

An Inspiring Peer

Business leaders reflect on the leadership and work of Ed Potter

May 1st 2015



On June 1st, Ed Potter, Director of Global Workplace Rights at The Coca-Cola Company retires. In order to mark the occasion of Ed's retirement, a number of business leaders wanted to express their appreciation for his contribution to the agenda and to their own efforts in their companies and industries. Their comments, listed in full below, paint a picture of a man who has inspired his peers in business in diverse ways.

The testimonials were gathered and are introduced below by *Mark Hodge of the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights* – an organization that Ed was key to launching in 2009. Please contact the IOE to add your own testimonials to those below - thoms@ioe-emp.org

We know that the world is made a better place thanks, ultimately, to a small group of committed individuals. But we rarely admit individuals working in the world's largest multi-national corporations to that small group. The tendency is that we disqualify women and men working in companies from being leaders in social justice, acknowledged for effecting positive change in the daily lives of the most vulnerable workers and communities, or being given credit for strengthening international human rights protections.

I understand why this is the norm, but on occasion individuals come along that compel us to go against convention. Ed Potter who retires from his role as Director of Global Workplace Rights at The Coca-Cola Company on June 1st is such an individual. In the words of some of his peers, "Ed Potter represents a rare species in the corporate world, and it is thanks to the likes of him that we manage to make progress on difficult, and important agendas like business and human rights" and "Ed will be rightfully regarded as one of the heroes of the long march towards the corporate responsibility to respect human rights"

There are endless achievements that Ed is correctly recognized for – whether concerned with the protection of millions of workers worldwide at the ILO, the design of management tools to make human rights due diligence a reality in The Coca-Cola Company (and beyond because he decided to put all of Coke's approaches online for others to use), the company's leadership regarding responsible investment in Myanmar (which Ed tended to personally in great detail) or the recent zero tolerance policy to land grabbing. The tangible outcomes and results are simply too many to list. Some are noted below. As one of Ed's peers in a major U.S. company notes "I really can't comprehend how one man could have been so prolific and effective in his professional life!"

In a world in which business leaders gather to discuss policies, practices, tools and challenges as a means to scale business practices, Ed also brought something profound and maybe even more lasting – the ability to inspire his peers through his character. Business leaders have a key role to ensure corporate respect for human rights is a reality everywhere. These efforts will be hugely enhanced if we can somehow bottle - and globally distribute - Ed's conviction, insight, pragmatism, humility and generosity.

Ed Potter is an esteemed colleague and a very dear friend. Ed's presence has always enriched the conversation. If I need to brainstorm about a particular labour rights concern, or work on a collective solution, I'll call Ed because I value his opinion and trust his judgment. There are just far too many examples of his brilliance and humorous observations to note, yet he remains one of the most unassuming individuals I have the pleasure to know. His leadership role and vision in representing business as part of the US delegation to the ILO, has had a transformational impact. The Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work is a testament to his commitment and skillful steer.

Marcela Manubens

Global VP for Social Impact
Unilever

I had the opportunity to work for Ed over six years while at The Coca-Cola Company. So I was very fortunate to have had a microscopic view of Ed as a business leader and a friend. In summary, Ed has had a profoundly positive impact on the human rights and business conversation, and my career.

Ed demonstrated time and again, that he cares deeply about helping vulnerable populations and ensuring these populations are a part of business and human rights conversations. Before it was fashionable, Ed embraced the concept of actively engaging stakeholders who are critics of business to listen and seek out the "grain of truth" in their criticisms. Also before it was fashionable, Ed demonstrated thought leadership in The Coca-Cola Company and through key employer organizations, as a staunch advocate of embracing the "responsibility to respect" all human rights in business practices. Lastly, as a team leader and friend, Ed demonstrated unwavering loyalty in his interest in my career. I am unable to thank Ed enough for his impact on me and the broader human rights conversation in the business community.

Kent McVay

Vice President, Global Labor Relations and Corporate Social Compliance
Kimberly-Clark Corporation

Watching Ed negotiate the International Labor Organization's Forced Labor Protocol in 2014 on behalf of global employers was a master class in artful negotiation, verbal dexterity, consensus-building, preparation, commitment, composure, and subject matter expertise. I wonder if most people can begin to appreciate the skill, knowledge and, frankly, stamina that Ed exercised in helping the International Labor Conference reach a successful conclusion on the Protocol, which has the potential to positively impact millions of people in forced labor situations. These attributes have been evidenced not only in his three decades of negotiations at the ILO, but also in a much broader range of human rights, labor standards, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. I have long admired Ed for his work at Coca-Cola and in chairing the Labor and Employment Committee of the United States Council for International Business and I will be forever grateful for his tutelage and mentoring.

