

Making the connections between work and life

WITH



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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 affected your professional and personal life?

(MC) This year was very different from all the others, before or after 2020. It has challenged us as individuals and I was no exception. Being a mother, a wife and a daughter was different, many times extremely difficult. As a leader, you are expected to lead at the front, to inhale optimism and drive collaboration across the organization. Concurrently managing both roles was a huge challenge some days. Yet, looking back at 2020, I feel humbled by the experience and extremely proud of all leaders in Novartis, who, together with me, drove an exceptional performance. There was not a single patient untreated; we left not a single stone unturned. I feel privileged to be a leader during pandemic times!

(NM) I won't say anything new by saying that within a short period of time we have got into an unprecedented situation- the pandemic has been a shock that has brought significant change into everything – how we work and how we live. It strongly redirected our focus on what is vital. It is a test of resilience - societal, personal and a business one.

In professional life – there have been two priorities – health and safety of our people and continuity of business operations. We have been lucky and prepared – we were able to switch our entire operations to digital within 24 hours. From the people perspective – we have in place support mechanisms for our people to stay connected, engaged and to have available support they can reach for. The human element is crucial in everything we have been doing. The second wave

only highlighted the necessity of it. Adaptation at speed, agility and leadership from every seat were the imperatives for our business operations. What is relevant and most important for both strands is that leadership is needed more than ever, to navigate our people through these times. The world has not stopped, it changed, and we need to adjust as well as possible along with finding the new opportunities the situation brings.

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NIMA MOTAZED

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

(MC) Absolutely! It did not feel like this in March, when it all started. With time, we started to change our mindset and our behavior towards what opportunities does it open up, what is in it for us? We have upskilled all associates in digital technologies; we started using different channels to communicate amongst ourselves and with external customers, doctors, insurance companies, wholesalers, patient associations and our

mother company. It was amazing to see, how people joined in solidarity and helped each other. I feel our teams became more grateful for things that felt given before, i.e. being healthy, having psychological safety of not losing a job and simply being able to take care for your loved ones.

As an organization we empowered our teams to work independently at their own times and preferences, knowing everyone had to deal with multiple domestic errands. Our teams became creative in using different tactics in order to bring information to our customers and to engage in a dialogue in a very different way - the digital way!

(NM) As it happens, every cloud has a silver lining. In our company we have seen a high rise of agility and ownership – two corporate buzzwords that are better done than spoken and have a huge impact on the way we work with our clients. We have seen great team spirit, support and camaraderie. I think we have become more interested in each other as people. “How are you?”, has got a completely new dimension. We have proved to ourselves and also to our external stakeholders that we have excellent digital and technical skills that have replaced the personal contact in many ways. It is important to say that we are still in the eye of the tornado, and we need to focus on the resilience of our people to make our business continue and progress.

What is the favorite part of your day and why?

(MC) I started to enjoy mornings, there is no rush to dress up and get to work. I can have a coffee with my husband; I get to kiss my

daughter before she enters digital classroom in the safety of her home. As well, lunch breaks bring more freedom and options. On a sunny day, I can run to Kamzík. On a rainy one, I get to do the laundry, so it does not wait for me until Saturday.

(NM) My favorite part of the day is when I connect with people and have a chance to hear how they are doing, what concerns them, where they have questions. I love these conversations as I learn a lot from others as well as share some of my views and experiences. As we say in Swiss Re “we are smarter together”.

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

(MC) It evolved with time, at first I spent all days looking at the screen, hardly had time for bio break; I hardly found time to eat something before 6pm. Back to back meetings were the norm, and only a significant milestone, where I had to visit emergency room due to a severe migraine attack, made me realize I needed to own my day, my agenda and my calendar. Now I block my calendar with exercise time, lunch time and so called ‘me time’ where I can read, learn or simply browse through the news of the day. It keeps me in balance and at peace, so I do not turn into a nervous wreck by the end of the week.

(NM) I try to go for a 30-90 minute walk every day. At the beginning of the pandemic it worked very well, somewhere around summer it became difficult as the workload increased heavily. Last month, my family grew by another member, a sweet puppy, and this boy is forcing me to do my walks.

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

(MC) ‘Just be yourself! Know your



values and know your worth' I feel when we are young we do not know who we are and neither who we would like to be. We observe the world and have a lack of clarity as for what our values are, who we would like to become. We are driven, ambitious and hungry for success.

Once I delivered my daughter and counted a decade in corporate life, I realized you could only be successful if you are authentic and honest to yourself. This sometimes also meant admitting that I do not know. Therefore, some days you win and some days... you learn!

I do not compete with anyone, I only try to be a better person, wife, mother, daughter, sister and friend than I was yesterday.

