

A Conversation with Anna Lombard a Payroll, HR and Marketing Specialist Supporting RIT'S Global Campuses.

Facilitated by Luke Auburn

Luke Auburn: You're listening to the RIT Professional Development Podcast. I'm your host, Luke Auburn. Our guest today is Anna Lombard. Anna is from Russia and in 2005 she moved to the United States to pursue her master's degree in communication and media technology here at RIT. Upon completing her degree, she worked as a marketing specialist for a company called The Lighting Division then joined RIT as an employee in 2008. Today she works as a payroll, HR, and marketing specialist supporting RIT's global campuses. We'll talk about her intriguing career path and advice she has for others thinking about their own professional development. Anna, thank you for joining me.

Anna Lombard: Luke, thank you so much for inviting me to participate. It is true that the move to the United States can be characterized as massive. I was 29 when I decided to enroll in master's program at RIT and I do think that this was a good decision. I had been working for the American companies in Russia for about 10 years after my graduation with a degree in international business. I worked for Sun Microsystems, Colliers International, and Intel Technologies. All through the years I have been trying to understand the specific area of business that interested me the most. I ended up at finance administration department at Intel and was very happy with my job, my colleagues, Intel environment that prompted employees to grow, develop, and move within countries and departments. Nevertheless, I always felt that I would like to get true American education. CMT program was a good fit with what I was planning on doing. It provided a wide range of disciplines from communication to graphic design and marketing. I could not find a better program in Russia. Having said that, I think that not everyone is wired for such tremendous life-changing relocation. I feel that education is still the best investment that will serve anyone throughout the lifetime. I will never forget riding my bike to RIT at the age of 30 wondering about what my next steps in life could be. You never know what life brings you next, but when you have hope, perseverance, and risk-taking ability, you fearlessly move on and into the unknown.

Luke Auburn: So, I'm curious, how did you find the master's program at RIT? What lead you to that particular one?

Anna Lombard: To be honest with you, I was ready to go to University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. The price was absolutely outstandingly higher than RIT and Rudy Pugliese invited me to enroll into master's

degree at RIT and RIT also provided me a scholarship. So, that's really something that was the decision-making factor.

Luke Auburn: What other mentors or role models have you had along the way on your career path and whom do you kind of admire?

Anna Lombard: I think that throughout one's career each person meets one or several unique people who she or he looks up to. I'm very lucky that I encountered James Zuidema who came to Russia from the U.S. to take a position of the finance controller for Intel Russia back in 2000. I admire James' personal motivation, personal competence, cultural adaptability, and leadership style. His ability to align people of different cultures working seamlessly under pressure always keeping smile on his face made me think that he is a superhuman. He always believed that employees' abilities and individual responsibility for each assignment gives his subordinates projects that challenge them and gradually increases task difficulty. Mentoring plays a huge role in today's world. Finding the right people for a mentor can be as valuable as winning the lottery.

Luke Auburn: You talked a little bit about, like, stretch assignments that he kind of gave. What were some assignments that he gave you that allowed you to kind of stretch your abilities and just learn new things?

Anna Lombard: I remember very well that he would give me huge tasks of organizing events for a very huge office at Intel Russia and he would just say, OK, now it's all yours. You know what to do, just run with it. If you have any questions just keep me posted, but I truly believe that on the basis of small, let's say five or ten different projects, I do have hope that you would do it and you would do it successfully.

Luke Auburn: So, when you made that big move from Russia to here in Rochester, how did you handle the emotions that surrounded that? That's a big shift in life.

Anna Lombard: It's a huge shift in life and I remember that back at Intel there was a time when everybody would have to use Mercedes to travel on the Intel assignments within the city. Here I didn't have a car and I really didn't want a car, so being here in Rochester challenged me to a great extent. So, I had a bike which I still remember it was Mount Fury and it was a little guy that I had to use everywhere and sometimes I just wouldn't be able to travel far, but I had a network of great friends and they would drive me and overall people in Rochester are absolutely terrific and that's why I think I settled here because they are so helpful and the community completely supports student population. Everybody loves to be surrounded by students and I do feel that it's a great area to raise your family as well.

