

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

As of February 1, AmCham Slovakia has a new Executive Director. Martina Slabejová took over AmCham's leadership after Ronald Blaško, who has more than successfully guided the chamber through challenging times since June 2018. We asked both of them to share their thoughts on AmCham's role and vision, as well as their personal values and experience.



RONALD BLAŠKO
Former Executive Director
AmCham Slovakia

Ronald Blaško served as GLOBSEC Vice President for corporate and strategic relations until 31 May 2018. He spent ten years in various capacities at Slovenské elektrárne, including executive director of an engineering subsidiary corporation. Ronald served as external affairs representative at Foratom in Brussels, for two years. He holds a master's degree in aviation and transportation from the University of Žilina and a postgraduate degree in international economics from Kiel Institute for the World Economy. Ronald Blaško has over 13 years of experience in public finances, management consultancy, insurance, European nuclear safety and energy sector risk management.

What are the key lessons you are taking away from your years at AmCham?

(RB) There are many lessons I have learned at AmCham since I joined it in 2018 and for which I am grateful. Should I limit them to only to the key ones I would focus on the following half dozen:

1. Delegate as much responsibility as possible
2. Don't be afraid of showing your disappointment and dissatisfaction
3. Look for clever instead of like-minded friends and colleagues
4. Make unavoidable decisions before you have to
5. Keep your intellectual interests much broader than your work requires
6. Pursue some activities where you can really excel

Plus one extra lesson which is impossible to pursue while being at AmCham 😊 (unless there is another lock down). Limit the number of meetings and social gatherings (provided you have already built your social network) as much as possible.

What made you accept the offer to become AmCham's next executive director?

(MS) I've known AmCham Slovakia for more than 20 years, from the time when I was a junior sales person at Microsoft Slovakia and one of my first managers at Microsoft became the president of AmCham. While I was working in the public sector, I cooperated closely with AmCham and its member companies, mostly from the ICT industry. And

surprisingly, during my time in the real estate industry, we found a very important path of cooperation with AmCham related to the post pandemic situation. We were both involved in the effort to motivate people in the organizations to return to offices, and help the organizations implement meaningful safety and health guidelines.



Our mission is to create an environment hungry for new information, hungry for innovations, aspiring to learn and explore, to apply new solutions and not to be afraid to make mistakes.

MARTINA SLABEJOVÁ



However, what made me accept the job offer was the ability and potential which this position and this organization represents through its members: to make a difference and

to make an impact in the society in areas such as Rule of Law, Innovation represented by Digital, AI, or Healthcare, Education and Regional Development.

With experience from both sides and having worked for business and the government in the past, I see a great potential and opportunity in how business can help and support the government and vice versa.

How would you define AmCham's role in improving the business environment in Slovakia and in being the voice of the local business community?

(MS) AmCham represents the needs of the business community and supports the creation of a healthy and efficient business environment with opportunities for innovation, talents, business growth and prosperity. Together with our partners, we are trying to unify our voices for the benefit of our members and of the society at large. We aim to bring the topics we consider critically important to the table of the government representatives and politicians not just in Slovakia, but also in Brussels.

The labor market, taxes, GDP per capita - the overall ratings of our country are impacted and created by our members and their businesses. Without creating a good business environment, they are not able to invest and grow.

(RB) Rather than trying to define this role I would say that AmCham's potential



MARTINA SLABEJOVÁ
Executive Director
AmCham Slovakia

Martina Slabejová's previous working experience covers more than 17 years in the IT industry and over four years in the real estate industry. Before joining AmCham, she was the Group Leasing Director at HB Reavis, leading a group of leasing professionals across five countries, as well as co-creating new hybrid work strategies. She also served as the Director General, Department of Informatics Society Management at the Office of Deputy Prime Minister for Investments, and Informatics between 2016 and 2018. Prior to that, she spent 17 years at Microsoft, moving through various positions, ultimately serving as the Government Industry Director for Central and Eastern Europe, covering 33 countries. She holds a PhD in Economics and Suitability from the Comenius University in Bratislava as well as an MBA in economics from INSEAD Seattle.



is still greater than what has been achieved during my leadership. And that offers Martina plenty of opportunities for further growth.

What skills and experience from your previous positions can you now put to good use at AmCham?

(MS) My knowledge of diverse areas of business industries, of various managerial positions and an extensive experience in how different regions and countries work and manage things - all of these present a huge advantage for me at AmCham. Also, the network I've built during my professional career will be a good base for communication. And above all, my result driven attitude, my daring energy and confident passion to fight for good things, to inspire change and help guide any process into practical application- these are all parts of who I am and I relied on this combination to achieve the desired results at all positions I've held.

