

## **NARRATOR**

Olga Girstlova is 43. She's the General Director of GITy Telecommunications, and a mother of four. In 1999 she was the first Czech woman to receive the Leading Business Woman of the World award in Monaco. And she was one of the founders of an international conference under the banner, A Woman, - A creative personality in the third millennium.

### **Olga Girstlova, General Director, GITy Telecommunications**

I believe that a top manager has to give as much energy as a top athlete. That's why I've organised my daily life to suit.

I asked myself a question.

How can I survive? Survive long-term not just for a short time. When I'm 60 or 70 I want to be in good shape and I'm looking forward to this enormously because that is a perfect age.

But something has to be done right now in order to enjoy that age later. The right conditions must be created. We must combine a healthy regime with regular sport and relaxation including a certain amount of holiday throughout the year. That's important.

What was there at the start of our firm? Three people decided to start from scratch with a capital of 100,000 Czech crowns, about 3,500 US dollars. Our company grew very rapidly. This meant that we three, my dad, my husband and I, had to manage a situation of literally rocketing growth. Of course we had and still have to work hard. When we reached a turnover of a billion Czech crowns in 1995, that's 40 million dollars, we said to ourselves, 'that was a very good beginning'. We enjoyed it. We wanted to pick up the tradition of Czech pre-war enterprise, to strive for success.

I'm sure that there is something special about the female creative approach to company management. Because women have a natural ability to create a harmonious environment, because of centuries of experience in organising the household and rearing children we are predisposed to management activities, handling functional processes in the company, creating the company climate and culture and so on.

At the beginning, I didn't expect to have four children. That was not a conscious decision, it just happened. But I must say that I'm glad. Our life has been enriched by them. We had them at different ages so that they make a kind of team. The whole family has to co-operate and we're all team mates. But I think that's very fulfilling.

## **NARRATOR**

International business successes like GITy, aren't yet common in the Czech Republic and they attract attention. Even more so when one of the top managers is a woman.

Olga and her husband want their three younger children to grow up away from the media spotlight. That's why you won't see them in this programme. Today, the birth rate in the Czech Republic is low. One reason is most companies won't employ mothers with small children.

### **Olga Girstlova**

I had my first two children before the company was founded. My son was born in the company's third year and I always found a solution. It's about organising one's time and having a good understanding with your partner. I must say that my husband has always supported and helped me. It's also about ensuring that there's help with the housework.

It's very difficult to forget work problems when you come home, though usually I manage. But when there's a crisis, which sometimes happens in the company, then we have to think it over and find a solution. And we discuss it with the children. Of course we don't tell them what our problems are, but we explain to them that they will see us less often for a while and as soon as we can resolve it, we'll spend more time with them again.

We are trying to ensure our children live their lives freely, that's why we live in a village where they can play freely with their friends and join in other activities. They live ordinary children's lives. They're not in an isolated, socially elite group. It is important to be aware of ordinary life around you and to follow the maxim, think globally and live locally. We're therefore trying to support local businesses.

It is also important to help create a quality infrastructure in this country. That is essential for mothers with small children. They could work from home, but this requires connecting towns and villages to the internet. New jobs would then appear. Women living in regions with higher unemployment could offer their skills via the internet.

As a business woman, I feel responsible for my employees. If you have 500 employees in the company, this means 500 families. And I often feel this pressure when making decisions. The quality of my decisions could influence the chances of these people getting long-term jobs.

We have a female assistant, an excellent and skilled worker. She gave birth to twins and was on maternity leave. She was single, without a husband and in a difficult situation. Our company helped her by paying a nurse for three years so that she had someone to take care of the children. We could afford it because of her performance at work.

One always has to assess the situation on an individual basis and then decide what working conditions should be provided.

My husband is President of the company and Chairperson of the Board. He's number one. My position is number two, General Director and Vice Chairperson. We have it on our mobile phones too. He's number one, I'm number two.

I see working with my husband as a plus. It's often demanding and difficult. But the delight of being successful together outweighs any friction there may be. In the end, it's not important that one of us sees the situation as orange and the other sees it as blue. Agreement is what counts.

### **Valentin Girstl**

In a way, business is more difficult for women than for men because women weren't given many of the things nature gave to men.

But Olga compensates for the innate combative nature of men. Of course those with enough testosterone, by her charm and her other qualities and skills.

**Olga Girstlova**

Our eldest daughter was in the process of choosing between medicine and business. We could have afforded for her to go any college in the world but she decided to study here in Brno, and work at the same time. It was her own personal decision.

**Olga Stepanova, Director of Human Resources, GITy**

Working in a family firm has its advantages and disadvantages. I think this is because my bosses are my parents. They make many more demands on me than the other managers.

**Olga Girstlova**

When our eldest daughter moved out at the age of 18 during her last year at school, it was very hard for me.

**Olga Stepanova**

I wanted to become independent. To show my parents that I'm able to look after myself.

**Olga Girstlova**

I feel our lifestyle has an indirect influence on our children. We can't change it much any more. We are what we are.

**Olga Stepanova**

I think mum can be rather strict, but not always.

**Olga Girstlova**

Olga does not get any preferential treatment at all. Should anything happen to us, she must be able to take over the firm. She has been trained for that. That would mean either developing the firm further or selling it. But she must be able to take care of her brother and sisters because they are still small and need to study. So she has been trained to handle difficult situations. The essence of business training is to guide children to think creatively, thinking in terms of opportunities not problems. We started to work with schools and promote education for business. When children start to think in terms of the problems that parents discuss in their presence, they don't see the opportunities around them. When you guide children in the direction of opportunities, they develop in a totally different way.

**Olga Girstlova**

I have no feelings of loss. I feel rather enriched by the business. I have gained new knowledge, new opportunities and new better relations with people.