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As told to Karen Christensen

My job

As Secretary of Economic Development for the Mexican state of Hidalgo, I am responsible for encouraging local companies to become more internationally competitive by linking demand and supply. We keep a constant eye on which companies are buying which products, and try to get our local companies into the mix. I also work on the state's infrastructure, because local businesses can't be competitive without the proper environment and regulations in place.

Hidalgo's business environment

One of the key industries here is the textile and apparel industry. We have companies that run the gamut from producing natural and synthetic fibres to making end products. But while we offer the entire production chain, it isn't well integrated. We have some very large companies here, like **Kaltex**, which is a Mexican company and a Latin American leader in the production of cotton products – they produce **Dockers** pants for **Levi's**. But they are very vertically integrated. They don't obtain most of their raw materials from Hidalgo, which they could be doing. We are trying to integrate our small and medium-size companies with big companies like Kaltex, which act as 'anchor companies'.

Another important sector here is the mechanical industry. **Bombardier** has a plant here, which recently won a US\$500 million contract to construct 405 train cars for Mexico City's subway system. Anchor companies like Bombardier allow us to attract direct investment to Hidalgo – both national and foreign, and the suppliers that come with it. This means that contracts will go to our local companies, who can work as second-tier suppliers.

My key challenges

This administration ends its term in March 2005, and I don't know whether I will continue on here, so my key challenge is to leave the Secretariat with a solid basis in place to continue the work we have started. For instance, we recently started a cluster-creation program for Hidalgo, to make it globally competitive by 2025. It doesn't make sense to attract new investments here if we don't think about what kind of companies we need to strengthen the industries that already exist.

The key tools I use

Strong communication skills are very important. So is knowing which way to head, strategically, and how to get there. Third is focusing on training. If people here don't have the skills to understand concepts like globalization and competitiveness, it's impossible to implement all



the projects we have in mind for the next two years. My entire staff is taking English as a second language – we offer it as a free benefit. They are motivated to participate, because the more competitive their skills, the better the chance that they will still have a job in the next administration.

Traits of a good leader

Leaders must be very involved at all times – if they don't understand what is going on, it's impossible to implement anything. Secondly, it's vital that people understand the situation from the leader's perspective. Sometimes, a leader knows what should be done, but forgets to share the vision with people throughout the company. This means investing time in talking to people. Finally, a good leader listens to everyone's ideas – because we don't have all the answers!

Work-Life Balance

I work from 8:30 to 4:30, and try to keep my afternoons free for my daughters, Camila and Renata (aged 5 and 3.) For me, it's very relaxing to spend time with them. Otherwise, I get concerned about them – which creates stress. I also try to have weekends free for family time. We have a ranch half an hour from Pachuca, where I live. Our neighbours have horses, which we ride sometimes. My husband José and I also sometimes go to Mexico City (we're about an hour and a half away) on Friday evenings for a movie or the theatre.

My Philosophy of Life

It's important to believe in what you are doing and enjoy life. People should make a concerted effort to accept reality. While there are many things in the world that have to be changed, it often isn't within our control. I advise my associates to push themselves, and to participate – but if something isn't possible, don't get frustrated! I also try to enjoy every minute with my family and friends. As our governor says, 'You can't assume you will wake up tomorrow', so enjoy every day!