

**Interview with Milena Jørgensen
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Oslo**

Milena was one of the participants at the Norwegian programme for recruiting managers. She is now a middle manager at the Ullevål University Hospital.

The Norwegian recruitment project was initiated in 2006 as collaboration between Ullevål University Hospital, Ringnes Breweries, Oslo Sporveier (public transport) and Vox, the Norwegian Institute for Adult Learning. The main aim of the Norwegian recruitment project was to qualify and recruit workers of immigrant origin to middle management positions. The programme was designed to empower workers of immigrant origin to seek and obtain middle management positions in competition with other job seekers. For more information about this programme, go to <http://www.statvoks.no/m2m/bestpractice.html>

- 1. Could you please tell us a little about your background (nationality, education, why you came to Norway and other things that you may find relevant)?*

Milena:

I was born in Germany but grew up in Yugoslavia (ex-Yugoslavia, today Serbia). I am an agricultural engineer by training and I have also a Master in Management from the Norwegian School of Management. I started my studies at the Norwegian School of Management after having taken part in the programme for recruiting managers and I studied part time while working full time. I am married to a Norwegian and have lived in Oslo for six years and I have worked at Ullevål University Hospital for seven years. I work as a laboratory technician.

- 2. In what way were you introduced to the programme for recruiting managers?*

Milena:

I found the information about the programme on the hospital's intranet. First I thought that I was not qualified to take part since one of the requirements was that participants had passed the "Bergenstest" (a language test). When I came to Norway they did not require that you pass a language test so I never did. Then I talked with our Human Resource officer who encouraged me to join the programme. She told me that this requirement was just a formality and that my Norwegian was good enough.

- 3. Which was your immediate reaction when you learned about the programme?*

Milena:

I thought it is was very good that Ulleval University Hospital is runs programmes like that. I have not heard about other hospitals offering similar programmes. It is quite difficult for employees with immigrant background who want to promote their careers and improve their professional situation.

4. How do you assess the programme as a whole?

Milena:

The programme was very good. It gave the participants insight into what it takes and what it means to be a middle manager. The programme provided us with the theoretical background and understanding of what it means to be in middle management.

On the other hand, I found the programme too wide in scope and too general. There were participants from three different organisations. We all had different educational backgrounds and we were also on different levels as to language skills. I would have preferred the participants to be more equal as to education and language skills.

In my opinion, the course could have been more intensive. We met only once a month and then for three days. I would have preferred to meet for a week instead of only three days. I would also have liked to have more homework, more concrete tasks, to do at home between the gatherings. I would more easily have kept up my motivation and focus if I had met with my group between the gatherings, in my spare time.

5. What do you consider most important from what you learned during the programme?

Milena:

The most important thing for me was that I acquired a deeper multicultural understanding. Although Ulleval University Hospital is a multicultural workplace, in my daily work at the hospital I mainly work together with (ethnic) Norwegians. During the programme I really realised that we interpret things differently, depending on our cultural background. This may be spoken words or behaviour. As a manager it is crucial to understand what people actually are saying. This is especially important in a workplace characterised by cultural diversity.

In the programme we were divided into groups and we had to tell the others in our group what we thought were their strengths and weaknesses. I realised that being a female manager can sometimes be a challenge. For example, according to some participants a female manager is not taken seriously if she smiles too much.

Another thing that was an important outcome for me was the part of the programme that dealt with self development. We had to look into our own

weaknesses and strengths and work on them. In this was I became very aware of my own weaknesses, for example my tendency to very quickly become impatient.

6. What do you think of the methodology of the programme?

Milena:

The lectures were characterised by a lot of variety. But I missed more attention on ICT and how to use Internet and e-mails to communicate. Not all participants were very familiar with ICT and e-mails, and nowadays you have to know how to communicate by e-mail and Internet.

7. Did you aspire for a middle management position before you joined the programme? Could you please say something about this? (If no – why not? If yes – which effect did this programme have on you ambitions?)

Milena:

Yes, I did aspire for a middle management position prior to the course. But during the programme I understood that I actually could become a manager. My self confidence has strengthened. I also realised that I have a very good educational background. I compared myself to the other participants and I understood that I have very good Norwegian language skills, communicative skills and also a very good understanding of the Norwegian culture.

I also learned that it is possible for me to change to some extent, that there is some potential for improvement, and to stop thinking that "this is what and how I am and that cannot be changed".

I also learned that as a manager I have to view the whole picture of how things are and keep in mind what is important for the hospital or for my department or unit as a whole. I have got a better understanding of how a big organisation functions.

