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Returning to the field

Speakers: Karine Vasselin, Andrei Ispas, & Praneeta Raina

Karine: At Capgemini, everyone is in the game. We shape a common passion for sports and we build inclusive futures for all, on and off the field. In this series, we will be hearing from amazing athletes and inspiring role models, how they break stereotypes and overcome challenges in sports and in the workplace.

I am Karine Vasselin. I'm leading the Group Diversity and Inclusion agenda. I do para triathlon myself, and I will be your host. I have the pleasure today to be with two of my colleagues, Andrei, who is a basketball champion from Romania, and Praneeta, a veteran from India. And together, we'll learn how we could take a break, and what it takes to take that moment off and have the courage and the way to return to the field.

Hello, Andrei! Thanks so much for being with us today! How did you start playing basketball professionally? And what can we learn to build inclusive teams?

Andrei: Hey, hello, Karine. Hello, Praneeta. I was playing professional basketball. I started when I was 11, like a hobby in school or during breaks. And at that time, a coach spotted me during some games. He told me that I'm playing really well and asked me if I want to join his team. That was actually the moment I started practicing professionally and being part of a professional team at the junior level.

And I had my biggest win actually in my career, that was the national champion under 20. That was the gold medal I've achieved.

To your second question, we can learn a lot from, from basketball, as from any other team sports, which we can also use in our day-to-day work because playing in a team or working in a team is the way you can achieve much better results. We have to be a team, and we have also to give our colleagues the feeling that they are really belonging to the team.

Karine: Thanks Andrei. Very inspiring and impressive!

So hello, Praneeta. You started your career in the Indian Army and now you're with us in Capgemini. So, can you tell us more about how you made this transition?

Praneeta: Hi, Karine. As you rightly said, I am a third generation military veteran and I served for 14 years in the Indian Air Force.

And, although I was very, very passionate about my career with the Indian Air Force, but there came a time wherein I felt that the system that I was working on did not give me an opportunity to add to my skills or accelerate my growth in any way,

which is when I decided to pursue a career in corporate, because I thought that this would give me an opportunity to grow in a more fulfilling manner.

So, that's when I decided to transition and, trust me, it has not been an easy journey. So first of all, I took a break of about six months from the armed forces - went to IIM Indore wherein I spend some time upskilling myself. And, after that, I thought I was kind of ready to pursue a career in business. Post that, I was selected by Capgemini through their veteran hiring initiative.

And, since this series is about sports and inclusion, I must place on record an incident, which I recall, that swimming is a mandatory sport, which is a part and parcel of our training during armed forces. In fact, it is so important that culmination of training happens only after we pass a swimming test. I remember I was introduced to swimming by my father for the first time when I think I was nine or ten years old.

So for the initial few days, he was quite patient with me, but then eventually he lost his patience because, of his, what my water fear and all of that. So, there came a day when he literally threw me into the pool, which is when my water fear went away. But, that thing of overcoming the fear, I think, it became a part of my personality since then.

And that came in handy when I was to take a huge step of transitioning from the armed forces to corporate.

Karine: So Andrei, we just learned from Praneeta that she had to take a six month break, and I think that you had to take a break, too. And then, had the chance to return to basketball. Can you tell us how you lived this experience?

Andrei: Yes, indeed, you're completely right. So, I used to play basketball some years, also after winning the national championship. But, at the moment I've turned 24, there was a lot happening in my life, meaning my first child was born, I've moved from one city to another, and, at the same time, I started studying at the second university.

And, I've realized that I have to prioritize my life. And, the only thing I could quit at that moment was basketball. It was a very tough decision, of course, but, yeah, I had to do it. I took a break of around about one and a half year. The problem was that, at that moment in that time, I've, I've gained a lot of weight. And, I've realized I have to come back, it was actually the moment when my second child was born and the moment I joined Capgemini. And then, I started again playing basketball. It was very hard because of the 30 kilos I had more than before, but my teammates were very happy having me back. But, only practicing once, twice per week was not enough.

At that moment, I've realized I have to do more, and I've started doing trail running, which developed as a new, passion for me, participating at marathons or ultra marathons through mountains. It was very nice. And, I've again pushed my limits.

Karine: Praneeta, coming back to you. So, can you tell us what kind of differences you have experienced between the armed forces and Capgemini?

Praneeta: So Karine, it has actually been a 180-degree change of industry for me. But, if there's anything that armed forces teach you, is to have a lot of mental strength and to face any crisis situation with a smile on your face. And that's what kept me going. So I think, I felt there were two major differences, one in the work culture, and second, in the work environment.

So, while we are in the armed forces, though, we look after a particular system, fly a particular aircraft, we do have expertise in an area, but there are a lot of other areas, which are very common to everybody. So, a lot of people are responsible for a similar kind of a job. Second, in the armed forces, I think I was leading a team of about 100 persons, looking after their professional, personal aspects, as well, and it was a very disciplined kind of an environment. But, now that I have switched to corporate, I feel here everybody has a particular domain and, over a period of time, while working in that domain, the person masters that skill and becomes an expert, which is really good.

And on the whole, there's a lot of flexibility. We work with teams remotely. There's a lot of change in culture, which I saw, but on the whole, I'm very thankful to the armed forces for having shaped my personality up. And, as far as this part of the world is concerned, I am settling down more and more with each passing day with the help of support from my peers, colleagues, superiors, everybody.

Karine: So hearing from your two stories, we can really see that it takes time and it takes courage to revisit our own priorities and be ready to take another step, and potentially to embrace a new sport or a new career. So Andrei, what kind of tip or piece of advice would you give to a colleague who would be hesitating to take a break or to take another step in a new direction?

Andrei: In my opinion, it's very normal to take a break. I've learned some years ago that, in life, you have to prioritize your tasks, and that you cannot do more than five important things at a time. Meaning if you choose to be a father, then you have to put it on the first five places in your life.

If you choose to be a basketball player, then it has to be on those five places. So, you have to see which, in that moment, which are the five most important things in your life. So that's my advice. Go look, look further, look in the future and see what is important for you and what you really like.

What is your passion? And don't be afraid to make a break. It's normal.

Karine: This balance of identities could really evolve with time. Really, really, inspiring. And Praneeta, back to you, your turn to give us a recommendation or an advice for people around us who could be at the crossroads of their life with a difficult choice to make for the, for the future.

Praneeta: Sure. So, one of the advice that I would like to give is, whenever you are facing a challenging situation at work, do not deter from the main goal. Always overcome failure and continue moving forward towards accomplishment of your goal. And, you will certainly reach somewhere. And, I think it's very natural for all of us humans to resist change because there's fear of the unknown involved, but then successful are those who overcome that fear and cross over to the other side.

And, to be very honest, at this stage also there's sometimes, when I'm having a not so good day at work, I question myself if I did the right thing, but I know I just have to hang in there. And, if I be a little more patient and perseverant, maybe things will just fall into place eventually.

Karine: Thank you so much, Praneeta and Andrei! This was really interesting and gave us much food for thought.

Praneeta: Thank you so much for having us.

Andrei: Thank you very much.