

June 2021

## IEDC Alumni Success Story

**DANIJELA MILIĆ:»I HAD A WISH TO MAKE A BIGGER CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY FOR QUITE A WHILE, AND I WANTED TO CONTINUE MY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN AN ORGANIZATION WHERE MY SKILLS COULD BE USED TO MAKE A MORE SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF MY COUNTRY.«**

*Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova  
Photos provided by Danijela Milić*

**Y**ou have been elected as a CEO of CROMA – Croatian Managers' and Entrepreneurs' Association, quite recently. How did you become involved with CROMA? What does the Association do and how do you manage operations now, in these pretty challenging times for the business? How important organisations like CROMA are and what is your opinion about importance of network and networking?

I had a wish to make a bigger contribution to society for quite a while, and I wanted to continue my professional development in an organization where my

skills could be used to make a more significant impact on the development of my country. I believe that the leaders are the engine of the Croatian economy and through CROMA association we strive to create, transfer and exchange knowledge and experience in order to develop and prepare leaders of the future. The position of a today's manager is extremely demanding and stressful. Continuous work on self-development is something of a norm nowadays, as well as being able to lead by example and to be prepared for constant change and innovation. The expectations placed on today's leaders are extremely high and maintaining manager skills on the level of the needs of today's business is unusually

difficult. Everyone expects them to be fearless, brave, decisive, flexible, empathic... and yet those managers are just people, with their own fears, doubts, private lives and problems and of course some weaknesses... Through CROMA association we try to create an environment where they can share their fears, their thoughts and their everyday problems with other managers who might have faced and overcome the same challenges



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during their careers.

Developing the management profession, promoting its moral values and positive impact on the society and environment, lifelong learning, sharing experience between managers and encouraging networking are the key foundations of our association. Building meaningful relationships is essential to move your career or your business forward and through CROMA we aim to regularly create opportunities for networking.

**Taking a retrospective look at your career path so far, starting in Electronics and Telecom companies in marketing and CRM positions, to doing a complete U-turn many years later, leaving a stable corporate job and becoming your own boss... would you do anything differently, given another opportunity? Why/why not? What was the reason for that U-turn?**

I am extremely curious and staying in one place is not an option for me... If I were given a chance to do it differently, I would just do that move much earlier than I did, as I always want to see the things from another perspective and I was really interested to see it from

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an entrepreneur perspective...

I moved from telecom to nautical tourism and founded my own agency. I was very excited at the time, but also felt pretty helpless quite often, particularly, in situations when one knows exactly what would be the right thing to do at a specific moment in order to expand the business,



but as a decision-maker has to prioritize because financial possibilities are limited. So I had to be extremely resourceful and innovative to be able to gain my place in the market and I have never allowed myself to compromise quality and client relationship. I have met so many wonderful people throughout my journey, and I have to say that now, in CROMA, I am surrounded with so many remarkable and yet extremely humble people and I feel that with this great team we can really move mountains and do miracles.

**You've got an IEDC EMBA 2005 diploma under your belt. Would you recall if that one-year program was very intense? Who were your**

**favourite professors? Do you still keep in touch with your classmates or come across fellow IEDC alumni in business circles? Does that network still help you now? Particular good memories from the school that come to mind that you cherish?**

That one year in Bled was

extremely intense but I really think that that intensity is also extremely valuable. The connection we had with classmates was very deep on many levels. We had the privilege to forget about our real life during that time while in Bled, as 5-week long modules every month and a half really provided us with that opportunity. Our mind was flying from one business to another, from one case study to another, from one possibility to another and that might have been the biggest benefit of it all - us being placed in neutral surroundings, out from the regular life and work, all the time challenged by professors but also by your team member and all the other participants



forced us to improve much faster and to see things more clear as you start thinking out-of-the-box...I think we were having the opportunity to reset our minds and partially get rid of "what we know" to be able to see things in an unclouded and more connected way...

When leaving Bled we thought we will never stop being in touch with members of our group but with years passing we become aware that this is an illusion. However, I have to say that a smaller part of us, let's say 10-15 people from our group, do manage to stay in touch: few times per year we meet for dinner, there is a WhatsApp group where we send some messages from time to time. What is important, we all really like our gatherings when we share our experiences from today's life and laugh recalling the memories from the time in Bled.

**What would you say was the best takeaway from your time in Bled? Or had the most impact on you, your skillset, your confidence level?**

There were really lot of things from my time in Bled that had impact on me. I will never forget that very high level of energy during my year in Bled that didn't decrease even during the days when we were pushed into highly stressful situations. There was once that task to prepare a presentation for the next day early morning and the topic (on a completely unknown matter) was given to us an evening before. The team was chosen randomly and we had to do the research and to come to a



solution to a particular problem and make a presentation, all in 12 hours time available in one night only. It was amazing to see how in that short time, one night, we were went from total chaos and desperation to an organized and structured work and how the roles of team players were naturally taken according to their skills and abilities. Each of us was reacting differently but in order to reach the goal, we managed to overcome our pride and vanity and the job was done. I became aware that differences are what in fact contributes to reaching excellence and how together we could deliver something that at the beginning seemed quite a challenge. That reminded me as well about the lectures of Prof. Paul Claudel that I appreciated so much, as he was talking about adoptive leadership and a personal approach to each employee that results in top performance and high personal satisfaction for each team member...

**Being a busy and highly engaged business person, how do you keep up with**

**the pressure? What are your "support systems" or principles you figured out that work best for you?**

Hiking, yoga, horse riding and piano playing are helping me keep my balance. Each of those four things has special part in my everyday life and depending of the schedule I try to do at least one of them. Piano is always there in my living room if I need it for an emotional relief, walking in a forest never fails to fill you up with positive energy, yoga gives me balance and reminds me to stop and reflect from time to time and horse riding - well, I think it gives me all this positive energy and peace-of-mind whenever I am in contact with those amazing beings.



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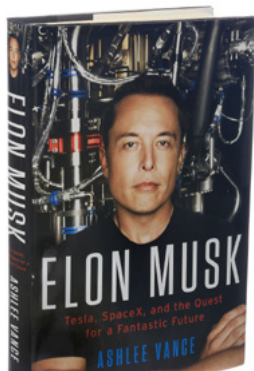
However, above all, my two amazing sons are my inspiration and my everything and I really try to be as present in their lives as I can and I give them all my support and love.

I like to go beyond my limits, I always try to see the positive things in any situation, I always consider change as an opportunity and I never forget that learning is a process which

never ends...I also like to ask myself over and over again "What will I be when I grow up?"

## MEET DANIJELA IN PERSON

*Last book I've read was...*



*...the biography of Elon Musk.*

*An advice I would give to my younger self... Never doubt that being yourself is always the right way, no matter which crossroad you are standing at...*

*My favorite free time activity is...*



*...horse-riding.*

*My next travel destination will be... South Africa because I'd like to enjoy a safari tour with my kids.*



EMBA 2005

**Danijela Milić**  
CEO of CROMA,  
Croatian Managers' and  
Entrepreneurs' Association

*Last TV series I watched that impressed me was... "La Casa de Papel". I have watched it during the lockdown, otherwise I am not such a fan of TV series :)*

*My favourite movie is...*



*"Heat" from Michael Mann.*

*When driving I prefer listening to... Andrea Bocelli.*

