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# BEST PRACTICES GUIDE



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# **GOOD PRACTICES GERMANY**

**EUROPASS BERLIN**

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# NIKOLA JOETZE

## Introduction to the interview

**Nikola Joetze** is the project manager of **Berlinale Talents**, the annual summit and networking platform of the Berlin International Film Festival. As a **cultural manager**, she has been managing numerous film and art projects in Berlin, across Europe and around the world for over 20 years, with a special focus on **finance, fundraising** and production. She has also worked as a **mentee** for the **German Cultural Council**, and is now active in the mentoring working group of the association **WAM - Women in Arts and Media**.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

While working with **international teams** and people from different cultural backgrounds, Nikola has faced multiple obstacles. However, one recurring thing she noticed at the beginning of her career was that, whenever she was going to a meeting, **people tended to talk to her male colleagues rather than to her**.

After becoming aware of the imbalance in the way men and women are addressed, she thought of how to overcome this obstacle. The strategy she developed was to always be extremely well prepared before any meeting, and to systematically have **a clear plan for showing how much knowledge she had**. Yet, she realises that this strategy also meant that she needed more time before each meeting, and that **she always needed to work more** than a man, because the recognition was not the same and the welcoming was not equal from the very beginning.

## Outcomes and results

The **combination of communication and teamwork** is crucial for the work Nikola has been doing as a **team lead**. In her experience, communication is what makes a good team work together, and a good team is what determines the positive outcome of **project management**. Nikola highlights the importance of communication for **clarifying and knowing what is the role of each person** in the team. She also believes that, while working in teams, everyone should be left a **space for learning and growing**.

When rethinking her own career path, Nikola sees **curiosity as the crucial key** to her **success**. In fact, curiosity has pushed her to explore different cultures, to experience herself in different cultures, go to new places, and try out different workplaces and roles. Her current slogan is to stay curious and see where life can bring her in the next couple of years. Her hope for the future is that, when she will turn 84, she will still be curious.

Nikola gives the following recommendations to any woman who wishes to break the ceiling: be **the authentic version of yourself, do what you love and is coherent** with that version, and whenever you find an obstacle, **do not let that obstacle stop you**, but start thinking of how you will overcome it.





# GIULIA BORRIELLO

## Introduction to the interview

Giulia Borriello is a **psychologist, psychotherapist**, and the **president of the first Italian mental health association in Germany**. As an expat woman herself, she has long-standing experience in supporting **women with migration backgrounds**. She currently works at an **international practice in Berlin**.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Giulia has been sharing the same obstacles with many her clients: **being an expat**, leaving their comfort zone in a moment of crisis, and **facing radical change**. She believes that restarting her career from scratch in a foreign country has changed her profoundly, on the deep psychological level, both as a human being and as a woman.

in fact, Giulia reports that, by leaving Italy and coming to **Germany**, she also moved from a country where her work field is still male-dominated and hierarchical, and inclined to discriminate young professionals because of their age, to **a society where young people look more reliable and women tend to cooperate and empower each other more**.

## Outcomes and results

As a psychotherapist, Giulia is mostly interested in **intercultural communication**. She says that, while working in Italy, she was dealing with a style of communication that was not always transparent.

Nowadays, she believes that **assertive communication, communicating boundaries** and being transparent are crucial skills for the success of any woman, and of any person in general. She also sees **mentalization** - the ability to get out of your own mindset and try to enter the thinking processes of others - as a key skill not only for psychotherapists, but **also for non-professionals**.

Her piece of advice to women who want to succeed in their career is **to be courageous**, which from her perspective is as important as being able to **ask for help, delegate, renounce to perfectionism** and avoid the capitalistic mentality of the self-made man who wants to do everything alone.





# JULIA IHLS

## Introduction to the interview

**Julia Ihls** is an interdisciplinary researcher and designer. She is the managing director of the **Bio Design lab** of the **Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design**, a hybrid and evolutive environment for living matters that exist both in the digital and in the physical space. She works at the intersections of natural philosophy, media theory and scenography.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Julia has faced many different levels of obstacles in her career. She sees **academia** as a place where women also have to deal with **unclear financing situations, problems in the infrastructures, a hierarchy that affects communication, and a lot of precarity in general.**

Furthermore, at the Bio Design Lab she works with what is currently a **sub-discipline in design**, which also brings the fear of **working with microorganisms**. In fact, working with different, more than human, organisms, **requires a lot of empathy**. The Bio Design Lab is also showing her the importance of **raising an awareness** inside a community and of bringing it to a wider public. Overall, what she finds helpful is **adaptability**, which from her perspective **does not mean renouncing to your own opinions.**

## Outcomes and results

Julia believes that communication and teamwork are equally important and go hand in hand. In her field, **teamwork is** particularly **crucial**, because bio design is a discipline that faces such a **complexity** that it would not be realistic to rely on the expertise, abilities and skills of one single specialist. On the contrary, her research community has to bring designers, biologists, theorists and artists together, which means **communication** is also crucial. In fact, exchanging ideas between **people from different disciplinary fields** also means to bring **different languages together**, to switch from one code to another and even face **problems of common wording.**

**Empathy and patience** are her final recommendations to address complexity. She also believes that, in terms of **leadership**, one should never feel more entitled than the people around them.

**Curiosity and enthusiasm** have helped her to face new projects and challenges, to stay open, get excited about things that are completely new in her field of expertise, and jump into them. **Enthusiasm**, however, **is not sufficient**, in her opinion, and it has to be complemented by something in between **efficiency and ambition**, because sometimes you can be enthusiastic about a certain topic, but then you also need to bring a plan.

Eventually, Julia believes that it is important for women to **take the responsibility** for their own decisions and actions, to **stay** curious and **open to change**, but also have **faith in their own abilities**. In fact, while she recognises the importance of being able to ask for help, she recommends trying to **solve things creatively yourself first.**





# SANDRA FENDL

## Introduction to the interview

**Sandra Fendl** is a **scientific advisor** for **biotechnology and bioeconomy** and **Equal Opportunities Officer** at **acatech**, the National Academy of Science and Engineering in Germany. In the last ten years she has worked as a researcher in prestigious centers, such as the **Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology in Munich** and the **University of California, Berkeley** in the States.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

**Accomplishing her PhD** in neurosciences at the Max Planck Institute of Neurobiology in Munich was one of the biggest challenges Sandra faced in her career. In that context, obstacles included a lot of **competition and pressure for publishing**, while having to accept that 90% of the times her experiments would fail. The most important things she had to learn during those times were **resilience and perseverance**, as she had to believe in herself and **continue to still work after each failure**.

