



Season 3, Episode 2 – International Consulting

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Stacie Berdan:

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you've considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host! In season three, we explore the rising trend of ESG and how it is shifting the talent landscape on a global scale. Come with us as we share with you how responsible active engagement is changing the face of the global workforce today. So today, I have the pleasure of interviewing Ramiro Prudencio – Partner at McKinsey and Company where he leads the firm's communication function globally. He joined McKinsey after more than 20 years in the public relations and public affairs agency business, where he was responsible for leading regional offices and client engagements in Europe, Middle East and Africa, and Latin America. He's lived and worked in the UK, Brazil, Chile, and the US, where we first worked together at Burson-Marsteller in DC. Ramiro speaks Portuguese in addition to his native Spanish and English. Welcome Ramiro, it's terrific to have you with us today.

Ramiro Prudencio:

Stacey, it's great to be with you and the CIBER community. It's a real honor to be able to share some of my experiences, something I feel passionately about with you and the listeners.

Stacie Berdan:

Great. So let's dive in. So one of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there, more than just titles. What do you do?

Ramiro Prudencio:

What do I do? Well, I lead the global communications team at McKinsey. So let me just explain what McKinsey is. So, we're a management consulting firm, and we help organizations – private sector, public sector and nonprofit organizations – improve their strategy and their operations. We help launch new businesses, we improve supply chain, we help companies with their logistics, we help them digitize their businesses – for example, helping bricks-and-mortar companies become e-commerce companies. So, we basically help companies and institutions perform better. Increasingly, we're focused more on the area of sustainability, what we call inclusive growth, helping our clients achieve a sustainable and inclusive growth. Which means, helping organizations reduce their carbon footprint – so that's the sustainability piece; also make sure that their workforces are diverse, and that they have the skills needed to participate fully in what is a very rapidly changing global economy and labor market – that's the inclusion piece; and also continuing to grow. You know, growth is essential for all organizations, it helps their people and their communities prosper. Increasingly, growth is also going to help us find the very important energy transition that we're going to have to make to move to a low carbon economy. That's what we do at McKinsey. And then what does the communications team do? So, we help our organization engage with our key stakeholders. So that's those are our clients, our colleagues, right, and that's all the way from potential recruits to colleagues who are at McKinsey, and to our extensive alumni network, and also broader society. We want to be increasingly transparent about what we do, make sure that people outside of McKinsey, know who we are, what we do and how



we do it, and make sure that they understand that it's aligned to society's values and expectations. And specifically, so what does the team do? So we have a publishing team. You know, last year, we published over 1200 articles that were read by 70 million people. We have a team that engages the media last year, our research was cited in over 5000 articles in leading newspapers and magazines around the world. We run advertising campaigns, we run social media campaigns, we manage the McKinsey website, we organize McKinsey's participation at the World Economic Forum (or Davos, as many people call it) and other major business events, we manage issues... So just in the last few weeks, we've been very intensely working on supporting our colleagues in the Ukraine, helping them leave the country, also supporting our colleagues in Russia, some of those have chosen to leave the country and we're helping them as well. And perhaps most importantly, you know, we listen and we learn. I think the communications function... people often think about the communications function as pushing information out of an organization. The communications team should be listening, right, and learning; are we responding fast enough to our client's needs? Are we creating a great experience for our people? And also, are we listening to what society expects from us, right, and translating that back into the organization? It's a fun job. It's a great job. It's challenging, it's never dull. And most importantly, I have a world class team of colleagues that I learned from all the time, so it's a great job.

Stacie Berdan:

Terrific. Thank you for that great explanation. Clear. Listening is key and good communications – really tough these days. There's so much out there... You know, I read that your philosophy of communications is that it plays a critical role in helping organizations succeed and fulfill their mission. How so?

Ramiro Prudencio:

Well, communications is fundamental at the personal level and at the organization level. Guess what, you're a communicator, I'm a communicator. And we happen since shortly we, we enter this world, right, and there's no choice. We're communicating constantly. So we might as well be good at it at the individual level. And the same goes for organizations. You know, an organization... and we're going to talk about organizations, but you know, this can apply to a business as much as it can apply to a nonprofit or even a government institution... organizations or businesses – they can have great ideas, they can have brilliant people, but they will only be successful if they can engage their stakeholders, if they can shape an understanding of the product services or mission that they are on, and if they can convince people to trust them, and that they are a force for good. That's fundamental for the success of any organization. And, you know, there are lots of examples of organizations that have done that well, and lots of examples of organizations who have fallen outside of that and suffered significant consequences. But it's also coupled with another thing, right? An organization needs to first and foremost do the right thing. Communication is not a substitute for an organization failing to do the right thing; communications will never be able to compensate for poor behavior, it shouldn't... what we do as communicators, as professional communicators should be an ethical activity. And the ethics should demand that the people or organizations we represent are doing the right thing, or at least trying to do the right thing and acting in good faith.

