



## **We Are Vodafone - Episode 9 Transcript**

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### **HOST**

Tim Samuels

### **GUESTS**

Moira Cheng

Réka Pusztai-István,

#### **Tim Samuels 00:06**

Welcome to the second series of We Are Vodafone, a podcast that's about people who work at Vodafone, but for everyone to listen to. We all want to keep moving forward; it's human nature. We want to stimulate our minds with new things we want to grow, learn new skills, take on new responsibilities. But that can be easier said than done. How do you know what's the right opportunity for you? And what's not? How do you step outside your comfort zone, and ride the discomforts that can come from change? What mindset do you need? And what people do you need around you to grow personally and professionally?

I'm joined by two people who've taken very different approaches to personal growth, and who followed intriguing paths as a result; paths we can all take inspiration from; Moira Cheng in Reading, here in England, and Réka Pusztai-István, in Budapest, Hungary. To start off, I wanted to find out what they're both up to now.

Moira, you've moved around so much, it's hard to know exactly what you're doing. But what is your job at the moment? What are you doing?

#### **Moira Cheng 01:18**

I currently work within a group function in IT operations and I'm running a DevOps transformation programme. We're changing the mindset of people to ensure that we've got operations teams and development teams together, collaborating for faster delivery, and better sustainability of our products and reliability.

#### **Tim Samuels 01:35**

Sounds pretty crucial. Reka what you're up to now?

#### **Reka Pusztai-István 01:39**

I'm currently working with Vodafone Group, and I am one of the key persons of the global design system team. So, we are creating components that the users would see in the My Vodafone applications and throughout all the web products that someone could come across. I'm training designers, giving guidance and advice on how to use the system.

#### **Tim Samuels 02:00**

You've both taken very different routes to where you are now. You've overcome hurdles, obstacles, there are some dilemmas and tough decisions that you've made. And I think it's useful for all of us, if we you know, perhaps during this show, look at three pivotal moments



where you've come to forks in the road and made decisions which have been instrumental to how you ended up here. Moira, your first moment, I suppose it's moving from Malaysia, where you grew up, to the UK, and in Malaysia, you were working in corporate communications, you move to the UK to start from scratch. Why?

**Moira Cheng 02:43**

I was born in the UK. I mean, I had grandparents here and relatives here but my father's Malaysian so we, we lived in Malaysia for most of my life. I started my real career really in corporate communications in an investment bank. And we were involved in advertising and marketing briefs and branding and all this fancy stuff. I got married a couple of years later and before we sat down roots anywhere, I thought if we're going to give it a go somewhere else and go to England, where I was born. Let's do that now. So, it was the right time in my early 20s to make that move.

**Tim Samuels 03:13**

But the move goes from a nice job in corporate communications to ending up in a in a call centre. Is that right?

**Moira Cheng 03:22**

Coming from a corporate comms and public relations background, you know, when I landed in the UK, I didn't know the difference from The Sun or The Telegraph. I've had no idea of what the media state was like. Obviously, it was really tough to get back into that stream of work and as any person would do you find where you can actually start from, and I ended up working in a call centre for a bank. You know, they noticed my potential I was obviously capable of doing other things. I moved into managing several call centres. I was young, I took it in my stride you know, every experience is a new experience to me, and I saw it as a stepping stone. So, I wasn't too fazed by it, I knew to get your foot in the door, you got to do something and you learn from it. And then you move on.

**Tim Samuels 04:02**

Reka another story of moving countries, in your case from Romania, to Hungary to follow your passion for design. What led you to jump countries?

