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Maria Gudkova - Ter Avest, Owner at Coaching and Consulting Boutique, EMBA 2009, the Netherlands

»I BELIEVE THAT IN THE BUSINESS WORLD, AND IN THE MODERN BUSINESS WORLD ESPECIALLY, THE ABILITY TO REINVENT AND PERPETUAL DEVELOPMENT ARE KEY TO SUCCESS AND SURVIVAL - BOTH ON A CORPORATE AND AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL.«

Everyone's life is a story. While you are the main character of your own, you are at the same time playing a side character role in many others. It's interesting to stop from time to time and take a look back and reflect on twists and turns one went through and what kind of impact it had or did not have on you.

Meet Maria Gudkova - Ter Avest, our MBA alumna. Back in 2009, Maria was confidently navigating the corporate world waters, serving as a top executive in one of the well-known global giants - Henkel. More than ten years later, Maria says that everything is different and everything is the same: she is still learning how to live this life and still curious about what comes next. In 2020 though you can find her in the Netherlands and not in Ukraine, where she comes from. She is her own boss, blogs about various topics including coaching that became one of the sources of her professional inspiration and passion and, in fact, her own consulting business. We asked Maria to tell us more about what she is doing nowadays and what has happened in the last ten years.



Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova

It's been a while since you graduated from the Executive MBA, in fact, it's been 10 years now. How much did your life change since then? What you are you doing nowadays? How happy are you on the scale of 1-10 at the moment with where you are and what you are doing and why?

The world has changed since I have graduated, really. Ten very dynamic years (I am now thinking of this number and feel the chills) have gone by and nothing is

the same or as I used to know it. I used to live in Ukraine, now I live in the Netherlands, I used to be single, now I am married, I used to be "just me", now I have a son, I used to work in the corporate sector, now I run my own practice, I used to be 30, now I am 40. Everything is different and everything is the same: I am still learning how to live this life, I am still fully experiencing all its curves, I am still curious about what waits for me around the corner and I am still building my life around what I find valuable to

make sure it is mine 'truly madly deeply'.

At the time of your enrolment, you were holding a top position in Henkel in Ukraine, having more than 10 years of work experience in an HR field and with two degrees under your belt. Why did you decide to do an MBA? Did you stay in Henkel after that for a long period or not and why?

At that time when I enrolled into the MBA program my academic

background lied mostly in the sphere of natural science as I hold degrees in biology and ecology. At the same time I have built up my career in the field of HRM and organizational development. Holding top managerial positions, being a part of the executive team, I had to deal with business challenges, to understand business drivers and key business success factors to make sure I am on the same page with my colleagues and make sure I deliver the best of my knowledge while finding business solutions that not only solve tactical issues but take company to the next level. I believe that in the business world, and in the modern business world especially, the ability to reinvent and perpetual development are key to success and survival - both on a corporate and an individual level. My executive education helped me fill in the blanks when it came to finance, economics, accounting, sales and marketing and general management. All this knowledge I have later put into practice while continuing my corporate career and building up my own consulting practice in Ukraine and now in the Netherlands.

One of the things that you mentioned then, in 2009, was that you see yourself in the future as an owner of a consulting enterprise providing career and personal coaching. Did you realise this idea?

Yes, I did and I do. Back in Ukraine, besides having a full-time managerial career, little by little I started to slowly build up my consulting practice, first as a freelancer, and, later as an entrepreneur offering consulting projects for both companies and individuals. After moving to the Netherlands I have continued with my own practice, adding coaching to the range of my services as of last year. It turned

out that coaching - professionally assisting individuals in achieving of their goals - became one of the sources of my professional inspiration, and I get passionate about it as I get joy, sense of value and, of course, a sense of pride when my clients get the results they were looking for.

Speaking about coaching, it seems this field became popularized in the last few years and having a coach sort of sound like a having a GP, or a family doctor. What is the main difference between having a coach and having a shrink? There is a joke about coaches, that they do not care about your past as much as your doctor. Is that so?

This one is definitely a good joke and I will surely use it my sessions!



:) There are many different styles and schools in coaching. There are coaching schools that are mostly concentrating on the pragmatics of the path to the goal, and there are coaching schools that combine both psychology and practical steps. Having experienced coaching myself and seeing its results, I am a big fan of the second school, as I believe that we are all living humans, not biorobots, we do have feelings, limiting concepts, perceptions, assumptions, fears and other

settings that eventually define our success or failure. Therefore, I believe that ignoring our soft side and concentrating only on the rational side can surely give us short-term results, but it's value as a method leading to sustainable results, in my opinion, is questionable. I am not yet a professional psychologist (I am starting my education in the second half of 2020), but already now, in my work, I am using particular psychological techniques or some of its elements that help my client see internal obstacles and deal with them, change or substitute them with the ones that are more effective or at least minimizing their damaging effect. In coaching we don't go as deep as processing traumatic experiences of the past, deal with loss or deep personal crisis, but we do touch those issues that are standing in the way of building the life that client desires for him

or herself. I like to think of the role of the coach as of a reliable partner who keeps his/her eye on the client's goal, supports the client on the way to it and works on it with dedication until client gets to his destination surely and safely, within the desired timeframe.

I am happy that coaching becomes popular as I believe that if you found the right coach, you will save yourself time and effort and get there, where

you want to be in life, faster. Of course, growing popularity increases competition, but yet again - as we have learned from our MBA study - competition is a driver of professional growth as it stimulates creativity and development, therefore, I think of competition as one of the drivers that contributes to the development of this profession.

