

Carlos Velo dos Santos: “I don’t manage a company, I manage talent”

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Carlos Velo dos Santos, CEO of Amorim Cork Italia, outlines a visionary human-centered leadership model. From work-life balance to emotional intelligence, the company fosters employee well-being as a strategy for success. Through Family Audit, Positive Organization and talent-focused recruitment, Amorim is redefining sustainability in the wine industry.

Human resources are an increasingly critical issue. In the framework of the “[Amorim Wine Vision](#)” project, I interviewed Carlos Velo dos Santos, CEO of Amorim Cork Italia, who stressed the importance of seeing employee wellbeing as a crucial element of modern business sustainability and success.

A people-centered vision that values both professional and human growth offers practical models and developmental ideas, particularly valuable for the wine sector, which faces unique challenges in recruiting and retaining young talent in rural areas.

By outlining the initiatives implemented to improve work-life balance, Carlos emphasized the importance of creating **a workplace that enhances talent and supports psychological wellbeing**. He also shared his thoughts on positive leadership and how it drives innovation and employee loyalty.

Why is social sustainability often overlooked compared to environmental issues?

It's a matter of awareness and business sensitivity. Most companies begin their sustainability journey focusing on the environment. Social sustainability has only recently gained attention, and managing human capital is the most critical element.

A new generation, Millennials, brings a different mindset, valuing work-life balance. Companies must align with this or risk becoming outdated. Today, Millennials typically stay 2–5 years in a company. Attracting and retaining talent now means offering benefits beyond salary.

What is the Family Audit certification and what actions has Amorim taken?

We were already implementing these policies before being certified. Family Audit, born in Trentino and endorsed by the Italian government, brings in a consultant to gather employee proposals called "reconciliation measures." We approved the first 11 immediately; today, we've implemented over 45.

We introduced a time bank, remote work (since 2019), flexible hours, and time-saving projects. Motivated people are more productive. Supporting them to reach their potential benefits the company far more than dealing with unhappy, underperforming staff.

What's missing is putting yourself in employees' shoes

Managing a company doesn't mean managing numbers; it means managing people's talent. I define the roadmap and empower teams. Empowerment means shifting mindsets and constantly stimulating growth.

What challenges did you face with Family Audit?

The biggest hurdle was the cultural mindset, the belief that one can't be happy at work. We must rethink work as something that doesn't make us victims of the weekend. Young people no longer want to be tools for work but want to use work as a tool.

How does Amorim approach recruitment?

Since 2011, we focus first on psycho-attitudinal skills, not just technical ones. Toxic behavior, even from skilled individuals, can be destructive. Everyone at the company, including me, undergoes this profiling every three years to tailor personal and team development plans.

We prioritize attitude (80%) over technical skills (20%), building a strong, cohesive team.

What does it mean to create a positive

work environment?

We launched a Positive Organization (ORG+) journey. Over 18 months, we identified 12 Chief Happiness Officers (CHOs), including 3 who were previously seen as negative influencers. Together, we created an “energizer code” of behaviors for a positive atmosphere.

We also trained leaders chosen for their leadership potential. These are long processes of transformation that require clear conduct guidelines.

How do environmental and social responsibility relate?

We've led environmental sustainability since 2011, launching the “Progetto Etico” with over 45 NGOs to collect more than 30 million corks. Amorim also manages 8,700 hectares of cork oak forest.

We champion circular economy projects like Suber Design, reusing cork to create furniture. We also provide meals in-house or at partner restaurants and offer free organic fruit during coffee breaks. Wellness signals true sustainability.

What's your view on cultural development for employees?

We created the Amorim Cork Italia Academy for both internal and external education, from olive oil and wine courses to public speaking and digital marketing. We also run emotional intelligence sessions for all employees.

We extend learning to employees' children through talks and experiences that foster a sense of belonging. We also offer affordable language lessons in English, Chinese, Hindi, Russian, and more.

What is a Positive Organization and why pursue it?

A motivated workforce drives innovation and reduces turnover. A strong sense of belonging and clear management practices are crucial. Positive leadership is now a major focus at top U.S. business schools.

What defines a “positive leader”?

We seek genuine, empathetic leaders who prioritize ‘we’ over ‘I’. I made it a point to personally lunch with all new employees to understand and engage with them. The 1927 “Hawthorne Effect” proves that healthy, open relationships improve productivity.

How can wine companies in rural areas retain young talent?

Rural wine businesses struggle to retain young professionals who seek clear career paths and emotional engagement. A lack of structured growth plans leads to high turnover.

We even benchmarked local salaries to stay competitive. Some employees joined us at 18 and stayed for life. But that’s increasingly rare. That’s why wellbeing must be a priority if we want to keep good people.

This interview was conducted in partnership with [Amorim Cork Italia](#) as part of the “[Amorim Wine Vision](#)” project – a network of thought leadership on technical and topical wine-related issues, spotlighting the original visions of industry entrepreneurs and managers.

Key points

- **Employee well-being is the cornerstone of Amorim's success model.**
- **Talent is prioritized over numbers and technical skills.**
- **Family Audit fosters flexible work and inclusion.**
- **Positive leadership boosts innovation and retention.**
- **Rural wine firms must offer clear growth paths for young talent.**