**Reka Pusztai-István 04:13**

A friend of mine drew my attention to a global event called Portfolio Night. Basically, it's a set of mini-interviews that you can attend while in the hopes of getting a design job. And this was held in Budapest in Hungary. It seemed really exciting to you know, get a shot and try to find the proper job that I wanted to get. So, I came to Budapest and I managed to get a junior art director job here. It was amazing. I was overjoyed really and that was the thing that made me move from Romania to Hungary to try my luck here. Everything goes great, three months and then the company tells me that well turns out they don't really have the capacity and the time to help the new joiners to get on board and train them properly. So, we had to say goodbye. It was pretty funny because I would say they were treating me in a way that they didn't want to hurt me or something they didn't want for me to have any hard feelings, and they kept saying, "yeah, you shouldn't take this as a failure" or something like that. And I was like, "yeah, that's fine, I would never take this as a failure, because this is just a slight change of plans", right? So, I have to try and make the best out of it. So, I decided not to go home to Romania, because it didn't make sense to me to move back again after three months. I looked for another job, unfortunately, I couldn't find the job that I was looking for in design. So, thanks to speaking



other languages than Hungarian I managed to find a job in a call centre in an IT service desk for a little bit more than a year. Meanwhile, I was trying to freelance.

**Tim Samuels** 05:45

How do you deal with that blow Reka? You know, you've seen your kind of dream opening, come and go very quickly, how do you sort of pull yourself back from that?

**Reka Pusztai-István** 05:54

You can make plans, but obviously, there is an aspect of change, you cannot really control. There's no meaning in focusing on the aspects that you can't control, right. So, you have to experience the happenings around you and you have to acknowledge that something is not going according to your personal plan. But after a while, you have to stand up and focus on the things you can control. I just had to look harder and had to take some time in finding the right fit for me.

**Tim Samuels** 06:20

And this passion to work in design. How strong a drive was it? How long have you felt this way?

**Reka Pusztai-István** 06:26

I've been feeling this way for a very, very long time, I think I was around 14 or 15 when I was confidently feeling that this is the route that I want to take. Design is my passion, my calling really.

**Tim Samuels** 06:38

And Moira, it seems that you also were quite driven as a child, maybe not for working in the telecommunications industry. But you were a kid with passions that you took seriously.

**Moira Cheng** 06:50

Typical little girl really quite sporty, did a lot of ballet and tap and I got quite competitive in gymnastics when I was young; rhythmic gymnastics over in Malaysia. Having being in a sporty environment, I know that you know, you can never be number one sometimes, but you just try the best you can. That inner drive, I suppose sets you up for life and in your career as well. As a child, I always saw myself as a little bit of an outsider. So, for me, that's just made me more adaptable to change, I think, in whatever environment I'm in. We evolve as we meet people, and as we grow in our careers, and that's what I strive to be the best person that I can be I don't try and compare myself to other people and to be an individual as much as being able to blend in, I suppose.

**Tim Samuels** 07:33

Reka, can you relate to any of that?

**Reka Pusztai-István** 07:36

Yes, as I was listening, I was thinking about that part, when you said Moira, that you have to be the best version of yourself and not necessarily compare yourself to others. I don't think that that is something that comes straight away, that you understand that you don't have to always compete with others, but you have to make the best out of yourself really to be the best version.



**Tim Samuels 07:55**

You both certainly took that drive because you kept moving. Moira, you joined the call centre and you didn't just sit still and answer the phones, you moved into more of a sort of project management role. So, this is your second moment really, this is your this is your dilemma whether to stick with project management or move into service design and what's going through your mind at the time?

**Moira Cheng 08:17**

What I was really weighing up was, do I want to manage the delivery of projects and products? Or do I feel I'm a bit more creative and do I want to get into the detail of actually designing and creating the solutions that we offer our customers? In the end, you know, I thought it'd be more of a challenge to me to go into more of a business analysis and service design role, where I was actually understanding the technology, understanding the people in the process and blending it all together to create a solution that had a bit more creativity in it rather than project management and that's what I chose.

**Tim Samuels 08:47**

And talk me through the process of how you make a decision in I like to almost draw up lists, and like pros and cons and then there are certain people I bounce things around, and then I lose a lot of sleep. How do you do your decision making.

