

Competitive Intelligence Specialist Interview with Ms. Leila Gasserud

By Ambreen Ahmed (ambreen@raw.com.pk)

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Making career choices is a tough decision and is one of the biggest stresses in a student's life. RAW is here to help you make intelligent career choices by featuring in-depth interviews with professionals from a wide range of fields.

Yes there is more to life than just being a doctor or an engineer. If you are not a student anymore and are looking towards switching your career than this section of RAW is helpful for you as well.

In this first part of our '**Profession Analysis**' column on RAW, we bring to you the interview of Ms. Leila. Gasserud on to find out if you have what it takes to be a **Competitive Intelligence Specialist**.

How would you describe your profession?

I am a Managing Partner and a consultant, specialized in Competitive Intelligence and Market Research.

How did you develop an interest in this profession?

I have always had an inquisitive mind, and I like the puzzle-like nature of the profession. It is in many ways like looking for the pieces that will show you the entire picture. And the feeling you get when you have solved the puzzle is addictive.

What qualifications are required to be successful in your profession?

In my profession, people come from all kinds of educational backgrounds. The most important thing is to understand the tools and techniques we use in order to collect the information, and develop the special skills necessary to analyze it.

What are the key skills to succeed in your profession?

It is very important to keep an inquisitive mind, and to understand the nature of information. It is very easy to try to make information fit into a pre-determined picture, which makes the analysis wrong, and ultimately, the intelligence provided to decision makers incorrect. It is vital for both a collector and an analyst to understand that we often see what we want to see, and therefore miss what we should see. It is also important to know when to stop collecting and start analyzing. A thorough understanding of the tools and techniques used are also very important,

and develop the skills to use them properly.

What is the best aspect of your job and what is the worst?

The best aspect of the job is that I get to put together "puzzles" every day. It means that I need to understand what exactly the client is looking for, and then I need to find it. I have to look for sources, create hypotheses, collect information, and provide the client with a final analysis, which will affect his / hers business decisions. The worst part is the long hours I have to spend on my computer, and when it is very difficult and time consuming to find a tiny, but important piece of information that I really need.

How does your profession affect your everyday life?

I seem to almost unconsciously collect information and make mental notes, for databases and future references. It becomes a way of life, I suppose.

Which is the most relevant quotation for your profession? One which always comes to your mind?

Peter the Great said it best: "It is honourable to be defeated, but never to be surprised"

How do you take care of your Physical, Mental, Spiritual and Emotional dimensions?

I play the piano, and use that to relax. I also play polo, which keeps the mind and body focused on something else for a while. My job can be quite stressful, so it is important to find something I like to do, which is unrelated to work.

What are the opportunity costs of being successful in your profession?

As I see it, there are mostly benefits. It is fun and sometimes frustrating at the same time, but very few things beat the feeling when you have collected the necessary information, conducted the proper analysis, and provided a decision maker with a report that you know will make a difference, and allow him to make a better decision than he would have made without your work. The only thing is that sometimes it can be difficult to switch off the thinking process - especially if you have been dealing with a specific problem for a while.

What do you feel about the graduates entering the job market nowadays?

I feel that many of today's graduates are unfortunately not very strong on the analytical side, which is important when you are interpreting the information and looking for patterns. Critical & independent thinking and assertiveness skills are also important, since you will often be telling your boss or your client something he/she doesn't necessarily want to hear. These skills should be highlighted more in the educational system today.

What advice would you like to give to our readers, who would want to adopt the field you are in?

Keep a curious mind, and always ask the questions "why" or "why not"? It is also

helpful to talk to others in the field, to get a better understanding of what we do, the ethical guidelines we follow, and the tools we use.

Any special comment that you would like to write concerning your profession?

It is a great profession, where two days are never the same - and it is never boring. It is also possible to choose your own specialization within the field. We need more people in this profession in the Middle East, to increase the competitiveness of companies and organizations in the Region. Competitive Intelligence professionals around the world have an interest organization called SCIP (Society for Competitive Intelligence Professionals). This organization is very active, and conducts much training and many conferences per year. For anyone interested, please go to www.scip.org .

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