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## Insights from European CEOs: EPIC interviews Raylase CEO Dr. Philipp Schon



Written by Anne Fischer 18 July 2018



Dr. Philipp Schön has a strong technical background much like other CEOs of technology companies in Europe. He finished his Dipl.-Ing. in Mechanical Engineering at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in 2002, and in 2006, earned his PhD

in Statistical Physics/Nanotechnology at ETH Zurich. IBM was interested in his experience and knowledge of Nanotechnology, and hired him for cooling strategies for next generation supercomputers.

After almost two years with IBM, Philipp decided to change direction from research-driven work and in 2008, he joined a small technology think tank as Innovations & Technologies Manager.

With a focus on developing new technologies for its big parent company in medical technology, this technology think tank tasked Philipp with finding innovative solutions and driving business development. After two years at the age of 32, he became COO (Chief Operating Officer) and ran the 40-people strong company for the next five years. During this period, Philipp developed important leadership and management skills as he had met the challenge of running the company, while also being a friend and colleague to some of his employees who had previously been fellow team-members.

After many years spent in Switzerland, Philipp returned to Germany in 2015 to spend more time with his family. Philipp believed that SMEs were the only type of company that could give him the independence to move freely and be part of something innovative.

It was this conviction that motivated Philipp to join RAYLASE with the mission to finally take over the managing control from the founder who planned his retirement. Philipp joined RAYLASE as CSO (Chief Strategy Officer), missioned to set up the company's strategy for the coming years as proof of his ability to step into the CEO position. Although still relatively young to be a top corporate person, Philipp managed to gain the trust of RAYLASE's top executives because they valued not only his intellectual capacity but also saw him as a person with vision, someone who had a definite plan to change the company's direction and steer it into the future.

These were the qualities that attracted RAYLASE to finally appoint Philipp as CEO and hand him the keys of the company. Together with his team, Philipp managed to adapt the strategy of RAYLASE to market needs, particularly the competitiveness of Asian companies, to one that would take the company to the next level

### Consultative management style

This is where Philipp's expertise has come to the fore, because while he may

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not had extensive experience, he has brought success to the company by establishing and developing an effective consultative management style. In the early days, this enabled him to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of RAYLASE by spending considerable time talking to its employees, who, in Philipp's opinion, are the most important asset of the company and are the main reason for his success as CEO. While he is the final decision maker, Philipp admits that he always consults his staff beforehand.

### Biggest challenge as CEO

For Philipp, the biggest challenge as CEO of RAYLASE has been defining the team around him to tackle the future obstacles the company is challenged with. As with other companies, internal politics has also been problematic. However, Philipp believes the best way to overcome them is by not succumbing to emotions and by being reflected about the overall situation and context.

### Finding the right people

Like other European photonics companies, RAYLASE faces the challenge of finding the right people who fit into the company's culture and who have the required experience. However, Philipp believes that this difficulty can be overcome: firstly, by explaining the company's story and its goals and visions; secondly, by carefully examining the applicant's values to ensure they are in line with RAYLASE's own values of respect, loyalty, and authenticity; and third, by convincing the applicant that working at RAYLASE will be rewarding because it will be for the larger purpose of making the laser the digital tool of the future, and transferring laser technology into mainstream manufacturing of the future.

### Advice to young entrepreneurs in Europe


All over Europe, there are young people with degrees in business and engineering who have big dreams and would like to set up a company or become a CEO of one. Philipp's advice to these young people is to love what you do and be willing to learn from others. If you have passion, you will be able to achieve success in whatever you aspire to, whether it is founding a company or becoming the CEO of one. Willingness to learn is also key to success, because if you think you already know everything, there's a high probability you'll fail.

**Written by Jose Pozo, Director of Technology and Innovation at EPIC (European Photonics Industry Consortium).**


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