The possibility to rely on **the support of a community of people and colleagues** also helped her a lot in the process of completing her PhD successfully.

## Outcomes and results

Sandra is aware that she would have never completed her PhD without **a team around her**, not only because the workload of her project could have not been afforded by one single person, but also for the importance of **being emotionally supported**.

She strongly believes that **communication and teamwork** are deeply connected one to the other, and that they have to go hand in hand with **empathy**. Sandra highlights the importance of understanding yourself, communicating what you need and what works/does not work for you, but also of understanding others, as a way **to build not only an effective and performing team, but also a nice working environment**.

Overall, she believes that the crucial skill in her career was communicating openly, and **being daring in communication**. In particular, she recommends women to **have the courage to ask questions and favours**, which is something that they tend not to do easily for fear of appearing stupid or weak.

Her last message to a woman is: **believe in yourself, even before you really believe in yourself**. In fact, she thinks this piece of advice is particularly important for a woman researcher **at the very early stage** of her career, **when** ideas and talents can already be there, but **there are not too many external accomplishments** or papers that can objectively boost self confidence. Sandra's recipe for that stage is: believe in yourself anyway; tell yourself, or even write down in a journal, "I can do that", because by repeating this, you can really **change** something in your **mindset**. Finally, Sandra highlights that **such an internal work should never cease**, as even later, in a woman's career, when there are many evident accomplishments, one will never be 100% self-confident.





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# **GOOD PRACTICES GREECE**

**E-SCHOOL**





# Sofia Pakalidou

## Introduction to the interview

Sophia has been working for the last ten years in quality certification bodies and in different IT companies. Her role is either **managerial** or as a **senior executive at the management level**.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

In her view, corporate culture is not as male-dominated as it is portrayed. However, the woman has to make a greater effort than the man so that she can gain as much confidence in the workplace as the man. This is one area where we are lagging behind as a country, she points out. And the problem is not in the denial of cooperation, but in the fact that a woman's opinion in the field is not as readily valued unless she first proves her worth.

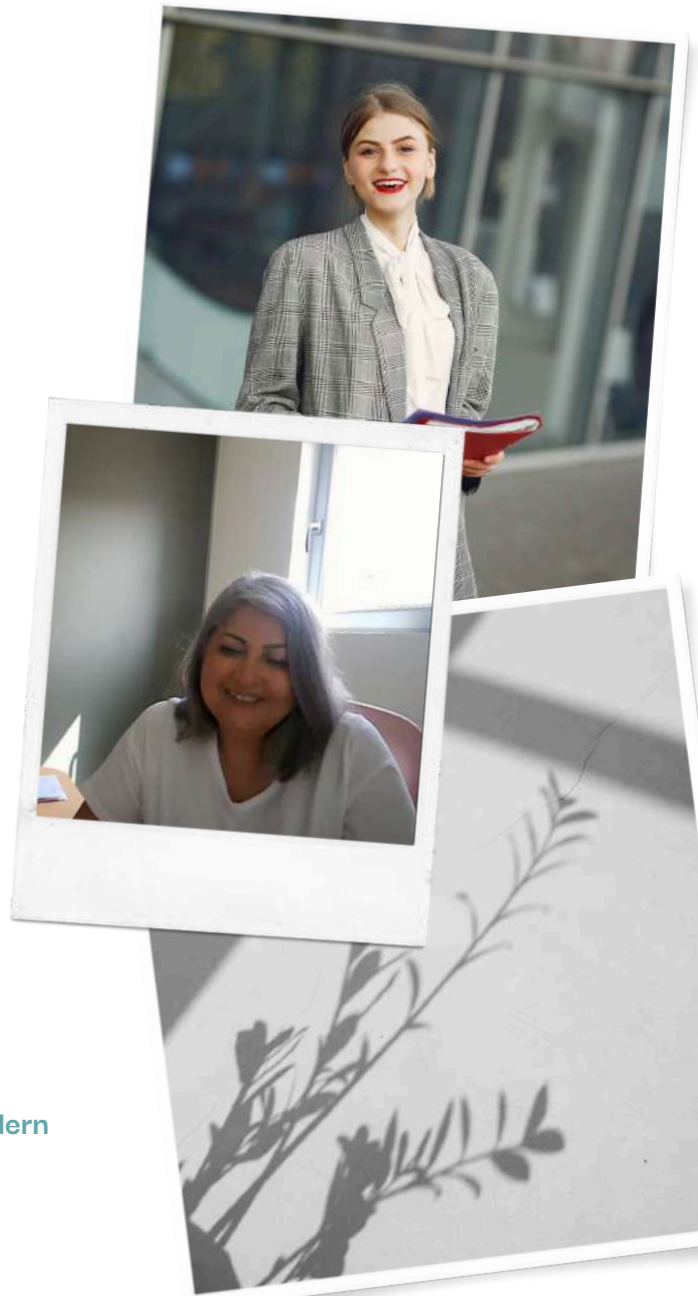
In order to establish itself in the industry and grow, it has tried to organise its strategy in such a way that it can face the various challenges of the professional world. Apart from organisation and a positive work ethic, as she mentions, communication, problem solving and active listening played a very important role. As she says, when you are high up in the hierarchy, you have to manage all the people, the next, the top, the bottom and most important of all, the relationships between them.

Finally, another major problem that all companies in Greece have to face is teamwork, there is and has been no cooperation and 'safe' space for growth in Greece, and that's what she had to create in many cases.

**'Adaptability' is the key word in modern working life.**

## Outcomes and results

When you've decided on your cover story, come up with a list of topics for your feature articles. This can range from interviews, product reviews, human interest pieces, and even lists. Think about what your audience would be interested in and get writing! Again, choose engaging photos and graphics to accompany your words, as these also help catch your audience's eye. Most magazines feature a full-page advertisement, which you're also welcome to do. Why not partner with a local business and feature their products? Not your style? Simply include some contact information and tell your audience how to reach you.





# Maria Malliora

## Introduction to the interview

Maria is the executive director of Innovation Footprint, a non-governmental organisation specialising in the provision of educational services. Its main objective is the education and training of teachers.

The field of education is an ever-changing one, the educational needs of students are changing and technology has played a key role. The aim is to disseminate and teach educators new methods and tools to better meet current needs.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Obstacles and difficulties are something that a company faces on a daily basis. So far there has not been a period when we have not had to deal with obstacles, but we have always done our best to deal with them. Every time one issue was solved, the next one arose.