Luke Auburn: That supportive environment sounds like it was a big factor in helping you succeed.

Anna Lombard: Yes, that's true.

Luke Auburn: So, now in your current role, fast forward and you're working with people remotely constantly with people from all of our satellite campuses thousands of miles away. Does this make networking a challenge or does it create unique opportunities? How does that sort of impact your professional development?

Anna Lombard: Working with people remotely is a true challenge. Sometimes this challenge may be overcome, in some situations it may not be. Since 2008, I have been working with RIT Dubai and later I got to know our colleagues from RIT Croatia and Kosovo. As long as I remember that my way is not the only way when dealing with cross-cultural teams, I am in a good shape. Edward Hall came up with high- and low-context cultures theory. I tested this theory answering the question of how much context or unspoken background does someone need to have to understand a statement or a behavior. In some cultures, you have to meet people on the ground and only through the handshake you may get an understanding of their personality, motivations, and beliefs. In my opinion, meeting people from RIT Dubai personally and not through voice over technology built better communication and brought better work results. RIT Croatia and A.U.K. are different in this sense. For me, it was much easier to get work done via email, Skype, and meeting my colleagues on Facebook. My colleagues from RIT Croatia and A.U.K. are very flexible and responsive to the needs of RIT New York and I'm endlessly thankful to them all for our day-to-day cooperation and their partnership with RIT.

Luke Auburn: That's interesting how you took a theory and-- an intercultural communication theory and applied it. So, was that something you learned in your studies or is that something you had to kind of research as you were learning to deal with people?

Anna Lombard: Actually, this theory came up when I was preparing for global professional in HR certification program and I truly believe that there is a huge deal of truth in it. It's not just a theory. Some cultures you have to work with for years in order for them to recognize your professional and cultural background and standpoint. Certainly with RIT Dubai I had much more challenge compared to the European campuses at RIT Croatia and Kosovo, but it still doesn't make it less fun to work with them.

Luke Auburn: From what I understand you also do some volunteer work as well and you've served as a board member of Margaret's House since 2008. What impact do you think volunteer work plays in professional development? How can it allow you to work on other skills that you may not do in your typical day-to-day job?

Anna Lombard: Volunteering work is something that is very unique to the United States. When I was growing up, it was not something that my parents would do when I had-- when they had free time. I love the idea of volunteering and I support the mission of Margaret's House at RIT. Providing some ideas for making this childcare center a better place widens my horizons and encourages strategic thinking. Working with other RIT parents and coming up with some new ideas on how to help this wonderful center is always exciting and satisfying. Volunteering is a fantastic networking opportunity. I got to know so many students, faculty, and staff members through Margaret's House and they eventually became my personal friends. I measure personal success in life through meeting great people who allow you to see something new in your daily routines and make them better that way.

Luke Auburn: And what do you see as next for your professional development? You've earned your master's. What's the next step in your career towards advancing to where you want to go ultimately?

Anna Lombard: RIT is really an amazing growing place with many remarkable opportunities. I'm always open to new global challenges that are associated with growth and extension of RIT Global. Coming up with new ideas about how to make multicultural HR and payroll processes smooth, more transparent, and simple for staff and faculty is always on our agenda. RIT faces with myriad of challenges starting with working environments, business partners, travel, social expectations, business practices, economic, and relationship issues. Tackling all these issues tests my ability of finding the best solutions to our existing problems and I'm ready for more challenges.

Luke Auburn: Interesting. So, we'll see what the next challenge is that arises. Anna, thank you very much for your time. That concludes another edition of the RIT Professional Development Podcast series. For more information on how you can develop your career, visit rit.edu/CPD.