

Interview

Focused and Disciplined

An Interview with Andrew J. McKenna,
Chairman, McDonald's Corporation



Andrew J. McKenna

EDITORS' NOTE In addition to his current position as Chairman of McDonald's Corporation, Andrew McKenna is the Chairman of Schwarz Supply Source, and also a director of Aon Corporation, Chicago Bears Football Club, Inc., and Skyline Corporation. He acted as Chairman of the Chicago White Sox during his group's ownership of that organization from 1975 to 1981. He also served as Chairman of the Board of the Chicago Cubs from August 1981 through December of 1984. He served as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the University of Notre Dame from 1992 to 2000 and was Vice Chairman for six years prior to that and continues to serve as a trustee. McKenna is a past Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Museum of Science and Industry and continues to serve as a trustee. He is a director of The American Ireland Fund; Children's Memorial Hospital, Chicago; the Big Shoulders Fund of the Archdiocese of Chicago; the Ireland Economic Advisory Board; the Lyric Opera of Chicago; and the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago. He is the Founding Chairman of Chicago Metropolis 2020. His former corporate directorships include: First Chicago NBD Corporation (1991-1999), Dean Foods (1982-2000), Tribune Company (1982-2002), and Click Commerce (2000-2006). He is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame with a bachelor of science degree in business administration and marketing, and also a graduate of DePaul University Law School where he received a Doctor of Jurisprudence.

COMPANY BRIEF Oak Brook, Illinois-based McDonald's Corporation was founded by Ray Kroc, and is the leading global food service retailer with more than 32,000 restaurants serving 58 million people in more than 100 countries each day. McDonald's is one of the world's most well-known and valuable brands and holds a leading share in the globally branded quick service restaurant segment of the informal eating-out market in virtually every country in which they do business. More than 75 percent of McDonald's restaurants worldwide are owned and operated by independent local men and women.

Amidst today's economic issues, McDonald's has remained strong and has posted very good results. To what do you attribute this success?

We have a strong management team led by CEO Jim Skinner. We believe being what you are and avoiding what you're not is vital in the world we're in today, and we've been fortunate in sticking to our basic business.

Many leaders say the global nature of today's crisis makes it different. Do you see light at the end of the tunnel?

Hopefully, the U.S. economy is on the right track. I'm not quite seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, but I know it's there. We have to put a positive focus on these economic issues. In the past, we experienced business conditions like we're dealing with today, but people often think at this time this is the worst one we've had. Because of the global nature of this one, it does reach pretty far, and I wouldn't know exactly when it's going to straighten itself out. But I do know we have to go about whatever we're doing in as positive a manner as we can.

Throughout your career, you've focused on corporate responsibility. How critical is that role for leaders today?

I've been fortunate to have the opportunity to be involved in some philanthropy, and it's a good experience. Many times, you get back more than you're giving, whether it's your time or dollars. It's an important part of any corporate leadership opportunity to recognize that the first priority is to serve your shareholders and to make sure that you're conducting business in the best possible fashion. But, by the same token, all of us need to recognize there are community needs we must respond to, and while it may be personally fulfilling to help, it's also critically important to do so.

You must be approached to get involved in many different areas. Is it important to focus on specific areas where you can have the most impact?

You need to give not only where it's needed the most, but also where we all benefit the most. You have to be selective and also professional in the way you go about it. Those who just brush over the needs are not the most effective. Being selective and prioritizing well are both very important considerations.

You have been very involved with various issues in Chicago. From a place-branding point of view, is the message about what Chicago offers today and how it's attracting global business being heard?

Chicago is an interesting community. It's a mix of people and a melting pot, and it's a very good place to do business. We have a Mayor who is very business conscious, and we have a very active civic committee that provides a lot of the leadership we need, not only to grow our current businesses, but also to attract new business. I would not deny the fact that we can always do a better job of getting our message out there. But at this moment, we here are all very confident about Chicago – where it is, and where it will be.

In a city like Chicago, how critical is public/private partnership?

Part of why Chicago works well is because of the relationship between the public and private sectors. Fortunately, our Mayor is anxious to get input from people in the private sector, and by the same token, the people in the private sector are anxious to have a good relationship with government – it's a two-way street. The business community has to be prepared to do what needs to be done, and we have to have leadership from the public sector that also focuses heavily on getting the job done. I think we have that on both sides.

With seven children and 24 grandchildren, it would seem you have plenty happening with your home life. Are you able to find a balance between work and family?

I hope so. I think family life is very important. There is probably never a weekend when we don't have some family experience. It's important to have the right balance, and I think we do. We all need a little balance in our lives, and as far as I'm concerned, I like my balance to come from family. ●