

## Mauro Porcini, from Varese to the top of PepsiCo.

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**Read books, travel a lot, be curious and passionate about knowledge.** This is the recipe for the future that **Mauro Porcini, the chief design officer of PepsiCo**, revealed to the students of the **Ferraris High School in Varese**. A former student himself, who is today considered **one of the 40 most successful men under 40 in the business world**, Mauro spent two hours, talking about his life, which began in Varese, or rather in Gallarate, and then continued in Milan, Dublin, Minneapolis and New York.

He was first a student at the science high school in Varese and then at the **Polytechnic in Milan**, where, by chance, he chose to attend a course that had just started: **industrial design**. His life has been one of challenges, always tackled with great passion, because “every incorrect choice can cost a company billions of dollars”. (PepsiCo is the world’s second largest multinational corporation in the field of food and drinks.)

Mauro is the head of a **fast-growing division**, which was established only three years ago, and which, today, has 100 employees, a number that will soon triple. He has the CEO’s ear, with no intermediaries. **It was Mauro who created PepsiCo’s trendy events**, the musical interlude during the interval of the Super Bowl, and it is he who creates presentations, launches and evenings that combine art, culture, fashion and design, for one of the world’s largest brands in soft drinks and food. “We’re getting ready for 28 May, a sensational event in Milan, connected with the final of the Champions League.”

During the two-hour lesson, Mauro Porcini spoke to the students about the world outside, which is

undergoing huge changes. **“It’s a magical time. The Internet has revolutionised the rules.** Today, our competitors are not only strong, famous brands, but also young entrepreneurs, who have creative ideas and find, on the web, easy ways to make it big. When I was your age, I had to go physically to find information. Today, you have all the knowledge, at a click of a mouse. And that’s the difference.”

Porcini’s world seems unreachable, so far from that Great Hall where curious and attentive students in their final year at the Ferraris High School gathered. **“What I am today is the result of a journey that has solid roots in Italy and in its culture.** If I hadn’t taken that journey, hadn’t studied what I studied, I wouldn’t have had the tools. **The Italians have a great talent: problem solving, or the art of getting by.** We’re used to facing problems with a shortage of tools, we’re able to connect new situations and recreate them to produce a winning solution. **What we lack is the strength to transform this spirit of ours into something more noble,** into something that can be exported around the world. My role in the company is to bring together different, hyper-specialised situations that are unable to relate.”

**What does it take to maintain a winning profile?** “Today, communication is different. Traditional advertising doesn’t work anymore. There are new **emotive and emotional strategies that have to speak to a person’s dreams and desires.** We need to respond to them as they appear, and be able to interpret them. Each one of us is a vehicle of communication: the choices we make, the way we dress, our desires are all details in a story. We need to start from that story, to tell a tale that incorporates the brand, which, in turn, becomes the object of emotions and a vehicle of communication. The tale is told on three levels: **the first is the deep and visceral emotion; then, there’s rationalising and lastly, sharing.** The social media have profoundly modified how we relate; today, we have to focus on the amplification that the users do for you. **The brand no longer speaks directly, but is the object of conversation.**”

Setting off from Varese and conquering New York is not everyone’s cup of tea. **“You have to have big dreams and broad perspectives;** curiosity and an open mind. Never stop, but continue to look, to discover and to know. A new place, an encounter will change your perspective, giving rise to innovative ideas. I’m surprised by so many things I’ve heard repeated here in Italy over the last few days. I’m from New York, accustomed to living with different ethnic groups and religions, where the exchange of ideas and knowledge enable us to overcome obstacles and to create other relationship parameters.”

**Today’s meeting was organised by the association of “former students” of the Ferraris High School,** who started with an announcement about Andrea Paladini, the student who tragically died in an accident, and who has left a great emptiness in the entire school.

di Alessandra Toni Translated by Andreacchi, Miola & Pellegrino (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)