

## I believe in Value of Education

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**CHIEF REINVENTION OFFICER**

Specon – Member of Primestore Group, Serbia EMBA 2019/2020

**F**irst of all, congratulations for being elected the President of the IEDC Alumni Club Serbia. We hope that despite all the hurdles and havoc coronavirus causes in our daily life, you will manage to have activities of the club up and running. Have you already discussed with management team and perhaps some club members on what are the expectations and what would you try to do during your mandate?

Thank you so much, it's a great honour and responsibility to lead IEDC Alumni Club Serbia.

In club, I see my role as a member who is supposed to engage community members, motivate them to share experiences, opportunities and knowledge, and generally contribute in creating greater value for IEDC network. I think that Covid situation

won't create hurdles, since all of my plans include strengthening online communities on professional social network and channels. On the other hand, I will strive to promote school and extend our network with new members.

Probably anyone living in Belgrade, without realising it, even once was entered a shop designed and implemented by the company you are leading. Specon – Member of Primestore Group is retail design agency and brand consultancy from Belgrade. Would you tell us a bit on how did it all start? How did you get involved?

Great thought, thank you. Specon was founded by my mother back in 1990. At that time, there were no specialised retail agencies in Serbia,

so she gained big accounts quite easily. I was in my first year of law school, when she proposed to me to get involved with company operations. I wanted to earn some extra cash as a student so I gave it a try. And that was it, I fell in love with the job. We are always trying to find new ways to excite customers, our approach is people centric. This approach attracts me. It requires your full engagement in understanding client business model, and fitting it into customer needs and preferences. It pushes you constantly to think through filter of logic and psychology, it's very creative and I enjoy it. The thing I like most about Specon is that we are constantly changing, evolving with industry. First we were retail environment specialists, then customer experience specialists and today we are all into Omni channel. This gives me that thrilling feeling that I am constantly reinventing myself.

It's quite remarkable that graduating from law you were in fact covering marketing field of the business. How did that happen and not, for instance, legal matters of the business? What would you say you took with you from your law background that helped you in what were you doing in the company? Also, when you were attending an EMBA at IEDC, particularly, Marketing course with Prof. Joe Pons –

would you recall any “aha” moments that you thought you should have known earlier and could have been helpful in your work back then? What were they?

Law school thought me to see wider perspective, even on noncomplex situations. Lawyer's job is quite creative; it requires creating certain interpretation of situation that occurred. I find it quite similar to my current occupation. When I started my practice in Speccon, I was covering some elements of legal and administrative matters, but very soon it became quite boring for me. I needed something challenging, some fresh perspective, so I aimed for marketing and sales department. I wish I knew Joe Pons back in those days. He is quite extraordinary person and professor; he gave me ‘aha’ moments in each case we were discussing during MBA programme. I remember, while he was introducing himself to the class, he said we will change the way we think till the end of the course. Every case was like a roller-coaster, he would lead us from one conclusion to another, making every single scenario possible, while developing strong logical and critical opinion in each and every one of us. I have to admit that I quite admire his methods; he is one of a kind.

**In 2018 you became a GM of the company and that was also the year when you sent your application documents to the IEDC for the Executive MBA. Why did you decide to enrol in that particular moment? What was your main motivation? How did you hear about IEDC and have you considered other schools – why/why not?**

This was my first role as organisational leader. I had a clear vision about company potential and direction, and I was aware that I lack experience and knowledge. Executive MBA seemed like a logical step at that point of time. Today I have

to say it was the best move I could make.

I was looking for knowledge, not just diploma. When I started to research business schools, IEDC and Bocconi stood up. IEDC was more interesting to me because it had substantially wider alumni network in Serbia and region. Coincidentally, at that point in time IEDC organised set of lectures here in Belgrade and naturally I went to listen them. First lecture was given by Jim Ellert – I was WOWed! All of my fellow colleagues who had privilege to attend Jim's class know what I am talking about. On that occasion I also met Igor Kordik, who was the president of Alumni club. He helped me realize the benefits of MBA programme in Bled and later on, he even helped me with a scholarship, for which I am highly grateful.

**What would you say was the most useful part of the studies for you? Or had the most impact on you, your skillset, your confidence level or on the way you manage the company?**

The whole experience is life changing, from professional and private point of view. When you are in Bled, you work with professors on cases; they transfer you to state where you act like the case is happening to you, right now, so you and your classmates gain experience in safe environment where mistakes make no harm. I enjoyed the cases that cover years and decades of some company life, they were super insightful. Overall experience raised my confidence level and that affected the way I make decisions on daily basis and manage company. I would recommend this experience to everyone on senior managerial position; it is the best investment in yourself. I was so amazed by value I received in classes that I even created an IEDC scholarship fund in our company - our Chief Creative Officer is currently on Executive MBA programme and our Senior Innovation Design Engineer just completed Young Manag-

ers Programme. I believe in value of education.

**Working with the retail business and covering the area that you are, one has to be continuously up to date with the latest trends. How do you keep up with it? Are there any industry related events/conferences that you attend or are a member of internationally or regionally/locally?**

Industry is constantly changing and you need to be up to date or you will be forgotten. Besides the fact that we are constantly practicing online research and reading case studies, every year we visit London and New York for retail design conferences. The best part of the whole experience is the fact that every trend you listen about at the conference, you can actually already see in it in the shop windows on the street. This is why I admire those cities and their economies.

**Last but not least, besides work, we all have lives and for busy, highly engaged business people, finding the right balance to have family and work obligations harmonized is not always easy. How do you do it? Do you have strict “work time” and “family time”? Or it's all mixed and an indispensable part of one?**

Finding balance between private and professional life takes a lot of hard work on yourself, each recipe is quite individual. For me the answer is love, towards myself, my family, my work. When you love things you do, you are in constant process of giving and gaining energy and everything seems mixed up, but it really isn't. I find that consuming time with my family, in everyday schedule, recharges me profoundly and brings me joy, which consequently makes me more energised and innovative in my work. This is my recipe and yes, it requires distinction between work and family time.

## MEET MAŠA IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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- 1 My usual working morning looks like this: It's a ritual. I have a coffee with my closest team. We wrap up the day behind us and recalculate the route for days to come.
- 2 My favourite free time activity is daydreaming about next great adventure with my two sons and husband and then going for it.



- 3 My favourite travel destination is costal area of Spain, all the way from Barcelona to Malaga. The culture, sensibility of people, music, food, landscape and overall atmosphere is so appealing to me.
- 4 Last TV series I watched is Curb your enthusiasm by Larry David and I liked it because of different perspective on everyday situations that brings me laugh and good energy.
- 5 If I had an opportunity to pursue an alternative career, I would have become an environmental scientist because I believe the sky should be blue and grass should be green for my kids and their kids and so on.
- 6 An advice I would give to my child is... Always be honest to yourself.