

CONFERENCE

Talking about my generation

In the same week that the EU warned firms could be sanctioned from 2020 for not picking female candidates if they have a less than 40% share of women on their board, AmCham hosted its annual Diversity Conference and Women of Excellence Award.



And while in previous years the conference has looked at themes such as Roma inclusion and rehabilitating the physically less able into society, this year the topic was perhaps less obvious, but no less important: generation diversity.

In a sense, the generation issue was reflected in the Women of Excellence Award, too. Now in its third year, the first two incarnations took work/life balance and leadership as their themes. To have achieved either, candidates had to have the experience

of years behind them. This time the focus was put squarely on the younger generation, with an upper age limit of 35.

The award grew out of conversations AmCham was having with Morgan Stanley, which already promoted a similar event in Asia, and Mars Hungary. Both have remained major sponsors, as have Citibank and Jabil, and the first three also provided moderators for the panel discussions.

The first, dealing with Generation Y, was moderated by Éva Bressyenyiszky,

an executive director at Morgan Stanley Hungary Analytics Ltd. Had anything from her panel surprised her? "During the preparations it was a very nice surprise to hear that it is not just the MNCs who are promoting inclusion, but also entrepreneurs, sociologists and advisory people all feel this is the right way. In Generation Y there is a very clear understanding of what are good strategies," she said. She also thought the audience could be reassured that it is not lacking in maturity. "Generation Y is trying to find remedies, to work on the issues and to be

WOMEN OF EXCELLENCE SHORTLIST

KATALIN BÁRSONY Sociologist, film director, and managing director of the Románia Foundation. Previously, as a journalist she has won international awards with her documentary and video reports.

BARBARA BASKA Ad designer, artist, and camera operator. At 14 she designed the image for a European Council project called Democracy for School. Studied at the University of Arts and the University of Theatre and Film. Her diploma film, *Kálmár*, was shown in the Unifilm cinema, and was invited to the Hungarian Film festival (Filmszemle) in 2012.

HENRIETT DINÓK Lawyer, at present a researcher at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences' Social Science Researcher Center of the Institution of Law. She was a researcher at the University of Chicago until this fall. Involved with civil organizations such as the European Roma Rights Center and the Helsinki Commission. She is the member of the curatorium of the Chance for Children with Disadvantaged Backgrounds Foundation, and a volunteer worker at the Romaversitas Foundation.

BORBÁLA FELLEGI Social politician, criminologist, founder and managing director of the Foresee Research Team, the only NGO in Hungary dedicated to giving scientific answers to the complex questions of preventing and reducing social inequality.

SZILVIA GYURKÓ A lawyer, as a teacher at ELTE she became the professional leader of a program called law clinic. For years she has been a staff member of the National Institute of Criminology. She was a leader of the Family Child Abuse Association (Család, Gyerek, Ifjúság Egyesület), and has been the legal advisor to several important organizations. At present she is advocacy director of UNICEF Hungary.

part of the solution. It is a very positive attitude and good to hear."

One other important message had come out of the panel, she said. "It is important to go abroad to really appreciate the world and to learn, but it is even more important to come back after a while and share what you have learned." Although this was the sixth diversity

between Generation Y and the Baby Boomers; it actually transfers a lot of knowledge from one to the other."

As for the award, he believes it is beginning to have an effect, though the process is inevitably a lengthy one. "It and its aims are a long-term investment, because we are trying to change attitudes, and that needs time. I believe it is a good investment, I see very high



conference, and the third time the award had been presented, Bresztyenszky warned that there was much to do, adding that Morgan Stanley remained deeply committed. "Promoting diversity with these events is absolutely essential for us... I feel in this region there is a backlog. It was not on the agenda before the '90s and the system change. People just were not aware, and society was traditionally paternalistic. This does seem to be something specific to CEE, this backlog of progress and a social system that supports staying at home, which is both good and bad, of course. It is not just an issue for women; from a responsible employer's point of view it is a huge challenge."

The "middle-aged" panel fell to Zsolt Mayer, the corporate affairs director of Mars Hungary. "This generation is somehow a bit of a contradiction: they are flexible, because of their education in the late '80s, right before the political and economic changes," explained Mayer. "Although they underestimate themselves somewhat, they have learned that if they have a vision they can make it out there. This generation is a bridge

interest at these events, the award is getting more widely known," he said.

"The candidates this year were very diverse and colorful, from different fields, like the arts and NGOs. This is exactly what we wanted. I think we should find a way to make more use of previous winners as ambassadors. And in a couple of years' time, when we have five winners, perhaps we could get them to do something together, because they will have a real diversity of ages, backgrounds, and careers."

Kornelia Vass, the country human resources officer for Citibank Hungary, and senior VP for Hungary and Serbia, moderated the 50 plus panel. Was there anything in the panel that might have surprised the audience? "I think the surprise would have been that we did not start complaining! I think ours was the most cheerful and positive panel. We wanted to be a good, living example, and we wanted it to be personal, human," she said. "We showed we love to work and want to work, not just for the money. That was the most important message, really: enjoy what you are doing. You have to work hard, you have to be flexible, to be resilient, to be productive, but you must enjoy it too."



ALL ARE WINNERS

Q&A with Women of Excellence Award winner Szilvia Gyurkó

Q: What does it mean to you to win this award?

A: It's an opportunity to stop for a moment and look around and look back to see what's happened with me and around me in the last few years. It is also a good opportunity to keep a distance from the all-day activities and rejoice in the results of my work. I am really glad for these opportunities. From another point of view, thanks to this award I hope that I can reach more people with UNICEF messages and I can raise awareness of children's rights issues.

Q: How important do you think such awards are to improving the position of working women in society?

A: AmCham is a recognized organization, so I think all the efforts that AmCham makes for equal opportunities, diversity, women's power etc. can shift attitudes, social norms and conventions in our country. I also think that it's a process, and every small step is important. Every newspaper article, every book, every event, every conference and also the awards play an important role in mainstreaming the message that even young women can be successful, powerful and influencing.

Q: You now have to consider yourself a role model. How does that feel?

A: It is really baffling. I honestly believe that all the nominees are role models in their field.

Q: What would be your message to young women trying to forge their own career?

A: That there is no limit if you enjoy your work.