It's important when you have a problem to communicate it. Because when you don't externalize it and it gets swept under the rug, the problem becomes greater.

The most important thing he has to say about skills is how many skills a person needs to have in order to survive in the workplace. That's why it's hard to pick out just two. A combination of skills is required to succeed in a career.

However focusing on two of them, organization is definitely a key skill. This refers to one's ability to complete one's tasks on time in the time allotted. Time management therefore goes hand in hand with organization.

A second important skill is a positive work ethic. The ethical principles that we follow in our personal lives must also accompany us in the workplace.

## Outcomes and results

In modern times we live in an ever-changing professional environment that requires constant updating of our skills. It is therefore essential to develop and renew our skills.



A combination of skills is  
required to succeed in a  
career.



# Maria Papadopoulou

## Introduction to the interview

Maria Papadopoulou is the general **manager** and **director** of an educational facility based in Karditsa, Greece. This facility mainly focuses on children's cognitive response to school lessons and it has been active for the past decade.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

The start-up faced an excessive number of obstacles, particularly at beginning. In order to attract parent-customers, the educational structure and its objective had to be promoted in a specific manner in the local market. This was further complicated by the fact that we were not selling a material that the consumer could use to satisfy their need; rather, we were selling a service that is evaluated over time rather than immediately.

Nevertheless, it is challenging to address all of the strategies that must be implemented in order to achieve the desired outcome. Consequently, we will concentrate on the most critical one:

**The will and desire to succeed. This is of greatest significance.**

I was at the right juncture, as I had a growing idea after many years of working in a variety of educational structures, the conviction that I could do it, and the belief that I had to do it.

It is also crucial to enjoy your profession, as this will attract an unprecedented number of customers.

Therefore, **good communication skills** and **positive work ethic** and **organizational skills** have been vital for her success.

**It is crucial to enjoy your profession,  
as this will attract an unprecedented  
number of customers.**

## Outcomes and results

Maria became a member of the educational community of Karditsa as a result of her self-assurance, confidence, and trust in her abilities to make decisions, which are essential to success.





# Zoi Hatzi

## Introduction to the interview

Zoi is an entrepreneur, and in particular she is the **president of UCERT, a company based in Athens, Greece.**

**All horizontal skills are important for professional success. The one that was crucial for me, however, was flexibility.**

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Establishing and securing my participation and position in an already structured professional environment was one of the biggest challenges I had to overcome. One of the greatest obstacles I had to surmount was establishing and maintaining my presence and role in an already established professional setting.

In conjunction with his other abilities, he was able to alter the status quo by demonstrating a positive work ethic. He asserts that the success of a business is contingent upon the implementation of effective communication strategies and the active listening of employees and colleagues to their concerns.

According to her, the company's success was also contingent upon the perception of issues and controversies that were arising in the workplace and the timely resolution of them.

## Outcomes and results

UCERT is a certification body that is mainly active in the certification of individuals and is one of the largest certification bodies in Greece. It works closely with major institutions, with one of its main partnerships being the Frederick University of Cyprus in distance postgraduate education.





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# **GOOD PRACTICES ITALY**

## **SKILL UP**





# SERENA CASTELLO

## Introduction to the interview

Serena Castello is a **manager and entrepreneur** based in Rome, IT.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

The biggest obstacle that Serena had to face in her career was **gaining the trust** of her clients and of her collaborators. She has always had to go the extra mile to prove her worth, and to show that what other people considered innovative ideas and methodologies were already a stable part of her work habits. Serena has always been able to **anticipate trends** and to develop a long-term vision, which is the sign of a good entrepreneur, but convincing clients and collaborators to **embrace and accept change** has never been an easy task.

She succeeded thanks to strong **team-working skills**: her empathy helped her create a cohesive team that shared her vision, her ideals and her goals. Strong **problem solving** and **optimisation competencies** allowed her to be considered a referring point and a leader by example at the same time.

She has always believed in a **positive approach** based on enthusiasm, passion and empathy.

*"Don't let the **nay-sayers** bring you down- hearing no is the only way to grow and become stronger and better"*

## Outcomes and results

Serena has formed a strong, united team that she has led through change. She owes much of her success to a constant **fostering of learning and growth**, starting with the ability to self-reflect and exit her own comfort zone. Approaching people from an empathetic point of view is key in order to result impactful, both from a human and professional perspective.

Keeping her team united and equipping it with the tools to face change after the COVID19 pandemic hasn't been easy, but today she recognises that **self-confidence** is necessary in order to be a good entrepreneur: no one will believe in you if you don't believe in yourself first.



# ANNA CAMPANILE

## Introduction to the interview

Anna Campanile is a **marketing and communication director** from Aversa, Italy. She also works as a **consultant** and advisor and has 30 years of experience in large-scale distribution.

*"Today I can say to young women who are entering the labour market to most of all believe and invest in themselves, and finally, as I always say, to always smile"*

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Anna was hired in the company as director when she was very young. She was also the **only woman in a position of power**, and this, together with her young age, has meant she always had to prove her worth and her competencies directly on the field, especially in front of male colleagues and in front of older colleagues.

She chose to rise to the challenge and face the difficulties by taking care of the **social relationships** she was establishing in her work place. The **"human factor"**, the ability to build a bond of trust with the people working with her and for her, allowed her value to shine through and enabled her to introduce efficient and seamless procedures. **Empathy** has been her superpower, and she still advises all young women wishing for a successful career to never lose sight of the relationships they are building.

## Outcomes and results

Anna describes herself as **passionate, enthusiastic** but also very **pragmatic**, and very competent. These are the characteristics that brought success to her company and to her as a director and as a person.

She stresses how important of an investment training is for any worker, and so much more so for a woman. **Continuous learning and education** usher in growth and success when used to hone skills and to keep ahead.



# VALENTINA VINOTTI

## Introduction to the interview

**Valentina Vinotti** is a professor, trainer, researcher, a consultant and a mother. She teaches Cultural Anthropology applied to Design at the European Institute for Design (IED) in **Rome**, and she works as a freelance researcher and consultant for training companies.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

**Creative** and **free-spirited**, Valentina started her work life in classic, hierarchical companies, and soon realised this work environment wasn't right for her. In order to **work on her own terms**, to find **meaning** in her profession, and to have time and energy to devote to her **family** and her two sons, she chose to be a **freelance**, so that she could pursue jobs in line with her values and her skills. This double (and sometimes triple) act as mother, teacher and consultant calls for extreme flexibility, great knowledge of her skills but also of her limits, and the ability to solve problems by trusting and involving other collaborators, colleagues and team-members.

