

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 impacted your professional and personal life?

(AK) As many others, due to the nature of my work, during the pandemic I find it more challenging to find the right work-life balance. In pre-Covid times, when I was leaving the office in the evening, even if I stayed beyond working hours to complete some specific task, I was able to clear my head travelling home and only if there was a real 'emergency', I reopened my laptop after coming home. This habit took me some years to build, and now, I often find myself in front of my computer in late evening, trying to catch up on what I did not complete during the day due to a continuous series of online meetings, which do not provide much space for 'work' itself.

Of course, I miss personal interactions with colleagues, lunches with my friends and all these opportunities to obtain some mental break. I see it much more mentally and also physically demanding to be online with almost no interruptions during the whole working day.

Personally, I see the pandemic even more demanding when it comes to women and mothers. Sometimes I feel overwhelmed with all the duties including cooking, cleaning, shopping... And although other family members do their best to participate in what needs to be done, it still feels like most of the tasks are on my shoulders. This has got worse in the last three months since my husband was diagnosed with cancer and has been going through chemotherapy treatment.

During the 1st wave of the pandemic, before we found and implemented new daily and weekly routines within the family, I often had feelings of guilt that while working from home, I was not able to provide as much support to my kids as they would need and make sure their time was filled with reasonable and useful activities. It was a challenge especially with respect to my 9-year-old son, since my 15-year-old daughter is already rather independent and fortunately highly responsible when it comes e.g., to her study duties. But I see her struggling due to lack of in-person contact with her peers for such a long time. I cannot imagine being in her shoes when I was her age and I feel very sorry for her generation.

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MARTIN MAŠŤALÍR

(MM) I must first start by saying that the pandemic has really had an impact on life. Personal and professional. And while it sounds like a cliché, it's true that it made me rethink the priorities that really matter and realize again that life has a limited number of days. The involuntary halt has fully shown

what is really important in life and what is not. For example, how important school is not only for children, but also how quickly we can adapt.

As for how my daily routine at Cisco has changed, on the one hand I have to say not that much. We've always had a model for remote work in place, so it wasn't really a change. The main change consisted in adapting to a world where more meetings take place in the virtual world. And we gradually learned that as well. All together.

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

(AK) Workwise, especially since I work for a technology company, I see that the pandemic also brought many positive things. For example, immense acceleration of communication and collaboration tools use has created completely new opportunities to increase flexibility of labor force. The development we expected to happen within the timeframe of a few years is suddenly here: for a significantly wider range of people work is not a place to go to anymore, it is rather a place we connect with, providing also much higher flexibility. This will lead to accelerated growth of fluid workforce. And when it comes to businesses the pandemic can be perceived as a strong impulse for further digital transformation and significant reinvention.

(MM) The current situation has changed our way of life and, as has been said, has helped us rethink our lives and priorities. But we are gradually getting used to the "new normal" and the price

for this awareness is very high. If we can talk about something positive in this situation, then I consider the main benefit to be an experience that I believe will help humanity learn and do things differently. Mainly in relation to the environment.

What is the favorite part of your day and why?

(AK) I love when my son wakes me up coming to my bed in the morning for little cuddling... Given his age, this might not last for long so I really enjoy it and use it as a battery refill prior to another demanding day ahead. And in the evenings, we have reading time – he reads to me aloud for at least 30 minutes as a part of his daily routine. Then we discuss the new words he learned and guess how the story will further evolve. I think that despite all the negatives that the pandemic brought, including the fact that we are not in personal contact with the wider family and friends, it brought us closer as a family.

(MM) My favorite part of the day is eating together, when we as a family returned to daily cooking and meeting at one table. It is a ritual that helps unite the family.

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

(AK) I must admit that I am not very disciplined when it comes to maintaining work-life balance in these times... Before, I used to go swimming several times a week, which provided me with necessary physical activity and also mental relaxation. I did not have enough motivation to replace it with something else once the swimming pools

were closed during the winter months. But I strongly hope that with better weather I will start playing golf again and spend the weekends outside with my family on the golf course.

And I have to confide that I am a Netflix and HBO-GO -addict – I also relax well watching the shows and movies in English with a glass of wine in my hand :-)

(MM) Virtual meetings also brought the realization that meetings can follow one another practically without a break. That's why it's important for me to move every day and find the time to move. It also serves as a time for me to think and relax. Finally, the practical meaning of smart watches has also been shown, apart from the fact that they can tell you the time. When you suddenly find out that you have walked 200 steps in a whole day in your living room/kitchen home office and it is a good time to do something about it.

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

(AK) To be more self-confident, believe in my own abilities and not be afraid to step out of my comfort zone. Usually there's not so much to lose. On contrary: every step outside your comfort zone is a learning opportunity, which pushes you further.

(MM) Never stop learning and listening.

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

(AK) My main work responsibilities in Accenture Slovakia are two-fold and in both areas, my main source of motivation comes from results and value delivered by projects and initiatives I am involved in.

