

# Boyden UK Annual Assembly 2022, IET London 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022

Boyden's UK Assembly 2022 hosted a special, live appearance from Vadym Prystaiko Ukraine Ambassador to the UK and Igor Smelyansky, CEO of Ukraine postal service Ukrposhta to discuss: *Leadership through a thunderstorm*

## Event summary and Q&A

Hosted by Chief Executive, Boyden United Kingdom & Ireland, [Nick Robeson](#) and the Boyden UK team, over 200 clients, global colleagues and other friends met at Boyden's UK Annual Assembly 2022: a rare chance to hear, live, Vadym Prystaiko, Ukraine's Ambassador to the UK and Igor Smelyansky, CEO of Ukraine's postal service Ukrposhta talk about leadership during an invasion.

[This is possibly the only live address sharing Ukrainian diplomatic and business perspectives with the UK's business leaders.](#)

The discussion was moderated by Army veteran and Associate Editor (Defence) Editorial, Telegraph Media Group<sup>1</sup>, Dominic Nicholls.



*From left: Dominic Nicholls, Telegraph; Nick Robeson, Boyden; Ambassador Vadym Prystaiko*

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Telegraph* is the only news source that has commented on Ukraine on a daily basis since the crisis began.



CEO Igor Smelyansky on live stream from Kyiv, with Nick Robeson

## A watershed in global history

Just hours before the event, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs warned the risk of nuclear confrontation between the 'five nuclear powers' (their words) is now the highest it has ever been.

Ukraine's military continues to fight for everyone in Europe and worldwide. We are at a time in history when the potential for breaking the nuclear taboo that has held since 1945 has never been stronger. Vadym Prystaiko spoke for the world, saying:

"Now, when we hear these threats, we have to remind everybody around the world that they have a moral obligation not just to fight on the side of those who have been threatened, killed and bombarded every day, but because - if you do believe that our globe has to get rid of nuclear weapons - one day, sooner or later, anyone can launch this missile."

Vadym Prystaiko and Igor Smelyansky shared extraordinary insights into their approaches to leadership during the current crisis.

### Ambassador Vadym Prystaiko, diplomatic leadership themes:

Vadym has become a global leader, with the Ukraine crisis bringing the world's attention to the potential impact of nuclear weapons. He stressed the importance of global alliances and being able to tell the Ukrainian people: '*Fight because your friends are with you*'.

Advance communications were a critical element: when Vadym sensed the Russians mobilising, he conducted 200 media interviews before 24<sup>th</sup> February, galvanising worldwide support for his country. On leadership he says:

- "To win this war, we must have two things: hope and unity. We can succeed if leaders around the world across business, government, military and beyond unite and believe Russia can be defeated."

- “Conscience [in the form of support from other countries] is not a given and we have to work every day on that... I am driven to urge world leaders they have a moral obligation to ally with those who are killed and bombarded.”
- “I have had to understand where my team’s limits are. You can work twenty-four/seven for eight months and sooner or later they will lose their effectiveness as a team.”
- Leadership involves speaking to all audiences and offering solutions that resonate with them. “Tanks and ammunition are not expected from neutral nations; their role can be to help restore infrastructure in future.”
- Bi-party parliamentary processes are critical, together with a free press, to let steam out of the system. Otherwise, everything will break down again and again.

### **CEO Igor Smelyansky, business leadership themes:**

Igor’s guiding principle is to do whatever it takes to be with your team to know how they feel, so you can make decisions based on what you know what they are facing.

- “You just have to keep making decisions, and your work will support you. I work with a long-term view but know that every day could be my last. No matter what my stress level is during the invasion I have to make a decision, live with it and move on to make the next one.”
- Risk adjustment changes daily, impacting leadership and decision-making. “I had to strike a balance between making key decisions on my own, and delegating decisions to the head of the regions, because the war was changing all the time.”
- In this crisis, leadership involves more individual decisions than collective decisions that would previously have involved risk officers, lawyers, checks & balances, and so on.
- Create new procedures for new situations: retain previous procedures and adjust them to enable flexibility and the ability to make big decisions.
- In a crisis you have to break all the rules in corporate governance – risk, health & safety, insurance, what ifs... that’s how we deliver millions of products, parcels and pensions using rail freight for the first time in 21 years.
- “Formality kills business. I have always preferred an informal leadership style. Informality helps companies to move fast, like Google and Tesla in the early days”.
- “You have to be adaptable and establish informal relations with employees because it enables me to make a decision on how to move forward”
- “Don’t be afraid to make tough decisions. You have to make a decision, live with it and move forward to the next decision”.
- “Be ambitious in decision-making, and choose what is right both morally and for the business.”

