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OTB: Fostering Creativity, Challenging The Rules

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To welcome OTB (which stands for Only The Brave) to BoF Careers, we sit down with Stefano Rosso, group CEO and son of founder Renzo Rosso, to talk about the company's "courageous" culture.



Stefano Rosso, CEO of OTB | Source: Courtesy

BREGANZE, Italy — Italian fashion group **OTB** was founded by **Renzo Rosso**, the entrepreneur best known for transforming **Diesel** into a multi-billion dollar lifestyle giant, selling everything from fragrance to furniture, driven largely by the success of its premium denim offering and controversial marketing.

Diesel became the cornerstone of OTB, which Rosso grew by acquiring a range of companies, including **Maison Margiela**, Viktor & Rolf and **Marni**, as well as **Staff International**, a company that manufactures and distributes products under license for brands including DSquared2, Just

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Cavalli, **Vivienne Westwood** Red Label, and **Brave Kid**, which makes and distributes products for high-end childrenswear brands. Today, OTB generates more than €1.5 billion (\$1.7 billion dollars) in annual revenues, which some credit to the group's courageous decision-making in a wider fashion industry that is often too reverential and formulaic. We spoke to Stefano Rosso, Renzo's son and now the group's chief executive, to learn more.

BoF: How do you define the DNA of OTB group?

SR: It comes from the DNA of the founder; it comes from the characteristics of my father, where our key group values originate. Our main ability is to see things not for what they are, but for what they could be. Without a cool and innovative product you will never be able to achieve results.

We believe that you achieve results only as a consequence of what you are able to deliver to the market. We don't want to be another big group. Our goal is to become the coolest hub of brands and talents. The brand portfolio that we currently have represents this.

BoF: How is that reflected in the way the company is run?

SR: It can be boiled down to our values, which are courage, excellence, respect and evolution. I gave an illustration to our top managers, in a little frame, with all the values written out. I told all of them, if you have a doubt, don't go to your boss, just look at these values and 99 percent of the time you will find the right answer. We encourage people to be creative and open minded, but at the same time it's very important that everyone is accountable for their actions and decisions.

The important thing is that from these pillars our organisation is able to evolve every single day and become better and better. For instance, we don't encourage people to change everything for the sake of it, but to make sure things are put into discussion so that every single day, a little change happens to make our organisation better.

We like to define ourselves as a 'human-centred company. It's fundamental that as a corporation we guarantee the right balance between the private and the work side. We have to step in if our employees think too much about work and not enough about their private life, or vice-versa, because sooner or later this will have an impact on both.

One last thing I would like to add is that if you don't recognise yourself as a team player you will never be able to work in this organisation.

BoF: How does OTB marry making these courageous decisions with commerciality?

SR: If you are brave enough to push creativity and innovation, sooner or later the results will arrive on their own. You have to let creativity free and then you need to be good at seeing the commercial side of it.

Appointing **John Galliano** creative director [of Maison Margiela] shows how much we want to push forward this concept of creativity. In 2002, we entered into Margiela and basically built the company step by step without affecting its creativity. It took us ten years to become profitable. We could have done it in two, but we would have destroyed the uniqueness and the heritage of the brand.

BoF: What are your ambitions for the group in the next 3 to 5 years?

SR: We want to grow, become stronger and bigger. We already have a lot of opportunities in the development of our existing portfolio. We have enough work for ten years!

Regarding our non-organic growth, we are not looking at buying new brands just to have more turnover, it's more about buying into the brands that we think make sense to the rest of our portfolio.

BoF: What characteristics do you look for in prospective applicants?

We look for people that are in line with our values, which are creative, open-minded, accountable, that have passion for their job and accuracy in what they do. They need to have a strong team spirit, be transparent, coherent and make things happen every single day.


We believe the evolution of our group relies on the evolution of our talent. To ensure this, we have a system of performance and talent management allowing us to track and plan the development of each individual resource, and as a consequence of the entire organisation.

BoF: What are the company's specific talent priorities at the moment?

We are constantly on the search for talent, in every area of all the companies. Generally, those that work in the creative teams require the most research to find, but they are also the ones that make the biggest difference! Two other fundamental talent needs are technicians, such as product developers and pattern makers, and managers. Managers must have the skills and competencies to drive the company in its development, but, primarily, they need to embrace our group's values and the way we work.

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