



»KEEP YOUR BEGINNER'S MINDSET, ASK QUESTIONS, TRY TO UNDERSTAND THE PAIN POINTS OF THE CUSTOMER AND TRY TO SOLVE THEM.« **KATHRIN MIHALUS DIANOVSKI, AREA VICE PRESIDENT SWITZERLAND/AUSTRIA/CEE, SERVICENOW, EMBA 2015-16, GERMANY**

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*Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova,
photos provided by IEDC and Kathrin Mihalus Dianovski*

What inspired you to make a move and how hard was it?

After 24 years at Coca-Cola, making a career change wasn't an easy decision. I'd essentially grown up with the company, starting at 16. But two pivotal experiences prompted me to consider what lay beyond the Coca-Cola world.

The first was my MBA program at IEDC Bled. It was a transformative experience on

multiple levels. I was the only German participant in my class and the sole representative from the FMCG sector, which made the journey particularly eye-opening. The program pushed me to reflect on fundamental questions - what do I really want from life, what makes me happy, and what's next? These thought-provoking discussions, combined with challenging leadership exercises, gave me the mental space to step back and imagine new possibilities.

At the same time, Coca-Cola was embarking on one of Europe's largest digital business transformation initiatives, and I had the opportunity to be a part of it. We took a brand rooted in tradition and made critical data, such as KPIs and business-driving metrics, accessible in real time on our mobile devices. It was incredible to be able to track, for example, how many new Coke Zero customers we gained yesterday or how many customer visits our 1,000-person sales team

achieved daily, weekly, and monthly - all at our fingertips. This wasn't just about numbers; it was a cultural shift. We moved from a siloed structure to a cohesive, customer-centered approach, giving everyone in the service department a unified view of the customer. It was a powerful transformation that made me appreciate the impact of digital innovation on both business results and company culture.

These two experiences - the MBA, with its introspective questions on leadership and happiness, and the hands-on experience of digital transformation - created a unique energy in me. They spurred me to take the leap and explore a new direction.

Nobody is probably talking about this out loud, but MBA does make you unhappy, at least for the first 6 months after you finish it.

No, I think "unhappy" is actually a completely wrong word for it.

Well, it makes you rethink, reevaluate what you want, doesn't it?

It's really about the fact that you have to reflect - not once, not twice, but continuously. During those two years of study, every time when you are on site, but especially when you off-site - back in

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your normal life between the modules, back at your job - this reflection process starts, and you cannot stop it. It's an ongoing process. So, actually I would say, it's more about the chance to make your life better, to improve yourself, to become the best version of yourself, to get to know yourself better. I would put it like that. I would not describe it as "unhappy". I mean, of course, there are very hard decisions to make both on private matters, and in business. But, as many IEDC alumni told me, the EMBA will change my life completely- and they were absolutely right.

million euros - a remarkable achievement at the time. They disrupted the market completely with the idea of having healthy, convenient products for very young kids. And we were even competing with established market leaders such as Hipp.

I got to know the founder and we agreed that I would help them build out their sales and marketing structure and implement Salesforce, a tool I had used extensively at Coca-Cola. By the end of the year, I had learned so much about what it means to drive business in a startup



So, the move, the leap from Coca-Cola to ServiceNow took you a while to do. However, it was not a straight leap from one company to another.

Yes, transitioning from one corporate environment to another, I used the opportunity to spend a year working with a start-up in Berlin, called Freche Freunde, which produces the fruit squeezies for young children. It was a team of just 60 people, who yet they were already managing a business worth around 8 to 10

environment. Decisions had to be made quickly, with results visible almost immediately - an experience quite different from the pace of a large corporation. That year was an invaluable learning experience.

Did you spend your sabbatical working with a startup?

No, the startup came later. My sabbatical was entirely free time. I needed that time, to be quite honest, to disconnect from "red-colour" of Coca-Cola after 24 years, to get

out of this circle, to stop being just Kathrin-from-Coca-Cola. I spent a lot of that off time in Croatia. I started my sailing and boating license and completed it this year. So, it was a lot of seaside. I got also to spend time and do things together with my family. I went to Budapest with my mom to visit our extended family there. I was focusing on my family, on myself, doing completely different things than having meetings and trying to get out of drill, trying to calm down and get to the point when I'm ready to do something different.

So, after your sabbatical and work with the startup, you transitioned to a completely different field: IT. Having worked in companies with such distinct cultures, what are some universal leadership skills or a leadership lesson you believe is universal, regardless of industry?

That's a really good question. For one, you work with people and it does not matter whether it's a soft drink or a software business. The customer should be the boss in any case. Secondly, you should always stay "humble and hungry". It doesn't matter what you are selling. And the third thing: keep your beginner's mindset, ask questions, try to understand the pain points of the customer and try to solve them. So regardless whether I was in Coca-Cola or Salesforce or ServiceNow these days – that's what always stays the same for me, these concepts are completely independent of what the product of the company is.



Can you tell us more about ServiceNow's business and your current role there?

I'm currently responsible for a substantial market of Switzerland, Austrian and Central Eastern Europe, managing the sales side. ServiceNow is an AI-driven platform, designed to automate and optimize workflows across every department within a company, regardless of its industry or business focus.

