



»REGARDLESS OF THE INDUSTRY YOU'RE IN, I BELIEVE TODAY LEADERS FACE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE OF MAKING THEIR TEAM COMFORTABLE WITH ALL THE CHANGES HAPPENING AROUND US.« **VITA GODEC, MANAGING DIRECTOR, LENIS FARMACEVTIKA, EMBA 2015, SLOVENIA**

May 2024

*Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova,
photos provided by Lenis Farmaceutika, Boris Pretnar and Združenje Manager*

You started your career focusing deeply on biochemistry and antimicrobial research at the University of Ljubljana and later at the School of Life Science at the University of Warwick in the UK, backed up by the International Fellowship you received from the UNESCO-L'Oréal foundation "For Women in Science". However, after your return to Slovenia, you decided to join Lek, a Sandoz company, as a

Scientist in Drug Product Development. What motivated you to transition from academia to the pharmaceutical industry?

Before I returned to Slovenia, I interviewed both for an R&D position in Lek and an academic position at the University of Ljubljana. Through my work in the UK, I got to work on a few industry-backed projects and I liked the fast pace and the applicability of the industrial research. I'm also a fan of

architecture and building things and when they told me Lek was going to build a new R&D building in Mengeš and that I could be included in this project, I was convinced that it was the right decision.

In 2015, you have enrolled into the EMBA. Why did you decide to do it? Did the IEDC Individual Case Study Competition you participated in the year before, have anything to do with your decision to

enroll?

I was never really interested in economy or business, but I am quite competitive by nature (mostly with myself), so when my husband forwarded me an IEDC post about the IEDC individual CSC, I was intrigued. Despite my lack of business knowledge, I did my research, and I managed to win! I received a scholarship from IEDC (in the value of 50% of the fee of the programme) which enabled me to enrol into the EMBA. I was a self-paying student and I had to scrap together the other half (I even sold my car), as my employer at the time didn't feel an MBA was something I needed, and they weren't prepared to support me financially or with unpaid leave to attend the classes.

Did the Executive MBA meet your expectations? How tough was it for you and your classmates, in your opinion? What were the biggest takeaways?

I had the best time at IEDC! I learned so much, for me as an academic by heart the MBA was basically a crash course on business and people. The toughest aspect of it was that I took the intense, 1-year course. To be immersed in

case studies, End-of-Module (EOM) exams preparation, study groups in the library, 14+ hours daily workload, 5 weeks in a row was tough. Luckily, I took a sabbatical that year (in 2015), so I had it easier than my colleagues who had to juggle their studies with their regular jobs. That doesn't mean I was bored between modules! I opened a consultancy to earn some money and one of my customers ended up being the company that I am leading today.

The biggest takeaways for me were: (1) always challenge your assumptions, (2) make sure you

lead the company. In your speech, you mentioned thriving as a "connector" between different teams despite being an introvert. Can you elaborate on how you've developed your unique leadership style over the years?

I was always interested in too many things to pick and become an expert in just one. At the university, I studied and did research in different fields: organic chemistry, biochemistry, structural biology. I even did a bit of coding when modeling binding sites of small



have all types of personalities in your team, if you don't then put "the hat" that is missing on your own head, (3) proper storytelling - how to make a kick-ass presentation, (4) do not kill the plant (the idea generator), it was Damir in our project team (we love you, Damir, but sometimes you were driving us crazy!!).

We had an opportunity to hear firsthand from you at the IEDC Alumni Led Conference at the beginning of April, what it's like to be an introvert who has to

molecules into active sites of enzymes. In industry I worked in R&D doing tech transfers to sterile manufacturing, I was in project management, business development and operations. I made our company's first-ever web page in 2015 and completely transformed and digitalized the company's operations. I also designed the additional floor in the building we're based in when we expanded our offices in 2023. Having so many interests in different project and departments gives you a really big picture of the

//
Although having numbers is great, one should not forget the power of intuition in business.

environment you're operating within. You get to see the issues from different perspectives, as you know which other departments it can affect. The other reason why I often feel like a "translator" goes back to my university years. Besides working in the lab, my other source of income was helping elementary and high school students with their maths and chemistry. For example, the logic that worked for me to solve a maths problem is not necessarily something that comes intuitively to others, so I had to play around to figure out what works for each of them.

