Speaker 0 00:00:00 <silence> So, hello, thank you for agreeing to do this interview with me. Um, as a disclaimer, uh, this, uh, interview will be recorded as it is, uh, gonna be used, uh, as data for the cultural code project that will be analyzed. So, um, yeah, this is recorded, but, but we will not reveal any of your personal information. Is that okay?

Speaker 1 Okay.

Speaker 0 Can we start with the first question?

Speaker 1 00:00:35 Okay.

Speaker 0 00:00:37 Um, so the first question, can you please describe what you do at your current position? Or you can also talk about your previous, uh, workplace position or job.

Speaker 1 00:00:50 Okay. So my previous position is the call center operator, and I was like on the outgoing calls, so I was like, I had a list. I mean, it was not a list, but like a computer assistant gave me the phone numbers with like a short description of what was already agreed in the previous calls. And then I would call people and, uh, either try to solve their problems or sell them something. I mean, the selling was the main point.

Speaker 0 00:01:19 Can you talk more about your company? What it, what it sells? And

Speaker 1 00:01:24 I mean, it's the biggest like phone and TV and like network operator in my country. So, um, they have call centers. They do a lot of business with the government and like when I was working there, there was different this like, um, section. So I was, uh, on the outgoing calls. So we had different like campaigns that we would have to do. And then there was the incoming calls, like I didn't work there because you need experience and there was a technical support where I also didn't work because I didn't have the qualification to do it.

Speaker 0 00:02:00 And this company is located in?

Speaker 1 00:02:03 In Slovenia.

Speaker 0 00:02:05 Okay. Thank you. Uh, so when you first started working in your company, did you need to pass some sort of, um, probationary period?

Speaker 1 00:02:15 Yeah, there was a period, but I think it was really short. Like after one month I was already like, it's government owned company, so the working standards are normal, not probation, because it was also like, um, not to go into detail about how the labor regulations work, but um, yeah, it was basically some sort of like limited hours per week contract. So, uh, I didn't have really a lot of like rights, so even the probation period didn't make sense because they could fire me at any time. So, uh, after one month I was just like, um, trained basically. I could start maybe not even one month. It was like two weeks and I was already making some simple like phone calls and uh, yeah, that's, that's it basically.

Speaker 0 00:03:05 Um, did you have a direct manager that you used to report to?

Speaker 1 00:03:11 I have my friend that was like my coworker, but we were like equal, but I relied on him for like information. But then I had the direct manager managers. There were actually two, and one of them was like, like the, how to say, the de facto manager. He was there like, uh, for years and he knew everything, but he was just like passed for all the uh, like, uh, advancements, I dunno, career progression because he failed through some like psychological tests, which is weird. And then we had this, uh, boss that she was like basically working under him. And then because she has this like bossy personality, she got like upgraded into the boss, but, and

Speaker 0 00:03:56 Officially. Or

Speaker 1 00:03:57 Officially, yeah.

Speaker 0 00:03:59 Okay. Um, so what did you dislike the most about your job if you had to choose?

Speaker 1 00:04:10 I mean, disliking is basically like that I, if you have professional, any kind of qualification, it quickly kills your brain because it's just, um, there is like, the challenge is mostly like not in something satisfying and uh, but the people that you call or sometimes rude. So that was the challenge. The challenge was the, not even like the salary, but like the lack of any kind of progression because you knew that like there was this kind of gap between the managerial positions and you knew that like the, even this middle management, like the, you know, you had different groups and then the, these groups each had the boss and then the bosses had one boss, and then this boss was the leader of, for example, like these outgoing call groups. And then there was this leader of the whole call center. And above him there was the leader of all the call centers in the country. So you know that like even for example, like this, uh, regional or like middle management, like, it was always like kind of we didn't understand what they are doing except when they changed some rules and the rules were usually changed in a way that made our work like, uh, harder. For example, like they gave us less time to, like, they demanded more time on call and less time doing other things. But sometimes like this couldn't be done because like in, if you want to like, um, make a, this, how, how do you call it? Like if you wanna fill some documentation or something, this would destroy your statistics. But like doing documentation was also kind of expected and demanded of us. So, so the

