

» I TRULY BELIEVE THAT ESTABLISHING PROPER TEAM DYNAMICS AND ENABLING PEOPLE TO WORK AS PRODUCTIVELY AS THEY POSSIBLY CAN IS WHAT MAKES AN ORGANIZATION EFFICIENT AND CAPABLE OF TRANSFORMING ITSELF.«

**ROBERT LJOLJO,  
GMP 2008, GENERAL  
DIRECTOR, HEALTH  
INSURANCE INSTITUTE OF  
SLOVENIA (ZZZS), SLOVENIA**

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*Interviewed by Vera Pasynkova,  
photos: ZZZS and IEDC archive*

**Y**our career spans from leading pharmaceutical projects to your new role as General Director of ZZZS (Zavod za zdravstveno zavarovanje Slovenije – Health Insurance Institute of Slovenia). Looking back, what key moments shaped your professional journey the most, and why?

First of all, many thanks for the invitation to the interview. Decisive moments in my career were always connected with

key people/managers who recognized my good traits and put me in new, challenging positions. For example, I was leading the IT Competence Center for Sandoz, expecting the next career step in IT, and the next day they asked me to take over the complete Supply Chain Management team for Lek d.d., which at that time had 100+ people. This was most probably the key moment, where I developed strong skills for change management and managed to turn around a rather sluggish

performance into one of the best teams in the whole group.

**How do you see your overall experience contributing to your new role as General Manager of an institution like ZZZS? What short-term and long-term goals and challenges do you anticipate in this position?**

I'm immensely proud that I received such strong support for my program within the ZZZS assembly as well as in the Slovene parliament. This

gives me the drive to address increasing challenges of an ageing population and increased costs of medicines and medical procedures. There is no magic formula to be applied; however, I offer my 25+ years of experience in change management, stakeholder liaison, and relentless drive for optimizations.

**How do you transition from being a technical expert in your field to becoming an inspiring leader who motivates and empowers others?**

Even as an “IT guy,” I always tried to look beyond the borders of a single department and tried to evaluate and appreciate the needs and interests of other stakeholders. Then my approach is to instill that appreciation into the team. Couple that with strong work ethics, going the extra mile—which people can observe—and the vast majority of leaders and people will follow.

**You’ve led a number of complex projects in your career, for instance, the construction of the Lendava biopharmaceutical center, which required a lot of resilience. How do you stay focused and lead effectively during challenging moments?**

**//**  
*Success has many different layers. For me, it means that I feel I made a difference after a potentially very long day—to my colleagues at work, to my work purpose and to people who love me and support me.*

**Prioritize / Execute / Review / Prioritize again** → In times when there is so much more that you should do than you actually can, being super focused on mid- to long-term objectives and not being distracted by everyday operational tasks is, in my opinion, one of the most important managerial skills.

**How do you balance the organizational goals of efficiency and innovation with the human side of management—ensuring your teams remain inspired and engaged?**

People and team dynamics were always my first focus. I truly believe that establishing



proper team dynamics and enabling people to work as productively as they possibly can is what makes an organization efficient and capable of transforming itself. Innovations will follow naturally.

**You’ve held demanding roles throughout your career. How do you prioritize personal time, and what advice do you have for maintaining well-being amidst professional responsibilities?**

To be honest, it was not always easy, and it took me a while to find what works best for me. I appreciate being able to work flexibly and during the times when I’m personally most productive. This enables me to accomplish more in a shorter period. New technologies also help a lot to shorten tasks and to be able to perform them from basically anywhere. Why not take a walk in nature when having a 1:1 meeting with your colleague or a virtual conference? Win-win.

**You are our alumnus of the General Management Program, and you’ve pursued education also at**

**prestigious institutions like Harvard and IMD. How has lifelong learning influenced your personal and professional growth?**

There are a few elements to that. Firstly, and naturally, you constantly get updates on what is new in the field of expertise. Secondly, through different trainings I learned how to think differently and approach challenges in many ways. And maybe even most importantly—you meet new people, build networks, and





appreciate different cultures.

