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BANKER ITALY

From Turin to the States

Cagliero (chief executive officer of Banor SIM), tells PRIVATE his story. From his participatory leadership style to family anecdotes.

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Founder and CEO of Banor, one of Italy’s leading independent investment firms, Massimiliano Cagliero was born in Turin, a city with which he still has very strong personal and professional ties. Cagliero graduated from Milan’s Università Bocconi in 1992 with honours in business administration. He went on to do an MBA at Harvard Business School in Boston in 1997, followed by a Master’s in Finance and Economics at the Wirtschaftsuniversität in Vienna, in Austria. Married to an American citizen, he’s a close and perceptive observer of events across the Pond.

When you were 20, what was your relationship with money: spend or save?

A number of family events taught me to appreciate the value of money at an early age and to always consider it as a means to achieve intellectual and personal freedom, never as an end in itself. I couldn’t say if I was more of a spender or a saver: I’ve certainly always appreciated the value

of money but, and I can say this with certainty, it's never been the basis of my professional motivation.

Where did you take the first steps in your career?

I graduated very young and started my working life at Goldman Sachs. I spent many good years in the London offices, working with people I've remained very close to. I remember an environment where people were very enthusiastic and proactive. But I also remember that those were the early days for investment banks and they needed to make a name for themselves. The introductory pages of our presentation to potential Italian clients were always devoted to explaining what an investment bank was.

What's your leadership style?

I have the good fortune to work with people who have great human and professional qualities and with whom, over the years, we've created a very close and cohesive team. At Banor, turnover of partners and personnel is practically non-existent. The advantage of being surrounded by top-class people is that you can take decisions in a collegiate manner and listen openly to even the most contradictory opinions, in the conviction that the primary goal for all of us is the good of the company.

How do you view your profession?

I place huge importance on the fact that clients give us their capital to manage. That's a profound act of trust. Individuals often spend part of their lives putting together a certain amount of capital, which they then entrust to us: it's as though they were entrusting us with part of their very existence. That's why we always need to be well prepared and able to meet our clients' needs, do our utmost to grow their capital, help them hand it on to the next generation and always be available to listen to them and understand their needs.

Your wife is an American citizen and you yourself know the States well. How do the Americans view us?

In recent years I've noticed that the Americans have become very inward-looking and less and less interested in the rest of the world. Recent US foreign policy decisions reflect that attitude. On the financial investments side, however, I've noticed that the Americans are again showing an interest in European markets, Italy included. Perceptions of a solution to the banking problem have of course been a decisive element in channelling investment from the United States to our country.

Returning to your sector, what are the most tangible differences between us and the States in the way we work and in relations with clients?

As you know, the Americans are much more business oriented and pragmatic than us. For that reason, I feel that the biggest difference in the approach to client management lies in the ease of establishing relationships and openness to doing so, which is perhaps greater in the United States. However, this is often accompanied by less human depth and client loyalty.

Is there any anecdote or mantra that has stayed with you over the years in your approach to work?

I remember a story from when I was at middle school. I had just finished playing football and was getting ready to go back to the classroom for the afternoon lessons. The head of the school – a religious school – where I was studying stopped me, strict and elegant. He asked me why on earth I was so “dishevelled” and how I was doing at school. I explained that I’d just been playing football with my friends and that I was very good at my lessons. He didn’t speak for a moment and then he said “discipline and method are often as important as intelligence”. He was clearly referring to my appearance. That lesson made a great impression on me, like the education I received: always with a focus on the values of sustainability and ethics. I’ve passed on these principles in Banor. Rigorous method and discipline combined with the integration of environmental, social and governance criteria in our evaluation models are the legacy of the education I grew up with and which I still bring with me into my profession today.