

insight

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Corporate Social Responsibility in Practice



In a series of 10 interviews with Business Leaders in the Czech Republic, Mark Hamill (pictured), Global Managing Director for SpenglerFox, an Irish Executive Search organization and external partner with UNICEF across the CEE markets discusses social, professional and corporate social responsibility challenges facing business leaders in these demanding times.

Jane Gilson is General Manager of Microsoft Czech Republic. She was appointed on October 11, 2007. She has been with the company's Czech branch since March 2007, originally serving as its Business and Marketing director. She has managed the branch as its Executive General Manager since July 2007.

Before joining the Czech Microsoft, Jane managed the Windows Embedded division in the company's headquarters in Redmond, WA, where she was responsible for product management marketing, alliances with business partners and users' awareness of Windows advantages for single-purpose solutions. During her time in the division, she launched various products including Windows Embedded Point of Service, Windows XP Embedded and Windows Embedded CE. She grew the Windows Embedded revenue double digits year over year while managing it from 2003-2007. Prior to her career in Microsoft, Jane worked on marketing management positions in Active Voice, Acadio Corporation, Talisma Corporation, iCat Corporation and KPMG Peat Marwick.

Jane Gilson graduated from University of Wisconsin with a bachelor's degree and continued her education at the Northwestern University where she received her Master of Science. Jane also graduated from the Microsoft Corporate Bench Program, an executive training program in 2006. In her free time, Jane is a keen athlete with passion for snowboarding and jogging. Her hobbies also include cooking and the historic architecture of old Czech towns.

As an expat in Prague, Jane enjoys dinners with both Czech and other expat friends in her Vinohrady apartment. When she goes downtown she enjoys a cocktail or glass of wine in either Tretter's or the Monarch wine bar. If she feels like staying local for a meal she enjoys the fish at Aromi. Thanks to Microsoft's office location, for business lunches she likes to go to either Grosseto or the Dock house.

When they have guests in town, Jane and her husband have a variety of 'Prague Tours' to take them on, ranging from a 'beer garden tour', to a 'senior citizens tour', to the 'fast tour' depending on the profiles of her guests. Her most enjoyable lazy afternoons in Prague are spent in Vysehrad walking the castle grounds, or enjoying a beer at the Jazz. The 'senior citizens' tour consists of lots of strategic chosen benches and involves lots of trams around Prague's sites!

If going outside Prague, then Cesky Krumlov, South Moravia and of course Ceske Budejovice are her favourite hot spots. As an American sampling the 'real Budweiser' in Ceske Budejovice is a special treat. Apart from that Jane and her husband spend their weekends discovering castles to visit, or just enjoying the weather lazing in Český Ráj by the forests.

Regarding the language, Jane carries a pocket dictionary around with her most of the time, and finds Czech people very helpful. Never afraid to ask for help or directions, Jane's favorite word is 'prosim' and she uses it a lot, and loves its double meaning of 'please' and 'your welcome'.

Having been here for 2 years, Jane is impressed by the teamwork ability of the Czechs. The spirit of teamwork is critical to success at Microsoft and they utilize cross group collaboration for many projects. Jane believes that companies who can foster great teamwork will be stronger and more successful through these challenging times. Employees are Microsoft's highest priority, therefore at Microsoft a lot of time and effort is spent focusing on people development.

Jane's recommendation to first time business leaders is to learn to set priorities and deliver clear and simple messages. You cannot be responsible for all, nor should you try as you will not succeed. Her advice is to focus your efforts on how to best manage your team and resources balancing short-term delivery with a long-term vision. If you can manage your people and spend your time focusing on their development you will be successful. Ultimately leaders need to be true to themselves and their values. You can't fake it, so be successful while being true to yourself.

Jane keeps in touch with the mentors she has had at different stages of her career from time to time, and sees how those relationships have changed as she has progressed through her career. Being true to yourself and giving people as much feedback as possible are part of her modus operandi. Jane stresses that if you want to grow as a business leader you need to be able to effectively delegate so you have more time for strategic thinking and other business challenges.

Regarding CSR, Jane believes that if you feel responsible to your community then you can see how your actions are important and she has personal experiences. During her work in Redmond, Jane also acted as a fundraiser for her division raising millions of dollars in the process. People in Microsoft believe that the most important area where they can help is giving all people access to modern technologies. Jane emphasizes that Microsoft's CSR strategy also directly affects its business success in the Czech Republic because it increases computer literacy and helps spread the skills necessary to use the latest technologies and software. Another positive effect of the CSR activities is the building of a knowledge society and highly qualified labor force that is crucial for all companies today, not just those in the IT business.

Jane, while rarely turning her smartphone off, does practice correct smartphone etiquette – she never leaves it on the table when at a customer or partner meeting or while having dinner with her husband! She receives about 300 emails per day, but uses Outlook to help prioritize her mails. She

prioritizes her mails according to how urgent, or if sent only to her, or from a team member, her boss, or from Bill Gates..She makes a point to respond to all mails, but without the ability to prioritize she would never be able to get through them all. Due to the time difference with the US, she will always check emails in the morning to see if anything urgent happened overnight that she may need to respond to.

Jane feels work/life balance is a personal decision. As she gets older, she is getting better with achieving that balance and knows that when things are hot she will be busy, but will ensure that she gets her downtime to compensate when the time is right. During the business planning and review season things are crazy and the hours long, so the sacrifice is made, but on the other side of it she will make sure she gets the time needed to recharge.

As a child Jane at different stages held dreams to be a criminal psychologist, attorney and later to be a pilot. Always one for a sense of adventure, she never thought she would become the GM for Microsoft in the Czech Republic but is very pleased with her decision to move to Czech Republic and take on the role here. She wouldn't change a thing. At some stage in the future Jane would like to go back to her Masters University - Northwestern University - to teach and give back to students.

For those who find themselves 'on the market' currently Jane advises, to keep optimistic and be flexible, see what transferable skills you have and possibly try something completely different. It could be a good time to 'retool' or apply for a post-graduate or further studies.