

Businesswomen A+: Giuseppe Tringali interviews Client Partner Puri Paniagua for “Revista Anuncios”

Madrid, Spain – In the field of employment, [Puri Paniagua](#) sees no differences between men and women in terms of technical capabilities, but she does perceive distinctive characteristics in terms of women’s leadership technique and lack of aggression that may be prejudicial to their professional careers. Puri currently works at [Pedersen & Partners](#), a leading Executive Search firm that finds top managerial and executive talent for companies around the world. Prior to joining Pedersen & Partners, she worked in consulting, where she landed “almost by chance” after graduating in Chemistry.



Before we start the interview, I'd like you to share with us a little bit about your background and your career...

I have a degree in chemistry, specialised in physical chemistry. Actually, I wanted to try engineering, but in a remote village in the Catalan Pyrenees, this seemed very radical... a female engineer was too shocking for my mother! After I graduated, I started almost randomly at Arthur Andersen, which later became Andersen Consulting, and is now Accenture. I enjoyed working for the company for over twenty years, learning from my teammates, and I was lucky

enough to be relocated to Argentina to work on a complex project. Later the company rewarded me with an MBA at Kellogg NW in the United States. This course opened my mind, helped me mature and learned to approach issues differently. In 2009, the economic crisis and the lack of opportunities in consulting motivated me to change career direction and focus on people instead, as I am convinced that talented, organised and motivated people make a critical difference in a company’s performance. I accepted the challenge and joined Pedersen & Partners, an international Executive Search firm with presence in 52 countries. We are leaders in emerging countries; we have a significant coverage and a great focus on talent.

"We women naturally like working in teams"

Has being a woman influenced your professional career in any way? What are the differentiating characteristics that a woman brings to a company?

For me, being a woman has been a positive factor in my professional career. Throughout my career I've moved in male environments, and I think it forces women like me to understand the rules of the game in order to survive. We have to adapt, and that makes you learn. It's like coming to a new country and having to learn the rules...it enriches you. I actually think that men and women are very similar in terms of technical capabilities, but there are nuances in terms of leadership, and interpersonal and personal skills.

Here we have to find a way of understanding, knowing what others expect from us, and how to relate. It is obvious that women bring a different kind of emotionality and leadership into communication. If properly used, this can contribute to a better outcome. We women naturally like working in teams. Moreover, we are less aggressive, which may be prejudicial to our professional career. When I interview female candidates for a position, it's usually hard for them to "sell themselves"; they wait for you to value them. Men are more like hunters, and more aggressive (in a positive way) when selling themselves and getting new positions. We women tend to work hard and wait for a promotion, while male colleagues ask for it. Our failure to express our desire to progress slows down our careers, because it is interpreted as a lack of interest. We have much to learn.

In the sector in which you work, do you notice any differences between men and women in positions of responsibility?

No, I do not think there are any differences in terms of technical capabilities, or at least I do not notice them. Of course we have different styles of leadership and communication. Women sometimes find it harder to communicate our achievements; this is cultural. We are all different; we have our own genetic makeup and life experiences that define our ability for understanding and relationship. Regardless of gender, when you interview candidates for a position, every conversation is different.

Do you have a professional female icon in your life?

I don't have idols, but I can name women who have influenced my life because of their professional career or their way of doing things. I have worked with some excellent women, both as bosses and as colleagues, from whom I've learned in every effort and every minute. Everything that we've achieved comes together as a whole. I am very proud of women who progress professionally and have positions of responsibility.

In general, professional women combine their careers with great dedication at home. Latina women generally have the advantage of having help at home, which Anglo-Saxon women cannot access as easily – the difficulty of combining the two worlds can make it harder for them to develop their careers. I also believe that countries that provide facilities to women such as reduced working hours or longer maternity leaves sometimes hinder their progression in professional careers. It is a double-edged sword – a company has a hard time doing without a top-level executive for eighteen months, for example. For years now, I have been well aware that women must demand the same equality at home as they do at work – every woman and every couple. To all young women out there, be careful whom you marry!

What do you think about mandatory quotas for women on management boards?

I am not in favour of quotas, not even as a "necessary evil." I wouldn't like to be in a club where I'm not received with open arms. I think that instead there should be a slow but continuous effort, based on the idea of helping young women to combine their career and family, and to continue with their development. We must facilitate understanding between men and women, and it requires an effort from both sides. Quotas generate doubts about the professionalism of the boards, just as today there are doubts about political personalities who accept board positions without previous corporate experience. We need to hire the most qualified people, whether they are women or men.

"It is obvious that women bring a different kind of emotionality and leadership into communication. If properly used, we contribute to a better outcome."

Can there really be any reconciliation between working life and family life?

This is an effort that has to be made, and it has to come from every one of us. The problem in Spain today is that we have a difficult economic situation with a very high level of unemployment. If you try to slow your career down for three or four years to devote more time to your family, there's a high risk that you won't be able to come back. Moreover, I think that reduced working hours for mothers (i.e. until their children are eight years old) can also be a trap. There are no universally-applicable solutions - each woman should make her own decisions and take her own actions, without being pressured by anyone.

In your free time, do you try to disconnect from work?

My sense of responsibility comes first, and it's very strong. Searching for talent involves serving client companies, and I cannot limit the hours that I serve them. Today's technology makes it possible for me to serve customers in my "down time." In any case, I really like my job and it gives me satisfaction to resolve any issue at any time.

What's the difference, if any, between a woman who is in an executive position and one who is not?

Women in management positions must always be available; it's a condition of these positions. Therefore, it's essential to have a defined and stable logistics solution for home, whatever that may be. Executive schedules and business trips make it difficult to combine family and business obligations.

I'd like you to tell me which aspects of your job make you feel more comfortable and which less.

I love my job; every morning I get up in a great mood to start the day. I like meeting people, having different conversations, learning. Every day I have the opportunity to chat with people in different functions; with different abilities and different personalities...it is a rich environment. Perhaps I feel less comfortable when I am not able to contribute something interesting or important to a conversation, or to connect with someone. When I interview candidates, I try to deconstruct the character (I always remember the Woody Allen film, Deconstructing Harry). My goal is to generate empathy so that the interviewee can relax, then the outward persona disappears and the real person with feelings, fears, and emotions emerges. In Executive Search, we say that companies hire employees because of their skills, and lay them off because of their qualities. For me, it's critical to understand the human qualities of the candidates I interview. Maybe that's why I enjoy this job so much!

Finally, I would like to know about your own human aspects – what is Puri Paniagua like outside her office?

I'm a passionate and emotional person. I have lots of energy. I like to learn and, well, I'm a little stubborn. That's what my mother says! [Laughs].



[Puri Paniagua](#) is a Client Partner at [Pedersen & Partners](#). Ms. Paniagua brings a successful record of experience in the Executive Search industry, having successfully completed many senior level and executive level search assignments in her career, also gaining experience in management audit and coaching in the Technology, Professional Services and Consumer Goods sectors. Before establishing her career in Executive Search, she previously worked with Accenture for over twenty years, where she was a Partner.

Pedersen & Partners is a leading international Executive Search firm. We operate 56 wholly owned offices in 52 countries across Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia & the Americas. Our values Trust, Relationship and Professionalism apply to our interaction with clients as well as executives. More information about Pedersen & Partners is available at www.pedersenandpartners.com

If you would like to conduct an interview with a representative of Pedersen & Partners, or have other media-related requests, please contact: Diana Danu, Marketing and Communications Manager at: diana.danu@pedersenandpartners.com