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IEDC Alumni Success Story:

LEA WEYERMANN LOZAR: » TODAY, I PRIMARILY SUPPORT BUILDING CONSCIOUS AND HEALTHIER ORGANIZATIONS, ONE INDIVIDUAL, ONE TEAM AT A TIME. THIS IS WHAT I AM PASSIONATE ABOUT.«

Interviewed by Vera Pasyukova

Photos provided by Lea Weyermann Lozar

Greetings from the sunny side of Alps to a place with some serious mountains, where you reside. Tell us a bit where do you live? How did you end up living there?

We live in the suburbs of Bern. As you say, Switzerland has some serious mountains and from our home, we get to see the views of Jungfrau, which is a very popular destination for many visitors. I moved here in 2008 after living in the US

for several years. My husband is Swiss so I followed my heart and I am happy to call Switzerland my second home today.

In 2016 you joined the Executive MBA program at IEDC. Your way before deciding on business education was slightly off the beaten track. A skiing career, followed by work in a company providing sports equipment and sports products, but not

in Slovenia... Would you recall why did you decide to go for the EMBA and why at IEDC and why not do it in Switzerland, where you find one of the best business schools too?



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due to my sports career. Yet, the interest in business and leadership, in general, existed long before that. My mother built a successful family business, my father was an IT professional in the banking industry. Despite my sports career, I was always in touch with business and had always imagined myself working in a corporate world. This came true when I got the opportunity to work for the largest sporting goods retailer Intersport International Corporation – it was a great way to combine my passion for sports and business. However, a few years into my leadership role, I felt I am ready for the next step, to climb up the ladder, but was lacking certain skills and strategic thinking that would give me the needed confidence and competence – I was coming from an operational side, so this was completely a new gameplay.

I did look at MBA programs in the USA and Switzerland, IMD was financially out of reach and others just didn't convince me. Besides, I joined YMP a few years before starting the EMBA, so I knew what IEDC has to offer. I was drawn to IEDC because I enjoyed the case study approach and hands-on practice in the classroom. Also, I wanted to deepen and,

at the same time, challenge my leadership knowledge and skills. It was also important to me to be taught by professors from different parts of the world to gain from their global perspectives and experiences. Lastly, being closer to my family after many years living in different countries was a big plus. In many ways, this decision turned out to be life-changing – and saving – I gave birth to my daughter during the 2nd and 3rd module of the program and continued with classes when she was just 6 weeks old. This wouldn't be possible without my family's support.

Best/brightest memory from the EMBA program?

There are still so many fond memories, it is hard to pick just one. The one that really stands out was during the IT and Operations classes with Professor Philip Stiles. Every group presented in a very creative and funny way a play based on the learnings from the book *The Goal*. It was like a comedy show. In our play, I was honoured to impersonate our EMBA Program Manager Barbara Ferjan. This experience built a strong bond between the two of us.

What was the biggest takeaway for you from your time in Bled?

About 2 months into the program, I received an evaluation note from Dr. Nadya Zhexembayeva, one of my favorite professors, who I respect and admire dearly. In her note she wrote: "My wish for you is to use it more (the

safe environment at IEDC). Come out of your shell and grab what is yours – fully – without hesitation." This was the turning point for me when I realized that I need to push further to get to the very edge of my comfort zone. From sports, I knew how this feels and where my limits are, in business I was holding myself back. I started to experiment more, to learn with and from others. This is having a large impact on my work today and how I approach coaching, leadership, and everything else in general.

Do you still keep in touch with your classmates? Do you manage to meet up?

I initially enrolled in a one-year program and extended it to two years due to welcoming my baby in the middle of the first year. This gave me the privilege to meet 3 different generations of EMBA students and I still have regular contacts with several classmates from each generation. The distance and now the pandemic made it a bit challenging to meet in person, but I regularly connect virtually with many of them. This year I also reconnected with fellow YMP classmates – we are now regularly meeting on Teams and it is just wonderful to reconnect and exchange. I am also in contact with some professors and faculty and when staying in Slovenia, I make sure to pay a short visit to Bled. A very strong connection is still existing here.

What do you do for a living nowadays? What are the pluses and minuses of



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going independent that you see now?

Today, I primarily support building conscious and healthier organizations, one individual, one team at a time. This is what I am passionate about. Right after graduating from EMBA, I joined a very successful today Swiss start-up, Sensopro AG. As the company grew, so did my role. I am working closely with the executive team on the strategic development where all the learnings from EMBA come very much to use. In addition, I am an internal leadership and team coach. It is quite an unusual combination, but I am happy that it is working so well. My learning didn't stop with EMBA, in the meantime I am also a certified professional coach and I have launched my own coaching and consulting business Weyermann Coaching & Consulting in 2018. As a coach I work with leaders, managers and their teams to understand their behaviours better in a variety of workplace environments. I enjoy decoding people's strengths, drivers, and motivations.