**Moira Cheng 08:59**

Just like that. I think it was pretty important for me to actually have a feel of both the roles and I was fortunate to have that opportunity where I did both roles for a year. It's not an instantaneous judgement, where you can say, "yep, I'm going for that", or the other one. You know, it was like, let's have a, an opportunity to see where my strengths are, and what I feel would be more valuable to my career development in order to decide which path to take.

**Tim Samuels 09:23**

But how important is it to have that stability and also have the company support you when things perhaps aren't going well, you know, how much you need that support?

**Moira Cheng 09:34**

I have to credit Vodafone and all my previous line managers, they've always been really, really supportive of my career and progression. And it came a point about six years into service design where I was really vying for a managerial position there to become a team manager of a portfolio, and an opportunity came up for that role. And I thought, you know, I'd apply for it. I was six months pregnant at the time and you know, I went for the interview just before Christmas, it was about the 22nd of December or something like that. And I was obviously very pregnant at the time and I said, "well, after Christmas, I'll come back, I've got a couple months to give before the baby comes", and that'll be great. And my little daughter was born early, she was premature. I gave birth to her on Christmas Day and I officially got the role and they called me up when I was in the hospital bed, I think just after New Year's, and I was still in hospital, with my little baby girl saying, "Congratulations, you got the job". And I had to say, "oops, I'm really sorry, but I've had my baby early". And that was a tough time, but they were so supportive of me. And I took obviously some maternity leave time out, as you would but you know, they gave me my promotion while I was on maternity leave itself. And I came back I think it's September, it was, the following year. So, the line managers and the organisation has been really supportive. So, I think I'm a case in proof that if you're pregnant, you can still get promoted while you're pregnant and on maternity leave. But yeah, they've been great.



**Tim Samuels 11:02**

It's great to hear. Reka, let's go to small back, you're doing a bit of design work, but then a competition to enter the fashion industry looms and you think "yep, I quite fancy going to the world of fashion". So I guess your dilemma was to stay in your comfort zone and what you're doing or will try and move into fashion?

**Reka Pusztai-István 11:21**

It wasn't an easy choice to make. At the time, I had the best job I could ever wished for. I had a compassionate boss, I had very professional, intelligent colleagues, I really liked the job itself, I was doing technical illustrations at the time, so it was very exciting and a lot to learn. Good wage, fantastic work life balance, really everything a young professional could wish for. And then I came across a competition, I have submitted my work, a Hungarian brand was looking for designers to collaborate with. So, they didn't even say anything about hiring and turned out they liked my work so much that they wanted to hire me. So, on one hand I was overjoyed. But on the other hand, I started freaking out, right, because you have almost everything you want to have. And then someone just puts another layer on top of it, I had to sit down, calm down a little bit and try to weigh my options. My husband took a very big part of the pressure that I had in this, that I had to weigh all my options, what I was happy to sacrifice in order to move to the fashion industry and try because it wasn't safe, it was unknown. I think when these sorts of decisions have to be made having a supportive spouse or friends or family, or even colleagues is extremely valuable.

**Tim Samuels 12:39**

What's your decision making process? Are you somebody that writes lists as well?

**Reka Pusztai-István 12:43**

I speak the lists, if that makes sense. So, I have a person with whom I can speak about this. I'm always weighing what is okay to sacrifice in order to gain something in the near future or long term? Because anytime I change jobs, or I take on more responsibility, I always try to look towards the future. What am I going to gain from this professionally speaking or personally? So, I have mental lists.

**Tim Samuels 13:08**

You made that leap. You left your comfortable design work behind and how did it turn out in the fashion world?

**Reka Pusztai-István 13:15**

I started working there and fast forward nine months, I'm resigning again, the difference here is that I didn't have or I don't have a new contract in my hand for my next job. And the happenings that got me there at that point where I wanted to resign, were very different from the previous situation. Unfortunately, I had to work in a very toxic environment. And even though I tried to keep in mind, all the wins that I could get from that particular job on the longer term, I had to get to the conclusion that it's too much at stake. I had to understand that my emotional wellbeing and my mental health is more important than work could ever be and this is very sad, because I don't think that these two should ever be on the same scale ever. It was a very difficult situation and I appreciate a lot of people don't have the luxury to stand up and leave situations that no longer serve them. But I was lucky enough to have had a very supporting



husband and family and friends. And to be honest, standing up for myself and leaving that situation was liberating. That's one of the best decisions I ever made.