As mentioned above, coaching in the last years got a lot of attention for a good reason, however, it also means that there are plenty of coaches offering their services and it became harder to find a good one. What would you say are the things that managers who are looking for a coach, need to know about before choosing one? Who in your opinion is a legendary coach or close to that definition?

There is a number of things worth considering while choosing a coach. Apart from the obvious ones like price/quality, references and feedback, education and background etc, there is a number of factors that are not so obvious but yet, are important to me.

One of the crucial factors is the ability of the coach to be impartial and to lead you in finding your own solutions. The responsibility of a good coach is to help you make your own decisions and increase your integrity. The coach is there to make sure you are in control of your life, help you enrich your experience in the manner that suits your interests and leads you to your goals. A good coach is the one who helps you discover what kind of resources you have and how to utilize them effectively. Furthermore, what I find important is a "scale" of a personality of a coach. In my opinion, a coach is more effective when he or she is



accomplished, experienced, has made and learned from his/her own mistakes, when he/she grew as a human being while going through and learning from crises of life. I also believe that the ability of the coach to be creative and go beyond certain limits, and challenge you by showing you new horizons, stretch your imagination and stimulate your thinking, can take you far.

There are, of course, many examples of professional and dedicated coaching: for instance, Tomas Leonard (one of the founders of the coaching method), Bill Campbell - a longtime coach of the Silicon Valley. My personal hero, the person who opened up coaching for me as a profession is Yulia Gur-Arje, a professional psychologist and a coach from Israel, with more than 20 years of practice, who I am happy to have as a supervisor and my mentor. My other personal hero is Maxim Tsvetkov, one of the founding fathers of coaching in Ukraine, Russia and post Soviet countries, who has introduced coaching to the market in the early 2000s and is still passionate about it. Maxim is my dedicated teacher and I am proud to be able to learn from him.

You live nowadays in the Netherlands. How come you

decided to move there? How long have you been there? Did Dutch way of life affect your attitudes and perspectives and in which way?

I've been living in the Netherlands for almost 6 years now. I moved here for the family reasons, learned the language, started my business, integrated and built up my life here. The Netherlands have welcomed me and have not made my integration as difficult as it could have been (as I have relocated to other countries before, I have some experience in that area), I have got a lot of support from my family and those who surround me and I am going to be internally grateful to them. My Ukrainian background and Dutch reality are both shaping me into a happier, calmer and more stable version of me. I learn to balance my professional interests with personal life as a lot of the Dutch do, know and cherish my resources, utilize them to my fullest but not over-exhaust them, value pragmatism of life and plan long-term as the Dutch do. My emotional Ukrainian personality has formed the alliance with the rational Dutch style of living, and now I apply a combination of the two to the benefit of my clients, making "East meets West" in my coaching and consulting. One of the areas where I offer my

coaching services is immigration and relocation coaching - I assist my clients on the way to their new home, from making a decision to relocate to settling and building a new life in the new country. I am happy to be of use and apply my personal experience and professional service to those who are making this major life change and make their transition smoother.

Apart from coaching you also decided to load yourself with another shift - in a restaurant. Why do you do that and why do you like it?

Three times per week, apart from my coaching and consulting practice, I work in the kitchen of the restaurant as a support staff. My responsibilities include washing up and assisting chefs in preparing ingredients. It is heavy physical work with a clear obvious result. Result is what I love both about coaching and restaurant. During the day I work with clients as a coach, I get emotionally and mentally involved and my work in the restaurant is my way to unload and clear my head and

heart. We have a great dynamic team, we laugh a lot, we have an atmosphere that makes you want to come to work every single time. At the same time, the restaurant is a production line with a complex value chain and I love to see how different stations of business mechanism work as one to deliver our main product - happy satisfied clients. I believe that restaurant business is a business of communication - we communicate certain ideas and emotions to our clients through the means of creating experiences via our dishes. With every plate we tell a story that a client gets a taste of with his senses and I am happy to be a part of that world, while making my small but a significant input. I work in a restaurant for the second time in my life and for the second time it is literally the work that makes me happy, makes my hands busy while letting me refresh my mind.

If you met yourself 10 years ago, what advice would you give to the woman you were then?

Find the right rhythm and give

yourself time, pace yourself, slow down - everything is possible when you are in balance with yourself.

If you think of corporate leadership, any person that you would name that, in your opinion, represents a good leader? Why?

My favourite corporate leader of all times is my first boss - Judy Saleeby, owner of the Judy's European Bakery, Branford, CT, where I had a pleasure to work when I lived in the USA. Judy was a true mentor and a teacher to me: passionate about her work, a dedicated and a successful businesswoman, true inspiration to her team, humane, caring, fostering. While setting high professional standards, she was expecting the best possible result from her team, and making the best bread ever that people still talk about, even almost 20 years later.

MEET MARIA IN PERSON

My friends would describe me as... empathetic, speaking my mind, charismatic, understanding.

My favourite free time activities are...walking, reading, yoga, travelling.

The last book I've read is "Pragmatics of human communication" by Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas and Don D. Jackson. I found it interesting because it talks about scientific background of how and why humans communicate the way we do.

My favourite movie is..."Love actually", TV series "Breaking bad", "The Crown" and »Friends«.

The best song of all times for me is..."Bright lights" by Gary Clark Jr.

The country I have not been to yet and would like to visit is... Mexico because of their religion and unbelievable free use of colour in their culture.

An advice I would give to my child... "you are your own universe, take good care of it".