

# EDGAR STENE PRIZE 2019 WINNER OVIDIU CONSTANTINESCU

*Romania*



I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) in 1996 and have subsequently had replacement operations on both hips. I've been a member of the Romanian League against Rheumatism (LRR) for more than 15 years, concentrating on helping with communication and advocacy matters.

In the 1990s I worked as a journalist with the BBC World Service (Romanian Section) in London. After returning to Romania, I worked as a public relations specialist with several companies in diverse fields such as oil and gas, legal, civil engineering and the media. For the past two and a half years, I have run my own small PR company, focusing on business communication.

I learned about the theme of this year's Edgar Stene Prize competition from the LRR but I was, of course, already aware of the competition from previous EULAR PARE conferences that I had participated in.

# WINNING ESSAY 2019

## **An interview with a Straight Face**

So here I was... at the most important interview in my entire professional life. Let's face it, it's not easy to change jobs when you are in your mid-fifties. And Straight Face wasn't making things easier as he knew all the milestones of my career quite well: my successful projects and embarrassing failures, what I have achieved and what my weaknesses have been. in.

"Let's talk a bit about the work you may have to do here," said Straight Face.

"OK, but before we go any further I have to tell you that I have RA," I said.

So what?" Straight Face's eyebrow rose up dangerously. "I have had RA for over two decades too, so don't you worry. You'll get your comfy chair, a proper desk, a computer, tea breaks, stretch-breaks and whatever breaks you may need, as well as a bit of understanding about the days you will have to go to the hospital for medical checks," said Straight Face impassibly.

It seemed that my openness had achieved its objectives: a sort of a promise for flexi working hours, for a flexi-chair, for flexi-breaks. Even if Straight Face was irritating in his apparent lack of empathy, I felt that, somehow, he was with me.

"You know, I am a bit involved in the RA patients' league and I may need to do some work for them from time to time too," I topped up.

"Oh, that's quite OK. We like our people to get involved in the community, helping other less fortunate than them to cope with what life throws at them – RA included. You realise how fortunate you are, do you?" said Straight Face, as he upped his voice and fixed me with a deep radiology-like look that went straight through my bones and joints. "We see community involvement as a sign of enthusiasm and empathy, part of the company's values."

I had to admit that I had started to kind of like Straight Face. After all, he was not THAT bad.

"What about the salary?" I asked without any proper diplomatic introduction.

"100% performance-based. You perform, you are paid. You don't perform and you get nothing. Based on what you have done so far, I am 100% confident that you will do OK. The wage is the last thing on my worries list," replied Straight Face as he lowered his hand in boredom.

Well, it may be that MY wage is the very last thing on YOUR worries list, but it tops MINE! However, Straight Face's trust in my abilities was uplifting and made me think that pushing hard may also be called job satisfaction or pride in a job well done.

"What about the working environment?" I asked.

# WINNING ESSAY 2019

“Now WHAT about the working environment? You know, you are quite a character,” blasted Straight Face at me. “To begin, you will be alone in the office – you will run the office, to be more precise. But we are looking forward to bringing in more dedicated people like yourself. You are fortunate to be in a position to build the working environment as it pleases you, so feel free to bring in whatever makes you feel good and happy,” said Straight Face visibly annoyed.

“A-a-am I going to run the office?” I asked candidly.

“Oh yes, you will,” he said calmly but firmly. “You will take care of resources and deadlines; you will make coffee and tea; you will do presentations; you will listen to customers’ stories and write even better ones because this is what we do. We do ‘words for news.’ Do you like our motto? I chose it,” said Straight Face proudly.

“I am afraid to r-r-run the office,” I whispered after a long and embarrassing pause. That came down like the asteroid that wiped-out the dinosaurs, but, to my utter surprise, Straight Face didn’t laugh. Or, at least, I didn’t hear him laughing. He wasn’t dismissive either. He looked straight at me and smiled with some sort of encouragement.

“Hey, what’s your problem? Cheer up,” said Straight Face. “You will be doing the same things that you have done for the past 20 years or so. You will write presentations and speeches. You will twist and spin the words. You will write wonderful stories out of bland business figures. Be brave and face reality: this is not a job, it is a chance. It’s take it or... or take it!”

Straight Face was saying everything that I was afraid to – and he wasn’t mincing his words. “There is no other way, pal. You have to run the office. You have to run the company. After all, it’s yours. You are way too young and unprepared to think about retirement or pension,” said Straight Face.

And then I fell asleep.

## Epilogue

Two and a bit years have passed since I had that interview with Straight Face. The very next day I woke up and started working for my own business. As a matter of fact, I still talk to Straight Face now and then during my golden minutes when the brightest and creative ideas hit me – the 30 mins or so just before falling asleep. Yes, I am running the office exactly as he said. I got myself the comfy chair, the comfy desk and I make the coffee every morning as I read the business papers. I take my stretching breaks and I do my bit with the RA patients’ league too, according to the company’s values and commitments. I meet a lot of people, listen to them work and write their business stories. I love what I do and I am proud of it. Now, I wouldn’t change it for the world.

“It is worth being happy without a reason rather than feel miserable without a proper reason. You are way too young and unprepared to think about retirement or pension,” said Straight Face to me again the other night.