(NM) I would definitely advise my younger self to exercise more. Besides that, I was just talking to my sons last week about some of the books that I read now, I should have read them 30 years ago. At the same time, every age has its specialties and you should enjoy it. To be frank, I have no regrets.

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

(MČ) I spent 20 years in the pharmaceutical industry and only the last two in the oncology therapeutic area. It stole my heart! It is needless to say, that seeing a young mother with metastatic breast cancer, living longer with her little children, makes my heart sing!

There is an area of my life, which I am extremely passionate about and this is people! I love developing people, understanding team dynamics, looking for the best in people and co-creating a culture, where people love to come to work, have fun and grow while working. Seeing individuals succeed and move on makes me proud as a leader. People are my biggest passion!

(NM) My motivation comes from things moving forward and when issues are being solved swiftly. I am a very pragmatic person and I was never a perfectionist. I love to simplify problems until you reach their main core and then

solve them fast. I love to work in teams as only through a team's strength you are able to simplify correctly and come up with great solutions.

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

Well, as mentioned, anything that has people development and culture in its DNA. I started realizing this only in recent years, seeing how much impact can a motivated associate have. Teams treated with respect and given trust are thriving! We have multiple examples within the company and I have witnessed quite a few in other Slovak organizations.

The other passion of mine is charity. I've always dreamt I will open an orphanage for African children and all couples who cannot have children will be able to come and build a family.

I went to Africa at the beginning of this year in order to reconfirm my values and to explore if I can make my dream come true. It was a bittersweet visit. I realized the level of corruption and administrative gap is huge. I would need to completely dedicate my time to this in order to have a slight possibility to succeed. As I said before, some days you win, some days you learn.

(NM) I was asked this question several years ago and I said that I would love to be a project manager of the next summer Olympics. This is a highly complex exercise, involving so many different people and professions and it is over after two weeks (at least the visible part of it).

What book do you give as a present or recommend the most often and why?

(MČ) I read a lot of leadership books and I very often recommend my mentees to read 'Fish philosophy', 'Our iceberg is melting' and '5 dysfunctions of a team'. They all speak to leaders and teams, explaining how to work together no matter the differences in order to be successful. I do not believe in individual success, I only believe in team success. It is so much more fun!

(NM) Oh, there are many. In our last Summit event, that is once a year when we bring our top talents together and task them about the goals which we would like to achieve over the year, I gave everyone the famous book of Thomas Erikson "Surrounded by Idiots" which talks about different types of personalities and why everyone feels that others are behaving like morons.



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MATEJA ČOTAR

Can you name three sources you have recently learned from or have inspired you the most (e.g. people, books, websites...)?

(MČ) A colleague Teresa Sala has recently inspired me. She gave me the advice 'you cannot save everyone'. I tend to look for solutions beyond reasonable horizons and she put a certain situation in perspective.

I have a 12-year-old daughter and she is the toughest coach I've had in my life. She puts a mirror in front of my face and she is usually right. When I worked in Basel, I took care of 34 countries of Central and Eastern Europe. I traveled 30 weeks per year.

One Sunday evening she came to my bed and whispered in my ear 'Mummy, I need you now, not when I am 16 years old'. I made the toughest decision later on and asked my boss to find me another job, one that would allow me to be there for her! It was the best decision I have ever made, as it was for Zoja and for my family!

There is no 'one fits all' recipe. I would advise young or expe-

rienced leaders the same - surround yourselves with people you get energy from and who accept you at your best and at your worst. And never, I mean never, compromise on your values! You have only one life to live!

(NM) Firstly during this Covid pandemic, I was looking into the work of some heroes of our society, not only doctors and nurses who are truly role models but also supporters who take care of homeless people, addicts, people in poverty and I was really inspired by their work and realized how little I know.

Then I listened to a series of interviews and speeches of Viktor E. Frankl with the title "If You're Looking for Meaning, You Will Find Healing - German: Wer Sinn sucht, findet Heilung". Impressive and inspiring how purpose gives us a sense for our being and all its aspects.

And finally, I read a book from Peter H. Diamandis and Steven Kotler "The Future Is Faster Than You Think" which made it clear to me that I have a really good chance to experience some of the topics that I thought only my kids will have the chance to witness.

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

(MČ) I fear computers and social media will hijack personal interactions and emotions. There is nothing more powerful than a human touch, a warm smile and a friendly chat on a dark day. We are human beings, let us not become robots, operating in virtual settings only.

So, I hope we will use the benefits of what future innovations hold for us and at the same time remain human, friendly and warm individuals.

(NM) My biggest fear is complacency and a lack of defining a meaningful purpose for their lives. My biggest hope is through their access to knowledge and better education to make this planet a better place to live. I am sure that our parents and grandparents also had similar fears and hopes.