



**Interview to
Monsignor
Fernando Ocariz**

“The mission of leadership should always be service”

On January 23, Pope **Francis** appointed **Fernando Ocariz** prelate of Opus Dei, thus also making him the new Chancellor of the University of Navarra. Msgr. **Ocariz**, brother of Prof. **José Ocariz**, knows the school well and wanted to take the opportunity to communicate with the IESE community through this interview, one of the first following his recent appointment.

How do you approach this leadership role?

Jesus Christ, our Lord and Master, said that he had come not to be served, but to serve. Service is – or should be – the mission of all governance and leadership. In my case, this is obviously about serving the Church and the Pope, leading this group of God’s people, the prelature of Opus Dei. For members of Opus Dei, my mission is to ensure they receive the necessary Christian education and pastoral care, and to enable them to sanctify themselves and contribute to the evangelization of society, each person in his or her own place and situation. This also means giving encouragement and light, in both spoken and written word.

And, knowing that it is God who sanctifies, I carry out my work knowing that I have help from Heaven above. So,

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from the start, I have asked the faithful of the prelature and the cooperators to support me with their prayers. I now ask this of the people of the IESE community.

What criteria do you consider to determine what is urgent and important, and how do you approach leading an organization in which cultural differences coalesce with a common goal?

Saint **Josemaría**, the founder of Opus Dei – and the founder and first Chancellor of University of Navarra – warned of the danger of neglecting the important matters while focusing on urgent matters. He always said – and led by example – that we must carefully review matters, taking as much time as needed for each one: nothing less and nothing more. Hastiness does not equal diligence, just as procrastination does not equal prudence. To prevent nervousness and haste, which can easily lead a person to decide before having all the relevant information, he used to say: urgent matters can wait, very urgent matters must wait. Moving at the right speed, being agile – this is the result of an intensive, continuous effort, and following up on decisions, to handle each stage without letting things drag out.

All these conditions of good executive leadership are easier to achieve if the governance is collegial, as established in Opus Dei, by prudent provision of the founder. Decision-making and agility improve when multiple people review a given matter. Diligence is not about sidestepping someone who needs to give their opinion; it’s about not becoming stagnant, as Saint **Josemaría** said. In other words, not holding things up, but examining them and processing them so others may also see and everyone can contribute to the joint decision.

Working that way makes it easier to assess what is important and urgent. A basic guideline here, I think, is that the most important thing is whatever affects people most directly. Organizational matters are obviously important; but these are secondary: people come first. And for a consistent Christian, who has received and values the tremendous gift of faith, that priority service to people is also service to God.

As for how to get cultural diversity to coalesce with a common goal in the prelature of Opus Dei, the key is to encourage freedom. The primary mission of Opus Dei is to help its members to each act freely and responsibly, in the appropriate place and situation, while striving to embody their Christian faith in what they do. Nobody in Opus Dei will tell them what solution to implement on professional, social or political matters: they must decide conscientiously, based of course on their professional background and their own personal way of being and thinking. The resulting diversity is not chaotic at all: harmony arises from that plurality of voices, where each one contributes to the collective symphony, and to the work of evangelization. It is essentially the same “Catholic” unity as seen in the Church, the common home for all peoples.

And those who seek to be better people and achieve excellence through their work in business administration, how should they assimilate a daily life as such?

I am not proposing any specific solution, nor could I. But I will offer some general ideas that, if applied by individuals in their own way, perhaps might be of some use. We all know that executives tend to be under pressure, due to the volume and difficulty of their work, and above all the responsibility that weighs down on them.

First off, I feel it is important for them to share the burden, especially with their immediate peers, and know how to delegate. If you show confidence in people, giving them responsibilities and latitude in their own initiatives, they usually react well, taking ownership of their work and identifying with the collective project.

Secondly, I would advise believers to unload that burden on to God, our Father. A good professional and good Christian works as hard and as well as they can. But they also understand that not everything is within their control and leave what they cannot control in God’s hands. **Jesus** taught us that God is a loving Father who takes care of the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, and his children far more still. If we face every day with practical and real faith in divine providence, which governs everything for our good – although at times we may not

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understand it – we shall grow as people in our work and we will do a better job, free from burdens that bring harm and inefficiency.

In this respect, it is also important to allow for rest: for ourselves and those working with us. Balancing the demands of our obligations and regaining strength enables us to continue to satisfy them with renewed vigor.

How can we integrate mercy – which Pope Francis so often speaks of – with the demands of a market that often seems to have no soul? How can we help promote a more social economy?

How to manifest mercy in the realm of business? Mercy itself will guide us, if we let it come in and shape our life. Pope Francis teaches that mercy is creative; in his closing letter from the Jubilee last year, he encourages us to unleash the “creativity of mercy,” which brings about new undertakings. Mercy is not just for special occasions. It is a permanent attitude of feeling the miseries of others in our own heart, to suffer as if they were our own and seek to alleviate them.

With this deeply rooted inclination, Christians who work in the commercial sector, finance, industry, and so on, can help “give a heart and soul” to the market – and all social institutions. In other words, operating in the market with an awareness that interactions involve people, striving to be equitable and meet the needs of others. That in itself contributes, albeit through small contributions, to making the economy more social; I know that IESE encourages this in its management education. IESE also can contribute meaningful studies and proposals, so that business practices and economic and labor policy move in that direction.

In addition, we must practice mercy as a free gift, to help make up for the material and spiritual shortcomings that the market cannot or has not remedied. Many entrepreneurs engage in assistance and human development initiatives, which exemplify the creativity of mercy.

How does one prevent the desire for success from overshadowing the desire to help others?

