

I want people to know that in the 21st century they don't have to smoke

Andrea Gontkovičová started her career as an assistant and today she is Director for Innovation and Commercial Development at Phillip Morris for the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. She was awarded the Absolute Slovak Woman of the year 2019 award and, besides managing, she also mentors women who, she says, need to gain confidence.

At Phillip Morris, you are Director of Innovation and Commercial Development. How is the tobacco industry innovating?

Many people know Philip Morris International (PMI) as a producer of standard cigarettes, but we made a key decision a few years ago that we wanted to stop selling cigarettes, provided we could succeed with our innovative business model. There are only a few products that have radically changed the direction of an industry. We believe IQOS is one of them. For me personally, the success of this product is a life goal.

Isn't it best to just quit smoking?

Yes it is, and we recommend it to every smoker. However, there is a group of adult smokers who never stop smoking and so we wanted to solve the main problem of smoking. This is not tobacco or nicotine, but the combustion of the cigarette. We decided to work in this area and offer the consumer a product that would give them tobacco and nicotine satisfaction, but with a lower negative health impact. We have been working on developing heat control technology to maintain a constant temperature well below the burning point, and we have successfully applied our knowledge, effort and technological possibilities. Like any tobacco product, it contains nicotine, which is addictive. Therefore, the best solution for health is never to start, or stop smoking completely.

Do you encounter negative reactions when you tell people you work for a tobacco company?

Not very often, but yes, I have. I don't want to criticize anyone, but mostly it was prejudice. This is especially true now, because my biggest goal is for people to stop smoking and switch to IQOS. Quitting smoking is always the number one option. If I have the opportunity to talk to people on this subject, they understand the essence of this project. The change is not only about smokers.

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You are also involved in mentoring, equal pay, and gender diversity in the workplace. Do you see engaging on these topics as a social responsibility?

Yes. I see it as a way to encourage women to not be afraid to take part in this dialogue. It is important to realize that the best ideas and decisions are usually made in gender-balanced teams, i.e. with equal representation of men and women at all levels.

Has your work ever made you cry?

Yes, and not just once. However, it is important to recognize the

importance of your decisions and consider whether your goal is worth it. For me, a project like IQOS is worth it and I want to continue working on it. At such moments, it is important to have family support and I have my three musketeers at home, who always support me.

During the interviews, you mentioned there is a great chance waiting for every person - what was yours?

My husband. I couldn't imagine my life without him. We wanted to live as a family, we have two children and we did not have anybody to help us. We are both from the Tatras, from one town and he used to live on the next street. We are both from ordinary, poor families. During our childhood, we cycled below the Tatra Mountains together, and although we have known each other all our lives, we only started going out together during college. We have been growing professionally all our life - he became a lawyer and I started to grow at PMI. I went to Switzerland and then to Prague, which meant he had to stay at home. He took a career break and since then only I have been able to grow professionally, but we are developing personally together. My husband is the best chance I got.

What does your work for PMI mean to you?

It's a life mission. I want people in the 21st century to know they don't have to smoke cigarettes anymore. Whether they choose IQOS or an alternative, it is their choice. If they decide to quit smoking completely, we will be even happier.



ANDREA GONTKOVICOVÁ

Director for Innovation and Commercial Development for the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, Phillip Morris International



BIOGRAPHY

Andrea Gontkovičová was born in Liptovský Mikuláš and lived in Svit from early childhood. She studied at high school in Poprad and received a doctorate in translation and interpreting in English and Spanish at the Comenius University in Bratislava. Since 1997, she has worked at Philip Morris International, taking a number of posts in Bratislava, Lausanne and Prague. Last year, she moved to Prague, where she is managing business development and innovation in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. She is in charge of developing the IQOS product.

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