Knowing from the start **what to avoid**, what kind of tasks, jobs, environments or people she didn't like or she didn't work well with allowed Valentina to build a career that resembles her while building her self-esteem and self-confidence too. **Curiosity**, **flexibility**, **continuous learning**, and a constant **exchange of knowledge** and skills with the people she works with are the secrets to her success.

## Outcomes and results

The career achievements Valentina is most proud of all have to do with seeing and measuring the **impact** she's had on people and organisations. She loves when her students present her with research projects that go beyond her expectations, and when she can tell her lessons have ignited passion and most of all, questions. A few years ago, her work as a trainer and researcher brought her in touch with an young man who had been **hikikomori** (refusing to leave the house) for quite some time; through **Valentina's intervention**, he re-built his social life and turned his passion for gaming and coding into a IT job.





# SONIA PEDROLI

## Introduction to the interview

**Sonia Pedrolì** is the **head of the Food Fraud Inspectorate Office** in Pescara, Italy. She has worked in the public administration and the Ministry of Agriculture for decades, but has only reached the peak of her career during the last few years, when her children were grown.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Thinking about the position of high responsibility and success that she holds now, Sonia recalls how her career has definitely sped up in the last years. Mum of two, she chose to **prioritise her family and her children** until they enrolled in university. This has meant turning down opportunities earlier in her work life to remain present in her children's life.

*"Women can't have it all. It is unrealistic to tell women that they can have as many children as they want and work 12 hours a day without any help. It is maybe doable if you have a trusted relative, your partner, your parents, a sibling, who can take care of the children when you're not home, but otherwise you have to make a choice".*

Her story shows that **success is not less satisfactory when it arrives later** in life. Moreover, prioritising being a mother has allowed Sonia to attune qualities such as **empathy, understanding, tolerance**, that made her successful in her job as well.

## Outcomes and results

Working in public administration has allowed Sonia to follow her children's development, and then, when she felt ready, to finally accept those opportunities and those positions of responsibility that she had turned down at the beginning of her career. "Maybe it's different if you have a job in a private enterprise or if you are self-employed [...] but maybe there's a lesson in this as well. If you want to have the time and energy to be a mother without giving up a career, **choose who you're working for very carefully**".





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# **GOOD PRACTICES AUSTRIA**

**VAEV R&D**





# MEYSARA MAJDOUB

## Introduction to the interview

Meysara Majdoub, an independent artist and founder of arasyems Art, shares insights into her journey as a self-employed creative professional. In the interview, she discusses her path to establishing her own business and the significant personal and professional challenges she encountered along the way. Meysara highlights the importance of self-confidence and perseverance in transforming her artistic passion into a sustainable career. Her experience serves as an inspiration for others looking to pursue their dreams and make a mark in the creative industry.

Meysara's story underscores the complexities of stepping out on one's own, particularly in the arts, where the success of a venture often hinges on both personal conviction and the ability to engage with the public. Through her candid reflections, she offers valuable advice to aspiring artists and entrepreneurs, emphasizing the role of belief in one's ideas and the need to actively communicate and share one's vision with the world.

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

The greatest obstacle Meysara faced in her professional journey was taking the first step into independence. The transition from being an artist to becoming a self-employed entrepreneur required a great deal of self-confidence, not only to believe in her ideas but also to present them publicly. This challenge was particularly daunting because it involved moving from the conceptualization of her work to actively engaging with the outside world. The fear of public exposure and the potential for failure were significant hurdles that she had to overcome.

To address these challenges, Meysara employed a strategy of visualization and goal-setting. She meticulously wrote down her ideas and goals, which helped her to clarify and solidify her vision. This process of visualizing her objectives was crucial in motivating her to take action. By breaking down her goals into manageable steps, she was able to implement her ideas effectively. Additionally, Meysara focused on building self-confidence through the practice of social skills, such as networking and small talk, which she believed were essential in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

## Outcomes and results

Reflecting on her journey, Meysara advises young professionals, particularly women, to believe in themselves and to overcome internal hurdles by taking the first step, even if everything is not perfectly planned. She emphasizes that unexpected developments should be welcomed, as they can lead to new opportunities and pathways. By embracing the uncertainties and taking action, one can gradually find their way and achieve their goals. Meysara's experience illustrates how determination, strategic planning, and an openness to new experiences can lead to success in both personal and professional endeavors.





# MELEK SAGLAM

## Introduction to the interview

Melek Saglam, the founder of the election campaign group Türk-İş to the Austrian Chamber of Labour, shares her journey and the challenges she faced as a non-native speaker working in various companies. Over the past 15 years, Melek has made significant contributions through her advocacy and engagement with the community. Her experience highlights the complexities of navigating a professional environment where language and cultural identity play crucial roles.

Melek's work focuses on bridging the gap between employees and companies regarding the use of native languages in the workplace. She has taken on the role of a chamber councilor, actively visiting businesses and engaging in discussions about the value of employees' native languages. This introduction sets the tone for understanding the obstacles she faced and her commitment to fostering inclusivity and respect for cultural diversity in the workplace.

