

no thing new

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Ludo Diels,

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*'Nothing New' is dedicated to my brother Leon
* Maastricht 1939 † Auschwitz 1944
who I sadly never had the opportunity to meet.*



introduction

BENOIT WESLY

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I HAVE BEEN GIVING LECTURES IN THE UNITED STATES FOR OVER 20 YEARS NOW. I MAINTAIN A FOND RELATIONSHIP WITH THE USA PERPETUATED BY THE COURSES I HAVE TAUGHT AT VARIOUS LEARNING INSTITUTIONS. I HAVE LEARNED A LOT AND MADE SOME WONDERFUL FRIENDS. OVER THE YEARS MANY OF THESE FRIENDS HAVE ASKED ME WHETHER I COULD PUT MY THEORY ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP INTO SOME TYPE OF STUDENT HANDBOOK.

Seeing how I am not a born theorist and I like keeping things simple, I gave the idea serious consideration. Without pretending that I have anything truly new to share, I would very much like to respond to the request for a book that outlines my ideas.

specific way of life in “Nothing New” but I describe the various aspects of my life and work in no particular order or chronology. These are often slightly philosophical in nature, the things I have personally experienced. I am thrilled that students want to follow the path that I have chosen.

I also embarked on an actual, physical path in writing this book. Call it a true “soul search.” I visited Auschwitz, which was the end of the line for my brother Leon over 50 years ago. A former death factory where I came to learn quite a bit about myself in the summer of 2007.

Ultimately, I decided to add this incredibly personal story to Nothing New because it says so much about my background. After all, it represents a journey to the very center of my soul. Several speeches have also been included as they are highly representative of both my approach and my character. Nothing New may be entirely familiar to one reader, while at the same time a real eye-opener for another but at the end of the day, I hope that my book will prove educational and entertaining for all.

Most of all, I hope that you enjoy reading it.





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Foreword

Nothing New is the result of a number of conversations with journalist and copywriter Ludo Diels. He transformed the conversations into stories, written in a style that reflects how I perceive my environment. He translated my feelings. These were interesting conversations during which I was regularly compelled to speak frankly. A very interesting experience for me, to be sure.

Journalist and author Hans Toonen handled the final editing. He took the collection of individual anecdotes and turned them into a single coherent work.

I would like to emphasize once again that this book reflects my personal truth. It does not pretend to make any academically based claims or venture to explain the way of the world. It is simply a personal book, nothing more.

Benoit Wesly

Maastricht, 2008



ABOVE ALL

KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS

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The way I see it, questions are more interesting than even the most fascinating of answers, because ultimately, he who asks questions, retains his curiosity, and curiosity is the tried and true path to creativity.

My motto is: keep asking questions until your dying day.

People who ask questions want to learn. Of course, this is not to say that I am wholly uninterested in answers. In the best case scenario, answers are honest. Before you know it, you will be eager to ask the next question.

This questioning attitude helps me greatly in my ongoing search to find out why something is the way it is. That is why I have made asking questions a permanent habit. It keeps

**APPLEBEE'S HOW IT STARTED OUT
GREAT BUT STILL ENDED UP GOING AWRY**



Perceptions are hard to shake. For example, in the Netherlands, we see the United States in a way that has is far removed from the actual everyday situation. The same goes for the prevailing image that the US has of the Netherlands, although the Netherlands is obviously a far lesser known country. Oh sure, we have Hans Brinker and his finger in the dike, and Rutger Hauer has thrilled movie audiences worldwide. The Van Halen brothers, too, hail from the Netherlands. Still, when it comes to iconic images, the US rules. And we are all too eager to believe that the Wild West really exists with special thanks to Hollywood.

I personally believe that the film industry is responsible for much of the appeal that the US holds for Europeans. In post-war Netherlands, collecting bubble gum pictures of Hollywood stars was all the rage. Who could resist Marilyn Monroe, Lana Turner, Carey Grant and Humphrey Bogart?

