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**TAKING EXECUTIVES &
LEADERSHIP TEAMS ON THE
JOURNEY FROM GOOD TO GREAT**

**MARINA CVETKOVIC | CO-CEO
HEIMANN CVETKOVIC & PARTNERS**

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2021 is becoming a milestone year for Marina Cvetkovic. While the 37-year-old is clearly not short of them in a life of unimaginable purpose, it may just be that the award-winning executive coach, board advisor, entrepreneur, and philanthropist finally finds herself coming full circle.

This latest chapter began last year, when Marina took on a role as a Co-CEO of Heimann Cvetkovic & Partners, a boutique executive advisory firm, bringing together the world's leading experts in leadership alliances. This was the year in which Marina started her portfolio career, adding the Chief Commercial Officer role as well at The NextGen Project to her portfolio.

Just Another Corporate Career Journey

"I have been advising senior leaders, management teams and boards all my career in various capacities," Marina says "and I have been a senior leader myself", she continues. Senior leadership roles have indeed shaped Marina's career: most recently, Marina was the Vice President of Strategy and Chief of Staff to the CEO at Swiss Re, the largest reinsurance company worldwide, where she focused on developing a culture of agility and innovation for a 4'000 FTE organization. She also held senior leadership roles in other global

leading management consulting and executive search companies across Europe and the US.

It was in her last business role, as a Head Executive Office of an eminent global organization, that Marina realized –her zone of genius is at the intersection between leadership and business topics. "I've noticed that the most common bottleneck to rapidly advancing the business agenda is

"Most leadership teams and boards I work with would agree with the vision of creating a true partnership, however, almost all of them struggle with how to do that."

usually not in places we look into first: better strategy, project plan, productivity. Instead, the key is in strengthening the alignment."

Early Days and Discovery of One's Mission

Born in Belgrade, Serbia, Marina's early years were not easy. Difficult family situations as well as challenging economic and societal environments, including the NATO bombing of Belgrade, her hometown, was her everyday reality. "I have seen many, even more, ambitious and successful children, give up slowly. "It was an environment that killed every hope,

to be honest", Marina says. Still, this challenging upbringing did not break her but indeed made her who she is today" My blessing was that my father was a successful executive and entrepreneur." He would share stories with Marina from a very young age: on his latest business challenges and successes, bringing the idea of big, bold dreams becoming a reality, closer to Marina's heart. "By the time I was 20, I felt like I can conquer the world!" Marina laughs.

She shared with us that she contributes her success, to this very date, to the unlimited self-confidence that her father instilled in her – combined with humbleness to never stop learning and growing. Her success is inspiring – just a few

months ago, Industry Wire awarded Marina 10 Best Leaders 2020 globally after she had been awarded FiNext Award 2019 for her contribution to the financial services industry.

The truth is, Marina is a life-long learner "I cannot count the number of leadership books I've read!", Marina laughs "Nor the number of coaches I've hired in the never-ending pursuit of a better version of myself". This is how the new chapter for Marina began. In one of the executive legacy exercises she went through, she realized her mission was a deep, transformative impact on other senior leaders and management



HEIMANN CVETKOVIC & PARTNERS

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teams. Shortly after, Marina decided to leave her fancy corporate job behind and move on to become a board advisor and executive coach instead.

Marina Today

The rest is history: today, Marina is a member of the prestigious MG100 community alongside Dr. Jim Kim, Alan Mulally, and other highly accomplished leaders and coaches. She is a member of the Forbes Coaches Council and certified coach-supervisor in the EQ Coaching Certification program founded by Prof. Daniel Goleman, a pioneer of emotional intelligence. Her work has been quoted and featured by UBS, Amex, Insurance Thought Leadership, ICF, Forbes, and others. She is a TEDx speaker and founder, as well as a sought-after keynote

speaker on leadership and boardroom-related topics.

"I feel truly blessed to not only know my mission in life but also live it every day", Marina smiles. "Doing what I do, you become unavoidably aware that, unfortunately, very few of us out there know what our personal mission is. And, from there, only a very low percentage of us make an effort to go through the transition, change and, ultimately, pain necessary to live it".

Today, the main focus of her company, Heimann Cvetkovic & Partners, is supporting senior leaders and management teams in living their mission through authentic leadership and true leadership alliances. They support senior leaders and management teams in discovering their purpose,

individually and together, and agreeing on the most effective way of working together to accomplish it. Marina and her business partner and Co-CEO, Nicole Heimann, support executives embarking on this journey through executive coaching on topics such as executive transition, authentic leadership, executive positioning.

The Leadership Alliance Concept

"Of course, it is not only individual leaders who need to discover their personal mission and purpose", "the same is true for leadership teams. Whether they realize it or not" Marina adds. Having clarity on the mission and purpose of the management team is key to alignment and unlocking the full performance of the team. From here, we take management teams and

boards on a journey to define and align on HOW they want to work together. The journey to a true leadership alliance.” Marina passionately shares.

Their Leadership Alliance Culture signature concept for accelerating performance and alignment in top teams has been endorsed by Alan Mullaly, ex-President of Ford Motors, and many other C-suite members across the globe. “What makes our concept different, is how holistic it is. We don't just focus only on the vision, or team norms, or culture. We look at all of those factors holistically, help a

Marina smiles. “Not every team is ready for an intervention or a team coaching journey – but they may be curious to hear us share some of the best practices we have observed in other boards and management teams”, Marina explains “Keynotes create awareness and creating awareness is essentially opening the door to transformation”. Keynotes, in Marina's case, are often a beginning of a long-term strategic partnership with clients.