**"I think you should just be proud of who you are."**

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

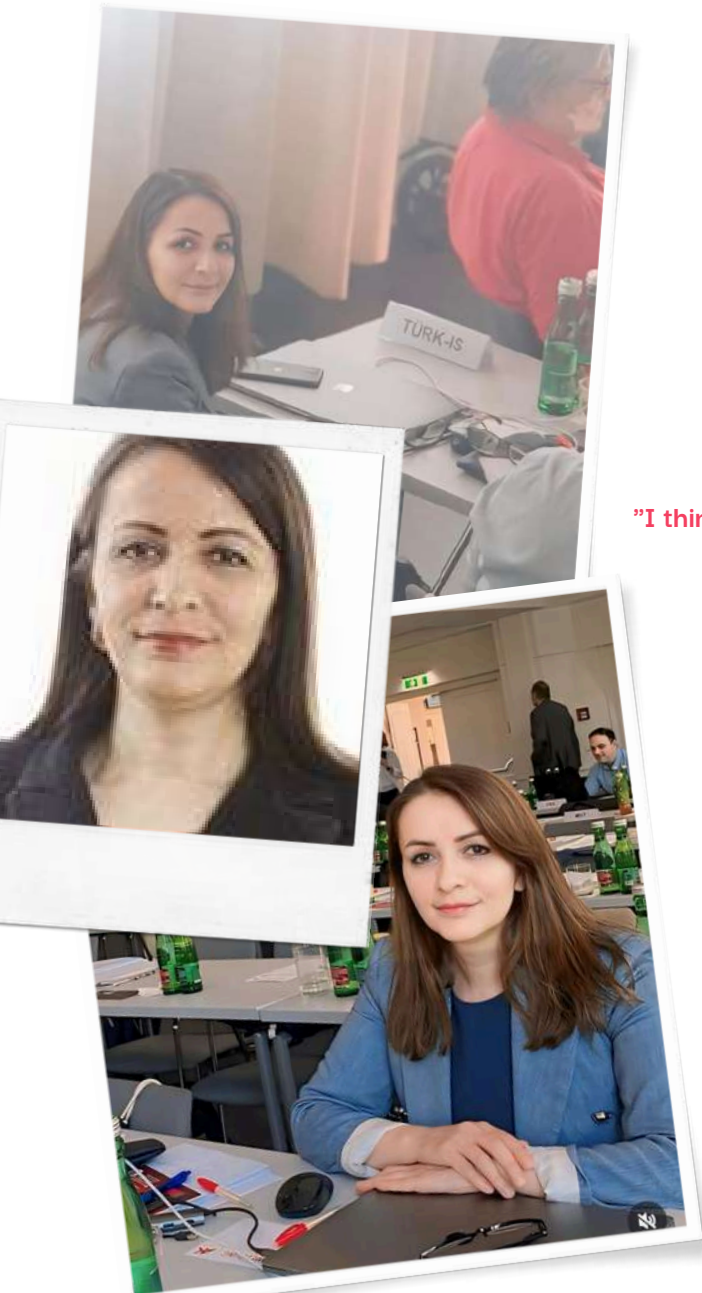
The most significant obstacle Melek encountered was the language barrier in her professional life. Although her ability to speak another language was initially seen as an asset, it later became a challenge when employers did not value her mother tongue in the same way as other languages. To address this, Melek dedicated herself to understanding and advocating for the use of native languages within companies, ensuring that employees could communicate effectively with their clientele.

Melek's strategy involved actively engaging with companies and employees to discuss the importance of native languages in the workplace. She sought to create a supportive network of individuals who shared her views, ensuring that she was not alone in her advocacy. By continuously challenging the status quo, Melek has worked to overcome the language-related challenges she faced and to promote a more inclusive work environment.

## Outcomes and results

Melek's efforts have strengthened her self-confidence and reinforced her pride in her cultural heritage. By recognizing the value of her native language and origins, she has been able to turn what was once a challenge into a source of strength. This has not only empowered her personally but has also positioned her as a strong advocate for cultural diversity in the workplace.

Her persistence and determination have been crucial to her success. Melek's ability to conduct thorough research, question authority, and find alternative solutions when faced with obstacles has been instrumental in her achievements. Her work continues to inspire others to embrace their cultural identities and to advocate for their rights within the workplace.





# VASYLYNA HYRIAK

## Introduction to the interview

Vasylyna Hyriak, known for her creative expertise at the online marketing agency Whitecat Media, shares her professional journey and experiences. She moved to Austria at the age of 21 to study Digital Marketing and faced numerous challenges in finding a job in her field. Her story highlights the resilience and determination required to overcome these early career obstacles. By establishing her own path within the agency, Vasylyna exemplifies how perseverance and creativity can lead to professional fulfillment and success.

Vasylyna's role at Whitecat Media centers around leveraging her creative vision and marketing skills. Her transition from a job seeker to a key player in the agency underscores her ability to adapt and thrive in a competitive industry. This introduction sets the stage for understanding how her personal challenges and professional strategies have shaped her career.

**"Dream a lot, believe that your dreams will come true, and always hold this vision in your head, that everything is possible, for everyone and also for you."**

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Vasylyna faced a significant challenge when she moved abroad and struggled to secure a position in digital marketing. Despite numerous rejections and initial frustration, she chose to redirect her efforts towards self-employment. This decision led her to focus on developing her own projects within Whitecat Media. By embracing this new direction, she managed to overcome the barriers that had initially held her back.

Her strategy involved using her setbacks as motivation to build a successful career in marketing. Instead of giving up, she took proactive steps to establish herself in the industry. This approach not only addressed her immediate challenges but also provided her with the opportunity to shape her professional future according to her own vision and strengths.

## Outcomes and results

Vasylyna's decision to pursue self-employment and join Whitecat Media has resulted in a rewarding career trajectory. Her ability to adapt and persist through rejections has allowed her to contribute significantly to the agency's success. By focusing on her creative vision and leveraging her marketing skills, she has made a notable impact in her field.

The results of her approach include personal satisfaction and professional growth within the agency. Vasylyna's emphasis on empathy and perseverance has not only helped her build strong client relationships but also fostered a collaborative and supportive work environment. Her experience serves as a testament to the importance of resilience, self-belief, and continuous effort in achieving career success.





# MASHIAH SHEIKH

## Introduction to the interview

In the interview, Mashiah Sheikh, a sustainability manager at a pharmaceutical company, shares insights into her professional journey and the challenges she faces in her role. As someone primarily focused on communication and people and culture, Mashiah's work revolves around social sustainability. Her role involves addressing both internal and external aspects of sustainability, including the well-being of employees and community engagement. This multifaceted position requires a blend of skills to navigate the evolving landscape of sustainability, which she finds both challenging and rewarding.

Mashiah's career in sustainability is marked by her emphasis on social sustainability, highlighting the importance of aligning company practices with broader societal needs. Her experience reflects a commitment to ensuring that the company's initiatives not only comply with regulations but also advocate for meaningful change. The conversation reveals her dedication to creating awareness and fostering a culture of empathy within the organization and in the community it serves.