## Guest reactions

"The content and impact of the speakers was quite beyond what I was expecting. I don't think I have ever seen a more moving or inspiring session than the interview with Igor Smelyansky – what a leader! And Ambassador Vadym was also incredibly impressive, polished yet natural, diplomatic yet far from bland. An evening to remember, and I will be sharing bits of it with clients and partners for some time."

"Wow – what an evening! It was absolutely outstanding in every aspect. Both speakers were excellent and I admired their ability to show humour, despite the darkness of what they are experiencing. The fact that you could attract such quality speakers to your event speaks volumes about you as people and the status of the Boyden brand. This was probably the best business event of this kind that I've ever been to – and I'm still buzzing!"

## Impact on Boyden Ukraine

Nick Robeson, Chief Executive of Boyden United Kingdom & Ireland, explains:

"Russia's invasion of Ukraine impacted Boyden very directly. Our team is based in Kyiv and on 24<sup>th</sup> Feb found itself dealing with the terrifying circumstances of the Russian invasion. Boyden's response was immediate and in line with the true values of our partner-led organisation. The UK, together with Poland and Spain, the Canadians and the French immediately reached out to see who was in a position to travel and five of our Ukrainian colleagues moved to different parts of the business.

We also raised a relief fund; the combined efforts of Boyden globally raised US\$250,000 to support Boyden's Ukraine business and the families of our colleagues. Ultimately it was very quick, and we felt we were able to provide them with some security."

Oleksii Dolhikh, Managing Partner, Boyden Ukraine, commented on the event:

"I am proud to be a part of the Boyden family, who against the current injustices are continually supporting humanitarian efforts in my country. Whether it is welcoming Ukrainian colleagues into their homes or providing financial support to families, I hope that UK business leaders will hear about the medium to long-term impact they can have in resolving this crisis and defeating Russia."

In [Nick Robeson's](#) conclusion to the event, he said, "In today's increasingly challenging global environment, the UK's business leaders will have been inspired after receiving their insight about leading through a global crisis. I have no doubt they will be reflecting on how to apply the pair's mentality to their own leadership".

## Interview with Ambassador Vadym Prystaiko

In his first interview, Dominic Nicholls took us to the diplomatic front, to understand how to build and maintain a partnership of external countries who wish to see Ukraine prevail.



*Dominic Nicholls and Vadym Prystaiko*

**Dominic Nicholls:** we are nearly nine months into Vladimir Putin's lightning three-day offensive to take Ukraine. The war started in 2014 but it has been the most violent phase since February 24<sup>th</sup> this year. How do you respond to the risk of nuclear escalation.

**Vadym Prystaiko:** I take you back to 1994 when we were promised we would be defended if we give up nuclear weapons: so we signed the [Budapest Memorandum](#). We had weapons on the same level as the UK, France, China and more than a thousand tactical nuclear devices from Moscow; we had uranium, rockets, we had the technology, we had scientists. So, we could have been a strong, threatening nation ourselves, but we took this decision to disarm ourselves, reducing the risk to the whole of humanity. Now we are paying the price.

We have to deal with the Ukrainian crisis, we have to explain to Iranians and North Koreans, nobody is expecting you to be foolish enough, as the Ukrainians were, to give up your nuclear weapons for a piece of paper if there is nothing behind it.

The Russians have their own doctrine in how they use nuclear weapons, only for 'the defence of their nation'. Nobody in this world is threatening them. They used to be our biggest trade partner, our biggest energy provider; Ukrainians don't bite, we don't need anything from them anymore. I don't see any threat to their territory or their people and frankly no threat to their existing way of ruling their own people, which is their own business. I see no need for Russians to wage this or threaten anybody with nuclear devices.

*"We took this decision to disarm ourselves, reducing the risk to the whole of humanity. Now we are paying the price"*

**Dominic Nicholls:** nobody in your political establishment has been tested to the degree demanded from Feb 24<sup>th</sup> onwards. You would not be human if you didn't have any doubt at all about the leadership qualities of your President and possibly yourself. When did you know that you had the right person in charge?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** When President Zelensky called me, I was Ambassador to NATO and he offered me the job of Foreign Minister. I had been working for every Ukrainian President, advising on foreign policy and security issues, so I decided to take it. When I went to his office, instead of greeting him I asked, "Do you even know what you are doing?" He looked at me and said "I guess so".

