

# Career Transition:

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## How Other Executives' Experiences Can Help You

As many of you know, the time when you transition between career roles, i.e. when you've left one role and haven't yet secured another, is a challenging time. You have to get used to a new "available on a short notice" status and a "new way of living and not working." You also have to find more and more new ways to motivate yourself and maintain your self-esteem. This is why SpenglerFox decided to put together a short article on "top insights" that we've gathered from our Practice Group Leaders. We hope that this material will inform our prospects as they, or their colleagues, go through this critical moment in career development.

Below we offer a more general "Top 5" set of tips or guidance for readers on issues they need to look at and reflect on during transition periods in their careers. Following that set of tips, we provide a profile on a SpenglerFox executive network contact, Sviatlana Filonava, who experienced 12 months of transition herself when she left British American Tobacco in the middle of her career. We hope that our recommendations and Sviatlana's experiences will inform and inspire many of you as you make your way through your career transitions.

### Tips on Career Transition: What to Monitor When You Are Out of the Work Environment

1. Learning never stops: take time to invest in learning something new. This can involve acquiring knowledge, skills or experience that you never had time to gain, while you were working 40+ hours a week.
2. Don't forget your networks: most likely, you're not the first person to transition, so pick the brains of your professional network (in a discrete, professional way) to learn how others have dealt with and overcome any challenges you might be experiencing. In turn, make sure you are there for them, should they (or others) come back to you with similar requests for support.
3. Establish your personal brand: this will require some reflection. Find time to take yourself out of "the process" and make self-evaluations. Think about what your strengths are, both functional and leadership, what achievements you are most proud of, what drives you and what you enjoy most, etc. This will help you to define what you stand for.
4. Enjoy the exposure: While you are in transition, you have the privilege of getting exposed to the business processes of other industries and an opportunity to meet executives from different companies. Make the most of this with every potential job you are interested in. Research everything you can about the company, the brands and the people you'll be meeting.
5. Don't be afraid to fail: you will get rejections – 9 out of 10 prospects do! It hurts, but you need to learn how to go on, learn from the experience and do better next time. Don't take it personally and, most importantly, keep moving and don't give up on your ambitions.

Quote for inspiration, shared by Sviatlana Filonava:

*"I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I was trusted to make the winning shot for a game and missed. I've failed over and over, and over again, in my life. And that is why I succeed." Michael Jordan*

## **Profile of Sviatlana Filonava, Channel Marketing Director Asia at Carlsberg Group**

Sviatlana joined Carlsberg Group in Jan 2014 as Channel Marketing Director Asia, located in Hong Kong, being responsible for trade marketing strategy and commercial capabilities development across 14 markets in the region: including some of the world's most dynamic and fastest-growing markets such as China, India, Vietnam, Nepal, Laos, Hong Kong and Malaysia.

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### **The 3 C's Of My Big Transition: Choices, Chances, Changes.**

I started working with British American Tobacco (BAT) as an intern for 6 months – and then I stayed for the next 12 (!) great years, being part of the company success story in Belarus followed by international career in Western Europe. I joined the company's Representative Office in Belarus in 2001 and I was privileged to be brought into a very unique process. We had to transform the whole business model in line with the company's ambitions to move the business rapidly from cost centre to profit centre. The company aimed at gaining market share and becoming a key player on the market.

I had an opportunity to be part of the great "start up" team who set the "rules of the game" in Belarus. Within a few years, through lots of hard work and leveraging everything humanly possible, we gained 20% market share, achieved Benchmark Supplier status and became the industry voice for key stakeholders. It was the biggest project that I had ever been involved in: from getting the operating license to managing actual market performance. It was an exciting time. Being part of a very entrepreneurial culture, I learned how to take calculated risks, maximize work efforts and multi-task. I also developed a critical mindset that "nothing is impossible."

In 2009 I opted to pursue an international career within BAT; moving from East to West through a regional role in DSI (the European Centre of Excellence for Route to Market) and on to heading Trade Marketing function in the BeNeLux countries. These were fantastic opportunities to work with cross-cultural teams and learn new business environments.

In January 2013 I opted for a career transition – on the rise of my career in the company - and left BAT after 12 years, what has so far been the longest relationship I've ever had in my life! I wanted a change, while at the same time questioning "is there life outside BAT?" So there I was: having 10+ years of commercial experience in a very "special" tobacco industry, with professional and personal network very much BAT-centric, an immigrant from Belarus "globally mobile", speaking no local languages (and non-native speaker of English either) and with a great desire to explore new opportunities. I was pragmatic enough to accept that I had no experience whatsoever with doing a proper job search or going through the interview outside of the comfort zone of my own company. I thought that the best way to learn about it was by doing. So I put all my effort into getting involved in recruitment processes: in all possible shapes and forms! I started to reach out proactively to executive search companies so I could get a feel for how recruitment processes are managed. I was contacting at least 10 people a day and was lucky if 3 out of 10 responded back to express some interest. After 6 months of weekly practice I could consult others on how to get ready for a good interview and exposure to some of the great companies helped me to get a more balanced view of the world and proved that "yes, there is life outside BAT".

Here are a few highlights based on the feedback received from interviews. When I took a decision to leave BAT and start a new career, I hadn't expected these reactions, but I had to face the reality:

- “You’ve only got tobacco experience. This is a clear limitation!” (Translation: *You do not know other industries practice and you are lacking experience in ATL and digital!*)
- As you are 6 months or more into your transition, the pressure from your network becomes greater. (Translation: *You are losing your market value, since you have been out of a job for more than 6 months.*)
- When I approached executive search companies in Asia, they were very keen on a candidate having prior experience in Asia. (Translation: *You have never worked in Asia before. You have zero chance of finding a job in Asia.*)

Acting on the feedback, I studied Digital Marketing with CIM as part of a distance learning course. This made me better qualify for jobs with digital marketing elements in the future. I joined an international consultancy, InReach Global Consulting, as a freelance consultant to work on an automotive after-market industry Route To Market project. This experience helped me understand that my skills are transferable. And some of the feedbacks I just ignored – I didn’t accept that I had zero chances and kept aiming for Asia ☺.

All in all, this transition process turned out to be an important learning curve. It afforded me an opportunity for some broader reflection on my past experiences and future ambitions. During this time, I found that learning to handle rejection was a critical skill. I also mastered persistency, which proved to be one of critical factors of my success. I received a flat-out “NO” at least twenty-five times after being advance in the recruitment process. Hundreds of times my CV was just ignored! But I kept going.

The transition also proved a great way to meet great people and keep in touch with the mentors I was fortunate to have. I count my blessings twice when I think of you: Wayne Merrett, Edward Gramovich, Torsten Helbig, Esther Berrozpe, Jason Murphy, Christos Tsolkas, Ron Ridderbex, Huub van Doorne, Natalya Davydova, Jan Rijkenberg, Turkhan Mahmudov, Frank Rouwens, Marcus van den Heijmen and Irisz Lippai-Nagy – thanks a lot for being encouraging and stretching, always with a good perspective to share, honest and clearly passionate, you were building enthusiasm for change and giving constant support!

In January 2014, 12 months after I left BAT, I moved to Hong Kong to open a new chapter in my career as Channel Marketing Director for Carlsberg Asia.

Quote for inspiration, shared by Sviatlana Filonava:

*“Impossible is not a fact. It's an opinion. Impossible is not a declaration. It's a dare. Impossible is potential. Impossible is temporary. Impossible is nothing.” Muhammad Ali.*

## Contact Info

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