Stacie Berdan:

How do you see the role of that – you mentioned sustainability, but the importance of ESG for companies today?

Ramiro Prudencio:

Well, ESG is taking a series of expectations of behavior and baking it into how an organization performs, particularly a publicly-traded organization or a private sector organization. So, ESG, right - E is the environment – so that's how well is the company taking care of the environment. How is it conducting its relationship with employees, suppliers, customers in the community – you know, that's the S – which is society. And how it manages and governs itself – that's the G, right? How does it treat its shareholders, how does it follow regulations, what are the consequences when it finds poor behavior among its employees.



Stacie Berdan:

What do students or young professionals need to know about ESG to help enhance their own careers.

Ramiro Prudencio:

So, I think anyone who works in business will need to be familiar with ESG. And the mandates that their organization has for employees, and for the organization's behavior. If you're an employee in an organization today, in a business today, chances are you will have a code of conduct that you need to be familiar with. Leading organizations will test you on your knowledge of that code of conduct on an annual basis. That happens to everybody who works at McKinsey, you go through several hours of training every year on our code of conduct. That training changes every year, right... We need to adapt because the world is changing as well. And the situations we find ourselves in are changing as well. I think that organizations are also now trying to get their workforces to better understand sustainability and how they can participate in an organization's sustainability targets. So do you have to get on an airplane every time, you know, there's a global meeting? What's the carbon footprint that you have as an employee for an organization? At McKinsey, we're working very hard at reducing our travel schedule so that we are meeting our own carbon reduction targets, right, our path to net zero. So, you will start to encounter all these things as you work in an organization. And chances are that that bar is going to increase year over year. Also, that allows an organization, if it's doing all that well, it allows an organization go out and communicate effectively and say, you know, this is our commitment, this is how we're meeting the commitment, you know, we're closing the gaps between where we want to be and where we are on issues around environment or social commitments and governance. It also allows large organizations to tap more capital. So increasingly, ESG is driven in great measure, right now, by investors – investors want to make sure they're investing in companies that are behaving ethically. And the ESG framework allows investors, ideally, to measure those companies. Now the metrics are still evolving. They're a bit of all over the place. There's a lot of focus on building a clear framework of metrics around ESG, so that everyone knows what the rules are, we're not there yet, but it is evolving and evolving in the right direction. And over time, I think that we'll have a consistent set of metrics that publicly traded companies will work against.

Stacie Berdan:

It sounds like what you said for listeners to specifically... if they're looking at these various companies, wherever they're pursuing a career, right, that they should actually take a look at what the sustainability initiatives are, and be familiar with them, when they go in for job interviews, or even when they're doing their own research as to where they want to... where they want to work and where they want to choose to pursue a career.

Ramiro Prudencio:

Absolutely. You know, it's more than a job, you're going to be spending at least eight hours, probably more, if you're in a job that's demanding. You want to be in an organization where you feel your values are reflected. And so, I would absolutely encourage anybody who's looking to change jobs or looking for a first job to look at the organization, what is its CSR or ESG framework, what does it prioritize, how does it communicate these targets, and how is it meeting these targets... And how ambitious is it in trying to be a force for good.

Stacie Berdan:

Makes perfect sense. So, Ramiro, you have travelled around the world, lived in so many places, worked around the world... And I'm pretty sure, based on my conversations with so many students, that your career is one that many aspire to, especially in international consulting. What advice or specific tips do you have? If someone, say, wanted to follow in your footsteps?

