



LET'S MEET SILVIA SALOMON

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKING/LINKEDIN TASK FORCE LEADER

1. Tell us about yourself (your background/journey/experience):

I was born and raised in Milan, Italy and I have been a C-level Executive Assistant for over 20 years now, working for different companies from family-owned businesses to big multinationals. I have met all kinds of bosses, old and young, true leaders and poor teambuilders, simple managers and charismatic entrepreneurs. I have seen a lot and done a lot, but I haven't seen enough and done enough, yet. I always long for new experiences, the need to learn is what drives me the most.

I hold a Major Degree in Foreign Languages and I specialize in Linguistics and Semiotics. I also have a Master Diploma in Corporate Communications Management from the Faculty of Economics. The dynamics of how people relate to one another and express themselves to convey their messages have always fascinated me, no wonder that Corporate Communications have often become my core activity both as an EA and as a Trainer/Consultant.

My career started in my mid-twenties when I landed a job as the Assistant to the President of a company that produced blow-moulding machines for plastic containers. I thought the focus would be to interpret for my boss, who did not speak any foreign languages, but getting tasked with a lot more broadened my horizon and I fell in love with the job. I was at the centre of relationships, organization, planning and executing. I was responsible for keeping processes smooth, for motivating people, for solving problems. The position needed passion, commitment, vision and I had it all. It was the perfect fit. Yet, it was a small company and had small margins of growth. A perfect starting point, though.

Following a move to Lake Iseo, Brescia for personal reasons, I took a job as the EA to the Director of the first Italian online bank, only to find out that nobody there, including my boss, had any idea what an EA would do. So, when I was asked to become the EA to the CEO of a biomedical company that produced devices for minimally invasive angioplasty interventions, I immediately jumped on it and I was up for a big adventure. The Italian-German company provided a multicultural environment in which the official language was English, and the span of my work really went global. The company values surely welcomed passion, commitment and vision, but that was only the basis. From then on, I really learnt to perform, to deliver, and I started adding layers of competencies in company organization, people management, team building, time management, problem solving, event management, legal affairs, budgeting and financials. It all came through training, both on-the-job and traditional, but also through observation, active listening, information scouting. Professionally, I flourished and soon my career skyrocketed. Suddenly, I wasn't only the EA to the CEO, but also the Corporate Communications supervisor, the person responsible for Employee Relations, the coach and trainer to every other Assistant in the company (and beyond) and I started ghost-writing my boss's speeches.

Ten years later, the company had grown to a small multinational of 1000 employees and had sieges all over the world, from Japan to China to the U.S., while keeping its headquarters in Brescia. It became too big in the market and competitors made their moves. In the end, the company was acquired (and slowly dismantled) by an American multinational, new headquarters established in the Swiss plant we had opened only three years earlier. I was asked to support the newly appointed General Manager from the US during the cultural and organizational process of integration, and for one year I commuted every other week to Zurich, dealing with an enlarged Management Board that counted 18 members from ten different countries and four different religions. When the integration process was complete, my position was no longer needed and it was clear that, after such a huge experience, we would separate ways.

I found myself over-skilled and overpaid for a job market that had in the meantime collapsed, due to the world economic crisis. Recruitment processes were on hold for many companies and the shrinkage in salaries was abnormal. That was when I met two work psychologists from the State University of Brescia who were circling around a new project and they needed some of my competencies, so we teamed up and we co-founded a Consultancy network dedicated to the management of job-related stress. Of course, I covered every aspect related to communications, from people training to re-writing communication processes inside the companies, thus building my position as a trainer and consultant, which I still occasionally hold.

Beside the network, I never really started my own business, though, because I have never been much of a freelancer. When I work, I need to be part of a team, and as an EA, the company environment is where I really belong.

I currently work as MA to the Corporate Real Estate Manager at a Holding Group that owns wineries and 5-star resorts in Franciacorta, Tuscany and Sardinia. It's a new challenge that gives me a chance to explore a new aspect of the Organization, treating the Corporate Real Estate as a strategic asset, the more so when the core business is to provide products and services based on it (wines from the land and hospitality in the historical buildings) and when you have to daily negotiate the business aspect with the conservation of historical/art assets, the urbanistic point of view and the environmental requirements.

On top of this, since 2008 I am a member of IMA-International Management Assistants, I have been Responsible for IMA Italy's Training programs for years, also providing coaching and training myself, and since 2015 I am the National Chairman of IMA Italy, now in my third mandate.

2. What inspired you to support the WASummit?

As an EA and as the National Chairman of IMA Italy, I feel responsible for the development of the profession even beyond my personal goals and my personal needs. At my professional age, not only do you concentrate on how you can possibly grow further individually, but you also start to think about how you can share, what type of legacy you will leave to the new generations and how you can give back something of what you have been given by this wonderful job, by actively contributing. When I came to know about the WASummit, I immediately considered it as a chance to work with peers, from all over the world, on the main topics/issues/opportunities that characterize our profession, in this particular time of fast change, to make a difference, to advocate for the position and to raise awareness in those stakeholders who still do not understand the potential of this role in organizations.

