

JOE DWEK
BUSINESSMAN AND CHAIR OF THE
MERSEY BASIN CAMPAIGN

THE TURNAROUND SPECIALIST



"The Northwest is waking up to the fact that environmental improvements must go hand in hand with industrial regeneration," says Joe Dwek, Northwest businessman and out-going chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign.

It's the kind of message the green brigade have been trumpeting for years, largely unheeded. Coming from them it sounded a little too good to be true, like sugar coating on a pill, and many in the business community turned a deaf ear. But Joe Dwek, CBE, is not easy to ignore. Ranked amongst the most influential industrialists in the region by Northwest Business Insider magazine, he's one of the business community's own leaders. After rescuing a series of struggling businesses he's widely regarded as a turnaround specialist.

region's rivers and canals. His experience in turning around struggling businesses was about to be tested in the public sector. He says of the Campaign at that time, "It didn't have a proper corporate structure, it didn't have a satisfactory work programme, the work programme was not a delivery mechanism - it was a campaign mechanism - and it had not won the respect of some of its key partners." The problem was how the Campaign had been set up at the outset. His predecessor, Brian Alexander, "actually did a bloody good job," he says. But "coming from the private sector you look at it and see a government quango which doesn't seem focused."

His response was to make an agenda and start working through it, although it rapidly became apparent that things had to be done differently compared to the business world. "In business the chief

**"Reputation is a one day phenomenon.
It has to be sustained."**

Renowned for his whirlwind energy, he is possibly the only man in the region who arrives in the office earlier since he retired than he did when he was working.

Dwek started in business in 1962, when the Northwest was a very different place. Born in Brussels but with a British father, his family were captured by the Germans in 1940, interned and put on a boat bound for Germany before their boat was captured by the British fleet and the family returned in Manchester. Dwek followed the great Northwest tradition and built up a successful business. But it was when he joined Bodycote International as managing director in 1972 that things really took off. When he retired in 1998 the original £3 million textiles group had been transformed into a science based metallurgical technology business with a market capitalisation of around £1.4 billion and operated in 17 countries with 200 plants.

It was soon after he retired that Dwek was appointed chair of the Mersey Basin Campaign, the organisation established by Michael Heseltine in 1985 to bring together industry, the community and the public sector to clean the

executive can make decisions and next morning people will get them done. In an organisation like the Mersey Basin Campaign, consensus objectives are very important. You have to take people with you, keep them informed, bring them into the loop and make sure that when you move they are with you." The lesson, he says, is that "it's an entirely different approach to the same problem."

Looking back on his business experience, his time at the Campaign and his numerous other public and business roles, Dwek is optimistic. The Campaign is now set up "in a way which makes it respected and gives it corporate objectives, and the right people are now in the right slots." As for the region as a whole, the "disparate collection of individual fiefdoms" has been replaced by a realisation that "the problems which confront us unite us, rather than divide us and that's a major step forward."

Equally importantly, "We've got across the boundaries so that everybody is working across the region with the same objectives and everybody can begin to realise that a healthy environment is good for jobs, output, growth, recruitment, inward investment and so on."

So is it finally time for Joe Dwek to slow down? "Never with me. I feel a very young, fit sixty-three and a half."