

## The Timeless Pursuit Of Adventure

An Interview with Jochen Zeitz, Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer, Harley-Davidson, Inc.

**EDITORS' NOTE** As the President, CEO, and Chairman of the Board at Harley-Davidson, Inc., Jochen Zeitz is guiding the iconic motorcycle brand toward new horizons. Zeitz hails from Mannheim, Germany. His academic pursuits took him across borders, as he studied in Germany, Italy, France, and the United States. He graduated from the European Business School, specializing in international marketing and finance. In 1990, he joined PUMA and, by 1993, he became the youngest CEO in German history to lead a public company before the age of 30. In 2014, Zeitz co-founded The B Team alongside Sir Richard Branson, uniting global business leaders for socially and environmentally conscious practices. He also played a pivotal role in establishing the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa and founded the ZEITZ foundation, promoting sustainable solutions that balance conservation, community, culture, and commerce. Zeitz's journey exemplifies resilience, vision, and a passion for positive change.



Jochen Zeitz

**COMPANY BRIEF** In 1903, out of a small shed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, four young men lit a cultural wildfire that would grow and spread across geographies and generations. Their innovation and imagination for what was possible on two wheels sparked a transportation revolution and lifestyle that would make Harley-Davidson (harley-davidson.com) the most desirable motorcycle and lifestyle brand in the world. Today, the company continues to define motorcycle culture and lifestyle. More than building machines, Harley-Davidson stands for the timeless pursuit of adventure. Freedom for the soul.

**Will you discuss your career journey and what you feel have been the keys to your success in business?**

I started my career at Colgate-Palmolive in New York, then joined PUMA in the 1990s and quickly rose to Vice President of Marketing and Sales. The company was bankrupt on paper and was being taken over by a new Swedish PE firm who asked me to explain what was wrong after hearing about me from a previous CEO.

I was made CEO and Chairman of PUMA in 1993 at the age of 29, but we didn't announce it until I turned 30 some weeks later – to make it sound better. During my tenure, PUMA went from

near bankruptcy to being sold to Kering (then PPR) as one of the top three sportswear brands in the world, growing its sales to almost \$4 billion and its share price by 4,000 percent.

In 2008, we introduced PUMAVision, an ethical framework defined by the four key principles of being Fair, Honest, Positive and Creative, applied to all professional behavior, business procedures, and relationships throughout (and outside of) PUMA.

Additionally, while at PUMA, we developed the Environmental Profit & Loss Account (EP&L), which put a monetary value on environmental impacts across a business' supply chain, inspiring a new, internationally recognized, environmentally and socially conscious business model.

In 2013, Sir Richard Branson and I co-founded The B Team – a not-for-profit to promote socially and environmentally conscious business practices across the globe.

I joined the Board of Harley-Davidson in 2007 and was appointed interim CEO in February 2020. In May 2020, I officially became the Chairman, President, and CEO of Harley-Davidson.

I believe the keys to my success have been a combination of tenacity, passion, and detail-oriented execution, underpinned by strong values. But most importantly, I always had a great team that I worked with, a group of committed, dedicated and passionate colleagues. It always takes a team to win.

**What do you attribute to Harley-Davidson's leadership, and how has Harley-Davidson been able to innovate and evolve to remain so relevant over the years?**

Harley-Davidson is one of the most recognizable brands in the world and the most desirable company in the motorcycle industry. In a way, you can say that we are the industry in the most important U.S. market thanks to our incredible heritage that we built over the past 120 years. The Harley-Davidson brand means something to people – they identify with our values and what we stand for. It's more than just a motorcycle; it's part of an identity and culture. Our mission is the timeless pursuit of adventure. Freedom for the soul.

This requires us to innovate, evolve, and expand on the experiences we offer to riders and fans to stay relevant.

My big focus on becoming CEO was to make sure we had a plan to innovate and



Jochen Zeitz with a Harley-Davidson motorcycle





Segera (above); Jochen Zeitz with his family at Segera wildlife conservancy in central Kenya (below)

modernize our core segments and, in particular, our Touring motorcycles – the most important of Harley-Davidson’s business segments. This year we launched the most technologically advanced touring platform the industry has seen.