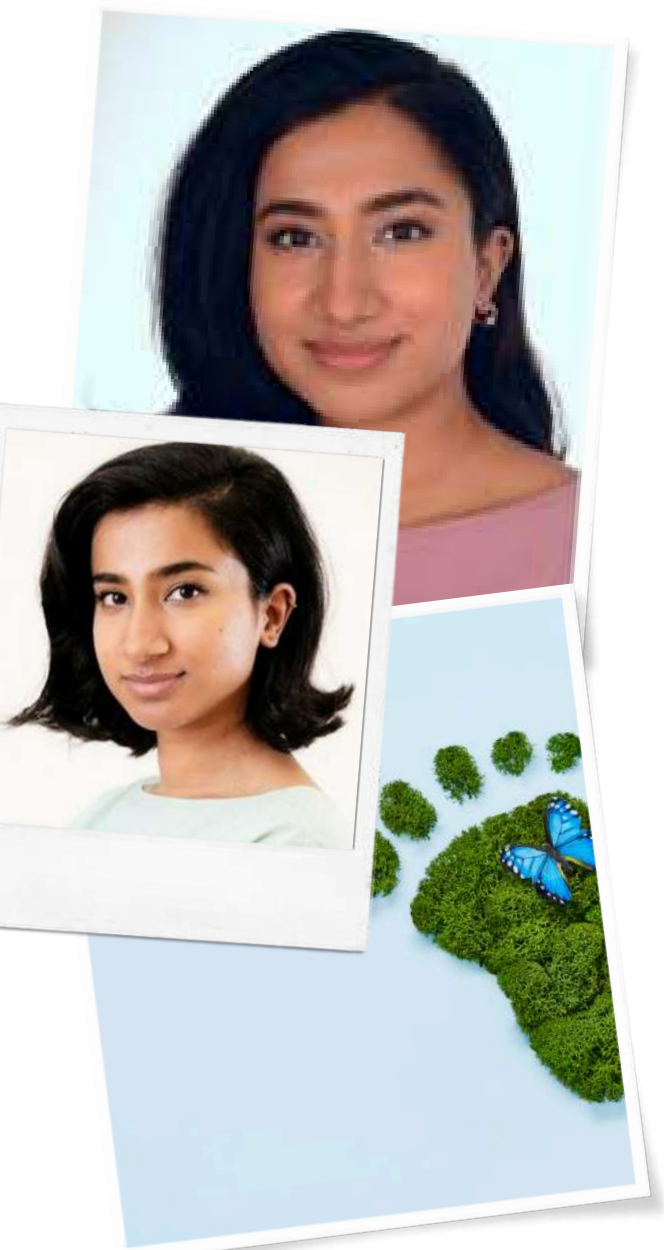
## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

One of the major obstacles Mashiah encountered was the challenge of defining her path within the rapidly evolving field of sustainability. With sustainability practices and priorities shifting constantly, she found it difficult to determine whether to focus on compliance or advocacy. This ambiguity, coupled with the fast pace of change, made it challenging to carve out a clear role. Mashiah overcame this challenge by reflecting on her interests and aligning them with her professional role. She discovered that her passion lay in social sustainability and communication, leading her to focus on these areas to effectively contribute to the company's sustainability goals.

Mashiah's approach to overcoming these obstacles involved a process of self-discovery and adaptation. By honing in on her strengths and interests in communication and awareness creation, she was able to find a niche that not only suited her but also added value to her organization. This strategy allowed her to navigate the complexities of her role and stay relevant in a field that is constantly evolving.

## Outcomes and results

As a result of her strategic focus and adaptability, Mashiah has been able to navigate the complexities of the sustainability field effectively. By clearly defining her professional path and continuously updating her knowledge, she has maintained her relevance and effectiveness in her role. Her work in social sustainability, particularly in communication and culture within the company, has likely contributed to the company's broader sustainability goals. Through her efforts, she has managed to carve out a niche for herself and drive meaningful impact in her area of expertise.





**Breaking  
the Ceiling**

# **GOOD PRACTICES ICELAND**

## **STEP BY STEP**





# SANDRA BJÖRK JÓHANNSDÓTTIR

## Introduction to the interview

Meet Sandra Björk Jóhannsdóttir, a 52-year-old woman from Reykjavík, Iceland, whose life story is as compelling as it is inspiring. Juggling her roles as a lawyer at Lagaréttur / Lögmannsstofa and Dattaca Labs, as well as a financial specialist for a trade union, Sandra's journey is one of resilience and reinvention. Her path began at Háskólinn á Bifröst, where she laid the academic foundation for her diverse career. But beyond her professional titles, Sandra is a mother, a daughter, and a woman who's navigated life's ups and downs with remarkable strength. Her intuition, which she fondly refers to as her inner compass, has guided her through life's uncertainties, especially during the most challenging times.

*"I believe in the power of open communication and the value of true friends who stand by you no matter what. Empathy and active listening are key to building trust and understanding, and staying flexible and solution-oriented with an open mind."*

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Life has tested Sandra in ways she never imagined. At 34, she was at a crossroads when betrayal shook the foundations of her personal and financial life. Forced to sell her apartment and start anew, Sandra made the courageous decision to move to the countryside and return to school. It wasn't just about earning a degree but about rebuilding her life from the ground up. During those years, Sandra found solace in her studies and strength in the support of her close friends. She realised that empathy and active listening weren't just professional skills but lifelines. Through these experiences, she learned to be flexible and to approach every challenge with an open mind and a solution-oriented attitude. Her son, who was only six then, became her greatest motivation, reminding her daily why she had to keep pushing forward.

*"Embrace change, believe in yourself, and always lead with empathy. These are the principles that have guided me through my career and helped me overcome the challenges I've faced."*

## Outcomes and results

Today, Sandra is a living testament to the power of resilience. She's not just a lawyer or a financial specialist; she's a survivor who turned her pain into purpose. Her story is a beacon for other women, showing them that they can be overcome no matter how daunting life's challenges may seem. Sandra's advice is simple yet profound: pursue your dreams, break them down into manageable steps, and, most importantly, trust yourself. Looking ahead, Sandra is excited about the future and eager to continue growing personally and professionally. She knows the journey isn't over and is ready for whatever comes next.





# Bryndís Óskarsdóttir

## Introduction to the interview

**Disa Óskarsdóttir** is a multifaceted creator known for blending her graphic designer, food technician, and coach talents into her unique role as an "idea creator." Her passion lies in finding beauty and potential in overlooked or discarded things, a philosophy she has woven into her online course, "From Trash to Treasures." This course empowers people to tap into their creativity and transform everyday objects into something beautiful and meaningful. Disa's creative journey spans over 20 years, and her work is rooted in artistic expression and practical problem-solving.

Beyond her creative endeavours, Disa is also passionate about empowering others. She teaches people to unlock their creative potential by thinking outside the box and embracing their intuition. Her work isn't just about art—it's about inspiring people to take control of their lives and see challenges as opportunities for growth.

*"Every difficulty is an opportunity to learn, grow, and ultimately, create something even better."*

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Like many entrepreneurs, Disa has faced significant obstacles in both her personal and professional life. One of the toughest challenges she encountered was when her tourism company was nearly brought to its knees by unfounded rumors that spread through the media. Without the power to fight back against the negative press, Disa experienced the helplessness that many small business owners face when confronted by external forces beyond their control. To add to the strain, after a decade of dedicated development, her hotel project was abruptly halted when the municipality terminated its contract with her company. These back-to-back challenges were devastating, forcing Disa to reevaluate her path and find a way to move forward.

