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A Little Nudge Can Go a Long Way

Diversity and Inclusion

Skills and Professional Development

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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!

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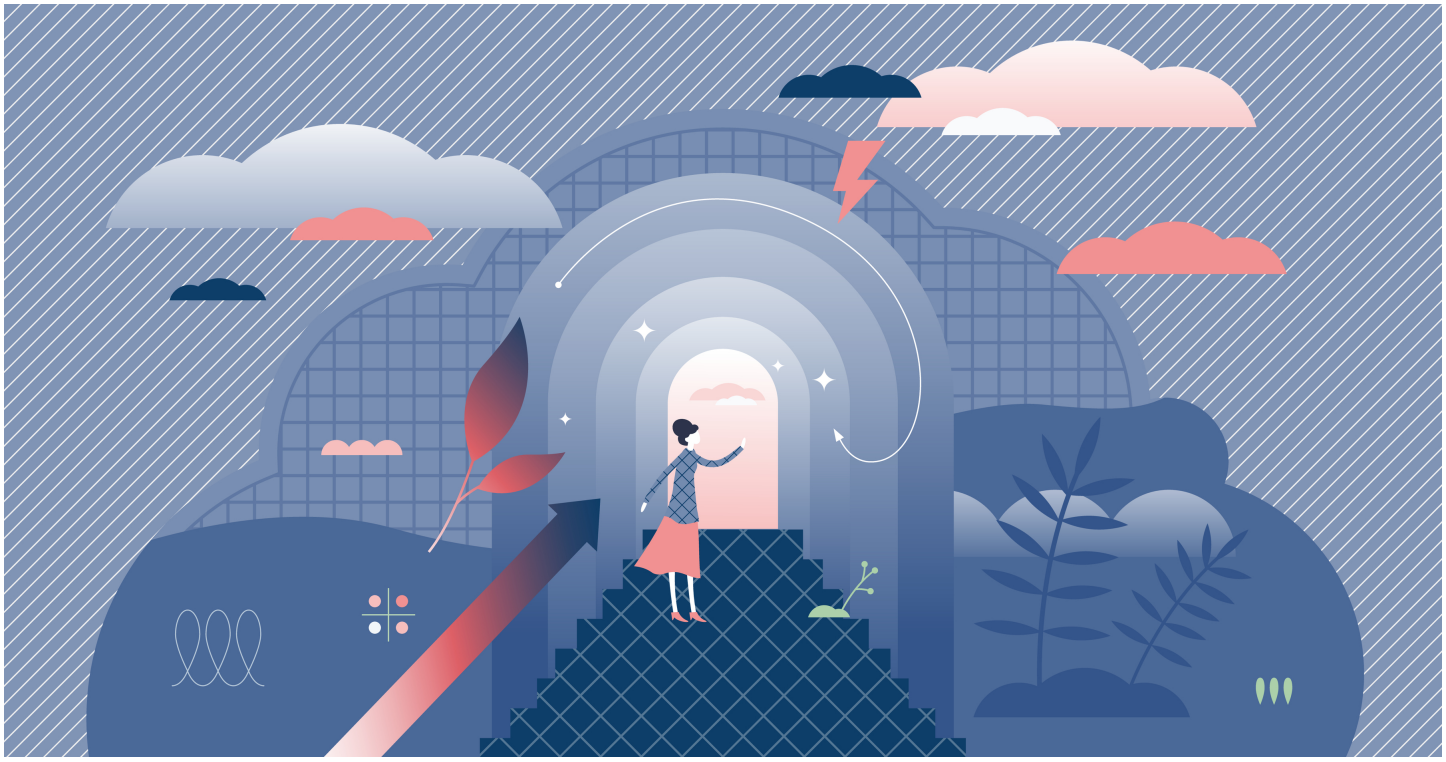
Careful readers who read my story until now have also guessed right that I am a female leader. Although I am self-confident and I have a good track record in my company, I needed this push to believe I could do that — to lead in areas I did not work before. Be comfortable with being uncomfortable.



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

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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.

Meltem Ozker Gunduz

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Novo Nordisk

Meltem Ozker Gunduz is the regional general counsel and vice-president for legal, compliance and quality at Novo Nordisk, a global healthcare company headquartered in Denmark which purpose is to drive change to defeat diabetes and other serious chronic diseases such as obesity, and rare blood and rare endocrine diseases. She has been with Novo Nordisk for more than 12 years holding previous roles covering Africa, Middle East and Oceania. Prior to that, she worked in Istanbul and London branches of one of the biggest law firms in Turkey 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.