

Uniting purpose



and profitability

Interview

_ Philomena Colatrella, CEO and Chair of the Corporate Executive Committee
CSS Insurance

Published in SMART insights 2023 magazine
In cooperation with



ergon

smart
people –
smart
software®

Philomena Colatrella is CEO and Chair of the Corporate Executive Committee at CSS Insurance. She describes herself as an all-rounder, combining a business brain with empathy and a thirst for knowledge. She is fascinated by the interplay between profitability and purpose, and firmly believes that a collaborative corporate culture is everything in a healthy company.

What drives you?

Definitely my curiosity and need to keep learning. Personal growth is the thing I love most. The more complex an issue, the more stimulating I find it. I need to keep things moving. I also get inspired talking to the teams. They know that I enjoy talking with them.

You see complexity as stimulating, then?

It fires the imagination and encourages joined-up thinking. It gives me a real 3D view of things. My business brain needs the big picture if I am to lead with vision, and delve deep into what the future will bring.

Where does that entrepreneurial spirit come from?

I think you're born with it. As a child I often went to stay with my grandparents in Italy. I would pick blackberries with my cousins and sell them on the side of the road. Drivers would stop and buy them.

Where did you go from there?

Home life gave me a keen awareness of what employees want and need. The positions I have had in business gave me an understanding of the business side. Ultimately it's about balancing the two. It inspired me to pursue healthy enterprise.

What else do you get from your family?

Ambition. And a fighting spirit, to put everything I have into finding good solutions.

So you're an idealist at heart?

I'm both a realist and an optimist at the same time. When I joined CSS as a lawyer and worked on some initial restructuring projects, I got an insight into the countless dimensions of the company. It led me to the question that I have tried to answer every day since: what is the true value of a company, and how do you create it?

In the case of CSS, this means 'who am I benefitting'? Is it patients, society, or the healthcare system as a whole? I'm fascinated by the business, profit-orientated side just as much as the need for meaningfulness. How can you do business in a good, human way?

Who had a particular influence on your career?

My former boss. He helped me to realise that I can achieve the balance between profitability and purpose that I'm looking for. It isn't a dichotomy. That mindset is the perfect fit for CSS, because it has embodied that balance since 1899.

How did it feel to be appointed CEO?

It was excitement combined with no small amount of respect. I question myself constantly. But that reflectiveness also helps me to stay grounded when things are going well, and to make rational decisions in times of crisis.

What is your decision-making process?

Facts, facts, and more facts. Collect, analyse and question. Anyone who really knows me knows that I would rather ask too many questions than too few.

“I would rather ask too many questions than too few.”

Autonomy is important in a work setting because ...

... it encourages
people's intrinsic
motivation and
engagement. It boosts
intellectual potential
and is crucial to
a corporate culture
based on trust.

How would you describe your management style?

Managing by walking around! I don't just mean in the literal sense, but also with mental empathy. You should be thinking along with your colleagues, sharing their thoughts and feelings, and speaking with them. You also need to cultivate a good balance between closeness and distance. For me, managing by walking around represents our healthy, human corporate culture. The working environment should encourage autonomy and initiative.

What are the most important qualities in a manager?

Integrity, sincerity and honesty are essential virtues. That said, the most important of all is the ability to listen actively and let your staff say what they need to say.

Does this integrity also extend to collaboration with externals?

Of course. Our Code of Conduct underscores the importance of our collaborative corporate culture. Ergon works in much the same way. That is probably why we work so successfully together. Openness, enthusiasm and trust really mean something.

Why are you excited about digitalisation?

I'm intrigued by how to translate the analogue world into the digital age, and in so doing, make it better and more efficient. Digitalisation is full of opportunities, especially in healthcare. Telemedicine is one example. It will make it possible in future to serve patients remotely, with more targeted treatment. And that can also help to cut costs.

Your recipe for success?

Get colleagues at all levels fully on board with my own enthusiasm and appreciation. />

“What is the true value of a company, and how do you create it? That's the crucial question.”

**Interested
in more?**

Digitisation projects
Change makers
Tech trends

Order now

ergon.ch/smart-2023