**Had the GMP program had any particular impact on your career at the time, and what do you think were the best takeaways from your studies at IEDC?**

The GMP at IEDC is most probably one of the best holistic studies for “fresh” managers, as it gives a perfect foundation for the next steps in a career. For me, it was an experience and a set of skills to which I returned many times later in my career.

**Can you share a time when demonstrating empathy and kindness in your leadership role made a significant impact on someone’s life or career?**

One of my best managers, Markus, once told me, “As a manager, you need to learn how to hire and how to fire.” And indeed, it is with the utmost empathy you need to act if you are in a position to let someone go. One of the best examples is that I needed to restructure my department and let go of some associates. And with one of them, we later became best friends, and he thought that the process and discussions we

went through together were one of the best learnings he had. He is now a successful executive in one of the largest Slovenian companies.

**In your opinion, what does it mean to be successful—not just as a leader, but as a human being?**

Success has many different layers. For me, it means that I feel I made a difference after a potentially very long day—to my colleagues at work, to my work purpose and to people who love me and support me.

**Who has been your greatest mentor or role model, and how did their example influence the way you lead and live your life?**

I was lucky that I had a few

exceptional managers in my life who identified my strengths and built on them. If I had to pick one of them, it would be my manager in my first global role at Sandoz—JJ Hussey. His humble leadership style, ability to get the best out of people, and the way he constantly searched for a way forward by appreciating all stakeholders in the process was just incredible.

**When you look back on your career years from now, what legacy would you like to leave behind—for your team, your industry, and the community you serve?**

From my purely personal view, I created the most in my professional life in my last job as CEO of Lek d.d., by making sure Slovenia was selected as a “base camp” for the future biosimilar footprint by deciding to build development and manufacturing in our country. Most probably, the broader public will only see the impact in the next decade to come. And I am sure this is not the end of the success story. Now, in my first public role, my motivation is to contribute to our way of life in Slovenia—to make sure nobody is left behind when it comes to health and long-term care.



## WHAT ONE CANNOT FIND ON ROBERT'S RESUME



GMP 2008

**Robert Ljoljo**  
General Director,  
Health Insurance Institute of  
Slovenia (ZZSZ)  
SLOVENIA

*What's the latest TV series or movie you watched that you could recommend?*

*With my wife, we like to watch different things on Netflix. One of the last ones was a series called The Eternaut. Whilst being fictional, it is a staggering reminder of how fast humanity can face an extinction event and how unprepared we are.*

*If someone wrote a biography about you, what would the title be?*

*Hm, maybe "Never Give Up."*

*What's one book you've read recently that left a lasting impression on you and why?*

*It is not really my most recent reading; however, a book called The 100-Year Life by Lynda Gratton and Andrew J. Scott made a significant impact on my thinking. Just to quote: "If you are now 20, you have a 50% chance of living more than 100." What does that mean for our society and the way we live and work?*

*If you could swap jobs with any person in the world for one day, who would it be and why?*

*Not sure you can do a lot in one day, but if you're asking: it would be interesting to read through some hidden archives as the Pope :)*

*What's your guilty pleasure snack?*

*Quite often, dark chocolate—and sometimes Kremšnita, my favorite dessert.*

*If you were stranded on a deserted island, which three items (besides essentials) would you want with you?*

*Pen / paper / survival guide :)*

*What's a habit or hobby you have that most people wouldn't guess about you?*

*Maybe people wouldn't guess that I like to play with a flight simulator—and that I'm able to quite nicely take off and land in a "real-life" Airbus 320 simulator.*

*If you could instantly master any new skill or talent, what would you choose and why?*

*I would love to play an instrument. Never had any real talent for that. I think music is a universal language.*

*The greatest band of all times for you is...*

*Queen – some of the most impactful songs ever made, in my view.*