Laura Chapman Rubbo

Director, International Labor Standards
The Walt Disney Company

Ed Potter represents a rare species in the corporate world, yet it is thanks to the likes of him that we manage to make progress on difficult, and important agendas like business and human rights. Ed asks critical questions and foresees risks and opportunities before anyone else thinks of the issues he raises. But at the same time he always stands tall as the pragmatic voice who can remind us that the way forward is to make super simple tools that business people understand and value.

Soraya Ramoul, Priya Matzen and Susanne Stormer

Novo Nordisk

In 2012 when I took up my current position I had the privilege of meeting Ed in both GBI and Shift meetings. From the first meeting it was clear that Ed was someone who made a difference as soon as he came into the room – well respected for his knowledge and experience, willing to share, and a good listener. So for someone new in the role like myself such meetings were wonderful opportunities to learn and to appreciate the excellent work done by Ed and his colleagues at Coca Cola in the field of business and human rights. May I also add that whilst we all deal with very serious subjects it is also important to be able to step back and laugh sometimes, and I'm sure Ed's sense of humour has always served him well in his mission to change hearts and minds.

Philip Jordan

Chairman of the Ethics Committee

Total

At Coke's last Human Rights conference where Ed's impending retirement was announced I described Ed as the "Derrick Jeter of In-house business and human rights counsels". It is an honor to have had an opportunity to work side-but-side with a "living legend" in an area as essential to the mankind's future as business and human rights. We are all blessed to have worked with Ed. His understated ability to clearly and succinctly advance the legal, social, and economic discussion about human rights is a rare talent. And his charm when doing so is rare to observe in a lawyer, if I may say so.

I had the pleasure of accompanying Ed to the 2012 ILO in Geneva. The respect and stature he enjoys in that rarified atmosphere is extraordinary. Among all of Ed's accomplishments at his DC law firm, at Coke, with the USCIB etc. I credit Ed with shepherding the Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work through the shoals of many competing views. This was a historic accomplishment for the ages. I really can't comprehend how one man could have been so prolific and effective in his professional life!

Finally, while we all will miss Ed, it's only fair that we let him go off to enjoy his loving family in shady white birches of the Berkshires. All the best Ed Potter.

Mark Nordstrom

Senior Labor and Employment Counsel

General Electric

I had the fortune to be part of Ed's team at Coca-Cola for many years. Under his direction and guidance, I developed an appreciation and understanding of the importance of focusing on Human Rights vs the standard check the box compliance approach in Supply Chains. He used tools, teamwork and strategy to teach his team the best methods for implementing respect for human rights. I have been able to leverage this approach with my team and it has allowed me to expedite our capacity building to a strong, effective Human Rights program in a very quick period of time.

Michael Rittersbacher

Director, Corporate Social Responsibility

Lenovo Mobile Business Group & Motorola Mobility, LLC

Ed Potter and I were sitting out a session at a less-than-inspiring international human rights conference, checking our phones and chatting about supply chain issues common to our companies. I learned more in that hour of intermittent exchange than in the three-day conference we were supposed to be attending. And that's the great thing about Ed: Listen carefully and you feel the weight of many years of corporate and field experience coming through in tight and targeted statements. He has done a huge amount to inform and inspire, even if he doesn't always realize it. He will be rightfully regarded as one of the heroes of the long march towards the corporate responsibility to respect human rights.

Ron Popper

Head of Corporate Responsibility

ABB

Ed's professional yet easy-going working style and vast experience give him natural leadership in the bodies where he operates. It is something that must have tremendously helped him inside the Coca Cola Company and explains the significant impacts he has had. It is not always easy in companies to make compelling propositions to business managers on topics – such as human rights - that potentially add complexity to the way they do business. Framing the issues to tackle them as part of normal business is an art Ed mastered well.

Ed's Coca Cola human rights programme not only mainstreamed the 'normal' labour practices issues but in doing so it improved the lives of many working for the brand around the world. It also led to bold commitments for example on the topic of land rights. Ed was not afraid of campaigns and worked with the NGO community to understand the issues and find ways forward. He displayed courage to lead his company and senior executives to public commitments. It is his courage that we admire most in the way Ed has led his teams and advocated direction in our industry group. This courage is the behavior we will need to maintain and build on to develop the next generation of approaches to corporate respect for human rights.

