



Koen Van Gerven



Charles Bouaziz



Jean-Paul Philippot



Marc du Bois



Jules Noten



CEO for a Day

Meet the five Solvay finalists who became CEO for a day!



Ralph El Dick



Olivia Ver Hulst



Aiham Shoab



Clémentine Dumortier



Marin Vandamme

Five Master students from Solvay Brussels School - ULB, Odgers Berndtson's exclusive partner for their "CEO for a Day" event, have been selected for a match-up with five CEOs. See what they learned from this amazing experience!

Interview with Clémentine Dumortier who spent a day with Marc du Bois, CEO of Spadel



How was your contact with Marc du Bois?

I had the chance to spend a full hour with Marc du Bois at the beginning of the day, which was the opportunity to ask him questions and learn more about the company. The rest of the day was devoted to an executive committee with very diverse topics, where I could not directly ask questions to Marc du Bois but rather listen and observe the interactions between these executive people.

How would you describe Spadel's culture, as you observed it today?

I believe that Spadel's culture can be described in 3 words: familial, dynamic and innovative. It is clear to

me that Marc du Bois wants to maintain a familial spirit in the company, for instance by meeting the employees on a regular basis. According to what I have seen, the employees are dynamic, engaged and motivated to make the company better, for instance through various innovations.

What part(s) of the day did you enjoy most?

Breakfast with Marc du Bois which was the opportunity to ask him questions

Executive committee where I learned a tremendous amount of things about the company

What were the most important lessons you learned about leadership?

Listen to others, especially when they have a different opinion than yours.

Was being a CEO different from what you thought it would be?

I did not think managing interactions between people would be of such great importance.

What did you learn about yourself through the process?

The Hogan personality assessment enabled me to think about myself from another perspective – which was very interesting.

How did the day influence how you look at your own career?

First of all, I will be able to better understand the challenges my managers are facing. Secondly, my

key take-aways to be impactful and move forward are to listen to others and be open to criticism.

Could you already apply anything you learned to your life or studies?

I could definitely apply what I have had the chance to observe as CEO for a day in the context of student organizations I am involved in. Especially the ability to jump from a topic to another and the way to lead meetings, by giving the floor to the different people who are around the table and summarizing what has been said.

Why do you think initiatives like this are important for students?

These initiatives teach students to go out of their comfort zones and to adapt to unusual situations while discovering the corporate world. This is especially important knowing how theoretical the Belgian teaching method is.

How would you summarize your experience in the CEO for a Day program?

Demystification of the word CEO by learning more about this executive function but also about yourself.

Any last thoughts about the day?

Intensity! The day was brilliant but very intense, with many meetings following others.

Meet Ralph El Dick who spent a day with Koen Van Gerven, CEO of BPOST



What was it like being CEO for a day?

Being CEO for a day was certainly one of the most resourceful and meaningful experience I had in my life. Indeed, you are present in different meetings with different challenges, different strategies and you must adapt yourself all the time. Plus, you always have to show a good image to all your employees despite all the pressure and responsibilities you have.

How was your contact with Koen Van Gerven?

The contact with Koen was pleasant and open to many discussions. Koen gave a lot of attention to our conversations by carefully listening and sharing his opinions on my topics all along the day. We also had some "informal" discussions during the day which was nice.

How would you describe his leadership style?

I really think that Koen has the perfect leadership style through three main criteria: Listening, being accessible and taking the right decisions at the right moments. Throughout the day and with all the meetings we had, Koen showed the same leadership skills without any differentiation between anyone.

How would you describe bpost's culture, as you observed it?

I really think bpost's culture changed tremendously these last years. Bpost became a company where performance, initiative and flexibility are primary. However, they do not forget the well-being of their employees by offering many chances to evolve and keeping the right values.

What part(s) of the day did you enjoy most?

There were three main parts I enjoyed the most. The first was the meeting for their "fresh strategy". It was a real business case that they needed to solve with many challenges but also many opportunities. Listening to their way of tackling this kind of problem was interesting. The second was the meeting for the young talent program where

I could share my ideas about how to attract the best students from university. Finally, I really enjoyed the restaurant with Koen and Marc Huybrecht where we could discuss the evolution of the company and their personal perspective.

What were the most important lessons you learned about leadership?

After this experience, I learned three main lessons about leadership. Whatever the position you hold in life, stay yourself and treat everyone like you want to be treated; give your employees responsibilities and trust in them to perform well; and, finally, never stay in your comfort zone if you want to evolve in your professional career. Koen is the perfect example.

Was being a CEO different from what you thought it would be?

We all know that a CEO has a heavy schedule. But no one can realise the heavy responsibilities that Koen must continuously handle. But, with an open-office, a simple "hello" to all employees, and his presence in the field, he showed that a good CEO is also accessible to everyone. As a result, employees are not just there to realize their work but are involved in improving the quality and performance of the company.

