

resurging differences demand respect

The world in which we live is a continuous one, a “porous” one in which there is less and less interference with the flow of people, ideas, capital, enterprise, and exchanges of all types.

The globe is a mosaic because seemingly all the pieces are combining in multiple and unprecedented ways.

Many situations illustrate the open nature of the world in which we live and the often unforeseeable consequences. In many cases, local or bilateral factors trigger effects in a chain reaction that go well beyond what one might imagine from the start.

We are really living in a world that features interactivity more than simple activity and where our actions and decisions have to be measured in that context. It seems that communications will have to play a major role in this environment.

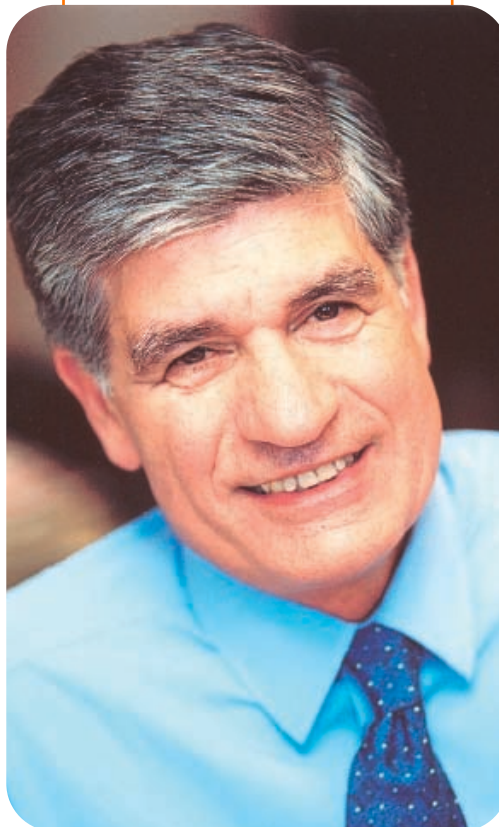
The term globalization leads people to assume that there is a growing uniformity in behavior and ideas worldwide. In fact, while ideas are moving easily in the MTV international era, the impact of those ideas is often the opposite of what we might assume at first.

The fact is that we are seeing a resurgence of differences and even a search for specific identity outside of the great mass of mainstream thinking. And if globalization is an unstoppable phenomenon, so is the need to carefully sense and manage the differences inevitably generated in reaction to it.

So, what does it mean?

First, in an increasingly global world, if you want to lead, you must demonstrate respect for those on the other side of the transaction. That is not as easy as it sounds. It means more than talk. It means listening and, especially, applying the old rule that “your freedom begins where your neighbor’s ends.”

Or, put in other terms, if you want to encourage commerce, you need to respect the commercial partner. Real power is in the hands of the one who knows how to limit its use. Brandishing power, over the long term, can lead to squandering its potential and losing a source of effectiveness and, ultimately, wealth.



Second, the very rapid evolution of our globe is generating ever greater disparities between the powerful and the less powerful. A famous French storyteller, Jean de La Fontaine, used to say, “You always need someone smaller than you.” Or, in economic terms, it comes down to understanding that markets simply won’t work if the differences simply keep getting greater.

Take the example of Europe. It includes 15 countries and will soon be 25. That represents a formidable challenge because of the real differences among the member states. Indeed, even from the beginning, when Europe was six countries, smaller countries like Belgium or Luxembourg (smaller than some states in the U.S.) had difficulties in the face of the power of Germany, the U.K., or France.

If the new Europe is to succeed, it is essential that each country be valued and recognized, so that real exchange is created—and that can only be based on respect for one another, be that relationship economic or social. We should show more respect, more consideration to small countries (as to small partners) if we want them to feel good.

Given this, communication is playing an absolutely critical role.

B Y M A U R I C E L É V Y

You may ask, “Why?”

Because communication helps understanding and because communication creates dialogue and can generate respect. Not that communication is everything, but it is essential to finding the right approach that can make such a difference in creating the contacts that are at the base of long-lasting relationships and not just one-off transactions. The difficulty is that we are all actors in a communications world—we are drowned in information and communication—where it is difficult to distinguish between what is essential and what is superfluous.

Let me show the reality of this in the context of our agency group, Publicis, with a few elements that illustrate our difference from the mainstream of advertising and communications agencies.

Publicis is a family group—yet a big one indeed, the fourth globally in the advertising and communications industry. If we have surprised the top three by getting there, perhaps it is because we: (1) carefully took the measure of our marketplace and the actors on all sides in our industry—clients as well as competitors and (2) looked at their sizes and their positioning and took steps to build the business that may have seemed isolated from the outside, but, in fact, was part of a connected path we envisioned to become a real force in the global industry.

Today, we keep the spirit of acting as a “small enterprise” by creating unique and scaled structures for maximum autonomy and motivation of 36,000 employees in 109 countries.

We are also profoundly attached to our roots which, today, are numerous and enriching

worldwide. There are, of course, our original French roots—strong and deep, the heritage of the group founded in 1926 by Marcel Bleustein-Blanchet, known as the father of modern French advertising, a visionary and innovator. But there are also the roots of all of the varied new members of the Publicis family. Among them are true icons of American advertising, such as Leo Burnett, as well as other great national advertising traditions.

We can succeed only if we receive the new members of the family with same respect, care, and love that we have for the original ones. Our aim is that everyone feels he is part of the family and that there is no “step child.”

We are not only committed to diversity; we are committed to respecting it. That is not only a matter of values and beliefs; the men and women who make up Publicis reflect the quality that is at the base of the respect we aim to win each day from our clients. By respecting those differences, we create the conditions for giving the most noble sense of human capital and encourage its fullest development.

That commitment to respect diversity within our group globally is also a necessary condition for international business to flourish in general. That is particularly important during periods of international tension and stress on traditional relationships. Finally, basically but deeply, it is a question of communication and respect. ●

*Maurice Lévy is chairman
and CEO of
Publicis Groupe S.A.*

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