Secondly, I told him by offering me this job 'you are buying both NATO and the European Union'.

**Dominic Nicholls:** Is the external support to your country at an irreducible minimum now, or do you have to keep the pressure? And if so, how do you see that external support changing?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** the encouragement we offer to our people is the support of the world. But it is not the whole world that is behind us. We have partners in the West, most of the nations in the South and the East do not understand, do not want to engage and want to stay away. We understand; support was not something expected or given. Some nations, like the UK, gave huge support. I am very happy and proud to be here, it's not just diplomatic talk, I am quite proud to be here and able to achieve what my people and I managed to do.

*"Conscience is not a given and we have to work every day on that"*

In some other nations they are just waking up to the call, as somebody else is threatened with a gas crisis, waves of Ukrainian refugees and the whole nuclear threat. So, these nations are growing their level of support and at the same time being threatened, trying to support us, find some sort of way out and avoid Putin. So, conscience is not a given and we have to work every day on that.

**Dominic Nicholls:** there were many people around the world who did not expect you to survive the first few days, weeks or months. After the performance of your country since Feb 24<sup>th</sup>, in particular the counter attack round the Kharkiv area, how would you prevent complacency that your victory is inevitable?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** Some of us always knew the Russians would come with all they have, we just didn't know the date. When we realised at the beginning of this year, I went to the media in the UK and did around 200 interviews before the Russians came; in less than two months, every time I said, '*Russians will be faced with a fierce defensive, and we will try to do everything in our capabilities to stop them*'.

When we put up a real fight, people were surprised at first, then they were encouraged, and now they come to an understanding: imagine Russia is defeated on the battlefield.

What will happen next? What will happen to Russia, the whole system of the world? Everybody now sees the Ukrainians, who were originally difficult to pinpoint on a map, can actually achieve a result. That's what we have been saying; '*it's not the last war, we have been fighting Russians all through our existence and we know what we are doing*'.

**Dominic Nicholls:** but is it achievable for your country to win and for Vladimir Putin to remain in power?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** We don't need anything from them now. We will stop them at the border and tell them, *'This is your problem. If you are not happy with what you achieved, with what your great leader was telling you, and now your nation is humiliated, you have lost so many people, deal with that yourself'*.

The problem in Russia is that they do not have this mechanism of parliament with more than one party, or a free press, which would allow them to 'let the steam out of the system'. Each and every time, they have to reinforce the system, they have to come to the point where everything breaks down. And that will happen again.

*"The problem in Russia is that they do not have this mechanism of parliament with more than one party, or a free press, which would allow them to 'let the steam out of the system'"*

**Dominic Nicholls:** This pressure cooker of Russia means there is going to be an explosion which is what the world is worried about. Putin will not allow you to do that, he sees himself as Russia, a defeat for the Russian forces is a defeat for him and his regime.

**Vadym Prystaiko:** In 1992 Bush Senior, President of the United States, came to Ukraine when the Soviet Union was collapsing, his speech is now known as the 'Chicken Kyiv speech'. He came not to support a newly independent state, asking us not to destroy the Soviet Union.

We told him, *'we want to live the way we expect to live'*. He was trying to impress us with *'Everyone loves you, everyone knows you, just take Chicken Kyiv for example, everyone loves that'*. Was he serious?!

*"Russians will survive, they only have to change their leadership. They can be wealthy with Siberia and their gas and oil; become another Canada, nice kind people, wealthy good guys"*

Now we understand we have to do whatever has to be done and become the nation we are building for ourselves. We don't care what happens to Russia. We have a responsibility to the whole world, we have paid the price not to have nuclear weapons, because this war would have looked very different if we had kept the third largest arsenal of nuclear weapons in the world.

I guess that Russians will survive, they only have to change their leadership. They can be wealthy with Siberia and their gas and oil; become another Canada, nice kind people, wealthy good guys.

**Dominic Nicholls:** You have seen how NATO works. Why do they not see the threat from Russia as clearly as you did. President Macron called NATO 'brain dead'. Is it, why do they get it so wrong?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** I was Ukrainian representative to NATO, we are not a part of NATO, we are at the 'child's table'. It's extremely frustrating to work with the self-accomplished, safe, rich nations that believe nothing will happen. Russia is a totally different world.

