

The Wilkinson Mirror Mistake

THE WILKINSON SAGA

In 1996, a razor company bought a battery company, convinced that shelf space and marketing strength could turn batteries into blades.

In 2003, a battery company did the exact opposite.

Energizer Holdings, a company built around alkaline batteries, acquired the worldwide Schick-Wilkinson Sword wet-shave business from Pfizer.

Analysts called it a smart move.

A natural diversification.

A way to become stronger with retailers.

Nobody seemed willing to ask the obvious question.

If Gillette — the company that truly understood the shaving business — had struggled to make batteries and blades live comfortably under the same roof, why would a battery company succeed where Gillette had found limitations?

The answer arrived slowly.

As it usually does.

In 2003, Wilkinson Sword launched the Quattro, the first four-blade shaving system.

It was a genuine engineering achievement.

For a moment, it appeared to validate the strategy.

But engineering was never the real issue.

Culture was.

A battery is sold through distribution, visibility, rotation, and brand recognition.

A shaving system is different.

Handle.

Cartridge.

Replacement cycle.

Consumer loyalty.

A relationship built over years, not weeks.

Energizer knew how to manage the first.

It never fully embraced the logic of the second.

For more than a decade, Schick and Wilkinson Sword operated inside a structure designed for a completely different business.

Eventually the separation came.

The battery business remained one company.

The shaving business found its own identity under Edgewell Personal Care.

Only then did the brands return to an environment built around what they actually were.

Looking back, two companies made a similar mistake from opposite directions.

Gillette believed a battery could be managed like a razor.

Energizer believed a razor could be managed like a battery.

Both underestimated the power of culture.

Because businesses may look similar on a spreadsheet.

In reality, they rarely are.

The Lady survived.

She always does.

But it took years before she finally found her way home.

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