Andrew Vickers, Vice President, NGO and Stakeholder Relations

Bert Fokkema, Social Performance Manager - Human Rights

On behalf of Shell

Since I started my own professional journey into the field of business and human rights Ed Potter was always there. Always listening, always humble, always present in the best discussions and interesting debates. I can see that Ed has been there for many people for many years, directly and indirectly through his work. I feel honored to have worked with such an influential man. His calm but persistent commitment to respecting all human beings extends to his daily interactions as well as the undoubtedly large impact on the world that he has influenced through his ideals and manner. Ed is truly a person worthy of recognition for his contribution to the world we live in, and that is no small feat.

Zoe McMahan

Director, Global Social & Environmental Responsibility Ethics & Compliance Office
HP

Ed's leadership and vision has had a tremendous impact large (Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work) and small (me). I'll start with me. I started working with Ed straight out of graduate school. He served as a mentor, colleague and friend whose wisdom, depth of knowledge and experience provided me with guidance I still draw on today.

On to the large - Time and time again throughout his career, Ed has demonstrated the creative spirit, combined with a constructive and collaborative attitude, essential for turning big ideas, like the Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work or the ILO Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor into realities. Realities that leave the world a little bit better and build bridges between stakeholders for future creative thinking and solutions oriented engagement. Super honored to have gotten to fly under his wing.

Anna Walker

Senior Director, Global Policy and Advocacy
Levi Strauss & Co

Like many companies, Microsoft's work in the area of human rights was greatly advanced by the issuance of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in 2011. Over the past four years we have embarked on a number of internal and external initiatives focused on meeting our responsibility to "respect" human rights as expressed in the International Bill of Human Rights and the principles concerning fundamental rights set out in the International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

While these international declarations and benchmarks have served as the North Star for our policies and practices, Ed Potter has served as our North Star for bringing the words in these documents to life within Microsoft. Long before I had the great pleasure of meeting Ed, I had heard of his work both at the Coca-Cola Company and beyond. Ed's commitment to the issue of human rights, his leadership within Coca-Cola and his vision for what corporate responsibility means is an inspiration to me and many, many others. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and get to know Ed and I look forward to continuing to work with him as members of the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Human Rights. Ed may be retiring from the Coca-Cola Company but he is not going to be able to retire from being one of corporate America's human rights leaders.

Daniel T. Bross

Senior Director, Global Corporate Citizenship
Microsoft

I think I'm right in saying I met Ed first in 1989 at the International Labour Organization when "young Ed" was on The USCIB ILO team and I was then a junior member of the British team. Those were the days when the employers were trying to re-assert themselves in the ILO process - working to avoid unworkable or unhelpful activities, and trying to work towards a more positive agenda that many thought was an impossible dream. Ed was there through the tough, often street fighting, times ... and then started to turn the agenda as the architect of the "Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work" which today sits at the center of international labor related human rights.

When Ed stepped out of the labor policy advocacy arena and went to Coke I was surprised and wondered how that would work out. He arrived in the company at a tough time with a problem or two in Colombia ... and he turned that around and moved Coke to where they are today in center stage on human rights. Few can claim to have made a changes in the architecture of global labor relations and transformed the approach of one of the world's largest corporations ... Ed Potter can.

Alan Wild

Vice President Human Resources; Employee Relations and Engagement
IBM

As President of the International Organisation of Employers, I am grateful for this opportunity to thank Ed Potter publicly for giving so generously of his time, expertise and experience to the benefit of the global employer community, and indeed to the constituents of the ILO generally. No one who has worked alongside Ed, as many members of the IOE family and I have had the privilege to do for many years, can fail to be impressed by his willingness to listen, to share his knowledge and to negotiate truly historic outcomes. These are many, but include his sterling contribution to the 1998 ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, which remains a key reference for enterprises as they meet their human rights obligations across their operations.

At the 2014 International Labour Conference, Ed yet again led the Employer voice with characteristic dedication in the successful negotiation of the Protocol and Recommendation to supplement the Forced Labour Convention. On this occasion, one Employer delegate echoed our thoughts as he described Ed's leadership in the discussions as "masterful", bringing to the fore the need for concerted public and private sector effort in meeting responsibilities towards eliminating forced labour. We will miss Ed's wisdom and expertise, as well as his friendly approach, and the best wishes of the 150 IOE members around the world accompany him on this next phase of his journey.

Daniel Funes de Rioja

President
International Organisation of Employers
