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WORK AND LIFE CONNECTIONS

Success comes at a price. Business leaders face difficult decisions regarding demands on their time on daily basis. The responsibility towards their families and their employees makes them carefully consider each minute of their day. We want to know how they like to spend their time out of work, what inspires them and motivates them.

How has the Covid-19 pandemic impacted your professional and personal life?

(ST) I have to admit that although the Covid-19 pandemic has brought immense negatives to the world and our lives, it had a very positive impact on my life both professionally and personally. It helped me re-evaluate my life, my priorities, my IKAGAI and even it changed the long-held beliefs I had about philosophical matters as well as about work and what works best for career success.

(IV) The pandemic has proven that working from home is possible nearly for all roles, and that as a company we are able to adapt quickly to changes in the market. We have changed and implemented so many initiatives and projects in the last two and half years, many originating from that period (downsizing office space, hybrid working space, full home office, online onboarding and training, artificial intelligence, and others).

In personal life, I learned to value my family and their support even more, as to combine motherhood, schooling, and being a manager literally under one roof was really challenging. The positive side was that I have improved my culinary skills and increased my level of patience. Additionally, I have gained valuable experience in crisis and strategic management.

Were you able to identify any positive side effects or opportunities resulting from this situation?

(ST) OH YES! Many positive effects. Let me share a few that may well resonate with you.



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I've learned that "Everything is temporary", which put things into perspective for me and made me value "today" more than "tomorrow". So now I celebrate each day and make more short term plans that I can accomplish faster rather than plan and postpone my vision for a longer-term horizon.

When the pandemic hit I was home in India and we had a total lockdown

for over a month. On the other hand, the strain on our medical facilities was too high and they were unable to cope with the rising number of cases. In such times I was amazed at how much humanity and kindness existed even among strangers. Neighbors, not just friends, scrambled to help each other. Households collected aid for daily wage laborers who couldn't earn during that period. And most times a single phone call for help set off a chain of calls and help would manifest itself sometimes even through a stranger. The pandemic and seeing people around me deal with it reinstated my faith in the "goodness of humans and our resilience"

I have always found it easy to make allowances for others but I tend to set high standards for myself and push myself. That's always been me. This unusual period taught me the hard lesson of being kind to myself too and that "it's okay to sometimes let it loose" you don't have to feel guilty for not doing everything today and perfectly; others will understand too.

(IV) Yes, without a doubt. Our diversified portfolio and effective teamwork—we developed new roles and had people fill them temporarily—were important factors in our success. This increased the sense of fellowship within the organization. We were also successful in acquiring a number of new business associates.

What is the favorite part of your day and why?

(ST) The favorite part of my day is not a point in time but the moments when I interact with someone who gives me a warm smile, who inspires me in the moment and when I impact someone's day in a positive way. I love those parts of the day because they leave me feeling like I grew a little and someone else grew with me.

If you're inquiring about a particular time on the clock that's my favorite then here is a secret - It used to be evenings since I liked to sleep in. But that has changed to mornings as I grow wiser (I believe) and use the mornings to set the pace for my day.



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(IV) Since I'm a person who enjoys the present,

the right response to this question would be anytime. I live wholeheartedly, enjoy spending time with my family in the early mornings or working out at the gym. I also like the mornings at work because I can get a lot done without being interrupted. I enjoy the busy workdays because they go by quickly. Once more, evenings are primarily used for family time and solitary work. Overall, I value my time spent with friends and family the most, no matter the hour or day.

Do you have any habits or routines that help you maintain your work-life balance and work well for you?

(ST) I will admit I have a long way to go in this department but I can tell you I am trying. I have chosen to work with work-life integration rather than the famous work-life balance. Not treating work and life as two demanding children competing for my attention and time. I see them as parts of my life that need to coexist in harmony, much like you would blend colors for a painting or threads for a tapestry. Luckily I work for an organization that allows me the freedom to do so with what we call "own the way you work" practice. For this to work I need to set very clear targets for what I want to achieve in a day personally and at work and then plan my day accordingly. For me logging in on a Sunday evening to tidy up my weekly calendar and emails works and sets me

up for a smooth week and I do that while relaxing at home. At the same time, if I need to be home to manage my chores or simply be there for my family during the day I do that with equal comfort.

(IV) I read every evening before going to bed, and I swim once a week in addition to going to the gym twice a week early in the morning. Work is not permitted on weekends, which are instead reserved for spending quality time (traveling, hiking, skiing, culture, etc.). I don't go into great detail about my work with family members, and I only infrequently use my home office because work belongs in the office.



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What advice would you give to your 20-something-year old self?

(ST) In my 20s I was a bit too driven and wanted to excel so everything was about my career and success in it. If ambition were a disease I think I had it when I was in my 20s and 30s. My advice to that 20-something-year old me would be:

- Take it slow you are only 20. Slow down. Enjoy your 20s and take things as they come. You have a lifetime to dream and make dreams come true. Don't be in a mad rush to tick all "check boxes of life" that society has put out there as a 'norm'; make your own checklist instead.