It is frustrating to hear those who recently joined telling other countries like us, 'you don't need NATO'. We do. Our history is dictating to us, trouble will come sooner or later. We want to have the same umbrella and live peacefully like other NATO members. We need to think of our security, so that each and every day we are able to do business with people, knowing we are defended.

The problem is that there is nothing better than this organisation in this part of the globe. We like the values, and the values of the European Union as well. We like each and every member and we believe this is the best option with nations who share our values.

## Guest Q&A, Vadym Prystaiko

**Guest:** we have just left the EU, why do you want to join it?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** Because there are 500 million consumers. Our previous partner Russia has 126 million. We are a big agricultural nation responsible to 500 million people. We need markets and we trust those institutions and values, and companies like you, who want to widen your horizons; you have human sympathy.

**General Rupert Jones, former commander of UK standing joint command:** On behalf of all of us, thank you very much for your words tonight and for the huge courage and determination of your country, because I for one believe you are fighting for us all, and we should show you huge gratitude.

I just left the British Army after an extensive career. We all saw the failings of the Russian military and some of us were not particularly surprised. But laymen should recognise that the act of warfare is incredibly difficult, so we shouldn't be too glib when we criticise the Russians. What we should actually do is commend and recognise the incredible military prowess of the Ukrainian military. It has been breath-taking and we are in awe of what your military has achieved.

*"I for one believe you are fighting for us all, and we should show you huge gratitude"*

If I have learned anything in my military career, there are no certainties in war. Before you go to sleep, what is the outcome you genuinely believe and expect, the outcome you think is possible?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** Before I go to sleep I am checking how we are doing on the front lines, and if I still have a flat in Ukraine, because I live in the centre of Kyiv and I have family there.

In the UK, you also have to pat yourselves on the back because you trained 25,000 people over eight years and over the last three months you raised it by another 10,000. I would love to have your people alongside mine. Three months ago, when I asked you to provide us with heavy weapons, you said it would never happen, but you are helping Ukraine to fight their war. So don't tell me it will never happen. We want to send Ukraine a message. *'Fight because your friends are with you.'*



**Member of Parliament:** will the war end when every Russian soldier has been pushed out of your country, or is it possible the war will end before that and roughly on what terms?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** So far we are quite successful in achieving what we want to achieve and we want to sit at the table and I hope it will be on the border of Russia and Ukraine, official and formal. That's where we can have a place to negotiate and we will have to negotiate something.

For example, how will we live together peacefully after this? By geography and history we have to live together. Maybe this generation will find it difficult to do so, but the next generation, perhaps. Sometimes nations push us to have this conversation right away, saying we don't understand Russians. If anybody in this world understands Russians it is us because the name was Kyiv Russe. We were the first original Russians, we were living with them. The problem is you do not understand Ukrainians. If we have to fight, we will fight. We might die, but we will fight to the end to gain independence. It happened in the past; this thirty plus years' is the best attempt so far.

**Polish guest:** Poland and Ukraine had a difficult history, I think today we have demonstrated all our compassion, support and help to the millions of displaced people. My question is does the Ukrainian government have any strategy or expectations at this point? When this war ends, what will happen to the displaced millions?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** Thank you, this is a very painful question. I have to start by praising the people of Poland. We found a way to cooperate and I believe you are the closest brothers and sisters; even in official negotiations, we speak Polish, we speak Ukrainian we understand each other perfectly.

Poland is hosting more than two million people. The average age of people crossing the Ukraine-Polish border is thirty-two years old. Seventy-five percent of Ukraine adults are higher-educated. There are over seven million living outside Ukraine, displaced.

For many nations in Europe this displacement would be a total disaster. We still hope we will survive this and some will return. How many? That's a very good question. Some are putting down roots in the UK with their kids, so they will stay here: forty-two percent of Ukrainians in the UK already have jobs.

How many will go to war-torn Ukraine to rebuild it from scratch? Who will pay for the reconstruction? I believe the Russians have to pay, all of it, but if some generous nations offer assistance, that's great.

**Former army officer.** Thank you for what you are doing to defend our values. Could you comment on the neutral countries and what their role is, if any, and how you are dealing with them bilaterally?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** They are not really neutral countries. For example, is now fifth or sixth in military supplies to Ukraine because they changed their mind to help us.