8. In what way has the programme influenced on your workday?

Milena:

I am more concerned about how I talk with my colleagues and also about taking care of their needs. I want to inspire my colleagues, show that I care about them and I want to be flexible in my relationship and collaboration with them.

I also understand better than before that when there are changes going on in the organisation, it is according to long term perspectives and plans.

I am a middle manager today but without having staff responsibility. I want other management positions in the future and I keep an eye on internal job advertisements. I particularly like the multicultural side of working at the hospital. I

find multicultural issues very interesting and engaging. The reason for this may of course be that I am married to a Norwegian and feel that I belong to two cultures.

9. In which way did the programme influence your colleagues' attitudes towards you?

Milena:

I don't think that me attending the programme has changed the attitudes of my colleagues. Our unit is so small and I have been working here for so long. We know each other quite well.

10. Few managers in Norway have an immigrant background. What do you think the reason is for this?

Milena:

The main reason is the language barrier. It is not so hard to learn Norwegian. The real difficulty is to crack the cultural code and fully understand the meaning of the words you are using. When you arrive in a new country as an adult, you have to work very hard to learn the language. I myself have to work on my (Norwegian) language skills continuously and I am very conscious about this.

Then there is the fact that as immigrants, we arrive with different educations from another country than Norway. It may be very difficult to have your education validated although it is less difficult when you come from another European country.

Immigrants very often lack a network that is relevant in work life. This kind of network is something you create during your studies and when you have studied in another country, you lack this network when you arrive in a new country in adult age.

As an immigrant you have to be particularly outgoing, extrovert and communicative if you aspire for a position in middle management. Most people prefer to hire and talk to people who resemble themselves. It is simpler and it also feels safe in a way and you know what you can expect from them. This is also a reason why employees with immigrant background are not recruited to management positions.

There are other barriers, for example, immigrants are often afraid. I myself read what was written in the papers on immigrants being involved in crime etc. and I wondered how Norwegians look upon me, what they were thinking about me. This made me very unsure about myself and I felt a genuine lack of self confidence. This has changed, though. My husband has helped me to gain confidence.

Another barrier is that many employees with immigrant background feel they are not good or clever enough, and that Norwegians do not appreciate what they do and the way they do things. It is important for employees with immigrant background to find and promote their egos. I think it is especially women that think in this way. It

is important for employees with immigrant background to feel that they are accepted and respected by Norwegians and that they feel that Norwegians value the work they do.

11. What can employers do to recruit more managers with immigrant background?

Milena:

They have to show that this is really important for them as they do here at the hospital. The HR officers at the hospital work very actively with multicultural issues and to recruit managers with immigrant background. There are always courses and training you can attend, and the Human Resource officers are continuously looking for employees with the right qualifications that can be offered further training to qualify as a manager.

During my last year at the Norwegian School of Management there were lecturers from several Norwegian hospitals and I learned that Ullevål University Hospital is the only hospital in Norway to have a programme for qualifying and recruiting managers with immigrant background. This was surprising to me since all hospitals in Norway have a lot of employees with immigrant background; nurses, doctors and all kind of staff.

12. What can the employee with immigrant background do herself or himself to be recruited to a management position?

Milena:

He or she has to be more offensive, you cannot hide yourself. In my opinion many employees with immigrant background have a tendency to withdraw themselves from the job market. They feel the job they already have is enough for them. They think that they cannot ask for more since they are immigrants and that the Norwegians deserve and have the right to claim the better jobs. Immigrants have to work on themselves, work hard, be ambitious and not hesitate to make a phone call if they come over an interesting job advertisement and they think they are qualified for the job in question. Of course this may be a difficult for many immigrants. You do not always feel comfortable or confident doing this when you feel you do not master the language well enough. Employees with immigrant background have to attend courses and training and in general be very active. If their former education is not valid in Norway or if there is no demand for their particular education or qualifications, they have to re-educate themselves. It is possible to do this in Norway.

13. Do you think it is important to have managers with immigrant background in Norway?

Milena:

Your background is not important as long as you are capable as a manager. But of course, it may be easier to access this position if you are a European and also married to a Norwegian, this provides you a faster learning of the language and a deeper understanding of the culture.

14. How do you yourself want to be as a manager?

Milena:

I want to be a manager that can make people look forward to go to work and that they seldom are on sick leave. I want to create a community feeling among the colleagues. I want them to develop themselves and acquire more competence. I also want to create an atmosphere where people care about each other. It is inspiring to make people perform better.