

bazaar

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up close & personal

By: Emma Staples

Thomas Lundgren

You just know when you've met THE one - and today I did! Before my husband gets worried - I'm talking about Thomas Lundgren - Founder and CEO of THE One.

It's not often you get to meet the man behind the brand. Thomas is a revolutionist, "I'm the anti-retail retailer - a rebel on a course", he's a dreamer, "Dreaming is a must - imperfection is what it's all about", he's an evolutionist, "This company is a process - I don't want to get bored and I don't want other people too," he's a romanticist, "I want to write a fantasy saga - I want a love story with a happy ending." There are many words to describe Thomas; but not enough to describe his character - he spills off the page. When we went to swap business cards he put several cards on the table each with a different scenario and asked me to choose one - (mine was 'save the world from boredom' - apparently a lot of people have chosen these of late - what does that tell you) others include saving the world from conformity, clones, colour, identity crisis, reality, gravity. Thomas is a man on a mission.

We started talking about how he got where he is today, and in a twisty dialogue

covered many things in a random journey that I suspect is how Thomas operates. He's focused, he knows what he wants but there are many tangents that interest him. Why follow the straight and narrow when there is a more exciting way to travel. A man with a vision, "To save the world from cheap, repetitive and over-priced furniture", a man who's a natural leader, "The whole point of doing your own thing is that you can bloody well do anything," and a man who is loyal, "I want THE One to be different but I also have old fashioned values. I want people to stay - some people have been with me over 10 and 20 years."

Thomas started out as a decorator for Ikea in 1984 in Saudi, before moving to Kuwait a year later as decoration manager. From here he worked himself up to general manager. When the invasion happened he was on holiday in Sweden, his home in Kuwait was gutted - they destroyed everything except his paintings and books. What you might not know is that some of those paintings have been reproduced and are now on sale - and these paintings are his! "There are two arguments why they weren't destroyed," chuckles

Thomas. "People say they weren't destroyed because they didn't understand them or because they weren't any good."

There is a fun and rebellious streak in Thomas. Which is just as well, as the beginning years of setting up THE One weren't easy. (THE One is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year - as well as its 10th store). "There were times when it was pure hell. I was working 24 hours a day and under tremendous financial pressure. It's not hard work that kills you - but financial pressure can. (Thomas ended up having open-heart surgery). I thought I could build a brand in two minutes, I was naïve. I realised I don't just want stores making money, I want the meaning behind it."

Happiness is important to Thomas - and not just for his customers. Next year they are planning to shut all stores for a week at a time and just "flock off". They will go into different communities and set up projects, whether in India to build a school or countries where they have stores, like Jordan.

When talking to Thomas about his products you hear words like 'soul' and 'passion' - anyone can be a trader, but at THE One they fight to be

different. (By the way CEO stands for Chief Emotional Officer - although he often changes his title. He's also the anti-gravity manager). They recognise that there is a feel good factor when buying - it's not just a logical or practical decision - there is emotion involved. "Forget logic, when a decision is processed and goes through the limbic system (an area of the brain) there is an emotional response. This is what counts."

It is the emotions and the relationships that matter to Thomas. "You can look at the adverts as flirting, when they come into the stores it's a date. If they buy anything it's like becoming engaged and if they keep coming back it's like a marriage. That's what we want - we don't want one-night stands - we want lifetime relationships," Thomas philosophises. "It is hard work being married - you have to put in a lot of effort and you need to continuously evolve," he grins as I realise we are back to the answer about the company being a process.

Thomas is a man with (another) new mission. "I want to blow your mind and free your soul."



The bazaar Questionnaire

What 5 words describe you?

Passionate, dreamer, creative, verbal, pain in the arse.

What do you consider to be your most treasured quality?

My creativity.

To what do you attribute your success?

Hard work and compassion.

What is your greatest fear?

That the world is continuing this negative spiral -going downwards, which means less tolerance, less understanding - resulting in us getting more divided.

What is your greatest extravagance?

Free time with my family.

What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?

The older you get the more you start to understand there is no good or bad traits, it's when or how you use them in different situations. The older you get the better you become in doing less harm. I hope.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

"But," (as in it could be done better).

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

To become a better listener, to read-between the lines and to listen to my gut instinct more.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

My family.

Who do you admire the most?

My mum.

Who or what do you dislike the most?

The bad leaders we have in the world today.

What are your goals?

To try and make the world a better place for people.

What is your most treasured possession?

My iPod or my virginity.

What is the quality you most

like in a woman?

Compassion.

What is the quality you most like in a man?

Naivety.

What do you want to be remembered for?

Inspiring others to live their dream.

If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?

My dog.

What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?

We are in a day and age that see children being abused and people starving to death and we can actively stop it.

Where would you like to live?

Please tell me. I don't know a better place than Dubai right now.

What is your greatest regret?

I don't have enough time to see my daughters grow up.

If you were invisible for a day, what would you do?

Go to the White House and find out what Bush is thinking.

If you were granted 3 wishes, what would you choose?

Peace, fun and rock 'n' roll.

What is your motto?

Live your dream. We are.

