

**AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP: ROOM FOR ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

# WE LEAD THE COMPANY WITH AMBITION AND ON A HUMAN SCALE

*“What you see is what you get – this goes for Argenta, and for me.” Thus speaks John Heller, Argenta CEO for a good 5 years “with the ambition of making Argenta the best bank in Belgium. Over the last few years the bank has grown from 300 to 800 staff members and last year we posted profit of 157 million euros.”*



Katharina Müllen encourages vitalizing leadership: the healthy way to sustainable performance and a happy life: [www.mindaware.org](http://www.mindaware.org) She is active in [www.ALIVE-Dialogue.org](http://www.ALIVE-Dialogue.org).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between patience – the grass doesn't grow any faster than you can cut it – and impatience – if it doesn't happen I'll explode – John Heller is busy using the Argenta DNA – transparent, honest, sober, no-nonsense, long-game, strong customer relations – to become the best bank in Belgium. “The best – not the biggest: it's possible, we've done such amazing things in recent years and we're flat-out busy catching up in areas where we're not number one.”

[we.listen@cxonet.be](http://we.listen@cxonet.be)

“But Argenta still has plenty of room for improvement. I have not yet reached my benchmark. Personal leadership development is just as important as a solid trading result. This applies, of course, to the young talent, but we also depend on the people who have been carrying Argenta for many years: professional, creative energy is critical here.”

### IF I MIGHT ASK

When, at the age of 37, I first assumed responsibility for leading a company, I asked myself: “What am I doing? I'm too young for this responsibility.” Fortunately I was able to find a mentor who pointed me towards loads of relevant books. But I was frightened to death surrounded by so much experience. Spurred on by my own limitations, I began to ask questions. Over the years I've noticed that this works best: an interrogative style combined with setting a fixed direction. That's how I stimulate our young talents.

### TEACHING ORGANIZATION

People are looking for different organizational models: our way of organizing in big organizations is not 'human'. I have to deal with this every day. I believe that you have to trigger energy in people. What do I take home with me from experience in other companies and voluntary organizations? “Be open yourself!” In fact I'm in constant dialogue with the people in Argenta about open-

ness and how to achieve it. A stimulating environment is important. ‘The context brings on change’, that sentence struck during a presentation by Prof. Ghoshal. That's just one of the reasons why I'd like to transform this building into a stimulating work environment in which together we can create a village community that helps to encourage interaction between people – work-related, of course.

### LEADERSHIP PROFILE

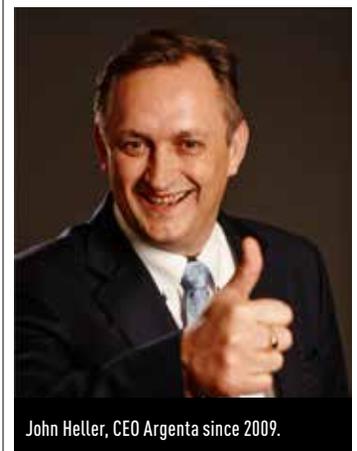
Driving people on by constantly reminding them of their roots soon burns you out. Driving for ever greater productivity makes no sense; we need a different style of leadership. In Argenta we try to do this via a profile in which five aspects are central: team-mindedness, responsibility, initiative, achieving results together, and professional knowledge. We look to the balance between these qualities without hierarchy. This development – the technical and the human – is crucial for the future of our company. Am I doing something special? No, not really. Anyone can do it – so have confidence in them. It's much more difficult to get a group of people pulling the same way once they've been in the company for 20–40 years. What kind of environment should I create for them?

### ANYTHING GOES

The best things I see around me here are all about well-qualified young

talent. They are socially engaged and genuinely interested in corporate social responsibility, sustainability, etc. They are consciously busy with choices: ‘Where do I want to work?’, ‘What do I want to learn?’, ‘What do I want?’ more than ever before, that's my feeling.

We pay close attention to these young talents so that they can gain wide experience. I like it when these people experience a very fast-tracked development. The impact of people who get the freedom, space, coaching and mentoring that they deserve is great. “Anything goes”, a motto of Feyerabend that means that we must break down the obstacles of the commonly accepted – that's after my own heart. So I like to see our people seize opportunity, take up space, use creativity, show initiative and assume responsibility to make this company. That's Argenta's pool for the future.



John Heller, CEO Argenta since 2009.