For example, in the HR department, the platform can streamline the entire employee lifecycle—from recruiting and onboarding to managing personal matters like vacation, certifications, and training, all the way to retirement. The whole process is managed within one cohesive platform, simplifying tasks for both HR teams and employees.

Another example is an International Automotive Brand, which operates with over 5,000 locations worldwide. They use ServiceNow to monitor their operations across all these sites, with the platform enabling real-time tracking identify any missing supplies and prevent business interruptions. This immediate visibility helps ensure that operations run smoothly and

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The platform is particularly beneficial for departments like procurement, where AI-driven automation enhances productivity and efficiency, ultimately reducing costs and boosting overall productivity. ServiceNow's capabilities allow organizations to operate more cohesively and effectively by centralizing critical processes and data in one place.

Basically, any company and any business can be potentially a ServiceNow client. Does the size of the business matter? Also, who are your competitors? Are local players that are offering some more narrower solutions, for instance, solutions for automatization of HR processes only, would you consider them as competition?

Essentially, any company, regardless of size, has the potential to be a ServiceNow client. Size doesn't limit the possibilities – it's about the need for a unified platform that can streamline and optimize operations across the entire

business. As for competitors, there are local players that offer more niche solutions, such as HR automation tools. However, we don't see these as direct competition because their offerings are often siloed, disconnected, and don't provide a comprehensive view. What sets ServiceNow apart is our platform's ability to integrate data across all business segments, providing an end-to-end solution. With the power of GenAI, we can drive transformation across the entire business, not just a single function.

With all your experience in all the companies you've been to until now, how do you approach managing cross-functional teams and how do you basically help them thrive and be productive and efficient?

The most important thing is to foster an environment of collaboration. But it starts with leading by example. You must align yourself with the leaders of other departments to ensure you're working together effectively. Secondly, when it comes to customer-centricity, the cross-functional collaboration means everyone acts as one team. Without that, success is out of reach.

Here, at ServiceNow, we set ourselves to a really high standard in this regard, a

standard set by our CEO, Bill McDermott. We strive for elite-level execution, which means operating as a cohesive unit.

You have completed your EMBA back in 2016, you mentioned that you were the only German in the class in that generation. How much did you actually know about the school before coming and what were your expectations, in fact?

When I joined the program, I actually knew very little about the school. At that time, The Coca Cola company had a sustainability chair with IEDC

understanding yourself better, and tackling the real-world business cases we worked on were some of the most impactful takeaways.

Do you still keep in touch with your classmates?

Yes, I do still keep in touch with my classmates. However, to be quite honest, the pandemic disrupted many of those connections, especially when it came to in-person visits and meetings. It caused a significant break in our interactions. Nevertheless, the network and the friendships we built are lasting. I can



(* - and still does), thanks to Mr. Muhtar Kent, the former chairman and CEO of The Coca-Cola Company. Germany was sponsoring one or two candidates and I had a privilege to be one of them. This was also the first time Coca-Cola Germany had made an investment in education and personal development at this level. I expected a mix of leadership and business topics, but what truly surprised me were the deeper lessons – the ones that really make a difference. Learning what it means to be a good leader,

always count on any one from my classmates, whether it's for help or simply to reconnect.

One more question, any favorite memories from the time in the school? End-of-module exercise, night preparations of presentations?

Absolutely. I think we were a truly special group - like a small family. I really appreciated that experience, especially two things: the hard work – the endless nights spent on cases or readings – and the fun we



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had, including the parties. That balance of 'intense work and enjoyment made it a memorable and rewarding time.

Coming back to current times, you mentioned you have a lot of things on your mind and are very busy. What helps you navigate the stress these days, have you figured out some support mechanisms for yourself?

One of the key things that helps me manage stress is having control of my own calendar. I

make sure to allocate time for myself, like when I schedule my workouts – I love CrossFit. It's just as important as meeting with a customer; it's a meeting with myself. Also, I make it a point to keep my weekends "business-free" - about most

of the time. I completely disconnect and spend quality time with my family and friends. Over the years, I've developed this habit of setting boundaries. Without them, it's easy to get overwhelmed.



WHAT ONE CAN'T FIND ON KATHRIN'S RESUME



EMBA 2015-16

Kathrin Mihalus Dianovski
Area Vice President,
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Germany

Is it true you speak Hungarian? How come?

Yes, it's true. My parents come from Csóka (Čoka - srb), about 70 km from Novi Sad, so I grew up with the Hungarian language being spoken in the family. They moved to Germany later and I was born already there. While I still understand the language perfectly, I'd probably need a couple of days to adjust and "get in the flow" again.

Where did you spend your summer school vacations when you were a child? In Serbia.

Is there a bottle of Coca Cola in your fridge right now? Always. Coke Zero.

Latest TV series or a movie you watched that is worth recommending? Madam Secretary.

You used to practice standard and latin dancing, do you still find time to do it? Unfortunately,

not Unfortunately, not much time for that now. Last time I danced with my dancing partner was at my 40th birthday party – and that was a surprise organized by my sister. And I don't think I could do dancing with anyone else because it's so special.

The last concert you've been to? Depeche Mode in Cologne in March this year.

If you could plan a perfect weekend getaway with no responsibilities, what would it look like and where would you go? At the seaside on a boat, with nice people, with good drinks and food.

Did you have a pet when you were a child? Which one? When I was a kid, I had a dog, a dachshund called Bommel.