

»A SUCCESSFUL LEADER
KEEPS THE COMPANY AGILE
AND READY FOR MARKET
CHANGES OR CRISIS
SITUATIONS.«

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*Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova,
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From Technologist to CEO: What key values or habits have helped you grow within your organization?

My career path has largely been driven by my natural curiosity and commitment to operational excellence. I started in technology, which gave me a deep understanding of the entire process "from field to the table". My core values were accountability and integrity at every step. The habit that drove me was

continuous learning – not just about solutions, but understanding why those solutions are the best and how to improve them. A focus on people is also key; I believe that a company's success is a direct reflection of the success of its people.

What leadership lessons have you taken from your early days in manufacturing to your current role leading an international business?

The main lesson from

any manufacturing is the importance of presence and practical understanding. In operations, challenges and solutions are discovered in the field, not just in the office. This taught me that as a leader, you need to respect and listen to the people who are in the first line, on the ground. People working in production have the most valuable insights. It is necessary to act transparently, as unclear instructions or poor communication lead to errors throughout the chain. I am very proactive in solving

problems. A problem solved at the beginning prevents a cascading effect on the entire business.

These are the principles that I carry over into leading our multinational and multicultural team, which requires understanding the 'terrain' in each country while consistently implementing the standards we have set for ourselves.

How do you define success in a leadership role, especially in times of uncertainty or transformation?

I define success in a leadership role as creating long-term value and resilience, not just short-term profitability. In times of uncertainty, this means being able to adapt. A successful leader keeps the company agile and ready for market changes or crisis situations. They lead the company with a clear purpose and vision that transcends daily challenges, thus maintaining high morale and commitment. At the same time, they do not forget empathy and determination. A successful leader makes difficult but necessary decisions, while caring for his/her people.

The ultimate success is when a company emerges from a transformation or crisis

stronger, more innovative and more ethical than it was before.

You led Perutnina Ptuj through a significant evolution – from a meat producer to a comprehensive food company. What drove this transformation?

The driving force behind this transformation was simple: putting the consumer first and envisioning the future of food. We have moved beyond the 'meat production' mindset

way to successful business.

The goal was to create a food company of the future that is not only responsive, but proactively shapes the market in the region.

Would you say that enrolling into the Executive MBA at IEDC back in 2010 helped you in any way transform as a manager and a leader in a company? What would you say were the major takeaways? Anything that stuck with



and focused on 'offering comprehensive and safe food solutions'. We have done this by diversifying our portfolio, developing high-value products such as ready-to-eat meals and plant-based alternatives; by integrating sustainability into the entire chain, from farming to the final product, as consumers increasingly demand it, while at the same time, through innovation and digitalization, we have set up modern, efficient and transparent systems that help us on our

you and you still apply in your daily work?

Enrolling in the EMBA program at IEDC in 2010 was a key turning point in my career path. Until then, I had strong technical and operational knowledge, but IEDC brought me a broader business perspective, which allowed me to transform from an excellent technologist into a holistic manager. At the same time, I upgraded my strategic thinking and planning and

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further improved my ability of analyzing complex business cases.

What impressed me and I still use is a holistic approach to problem solving - I never look at a challenge in isolation, but always place it in the context of the entire organization and the market. The international network and perspective that IEDC offers is also invaluable.

On your career path, there was a short “detour” for 2.5 years to the Lactalis Group in Zagreb. Why did you leave Perutnina and what prompted you to return?

Leaving Perutnina for Lactalis was motivated by the desire to gain new experience in a different business environment and industry. At the Lactalis Group, a leading global player in the dairy industry, I had the opportunity to see and manage different processes, learn new management techniques and operate in a highly competitive international market. This was a valuable experience that broadened my understanding of multinational operations.

The decision to return to Perutnina Ptuj was emotional but at the same time driven by my strong professional interests. Perutnina Ptuj is my “home company”, I grew professionally with it. When the opportunity arose to lead the transformation of the company under the auspices of a new strategic partner, MHP, and to establish Perutnina Ptuj as a regional leader, I had to accept it. I returned because I believed that with the knowledge I gained, I could bring Perutnina

Ptuj to the next level, to the internationally successful leader in the field.

In what ways do proactive strategies and long-term planning give companies a competitive advantage, especially during crises such as the Corona pandemic or the war in Ukraine?

Proactive strategies and long-term planning are critical and significantly contribute to the resilience of a company.

In crises such as the pandemic or the war in Ukraine, competitive advantage lies primarily in a resilient supply chain, financial sustainability and rapid adaptation to change.