“Another element that is key to the success we bring to our clients is that we understand that there is no sustainable team progress without

team/board, become even only 10% better, the ripple effect of that throughout the organization is tremendous”.

Boardroom of the Future

Marina believes that the culture of every organization starts at the top and should therefore be a matter of highest strategic importance. “Just because a senior leadership team or a board is a collection of highly successful individuals - this does not make a highly effective team. Team effectiveness and performance is something that does not just happen organically – no matter how successful the individual leaders that make the team are”.

Marina shared with us that she believes the role of the board has changed significantly over the past decade and even more so over the past year. Increasingly, boards are asked and challenged to be a true strategic asset to organizations, moving past the outdated mandate rooted purely in governance and oversight.” This poses a question: What is the optimal way in which management teams and boards should work together going forward to successfully master the emerging business challenges?” adds Marina. “Most leadership teams and boards I work with would agree with the vision of creating a true partnership, however, almost all of them struggle with how to do that.” This is why her company, Heimann Cvetkovic & Partners, focuses on helping boards and management teams across the globe create

“When one or several of the five driving forces of the Leadership Alliance is weak or lacking, this negatively impacts the Top Team Alignment and Effectiveness and may have a detrimental effect on the Business Results and the Company Culture as a result.”

management team identify where they are today vs. where they would like to be – and then take them on that journey as their sparring partners”, Marina explains.

In addition to executive coaching and team-journey work with senior leaders, we have noticed that Marina has a busy keynote speaking agenda. “Yes, that is correct” Marina confirms. “Every leadership team is different, and we do our best to meet them where they are. That is the only way to take them where they want to go”

deep individual accountability of each leader”. For this reason, Heimann Cvetkovic & Partners always coaches the top teams and its senior leaders in parallel “We find that executive coaching is a multiplier of any top team coaching work – it helps leaders overcome their own obstacles in order to start showing up as a more effective member of that leadership team as well as lead their teams more effectively.” The other important element that inspires Marina and her partner Nicole to do this work is the ripple effect “If we help each executive, or management



“The Leadership Alliance Culture program provides the framework through which the alignment of the leadership team creates a powerful culture shift across the organization as a ripple effect of the culture shift at the Top Team level.”



Driving innovation and transformation by partnering with the Board as the Key Strategic Asset of the Organization entails: individual board leader effectiveness, collective board culture and dynamics and partnership between the board and the management team

strong leadership alliances. “A true leadership alliance presents a strong platform from which you can tackle all the business challenges much more effectively”, explains Marina.

As an experienced board member and advisor, Marina serves at BoardStrong, Rutgers University, and other organizations aligned with her mission. BoardStrong, for example, was founded in the 1960s as a project of the Harvard Business School Club of New York to place its alumni on nonprofit boards. Today, their focus has expanded to include not only board matching but also helping organizations build better boards and improve their board governance through sustainable board practices and board training.

Diversity in the Boardroom - More Than Just a Metric

“Because culture starts at the top, the need for a much higher diversity at these levels is real. And I am not talking just about racial or gender diversity. We need diversity of thought – and because this is not easy to measure, we use proxies for it”. As executive advisor and coach, Marina has noticed that one of the important voices missing in the boardroom is the next generation's voice. "I find it fascinating that while everyone is talking about gender diversity at top levels, generational diversity is still not quite at the forefront – although we live in the world in which the average age in the boardroom is still 64+," adds Marina. "At times when the pace of change in the market is unprecedented and when disruption is the only constant, I believe that traditional “legacy” expertise is losing importance while the relevance of “fresh” and different thinking that new generations are bringing is increasing." So this is how the idea to start a movement was born – a movement that advocates for stronger cross-generational dialogue and collaboration in the boardroom to successfully lead organizations into a sustainable and prosperous future.

Today, Marina is also a Chief Commercial Officer at The NextGen Project – an organization focused on enabling the cross-generational dialogue at leadership levels by bringing in external, independent top-class nextgen voices from across all industries and geographies. "We foster this dialogue in two ways: one - ensuring the next generation speaks with a louder and more powerful voice – by developing them into future executive advisors and board members through our nextgen leadership development programs," explains Marina. "On the other hand, we are also making sure executives allow the next generation to contribute and listen better when they speak up – by engaging them in structured, focused dialogue through nextgen advisory sessions." The NextGen Project has already inspired 100+ CEOs, boards, and executive teams to think differently, challenge outdated practices, and lead their organizations into a more sustainable future.

The Non-negotiables

We asked Marina how she finds time for herself, family, and friends: her non-negotiables, she shared with the world in her TEDx talk in 2019. “I am so glad you asked” she answers, “Because success is only the tip of the iceberg. All of this comes with a lot of hard work in the background”. She grabbed her diary and shared with us a few examples of her weekly agenda that made our heads spin – most of Marina's days start at 5 am. “The busier I am, the more important my family and friends become, to keep me balanced. There is no way I would be anywhere close to where I am today without my beloved husband, who truly gives me the wings to fly. And my doggie Joaquin! Playing with him is the best stress management technique!” says Marina with a glowing smile. In their free time, Marina and her husband Daniel enjoy entertaining friends at their lovely home on the Zurich coast or in NYC, two places they call home.