

Customer First: American Mentality in Hungarian Guise, IT Business & Technology

“I would like to be a recognised name in the profession, because I can create value for my clients”

In Hungary, having two university degrees and living overseas in the US is a dream come true. Nevertheless, this senior Executive Search consultant has reached professional fulfilment in Hungary. The catchy slogan “customers first” is often nothing more than empty words, but in this case, it is the exception that proves the rule. Overseas work ethic as the attitude to live by – Franciska Kiss interviews Tamás Gönczi, Client Partner at Pedersen & Partners.

“Attitude is the first quality that marks the successful man. If he has a positive attitude and is a positive thinker, who likes challenges and difficult situations, then he has half his success achieved” – Lowell Peacock’s rarely-heard quote comes to my mind while the elegant, low-key but confident Executive Search consultant sitting in front of me talks about his journey from American universities to the world of HR and Executive Search in our tiny country.

“I wanted to be a partner who does not just send a couple of CVs”

“When I was a university student, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I went to the University of Hawaii and later to the University of Montana in the US. In the first few years it is easy to change majors, so I started with IT and then switched to economics. I earned my second degree in human resources management and industrial relations at the University of Minnesota,” Mr. Gönczi says. “I have always been attracted to consulting, but my first job and my brother’s example were really decisive. My brother had become a CEO at a very young age and through him I saw early on how business leaders think and how focused they are on results, which eventually had a great influence on how I work now. Also, in my first job in the US I saw HR consultants working up close and I could see how they fit into the structure of an organisation, how they communicate and how much value they can create,” he adds. “I believe those early experiences strongly affected who I am today.”

Mr. Gönczi, who has also gained experience working in company HR and recruitment roles, says it is partly due to chance that he is now working in the field of Executive Search. “I think HR is a fantastic and very rich field, but after a while I realised that I need the fast pace and excitement of recruitment. Therefore, I left my HR job and joined a recruitment company. Ultimately, I wanted to get deeper into the project, to provide more value. I wanted to be a partner who does not just send a couple of resumes but has a deep understanding of the specific business field and truly advises organisations. And I have the opportunity to gain an understanding and build deeper relationships with our clients in my current firm, Pedersen & Partners,” he says.

Customers first: a phrase often reflected only in advertisements

At his current workplace, Mr. Gönczi has not only an overview of the Hungarian market, but also of the markets of the surrounding countries. This does not only provide a basis for comparison, but also creates an opportunity to learn about and share best practices, from which clients can benefit. However, Mr. Gönczi believes that there are other benefits to having international experience. “If you live or work in the US, you can acquire a work ethic, a work attitude that can be used at home too. To sum up, everyone there is trying to do what they excel at, and they want to create value in it. One has to be focused, fast, efficient, with a ‘customer first’ approach if one wants to succeed. If you don’t know something, you do not form an opinion about it,” Mr. Gönczi observes. “It is important that the client feels that our projects are successful and that is why I strive to be flexible and accommodating in many areas.”

Supporting the success of his approach, Mr. Gönczi mentions several decade-long collaborations with clients and some high-profile searches at CxO level that made waves in the business community. “As far as the challenges are concerned, dealing with uncertainty is the most difficult part. Our clients give us the ideal profile of the leaders they would like to hire, but until the time we can start ‘manufacturing’ candidates, there will hardly be candidates that are a 100% match to a profile,” remarks Mr. Gönczi with a smile on his face. “In the meantime, relying on our deep market knowledge that we have acquired over the years, we need to continually support our clients to find and recruit the best possible executives. In this case, the previously mentioned positive attitude, transparency and search for solutions are essential,” the consultant adds.

What do the employer and the candidate need?

Of course, every employer and every role require a different mix of competences, but in the modern workplace Mr. Gönczi believes that it is indispensable to be open to changes, to want to constantly learn and improve, to be reliable and to be self-reflective. Mr. Gönczi also mentions that employers typically like candidates who have a clear aim, a professional goal that they strive to achieve.

When it comes to employers, Mr. Gönczi believes that “transparency in a company is motivating for employees, as well as a strong team atmosphere where employees feel that they can belong to where they are supported.” He also mentions that “constant feedback is key, but not only pointing out areas to improve, as it is also important to give positive feedback.”

What is the role of HR leaders in a company?

When it comes to HR leaders, Mr. Gönczi believes that “the greatest challenge for HR leaders is to maintain a credible and independent voice to find the right balance between management and the employees. They need to be able to keep their independence of senior management and of employees as well yet be able to represent the interests of both sides. At the end of the day, this means that they need to represent the interest of the company they work in. In some ways they need to act as the CEO of the company, with a strong focus on people.”

Work-life balance

Mr. Gönczi says that “it is hard to find true balance nowadays when business has become so fast, but for me my family and tennis are an endless source of energy.”

The interview was conducted by Franciska Kiss. Read the original version [here](#).



Tamas Gönczi is a Client Partner at Pedersen & Partners. Mr. Gönczi joined the firm in 2007. He has been advising clients on the recruitment of senior management across the Technology, Consumer Goods, Services and Industrial sectors, with a focus on roles generating growth and driving international expansion. Leveraging the international network of Pedersen & Partners Mr. Gönczi has managed several cross-border and regional searches in CEE, Western Europe and the USA. He previously worked as a Consultant for an international recruitment firm. Prior to entering the Executive Search industry, Mr. Gönczi gained Human Resources management expertise within the Travel, Leisure, & Hospitality industry in Hungary and worked in the Technology sector in San Francisco, USA. Mr. Gönczi has a BA degree in Economics from the University of Montana and an MA degree in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations from the University of Minnesota, U.S.A. He speaks fluent Hungarian, English and French.

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