

Q&A: Chrysler's New Russia Chief Puts Down Roots

By [Anatoly Medetsky](#)

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Arriving in January, Giorgio Gorelli immediately made himself at home.

MOSCOW RACEWAY, Moscow Region — Whenever Giorgio Gorelli gets a posting to another country, he takes advantage of advice that he received as a rookie.

Then, the Fiat boss in Bologna, Italy, told the employee moving in from Rome to act as if Gorelli were going to spend the rest of his life at the new place. The same strategy should apply with every further relocation, the man said.

Giorgio Gorelli

Education

1983 — University of Rome

Work experience

January 2013-present — Chief executive of Chrysler in Russia

2011-2013 — Director in charge of central European markets and Russian sales, Fiat

2009-2011 — Managing director in Belgium and the Netherlands, Fiat

2008-2009 — Head of commercial operations on international markets, Fiat

2003-2008 — Managing director in South Africa, Fiat

2001-2003 — Italian market director, Fiat

1999-2001 — Head of the Italian sales department, Fiat

1998-1999 — Head of the Russian sales department, Fiat

1995-1998 — Spare parts and accessories director at the Italian sales and marketing department

1987-1995 — Various positions at Fiat

Favorite book: Pillars of the Earth by Ken Follett (1989)

Reading now: Long Walk to Freedom, an autobiographical book written by South African President Nelson Mandela (1994)

Movie pick: La Vita e Bella, directed by Roberto Benigni (1997)

Favorite Moscow restaurant: Carlson

Weekend getaway destination: Sokolniki Park, riversides and lakesides outside Moscow

"Otherwise, you will risk being a temporary passenger for all your life," he said, according to Gorelli's account of the conversation.

It was this attitude that the chief of U.S. carmaker Chrysler in Russia employed on his arrival in Moscow in January.

"It means bringing my family here, joining clubs, getting interested in the culture, in the language, habits, to find your favorite shops and restaurants and become part of the local life," Gorelli said in an interview.

He'd love to socialize even more, as follows from his laments about Russia's complicated visa rules that sometimes prevent friends and relatives from visiting expats here.

Gorelli expressed admiration for former South African President Nelson Mandela. The executive spent about five years in the country in one of his longest foreign stints.

As far as his work style is concerned, he preached simplicity.

"There is a tendency to make things a bit overelaborate," he said. "If you remove unnecessary things you will gain speed and presence in the market."

Gorelli agreed to take questions from The Moscow Times on the sidelines of a news conference where Chrysler announced it would also sell Alfa Romeo cars in Russia.

The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: Why did you come to Russia and why have you stayed?

A: I was here in 1998, which was a very special year for the country, when the economy melted down. To have an opportunity to see how the country has developed 15 years afterward was a very pleasant perspective from the human point of view.

Q: What is your secret to successfully managing people and business in Russia?

A: I think there is one characteristic in Russia in 2013: the capacity of the young and the willingness of people to be proactive and add value through their activity. It's sometimes the matter of creating the right opportunities for people to come together and overcome the first approach. If you are open, people will pay you back with the capacity to think out of the box and with being fast in delivering on even the most challenging tasks.

Q: When it comes to your business, what would you describe as the biggest change on the Russian market over past few years?

A: Doing car sales was very different in Russia 15 years ago. There were big buildings with a lot of floors, which were transformed to become dealerships. They were more like parking spaces. Nowadays, you find in Russia probably one of the most advanced expressions of brand identity and retail experience. This has been a major turnaround.

This phenomenon is not only about cars. It's wider and is related to the entire society. Earlier, the power was on the side of those who were serving customers. There was a sensation that the demand was so big and supply so low that those who had the products dictated the approach. Now, Russia is as good as any other place in the world. Now we all experience — in supermarkets, at gas stations, wherever we go — a very different attitude, with a good

benefit to consumers.

I think it's fair. I think we need to compete, seduce and delight our customers.

Q: What advice would you offer a foreigner who wants to invest or expand in Russia?

A: There are two pieces of advice I would give. One is to keep things simple in your daily work: for your customers and staff. There is a tendency to make things a bit overelaborate. If you remove unnecessary things, you will gain speed and presence in the market.

We just introduced a new policy which allows our dealers to count on some support depending on the volume of sales. We had previously used a scheme based on percentage, which resulted in a lot of checks and calculation, potential mistakes and exchange of documents back and forth. We now have moved to a system that is based on fixed amounts, which simplified things for the dealers and customers and our internal processes.

The second piece of advice is to dedicate time to creating a team around you that you can trust, develop and motivate.

Q: Who or what inspires you?

A: I do have a mentor in my work and private experience. It's Nelson Mandela. I worked in South Africa for 4 1/2 years. I think we all can take a lesson from such a great man. He is an example for humanity. He was able to embrace people of all races and forgive those who put him in prison for almost 30 years.

Q: What problems have you faced in Russia? How did you tackle the problems and what did you learn from them?

A: I think, everybody in Russia experiences problems related to visas not only for yourself and your staff, but also for your friends and relatives. I perceive that there are a lot of people in Europe that would like to come and visit you while you are working in Russia, but it's not that easy and simple, unfortunately.

In a world where there's plenty of last-minute offers; where you can decide on Friday where you can spend your weekend — from Paris to Majorca — it would be beneficial to the country to be part of this easy-travel environment. I would say, simplify the procedure. We have to respect the sovereignty of a country to control the immigration flow, but this can be done in a simpler way.

Q: Share some stories about significant events, meetings, problems that shaped who you are.

A: When I was first assigned in Italy to a new job location, which would take me from Rome to Bologna, my new boss in the very first meeting with me asked me about my expectations and plans. I told him I planned to commute quite often. He then asked me to do him a favor, saying, "Try now and wherever you go afterward to act as if you were going to spend there the rest of your life. Your real friends will not lose you, but you will gain more friends in the new places where you will have to start building your life. Otherwise, you will risk being a temporary passenger for all your life."

For me, it means bringing my family here, joining clubs, getting interested in the culture, in the language, habits, to find your favorite shops and restaurants and become part of the local life.

Q: Is there anything you can't do, but would like to learn?

A: I would love to play a musical instrument like my sons do. One is playing the electric guitar and the other a drum kit. Unfortunately, I am tone deaf and don't have a single bit of talent.

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