Speaker 0 00:05:54 Reports

Speaker 1 00:05:55 Yeah, so the reports and like you had to say like add these sales and then like put the sale into like first make the sale, which would take like some time. But let's say that like in one day, like one sale, especially if it was like a new new like phone or new subscriber, something would take one hour to like prop probably pro properly, like uh, put in all the systems and so on. Um, but that would kill your statistics because then you would have like less time in the call. But like, because these bosses, they didn't know the reality of call centers. They would just like make, they would see some sort of like goals and they would like try to kind of improve the sales statistics and the productivity. But the result was that always there, like we are like they found some sort of way to like, you know, basically cheat it. And uh, that was one thing. And uh, maybe yeah, this lack of like, uh, career progress because you knew that like the people who are the managers, they didn't start from the call center probably mm-hmm <affirmative>. So like it's kind of pretty, I don't know, it was pretty bad. Um, and then maybe also some sort of like, yeah, I dunno like a lot of things, but not really important I guess.

Speaker 0 00:07:19 But were there a lot of people who had been working there for, I don't know, more than five years?

Speaker 1 00:07:26 Yeah, there had been, because it's like a state owned company, so you have a lot of these like women that are like, and also, but I don't know why, but like in my section it was mainly the women that, like they have a few years bef until pension and they just like, they gathered all these like promotions in their sector and yeah, then they are just there and like they, they don't really care so much about like doing a good job. Like, because their job is in no way threatened and like they are protected under labor standards and yeah, they just, they just chill and sometimes they are rude, sometimes they are silly.

Speaker 0 00:08:09 Um, so like technically it's just not a very good job if you want like a career progression. But how is the working environment in general, like your, your managers, were they like good managers?

Speaker 1 00:08:28 Managers? I don't know. Like for me it was weird that this guy that actually, like he knew everything and all these like weird details. Like yeah, 10 years ago we were like moving the database from one system to the other and there is this bug in the system and you can like, you know, avoid it by doing this and that. And it's like one of these like one in 10,000 cases that like, he just knew because of his experience, but he was always like, he was always friendly and like, kind of because of that he didn't have this like, um, bossy traits, so they didn't pass him, like they passed him for promotion. And for me, this was kind of weird because like, I think he was a good manager and he really knew everything, but they like didn't let him progress. But like some other people did. But I don't know, like maybe that was the, the weirdest part. But because it's like it's government owned, like you have good pro good protection rights, like you get paid on time, you, they don't exploit you for extra hours because legally they can't, you get your own email, like some stuff you get like the motivation bonus and uh, yeah, but it's still like on the border between like regular employment, but you still don't have all the rights of the regular employment, which is also like sick leave and so on. So I dunno, goofy.

Speaker 0 00:09:53 Um, but as I've heard before, like in Slovenia, they also have this union. So your job was also kind of, uh, advocated by this union?

Speaker 1 00:10:06 Yeah, like, um, they basically, I don't know, like because of the unions, the standards were really high. So if you are employed there, like now the working conditions are really good, like judging from my ex-colleagues, like salaries are high and uh, compensation and they have this like, how to say vacation money that they receive that is not tax paid,

Speaker 0 00:10:28 Leave

Speaker 1 00:10:29 Paid, paid leave of course, paid sick leave of course. And a lot of leave, a lot of sick leave, a lot of everything they offer you like, you know, education, so on. So yeah. Good. Mm-hmm

Speaker 0 00:10:42 <affirmative>. So yeah, let's turn the conversation to more like lighter topic. So like what motivated you to do this job when you were working there?

Speaker 1 00:10:59 Money. I mean, simply because I wanted to save the money and I also knew that like on the job market, it's like if, I mean, if you don't have the qualifications or like, you know, you don't, you know that without the finished bachelor's degree, you don't really get like some dream job opportunity. So I think on the scale of the, these jobs that the students can do, it was a really good job because you could like, you know, you, you had some sort of, um, inducements for like better sales, which sometimes, like they didn't make sense because for example, like this key performance indicators were made this way that it was almost impossible to be like successful. Um, because you don't sell, sell a lot of phones, but like if you like, I don't know, they, they adjusted them based on something in some months they were like set unfairly basically. Um, yeah. But more or less the money and knowing that like there are a lot of worse works, like for example, that this is relatively like intellectual, you just have to like, you know, be friendly and uh, know what your job is. But for example, you could also work in some cafe and they wouldn't pay you. And like this nightmare would be nightmarish.