What did you learn about yourself through the process?

Through the selection process offered by Odgers Berndtson and the day with Koen, I learned that there are two main points that I need to work on myself: Patience and prudence. Being a good leader is about being patient in every situation, even if there is a crisis. Every problem has a solution, but it needs to be tackled in the right way and with prudence.

How did the day influence how you look at your own career?

The day allowed me to have a better picture about what is exactly the executive level of our society and who are the perfect people suited for these positions.

Could you already apply anything you learned to your life or studies?

When we are students and ambitious, we easily think that we want to reach an executive position in our professional career, but we do not know all the requirements, sacrifices, commitment and perseverance to set there. It is certainly something that I will keep in mind and apply to my whole life.

ABOUT CEO FOR A DAY

Since 4 years, [Odgers Berndtson](#) organizes the unique opportunity for top-students to spend a day on the side of a well-known Belgian CEO.

For the CEOs, it is an excellent opportunity to connect with the next generation of leaders and to better understand what drives them, and also to obtain favourable press coverage on their participation.

The participating students learn about the level of responsibility and the complexities faced by today's leading executives, while also getting a feel for how these leaders create value in their organizations.

CEOx1DAY
BY ODGERS BERNDTSON

Interview with Olivia ver Hulst who learned a lot from Charles Bouaziz, CEO of Ontex



What was it like being CEO for a day?

I believe that it is a one-time experience that brings a person very early the wheel of a company. It enables you to observe a mature career with the eyes of student, which makes this experience powerful.

How was your contact with Charles Bouaziz?

My contact with Charles Bouaziz was very open and easy. I had the chance to ask numerous questions to which he would answer very precisely and clearly. We had insightful discussions about his company and its market, and Charles' vision for the future of the company.

How would you describe his leadership style?

Charles seems to have strongly increased communication within the firm, to motivate and make every employee of the company a part of its success. I believe that this strategy gets people involved and enables the company to grow.

How would you describe Ontex's culture, as you observed it today?

Ontex's culture comes from its "glocal" characteristic. It is international, but also local for each of their entities. Employees are at the heart of the company.

What part(s) of the day did you enjoy most?

Every step was important, but I enjoyed most a debriefing with Charles, which happened after the investors' teleconference and after the presentation to employees.

What were the most important lessons you learned about leadership?

I learned how different leadership can be and about the different types of ownership. As Ontex was previously owned by a family, then by Private Equity firms and now it is public, I understood it went through many

restructurations that led to many different types of leadership (e.g. when it was owned by PE, there was almost no communication, nor HR department).

Was being a CEO different from what you thought it would be?

I was not sure what to imagine before. I believe that it is a job that I would definitely like to have as you are at the heart of an industry. Ontex's internationality and growing strategy made this day even more exciting as I always admire dynamism, which is a word that perfectly suits Ontex.

What did you learn about yourself through the process?

I learned what kind of behaviors are important in order to be successful and to have responsibility. I learned about leadership and its effects on the people a CEO manages. Last, but not least, I learned what was the role of investors in a company, and how important they are, even though they do not influence the day to day decision of a company.

How did the day influence how you look at your own career? Could you already apply anything you learned to your life or studies?

This day influenced my career in two ways. The first one in the short term: I know that I will adopt certain behaviors in order to have as much responsibility as I can handle, and the second one in the long term: choose well my path in order to reach a dream job that I need to set soon in my professional life.

Why do you think initiatives like this are important for students?

I believe that a student needs to know what career they are aspiring to. These types of initiatives enable students to better understand what a career implies and how to reach their dream job. I therefore believe it is key to offer that to student.

At Ontex, people are the heart of the company. We have various initiatives such as traineeships, graduate programs and talent development plans that enable people to develop in the group. Therefore, CEO for a Day is a natural continuation of it. It was a privilege to participate in the program, which gave me the opportunity to look back and share the transformative journey we made over the past 5 years. It's very rewarding to be able to support the new generation of young entrepreneurs.

Charles Bouaziz

USEFUL LINK

If you are a student looking for career tips and advice, or a company interested in our students for an internship, contact our [Career Services](#) !

MORE INFO ABOUT SOLVAY CAREER SERVICES:
<http://solvay.edu/career-services>

Interview with Marin Vandamme who spent a day with Jules Noten, CEO of Vandemoortele



What was it like being CEO for a day?

It was truly a formidable experience. I learned so much, both about people and about leadership. It provided me with the opportunity to see things I would not have witnessed that early in my career, but most importantly to ask a lot of questions. I was really able to ask a question to Jules and he would always answer with honesty - and his answers were really interesting. It was by far one of the most interesting one-day experiences in my life.