We are talking with India, reminding them we are trying to achieve what they wanted to achieve; living independently. We are not expecting these nations to give us tanks and ammunition. We want to tell them the Ukraine winter is harsh and the Russians have already targeted a third of our energy-producing capacities. People will die because they will freeze to death in their homes. A colleague in foreign affairs tells me there is no electricity or running water, no sanitation. I expect these neutral countries to help us restore facilities to our houses, to keep hospitals operational; this is something every neutral nation can do.

*"I expect these neutral countries to help us restore facilities to our houses, to keep hospitals operational; this is something every neutral nation can do"*

**Dominic Nicholls:** In closing, what about your own leadership – what are you doing differently compared to nine months ago?

**Vadym Prystaiko:** Just two things. Leadership of myself, managing feelings of guilt, that I am in safe London and my people are dying and you pretend you are helping with this.

Secondly, in pushing my own people, I have to understand their limits. After twenty-four /seven for eight months, they will lose effectiveness as a team. Our ambitions were extremely high that, somehow, we can help the millions in Ukraine from London, believing we can resolve everything. This ambition is important, but sometimes overwhelming.

## Interview with CEO Igor Smelyansky

Igor Smelyansky spoke to us via a link to Kyiv. He is a former professional soccer player, a BCG and KPMG strategy and M&A expert, a deal-maker in the energy sector and now CEO of Ukrposhta, the postal service of Ukraine. Ukrposhta is much more than a delivery service; it is also responsible for three million pensions every month, allowing Ukrainian society to continue.

In his second interview, Dominic Nicholls explored business leadership in wartime.



*Igor Smelyansky during his live stream interview with Dominic Nicholls*

**Dominic Nicholls:** Where were you on Feb 24<sup>th</sup> when latest invasion broke?

**Igor Smelyansky:** I wasn't at home, we finished our investment committee at 3am. I went home at 4am and at 5am got a call to hear war had started. I went back to work and made a decision to continue operations and we have worked ever since. On the first day, I paused to understand where the danger was coming from to save people's lives, made decisions to protect state secrets, then got to work.

**Dominic Nicholls:** how did you establish a framework to assess risk in this new environment?

**Igor Smelyansky:** The risk adjustment changes every day. I had to strike a balance between making key decisions on my own and delegating to the head of the regions decisions on where they would go, because the war was changing all the time. We had to assess whether to go on the road or not, and which roads so we don't cross Russian tanks.

We are delivering over three million pensions in cash, so we need a secure way of getting it to retirees. Bank cards don't work when you don't have any electricity. Bringing cash and products became more important during the first months of the war to survive.

**Dominic Nicholls:** What elements of the new business working arrangements would you like to retain after the war and what would you do more collectively again?

**Igor Smelyansky:** It is hard to say, but a lot of things we do go against standard corporate governance procedure. I often go to the front lines to support our people, to work with them, to understand the situation on the ground. The chief risk officer would not allow the single top executive to go to the front line, but you can't not go, because people are waiting for you there and it's extremely important to be with your team.

Whether we can go back to the old ways, collective decision-making, attorneys, risk officers, checks and balances remains to be seen. We need a balance between making quick decisions which could be wrong, or a prolonged decision which could also be wrong because things are changing as fast as they are. Today, I was planning how the post can continue without electricity or mobile connections.

*"You can't not go [to the front line], because people are waiting for you there and its extremely important to be with your team"*

What kind of peace time lies ahead? At the end of the day, Russia will still be at our borders. What kind of security procedures do we need? I went to one of the villages, but the team wouldn't let me go all the way because it is half Russian, half Ukrainian, with a border right in the middle. Russian soldiers can see you in their binoculars. What procedures are there to provide a postal service while you are in harm's way?

In the near term, we will retain the procedures we have, adjusting them every day. They allow us to be flexible and make big decisions.

**Dominic Nicholls:** How do you negotiate your way through enemy lines and what risk is there in employing sixty thousand staff, some of whom are sympathetic to Russia?

**Igor Smelyansky:** As in any negotiation, you find a way of negotiating with an enemy. What interests do they have in common with me and how do I make their lives miserable? This is possible, because at the end of the day according to The Geneva Convention they have to take care of people in occupied areas, so if I tell one of the large families the Russians stole their pension money, they will storm the building. That's not hypothetical, it has happened. When they come to negotiate the next time, they don't want me to do that again. I want Ukrainian people to receive their pension, to be able to buy food and you don't want a revolution on your hands. So, let's agree, you let me work and I will make sure you don't have a revolution. It's not the most pleasant way, but it's the results that count.