**Tim Samuels** 14:23

It sort of shows doesn't it but sometimes you have this kind of idea of a dream job, but often a job really comes down to who you working with every day and what you do. And if you're working with people who are toxic, it has such a horrible impact on your life and your mental health.

**Reka Pusztai-István** 14:39

And I think it's also sad to face sometimes reality. Meaning that not everyone is always kind and genuine and helpful is just as difficult to digest and to accept that not all work environments are for everyone, I think.

**Tim Samuels** 14:54

Moira, have you been lucky enough to avoid that sort of toxicity in your jobs?

**Moira Cheng** 14:59

I have to say I fortunately have and as Reka said, having a supportive environment around you to actually bounce off your thoughts, I think in those kinds of situations is really key. And being able to stand up for yourself Reka, completely agree with that, and recognising when it's not a right environment for you or for your career. It's a brave decision to actually take charge of your career and, and say, "well, you know, that's not on", and I've got to move on and move out and move up.

**Tim Samuels** 15:25

One of the things Moira, which strikes me talking about your sort of jump towards service design was you, you moved into an area where you, you didn't have the skills to start with. We sometimes have an image of a job where we think we have to do these jobs, but we know exactly what we're doing. But in reality, it's more about an aptitude and ability to kind of learn or project a confidence.

**Moira Cheng** 15:46

I think it takes actually a lot of time to recognise if you have a natural skill set. There's such a variety of skills; there's technical skills, there's people skills, there's leadership skills, you know. Skills, I think, are critical, however, how people use those skills to their advantage or want to build on those skills for their advantage is important. And if they have the right aptitude towards learning and gaining those skills, then that is key, we all have to finesse our skills at some point or understand where our strengths are and there is no one right skill or one better skill I think.

**Tim Samuels** 16:22

Were there any moments when you felt hopelessly out of your depth?

**Moira Cheng** 16:26

I felt quite out of my depth when I moved into my third role into this IT Ops DevOps role. Because in services, I've gained skills over the years, you know, I've moved with the times and learn more, and I progress more. And over time, I got to really understand my strengths in that role.



**Tim Samuels 16:43**

Let's take on your third moment where you think you're saying you become an IT ops, transformation programme manager?

**Moira Cheng 16:49**

Which is exactly what I'm doing now, I had a very comfortable role, you know, in service design, I was there for about 11 years, and I'd grown, I'd become a coach and a mentor and a manager. And you know, I knew what I was talking about. So to decide to actually pivot your career to do something else that was completely moving myself out of my comfort zone. I realised that I wasn't being challenged anymore and really, I needed to explore what my other options were. I was really thankful I had very, very supportive line manager who actually recognised that there is not much more that you could possibly do to stretch yourself here. I was fortunate enough to find the opportunities. I got an opportunity through networking for women's in technologies network and there was a lady there who is looking to go on a sabbatical for her master's, and she said, "ahh, well, you know, there might be something you can do here to cover for me while I go on my sabbatical. Would you like to explore that?" And I was like, "oh, yeah, well, what what's it all about?" "Oh, it's to shape up this new programme we're doing around DevOps", I was like, "okay, I know a bit about DevOps", you know. But I did not have any clue about what I was going to step into and so it took a bit of courage and supportive line managers on the outgoing side and the incoming side to say, "should we give her a little opportunity for a secondment here where we can see what she can do?" I grabbed it by its horns, really. And it's about being confident in your own skills and believing in yourself. And being willing to take that jump after all, if it didn't work out, I'd learned something.

**Tim Samuels 18:16**

Brave again. But that's led you to moments where you've perhaps not known exactly what you're doing, but also some, some real highs as well.

