



HBA ELS Speaker Highlights: Why Authenticity and Inclusion Matter – an Interview with Marc Timmerman

Speaking this year at the HBA European Leadership Summit is Marc Timmerman – the Managing Partner for Axiom Consulting Partners.

Since 2001, Marc has been a Guest Professor in Leadership and Talent Management at the Vlerick Business School in Belgium. In 2013, he was appointed Senior Advisor to the European Foundation of Management Development (EFMD).



Marc Timmerman, Managing Partner for Axiom Consulting Partners

He was the first male chairman of the Women Leadership conference in Brussels and has been doing extensive research and program design since 2007 on the topic of Inclusion & Gender Diversity.

With a master's degree in Clinical Psychology, majored in Psychoanalysis, and a postgraduate degree in Business Administration, Mr. Timmerman has worked on Inclusion & Diversity research, program design and implementation for the last 10 years. He is behind designing specific programs for Pfizer EMEA and facilitating them for the last 7 years.

We had a chance to talk to Marc about the value of sharing knowledge, staying true to yourself and the future we are building for generations to come.

HBA Europe: Your primary career focus has been around educating organizations of the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce. Can you tell me why you chose this path?

Marc Timmerman: Since the age of 3, I have been part of an education system where boys and girls were treated as equals and competed as individuals and where it was normal to see boys and girls

working and playing together. Only when I joined university, great was my surprise that my education had been quite exceptional than for most others for whom it was new to study and work with the other gender. Being an atheist in a mainly catholic country made me aware of how it feels to be treated as a minority. In 2007 I started to invest energy, time and effort in doing research on gender diversity and inclusion after having published a book on



high potentials, where it was clear that the situation for male and female high potentials was not the same. In 2010 I was the first male chairman of a women leadership conference in Brussels and since then my involvement and knowledge have only grown. In 2011 I have designed a specific program for female leaders and high potentials at Pfizer Europe, a program that is highly recognized for its positive effects and runs for its 7th year.

HBA Europe: In your experience, what is the biggest misconception organizations make about diversity and inclusion?

MT: Based on my experience and observations, I would say that the segmentation of the workforce and its diversity will not lead to more inclusive behaviour. We are too much boxing in groups of people in categories, and thus reducing people to being part of a certain community. We need to “unbox” people and indicate the commonalities. It all starts by having enough inclusive leaders who basically only look at values, human capabilities and potential, and collaboration. Inclusive leaders create a truly diverse workforce where equality is a success-factor, rather than a legal criterion in a theoretical desired state.

HBA Europe: And what would you say is the one behaviour or trait that you have seen derail more leaders' careers?

MT: Difficult question, I am doubting between hubris and losing one's own authenticity. But in the end it comes down to the same fact that the derailment starts when they are lacking credibility as a leader, because they care too much about

their own personal success, their own financial goals, their own reputation, their own likeability or popularity, or their own legacy.

HBA Europe: What is the most important decision you have made in your career and how did you come about it?

MT: The most important decision I made in my career was to say “no” when I was 46 years to a “golden cage” succession plan where I would have become a captive of the organisation for the rest of my career. Instead I chose the more challenging path to start up a new company where I could integrate all my experience and knowhow and lead a team in a better way, how to bring real added value for my clients, how to create more positive and fundamental leadership development experiences. I realized that in order to avoid a “boiling the frog” scenario, this frog needed to refresh the water and define its own long term plan.

HBA Europe: Innovation in healthcare - what is the first advancement you foresee disrupting the sector?

MT: Artificial intelligence, new disruptive business innovation models and methods in R&D, partnership models versus doing it all on our own.

HBA Europe: What do you believe would be the barriers to adopting it?

MT: Doing it all by ourselves. What we do alone, we do better. In short, we are not wired to re-invent ourselves fundamentally.

HBA Europe: Why is it important to you to talk about gender equality?



MT: We don't have much time anymore if we don't want to disappoint the new generation that enters the labour force in 2020. They expect equality, great will be their disappointment that we did not manage to offer full equality despite all the brainpower, facts and evolutions. Shame on us if we did not manage it by then.

HBA Europe: How can women operate in male-dominated senior networks?

MT: Educating the male role models on their own biases; offering visibility and airtime to male inclusive leaders; decreasing the male ignorance and anxiety towards a truly egalitarian model; increasing the number of women leaders in the senior networks until you reach at least a critical tilting point (>35%) where diversity will start to self-regulate and become a non-issue; making also the women aware of the "glass ceiling" and of "the sticky floor" syndrome.

HBA Europe: What can men do to facilitate inclusion and encourage a conversation around gender equality?

Come meet Marc Timmerman on 5-6 October in London. He will be part of a discussion panel at the HBA European Leadership Summit at the Gibson Hall. [Register now](#) to attend the summit and join Marc in building a better, equal and more inclusive world.

MT: Become consciously aware of the advantages of a diverse workforce. Too many men and male leaders still ignore the specific issues that women face and what lies at the base of the inequality; too many male leaders are unaware of their own biases; many male managers are anxious about possible negative effects deriving from the introduction of gender quota. Men in order to benefit from becoming an inclusive leader have to experience the positive effects for themselves through appointing a competent woman in a leadership role, through seeing to it that there are balanced teams, from being confronted with their own unconscious biases and building in new guiding principles.

HBA Europe: And finally, what should we expect from the panel discussion you will be a part of?

MT: Concrete suggestions and recommendations on what can be done. Thought exchange on what the critical success factors for change are.

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