

Dear friends and colleagues in the plastics processing industry!

At this time the world is challenged by a unprecedented situation which many call the corona virus situation. Public life in many countries has come to a halt. Borders are closed. We all experience limits, which we could not believe will ever happen. Thousands of people, especially elderly are passing away too early. Industry is down in an unprecedented manner. Supplies and established cooperations are challenged and this cause a lot of manufacturing disruptions. Governments around the world try to support development to the better by bumping lots of money into the markets.

I wanted to share with you one of the lessons, I have learned in China. In Chinese the translation of „crisis" is „Wei Ji“, wich directly means „dangerous chance“. I think this tells it all. Every crisis is also a chance. It is a dangerous one though, so one need to carefully study and evaluate the opportunities but also be brave and take decisions. So, I believe nothing will change the world (besides the wars in the 20th century) like this crisis. So it will depend whether societies will take the chance to develop new progressive values and new approaches for a life together on this earth or money will be printed to return to the „comfort zones“ and continue the „old“ way.

If chances are taken, then in my opinion large opportunities will open for forward thinking, creative and innovative people, such as but not limited to:

- Develop a real resources saving and environmental oriented industry. We got only this one planet. At least for the next 100 years. Instead of just pointing out, what all others can and need to do in this respect, we need to develop new business models. Something like for instance, change from purchasing goods as property - to using it for a defined period and then return it to the manufacturer for utilisation. Nobody know the product better, than the manufacturer and he will be the the best qualified to recycle and use components for further goods. This applies in my opinion for all spheres of industry including plastics parts and assemblies and of course plastics machinery. We use our nature and environment in many respects, so we nee to return to it as well.
- We also use our society. We use services like rubbish collection and disposal, roads and bridges, teachers, nurses, doctors, we rely on science and research and many more. So we need to develop our business in a way, that we can return and contribute to the society, not only by paying or sometimes avoiding to pay taxes. Business models avoiding taxes in my opinion have no value for future. Of course a main concern will be how money is spend – and here a broad participation of the society in democratic discussions and decision making is key. In some countries we have already seen great achievements, like for instance in Switzerland.
- Just profit driven, unlimited and unconditional growth in my opinion is not a future value. It makes no sense to build large wealth, stand alone this can not be a value. However, not to misunderstand, I strongly support open markets and competition in all spheres as a driver for performance. But maybe it is not very wise to continue to carry parts and components twice around the world just to make a pence more profit.
- In my opinion a very careful look has to be taken on globalisation. The past 20 years of globalisation in my opinion have failed, because it has created winners and losers. The situation with the migration in many western countries has resulted from this wrong approach. Companies have mixed up „globalisation“ with „outsourcing“. The growth of wealth and prosperity in some, mainly western, countries has come along with unemployment and under-education in most countries of Africa and some in Asia and south and latin America. So – if wealth is not coming to them, they will go to the wealth and try to take their share share. Same applies for international trade, which in my opinion has to be balanced in order not to transfer the problems of one country to the other.

- After having developed new business ideas and models, innovation as a powerful tool to its full utilisation will get a large boost. If innovation will be based on old business models, real progress with respect to resources, environment and society will be very difficult if not impossible to achieve.

All this and much more, are the challenges - and the current crisis offers the great opportunity to think, plan and develop models in this direction. Mankind will find a way to deal with viruses and other unforeseen disasters, because when corona 19 is over, other viruses may appear and nobody can stop the world every year for several months. If new values can be established I see huge positive development opportunities to come for our planet. As I don't think a „great leader“ will appear and establish these new values from the top, it needs to develop from the bottom, in education first and followed by relations between people, nations and regions. It will take some time, but such a crisis as currently may help to make people think a little faster. By the way, I don't think digitalisation for the sake of digitalisation or any kind of artificial intelligence will help the world to new values. They are just innovation tools. I think, in the past we have concentrated too much on these innovative tools, incl. automation and forgot a bit to adopt and define new values, as a mastermind for all sustainable development. Consequently, in my opinion everybody should start by himself in his direct environment and even in his family, not first looking on others. And this also applies for the plastics processing industry as a whole, including materials, machines and plastics part processing.

I wish all of you and your loved ones, to stay healthy and strong. Please also stay positive and try to think in new values, developing new business models and taking brave decisions. Brave decisions are always the best decisions. I am sure if thinking completely new, one can also move on to pastures new.

*Cordially yours,
Prof. Helmar Franz*