The two are not incompatible, if they come from the same impulse and seek the same outcome. The sanctification of work – a core aspect in the spirit of Opus Dei – materializes by doing good work, with competency and a supernatural motivation. In our work, if we seek to love

God and our neighbor, all other intentions become unified, and the activity itself is sanctified. Thus, there is no opposition between success and solidarity. An executive who wants to be a good Christian seeks success to pursue their professional goals while, at the same time, helping others. The two desires are mutually reinforcing.

Specifically, how can we introduce a more humanistic view of interpersonal relationships at work?

I’m sure this is something that IESE does constantly, by emphasizing that a company is a community of people and showing how this reality should be reflected in management styles. In turn, those trained at IESE extend that vision and derived practices in countless ways, by inventively applying what they learned to their various professional situations, and always paying particular attention to those most in need.

What criteria do you think men and women should take into account to address this challenge? What challenges do these changes pose for families, as having two salaries is increasingly necessary?

It is not only because households need two incomes, but also because a mother with a family can have a career as well. It is a shame to face this dilemma of choosing between family and career. In fact, this issue often arises for men also. Of course, if women can and want to, they may stop working outside the home to focus on caring for their children, particularly when the children are very young. This decision is sometimes necessary and, in any event, worthy of applause.

Moreover, many women combine family care with other work, as increasingly more men are doing by reducing their working hours to spend more time with the family. Balancing work and family life is one of the most important issues facing society today in many countries. I know that at IESE you pay close attention to this, and I trust you will continue to help find solutions.

But I would like to emphasize one vital aspect. When mothers and fathers take care of their household and educate their children, with such love and sacrifice, in the face of countless difficulties, even if it does not always go so well or things don’t turn out how they would like, they are doing something wonderful. They are giving the biggest gifts of all: the education and happiness of other human beings. They deserve the gratitude of society, as they

are making an irreplaceable contribution to the common good. And, above all, God looks upon them with delight. Saint **Josemaría** used to remind entrepreneurs that the best and primary “business” they have is their family.

What values would you say distinguish an ethical company both in good times and bad, when it must make unpleasant adjustments?

Any business leader could answer that question better than I can. I believe it is important to consider that situations sometimes involve great diversity and complexity.

There may be some insensitive people out there, but clearly many executives suffer anytime they are forced to cut staff when no other solution has been found to ensure the company’s continuity. They suffer because they see that those affected include individuals and families who may be at risk of long-term unemployment. They also suffer from the worrying and low morale that can spread among the employees who keep their jobs, as well as their own concerns about the future of the company and, consequently, their own families and those of others who depend on it.

That kind of reaction in tough times is a sign of an executive’s ethics: by focusing on people, which they will know to translate into company policy and practices. In good times, that same attitude leads managers to put their talents into ensuring the prosperity of the company, and not just seek short-term profits. They will take care of their human capital, for example, by investing in employee training. Their practice of focusing on people first also explains their respect for the law or the environment; that respect is part of the company’s mission, to contribute to the common good. Sometimes it is very difficult to integrate all these factors: it is a complicated decision and one that gives rise to mistakes. Ethics is neither a limitation nor an afterthought to good management; it is a vital dimension.

Does establishing codes of good conduct and monitoring mechanisms suffice to give a company an ethical foundation?

Codes can be helpful, especially if compliance is monitored. They express fundamental ethical guidelines and apply them to the various facets of the business. However, in real life, decisions are made in specific situations, and the incredibly diverse situations that arise in real life are not always covered by a code. To succeed in each situation, managers must have very firmly held ethical and professional principles. But they also need experience, tenacity, the strength to withstand the pressures to give in to evil, and the flexibility to make adjustments. Learning these attitudes and exercising them is part of an executive’s education.

You are, of course, familiar with the role IESE plays in the development of management schools in Africa and other emerging economies. How can we help them

A DISTINGUISHED ACADEMIC

Msgr. **Fernando Ocariz** was born on October 27, 1944. He is the youngest of eight children, one of whom, **José Ocariz**, is professor emeritus of accounting and control at IESE.

Msgr. **Ocariz** holds degrees in physical sciences, from the Universitat de Barcelona (1966), and theology, from the Pontificia Università Lateranense (1969). As a student, he lived in Rome along with Saint **Josemaría Escrivá**, founder of Opus Dei. He earned a Ph.D. in theology in 1971 from the University of Navarra. That same year, he was ordained priest. In his early years as a priest, he focused especially on youth and campus ministries.

From 1994, he was vicar general of Opus Dei; and in 2014, he was appointed assistant vicar of the prelature. For the past 22 years, he accompanied the former prelate, Msgr. **Javier Echevarría**, in his pastoral visits to more than 70 nations.

As the new Chancellor, his primary mission is to ensure that the University of Navarra fulfills its purpose, according to its founding spirit, preserving the Christian identity and continually renewing the expression of its mission and values.

take greater strides in their role as educators, while respecting their cultural wealth?

I very much appreciate the great undertaking of IESE in the transfer of knowledge to developing countries. This paves the way for having a core group of entrepreneurs and executives who are well trained and have ideals, something those nations are in such need of. And it does so in the most effective way: by training the people who in turn will train their compatriots, and starting a movement that will endure with its own momentum and a style that is consistent with the characteristics and culture of that location. It will certainly move faster, thanks to the efforts of IESE, although it may take some time for the best fruits of that labor to be reaped.

As Chancellor of the University of Navarra, what do you ask of IESE?

Rather than asking for something, I give thanks, to God, because there are thousands of entrepreneurs and executives to whom IESE has given comprehensive education that has helped them grow as people and as professionals. IESE is a center of excellence, humanity, social responsibility and Christian spirit that reaches many realms and locations. Thank you!