

A chapter from the book "Human Leadership" by Håkan Lagergren 2003

Are we about to create a society we cannot tolerate?

Conversation with Rolf Ekman, Professor of Neurochemistry and Head of the Laboratory Neuroscience section at the University of Gothenburg, where he researches psychoneuro- imology, i e brain communication with the immune system. Rolf Ekman is known as the man behind concepts such as "brain stress" and headlines that "the brain must have fun". Behind this seemingly somewhat glossy facade is a great concern for the fact that stress, ie the lifestyle-related diseases, strikes at younger ages.

- **Rolf**, you know from your own experience what happens after you turned forty, fifty and sixty. As a brain researcher and human, do you have anything hopeful to tell all the young people who believe that life is over after forty?

- Well, there is a lot to tell, As I see life, it will only be more and more interesting over the years, but we forty-, fifty- and sixties, must begin to ask ourselves why more and more of today's children and young people express in earnest that they believe that The meaning of life in general lacks value and ceases after forty. There are, of course, many different explanations for this attitude. What I immediately think of is partly a failing parenting and lack of support from the adult world, partly a broken child care and school policy from the early seventies.

- How has the world become like this?

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- From a taxpayer perspective, I cannot ignore it from that various responsible "community builders" in many ways contribute to many of us being sniffed by capital, I mean business and industry's various seductively masked forced shirts.

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Or as a man in the upper middle age, ie forty plus, whom I met at a seminar recently, it expressed "what is the case is to have the highest mast on life's sailing".

In sharp contrast, a text comes from a song from a previous generation: "and who has said that you are to have luck and success on the journey" (Evert Taube).

- You mean that our core values have changed?

- Yes, overall! Today, it is easy for my generation, at Sixty plus, to burst into "we are drenched in rubbish and a meaningless consumption" and who contribute to this? Almost all of today's "adults", the eternal teenagers, ie those who are forty plus are accomplices. Money talks!

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This means that we are subjected to various attempts to treat us as early as possible, like the Pavlov dogs, to a life-long, unreflected and in the long run meaningless consuming, from the cradle to the grave. Highest mass signals that I have succeeded. But what?

The obvious question then poses: Is this the meaning of life? Yes, if we do not teach our children and grandchildren anything else. This materialism and consumption steals time from our opportunities to develop into healthy and solidarity world citizens.

In the past, it happened that children were put out in the woods. Some of these were taken care of by wild animals. When these children were later found, they behaved like animals and could not be re-adapted to human society. Something to reflect on - that is, how the social environment characterizes us.

- What do you think might be behind this?

- I do not wonder if radio and TV were initially one of the most important roadblocks to open up communities and

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reflect both opportunities and malformations. Have the managers responded to expectations and opportunities? No, today's media offering, rewarding superficiality, betraying humanity, money talks.

Instead, let me address one of many examples of what I miss. The media, all, could be the link between the research community and the public by really taking their responsibility and clarifying that the search for more knowledge about the human genome, DNA, stem cells etc. is of greater importance than the reporting on the Internet, Telia and Ericsson.

It is far more important to raise questions about the meaning of life and prepare for the "centuries of biology", ie the insights that the environment and lifestyle are what in the long term creates the conditions for health and quality of life and "flowering structures and societies". These perspectives and profound changes will be far more extensive and vital for the individual than what the industrial and information society once offered.

- What drives the young people today?

- If I now correctly perceive the signals from today's thirty-fours so much or they will have to catch up with as much as possible without any really more pronounced goal than the short-lived experiences in themselves.

We slowly and inexorably change and age, ie no one avoids the biological reality. The eternal teenager does not have the power to "play" really as much as before. Perhaps it has suddenly become time to think about whether there is time to get children? The possibly future parents are then around thirty, forty years.

- How do you think we should design the social structure of today and tomorrow ?