Speaker 0 00:12:18 Mm. Okay. Um, next question. Um, in this line of work, what is usually the right way to make decisions? Do you make them, did you make them on your own or did you have to consult your manager or your more experienced colleague for example?

Speaker 1 00:12:42 I think that at this level there are no decisions like per per se. Like, because for example, the decisions are like, sometimes there is some cases like for example the business or something and you just have to like forward them because the, at this level, the business process is so streamlined that you have your job, whatever is not your job, you forward to people whose job this is. And um, yeah, you don't really, it's, it's more like lack of training. So, you know, as I was saying, these extreme cases of like, you know, having to do something in some old database or something that someone would tell you, but no decisions, I mean, decisions were mostly like sometimes you had these people that the system told you to call, but like they were born in like 1928 and you knew that like a 95-year-old grandma wouldn't like, want to probably become a new subscriber for some, you know, like family whatever package. So you know, like these people you just like kind of skipped them, although it was not really legal under the company's terms. Yeah.

Speaker 0 00:13:54 Okay. Um, so you've talked about what you did in this work. Could you maybe describe your usual working day? Like from morning to um, evening?

Speaker 1 00:14:12 Um, my usually morning, morning days, like I would, depends like usually I was working another job in the morning, then I would have some lunch and come in the afternoon. Um, the best, the good thing was that like actually the leave, like the lunch leave was paid. So like, you know, it's not like in Russia you did basically work nine hours, but it's eight hours. Like there, if you worked six hours that you would like come and like at, I don't know, eight and six hours later, I think that's at two you would like leave the premises. And in that time it was calculated how many minutes you can like go out. Of course you could like make it longer. So I mean, I would come in, I would, it would take like you had some sort of like limited amount of time to prepare your equipment. So that was usually 15 minutes before someone would start. Like they had these people that were monitoring if you are coming on time, blah, blah, blah. So then you would set up the things. And then first, like usually I would take care of old business. Like for example, I don't know, see how much of these contracts have been, uh, actually like executed because not all people like send the documents signed back, so then you can call them again and remind them and this like boosts your performance. And uh, yeah, so that's the first thing I would do. Some calls that, for example, maybe I have a void, that it's best to leave them for the start, uh, because you're still fresh and you're not upset. And then basically like you work, you work, you work first you try to have as much calls as possible so that like, you know, you have good statistics and then like you can take a rest or like take it easy.

And sometimes like I would leave these documents for the end, especially if it was like Friday or something because you can like finish them and then you can be done a a little earlier and uh, that's good. But like later they kind of like banned us from what, from not calling in the last two hours, blah, blah, because everyone would just like work and then in the last two hours they would use all their like free time and pause and so on. So yeah, I dunno, they kind of didn't want that to happen, but people still did it.

Speaker 0 00:16:35 <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. So your work day was from the afternoon until evening for eight hours or?

Speaker 1 00:16:43 Yeah, I would come at two and then I would leave at seven 30

Speaker 0 00:16:46 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Something like that. So. And also you mentioned that you had another job in the morning. Can you maybe like talk a little bit about, uh, the other job and maybe compare, uh, the, this morning job with the afternoon job

Speaker 1 00:17:02 Job in the morning job was online, so it's hard to compare, but like the other job I kind of liked because like the, I was just a cog in the mechanism. So you know, if something is too hard, okay, no problem. Like, you know, you find somebody else to do it, you can like have do a lot of this weaponized incompetence and uh, yeah. But the first job was like, you know, I had a set of some instructions. The tasks were also like really repetitive, like yeah, copy all these people from one excel to the other and send emails to 250 people and such. So I don't know, like the, also it was more vague and I think that like the boss didn't really pay attention to what I'm doing. So yeah, the second job was more like corporate, but also the, I don't know, during the first job I could like automate my work and go for a walk, but during the second job I was limited with this magnetic card mm-hmm <affirmative>. That would record if I left the building.