Despite these setbacks, Disa leaned on her creativity and problem-solving skills. Rather than dwelling on the obstacles, she saw them as signs to explore new opportunities. Her ability to adapt and embrace change allowed her to look for new directions, staying positive even when the dream she had built came crashing down.

## Outcomes and results

Through these experiences, Disa developed a resilient mindset that has helped her thrive personally and professionally. She believes strongly in three core principles: active listening, self-confidence, and flexibility. These qualities have allowed her to overcome challenges and transform them into stepping stones for more tremendous success. Her work today, particularly through "From Trash to Treasures," reflects her belief that there is always a way forward—whether it's through creative expression or simply finding a new perspective on life's challenges.

Disa now uses her experiences to inspire others, encouraging people to approach their problems with an open mind and to believe in their own abilities.



# Hrönn Hjálmarsdóttir

## Introduction to the interview

Hrönn Hjálmarsdóttir is a 53-year-old business analyst, health coach, and lifestyle trainer with a passion for empowering others through health and wellness. Originally from Iceland, Hrönn is also a devoted wife and mother of two teenagers. After working in a demanding business role in Iceland, Hrönn's life took a significant turn when she and her family moved to southern Germany. This relocation marked a dramatic shift, both professionally and personally, as Hrönn went from a fast-paced career to becoming a housewife in a new country with a very different societal structure. Through her determination, she built a new career in health coaching, focused on nutrition and well-being, while embracing the challenges of a foreign environment.

*"Never give up on your dreams, no matter how hard the journey may seem. Keep an open mind, be resilient, and trust in yourself—there's always a way forward if you believe in the possibilities."*

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

One of the biggest challenges Hrönn faced was the sudden shift in her identity and role when she moved to Germany. From a thriving business professional to a housewife in an unfamiliar country, she struggled to find purpose and direction in her new life. The isolation, combined with a lack of community and cultural differences, made it difficult for her to thrive.

Despite these obstacles, Hrönn turned to her longstanding interest in nutrition and health as a way to find fulfillment and growth. She began studying nutrition science and became a health coach through distance learning programs, all while managing the demands of being a mother in a foreign country. The language barrier was significant, but Hrönn's resilience and determination helped her push through, and she eventually started to build her own business by sharing recipes and health advice on social media. This entrepreneurial spirit allowed her to regain a sense of control and purpose in her life.

## Outcomes and results

Today, Hrönn has established herself as a successful health coach and lifestyle trainer, guiding others on their health journeys. Her experiences have shaped her approach to coaching, emphasizing the importance of self-confidence, resilience, and keeping an open mind to life's opportunities. After returning to Iceland, Hrönn faced the challenge of starting her business from scratch, without a strong network or connections. However, her persistence and belief in her vision allowed her to rebuild her career and secure a job in the health sector.

Hrönn's story is one of perseverance and adaptability. She encourages others to never give up on their dreams, to stay open to new possibilities, and to approach life with confidence and resilience. Her journey is a testament to the power of personal growth, no matter the challenges one may face.





# Guðný Þorsteinsdóttir

## Introduction to the interview

Guðný Þorsteinsdóttir is a dedicated mother, grandmother, and seasoned sales and marketing professional. With over 25 years of experience in the industry, Guðný made a significant career shift four years ago, earning her license as a real estate agent. But her life's journey has been marked by far more than career changes. At the age of 43, Guðný became a widow, losing her husband after an 18-month battle with cancer. This devastating experience shaped her life, forcing her to rebuild herself and her family while navigating through immense grief.

*"Even after life's hardest challenges, you can rebuild and thrive. Trust in yourself, stay open to new beginnings, and never give up on your dreams."*

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

The greatest challenge Guðný faced was the devastating loss of her husband to cancer. As a young widow with children, Guðný had to confront not only her immense grief but also the struggles of navigating a healthcare system she felt failed her family. Moving to Sweden for her husband's treatment was an attempt to save him, but despite their hopes, the treatment was unsuccessful, leaving Guðný to pick up the pieces of her life in a foreign country.

In the aftermath of this tragedy, Guðný was left grappling with feelings of isolation and self-doubt. Initially, she chose to take on a quiet job, allowing herself time to heal and rebuild her confidence. However, one of the more personal challenges she faced was not just emotional but physical—Guðný struggled with her weight and the impact it had on how others perceived her. After losing 25 kg, she noticed a stark difference in how people treated her. She shares candidly that "people started to listen more to 'Guðný the slim one' than 'Guðný the fat one.'" This realisation deeply impacted her, highlighting the societal biases that often affect women, especially in male-dominated fields.

Despite these obstacles, Guðný found the strength to reinvent herself. Encouraged by her partner, she decided to pursue a career in real estate, despite concerns about financial instability and entering a profession where women, particularly middle-aged women, are often overlooked. Guðný's personal transformation—both in terms of her physical appearance and her renewed sense of confidence—played a pivotal role in how she approached this new chapter of her life.

## Outcomes and results

Today, Guðný is a successful real estate agent and a powerful example of resilience. Her journey reflects not only overcoming personal loss but also embracing change, both within herself and in how others perceived her after losing 25 kg. This transformation highlighted the importance of self-confidence in gaining respect and attention.

Guðný now uses her experiences to inspire others, emphasising active listening, empathy, and understanding. Her story shows that, even after life's toughest challenges, it's possible to rebuild, regain confidence, and thrive.





**Breaking  
the Ceiling**

# **GOOD PRACTICES SPAIN**

**INDEPCIE**



**INDEPCIE**



# INMACULADA CARMONA

## Introduction to the interview

Inmaculada Carmona is a seasoned professional in the field of education and she is the CEO at the organization PODERÍO in Spain. With a degree in English Philology and a Certificate in Pedagogical Attitude, Inmaculada boasts an impressive 20-year career as a language teacher. Her expertise spans across both formal and non-formal education, catering to learners of all ages, from primary school students to adults.

In addition to her extensive teaching background, Inmaculada has a profound understanding of emotional intelligence and has successfully trained adults in employment skills. As the CEO of PODERÍO, a multidisciplinary training organization, Inmaculada leads a team of eight experts in various fields, including language instruction, coaching, emotional intelligence, pedagogy, and international relations.

"My advice to women is to never abandon their goals, despite the difficulties."