Another example on the other side of the spectrum is our drive to innovate in EV. Nobody thought Harley-Davidson could build competitive EV motorcycles, but we proved them wrong when we introduced our first electric motorcycle, LiveWire, which was pioneered during my time as a Board member. Subsequently, on becoming CEO, I decided to create LiveWire as a brand, then listed it on the NYSE – the first electric motorcycle company to go public in the U.S.

**What was your vision for buying Segera and how do you define its mission?**

I had traveled in Africa extensively when at PUMA and had seen how much damage was being done to the land, along with unprecedented social and environmental challenges that were unfolding.

I bought Segera when it was a run-down, degraded cattle ranch in Central Kenya, founded the ZEITZ foundation, helped nature to re-emerge, and over the years, it has become a thriving 50,000-acre wildlife conservancy and safe refuge for endangered species.

As the land regenerated and wildlife and biodiversity returned to the area, we decided to build Segera Retreat, an off the grid sustainable high-end tourism experience to share this incredible place as well as to inspire others.

My foundation pioneered the 4C’s philosophy – achieving true sustainability through a holistic balance of Conservation, Community, Culture, and Commerce. This philosophy was made global through a ZEITZ foundation initiative called The Long Run, which is now an independent registered charity and has become one of the world’s largest conservation alliances, preserving over 23 million acres

of wilderness and touching the lives of 750,000 people across the globe.

**Where did your interest in philanthropy develop and how do you decide where to focus your philanthropic efforts?**

My interest in sustainability and philanthropy began while I was at PUMA and continued to grow as I realized that business needed to be more holistic in its approach to creating win-wins for people while minimizing the negative impacts it can have on the environment and society, becoming more of a force for overall good. I had always felt passionate about Africa, especially its people and diverse cultures, so I started to focus my philanthropic efforts on Africa and Kenya in particular.

In 2017, together with the V&A Waterfront, we launched the Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (Zeitz MOCAA) in Cape Town. We wanted to create a museum in Africa committed to preserving and exhibiting cutting-edge contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora, enabling Africa to tell its own story and share its incredible talent with the world.

With the ZEITZ foundation in Kenya, all of our projects are interlinked, sustaining each other and flowing from one into the other. We created the first All-Women Anti-Poaching Ranger Academy in East Africa, then during the pandemic, when social activities became limited, we initiated a reforestation initiative to plant over a million indigenous trees in central Kenya by 2024 and grow from there to two and then three million trees.

In response to severe droughts in East Africa, we started constructing a large-scale

water dam and other water infrastructure to support it. We are now combining all of these efforts to launch the Segera Rhino Sanctuary, which depends upon skilled wildlife rangers, forests, and sustainable water access to name but a few vital elements that are necessary to create one of the largest rhino sanctuaries in the world.

**Do the traits that make you successful in business translate to being effective in philanthropy?**

Yes – I believe that attention to detail is extremely important in both business and philanthropy. You have to be clear about your vision and your mission in both areas. It’s also important to build a great team and strategies for the long-term, so there are many similarities and synergies, but it sometimes takes a philanthropic angle to start a new initiative that would not work if you just applied a business lens. That said, I think that philanthropic endeavours need to be as efficient as you would run a business.

**What role has resilience played during your career?**

I’ve been in turnaround businesses all of my career – from PUMA’s near bankruptcy to navigating Harley-Davidson through COVID and various supply chain hurdles – and resilience is key. Ultimately, success isn’t a straight line – you need to be resilient in order to react, adjust, or course correct to win in the long run.

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership?**

I believe that you must have a clear vision and mission and the ability to not only share it, but also to translate it into action. Additionally, all leaders must be able to lead by example – you can’t expect people to work hard if you don’t do the same.

Over the course of my career, the power of being able to make the tough and daring decisions has been extremely important – it’s never been more clear coming through the pandemic and having to make so many tough choices.

Lastly, in my opinion, all leaders have to keep moving – despite being a perfectionist, you can never let perfection get in the way of progress. I often say that you don’t need to hit a ten to win, you just need to make sure you hit a target as entrepreneurial leadership does carry uncertainty. So, you just have to make decisions that are a lot more right than wrong. ●