Speaker 0 00:18:04 Yeah. And um, can you maybe describe like some achievements in, uh, this jobs, both jobs if you want.

Speaker 1 00:18:19 I mean, some achievements is that like I, they didn't fire me and actually like considering that there is always the lack of workforce, and I mean even at that time it was covid, but they still had like the, I don't know why, but people are kind of like afraid to work in the call center because it's still even among these jobs that you don't need really a qualification. It's, it's considered some sort of like intellectual job or whatever. And a lot of people that came there to work were like frankly not suitable. They were like rude or just like idiots. So yeah, I don't know, like, uh, they, I don't know, what was the original question? It's kind of late.

Speaker 0 00:19:03 What are your achievements?

Speaker 1 00:19:05 And my achievements are basically not being fired and kind of, you know, like if I stayed longer in the company, probably they would take me for like the, you know, they would employ me for eight hours per day. But like some of my friends, like, you know, if some people just like it this way that you get a good starting salary, I mean like average starting salary let's say, and then you, you just like move inside there. Like it's like having 100,000, 140,000 rubles in Moscow and then you like your salary plus minus inflation just stays the same. It's like stability, paid, leave, everything. And people just like that. Like they live near the company, they go there, there, they work for eight hours because the company's like government company. They have like also the trade union, they can't get fired even if they are like massively incompetent. I mean, not, it's not the case, but like with my friends. But, uh, yeah, they'll really have these mechanisms that like first they have to like offer them alternative work post with the same and re-training and mentorship. And then after like two years of like incompetence, they can only like leave like fire. So, uh, yeah.

Speaker 0 00:20:23 But, um, what do you think of this call center department? Do you even think this, uh, will survive the next 10 years? Maybe they will remove call centers? Um, like in general?

Speaker 1 00:20:38 No, I don't think so because I think that probably if anything they would removed my first work because I even, I, I found like I'm not some a, uh, a IT expert, but they found these ways to like really quickly streamline these processes and uh, yeah, it's like the com like the second company. I don't know, like first of all, it's like the people I think now like that these AI chatbots are getting developed, they're still kind of like very limited. And I think that like having a conversation with a person, especially like, you know, the sales, I don't know, it's, it's kind of hard to imagine maybe if there would be like a big leap that would like 100% replace like how people communicate. But I don't see that happening. And the thing is that even in developed countries like this kind of, especially if the market is small, like you can develop a language model that will 100% replace like a nuanced language with dialects and so on. So maybe in America you can, or in India, but like, uh, I mean, not to be rude, but like, because they have like billion people in the market, it makes more economic sense. But in for this like small central European, uh, economies, I don't think so.

Speaker 0 00:22:06 Okay. So thank you. Um, that's it for the maybe like technical part. Yeah. We can maybe, uh, move to more cultural part of the interview. Um, so the first question of this part, um, how have you changed over the last five years?

Speaker 1 00:22:32 How's that connected

Speaker 0 00:22:34 To what?

Speaker 1 00:22:35 To the job interview? I mean to this job discussion that we just had.

Speaker 0 00:22:40 But this is the second part.

Speaker 1 00:22:42 Uh, how have I changed in last, what,

Speaker 0 00:22:45 Five years? So just like personally talking about your, um, personal growth.

Speaker 1 00:22:51 Yeah, I think like I just gained some like maybe insights I gained some like international perspective, but it's like maybe the last five years is not really representative because like I moved and so on. So my life is completely changed. But like, uh, you know, it's probably not in the really statistics statistic. S significant, I don't know how to say it, but yeah, it's the, I don't know, got more habits, got more like maybe maturity, more skills, more everything. Like see what I appreciate in uh, people like, I dunno, stop some nasty habits that I had. Yeah, maybe like that.

Speaker 0 00:23:42 <affirmative>. Mm-hmm And professionally, what has been the most valuable lesson in your career?

