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Continuous learning

Ali Ordoobadi, who gained his UTC engineering diploma in 1987 with the specialty field of robots and electromechanically propulsion units, has been Chairman & Managing Director of Valeo Japan and Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at Ichikoh, a subsidiary of Valeo and a front line company for automobile light systems. As a manager expert in automobile sector, Mr Ordoobadi has astutely combined an acute sense of cultural mix with a deep-rooted knowledge of industrial global strategies.

18 Sep 2017

Continuous learning

More scientific than literary by training, Ali Ordoobadi had an early, passionate inclination for mechanical engineering. Ever since he was a teenager, he stripped down car engines to better understand how they worked. Born in Iran, he learned English and French rapidly. His choosing UTC as his university was swift and almost self-evident: *“Compiegne offered an open, pragmatic training course with a unique international vista (at that time)”,* he recalls. UTC was one of the vert few HE establishments proposing a robotic specialty, directly applicable to industrial sites: *“The field was then quite novel and the lecturers were all extremely committed”.*

Over and above learning and developing his engineering skills, student Ordoobadi also followed a course to learn the German language. This was an optional choice that opened up some hitherto unexpected horizons. His knowledge and achievements in German allowed him to join Siemens just after his UTC diploma award. *“This was a company that epitomized for me the very best in technology combined with quality”,* he adds.

Rolling back the boundaries

Following this initial experience with Siemens in Germany, Mr Ordoobadi was approached by Valeo. Given that the French equipment manufacturer was expanding its activities in Germany, Mr Ordoobadi was hired to handle management of projects with the German car manufacturers. That marked the start of almost 30 years career with the French company Valeo. In the early 1990s, this company was one of the first to envisage production of ‘national’ parts outside France.

Our young graduate engineer took every advantage of the ‘spirit of conquest’ and new horizons, firstly in Europe, followed by Brazil and Asian countries. After his spell in Germany, Ali Ordoobadi pursued his career ladder in Great Britain. Toyota, Nissan et Honda were busy at the time setting up new production units in Europe, thereby offering more competitive products and, in this context, Valeo began negotiations with the new actors. Travelling frequently between England and Japan, he was able to learn yet another language and to discover Japan, a fascinating country.

After a brief experience in Brazil, Ali Ordoobadi’s inclination to accept new challenges was still as strong as ever. When he received a proposal to direct a plant in China, he accepted without hesitation. “*I knew absolutely nothing about China or Chinese and I had to learn the rudiments of their language and the very*

different way the workers there operate – very different from my previous experiences", he underlines, admitting that this job was not easy. Product quality problems with suppliers and delays in client payments were commonplace events. However, he did manage to stabilize the operation, improving the financial situation and obtaining new orders. Nonetheless, Mr Ordoobadi feels admiration at the way the Chinese have to adapt – this stage in his career can been read as an invitation to remain humble*. "Identifying the most relevant way to communicate is often just as important as defining the technical solutions",* he insists, advising those who envisage moving to China to learn the language basics before travelling there. After being head of Valeo's operations in China from 1999 to 2007, he himself then moved to Japan – a country he first visited 20 years before.

"*With the Japanese, being punctual and compliant in terms of delivery dates is fundamental but this huge respect for process and time for ideas to mature occasionally slows down innovation and reactivity",* notes Ali Ordoobadi realistically. Now Chairman and CEO for Ichikoh, since 2010, following his post as Deputy Chairman for Valeo Japan, he was able to bring a long-standing family-based enterprise back to earning profits and new growth. This new success story in no way prevents Ali Ordoobadi from underscoring that in a changing world, one must continuously question one aims and options. After Ichilkoh was taken over by Valeo in early 2017, Mr Ordoobadi moved back to his initial career company, as Chairman and Managing Director of Valeo Japan, while remaining Chairman and CEO of Ichikoh.

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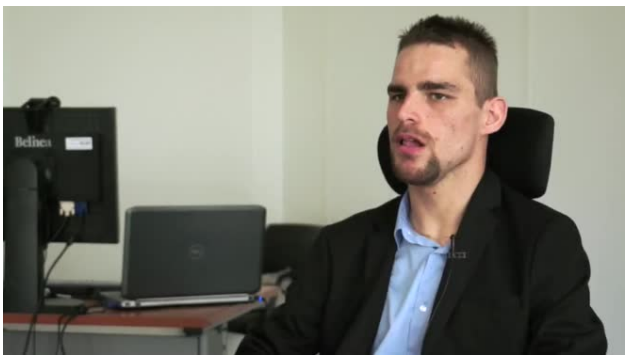

Portrait de diplômé : Timothé Penisson

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May 2017 • n° 43

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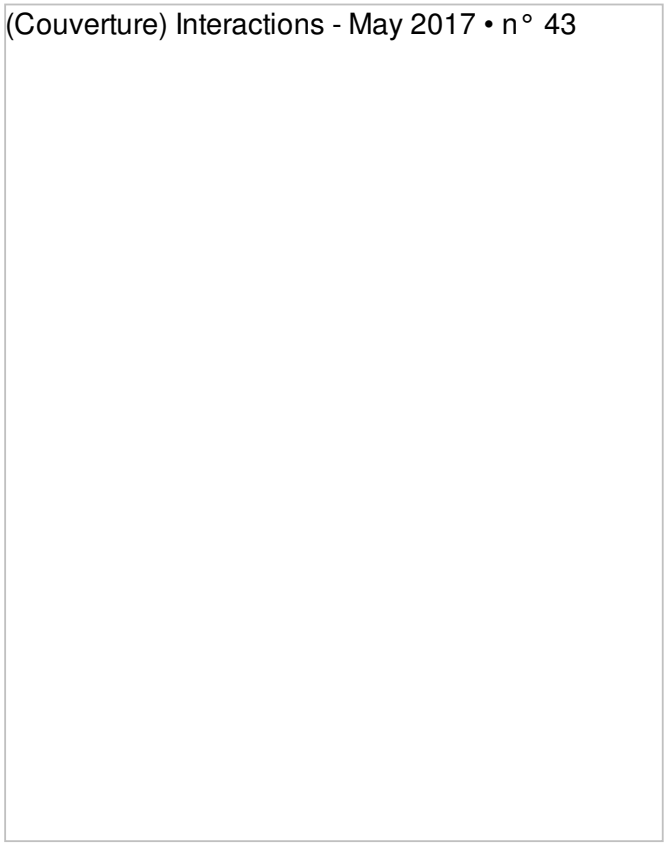

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