Your almost five-year tenure as AmCham's director covered various difficult and challenging periods - most importantly the Covid-19 pandemic, but also a move to new premises in Jurkovicova Teplareň. How did you perceive them then and how do you evaluate them now?

(RB) The global pandemic was tough for everybody and we were no exception. Thanks to our agility we were able to function distantly from the very first day of the lockdown. We adopted some new models for working and some of them we have been using ever since. But for an organization well-known also for its high quality social gatherings, it was very difficult to keep our members fully content

without this kind of service. Therefore I am very glad that after a three year break we could once again organize with great success our traditional Thanksgiving Gala Charity Dinner in November 2022. As to the office moving after fifteen years in Hotel Crowne Plaza, it was inevitable. The result speaks volumes.

Looking back, what are the achievements you appreciate the most?

(RB) All the achievements, and there are many, have been accomplished by the AmCham team with great support of our Board of Directors and precious members. It is not easy to single out the most important ones as only time will show which are going to have the biggest positive impact. However, already now I am glad to say that AmCham is in very good shape in terms of its reputation, quality of content, events and members plus financial stability. Furthermore, despite many misgivings around our decision to move to Jurkovičova tepláreň, the feedback we received from our members, partners, as well as the AmCham staff, has proved the skeptics wrong. On the other hand, I would love to see AmCham's positive impact on the Slovak business environment to be even bigger.

What are you most looking forward to in the months to come?

(RB) There will be much less meeting requests and no invitations to social gatherings in my mail box.

What are the challenges you are looking forward to the most in your new role?

(MS) Individualism in a negative connotation - favoring personal needs

over anything else - and growing aggression in the society have both increased rapidly over the past two years. It created a lot of insecurity.

Passivity at different levels of our society, partially driven by external events such as the war in Ukraine and the Covid-19 pandemic, but also by the politicians, media, and individuals - all this creates fear.

Lack of motivation and energy to learn new things created stagnation and this is crucial. That's where I would like to focus my energy and the energy of our team. Our mission is to create an environment hungry for new information, hungry for innovations, aspiring to learn and explore, to apply new solutions and not to be afraid to make mistakes - but in a secure environment.



Keep your intellectual interests much broader than your work requires.

RONALD BLAŠKO



The attitude of passivity goes hand in hand with a lack of trust. Our role, along with other organizations, is to help build that trust: trust in people around you, trust in businesses in Slovakia, trust in the government and political representatives,

trust in education, trust in society, trust in media, trust in the judicial system, and trust in ourselves.

What are the values and principles that characterize your leadership approach?

(MS) I believe in teamwork; teamwork creates a base for quality and success. I seek efficiency, fostering the success of my team and organization, our members and I support creativity. I've always celebrated diversity, supportive leadership, and critical feedback.

It's good to be always willing to transform and modify yourself and to simply have passion for life, work, and exploring the world around us. I call it The Joy of Life. And one of my managers from the past, a very smart lady from the UK, helped me define this principle.

I am not afraid to take responsibility and I do my best to act respectfully with an appropriate level of humility.

My core values are collaborations, accountability, entrepreneurial approach, openness and honesty, flexibility, innovation, responsiveness and authenticity and I will be happy to mirror those into the day-to-day life of AmCham.

What is your main source of joy and motivation outside of work?

(MS) My family and friends, Bratislava Koliba forest during all seasons is a source of my re-energizing therapy, books, good movies, music, travel.

(RB) The main source of joy for me are my little daughter, wife and nature. I find motivation once again in my family and nature

plus smart positive people and of course great books.

What is your personal vision for AmCham for the next few years?

(RB) I leave it to Martina to define her new vision for AmCham and wish her a lot of success in fulfilling it.

(MS) We are in the election year, and I believe the priorities presented by business organizations such as AmCham and other partners will be an integral part of the new government's proposals. I believe that those recommendations will find their place in its action plans and I want to believe they are going to be implemented.

Do you have any advice for Martina, the incoming executive director?

(RB) Martina is a very experienced manager so I am not sure I am in a position to give her any advice. Especially if I agree with the advice from singer Taylor Swift "I never give advice unless someone asks me for it. One thing I've learned, and possibly the only advice I have to give, is to not be that person giving out unsolicited advice based on your own personal experience." Nevertheless, I might share one recommendation from American journalist Herbert Bayard Swope, which is very useful in her new role: "I cannot give you the formula for success, but I can give you the formula for failure - which is: Try to please everybody."

(MS) I would like to add that I want to thank Ronald for the great work he delivered in the past five years. It will be an honor for me to continue in this effort, and to sustain and further grow the level of service which Ronald and his team have established.