When it comes to core business, I've spent more than 20 years working for local clients on various consulting, system integration and business transformation projects. It excites me, how technology has evolved during those years and what immense opportunities it can provide to us and our clients. Each client and project is different and there's always space to learn new things, meet new people and build relations. The greatest feeling is when clients express their gratitude for the work delivered, appreciating not only the company but also your personal contribution or even become your friends. At this moment, my main focus is to drive the launch of Accenture activities in Slovak public sector after years without our presence in this market due to lack of transparency and incompatibility

with our high ethical standards. I believe that a global technology leader like Accenture has a lot to offer to Slovak public sector not only business-wise. We can also contribute to cultivation of the overall environment, when it comes to transparency in public IT services procurement and tangible value delivered.

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ALENA KANABOVÁ

The second source of my motivation is related to my role of Corporate Citizenship Lead in Accenture Slovakia. Accenture is locally one of corporate social responsibility leaders and Corporate Citizenship is one of the pillars for our social responsibility. I am proud to be one of the key persons behind it and specifically behind successful initiatives such as #DigitalSkills. This particular initiative was launched in 2016 by our volunteers and since then evolved into a program that trained more than 1500 Slovak teachers from all regions to boost quality of computer science education at Slovak schools. Last year, we brought this program to the next level by launching the Digital Competencies Coordinators' Program for schools. What makes me proud is that under the leadership of Accenture, a unique and highly functioning ecosystem of partners from multiple sectors was built, collaborating, co-volunteering and jointly contributing to the success and impact of our activities, focused on building young generation's digital skills.

(MM) I still enjoy working with people, experiencing inspiring

situations, learning and looking at the world with different eyes. Yes, there are times that are not pleasant in working and non-working relationships, but they also move us forward and help us to get to know not only ourselves.

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

(AK) Profession-wise, I can imagine myself been a teacher. I love interactions, which give me opportunity to share knowledge and develop others. And if I were to leave the world of consulting and IT, at this stage of my career I would probably move to the non-profit sector.

(MM) I clearly see my future in education and I can imagine being in the role of a teacher in high school or university. I am already planning a future in this direction. I experienced a short period in the role of a teacher during my doctoral studies and I found out that this is the direction to which I am called.

What book do you gift or recommend the most often and why?

(AK) "Now, discover your strengths" by Marcus Buckingham and Donald O. Clifton. Some years ago, "Strengths Finder" concept was an eye-opening experience for me. It helped me better understand myself as well as the dynamics of my interactions and relations with other people. It is a very powerful tool and I am delighted that a few years later, this concept has been implemented in Accenture, completely changing for example the way we evaluate our people.

(MM) In the beginning of the year, I received a book by Yevgeny Zamyatin, "We", which describes anti-utopia in the early 20th century. It is unbelievable how current the ideas from the book are today and how important it is to constantly closely watch the elites and fight for freedom and equality. Therefore, I recommend that everyone remembers these rare values, which are more relevant today than ever before.

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

(AK) Sheryl Sandberg (COO of Facebook), her book Lean In, and Lean In circles concept connected with Lean In global community and knowledge base tailored to specific needs of women's personal & professional development (<https://leanin.org/>). Few

years ago, my friend and ex-colleague, inspired by Sheryl's book founded the 1st Lean In circle in Slovakia. Being a part of this circle was an extraordinary experience for me. We also brought the concept to Accenture, launching the 1st company circles. Lean In is helping women achieve their ambitions and supports them in development of their leadership skills. And we definitely need more women in leadership.

I've been recently inspired also by people from the Slovak non-profit sector, who are fighting hard to improve our education system, despite all the obstacles and lack of financial resources. Some of them I have met in Teach for Slovakia, where I am involved as a Board member.

(MM) www.dennikn.sk - I consider it important to find a relevant and verified source of information. "Why We Sleep" by Matthew Walker - which changed my view of overnight stays and night work. Anton Srholec, whose ideas will for me be a manifestation of humanity forever.

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

(AK) Despite the climate crisis, which represents a huge threat for future generations, sometimes it makes me sad to acknowledge that our children's world will be very different from what we used to know due to things brought by the digital revolution. However, I am optimistic, I think that there will always be an inevitable role and space for human ingenuity to go hand in hand with technology progress and that at the end of the day, the positives of this new world will definitely prevail. But to make our kids succeed, it requires bringing the education system to the 21st century: we must change the way how and what we teach and focus on those skills, which will be crucial to succeed on the labor market in the digital age. Yet, our education system is very far from the ideal state and that is also a reason why I am personally engaged in several activities and projects to change this.

(MM) I am afraid that children might lose their social contact and ability to think critically. At the same time, I believe that progress always changes our behavior. We will learn to process the large amount of information that has especially marked the new generation. Because for them it's already a standard. And if we find a way to use all that information meaningfully, it will be another milestone in history.