

Interview of Mr. Andreas Neocleous

Andreas Neocleous was born in 1939 in Episkopi, Paphos, into a family of twelve children. At the age of 15, he joined the EOKA liberation struggle of 1955-1959 and was imprisoned and tortured. The injustice he experienced under British detention and Turkish torture determined his subsequent choice of a career. He chose law as a profession so that he could strive towards justice and protection of human rights and human dignity. In 1970 he was elected as a member of Parliament in Limassol. In 1973, he established a legal partnership with George Nicolaou and Soto Stavriniotis. Today, that law firm is Andreas Neocleous and Co LLC, based in Limassol, with branches in Nicosia and Paphos and representative offices in Moscow, Kiev, Brussels, Prague, Budapest and Sevastopol.

“Every day is a different milestone along a journey. A journey that constantly changes depending on each decision you make”, says the renowned lawyer Andreas Neocleous, Chairman of the Board of Andreas Neocleous & CO LLC.

A significant station in life for Mr. Neocleous was the age of 15, when he experienced the injustice of EOKA’s liberation struggle of 1955-1959. He then made the decision: “wherever I have the influence, I will never allow injustice to take place again”.

Mr. Neocleous as a person and as a businessman

“I am offended by injustice. I studied law because I had experienced injustice from the British and the Turkish. My vision has always been for Cyprus to become a benign place for all its citizens and I have always striven towards that end.

I am deeply saddened when I observe cases where the principles of justice are violated, especially when the motives are ignoble.

Although fortunately these incidents are few, they are a blemish on the legal system and the reputation of Cyprus as a respectable place, which is the main advantage promoted internationally for our country, aiming to attract foreign investment and international service provision.”

Leadership Style

“When you take over a case, you need to study it thoroughly. This is what I always advise my lawyers and trainees to do. You have to embrace the problem, just like fire embraces oil, and to examine all sides of the case. When you enter a dark room, you have to feel your way carefully and ‘see’ everything. Do not ever act without first getting to know the subject well”.

Decisions

“I was planning to follow an academic career path, but the incidents of the Turkish rebellion left me with no choice. Therefore, I studied law in depth. I observed at that time that the majority of lawyers were, misguided in my view, dealing only with litigation cases. In

addition to litigation work, however, there were other fields, such as shipping and consultancy, which I studied and dealt with. Then, I contributed in the effort to promote Cyprus as an international trade centre, since I had good international connections. Further to this I had the leading role in opening the gate towards Eastern European countries, attracting Russian business to Cyprus”.

The qualities of a successful leader

“I believe a successful leader should always work with honesty and passion, whilst having the common sense and aspiration to move forward. These four principles are captured in the Dorian columns of our firm’s logo, which always guide our way”.

Role Model / Mentor

“I had a role model, but not a mentor. I looked up to Captain Michael, who always followed his heart, without justifying himself to anyone. Something which I consider wrong, however, because a piece of advice is also essential. I did not have a mentor, therefore, for the simplest issue, I had to study hard and discover the way myself.”

Respect, like, or fear the leader?

A leader should be loved, rather than liked or respected. Respect is relative and a leader should not be feared at all. It seems that some people feel some kind of fear towards me and I tell them that they should not. I do not want them to fear me, I want them to love me, instead.

Good Manager equals good leader?

“A capable manager is not necessarily an effective leader. A leader is someone who does not focus on how to earn money, but someone who has a vision aligned with principles, ideas and ideals. A leader is someone who considers how to contribute to humanity, country and science.”

Tough decisions

“When you make a decision, you do not always know if that decision will be tough and most importantly correct. The future will tell. We make decisions every day. I make hundreds of decision every day and I just pray that most of them are correct.”

Decisions from one or from the team?

“One person cannot make all the decisions. I always listen to the opinions of my partners on all matters.”

The biggest success

“Success is not measured by what you have gained or accomplished in life, because this may also be attributed to luck. Success is measured by the obstacles, the difficulties and the hindrances you overcome on your way, as well as by the strategy, stamina and effort you applied in order to overcome the countless challenges. The biggest success for anyone is to see their efforts and hard work pay off and see their children grow, becoming worthy. I feel I have succeeded in both. I established a small law office and with hard work and the right strategy, it developed gradually. Today, it is recognised by all the leading independent legal research organisations as one of the biggest and most reliable law firms in Europe and the region. Furthermore, my two sons are partners at the office and I can honestly say that they are both better lawyers than I am.”

The biggest failure

“I am having a hard time replying to this question. I experienced many failures in life, which caused me sadness and disappointment. However, I do not consider them a bad thing. Failures are the greatest lessons we can take from life, because they help us correct our ways and develop our strategy.”

Work – life balance

“Work-life balance is a vital factor in every employee’s life. Personally, I managed to keep this balance, regardless of the long hours I dedicated and still dedicate to my work, in Cyprus and abroad, and this is due to the love and understanding I had and continue to have from my wife and family.”

Advice for a smooth succession

“Initially, you have to be confident that the successor who will continue your vision has the ability to do it, or at least comes close to matching your and your clients’ expectations. The process is long and needs patience, hard work and complete acceptance that your successor has their own personality, thoughts and opinion, as well as a personal vision. The outgoing generation will need to pass on their knowledge, experience and wisdom to achieve the desired results. I would advise those who are preparing for succession to be methodological, patient, good teachers and under no circumstances compare themselves with their successor. The procedure needs correct strategic planning, continuous coaching, a good methodology and support from all the associates of the business.

Business today and during the old days

“There are definitely big differences and milestones within every decade. The 1970s were blighted by the Turkish invasion and Cyprus occupation, which destroyed many companies, whilst the signing of the Association agreement with the European Economic Community during 1972 brought new opportunities for business with other European countries. During the 1980s, Cyprus began to recover and by the time it reached the 1990s Cyprus had all the

specifications to establish itself as an international business center for many foreign entrepreneurs and investors.

However, prosperity allowed greed and slackness to flourish, something that has thankfully diminished due to the economic crisis. Recession has also inextricably connected business with fiscal policy. Entrepreneurs today need to improve the quality of their service and invest in innovation, since international competition amongst businesses is very fierce.

The state, therefore, needs to focus on transparency of its finances, taxation and cutting bureaucracy, as well as on providing incentives for foreign investors.”

Extraordinary Cypriot and foreign entrepreneurs

“I consider all Cypriot entrepreneurs extraordinary and I admire them all for surviving the recent economic crisis and the haircut of 2013. Out of the foreign pool, I particularly admire Bill Gates because he contributed significantly in science and progress and developed a remarkable philanthropic work.”

Advice to the new generation of entrepreneurs

“I advise the new generation to work hard, with passion and vision but also with honesty and decency. Prior to commencing a project or a task, to ensure they do effective planning and consider all the factors involved, in partnership with the right associates who will support and share the same goals and objectives. A company’s human capital is of vital importance and its most significant asset. Without effective human capital a firm cannot progress or develop. Furthermore, I consider it important for the new generation to acquire business knowledge. In a digital society, where almost everyone has access to business developments, there is no excuse for ignorance.”

Recipe for success

“Success is subjective. For me, success has always been to provide a high quality of service, which serves the general good. The recipe is in regards to the contribution. The only way to succeed is to have as a goal the general and public good. During my professional experience, I always gave room to innovation and to the new generation. For this reason, my office door is always open for the young generation and for those who wish to visit me and have a conversation with me. Therefore, I do not believe in recipes. I believe in hard work, innovative ideas, honesty and decency.”