How was your contact with Jules Noten?

The contact was great. It didn't feel awkward at any point of time. In the beginning, it was me asking him thousands of questions but then later during the day it changed to a real exchange from both sides and discussions.

How would you describe his leadership style?

Very much focused on people and leading by empowering others. He allowed the conversation its own flow and didn't need to show he was the boss but instead listened and only intervened when it was needed.

How would you describe Vandemoortele's culture, as you observed it today?

A true focus on people and on finding the best people for the job. A real care is taken for their people as everything is put in place to make the factories as safe as possible as well as making the job as interesting as possible.

What part(s) of the day did you enjoy most?

The parts where I was alone with Jules and that we could talk freely as well as those with the other employees of Vandemoortele where they talked about the company and its strategy.

What were the most important lessons you learned about leadership?

You should learn to listen. Build ideas together in order for people to have ownership about the ideas. It is also imperative to be able to translate the high level vision to concrete things for every employee so that they feel empowered working for your company.

Was being a CEO different from what you thought it would be?

Yes, it was more about listening than giving orders and direction like I thought it might be.

What did you learn about yourself through the process?

I learned that it can be possible to combine a career with a family. That I should listen more and never forget my values during my career.

How did the day influence how you look at your own career?

It gave me more confidence that it is possible to balance a family and a career. I also thought that I might enjoy having a similar function one day.

Could you already apply anything you learned to your life or studies?

I will now always focus more on the value of people and how people actually make the difference in every aspect of a company. My studies are almost over but I will try to listen more during group works.

Why do you think initiatives like this are important for students?

Because I would never have had the chance to ask those questions if I would not have had this opportunity. Many things I experienced that day were things I might never have experienced or experienced much later in my career.



Interview with Shoaib Aiham who was Jean-Paul Philippot for a day as CEO of RTBF

What was it like being CEO for a day?

It is very colourful to be a CEO since everyone in the different departments of the organisation go back to you and to your advices. It is not for the CEO to undertake the tasks themselves (except important meetings and assemblies), though the CEO is a guide to the different employees.

How was your contact with Jean-Paul Philippot?

The day started very well! His driver and I picked him up from the airport. The first thing he said is (of course) how do I pronounce my name? I followed by telling him different stories that sparked his interest and I got a good response from his side.

Throughout the day, he had many meetings and interviews. Therefore, I could not really talk to him very much, which I understand completely.

Overall, the day was pretty amazing!

How would you describe his leadership style?

M. Philippot is a very structured and square-minded person. He leads his team by listening to them weekly and by trying to find a compromise together with the different managers. In other words, high eloquence, great communicator, excellent team-player and trusting-nature describes him.

How would you describe rtbf's culture, as you observed it today?

It is very different from the public sector. I interviewed top-management of SNCB a couple years ago. I saw clearly that the RTBF is way more dynamic than the SNCB when it comes to the management itself or the organisational culture.

What part(s) of the day did you enjoy most?

Besides the time the RTBF sent the CEO's car to pick me up, or the discussion I had with Mr.

Philippot in his car, the production committee was very interesting to observe and further to analyse the behaviour of each c-level executive. A small tension rose between the CEO and one of his team members. It was extremely overwhelming to hear and see how the CEO responded to such "harsh" behaviour of his employee.

What were the most important lessons you learned about leadership?

Leadership is not only about leading people ! Leadership is about listening and caring about one's team! I totally disagree with individuals that state "you are either a team-player or a team-leader!" One can be a leader under certain circumstances and under a specific time and place. Whereas, that same person can also be a follower in a different situation. Nevertheless, in all cases, a leader is always a good team-player!

Was being a CEO different from what you thought it would be?

Honestly, I was not very surprised by the role of a CEO. Nor did I differ in my perception of a CEO. However, what triggered my interest is how a CEO has a very robust patience with all of the stakeholders, and more precisely with external journalists and reporters.

What did you learn about yourself through the process?

I learnt that being a good listener and understanding my team can be a great advantage to become an influencer. Additionally, I learnt that I must improve my communication skills and I should rely more on my team by assimilating delegation skills.

How did the day influence how you look at your own career?

I believe that the CEO job itself is interesting and has lot of ups-and-downs. To become a future executive, I will proceed with my journey of self-discovery! If one understands

who he is, he can connect with and inspire any other individual.

Could you already apply anything you learned to your life or studies?

I would apply good-listening skills on any project. An interesting way to respond to a harsh argument is by remembering to breathe calmly and reconnect your mind to your body. Otherwise, you will stress out and start to overact with your team-mates.

Why do you think initiatives like this are important for students?

For most of the Solvay students, ambition is the key driver to their career. Furthermore, such an activity is very important for the future c-level graduates. Shadowing the CEO is crucial especially when his/her tasks are very different and impactful.



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