**Dominic Nicholls:** How about vetting your own staff?

**Igor Smelyansky:** there is a city where ninety percent of the population worked with Russians, so we opened branches with staff from Ukraine-controlled territories, going through personnel to pick people who have cooperated the least with Russians. We need to start operations for fifteen thousand people waiting to receive payments from international AID organisations.

When we come to liberated areas, we come not just with pensions and products but also with news as the representatives of Ukraine.

We do have people who sympathise with Russia and we have to be realistic about that. My goal is to make sure every single person who is on the edge is loyal to Ukraine. They have to come back to Ukraine, start using Ukrainian currency again, not roubles, and have to be in the Ukrainian information sphere. That's why this job is more important than just delivering parcels or products or even pensions.

**Dominic Nicholls:** The last time we talked about your personal leadership style, you said 'informality works'. When do you use that style and what are the risks?

**Igor Smelyansky:** I always use it, informality is natural for me and I believe formality kills the business. At companies like Google and Tesla, especially at the beginning they had informal business decision-making which is why they grew so fast. Once you start building processes between the CEO and the mail carrier, there are about 25 people, so you don't get real information.

Once I go to the front lines, I knew exactly how people feel, and whether or not there are normal connections. For example, I go a city about 65km from Kharkiv. Before the war it would take an hour, right now it takes six hours to get there because all the bridges are gone. That means you have to get back before the curfew because it's close to the military zone. Again, you have to be adaptable and establish informal relations with employees because it enables me to make a decision on how to move forward.

*"You have to be adaptable and establish informal relations with employees because it enables me to make a decision on how to move forward"*

**Dominic Nicholls:** Looking at the wider business environment in Ukraine and what's going to come, how significant is the brain drain of experienced people, those in leadership positions and how will that change when the reconstruction phase starts?

**Igor Smelyansky:** We had a brain drain before the war, now it is even worse and we need qualified decision-makers.

It will be tough, and tough culturally. Yesterday I was in one of the more dangerous zones under constant shelling close to Russian lines when I asked my branch managers about their main challenges. Some colleagues have left, making it harder for them to cover the shifts. I asked, 'when they return, will you take them back?' They said 'no, because they left us during this time and I don't think I can take them back'. About eighty percent of them said that. It's an issue of brain drain and also of psychology around who stayed with you through the difficult times and who left, with good reason, to protect their kids, their families, and many other reasons.

I am travelling all day because I need to understand how people feel. I have to make a decision at the end of the month, what to do with the ten thousand people who left Ukraine? Do I keep them as employees or fire them? If you think you should care about people despite them leaving, you should keep them; if you believe you should provide services every day, I need to hire new people and train them. So, I hire them and train them, then the others come back, so who gets the positions? The ones that stayed with me or the new people that worked with me or the ones that came back? These are tough decisions for any manager to make. I don't have a solution. I will go with an informal decision-making approach and what I feel is right morally and for the business.

**Dominic Nicholls:** How do you look after yourself and keep going?

**Igor Smelyansky:** Sleep is a scarce resource. I usually sleep from 3-7am. Mr Zelensky is on same schedule; he wakes up earlier than me.

## Guest Q&A, Igor Smelyansky

**PR Consultant:** You talk about the importance of government leaders backing Ukraine. Are business leaders important and how would you like them to support you?

**Igor Smelyansky:** It is very important for us. From the first days of the war, we ask our partners across the globe, please don't stop sending mail or selling to Ukraine. UK companies continue to do it and Royal Mail continues to work with us. It is important because Ukraine actively sells on Amazon and ebay UK sites with over \$500m of sales by small and medium enterprises. This money keeps them going, and selling to the UK keeps business with us as normal as possible. I understand the risk managers and logistics managers who see huge risk, but it is extremely important from a moral and business support perspective that we continue to work.

*"Ukraine actively sells on Amazon and ebay UK sites with over 500m dollars of sales by small and medium enterprises"*

After the war, Russia will not disappear, they will still be at our border. The geography is what it is. Please try to work with us, and help us grow.