**Moira Cheng 18:25**

I think everyone goes into a new role feeling a little bit uncomfortable. You know, what am I supposed to be doing? What do I want to achieve? And how do I get there? And low and behold, I kind of took it in my stride and scoped this programme up, created as a team, got a programme running, understood what we were going to deliver. As I was moving into that new DevOps role I attended a three day conference all around DevOps. A year later, I had the opportunity again, to attend this conference and I kind of thought, well, actually, "why don't I submit to do a speech about my programme and what we've managed to do in the last year", and I was so surprised to get a call back to say yes, please come and speak at our conference. For me, it was a little personal achievement really from having known not much about the topic to actually being able to speak at the conference and getting such great feedback from the participants at the conference as

**Tim Samuels 19:15**

Reka, I can see your smiling in admiration.

**Reka Pusztai-István 19:18**

And nodding silently to a lot of thoughts that Moira pointed out regarding taking the jump, taking risks, being afraid, but doing it anyways. And I can totally relate to that.



**Tim Samuels** 19:29

Well, let's pick up where you've got to you. You left this toxic fashion environment did another year back in IT, and then you landed a design job in Vodafone. You started out designing icons, but you didn't just leave it there. What have you gone onto design?

**Reka Pusztai-István** 19:44

I joined Vodafone almost four years ago and I usually joke with my line manager that it feels like I have been working at four different companies ever since because there are so many challenges; there were so many challenges along the way. And I was always proactively looking for opportunities, networking, reaching out to fellow designers and trying to gain some visibility. I started out in a more junior role than my experience was at the time and I remember my line manager at the time telling me or asking me in the interview, like, "are you sure you understand that you are going to design icons, eight hours per day?" And I'm like, "yeah, sure, I completely get it. It's fine". But he was asking me, "but are you content with this? Is this going to be enough"? And I told him, "yeah, it's absolutely fine". Because given the size of the corporation, and the way how these big companies work, I'm 100% sure that there are going to be opportunities for me to grow many, many opportunities. And it turns out, it was true. At the time, I had almost no authority, I was managing a mailbox, I was creating icons and replying to a lot of requests. And slowly but surely, I managed to transition into a UI role I am currently, as I mentioned, at the beginning, working in the design system team. And my main activities as a user interface designer, are creating stuff like buttons, icons, or anything that a user would come across when interacting with one of our products, such as My Vodafone application, filling in a form, submitting a request, and so on. So, all those tiny elements are really coming from our work. I was afraid, because I knew that I had almost half of the skills required for the job, but I knew that I was willing to grow into the job and pick up all the skills that still were remaining,

**Tim Samuels** 21:33

What's interesting Reka is that that you've navigated the line of, you took a job that was more junior than you but you've kind of managed to smoothly push your way higher up and into different branches. How do you not be too pushy? How do you progress without putting people's noses out of joint.

**Reka Pusztai-István** 21:51

This was something that I had to learn along the way to know my value, so that I know exactly what I can offer and be proud of myself, but not in an arrogant way. In a way that it radiates confidence and that it radiates the fact that I'm okay with myself and that I'm in the right space. And also having managers or line managers who understand your potential and they are constantly bugging you and trying to pull you out of your comfort zone by assigning certain projects to you, or just simply inviting you to meetings to listen in, replying to emails, copying you in, like sneaking bits and pieces here and there. And I think this applies to any professional. So, if you demonstrate a willingness of learning and then growing professionally, and also demonstrating a little bit of courage by taking on more responsibilities, obviously, inside a normal circle of expectations, they can help you achieve your dreams, even if you have to skip a few steps in order to reach them.

**Tim Samuels** 22:48

Moira, would you recognise any elements of yourself in that?