Long-term planning means diversifying suppliers and establishing ‘back-up’ scenarios, which ensures uninterrupted supply and production despite disruptions. Proactive risk and liquidity management ensures that the company can absorb sudden shocks (e.g. rising energy or raw material prices). Readiness for digitalization and automation enables a

rapid transition to new ways of working (remote working) and process optimization.

We were so well prepared that we maintained stability and even increased market share despite turbulent times.

How has belonging to the MHP Group enabled Perutnina Ptuj to expand its regional and international influence?

Belonging to the MHP Group, one of the leading players in the European food industry, has been an accelerator for Perutnina Ptuj. It has primarily provided us with capital strength and stability. Access to significant investment funds has been key to the modernization of production, digitalization and development of new products. This has enabled us to consolidate our position in existing markets, enter new ones and further strengthen Perutnina Ptuj brand.

What kind of corporate culture do you cultivate at Perutnina Ptuj and how do you ensure that it remains aligned with your strategic goals?



We cultivate a culture based on respect, responsibility and proactivity. The fundamental pillars of our culture are responsibility, transparency and open communication, as well as continuous improvement.

We encourage employees to take responsibility for their work and think like company owners. We welcome dialogue at all levels, which is key to quick decision-making and problem-solving, and encourage innovation and learning from mistakes.

We ensure alignment with strategic goals through the OKR (Objectives and Key Results) method and regular, transparent communication of achieved results. Every employee must understand how their contribution affects the overall strategic success of the company.

How do you balance traditional values with innovation when running a company with such deep roots in local communities?

The balance between tradition and innovation is key and we see it as a strength, not a weakness. We maintain traditional values, such as caring for the local environment, high quality standards, and partnership with local farmers. This is our heritage and a guarantee of consumer trust. And we use innovation to optimize and transform processes that enable the preservation of these traditional values and are in line with modern requirements (e.g. digitalization, sustainable packaging, new product development).

In this way, tradition ensures authenticity and commitment to quality, while innovation ensures efficiency and relevance in the modern market.

How are OKRs and digital transformation changing internal dynamics and accountability in operations?

The introduction of OKRs and digitalization have dramatically changed internal dynamics and increased accountability. OKRs have allowed all departments

time data necessary to monitor OKRs, making decisions faster and more evidence-based.

Animal welfare, antibiotic-free production, and plant innovation are key focuses of your group. How do you integrate sustainability into your core business strategy?

Sustainability is not an add-on, but the core of our business strategy, a key investment in the future and a competitive advantage. We integrate it at multiple levels.



and individuals to focus on a few key priorities for a specific period. This has prevented unnecessary waste of efforts and energy. Key results are measurable and transparent, meaning that everyone is clear about who is responsible for which goal and whether the goal has been achieved. Unclear goals are a thing of the past. Of course, this approach requires coordination between departments (vertically and horizontally), which has encouraged collaboration and certain “silos” to be broken.

Digital transformation has provided us with the real-

With certificates and strict standards, we ensure high animal welfare, which is directly linked to the quality of the final product and consumer demands. Antibiotic-free production is our highest quality standard.

We invest in reducing our carbon footprint, using resources efficiently and reducing waste throughout the chain.

We also innovate in order to future-proof our business, by developing plant-based products in response to changing eating habits and as

a strategic diversification of our portfolio. This is a visible expression of our commitment to being a holistic food company.

Where do you see the greatest opportunities for growth in the European food sector over the next 5 years - and how is Perutnina Ptuj preparing for them?

I see the biggest growth opportunities in the European food sector in three areas:

1. High-quality, safe and traceable food: Consumers are willing to pay more for food that is accompanied by a story of ethical and sustainable production.

2. Convenience and health: Growth in the segment of ready-made meals and semi-prepared meals that are healthy and fit into a fast-paced lifestyle.

3. Alternative proteins: Plant-based products and potential new sources of protein.

Perutnina Ptuj is preparing for these opportunities by continuously investing in standards and technology to maintain our leading role in quality and traceability. We are developing new, innovative product lines, especially in the segment of ready-made and semi-prepared meals and plant-based alternatives, while optimizing international supply chains for efficient coverage and penetration of new markets.

What was the most difficult

decision you had to make as a leader – and what did you learn from it?

The most difficult decisions are always related to human resources and restructuring. Personally, the most difficult decision was related to the necessary restructuring of some parts of the organization in the past. This included decisions that had a direct impact on the careers and lives of colleagues who had dedicated many years to the company.