Speaker 1 00:23:51 I think that if like every product that you, that leaves your hands should be like the reflection of your work. Like for example, this is something that they really like under underlined in the, in the studies that like, you know, and also with the documents, if you, if you look normal, if you are like grammar, I mean it starts with these simple things looks normal. If you are handwriting looks normal, if like, you know, you have some basics of how some the like, you know, your products or whatever you are doing, like, uh, look like it goes a long way because like, I don't know if I compare the like, you know, normally even if your, the, the content of your text is not as good, it like makes a good first impression if you first like read the technical requirements and like do everything as per the technical requirements. And then like then someone where like, you know, the text can be brilliant, but if you open it and it's like the wrong size, wrong alignment, wrong everything, it's kind of like, and I think that these small things like, you know, it basically teaches you how to like present yourself and then you look like you have your life more like in your hands than people who are like more messy I guess.

Speaker 0 00:25:08 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So maybe like impression is very important.

Speaker 1 00:25:13 Yeah. To have some, some, some sense of order that like maybe even if your life is not like the most orderly and disciplined, you can still like make it look, look like to the casual observer that like, oh, this guy made a good PowerPoint, you know, like attention to detail. He wrote a good text, he put the comma in the correct place, he, you know, like filled the blank correctly, whatever. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Like, it may makes it goes a long way. Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Not to be sloppy.

Speaker 0 00:25:43 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Um, so talking about professional goals, if you were to start your own business, what would it be?

Speaker 1 00:25:54 Um, if I started my own business, probably it would be some sort of international trade. I'm like really interested in how things move, but I kind of don't have the guts to do it because I'm scared that like I would buy a lot of stuff and then, you know, like get it across the border, do the, uh, this, how do you call it? The, the customs, uh, everything and then like get some money and then pay taxes and everything. And I kind of like, um, don't see it happen, but I think this would be some sort of like, uh, yeah, I don't know how to assess supply and demand and how to like react upon it.

Speaker 0 00:26:36 <affirmative>. Mm-hmm. So what do you think are the three things that you need to succeed in this business?

Speaker 1 00:26:43 I think it's like, first it's knowledge. Second one is, um, to have some sort of like initial investment, the knowledge about like, you know, so that you prepare yourself maximum how like, so that you can probably succeed even like, you know, if you know how to bring one kilogram of grapes from China, it's probably the same as bringing one ton. I don't know. But like, uh, you know, and then from you can start from there. So knowledge to have some sort of like order I guess again, uh, so that like, you know, you don't, um, compromise on like investigating, streamlining, making stuff more efficient. And then I guess like to just have some, you know, like beginning budget or maybe like some team that, you know, you can spread the, like the motivated team, not just like some random people.

Speaker 0 00:27:39 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. So talking about teams, would you rather to, uh, make this business alone? Like would you rather work alone or like in groups?

Speaker 1 00:27:52 I'd rather work in groups, but like my experience with this is that like some people they would talk and then, you know, they, they wouldn't develop the business idea on their own or like, ideally there should be like a person who is like at least or more motivated than I am, but like I don't want to like, you know, send around reminders and like, yeah, let's do this and that and like, you know, have low level of, of commitment of everyone. So I dunno, I kind of like haven't met the, like some right. People I guess. I don't know.

Speaker 0 00:28:25 <affirmative>. Mm-hmm . If you had conflict with your team, how would you handle it?

Speaker 1 00:28:30 Uh, depends. Like if the conflict is in the beginning and the stakes are low, then bye bye. But like, I don't know, like it depends if it's friend, if it's just like a teammate, I don't know. I mean, there's always hierarchy and I kind of believe in this, um, rationality that like if somebody's saying something, um, you know, if there are good arguments, if their arguments are rational, then okay. But if the arguments are like, you know, I like it because of I like it or something. Or just like, if the argument is stupid, then there should be some sort of like authority that breaks the deadlock.

Speaker 0 00:29:10 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And would you be, uh, that authority or would you rather give that to someone else?

