



ACS Athens interviews Mr. Nikos Koumettis

by Katerina Michalakakou

President of Coca Cola, Central & Southern Europe
Father of Petros and Felicia



Nikos Koumettis, a rebellious teenager, now ranked as one of the top 5 executives of The Coca-Cola Company, explains that education plays a major role in defining the next generation of Greeks. His passion for education and his desire to see youth succeeding in their chosen fields, while helping through his company, the world to become a better place, have made him into the motivational and inspirational leader he is today. He talks about his school years and is reminiscent of the journey back to the past.

Which school did you go to and what do you remember from your school days?

I went to Leonteios School from 4th grade till 12th grade. Leonteios was a very strict school. The majority of the teachers at Leonteios were priests who applied rigid school policies and rules. However, it was a good school, as I met great people (including my best friend) and learned many new things.

I was an ok student, 16-17/20 and was extremely active and sporty. As a consequence, my favorite subject was gymnastics, but also geometry. I also used to be in the Volley-ball team, which I continued all the way through university.

Did you have any idea what your professional life would be like?

Not a clue. (giggles) I only knew that I wanted to interact with people and that a transactional-type job, or a job that required you to work on your own would not be good for me. I get bored easily and so I need to do something creative and different.

Did someone inspire you to aim high?

My first role model was at university, a professor of Marketing. He was a charismatic, knowledgeable person who loved out-of-the-box thinking. He made me feel that I was not an outlier, but someone who would be suited for a career in marketing.



My other significant role model was the Commercial Director at Bristol-Myers Squibb, where I started working for a small period of time after graduation. I call this person my professional father and mentor, as he helped me become the person I am now.

My father was also my role model; he worked for Bristol Myers Squibb for 40 years - very successful and disciplined manager.

Do you have any hobbies?

Teaching is my main hobby. I began teaching International Marketing and Sales Management at the American College of Greece – Deree College and Marketing and Advertising at Pantion University, when I was 24 years old and continued to do so for 13 years. Apart from the theoretical knowledge, I also had street-smart experiences to share with my students. I stopped teaching when I undertook my first position at Coca Cola due to extensive travelling

My other hobbies, include, winter skiing and sailing, while my latest one is googling (giggles again). I google everything, in order to satisfy my endless curiosity.

Thinking back, I can probably say that I have always had a balanced life.

Do you believe that work and personal life can be balanced?

I am a dedicated father, who loves his kids, but my work life does not allow me to see them as much as I would like to. However, I make sure that when I see them, I spend quality time with them.

As far as my work life is concerned, I have the mentality that people should not work on weekends. I almost never work on weekends, except if I have to travel on a Sunday night and I also don't expect my colleagues to work on the weekend.

I expect them to work at a logical time through the evening. What matters to me is the intensity and focus, not the time that someone has spent doing the job or work load.

Do you think that one's personality determines the kind of job they will have in the future?

Success requires the right skills and capabilities, the right timing *and* the right people (mentors) who will guide you. Finally if you see your job as a hobby, then you will have more than 80% chance to be very good at what you do.

Although I have a very intense and difficult job, I don't see it as a job, but as a hobby. I enjoy all aspects of what I do and this brings me great satisfaction.

How would you describe yourself now and what do you think has helped you to succeed in your career? Do you take risks?

Well, that's easy! Firstly, I'm a positive person who sees the glass half full most of the time and tries to make people around me feel the same way; secondly, I am a calm person and I rarely lose my temper; thirdly, I have the ability to build authentic relationships.

I don't play games- I am a walk-the-talk kind of person who likes to develop good teams and wants to have stronger and better people than me around.

As far as risk is concerned, yes, I am a risk-taker and I also urge my people to the same. My motto is: "If you wait to be 100% right to make a decision, then it's too late". You need to go to the 80% range and understand that a big part of life and business requires experimenting and making mistakes.



Risk taking is a necessity, as long as the risk taken is calculated. I take calculated risks, and although I think out-of-the box, I don't take out-of-the box risks.

However, I have made mistakes, but I am happy about them, because they helped me develop.

As of April 1st, you have been appointed President, Central & Southern Europe Business Unit of Coca-Cola, with headquarters in Greece. How does it feel to be back in Greece after 8 years of being overseas?

Coming back to Greece, for me, is symbolic, because I want my kids to learn about their roots. My children, in reality, have never lived in Greece and have only visited it as tourists. It is important for me that my children live in their country. However, I also came back because of the current situation. I believe that it is important for a senior person that can make a difference to come back to Greece and motivate others. To stay and fight for a better future.

Has the current situation in Greece influenced your personal and work life?

I have been partly influenced, as I only spend 30% of my time in Greece. As far as my family is concerned, we live a good life. What upsets me is the misery that I see around me. Greeks need to start thinking long term and creating strong policies. As a friend of mine quite accurately said, "Greeks consider even the traffic lights as a guideline and not as a law". And this shows there is something wrong. The future of Greece depends on proper education and discipline.

You have two children: Felicia, Grade 3 and Petros, Grade 5. What factors did you consider before picking the right school for your children?

Firstly, I wanted to find a high quality American educational institution, so as to be close to the standards of my children's previous school. Secondly, by beloved aunt, Fay Andrews used to teach at the ACS Elementary for 25 years and always used to tell me how good the school is. Lastly, but not least, Dr. Gialamas, the ACS Athens President. I can see and believe in his vision.

In three words, how would you describe ACS Athens?

- Visionary leadership
- Specialized teaching that focuses on each child's particular needs
- Good sport facilities

What activities do you enjoy doing with your children?

We enjoy going altogether to Allou Fun Park, but I also make sure to spend one-on-one time with them. For example, my son, Petros is very artistic. He may become a good film director, photographer or actor. He loves movies, especially musicals; he sings and can imitate 20 different accents. With Petros, I spent time watching movies and discussing them. Felicia, on the other hand is very sporty and active. With Felicia we do a lot of physical activities, such as bicycling on the weekends.

What message would you like to share with the ACS Athens Community?

Especially now with the crisis, I want to stress that our children's education is the most critical factor. The job that schools, like ACS Athens and others do will help define the next generation of Greeks. Unfortunately, the Greek educational system is not up to standard yet. ACS has a big role to play and I am certain that it will accomplish it.