Ramiro Prudencio:

Well, I... you know, I've been extremely fortunate to have an international career. If anybody would want to have one, I think mine's been very, very rewarding. And not rewarding necessarily just economically, it's been rewarding because I've gotten to see the world. You know, life is short, the world is a very big place, and your experience in



your life will be richer for having seen more of it. And when you work with people from different cultures, your horizons expand, I think become better at what you do, you become wiser. I think you also become constantly humble, because you're always being surprised and your expectations are always being challenged. In terms of what I would advise, I think, you know, you want to specialize to some degree, you want to think about is there a region or a country that I want to specialize in. Though, as I said earlier, the world is a very big place... Ultimately, your ability to land a job, an international job, is you're going to have to convince somebody that you can deliver value, right, deliver value to the organization, its customers, or its stakeholders, in some way that someone else can't, right, and that you're uniquely suited to do it. And I think that specializing, in my case, you know, I was lucky enough to be raised speaking Spanish. And so I was able to understand a part of the world and have a certain advantage on other people, and speaking the language and understanding the culture. So that is, I think one thing, pick a place that you feel passionate about, you feel is interesting and get to know it; if you have the language – all the better. Language can be a real advantage in many places, doesn't have to be everywhere. A lot of the world's business is not in English. Most of the world, it's still businesses studying local languages. The other thing is to have an industry or discipline of specialty, right? Again, what's your passion? What do you feel excited about? Is it an industry? Or is it a discipline? And when I mean discipline, I said, you know, is it marketing, is it supply chain management, is it human resources, right? Those are disciplines that can apply to different types of organizations or different types of companies in different vertical sectors. So have a geographic area of specialty, and then have an either an industry or a disciplinary area of specialty. And I think you start to hone your value proposition that way, and you become interesting to potential employers or others who have an international footprint and are looking for people to work for them.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great advice. So – geography, passion, and a discipline. How about looking to the future a little bit? What do you see on the horizon as the big issues that our listeners need to think about, people entering the workforce now?

Ramiro Prudencio:

Yeah, so you know, the world is seeing real fractures right now. And, you know, we're recording this at a time where the Ukraine has been invaded by the Russian military and the Russian government. And there is a whole world of pain and tragedy being felt by communities in that country, and on the periphery, and by the Ukrainian community abroad. And we have a large one in the US, and I'm talking to you from the UK, we have one here as well. I think that geopolitics is going to be a real challenge for the world moving forward. We have competing pressures. The world has integrated economically and culturally for the past 20-30 years, at a very accelerated rate. At the same time, the systems aren't always compatible. And there are competing interests today that are pushing against each other. And, I think that managing geopolitics is going to be a real challenge for all organizations. And I think if you have a real insight into how the world works, and that's your area of specialty, I think that organizations will be looking for people who understand the world, understand geopolitics, understand international economics, and understand politics and diplomacy. And that's not just for sets of public sector or government jobs. I think those jobs are going to be... are being created in the private sector at a very fast click, because companies need to start to manage their businesses across these very fractured geopolitical lines. Another area, I'd say, is sustainability. We have as, as a species, an existential challenge in the next 20 to 50 years – which is to transition the economy we've built over the last 200 years, which is a carbon-intensive economy to a low carbon economy. And we're going to have to do that in about 20 years. It's going to be the largest shift in capital allocation in the history of humanity. And it's going to happen really quickly. And I think if you have a unique skill in that area, you will be in high demand. And then another area is health. I think that there are tremendous gains to be made in the area of health. People are living longer. Hopefully, they're living better lives. And I think that's an industry which is going to grow as well, and internationalize as well. So, I think those are three areas where people who are interested in entering the international job market will be well served by looking at.



Stacie Berdan:

Thank you. Heavy, heavy, heavy insights, but really necessary. So thanks for sharing that. That's terrific advice for our listeners. Since we're on the topic of challenging things – can you share with us what is one of the most challenging professional experiences you've had? And how did you deal with it?

Ramiro Prudencio:

