsequent investments were made from the company's profits. Progress was therefore slow, but consistent and with growth.

Investment was firstly focused on research, then technology and lastly on the image of the company.

### **The influence of politics on the world of work**

At that time, industrial activity was viewed by many with hostility. It was the last years of the sixties, a time of political strikes and protests.

A lot of patience was needed but those moments were overcome. Then, we entered a new political period: the international climate was changing, and cooperation was replacing class struggle.

**In such periods the enhancement of our human capital** - any company's main asset - yielded significant results. These are the people who spend the majority of their time working in a company with the hope of realizing, through their work, their life's dreams. We have always sought to involve our people in the organisation of the business and the decisions that affect them, both directly and indirectly.

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## Promotional Article

Not many years prior, the famous mayor of Florence, Giorgio La Pira said: "A company is not so much who owns it but who works there."

In time, it was realized that cooperation and diligence create advantages for everyone. Managers, heads of departments and workshops (good and honest people), were always useful and indispensable advisers, as well as masters of their craft. **Once, in the artisan world, they were called masters of the workshop**, and parents often entrusted their children to them after school to get them started in learning a craft. Today the name has changed and there are now training colleges, however these teachers are still involved in putting into practice what the young people have learned at college.

### Improvements in production

Understanding the dental world and the professional activities of the then doctor/dentist, we were able to produce aspirators, and then also compressors, both pieces of equipment that are highly valued by the profession.

Slowly, but with some regularity, business increased and we expanded abroad. When demand grows and a company's production capacity is unable to keep pace, it is easy to overlook improving production and research. In a word, we neglect the future of the company. The continuous improvement of production and research should be paramount: **A company that does not improve and modernize soon starts to suffer.**

The aspirator units used in dental extraction are side channel blowers; they are simple machines that are not patented and are produced in various countries on a large scale. The blowers offer the advantage of producing air at a low pressure with modest operating costs and a long service life. We first began to utilise them at the beginning of the seventies, a time when these blowers were machined on vertical lathes and traditional milling machines. With such machines and tools it is difficult to accurately achieve precision to a tenth of a millimetre.

At that time CNC machines were becoming widespread on the market and unlike conventional machines (lathes), they achieved a tenth of a millimetre precision and also reduced manufacturing costs through their high operating speeds. **We moved to CNC machines without hesitation and successfully:** we could finally ensure a very high and constant flow-rate in all the machines – a very attractive proposition for the dental profession and beyond, as we will soon see.

The same work was carried out on the compressor, a machine that can last for over thirty years, while maintaining its ability to provide the same amount of dry and filtered air for the entire period, when mounted in a ventilated area to avoid overheating and is regularly maintained. This result was achieved thanks to the numerous improvements made in thirty years of production, the choice of materials (especially friction materials) and the extreme precision of the machining.

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**Improving our work is a part of who we are.** Improvement is part of progress: machines are improved when flaws are identified in the manufacturing process, and thanks to the market, which is constantly offering new materials, more precise and better suited to the specific requirements of the machines.

In practice, you never stop improving.

### Research

There comes a time, however, when **machines need to be reconsidered in the light of the technological advances:** this is where research begins.

With aspirators and compressors in the dental industry, our research into the construction of machines with inverters and computerized programs began in 1995 and the first new devices appeared on the market in 2006. We radically changed the functionality, design and manufacture of our aspirators, examples of which include:

- 1) In place of a machine sized to fit the clinic, we created a small machine that can grow in capacity as the surgery expands.
- 2) We added a program that allows operators to select the flow control function;
- 3) We installed a pneumatic sensor that automatically adjusts the motor speed of the suction unit to increase or decrease the flow rate according to the required level of suction.

These are only some of the features we have recently achieved, unimaginable without the application of modern technology.

Such innovations not only offer dental professionals functionality that assists their work, but also leads to **energy savings ranging from 30% for small systems of one to two chairs and savings of up to 50% for systems with four or more chairs.** As a result our aspirators have become very economical due to this energy saving over time.

