



A Little Nudge Can Go a Long Way

Cultural Competence

Skills and Professional Development



Banner artwork by Black Salmon / *Shutterstock.com*

Stepping out of your comfort zone

For almost 13 years, I have been working as a corporate counsel in Novo Nordisk, the Danish pharmaceutical company, where I had a chance to be part of different teams and work in various geographies such as Asia, Africa, and Middle East. We are driving change in diabetes, obesity, rare disease, and other chronic diseases. I truly have enjoyed it, especially our focus on patients.

A year ago, during a casual talk with our HR head, he asked me whether I would consider any general manager roles in the future. I was caught by surprise that he was thinking I could do the job. He recommended I talk to my boss, who in turn also encouraged me.

A little encouragement from our fellow peers can help us grow in our career. Vector Goddess / *Shutterstock.com*

I was caught by surprise that he was thinking I could do the job. He recommended I talk to my boss, who in turn also encouraged me.

But deep down, I had a feeling this was unlikely. I have been in leadership roles in different regions,

attended senior leadership trainings, and had worked closely with different parts of operations. These previous leadership roles were all in my area of expertise, thus I felt comfortable.

However, this one was totally different. I did not have a sales or marketing background, and I was thinking I might not have a chance. Nevertheless, I revised my Individual Development Plan and started thinking how I could be prepared for the future.



Feelings of uncertainty, anxiousness, and fear are all normal when taking on a new position. TA design / *Shutterstock.com*

Five months later, we received the announcement that our country manager for Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar was moving to another position, and that country manager role would be vacant. That could be my chance to serve those great countries and stretch my leadership competencies.

On the other hand, I hesitated. What if they already had a successor? What if they need a different profile?

A week later, I met our HR head who told me that they had no successor and I proposed whether I could do a short-term assignment as country manager, while they could take time to find the right candidate. The stars aligned, or let me say, my boss, HR head, and my new boss got aligned and I even had the chance to delegate my current role to a very talented team member so that I could focus on my new role.

A warm welcome

The Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar team welcomed me warmly. We worked together to drive change in diabetes and serve many patients that rely on our products. We managed business challenges such as ensuring continuity of our operations despite the uncertainty. We initiated a social responsibility project that will allow patients in need access to more affordable diabetes treatment. Expanded our network of stakeholders and had lots of laughs during our leadership meeting in Phnom Penh.

Our colleagues in Malaysia and Singapore, who also work for Business Area Southeast Asia, also supported us. Now that my assignment is over, and I look back, I am very grateful it was such an experience!

Now that my assignment is over, and I look back, I am very grateful it was such an experience!

Careful readers who read my story until now have also guessed right that I am a female leader. Although I am self-confident and I have a good track record in my company, I needed this push to believe I could do that — to lead in areas I did not work before. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.



Stepping out of your comfort zone can open the door to new opportunities. VectorMine / Shutterstock.com

Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.

In Novo Nordisk, we are being offered “life-changing careers” and this experience was truly one of them. From diversity and inclusion perspective, we have other female leaders who are now considering more of these commercial role opportunities and being encouraged that we can do hard

things. I gained a perspective I did not have before by taking a commercial role; it has a different pressure and expectations are not the same. Thus, taking that role now helps me as an in-house counsel to give better advice as I can empathize better with my stakeholders in commercial. We also need flexibility and think differently when we want something. And finally, leaders and HR heads who invest and believe in us.

Disclaimer: The information in any resource in this website should not be construed as legal advice or as a legal opinion on specific facts, and should not be considered representing the views of its authors, its sponsors, and/or ACC. These resources are not intended as a definitive statement on the subject addressed. Rather, they are intended to serve as a tool providing practical guidance and references for the busy in-house practitioner and other readers.

[Meltem Ozker Gunduz](#)



General Counsel, EAGM Zone

GE Healthcare

Meltem Ozker Gunduz is the general counsel at GE HealthCare covering Middle East, Africa, Russia, CIS, and Turkey. Prior to that, she worked in Novo Nordisk as regional general counsel and vice-president for legal, compliance and quality for almost 15 years holding roles covering Asia Pacific, Africa, Middle East, and

Oceania. She worked in Istanbul and London branches of Herguner, Bilgen & Ucer Law Firm representing clients from various sectors. She graduated from Galatasaray University Law Faculty. Gunduz is board member of the Middle East and North Africa Chapter of Association of Corporate Counsel as of 2019.