**Moira Cheng** 22:52





Absolutely. Well, not just myself. But you know, the circumstances that Reka has put down, supportive line managers, showing initiative to want to grow and personally wants to grow your career, I think finding the opportunities and being open with your line manager and to have supportive line managers that care about your future career as well and want to see your progress and give you those opportunities. That's an amazing attribute that I've fortunately been able to see in Vodafone, with all my previous line managers. An individual can't expect it to be handed to them on a plate, you've got to show an initiative, exceed expectations, demonstrate that you're ready for something a bit more challenging, offer up your extra skills or your extra time, take on some new stuff as it comes. And that's kind of how you build the confidence of your line manager or how you build the confidence in yourself that you can actually stretch a little bit more.

**Reka Pusztai-István 23:41**

Yeah, I think honesty is a very important aspect of this. So if you're open with your line manager, and they know what you expect from them, they are able to help you. If you just get into that frustrated mindset of “oh my god, I'm not achieving anything more than what I put in my contract”, nothing is going to happen. So you have to make that extra effort, I think.

**Tim Samuels 24:01**

I guess if you know people are feeling a little inspired by your stories and where you've got to and as I said at the beginning, you've both navigated hurdles, and it's not been a smooth line. What's the kind of wisdom that you have now? I guess also, what would you tell versions of yourselves who were starting out at the beginning of your careers? What do you know now that you perhaps wouldn't have known when you were in your early 20s? Moira?

**Moira Cheng 24:27**

I think you've got to recognise when you're stagnating in your career. If you generally feel that you've been there, you've done that and there's nothing new that's challenging, it's probably time to move on or to grow. Secondly is always be curious to learn something new. When I meet anyone really I go into the mindset of that person can always teach me something, there is something that person knows that I do not know yet. Then I think as much as you can, try and be in control of what you can control be in control of your career. Don't worry about the bits that you can't control, but be proactive in exploring options for yourself, you know. Understand what you want to do to progress your career, you know, network with people. Or if you spot an opportunity or you spot a challenge, and you think of a solution, be open with sharing that with your line manager or teams and be proactive in trying to demonstrate your capabilities there. Fourth point; have confidence and believe in yourself. To your point Reka, not to the point where it's arrogance or proud, it's just, you know, acknowledge where your strengths are. And then be comfortable with not knowing everything. So that's the last point be comfortable with not actually knowing everything, and then anything when you're adapting to change. You don't have to get everything right at the start, you know, but how you learn and improve is from making mistakes. So be comfortable with the fact that you will not know everything, when you go into something new.

**Tim Samuels 25:46**

And Reka, from the journey that you've been on, what would your wisdom be?

**Reka Pusztai-István 25:49**

Moira said everything I wanted to say; maybe two more things I might add, and I think one of them is mental health and emotional wellbeing. So you always have to look out for yourself. You



have to be very conscious of your mental health having an impact out of your personal life or your work life and really everything. If this would be a headline, it would be take care of yourself. And another thing is, the importance of a support system around you, be it friends, family, professionals, also is extremely valuable.

**Tim Samuels** 26:21

Wise, wise words. Moira, Reka, thank you very much for taking time to share your stories of personal and professional growth. Given the rate at which you both move whilst we've been speaking about either of you change jobs, has anything happened in the last half an hour?

**Moira Cheng** 26:36

Not yet, but I definitely want to get to know Reka a bit more though, so I'd build on this. It'll be great.

**Tim Samuels** 26:43

We'll put you in touch, but for the time being Moira, Reka, thanks very much for both your time.

**Reka Pusztai-István** 26:47

Thanks so much.

**Moira Cheng** 26:48

Very welcome Tim, thank you.

**Tim Samuels** 26:56

Many thanks to Reka and Moira for sharing their stories and looking back over the sometimes winding but inspiring paths which brought them to where they are today. It's a good reminder that getting where you want to be at home or work doesn't always follow the straightest or most obvious route. And it's about being alert to those unexpected detours and having the confidence to take them. I seem to have been waiting 30 years for that detour to take me into the Man City team. Oh well. This has been We Are Vodafone, a podcast brought to you by Vodafone for Vodafone and other people. Until next time.