Speaker 1 00:29:17 I mean, theoretically I'm the authority, but when it comes to practice, I'm really un conflict person. So I don't know what would happen in the practice.

Speaker 0 00:29:27 Okay. Um, talking about work life balance and stress management, uh, how do you handle stress or tight deadlines?

Speaker 1 00:29:42 Tight deadlines by managing, like seeing the order of priority, seeing what can, what has to be done like quickly and what has to be done well. Sometimes it's not like, you know, of course you shouldn't like completely compromise your standards and, but sometimes like, uh, you can see like for example, some things can be done on some sort of minimum standard. Some things will allow you to like, you know, they are just like more important than the others. Like, uh, for example, like writing a master's thesis is more important than applying for PhD because like if you don't do one, then you can’t do the other. Even if you do the PhD application. Well, so, you know brain

Speaker 0 00:30:24 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. And, uh, what is usually your secret to productivity? When you have a lot of things to do at the same time.

Speaker 1 00:30:34 To have a, like realistic scheduling include breaks and just start it in advance. Like I never met in school or studies or whatever, like any kind of deadline that couldn't be dealt with. Like that would be like, yeah, tomorrow you have to have 40 pages of text. Like, I think this, these things don't happen. Maybe I'm lucky because like I can write stuff and like work like rather efficiently. Um, and like, but yeah, this is like regarding this question, what happened in the last five years? I think I kind of became more disciplined with not doing things in the last second mm-hmm <affirmative>. And investing more time, more thought into it. So yeah, maybe.

Speaker 0 00:31:19 So talking about time management, um, and, and time in general, what would be your ideal work schedule?

Speaker 1 00:31:28 My ideal work schedule is to wake up early and then like work until sometime, then cut it off and just do nothing until you go to sleep. Like for example, did you decide like after, I mean, but in Russia this is rather unrealistic, but like after five or six, I'm not taking calls, I'm not like answering messages. I'm not, uh, doing homework, I'm not doing anything. But like, you know, you wake up early, you go to the gym because like kind of movement also helps with productivity and how your brain works. Like if possible you go to like some sauna or and бассейн then you feel like really energized, take care of like feeding yourself well and drinking enough water and then maybe like having the schedule that you can follow like, you know, something realistic. Like you can do eight hours of intellectual work per day. It's not like fair.

Speaker 0 00:32:24 Mm-hmm <affirmative>. Um, so maybe last question. Um, we've been talking about the, I don't know, kind of your, your personal, um, style of working and uh, time management and everything. Uh, do you think this is kind of influenced by your culture? Like how much is influenced by your culture and how much is maybe just like your personal experience and your environment and your, I don't know, kind of nurture in general?

Speaker 1 00:33:01 I mean judging, like first I thought that I'm very much influenced by my family, but like always there was this like, yeah, start what you finish what you started kind of attitude in my family. But then I realized that like in some ways, like there are also other kind of like influences. For example, like, you know, you sometimes meet a good teacher, you meet like a good mentor, you like you are part of some like business process that like your family or whatever, just like they were not because they are from other generations. So, you know, sometimes like the, there is like some dogma that you always thought like, hmm, yeah, this is good. Like for example, you know, yeah, you shouldn't for example be conf like, you know, enter conflicts with people, but then you realize that sometimes like, you know, you have to also set your boundaries and you shouldn't always just be friendly and like, you know, um, kind of understand other people's position because like, you know, that undermines your legitimacy.

So I think it's kind of, I don't know, mix of all like some sort of like traditional get stuff done to be recognized as a good boy mentality and also like modern mentality of like wanting to have money and wanting to be like recognized and you know, realizing there's a lot of opportunity maybe. So, you know, and if you are just like not there and lazy, then it will pass you by and you will just feel, you know, re regret maybe, I don't know. But yeah, culture I guess. I mean it's like central European culture. It's kind of, but I dunno. I mean not to analyze it too deeply, but yeah, you just like, maybe, maybe, I don't know. Maybe probably.

Speaker 0 00:34:54 Okay. Thank you so much for this opportunity to interview you. Um, this will be very valuable for our project.

Speaker 1 00:35:04 Ah, that's really nice.