Consequently, my fascination with the United States was primarily fueled by the movies and music of my childhood. America represented adventure, unlimited opportunities and optimism. Actually, this image remains intact today even



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MY FAVOURITE MISSTEAK



Applebee's, my most beautiful failure

If you want to hit the target, you have to shoot. Nothing new there.

Those who do not dare shoot for fear of missing the target will never achieve anything. They will not even get respect, because no one rewards fear of failure.

I myself believe firmly in the motto expressed by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt during his inaugural address in 1933: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself". Fear is, and always will be, a bad counselor. End of story. Challenge yourself. Dare to make mistakes - just like I did with Applebee's.

Before I go into details, I want to know what makes me tick as a hotelier and entrepreneur. Those who know me, know that I prefer action to talk. I prefer people who get down to business to those who like nothing better than getting involved in long arguments. Long-winded reflections from ma-

in perspective, but they should also be treated with due seriousness. From mayonnaise to musical wallpaper.

That is why Applebee's is my most instructive example of daring to aim and missing. And why I regard it as my most beautiful failure.

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TO REALLY SEE EXERCISE A LITTLE RESTRAINT

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To really see, exercise a little restraint

A businessman, a successful one at least, always has a full schedule. Your day is divided into blocks in which you engage in various discussions and participate in various meetings. You eat when the schedule says, not when you are hungry. Do I approve of this? Not really, but in a lot of cases you simply have no choice. You cannot get around it although there is something with which you can compensate: art.

I am a frantic man who sleeps with his daily planner under his pillow. I rush from one place to the next and hardly ever take a moment to slow down. When I was younger, you would have called me a “fast track” kind of guy. I am a product of our hectic times. I have become what the renowned Dutch biologist Midas Dekkers calls “Homo Adidas.” I run myself into the ground.

At the same time, I realize how little time I allow myself to really see the world around me. In addition to being a “Homo

poses a challenge – how does one connect the accelerated pace of the business world to the deceleration and contemplation that is art?

It could teach us how to see differently so we can see more. More opportunities, specifically. And in so many cases it is this new way of seeing things that opens the door to creative ideas. This is exactly what we need: people who see reality differently and spy opportunities. While others rush past, blinded by haste, these individuals see opportunities and know how to seize them. Fantastic! That is what they live for, instead of simply existing. I only discovered this late in life.



Laughter

It is obvious. It's even in a book called Nothing New. Laughter is essential. I discuss the role of humor elsewhere in this book, but I would also like to take a moment here to emphasize the necessity of laughter, including-no, make that especially in the business world. Laughter is the best way of ensuring we don't take ourselves too seriously. I always have time for a good joke or entertaining anecdote. Sometimes, a good laugh can last all day long. Do not underestimate the power of laughter!

Back to art. I admit it. I was not born with any artistic gift, I just wasn't interested. But just as friends, acquaintances and even family can prompt you to read a good book, listen to great music or see a movie, visual art can also provide the impetus you need.

During the course of my life, people have appeared at just the right moment to teach me something I know at that point.



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**DARE
TO BECOME
WHO YOU
ARE**

Who dares to become who they are? First of all, you need to get to know yourself and then act on what you have discovered. To do this you have to descend into your ‘epicenter’, your deepest self. You must, as it were, turn the searchlights on yourself and steadily explore every nook and cranny, because if you want to get the best out of life, you must have the courage to get the best out of yourself first. This quest for the self is one of the key tasks in everybody’s life – a challenging and lonely exercise. I myself am still engaged in this process, as will become clear from this issue of Nothing New.

We can now pose the still open, sometimes scary, question: who determines who or what you are in life? Is it God? Is it education? Or the place where you were born? The way you were raised? Is it money? Or is it love and happiness, after all?

I do not intend to enter the familiar ‘nature or nurture’ debate, nor would I dare to venture into discussions about evolution or religion, I’ll leave that so everybody can decide for themselves. I am, however, convinced that we become what we are through a combination of many factors. Every human

It shows that America is the symbol of attainable objectives. The dream, that is the American Dream, is within reach in the United States. It is possible to achieve something in the United States without too much knowledge of the nation's cultural achievements or its global influence. That is marvelous. The hurdles are low in the land of unlimited possibilities, giving everybody an equal chance. On paper, that is.



