

# Taking a wider perspective

Who are we and what do we believe in? How can our group make the world a better place?

**Nicolas De Santis** tackles some truly big questions

In the movie *A Good Year*, ruthless investment banker Max Skinner begins to question his values upon inheriting his uncle's chateau and vineyard. Intent on selling the property, he spends a few days there, but soon his memories, a beautiful woman and a young American interrupt his plans. He starts questioning his values and his future. He can see that money isn't his goal and that it can't buy him true happiness. He realises that he does not want to end up like his boss who owns real Picassos, but is forced to lock them away and put copies on display.

The dilemma is just as real if you are running a business: how often do you question your values and those of your organisation?

These are eternal questions: who am I, what do I believe in, where am I going, and how do I get there? Most importantly, how do I convince others to follow me there? Answer these questions and you will have dealt with the issues of morals, ethics, beliefs, dreams, aspirations and leadership. These answers will drive your company's business strategy, and an alignment of strategy and values will start to emerge.

These are the questions I asked myself when I returned to Twelve Stars, our family consulting group, after five years spent travelling across five continents to launch and build two international Internet start-ups: [www.beenz.com](http://www.beenz.com) (now sold to Carlson Marketing) and [www.opodo.com](http://www.opodo.com) (owned by Europe's leading airlines). On my return I was offered the position of secretary-general of Gold Mercury International, an international think-tank that focuses on global governance and ethical leadership, in addition to my work at Twelve Stars.

Here at Twelve Stars we have naturally adopted many values from the think-tank because of our value transformation and focus on sustainability. Twelve Stars invests in the think-tank projects, improving and promoting good global governance and ethical practices around the world.

Advising on vision and corporate sustainability has become our core focus, with design and branding as the tools to communicate large corporate transformations internally and externally. Now, all of our consulting projects include protocols on governance practices, ethics and corporate behaviour. We can't do our job without them. We advise clients on how to make products and services that solve true consumer needs while still being profitable.

Our consulting projects deliver ethical tools to help organisations become better 'global citizens' and make better decisions in a globalised world, minimising the



risk of making bad choices.

I want to share some of what we believe in (see box). These are not the usual business beliefs, like 'we choose our own clients' (we do), 'we do not pitch' (we don't), or 'we fire difficult clients' (we do), but we believe they make us what we are as a group of people. They force us to innovate and think hard about how we can change the world, for ourselves and for our clients.

If our list sounds more like that of a non-governmental organisation than of a consultancy, then yes, it is, because we believe all companies, especially consultancies, must be more like NGOs by thinking ethically and having a strong social outlook.

The design and branding industry has a great responsibility to educate its clients and, via them consumers, about sustainability. To do this, groups must change their core beliefs and practices. This won't be easy, especially if you are a consummate part of a larger group. Luckily for us we are independent, which gives us freedom to do what we want to, when we want to.

Sustainability is not about global warming or about donating money here and there. It is actually about ethics, beliefs and making the right choices. It is about changing behaviours before it is too late. It is not just an add-on to your business – it is finding solutions to the most pressing problems in the world by adding value for your employees and the world.

*Nicolas De Santis is chief executive of Twelve Stars and secretary-general of the think-tank Gold Mercury International*

## TWELVE STARS' CORE VALUES

- We are all on this planet together. No exceptions
- What we do with our lives is up to us. No one else
- The most important thing in this world is saving lives. Nothing is more important
- We all have to work towards world peace. Sustainability is essential to this
- We must protect our planet and its core resources. Without them we are lost
- We must create solutions that solve existing problems. No superfluous stuff
- Be happy and make others happy. This is our true gift