Every single person in this world has their own path to take so let things happen in their own time.

- Bet on yourself – Invest in your success. Make calculated investments in yourself to become the person you want to become and become your biggest fan.
- Make as many experiences as you can – that's what will make life rich.

(IV) Be yourself, don't be afraid to make mistakes as they will teach you the most. Invest savings into property.

What are the parts of your work that still excite you and give you motivation?

(ST) Everything other than the 100,000 row Excel sheets. The opportunity to work with amazing people, the learning and the new possibilities that come with technology and building frontiers for success with absolute autonomy - that's what excites me to get to the office.

(IV) My field is very dynamic plus I work with unique individuals, there is no time to get bored. Witnessing the growth of my team members is a source of personal satisfaction. Engaging in discussions and devising solutions for our clients are aspects of my work that I genuinely enjoy. Moreover, the opportunity to contribute to positive changes in the labor market is a fulfilling part of my role.

If you had to make a career switch, in what other profession can you imagine yourself?

(ST) Actually I did make a career switch, a big bold one. I majored in Human Resources in my MBA and legal studies post university. After heading HR for Swiss Re India for a decade or so I made a career switch to Strategy, Operations and Innovation. Then after setting up the practice and going from outside of my comfort zone to "I know what I am doing" I switched countries to come here to Slovakia to help lead Swiss Re's second largest and strategic location. If I could relive my life I would love to become a fighter pilot.

(IV) I'm always joking that I would be a beach bar owner and party organizer. Generally speaking, I would prefer a job that combines project management, working with people, and sales / key account management.



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Can you name three sources you have recently learned from or have inspired you the most?

(ST) Only three? That's too little. Alright, here are the super recent ones:

1. 'A bit of optimism' a podcast with Simon Sinek & the McKinsey podcast "Inside the strategy room". These two podcasts have given me food for soul and food for my mind.
2. Travel & Life – My travels over the last many months, the various cultures and people I have met, have been my best school and source of inspiration. Being open minded about these experiences has changed my perspectives and taught me so much that it has humbled me.
3. BTS – BTS the K-pop (Korean pop music) band (and the people of Bratislava too) reminded me again that beginnings don't matter, You can achieve anything as long as you never give up and keep giving love and respect to those around you. When it comes to your goals and dreams – run if you can't fly, walk if you can't run but keep going till you win.

- (IV)
- Tatiana Kačmárová – she is our mentor in the

Leadership Academy.

- Martina Novotná – founder of Akčné ženy / Equal pay day organizer
- 'Google' Dave Hazlehurst – his speech on Evolve Summit conference in Brno
- Miroslav Sendlai – I like his HR newsletter 'HRst' noviniek z HR'

What is your biggest fear for the generation of today's children? What about the biggest hope?

(ST) My biggest fear is their happiness will be based on the wrong F - on "followers" on Instagram rather than "family and friends". But my hope is greater – they are an intelligent bunch with access to so much information and exposure without boundaries. My hope is that they will love their fellow human beings and the Earth enough to use their knowledge to make it a better place.

(IV) A significant concern for me is the extent of their reliance on technology, coupled with a potential shortfall in critical thinking abilities. My greatest hope is that they are intelligent and have great opportunities. They have the power to improve the world if they decide to do so.

AmCham Slovakia celebrates its 30th anniversary this year - what wish comes to your mind for this occasion?

(ST) When I observed the impactful work AmCham is undertaking in Slovakia for our industry, and witnessed the substantial benefits companies like ours derive from their ability to unite corporate knowledge and action, I was amazed. My wish for AmCham is to only multiply the impact they have right now and be a stronger force propelling Slovakia to greater potential.

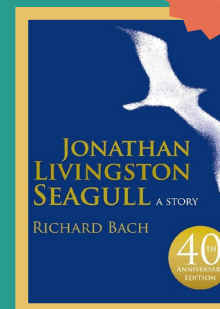
(IV) Congratulations on turning into the most engaged and well-heard chamber in Slovakia. Together with the members, I hope you'll continue your outstanding work and help to improve the business environment for all companies. I'm hopeful that the upcoming years will bring further success and closer ties between its members. Cheers to this anniversary!

To provide you with some bookish inspiration, this section of the *Connection* magazine features reading tips from various interesting people related to AmCham Slovakia. We have approached them with the following question:

What book has left the greatest impression on you recently and why?

recommended by

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JONATHAN LIVINGSTONE SEAGULL

by Richard Bach

I like reading autobiographies and biographies since they are the best way to learn from others and it's not just self-help advice. I personally think they allow us to live the lives we cannot live or walk a mile in the shoes of someone we admire. So I generally recommend that people read of lives of people they admire or want to be like. My favorite gifting book other than autobiographies is "Jonathan Livingstone Seagull" by Richard Bach.



Share your own book tip at connection@amcham.sk