I learned that you need to make decisions with your head, but act with your heart. The decision must be business-critical for the long-term survival and success of the company, but the implementation must be carried out with the utmost respect and support for those affected. It is also necessary to communicate honestly and transparently, because people can bear bad news if it is honest and explained with a clear vision of the future. However, the speed of decision-making is key. Sometimes a quick, albeit painful, decision is better for the company and individuals than a long delay in uncertainty.

How has Perutnina Ptuj

managed to remain resilient and even thrive despite external pressures such as inflation and geopolitical instability?

I attribute our resilience and success in turbulent times to operational excellence and efficiency, as well as the strength of the brand and consumer trust.

Through digitalization and automation, we have improved internal efficiency and reduced our dependence on rising energy and labor costs. The Perutnina Ptuj brand, which is synonymous with quality and safety, has maintained the loyalty of consumers who have chosen reliability in times of uncertainty.

A focus on high added value and cost optimization has enabled us to maintain margins despite inflation.

The MHP Group reported strong performance even during the war. What management principles or practices do you believe made this possible?

The strong performance of the MHP Group during wartime is a testament to exceptional resilience, strategic leadership,



and people commitment. This was made possible, among other things, by the “People First” approach, centralized crisis management and rapid decision-making and agility in operations.

This is an example of how leadership, ethical commitment and operational efficiency enable survival and success even in the worst circumstances.

What advice would you give to young professionals in the agri-food industry who are striving for leadership roles in large international companies?

Strive for comprehensive knowledge of the business. Understand not only your profession (e.g. technology), but also finance, marketing, logistics and, above all, people. Invest in understanding the entire value chain as best as possible, because the agri-food industry is complex. Successful leaders understand every step, from primary production to the relationship with the final consumer. An international mindset is important, which is why it is necessary to constantly learn languages, accept different cultures and be prepared to work abroad.



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Your personal story - fleeing the war in Bosnia and arriving in Ljubljana is a testament to resilience. What things helped you get through the tough times and how do you view this experience now?

This experience is truly the foundation of my resilience and work ethic. What helped me the most was my focus and gratitude.

The desire to get an education and create a decent life was stronger than any current challenge. I have always focused on what I can control – my work, my learning and my relationship with people. I also never forget where I come from. It keeps me grounded and grateful for the opportunities I have been given in Slovenia. The friendship and support of the local community have been invaluable. I view this experience as a gift that has given me an invaluable perspective. It has taught me that hard work, humility and commitment are values that are crucial in both life and business.

Business circles and not only are full of “big egos”, what do you think helps people at top positions to remain grounded?

Grounding at the highest levels is achieved by continuously being aware of the bigger picture and one’s own limitations. Three things help me personally:

1. Team: Surrounding myself with extremely talented and

sincere colleagues, who are willing to challenge me and tell the truth, regardless of hierarchy.

2. Responsibility: Knowing that my ego must not jeopardize the success of thousands of employees and their families. Responsibility to the company and the community is much greater than personal vanity.

3. Personal roots: Maintaining contact with family and old friends who see me as Enver and not as the “CEO”. This is the best corrective for a “big ego”.

What helps you relax after a particularly hard day?

After a hard day, I relax most easily in the company of family and friends and with physical activity. I really enjoy when I can take a day for myself in the Slovenian hills or when I manage to escape to the Istrian backroads on a motorbike. This is complete mental and physical relaxation for me.



WHAT ONE CANNOT FIND ON ENVER'S RESUME



EMBA 2010

Enver Šišić

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Management Board, Perutnina Ptuj,
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The best music band of all times for you?

It's hard to name one band, but Dire Straits and The Doors are the ones closest to my heart.

Last TV series you watched that you would recommend?

Succession!

Do you have a favourite childhood dish that immediately brings warm memories? What is it and why you love it?

Sandwich with Poli salami in a hot bun with pickles. Why I have loved this sandwich all these years probably doesn't require any special explanation. There is nothing better!

A country you have never been to yet and is on your bucket list to visit? Why?

The countries of the South and North Caucasus. I am fascinated by the rich history and natural beauty.

Any sports you follow and are a fan of?

I follow major sports events but I would hardly call myself a sports fan in the full sense of the word.

Have you ever owned a pet? What was their name?

I have a poodle called Kai. He is a great joy for the whole family.

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

I was addicted to reading and history when I was young. Later, different activities were among my hobbies - that came and went. My most recent interest is motorcycles. I want to visit many countries on a motorcycle.

Since you are in a poultry related business, so what came first – the egg or the chicken?

When it comes to business, it was definitely the chicken – the basic raw material and the foundation of our business. But if we look at the entire value chain, the key is the egg – the source of innovation and the potential for growth. Both are essential.