

## LIGHT FROM DARKNESS – ANDREAS HEINECKE

*Accuse Andreas Heinecke of working in the dark and he won't be offended. In fact, he would take it as a compliment. As a social entrepreneur, he uses darkness as the basis of a successful business model and as a way to break down prejudices and challenge preconceptions.*

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### BIRTH NAME:

Andreas Heinecke

### DATE OF BIRTH:

24 December 1955, Baden-Baden, Germany

### AWARDS:

1998 Stevie Wonder Vision Award (New York); 2005 first Ashoka Fellow in Western Europe; 2006 Deutscher Unternehmer Preis (Harvard Business School's Entrepreneurship Club); 2007 Outstanding Global Social Entrepreneur (Schwab Foundation); 2008 Nominated for the World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council on Social Entrepreneurship

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**THE FIRST REACTION OF MANY** on seeing a blind person is pity. Of our five senses, sight has always been considered the most important, and it is not uncommon to fear blindness more than premature death. Yet, while lack of or impaired vision is a handicap, it does not mean "less worth than normal." Andreas Heinecke challenges the preconceptions and prejudices that lead to discrimination and marginalization of the blind and disabled.

In his "Dialogue in the Dark," blind guides lead small groups of visitors through a completely darkened exhibition, in which sounds, temperatures, wind and textures convey daily environments such as a park, a shop or a bar. In the dark, roles are reversed: sighted people need to rely on the blind guides.

"The idea is simple – to put yourself in another's shoes," explains Heinecke at the recent opening of the first corporate Dialogue training facility in Munich, Germany.\* A doctor of philosophy, Heinecke previously worked with the Frankfurt Association for the Blind to develop devices and tools to ensure that blind people have a full life. The Dialogue exhibit idea emerged

when the lights went out at his workplace and a blind colleague showed him how to get around in the dark. "I remember thinking, 'This is it,'" recalls Heinecke.

The exhibition, which was launched in Frankfurt in 1988, has been presented in over 25 countries and over 150 cities around the world. "Darkness is an equalizer," explains Heinecke. "In the dark, race, religion, nationality, gender, age or profession does not matter. The role swap makes us think about our prejudices and stereotypes."

So far, 6 million visitors have experienced Dialogue in the Dark, and through it over 6,000 blind people have found employment and empowerment. The Munich Dialogue, which will also feature Dialogue in Silence, is the 11th permanent exhibition worldwide. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Licensed to Allianz Global Investors, the Munich exhibition is the first Dialogue owned by a company, offering unique learning opportunities to employees and the public.



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### ON THE INTERNET

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