



With entrepreneurial energy, Peter Harf has left a mark on consumer goods industries such as household products, cosmetics, quick-service restaurants, luxury goods, and beverages. He has also had an impact on tens of thousands of blood cancer patients by facilitating bone marrow transplants. Whatever the task at hand, Harf arrives with a passion for creative thinking and a commitment to getting the job done.

Harf is the chairman and CEO of privately held Joh. A. Benckiser SE, which owns Coty, Labelux, and stakes in Reckitt Benckiser and Burger King. He serves as chairman of Coty, the global beauty company and leader in fragrance.

He began his career at The Boston Consulting Group in San Francisco in 1974. In 1981, he joined Benckiser, focusing the company on consumer goods. “We had a lot of marginal pieces in our portfolio,” explains Harf. In those early years, Harf acquired around 25 companies. “I’m not afraid of taking risks. I’m not afraid of losing. I’m not afraid of buying something,” says Harf.

In 1997, he and Bart Becht took the detergent part of Benckiser public. Subsequently, in 1999, this company merged with Reckitt & Colman, forming Reckitt Benckiser. The new firm thrived, reaching a total shareholder return of 16.5 percent per year over a period of 10 years.

In 2002, Harf joined the board of Anheuser-Busch InBev, then Interbrew and today the largest brewer in the world. He has served as chairman there since 2006.

Peter Harf was born in 1946 in Cologne, Germany. He grew up an only child living right after the Second World War in the completely destroyed Cologne. “My mother, 21 years young when I was born, did the cooking and washing for 14 people,” he recalls. “She had tremendous energy. There was no money, but lots of love and happiness.” As a boy, Harf shared a room with a great uncle, born in 1886, who instilled in him an avid interest in

**MBA 1974**



**CHAIRMAN  
AND CEO,  
JOH. A.  
BENCKISER SE**

“ONE OF MY MAJOR STRENGTHS IS A LACK OF FEAR. LIKE MOST STRENGTHS, IT IS ALSO A WEAKNESS.”

history and politics. “My uncle died in 1957. I was 11 years old. No day passes that I do not remember stuff he told me as a little boy. It is amazing how a great human being can shape a child and guide him through life.”

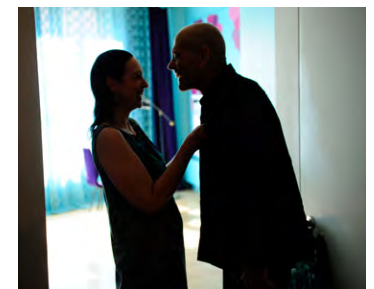
After graduating first in his class from the University of Cologne, he earned a PhD in economics. Despite a consuming, life-long passion for economics, Harf decided to become a businessman. He had recently married the love of his life, Mechtild, whom he had been dating for 10 years. The pair moved to Cambridge so he could attend HBS. “We had a fantastic time. Madly in love, lots of friends, great parties, smart professors, and the Cape in the spring,” Harf recalls. He savored working with smart fellow students. “Research into theoretical economics tends to be very lonely,” he observes.

After graduation, Harf moved to San Francisco. When his wife became pregnant with the first of their two daughters, fittingly named Viktoria, she decided they should return to Germany. “In family matters, Mechtild held the reins and I was riding shotgun. She wanted our daughter to have a clear sense of belonging.”

In 1990, tragedy struck, when Mechtild was diagnosed with blood cancer. She needed a bone marrow transplant, but there was not a matching donor. Eventually, she received a transplant, after Harf and his friends had started to frantically recruit potential bone marrow donors all over Germany. On her deathbed, Mechtild demanded that Harf stay committed to the fight against blood cancer. “What happened to me should not happen to anyone,” Harf recalls her saying. “Put your business smarts to work. There is more to life than making money.”

Harf and his wife’s physician, Gerhard Ehninger, launched DKMS, the cure blood cancer bank. “DKMS is not a charity, but a high-performance, nonprofit company driven by an impossible dream and a strong culture,” says Harf. Today, DKMS has more than 2.8 million registered bone marrow donors worldwide and has facilitated some 26,000 transplants. “So many people tell me they wouldn’t be alive if it weren’t for my father,” says Harf’s daughter Katharina, who serves as DKMS’s COO.

Like the happy endings that Harf has brought to many blood cancer patients, there is a silver lining to his personal struggle



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: VISITING DEREK LAM TO LOOK AT THE NEW COLLECTION; HARF LEAVES THE HOUSE AT 6:30 AM, SAYING GOODBYE TO TINA; HARF AND HIS DAUGHTER KATHARINA (LEFT) REVIEW DOCUMENTS AT DKMS.

with loss. In 1995, while promoting a line of cosmetics for women with cancer, he met Tina, a creative advertising director and writer who had also lost a loved one to cancer. They hit it off immediately and today are happily married, dividing their time between Milan and Manhattan. ▢

TIMELINE

1946 BORN, COLOGNE, GERMANY

1973 EARNS PHD, MONETARY ECONOMICS, UNIVERSITY OF COLOGNE

1981 JOINS JOH. A. BENCKISER GMBH

1988 NAMED CEO & CHAIRMAN, JOH. A. BENCKISER SE

1991 LAUNCHES DKMS, THE CURE BLOOD CANCER BANK

1993 BECOMES CEO, COTY INC.

2001 APPOINTED CHAIRMAN, COTY INC.

2006 APPOINTED CHAIRMAN, ANHEUSER-BUSCH INBEV