**Nadia Kaznacheieva, Director, DIF Capital, guest known to Igor Smelyansky:** We used to work together in Ukraine infrastructure post services. I remember when you were appointed as CEO, your job was to make all your employees smile when they see customers and in the workplace. Is this task still relevant and what are your key tasks for your people?

**Igor Smelyansky:** The goal is the same. When I joined the postal service it was probably one of the worst-run companies in Ukraine. People were not friendly to clients, we lost market share and products, and the Minister told me '*just do whatever you can to get the company to survive*'. Our net promoter score went from negative to positive in the first three years. Now in the villages, the cities, we have opened more branches, during the war we opened 100 new branches, and 500 new mobile branches. It's hard but when you see people's eyes when they meet you, it becomes easier because my employees see what their work means to people. Our customers hadn't appreciated postal services before the war as much as they do now. We were the last to leave Mariupol and we will be the first to come back. It will be a very different postal service after the war.

*"My employees see what their work means to people... it will be a very different postal service after the war"*

**Guest:** You have an amazing leadership style for your people to raise their game in such circumstances. What is your main strength?

**Igor Smelyansky:** Not being afraid to make decisions. During the war this is key and they are really tough ones. The toughest one in the early months was do I let my people work?

We made mistakes at the beginning and underestimated the enemy; our truck crossed Russian tanks and they killed all the employees in the truck. It could happen any day, but there are more killed at home than at work. As sad as that statistic is, we are making the right decisions, our people are not dying at work, we are creating processes to help protect them. You still will go to bed and wake up with one thought, '*how can I keep those people alive, while at the same time not stopping our services?*' And '*how can I make sure they show up at work when they do not have power or heat during the winter. Will they catch COVID?*'

Ultimately you have to make a decision and live with it, and just move forward to the next decision.

**Boyden's Nick Robeson:** Igor, we spoke about agility and innovation and how you and some others put a railway back together that hadn't been used for some time.

**Igor Smelyansky:** We moved mail moved overnight, usually by truck to the cities. During the war, we couldn't travel at night because of the curfew, and the roads are blocked. We needed to do something; apparently people in Ukraine still expect good service and fast deliveries! So, I met with the head of the Ukraine railway to discuss moving mail by rail, which had not been done in twenty-one years. They had twelve old postal cars stored in the warehouse.

We agreed to restart deliveries by rail, but we wanted to be ambitious. If we got lawyers involved we would never do it. So we agreed to start in five days. We restored the trucks and docking stations and updated the IT. We have now delivered up to ten million parcels by rail, not counting humanitarian goods and products. We now try to deliver parcels and products next day. Again, I believe we should do this and keep the economy going.

**Dominic Nicholls:** Do you find it personally 'intoxicating' to be in a position where you can ignore lawyers, risk officers, corporate governance – how are you going to give that up?

**Igor Smelyansky:** I am a US-educated lawyer, a member of the bar association and a certified public accountant, so I know the rules. I realise that when I screw up people will come after me. You are on top while you are winning. My recipe is that you have to keep winning and your board will support you, once you start losing, they will replace you.

From my first day on the job, I told my team every day *'we are working with a long-term perspective, every day could be our last, so let's work the hell out of it, do the best we can and if it's our last day, it's our last day and we would never go back and think we could have done something different'*.

When we started the railway service in five days, you can imagine how many rules we broke: technical specifications, engineers checking the track, evaluating what happens if it gets blown up, who pays for the insurance, what happens to health & safety rules; everything that means we would not be able to restart it.

Now we have set a goal to start international post by rail for the first time in twenty-one years, hopefully in November.

**Guest:** I would like to do my bit, where can I buy the sweatshirt you are wearing?

**Igor Smelyansky:** It's available on our stores on ebay and Amazon. We are the first postal service to open a store, no other postal service has done it. Part of the proceeds go to support our armed forces and you will receive it in two weeks.

**The Chairman of Boyden UK & Ireland John Dembitz brought the evening to a close.**

"It gives me huge pleasure to thank you all for making the time to join us this evening and partake in what we hope you felt was the most stimulating, uplifting and rewarding evening. The ambassador spoke freely and openly as much as an ambassador can and there were real insights in what he said.

What Igor said is quite extraordinary and there are lessons for all of us, but perhaps the most important is the simple message of management by walking about – how can anyone do more than Igor does going from his office in Kyiv to the front line in six, twelve, twenty-four hours, whatever it takes to motivate all his people with a smile, a hand on their shoulders, whatever it takes. What an extraordinary man."