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a woman's multifaceted powerful strenght

A FASCINATING PHENOMENON - THAT IS HOW I REGARD WOMEN. I CERTAINLY CONSIDER THEM THE STRONGER SEX. I COULD EASILY TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO CRACK OPEN A SIX-PACK OF CLICHÉS ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN BUT INSTEAD I WILL SIMPLY LEAVE IT AT THE OFT-HEARD LAMENT THAT WE MEN ARE FROM MARS AND WOMEN ARE FROM VENUS. THERE ARE SOME STUBBORN IRRECONCILABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO SEXES BUT I PREFER TO LOOK FOR WHAT WE HAVE IN COMMON. AFTER ALL MEN AND WOMEN ARE HUMAN BEINGS FIRST AND FOREMOST AND IT'S THIS PREMISE THAT FORMS THE BASIS FOR MY FOLLOWING TAKE ON THE STRONGER SEX. THEIR POWER TO GIVE LIFE.

Their power to seduce

Almost everyone knows the story of what happened in the Garden of Eden: he bit into the apple after she told him to and because of it they were both kicked out of paradise. Thanks!

Women have been born temptresses ever since Eve. Entire tribes followed in Adam's footsteps, falling for woman's charms.

Every night, another one of Adam's descendants gives in to the temptations of forbidden fruit, for example, at a hotel bar.

Man is a slow learner. A very slow learner.

Incidentally, women have a keen way of knowing the best way to get what they want. Armed with their weapons and natural self-interest, they are highly skilled at turning the tables to suit their needs. Some call this manipulation, me included, but I still have tremendous admiration for their knack at working multiple channels at the same time. They are the masters of combining various talents. Men are like beer: they tend to go flat quickly. Women are as complex and enticing as a cocktail. Something to toast.




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FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY




In the USA, freedom is the most important thing. Of course, freedom is important to all peoples of the world, but the American sense of freedom really stands out, I think.




Freedom is the essence of your American dream. It is part of your DNA, which I will get back to in a moment.



The longing for freedom arises in business, too. I believe, regardless of where you live in the world, that freedom is the most important motivating factor to starting a business.



It was that way for me. I stood at a crossroads where I was asking myself: do I want to spend my entire professional life working for someone else and doing it the way they say I should? Or do I want to be the boss? The one making the rules? I chose the second option.



I wanted to be free. I wanted to have the freedom to be in charge of my life. I have always regarded this as the ultimate challenge. Incidentally, you can still have freedom as an

WE EUROPEANS CAN SAY A LOT ABOUT YOU AMERICANS BUT WE CANNOT ACCUSE YOU OF BEING NAIVE. YOUR DOLLAR BEARS THE MOTTO IN GOD WE TRUST. EVERY MAN FOR HIMSELF AND GOD FOR US ALL. IT MAY SOUND UNKIND BUT GENERALLY SPEAKING TRUST IS A PRETTY RISKY BUSINESS. I BELIEVE IN THE ADAGE SEEING IS BELIEVING. I TRUST WHAT I SEE. PEOPLE ARE CAPABLE OF JUST ABOUT ANYTHING AND CONSEQUENTLY I HAVE VERY LITTLE TRUST IN PEOPLE WHO I DO NOT KNOW. THAT MAY SOUND CRUEL BUT I HAVE LEARNED THIS THE HARD WAY.

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in god we trust

In the United States, it is common to pay for your drink as soon as you order. The proprietor wants to be sure that the customer can afford to quench their thirst and won't be suckered by a big smile or deep cleavage. When it comes to trust, it would seem that he feels you should turn to God, not a bar. In Europe we seem to have greater trust in our fellow man. The bartender trusts that the drinks consumed will in fact be paid for, although he does keep track of how much a customer orders. I do not know which system is better, but I do know that the American way is more firmly rooted in a less sympathetic view of society, a vision that assumes everyone must look after themselves, and is based on the experience that not