From Medicine to Military Tech

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Theodor Himmel

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A Founder's Journey

Himmel:

Dr. Andres, you are a doctor, and now you sell optics and advocate for the idea that "*defence is a human right.*" How did that come about?

Dr. Andres:

Well, I didn't start directly in the defence sector.

During my studies, I had a PDA, something that young people today would probably call a smartphone. It could do everything except make calls or access the internet. The problem was that it was very fragile, so I wanted a hard case for it. I more or less built one myself during my studies.

Because of production requirements, I had to produce a small series, which left me with many units. To recover the costs, I sold them to friends and people in the community. That worked quite well. Demand increased, and I had to produce more. The revenue eventually became large enough that I had to register a business in 1999, still during my studies.

At the same time, I also worked as a doctor for a while. However, there was no shortage of doctors at the time, and I experienced a short period of unemployment. During that time, I focused on expanding the company, developing product lines, and producing cases for notebooks. That was the phase where the business grew more and more, and I was able to live from it and realise myself. Eventually, it grew to the point where I did not return to medicine.

Himmel: You mentioned that you first produced these cases and later moved into the defence industry. When did that transition happen?

Dr. Andres: That was around 2010. At that point, cases were no longer particularly interesting, and I wanted to do something new. So I decided that we would develop thermal imaging devices.

We had already started developing our own PDAs, handheld devices, and early tablet computers. Economically, we didn't really succeed in entering the market, but we had the technical expertise.

Through a funded project, we were paid to integrate a thermal imaging camera into a firefighting solution. That allowed us to understand the technology well enough to build our own devices. My goal was to build the smallest thermal imaging device in the world, as a kind of goggle. We achieved that in 2012, but it was not economically successful at first. It took a long time before we made profits in that area, only about five or six years ago.

Since then, things have developed quite quickly, and now we have a strong position in the military sector.

Promotional Material by Andres Industries



Himmel: Before we go further into the company, I would like to focus on your personal development. Many students don't know what they want to do or have ideas, but struggle to implement them. Was becoming self-employed something you planned, or did it emerge from opportunities?

Dr. Andres: At the beginning of my studies, I actually didn't want to work as a doctor in practice.

Himmel: Then why did you study medicine?

Dr. Andres:I wanted to work as a doctor, but in research. My goal was to work in genetics and develop treatments for cancer in a laboratory environment. I had also trained as a biological-technical assistant in Berlin and wanted to make scientific discoveries in the lab. That was the direction I was aiming for.

But during my doctoral work, I realised that working only with machines and lab equipment was not for me. Instead, my interest in people grew more

and more, and in the end, I enjoyed working directly with patients. I worked in psychosomatics.

Himmel: Psychosomatics, you mentioned that.

Dr. Andres: Yes. It is basically a subfield of internal medicine that deals with the interaction between psychological and physical conditions.

Put simply, if no physical cause is found but the person is still ill, they are referred to psychosomatics.

In the past, it was believed that certain illnesses, like stomach ulcers, were caused purely by stress. Today, we know that many of these assumptions were incorrect, but there are still connections.

The psyche influences the body, and the body influences the psyche; they are closely linked.

Himmel:

What skills from your studies helped you later?

Dr. Andres: There are quite a few. Even though I don't work in medicine anymore, I think it is a very valuable degree. You learn technical knowledge, biology, and medical topics, but also a lot about people.

For me, especially the human aspect was new. I learned to interact better with people and to understand them. This also applies to children. I had no connection to them before, but during my training, I developed a much better understanding.

In general, I can now better assess whether someone is telling the truth or what their intentions are. That helps when dealing with employees and customers. I often rely on intuition and can sense when something is not right.

As a doctor, you also have access to objective data and can compare it with what people say, which gives you feedback about behaviour and credibility.

Himmel: What led you into the defence sector?

Dr. Andres: From the beginning, we developed devices intended for military use. There was no real civilian market, and the sensors, mainly from the US, were not available to civilians, so the devices were either used by rescue services or by the military.

We initially tried to sell to the German military but were not successful because we were a small and unknown company. We then turned to police forces, who were more open. That helped us survive.

Later, regulations allowed hunters to use such devices, which increased demand. At the same time, the military market, especially in Eastern Europe, developed further after 2014 due to perceived threats from Russia.

From that point on, business grew significantly. At the same time, Chinese companies entered the civilian market and drove prices down, especially in the hunting segment. We could not compete there anymore.

However, the military market grew in parallel.

Himmel:

How many competitors do you have?

Dr. Andres: There are several worldwide. In Europe, maybe five or six can really compete. Many companies simply rebrand Chinese products. In Germany, in our segment, there are essentially three companies.

Dr. Andres: At the moment, demand is very high. We already have enough orders to keep us busy until next year. Even if we significantly increase production, we still cannot meet demand.

Dr. Andres: However, technology is evolving. It could be that the infantry market disappears in the future due to autonomous systems. That is something we have to take into account.

Dr. Andres: The relationship with the military hasn't changed much-they have always understood the importance of defence. But public perception has changed; more people now recognise that the military is necessary to protect democratic values. In the past, many did not see that need.

Dr. Andres: We organise a series called Forum Prometheus. It brings people together physically to discuss topics with experts. The aim is to counter misinformation and enable direct exchange.

We organise lectures, discussions, and workshops on topics such as security, resilience, and related issues.

Dr. Andres: We value people who understand global developments. But in a company like ours, practical skills are essential.

Students should also have basic business knowledge, understanding revenue, taxes, and costs. Technical understanding is also important in order to assess whether information is realistic or not.

Himmel: Perfect, thank you very much