
Kvetoslava Vranková: Expert in R&D

„What helped me to handle this career successfully were (my) strong self-management skills. Expert knowledge is important, but one needs to be prepared that one’s expertise will not be 100% applicable and one will need to open to new and diverse topics. “



Foto: private

Kvetoslava Vranková
Axxence Slovakia
Small enterprise (11 - 50 employees)
Sector: aroma-active ingredients for flavour and fragrance industry
Position: R&D director

The start of my research career was quite international, despite I'd craved for having all amenities at walking distance... I did my PhD in Scotland, then spent a postdoc period in the US trying out both a job in a private company and in a university lab. This international experience (that actually started with the Erasmus stay during my master studies) was crucial for my further professional, and even more personal development: it helped me learn languages (not just English), explore various work opportunities and lifestyles, make new contacts and much more. I decided to come back to Slovakia for personal reasons (and do not regret). I didn't have a job secured before my return so I was simply sending my CV to various employers exactly as my philosophy goes - look what's out there, evaluate the pros and cons and then decide! The company grew and this provided opportunities for my professional growth, too. After some time, I became a leader of a small team of three, later I was offered a position of R&D manager (group of 10 people) – still quite young (and female...). This was my turn to show I could do it (better)! There was a lot of co-ordination work going

on (new lab infrastructure, new research contacts, work assignment), yet still mostly about experts working together on joint tasks and building respect.

Another promotion came naturally with re-organisation of the company's formal structure. Now, as the R&D director I am responsible for development of the company R&D body (15 people) – from research project management to people leadership. I dedicate a substantial part of my time to preparing contracts, networking, developing partnerships and keeping records – activities far from science... Yet, I still need to follow the research to understand all topics of science used by our experts. That is to say that my actual scientific knowledge is less deep but much wider. It really is not about being on the top of the expertise, but about delegating the tasks and relying on one's colleagues (and occasional check of their methodology).

It took me some time grasp that moving from self-management to management (leadership) of other people is an enormous leap – and a deep dive into one's personal closet, at the first place.