

The gift and the wrappings were too good to pass; I am sure that we can all understand the dilemma Derek must have faced.

With this background we can have an opinion and say 'Yes, at the end of the day, the power of money is greater than that of values and mission'; cynics will say this is just the essence of human nature. Alternatively we can believe Derek in his strong statement: 'The time has come to apply knowledge of what works best... focused on achieving practical outcomes for obesity and related health concerns'; or his 'I have always sought to work where the potential for health gain is great'; and his final 'I am finding equally committed colleagues in the corporate sector who share the public health community's desire to make a difference to the lives of their consumers. Let us work together to make that difference'.

My position is that Derek is genuine in his motives and he has chosen this job as a new challenge and opportunity to influence the private sector from within. It takes someone like Derek to take on this daunting task, and I propose that we not only give him the benefit of the doubt, but clearly support his efforts and do our best for him to be effective. When I visited him last April in his office after a stroll in the garden and taking a picture of him by an original Picasso sculpture of Don Quijote and Sancho, I asked his boss Indra Nooyi, the CEO of PepsiCo, 'Why have you taken our standard bearer in the fight against chronic diseases? Some say he has now joined the enemy'. Her reply was instant and to the point: 'We have asked Derek to change this company; in five

years we want to have most of our product line meet the international standards supporting life-long health... if he fails we fail'. I am convinced that she meant what she said; and in my role as President of the IUNS I agree with Derek when he states 'The future will judge whether the commitments and promises made by the public and private sectors have been fulfilled. No sector has the monopoly of what works best and what is in the public interest'.

My final comment relates to the need for the international academic nutrition community to join the public and private sector, non-government organizations, donors and all others interested in improving nutrition to re-examine the present global governance structure and introduce the necessary changes to ensure greater accountability and participation of civil society and the private sector alike. Linkages and partnerships need to be significantly enhanced, so that priorities are better reflected in national and international normative guidance, programme implementation, donor funding, research, and advanced training. The pending work ahead demands an inclusive approach with clearly defined objectives and established monitoring and evaluation systems holding parties accountable for what they do or fail to do.

Prof. Ricardo Uauy  
IUNS President  
INTA U of Chile  
Casilla 138-11  
Santiago Chile  
Email: uauy@inta.cl

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## Invited Commentary to Yach editorial PepsiCo recruitment strategy challenged

As the former chair of the WHO Reference Group which advised on the Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health, it was disappointing to learn that Derek Yach, who originally spearheaded this WHO initiative, had accepted a post at PepsiCo. It was even more disappointing to find that the former Director-General of WHO, Gro Harlem Brundtland, who championed the WHO Strategy to Health Ministers in spite of food and soft drink industry opposition, had already been recruited very quietly to the PepsiCo Blue Ribbon Advisory Board.

Yach and Brundtland presumably believe they can achieve more in terms of improving public health by working within a single company than can be achieved by

working from the outside. While it is clear in the public health and nutrition field that we must be willing to engage in a dialogue, it remains quite difficult to achieve real influence over the private sector, whose agenda has so far been one of setting its own limits. My view remains that ultimately one can achieve a greater impact on important public health issues as an independent actor, rather than as a company employee, particularly if employed in a business which has been and, to some extent, continues to be 'part of the problem' on a global scale.

We have to be pragmatic, but the challenge to anyone moving from working in public health to working 'inside the system' is that they should know they will be held

accountable in demonstrating they are truly 'part of the solution'. The acquisition of notable health experts and political advisors provides a 'halo effect' – or perhaps less charitably a smokescreen – behind which to hide. This strategy has been adopted not only by PepsiCo, but by many Big Food companies which seem to think that engaging a few advisers to give their blessing to some modified products offers a solution in responding to the challenge of improving diet and tackling obesity. In fact, it may undermine greater efforts to bring about real change.

I am concerned in particular that there is a basic conflict in working within the snack food sector, since branding snacks as 'healthy' only diverts attention from the real issues. In my view it is the culture of snacking – the consumption of superfluous calories between, or perhaps instead of healthy main meals – which is an unhealthy practice in itself. Only the other week a senior brand marketing adviser told an audience at the McGill Health Challenge Think Tank in Montreal that the food industry could not deliver 'healthy' snacks – only 'healthier'. He meant the products were not quite as bad as before, but still undeserving of the self-serving health logos that have proliferated as an easy sales booster.

One of the most important issues, perhaps the overriding one, concerns the aggressive marketing of snacks and beverages to children – something now happening

worldwide. Recent industry pledges to curtail advertising to children under 12 years old disguises the fact that intense marketing efforts continue across the snack and soft drink sector. PepsiCo, which has branded at least 250 of its lines with its Smart Spot logo, has said it will market only two products to the under 12s – Baked Cheetos and Gatorade sugared drinks – from next year. I challenge them to go further.

Here is my 'Pepsi Challenge'. Will Pepsi be the first to:

- Support an international code of conduct concerning the marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to children of less than 18 years of age?
- Accept this as a binding agreement (not merely a self-regulated option)?
- Halt all marketing and sales of snacks and sugary drinks in schools and in the surrounding neighborhoods?
- Produce only non-sugary breakfast cereals?

Are they ready for a world without their very sweet 'Honey Monster'?

Kaare R. Norum  
Professor Emeritus, Department of Nutrition  
Medical Faculty, University of Oslo, Norway  
Email: krnorum@gmail.com