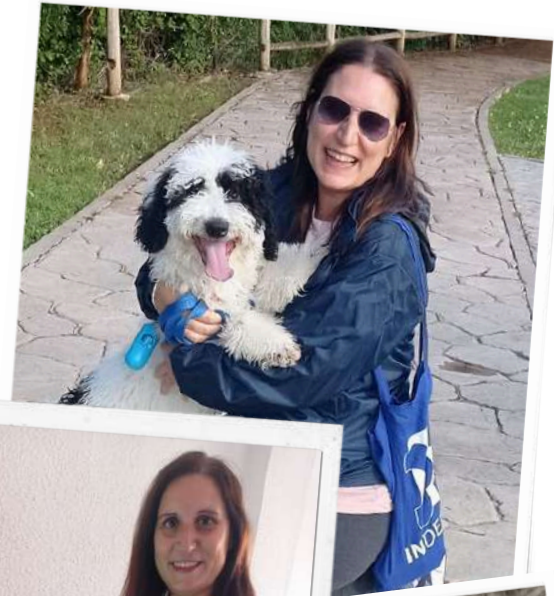
## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

From her extensive professional experience of over 20 years as a leader and worker, Inmaculada has encountered the obstacle of gender bias. She has found it more challenging to be valued and respected simply because she is a woman. She has observed that she is often held to higher standards and treated worse than her male counterparts. Inmaculada shares that even today, some men and women question her ability to lead because of her gender.

Nevertheless, she continues to work on overcoming these challenges, showcasing her abilities every day and proving that she can perform just as well as any man in her position.

## Outcomes and results

Over the last few years, Inmaculada has experienced significant professional and personal changes. This includes the challenge of conciliating family responsibilities after becoming a mother of two daughters, alongside her professional commitments. While she has always been dedicated to teaching, she has witnessed notable shifts in the educational landscape, particularly with the rise of online teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the changing learning preferences of newer generations. Consequently, she has had to continuously adapt to these changes to effectively respond to emerging challenges.



# AGATHE BELLAMY

## Introduction to the interview

Agathe Bellamy is the CEO and founder of Shore2Shore, a Spanish online agency based in the Canary Islands, specializing in organizing shore excursions for cruise passengers. Under Agathe's leadership, the company has grown significantly, managing a dedicated team of 15 people, along with partnerships in various countries.

Shore2Shore began its journey with a unique foundation: a team composed entirely of women. This initial team laid the groundwork for the company's strong emphasis on collaboration, inclusivity, and excellence, which are core values today. In this interview, we will delve into Agathe's insights on the cruise excursion industry, the challenges and successes she has encountered, and her vision for the future.

**"Believe in yourself; only you can achieve your goals.  
Don't let anyone clip your wings; if you don't try,  
you'll never succeed."**

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

One of the major obstacles Agathe has faced as a high-level executive is gender bias and sexist comments due to being a woman. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic marked a significant turning point for the company, as the tourism sector experienced a two-year hiatus, forcing it to start from scratch.

To overcome these challenges, Agathe has always relied on her abilities, resilience, and her vision for the company. This unwavering confidence has been crucial in navigating and overcoming the difficulties faced over the last 15 years of her professional career.

## Outcomes and results

After the post-pandemic reopening, Agathe had to greatly develop her flexibility skills to adapt to the new situation. They returned with more strength, ideas, and the entrepreneurial spirit that characterizes her, which has allowed her to continue growing professionally. For example, in the first year after reopening, they served 30,000 clients; in this last year, 2024, they served around 200,000 to 250,000 clients annually.

# BLANCA CARO

## Introduction to the interview

Blanca Caro is a young professional with several years of experience. She previously worked as a manager in the men's department of a globally renowned textile company in England and is currently a commissioning editor at an academic publishing house.

In this interview, we explore how, for professional women, a dual handicap often arises—being both young and female—leading to situations where they receive less favourable treatment due to their youth.

"Reflect on your actions each day and use a notebook to jot down your strengths and weaknesses."

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Blanca's greatest professional obstacle has been managing a diverse team when she was younger, which included individuals of all ages who had been with the company longer. These team members found it difficult to accept a younger leader and often displayed poor attitudes. Initially, it was challenging for Blanca to be taken seriously due to her youth.

She had to navigate various challenges, working diligently to refine her leadership skills. Through consistent effort, she gradually earned the respect of her team and other leaders. Blanca learned and improved her approach, ultimately becoming a more effective leader.

## Outcomes and results

From her perspective as a manager, one often feels alone. Therefore, she emphasises the importance of recognising both her own emotions and those of each team member and managing them to achieve desired outcomes. Balancing meeting material objectives while ensuring the team gets along and works happily is challenging and requires practice and effort.

Blanca believes that emotional intelligence has been crucial in maintaining optimal relationships within the team, contributing to a more positive and productive work environment.





# GENOVEVA CÁCERES

## Introduction to the interview

Meet Genoveva, a young and seasoned professional whose career journey has been remarkable. She began her professional life in the tourism sector, working as a travel agent in a retail agency. Her career quickly advanced as she joined a destination management company specializing in the British market and took on roles as a product agent and hotel contractor at one of Spain's top companies.

Genoveva's career took a fascinating turn when she became the support and QA manager for agencies at an airline developer and technology company, where she discovered a new and exciting world. Genoveva embraced this concept wholeheartedly, prompting her to reinvent herself. She reflected on her skills and attitudes, leveraged her knowledge, and pursued various courses, all with a positive outlook. With extensive expertise in the tourism sector, experience in packaging, and currently serving as a Commercial Representative at the most surprising workplace she has encountered to date.

"Learn to listen to yourself and trust in yourself, as it's easy to doubt yourself."

## Obstacles encountered and strategies implemented

Genoveva has encountered several obstacles in her professional life. These include her professionalism being questioned because of her gender, not complying with instructions from male managers that put her at a gender disadvantage, and being confined to roles that are considered more "suitable" for her gender.

Her methods for overcoming these challenges have varied. When she found herself in an environment that didn't align with her values, she had to switch companies. In other cases, where she saw the potential for discussion and change, she would express her ideas and concerns assertively to those in charge. This combination of unwavering adherence to her values and proactive, assertive communication has been vital in navigating and surmounting these obstacles.

## Outcomes and results

This combination of steadfast adherence to her values and proactive communication has been vital in her success. Today, Genoveva is a seasoned professional with extensive expertise in the tourism sector, and her career reflects her resilience and commitment to personal and professional growth.





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Breaking  
the Ceiling

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