3. Which Task Force are you working with/leading?

I am leading the Task Force that is writing the guidelines for the constitution of a WASummit LinkedIn group to be a virtual venue for all EA's and all stakeholders somehow involved in the position, with contents dedicated to enhance it and help establish WASummit's brand. During last WASummit in Frankfurt a decision was made to modify the approach to such a Group, from closed and on solely dedicated basis, to open and based on behaviour rules. I strongly supported this change, because an exchange of ideas and viewpoints is always important, especially from those who look at you from the outside. They can provide a different point of view and help us think out of the box.

I have been working for a couple of months now together with my teammates, Allison Lewis from Trinidad & Tobago, Paula Harding from UK, Tanya Tesnovets from Ukraine, Silvia Cominotti and Selvaggia Fagioli from Italy. We plan to provide guidelines for approval later this year and we are dealing with both strategic and tactical aspects: how do we support the brand we want to put forward, what are the contents to be covered, what kind of discussions will be going on in the group, how will the group be populated, what contribution each of us needs to give, how will the network expand, what security issues will we face, how will we moderate discussions, what rules will we have

to abide to. That is on the table right now.

4. What do you see as the key aspects of your involvement with the WASummit?

It is not about me, my job or my goals. We are in this together, and I think there is no goal that cannot be reached when the kind of people I met in Frankfurt last year work together. I felt energy, commitment, vision, synergy and I saw the right approach, being proactive without being disruptive. We are not up for a revolution we are taking a stand and we are making statements. I think it is the right approach. We have important things to say and we are finding a common voice to say them that does not sacrifice any individual voice.

The WASummit is the right venue to speak our minds, especially when it is changing its governance model to a new structure that will establish itself as a reference point for different entities, both individuals and associations. I feel perfectly in line with what we are doing. It is not what the WASummit can do for me, or what I can provide, but what we can do together for the profession.

5. How do you plan on using your experience/platform to assist Administrators, and what would you personally like to achieve for the WASummit?

As National Chairman of IMA Italy and a member of IMA, I am very used to work internationally, meet peer professionals from other countries and then go back to my country and be an ambassador for what I have seen and heard. We as IMA Italy always strive to translate global trends and dynamics to Italian EA's, that's what they ask us to do.

On one side we need to do this because, sadly enough, not all the Italian EA's are at ease in an international environment, thus missing the chance to interact at that level. On the other side, it is also because the Italian job market is very still when it comes to EA positions, due to cultural and gender bias that no longer exist elsewhere in the world. EA's are not considered and do not consider themselves on a career path.

On one hand, it is a matter of awareness. On the other hand, it is a matter of knowledge. Too many companies, bosses and HR recruiters still recruit individuals who are not prepared and not trained in the very specific skills you need to be an EA, because they do not know how international job descriptions have evolved to include different competencies, and because they think that –as generalists- anybody can take the position, which is not. So I am aware that there is a huge gap to be filled when it comes to convey locally what happens internationally and there is hard work to do, especially with new generations.

On another level, for those of us who do perceive themselves on a career path, to be an active part of WASummit provides that environment in which you can still grow and push yourself out of your comfort zone. And if I keep growing, I hope I can inspire others to do the same, and the members of WA-Summit to push forward, because we are on the right track.

6. If there is one piece of information regarding WASummit that you want everyone to understand, what would it be?

It would be that this sort of venue, on a world scale, is much needed when it comes to the advocacy for a profession that has so many layers of complexity. Firstly, different countries are in different stages of development/recognition of the position and the WASummit is a big chance, especially for those who are at a disadvantage to show where the international trend is going and hopefully close the gap.

Secondly, speaking of skills and competencies, what is a plus for many positions is a must for us: many of the soft skills to all other positions are hard skills for an EA, because we constantly deal with people and processes, and I cannot think of another job with this strong peculiarity, so no one like "ourselves" know, can help and can lead the change. The WASummit is made of us, by us and for us.

Finally, I see a very clear trend setting, according to which individual EA's who have come to outdo the position, only progress in their career by becoming something else, whether it be Project Managers, Trainers, Consultants, HR specialists, Paralegal... because if they remain EA's, there is nowhere else for them to go as they bump into the glass ceiling. Even my more enlightened boss always used to tell me "I don't know where to take you when it comes to the next level as an EA...I can only add tasks to your job description...I am not sure I can increase your salary...for sure I cannot grant you a higher rank, because you are not a manager. The only way for you to progress now is to become something different. Would you like to?".

Here we are...my hope for the future is that we are not asked to make this choice, that we can evolve in the position staying true to what we do, without becoming something else. Can we be acknowledged and rewarded for what we are? To have the WASummit so strongly focused on this aspect, is the most important strategic world asset we have.