**Furthermore, thanks to the flexibility that the inverter and program provide these machines, overload situations are avoided, wear and tear is decreased and a small motor is able to perform the job of a much larger one, reducing raw material by approximately 50%.**

New technologies have marked the end of an era: the time when manufacture could only be improved from the point of view of applications is long gone as new state-of-the-art technologies allow us to design machines which not only perform their primary function but also save raw materials and energy, as well as reduce pollution.

New technological and environmental breakthroughs in the manufacture of compressors and aspirators for use in dentistry are a source of pride for Cattani.

### A company's responsibilities

The magazine "EVOLUTION" (the SKF technical and marketing review) published an article

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entitled "SUPPLIERS OF SOLUTIONS" (com # 4 2013), outlining the complex economic, social and environmental problems being faced today, asking who can solve these problems.

In a study commissioned by the communications group Havas Worldwide in 31 countries, over 10,000 people were interviewed, two-thirds of whom answered that companies have the same responsibilities as governments and politicians in driving the social changes needed today.

Governments confirmed that **all businesses are directly responsible for the prevention and management of risks arising from the negative impact which manufacturing activities could generate** on human rights and the environment. Social media says that **"companies that act responsibly will be rewarded while those that do not will be punished."**

Sharing these thoughts, we are convinced that companies, in making the changes that our time requires, have a duty to actively research methods for prevention, implementation and reclamation.

At the same time, they must promote environmentally sustainable production, which supports savings in energy and raw materials. There are still too many companies whose production methods are anachronistic, as they do not carry out research.

For companies today, the search for financial profit cannot come from promoting financial policies that do not take into consideration the overall social context.

History has shown that the pursuit of profit, over the course of the centuries, has led to irreparable damage to the environment and to economic conflicts. What will happen in the future?

Very serious events have occurred over the last few years. Let us not forget that a group of financial operators, shifting gigantic sums of money, undermined the wellbeing of hundreds of millions of savers in many countries and destabilised entire economies.

So, against this backdrop, we would like to suggest a different entrepreneurial vision: the story of a successful Italian businessman who builds wells, when interviewed by a journalist from the Italian TV station RAI and asked to recount one of the greatest moments in his career answered: "When I was told that the pumps that I gave to an African mission irrigated their crops and their children no longer cried with hunger".

## Thanks

At the start of these remarks I underlined how the move from dental technology to industry was not without its difficulties.

It is true, it was not only difficult for me but also for my family, as I knew the practical and financial risks involved in such an initiative.

Despite this and despite the initial reluctance of both my wife and mother, **they were not**

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**passive spectators but both active players to a point where, without their help, I would have faced other difficulties.**

Later, I also had the support of **my children Ennio and Silvia, now working in the company for decades, both capable and determined, so much so that their conduct has encouraged me and inspired my confidence.**

**I must also thank my collaborators,** the first because they had faith despite initial uncertainties, and to all for their skills and commitment. I cannot name them, all as there are so many, but I am very grateful.

A special thanks also goes to the dental profession, for the trust and friendship they have extended to me. Many universities, hospitals, public and private clinics have used our products, In Italy and abroad. Recently, one of our technicians was asked to advise a clinic in Parma. I went along too, to thank the professional that had bought our aspirators, but whom I had never met. The professional extended his appreciation of our equipment and added: "some of my patients are your collaborators and they speak very highly of Cattani!". The proverb "no-one is appreciated in their own country" obviously does not stand in Parma!

Very special thanks is due also to all the professors at the Parma University hospital, in particular Professor Luigi Rusconi and Professor Pier Umberto Gennari, whom I hold in the highest regard, and whose remarks both encouraged and supported me.

Last but not least, I also thank all the "Brugg friends", Doctor Carlo De Chiesa and Doctor Giancarlo Pescarmona in particular, whom I hold in the highest esteem and to whom I am very grateful.

Many years have passed, exactly 48 for CATTANI and 29 for ESAM.

In the dental sector, we are considered key players in our speciality while in the industrial sector, among our most rewarding achievements, we can boast of the presence of our product on board the SHUTTLE and the EUROSTAR. For the Shuttle, we manufactured a special compressor which could not weigh more than 250 grammes and be no more than a few centimetres in size, but still able to generate a pressure of 30 bar; several successful launches were made. For Eurostar, we won a tender for the pressurisation of the high speed train system, a project on which we continue to work.

*Augusto Cattani*

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