Reliable Leadership Advice™



Interview with Kathrine Löfberg, Chair of the Board at Löfbergs

Löfbergs Grows Internationally – Guided by Family Values

Long-term perspective calls for decisions and results every day. As Löfbergs continues its international expansion, Chair of the Board Kathrine Löfberg highlights the importance of leadership that keeps the owners' ambitions alive, welcomes fresh perspectives and uses the company's history as a springboard for its next steps.

Author:



Nicklas Jungander
Partner & Global Head of Industrial Practice at MU

@ nicklas.jungander@mercuriurval.com

+46 707 159 915

"It can be a little dangerous to hide behind a long-term perspective."

Kathrine Löfberg returns to what the term actually means. In a family business with a 120-year history, thinking across generations comes naturally. But it must not become a reason to delay decisions or assume that things will work out further down the line.

"We have to sell coffee today and tomorrow, and we have to keep a very close eye on the numbers every day," she says.

For Löfbergs, decisions need to account for both today's business and tomorrow's opportunities. Kathrine Löfberg describes how this becomes particularly important during a crisis: addressing what needs to be resolved immediately while remaining committed to what the company wants to achieve over time. This approach also informs Löfbergs' plans for further international growth. Half of its sales already come from outside Sweden, and this is where Kathrine Löfberg sees the greatest potential for growth. Expansion will come both organically and through complementary acquisitions, with the ambition of building the brand in new markets.

History as a Springboard

Löfbergs was founded in Karlstad in 1906. The company initially imported a range of products before establishing a dedicated focus on coffee in 1927. Since then, the business has grown from a local roastery into an international coffee company.

For Kathrine Löfberg, this history provides experience to draw on. For the company's leaders, the task is to carry forward what has made the business strong while creating room for its next steps. The values provide direction, while products, ways of working and decisions need to evolve with the world around them.

"The risk for a company with a long history is that it gets stuck in the past," she says.

Curiosity about consumers has repeatedly taken the company into new areas. Sometimes, Löfbergs has been ahead of its time. Kathrine Löfberg recalls how the company launched iced coffee around 20 years ago, before consumers were ready for it. The initiative had to be scaled back. Today, iced coffee offers a way to reach new consumers.

Having the courage to experiment, learn and sometimes fail is part of the entrepreneurial spirit she wants to pass on.

The company's international presence also provides inspiration. Colleagues in different markets encounter habits, products and opportunities that may be less apparent at home in Sweden.

Owners who are Willing to be Challenged

For Kathrine Löfberg, long-term leadership begins with how the owners approach their role. The family devotes time to ownership matters and to preparing the next generation for the responsibility of owning and governing a company.

"First and foremost," she explains, they need to become good owners. Taking an operational role in the business is a separate decision, with its own requirements.

The family's guidelines require higher education, five years of experience working elsewhere and a role that matches the individual's skills and experience. *"You cannot just walk in because you have the name."*

At the same time, the family needs to seek expertise beyond its own circle. Löfbergs aims to have a majority of external directors on its board. Kathrine Löfberg values people with strong integrity who are willing to challenge established assumptions. *"The owners are not necessarily the best at everything."*

But bringing in expertise is only the beginning. The owners must also be prepared to listen and allow that expertise to influence decisions. Otherwise, she reasons, it becomes difficult both for the company to develop and for a talented person to want to stay.

The same openness is needed when recruiting leaders and other key people. Shared values matter, but the company needs people with different experiences and perspectives.

Kathrine Löfberg emphasises that people need to share the company's core values while contributing different experiences, backgrounds and perspectives. This also means being willing to question the owners and established ways of working. The task for leaders is to maintain a shared direction while drawing on the differences that help Löfbergs develop.

Leadership Brings Values to Life

As Löfbergs grows, its leaders play an important role in translating the owners' long-term ambitions into everyday practice. Kathrine Löfberg herself spent 20 years working operationally in the company. Her brother Martin currently works in the business. The family's presence has given employees opportunities to meet the owners and see how they act.

As the business expands geographically and the owners can no longer be close to every part of the company, leaders take on greater responsibility for carrying its direction and values forward. This requires them to understand what those values mean and demonstrate them through their decisions, actions and priorities.

The task for leaders is to maintain a shared direction while drawing on the differences that help Löfbergs develop.

Part of this work involves discussing with employees what values mean in different roles and situations. *"A word can be interpreted in very different ways,"* says Kathrine Löfberg.

A long-term perspective is one example. For one employee, it might mean building a customer relationship. For another, it might

concern investments or how resources are used. Through these conversations, leaders can build a shared understanding that holds true even far from the owners and head office. Leaders need to make room for those discussions and demonstrate in their own work what the company means. Otherwise, as Kathrine Löfberg puts it, the values risk becoming *"a picture on the wall".*

Acquisitions make it particularly important to work on culture and leadership, as people with different experiences and ways of working come together to develop the business.

This takes concrete form at farm level. Climate change and the next generation's ability to earn a living from growing coffee are among the industry's most important challenges for the future. Löfbergs participates in projects that help farmers improve quality and yields, increase their incomes and adapt their farming practices to a changing climate.

There is also a financial connection between the company's own operations: using less energy and less packaging material means making better use of resources. Developing employees and leaders is also part of this work.



Creating the Conditions for Coffee's Future

The owners' perspective across generations also extends to the people behind the product. According to Kathrine Löfberg, the Löfberg family's vision, *"Good moments for future generations"*, encompasses future coffee farmers, consumers, customers and employees.

She sees sustainability as an integral part of how the company does business and a prerequisite for continued profitability and growth.

For Kathrine Löfberg, continued growth therefore needs to bring together several ambitions: reaching new markets, maintaining a focus on taste and quality, and caring for people and the environment throughout the value chain.

Her advice to other family businesses is to work actively on ownership matters and seek external perspectives. Even after 120 years, there is every reason to keep learning. *"Bring in help, but you must also be prepared to listen."*

A PROUD MEMBER OF AESC

PEOPLE ASSESSMENT SERVICES DNV ISO 10667-2

Reliable Leadership Advice™ MU