You know, I had had my first international assignment that was in Chile, Burson-Marsteller send me to Chile to open their office in Santiago. I was about 28-29 years of age, Stacy, you were one of my closest friends in the Washington DC office where I was working. And I said goodbye to you and my many friends and said – I'm off. And in Chile, the country had a growing economy, PR, public relations and public affairs consulting was relatively new industry. I was fortunate enough to hire a good set of people early in my startup of person. They were great and talented people, we were able to build a super team and we had a thriving business in a matter of, you know, a couple of years. And then I moved to Brazil. And there the agency had been around for a while and it was really struggling. It was really struggling. Morale was low. Clients were unhappy. I think the quality of our work was poor. It wasn't where it needed to be, certainly not for a world class agency, which we aspired to be. And so I landed there, and as much as I thought I knew Latin America, Brazil was a very different place. Not only was the language different, but the scale of the business in the country was different. The clients were different and the team was different. Many people thought I had come to close the office. They said in Portuguese, they said "O gringo veio para fechar o escritório" – the gringo came to shut down the office. That became sort of the watercooler chat. I said, how am I going to convince people that I'm not here to close the office. So I began taking Portuguese lessons. But then I scheduled the Portuguese lessons at 9am and in the main conference room, which is a large conference room – it was only me and, you know, my Portuguese tutor/teacher in there. But I took the main conference for so that everybody who wanted to use the main conference room would see on the schedule Ramiro's Portuguese lesson. And then they started to say, well, if Ramiro came to shut the office down, why is he learning Portuguese, right? And so that was my way of convincing them that I was all in. And that if they wanted to come along, on this journey of turning the operation around that I was, I was with them. And I was, I was betting the farm myself on it. And that allowed... you know, then you got real clarity as to who was really committed to the organization and who wasn't, that allowed me to identify people who I could really then promote into more senior positions, because they were equally committed. You know, the transition from a startup, which we built, right, to a, you know, a restructure was the toughest point in my career, the move from Chile to Brazil, but also the restructuring and the success that we had in Brazil. It took us about 18 months to turn the business around; it was really, really satisfying. And to see that operation take off, to see people really thrive, to see clients happy to see us innovate, and bring all sorts of new services to the market was the most exciting thing I've done as well. So, that yeah, that was the biggest challenge. But also the thing that was most satisfying...

Stacie Berdan:

Yes, as it so often is... That is a great story. Thank you for sharing. And also shows that it's not always so glamorous and fabulous, is it? Sometimes it's really, really hard, and I'm sure you described it in a way that... the happy ending – I'm sure that there were days, weeks, months where... where it was not so... Great story. I admire one of the initiatives that McKinsey has – a focus on women working around the world, the next generation women leaders is something that the firm does. And something that I think a lot of our listeners would be interested in. Can you tell us about it?

Ramiro Prudencio:

Yeah. There is no interest like self-interest. So, we do this certainly as a benefit to society. But it's also a way we identify talented young women. McKinsey today is roughly, we're about 47-48% female across the firm. So we're nearly at parity in terms of our biggest number. But we want to attract the most talented people, we want to attract them, regardless of their gender, or their community, or their background. And this is one way that we create a better understanding of McKinsey for young women. So these are women who are either in college or postgraduate, or in the first years of their career. We run this in different parts of the world. You apply online, for what is



basically, I think it's a three-day workshop. It's been done virtually now. And so it allows us to scale to more people. Through participating in Next Generation Women Leaders, you will basically go through leadership training, a skills training, how to work in a team, how to run a project, how to set goals, how to find your own purpose and your own aspiration, which is really important as you decide what you want to do with your life and your career. And it's all run by McKinsey colleagues. It's also a chance for people to get to know McKinsey. And for McKinsey to get to know potential candidates. So, after doing the NGWL workshop, if you're interested in applying for a job at McKinsey, you have a bit of a leg up in the sense that you understand the organization.

Stacie Berdan:

So, we're coming to the end of our conversation, but before we wrap up, I'd like to ask you – is there anything else you want to add? We've had a terrific conversation, lots of invaluable insight from you. But is there something else for our listeners?

Ramiro Prudencio:

Stacy, I would say that, you know, I would just go back to the fact that you're going to be working for probably 30-40-50 years, right? The world is a very big place, you have one life and you want it to be as interesting as possible. Chances are that early in your career, you'll be able to take more risks, right? You may not have a partner, you may not have kids, you may not have a mortgage or other responsibilities just yet. And so, I would encourage people to really look at these opportunities early in their career. Because as you, as you get on over time and age, you'll pick up more responsibilities and they may not always be compatible with moving overseas and having an international career. So this is something... I think that the window is bigger – it doesn't entirely close ever, but it is biggest probably early in your career. So think about it now if you're interested.

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. Great advice. Ramiro, thank you so much for taking the time to talk about your stellar career, sharing advice with our listeners...

Ramiro Prudencio:

Oh, stop...stop... [laughing]

Stacie Berdan:

Yes, yes, it is amazing. I really appreciate the time you took, and I, you know, I appreciate you. So this has been personally wonderful for me too. So thank you.

Ramiro Prudencio:

Unfortunately, people can't see me blush on a podcast, but I'm, I'm fully blushing right now. You're too kind.

Stacie Berdan:

Let's go. Well, thanks again.

Ramiro Prudencio:

All right. Thank you, Stacie.

[Music]

Stacie Berdan:

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!