As a Managing Director at Lenis farmacevtika, what are some of the most challenging aspects of leading a company that focuses on specialty medicines? How do you navigate these challenges?

Regardless of the industry you're in, I believe today leaders face the biggest challenge of making their team comfortable with all the changes happening around us. Covid-19, war in Ukraine, inflation, further geopolitical instability, last year's catastrophic floods in Slovenia, uncertainty and unpredictability of the business and tax environment... you name it. Last year, before our yearly get-together of employees from the whole Adriatic region (we met in Otočec), we all read the book "Our Iceberg Is Melting", a fable on change management. We then had to act out the storyline in groups, which was a fun activity, but we kept returning to those penguins from the book and asking ourselves, what kind of a penguin do I want to be today?



Will I be a "No No" who resists change at all costs or will I go with the flow?

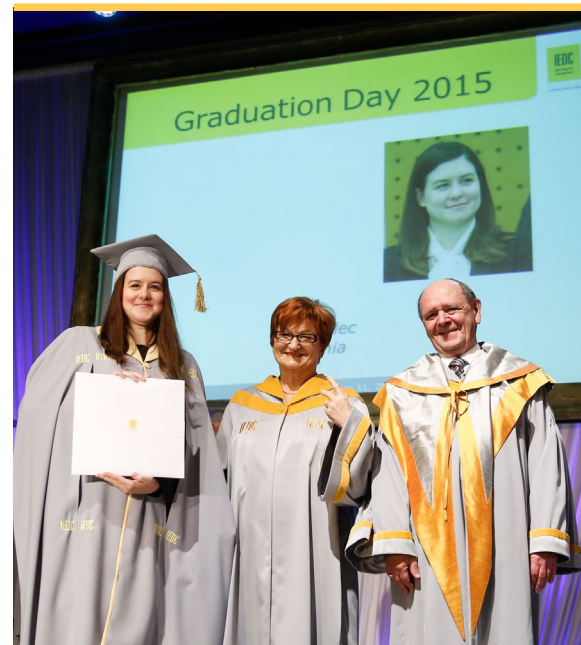
You have been involved in implementing and validating new ERP and BI systems. What are these? Why are they important? Can you discuss the impact of these systems on your company's efficiency and decision-making processes?

The ERP is the spine and BI is the brains of the company. In order to maintain the agility of the company throughout its growth, the IT systems have to be closely aligned with the processes they are recording and, on the other hand, the data you're collecting has to be analysed in an automated fashion to support the decision-making process. It was also very important to me in building these systems that the data is readily available for everyone who needs it. Gone are the days when you had to ask a colleague to run you a report in the system to see how much of a particular SKU you sold in a certain period or for them to look up a stock level of a product. We also have real time financial metrics and P&L statements in our BI system. This means we don't have to waste time gathering and analysing the data, we

rather spend it on discussing why something happened and how to react to it in order to get us the market advantage. Although having numbers is great, one should not forget the power of intuition in business. I have much to learn here from our founder and long-time Managing Director Dr. Branko Huč. Sure, intuition partly comes from experience, but he can sniff a good deal or opportunity from miles away!

Having received multiple awards like the "AmCham Top Potential 2018" and the "Artemida" award 2023 of the Managers Association of Slovenia, how do these recognitions influence your future goals and your company's direction?

I think awards like these are more recognition of the past work. On the other hand,



they are important as they hopefully encourage other young women to be bold and go for such positions. There are still far fewer women in the CEO roles in Slovenian companies than men. It's good to have role models and it is both a privilege and an immense responsibility to be one. I stand behind working hard, being transparent, and communicating well. Respecting the opinions and the knowledge of the team around you, while still pushing for progress and change. Above all, I strive to be a kind coworker. If we all led more out of love than out of our titles and positions, the companies (and the world) would be a better place.

It's a well-known fact in any organisation, that managing people is usually the toughest task for any top manager and a leader and building a great team leads to great results. What qualities do you look for when selecting team members, and how do you foster a collaborative environment, especially in a field as complex as pharmaceuticals?

