What's so tragic about fintech founder Jan Schoch's recent fall from grace? A fintech booster takes on Switzerland's stigma surrounding failure for finews.com.

Swiss Finance Startups, or SFS, is run by Christina Kehl, Gian Reto a Porta, Urs Haeusler and Thomas Braendle. The following is an editorial contribution from the four:

If there's one word which has seeped into every sector in recent years, it is digitization. Switzerland's efforts including a government-backed digital advisory board devoted to fintech regulation and a digital day which showcased corporate CEOs by transporting them by train through Switzerland.

But one major driver behind Switzerland's digitization efforts has garnered an enormous amount of criticism. At first, Jan Schoch was applauded. Now, eight successful years appear forgotten. We demand pioneers but no interruptions in corporate CVs; we want hits without the flops; entrepreneurs, but no failures.

Omelet = Eggshells

The debate highlights that we have failed to understand that digitization feeds off visionaries and doers, not dreamers. Mistakes, failures, trial and error are the nuts and bolts of innovation. The old adage «You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs» is more true today than ever before.

The jump into a digital age has already happened, even if Switzerland had to be nudged into the new era. Other locations have stolen a march on Zurich and Geneva. Start-ups in Berlin, Silicon Valley, Singapore, or Tel Aviv concentrate on the process of rising back up again.

Switzerland's Unicorn?

Jan Schoch is one of the few entrepreneurs in Switzerland who dared to outline and shape the digital future. For eight years, Leonteq was THE universally admired digital unicorn. He faced difficulties in the firm's ninth year, but we don't want to judge whether he make mistakes or not. What is clear is that he accepted the consequences when it became necessary. Leonteq has turned itself around, swinging back to profit after a very short unprofitable period.

We agree with iso-20022.ch's Ruedi Maeder, who writes: «Jan Schoch remains a godsend for Switzerland's fintech scene because as a 30-year-old he launched a start-up which advanced to a publicly-listed firm of considerable size and vibrancy within ten years.»
Schoch's vision hasn't failed at all; in fact, it has been launched and has grown – perhaps ultimately out of his hands. This isn't a failure, but a natural evolution and nothing uncommon.

What Switzerland Needs

Even if the «culture of failure» is trending right now, it isn't lived in Switzerland. Those who run into trouble are assured of negative headlines, when in fact the media could provide a valuation contribution by honoring engagement and encouraging those who fall to get back up again, instead of singling out failures. This is the widely-praised «culture of failure» that Switzerland desperately needs!

Fintech in Switzerland owes Schoch a lot: the industry took great leaps thanks to him at a time when the term «fintech» was virtually unknown. Jan Schoch was and is a major inspiration and role model.

Switzerland's burgeoning fintech industry is growing, but compared to international hot spots, remains reticent and cautious. We hope for the sake of future-proof financial center that more Jan Schochs emerge: daring, hard-working entrepreneurs with vision and pragmatism.

What do you think? Write to us at info@finews.ch