The combination of being independent and employed in an innovative and inspiring company suits me really well. In fact, these two roles really complement each other. I am still being part of a team, which I would otherwise miss very much, and by that I get to experience real challenges and teams face. This helps me understand my coaching clients better as well. And the knowledge from coaching I can integrate in many areas. At Sensopro we are right now going through a larger reorganization with the

aim to achieve flat hierarchy, empower people, and become more agile. I can bring in a lot of experience and knowledge from coaching.

Your experience of living and working abroad (USA, Switzerland), what kind of impact did it have so far on your identity? How do you in fact identify yourself now?

Moving to a different country required lots of openness, I had to learn to adapt to integrate well and succeed in a foreign country. I started this process from scratch twice, from getting to know a new culture, language, traditions, different political and social systems, making new friends. Such new beginnings can be quite shocking and overwhelming. I struggled when I first moved to Switzerland; as an ambivert, I had a hard time to get into casual conversations with strangers. In the US this was not the case. Perhaps this was due to the language barrier; I spoke some German, but for the Swiss, this is like a foreign language. I didn't feel accepted until I realized that to accept others and to be accepted, I firstly need to accept myself. I believe that languages very much shape our identity. Even though I am fluent in Swiss German today, I sometimes still feel I am a different person depending on the language I speak. In this sense, I am still finding my way to my true authenticity. Nevertheless, this journey helped me grow, be more tolerant, accepting and shaped me into who I am now. Today, I can say that I dream like an American, work like a

Swiss, and celebrate life like a Slovenian.

You got two little girls at home. How did your life change regarding family, work, plans for the future, overall view on life with kids? Are you raising your children multilingual, how is it going? Any funny moments so far? How much Slovenian is in your kids' life?

Becoming a mom indeed changed my life. Priorities shifted significantly and personal values now come in a slightly different order. My flexibility and patience get tested daily. I am much more conscious about self-care now than I was before. I certainly lowered my need for perfectionism, at the same time the need for my personal development increased. The girls turn out to be my greatest teachers and I really want to be a good role model for them.

Switzerland's system is unfortunately not very family-friendly. Maternity leaves are short, daycare is expensive, so many women put their careers on hold to take care of their children in their youngest age. I personally was never able to identify with that. My ambition to get really good at what I



am doing right now remains, just the pace in achieving my professional goals slowed down a bit. I manage my attention and presence, not my time. This is really the key.

Our girls are growing up around many languages, daily they are exposed to Slovenian, Swiss German, English, French. Switzerland being very multicultural, this is quite normal. As much as this is confusing for my girls, I know it will pay off in the long run. I am persistent in speaking Slovenian with them all the time. They are not fluent, but they understand everything. It is really important to me that they are familiar and close to their Slovenian roots. I take every opportunity to expose them to the Slovenian culture, language, traditions, cuisine. Their all-time favorites are pancakes and beef soup with noodles.

One last question, when you applied for the EMBA, you mentioned that you would like to be one of these women who managed to have a family and have a successful and fulfilling career at the same time. How close did you come to that on a scale of 1 to 10? Why did you rate it in such a way? What do you think could be still improved if anything?

That's very interesting, I don't even recall mentioning this. Today, I know that it is possible to have both without compromising one another. It is a balancing act that comes with a lot of hard work, prioritizing, and at times it also means putting some personal needs on the side for a moment – on all ends. It is very important to build a strong support system around you and practice self-

care. In this, I am succeeding quite well and it helps me focus on the job, be present and productive during the working day. We underestimate that working moms, and dads as well, with very young children, often come to work sleep-deprived, tired, which has an impact on overall creativity and productivity. I am no exception here, but then I quickly remind myself I am not a superwoman. And I slow down to go faster. I believe that measuring success is very objective in this sense, there is no real scale or KPI. We are (or at least should be) the ones who set the standards and define our success.



MEET LEA IN EVERYDAY LIFE



EMBA 2016

Lea Weyermann Lozar
MBA, ACC, Leadership & Team Coach,
Weyermann Coaching & Consulting;
Strategic project lead – Sensopro AG

My favorite free time activity is... spending time with my family and friends, yoga, running, and of course skiing in winter.

Last movie I watched was... »The Pursuit of Happyness«.

The one Slovenian product I miss in Switzerland is... I don't miss any products, but what I miss is Slovenian spontaneity. If you want to grab a casual coffee with a Swiss, this needs to fit their calendar which is often booked one month in advance :)

My favorite Swiss food/drink is... Cheese Fondue accompanied by a glass of white wine Heida.

My favorite and my next travel destination is... my hometown Lesce, Slovenia.

An advice I would give to my children is... to stay true to yourself, make mistakes and learn from them, don't let anything or anyone stop you from going after your dreams.

Name three things that make you happy... smiling and surprised faces of my girls, good conversations, Italian Gelato.