Culture fit is the most important quality we're looking for in a candidate. Are they willing



Being an introvert can be an advantage, you have to know how to spin it to your benefit.

to learn on the job? Push the boundaries? Do they have a can-do attitude? Fostering a collaborative environment is not that difficult if you are fair, transparent and if you communicate well. Sure, nice offices and team building activities help, but in the end it's about the common goal and Lenis' mission is to improve access to medicines. When there is a problem, a shortage of a particular medicine on the market, our team won't stop until we find a solution.

For young professionals in the biochemistry or pharmaceutical sectors



who aspire to leadership roles but may also identify as introverts, what advice would you offer based on your experience?

Being an introvert can be an advantage, you have to know how to spin it to your benefit. I would suggest to them to read some literature on this topic like Susan Cain's "Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking" and "Range" by David Epstein.

Being a manager and a parent, who is juggling

family and work obligations, how do you organise your time and priorities nowadays? What are your support systems in place that things run smoothly?

Time (or energy) management is key. In my Artemida speech I emphasized that there are two prerequisites for being successful professionally on top of your own willingness to work for it: (1) you have to have a great team at work (which I have in Lenis), and (2) you have to have a great team at home. I have an incredible husband, with whom I

fully share responsibility for household management and children. There is also my mother-in-law and my parents. Without their support I wouldn't be able to focus on my work half as much, so I am very grateful for it. And because we have flexible working time in Lenis and have the opportunity to work from home as well, I can organize my days in such a way that I don't miss too many doctor's appointments, school plays, dance & flute recitals, birthday parties and other important milestones with my children.

What's your way of »recharging« after a tough working day where you have to interact with a lot of people?

The best way is to drive back home in silence. Radio off, no distractions. I also prefer solitary activities like reading or sewing. Otherwise, I get reenergized by

my two daughters, kids seem to have endless amounts of energy – I went from thinking it drains me to thinking and using it to recharge me.

WHAT ONE CAN'T FIND ON VITA'S RESUME



EMBA 2015

Vita Godec
Managing director,
Lenis farmacevtika,
Slovenia

Which musical instruments are played in your family and if ever together? I play the piano and the saxophone, my husband plays the trumpet and my older daughter just started learning the flute. I play with my husband on a regular basis in a jazz orchestra Big Band Grosuplje, that's actually how we met.

Being a »science person« and surrounded by scientists, do you find Sheldon Cooper in Big Bang Theory a funny character at all? I find the show hilarious, and I probably watched all the episodes (more than once). Although the characters are caricatures, I know many people from my academic years (including myself) who have elements of Sheldon in them. I've seen a few clips of the spin-off series Young Sheldon and I find it beautiful that we're normalizing all sorts of characters on TV these days, not only high-school footballers and cheerleaders.

Your favourite way of spending vacations? Swimming and reading on a beach.

Any music band you were obsessed with when you were a teenager? I loved Slovenian bands Zmelkoov and Slon in Sadež, more for their lyrics and parodies. In my late teenage years, I listened to a lot of jazz and was obsessed with an American funk saxophonist Maceo Parker.

He played at the Jazz festival in Ljubljana and he autographed a few of his CDs for me (my most prized music possession).

Your favourite board game? I like Activity (a combination of miming, drawing and speaking), I used to play this a lot with my colleagues from university.

Since you spent some time living in the UK, is there any favourite British food you crave from time to time or anything British that makes you nostalgic about your experience back in the UK? My Irish roommate made the meanest chilli con carne. I know it's not a typical British dish, but that's what I remember the endless rainy evenings by. I also liked their teatime sandwiches and cakes, particularly the lemon and poppy seed muffins. Needless to say, I put a few pounds on during my two-year stay there.

What's currently playing in your Spotify/ Youtube music/Car radio? Dua Lipa, Leeloojamais, Gerry Mulligan

How many languages do you speak and what is the language you wish to learn? Besides native Slovenian, I also speak Croatian and English. I learnt French in high school and I'm trying to become fluent in it through Duolingo, reading and TV shows in the French language, although I still have a long way to go. I think it is a beautiful language and I wouldn't mind living somewhere in the French countryside in my retirement, eating a lot of cheese.

The latest TV series you watched and liked because of... I started watching Psych again, they recently added it to Netflix. It's an old TV show about deduction, but also includes plenty of humour. I also finished rewatching BBC's Sherlock, it's a brilliant show, the script, the cast...

If you had superpowers, what would they be? My superpower would have to be needing no sleep. That way I would have more time for my family and my hobbies.