



## Profound Philosophy of Late IKEA Founder Ingvar Kamrad

By Rebecca White - February 11, 2018



Ingvar Kamrad, the now late founder of the iconic Swedish home furnishings store IKEA, left a profound life philosophy.

**Ingvar Kamrad** has died peacefully in his home in Småland, Sweden aged 91, but his profound philosophy lives on as his legacy. Kamrad is remembered for his **visionary home furnishings store IKEA** that swept the globe by storm. Despite having lived a life of **controversy**, his primary passion was to provide **affordable products** that were available to the **masses**, not merely the **affluent few**.

Many people are therefore naturally familiar with the IKEA brand, and similarly, likely have IKEA furniture in their homes. In regard to global brands, IKEA is indeed “part of the furniture” in the global population’s **consumerist consciousness**. At the time of Kamrad’s death, over **300 IKEA outlets** span the globe, with more in the pipeline. So how did **a simple Swedish farm boy** go on to become one of the **wealthiest billionaires in the world**?

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## A taste for entrepreneurship

It was a 17-year-old Kamprad who founded the fledgling IKEA store. Initially, he sold simple items such as **stockings, watches, jewelry and picture frames** via mail order. But Kamprad had shown an **obsession for a good business deal** from an even earlier age.

As young as 5, he understood how to make a **profit** by buying matchsticks in bulk and selling them door to door for a profit. His **taste for entrepreneurship** grew as he extended his simple product line to **pens, pencils, and decorations**.

After gaining assistance from his father, Kamprad began his official **mail-order business** in 1943. Then, **his venture rapidly expanded** when he started introducing **furniture** to his product line in 1948. It was at this stage that he developed a **passion for home furnishings** and grasped this niche with two hands.

Kamprad pondered ways to innovate this market. He began to **dream** of how to corner the greatest possible demographic most efficiently: as many people as possible, or as Kamprad said, "**the many people**."

One of the most obvious ways in which Kamprad revolutionized the furniture market was with the introduction of **flat-packing**. Kamprad had a philosophy that his employees were more like **team players on a football field**. So, it would be one of his **star designers, Gillis Lundgren**, who would have the original idea of selling furniture that **the customer would assemble at home**.

## "Profit gives us resources" – Ingvar Kamprad

Lundgren would later **receive an award** for his innovation, and Kamprad enjoyed the **massive cut in production costs**. Unquestionably, **lower production costs meant lower prices for customers**. And till this day, customers embrace the work of assembling their IKEA purchases as part of a **sentimental ritual**, as much as they **enjoy paying less**.

Ultimately, Kamprad spent 70 years in an **official capacity** within his beloved IKEA. At the age of 87, he **stepped down** as a company board member. However, the company remained **an authentic manifestation of his unique vision**.

Never before had a mere furniture salesman **revolutionized an entire market**. And in Kamprad's 1976 manifesto **The Testament of a Furniture Dealer** he revealed how his life's philosophy became tangible through IKEA.

## "Development is not always the same thing as progressive" – Ingvar Kamprad

Kamprad's manifesto contained many **high ideals**, and one of the core tenets of his business and life philosophy was **frugality**. However, many have interpreted his **prudence** as either a **publicity stunt, OCD, or even miserliness**. Famously, the Swedish entrepreneur was known for his **cost-cutting** and leading a life that, on the surface, mimicked the **ordinary members of the population** he saw as his demographic market.

The **billionaire** set out to appear as **common** as possible. He drove an aged **Volvo**, would only **fly economy class** and **stay in economy hotels**. Additionally, he even went so far as to have his hair cut in developing countries like **Vietnam**. His home, in which he eventually passed away, looked typically **middle class**. In no way did he give away his **billionaire status**, to the point where his neighbors accused him of being a **miser**.





## *"Wasting resources a mortal sin at IKEA" – Ingvar Kamrad*

However, for a man who was **obsessed with living an inexpensive life**, Kamrad was obsessed with **hoarding his money**, keeping it out of circulation. The **corporate structure** of his many IKEA groups and companies resembled an **intricate maze**, and indeed he was **investigated by tax authorities**. Kamrad claimed that he wished to **keep his business in the family**. He felt that strict Swedish laws would mean that he could not pass it on to his sons, due to **restrictive inheritance laws**.

As well as maintaining a **secretive financial status**, which included never floating IKEA on the **stock market**, Kamrad also had **a dark and embarrassing past**. So controversial was Kamrad's history, it's **shadow lingers** even after his death. During the era of the rise of the **Nazis**, Kamrad was a keen member of a **Swedish Nazi youth group** and an active recruiter. After revelations of his involvement emerged, he gave a **swift apology soaked in words of deep regret**. However, later revelations showed he kept a close friendship with a primary Nazi leader for most of his life.

## *"A better everyday life for the people" – Ingvar Kamrad*

Nevertheless, Kamrad made every effort to **give the impression of inclusiveness**, and the global presence of IKEA appears to stand as the **testament** to this. He did not restrict his **underlying philosophy of opportunity** for the standard population of any particular race or culture. Instead, he sought to **find the common thread among all peoples**. He did this through providing products that met needs that we all have in common.

Indeed, Kamrad **refused to compromise on functionality or technical quality** for any of his products. His ideal was "*low price with a meaning*." Additionally, he would say "*Expensive solutions to any kind of problem are usually the work of mediocrity*."

Kamrad is survived by his three sons, **Jonas, Mathias, and Peter**. The three men have already been in charge of the company since their father officially stepped down. For all intents and purposes **will continue running their family business** along the lines their father

implemented.

References: IKEA Newsroom, BBC, Daily Mail, Independent

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