

## **MATTIPEDIA**

### **Episode 1 – How I found a job in Finland**

**Henna:** *Hi, you are listening to the very first episode of Mattipedia! This podcast series will discuss about somewhat surprising things that can be seen as challenges when starting and living a life in a foreign country as an international student – and how to overcome these challenges. Topics of our episodes cover working and social life in Finland, as well as learning the Finnish language. The podcast is in English, and each episode includes a summary in Finnish to boost your language learning. Welcome on board!*

My name is Henna Hirvonen, and I'm the host of this episode. I'm here with our lovely guest, Valéria Pinto, who comes from Brazil. She has lived in Finland for a little over three years now. Valéria is not that fond of salmiakki but loves Finnish summer. In this episode, she will talk about her job hunt experience in Finland. Valéria, could you please first shortly introduce yourself?

#### **Valéria:**

- Thank you for having me, Henna
- As you said, I am from Brazil and that's where I got my bachelor's degree in Law a lifetime ago and 8 years' experience as a junior manager in the media industry
- I have over 20 years' experience as a teacher of English as a foreign language in six different countries in the Americas and Europe
- I have just finished my 2 years' experience as a Media Coordinator in a non-profit in Helsinki and now I work as a project researcher on the Talent Boost team at Xamk
- I am "about" to finish my International Business Management master's degree at Xamk, hopefully by the end of this year
- I came to Finland a little over three years ago and so far, besides some challenges, I believe the gains have been greater than the pains.
- Finland is a safe country, internationally famous for its educational system, innovative mindset, and honesty. And this is what is the most important for me at the moment. Things for me are much better now than what they used to be three years ago regarding work and opportunities in general and I am optimistic they will be even better after I finish my master's program and have gathered three years' work experience in

Finland. Hopefully, my Finnish language skills will continue to improve gradually as they have in the recent months.

- When I am not working or studying, I enjoy swimming, riding my bike, playing the guitar, and watching Netflix

**Henna:** Sounds interesting! Next I would like to know, how did you actually start your job hunt in Finland?

**Valéria:** At the beginning it was a bit challenging to find work in Finland considering my academic and professional backgrounds, so I was out of work for a while. I was really interested in learning Finnish, so I visited the TE services' office in Helsinki where they interviewed me to know more about my professional profile and in less than 2 months they got me the Finnish language and integration course. It was there that my work path started in Finland. The last stage of the course was a 7-week internship, and this internship became my Media Coordinator job for 2 years. While I was studying Finnish, I visited some job-seeking websites such as Monster, Duunitori, LinkedIn and I also constantly visited companies' websites for job opportunities. Other than that, I regularly applied for jobs that would be related to either business or teaching. I found my English teaching job from TE services' website.

**Henna:** You mentioned that at first, finding employment in Finland was bit of a challenge to you. How did you manage the challenges along the way?

**Valéria:** First, you have to keep the faith. Then you have to persevere. There is no other way. I tried to participate in every cost-free job-related opportunity available such as seminars, webinars, workshops, informal meetings/cafés and any other "community building" activity. What you can't do is sit down and wait for opportunities to knock on your door.

I regularly checked Facebook events that would either help me network professionally or just keep me busy meeting new people and listening to different stories and perspectives. I opened myself to things I had never thought I would because I realized I needed to expand my horizons. I went hiking, meet people for boardgame nights, had picnics outdoors. I guess one of the things that helped me manage challenges was that I was not afraid to ask for help. If I

didn't know something, I would ask someone who might know. And I also kept my ears attentive to new opportunities and experiences. After some time, I realized that I had an interesting group of people around me and that I had already had very interesting experiences, too. This gave me strength to keep going.

One smart move that I think was essential to me was to go back to studying and go for my master's degree. Not only I would upgrade and update my academic knowledge, but I would also enhance my employability here and broaden my network in Finland.

**Henna:** You have many good tips there! Where did you find relevant help to improve your job search?

**Valéria:** I am a people person, so I talk with different types of people in any kind of situation. When I used to go to the free kielikahvila (the language café) at Oodi, I usually got some nice tips about things, places and people I should check. From there I got to know about many NGO services like Luckan Integration which is a Swedish speaking non-profit organization that can help immigrants with their CVs, career planning, networking or simply offer people some good time together. There I met someone from Familia ry who suggested that I developed some volunteer activities and so I did. I developed an event where people would know more about my country and culture through our music. This was a very nice project, and it is always good to have something like this in your CV. I had met someone who works at the YMCA Helsinki [Hi, Sonja!] and after some time she knew me better, so she invited me to develop and teach a Basic Computer Skills course. The project tried to include people who were not tech savvy and were facing challenges to access services like Kela, TE-toimisto after many of them migrated to online platforms because of COVID. This was a *plus* in my CV as well. I checked The Shortcut program that focuses on entrepreneurship, but I felt it was not really my thing. But the funny thing is that, after having applied for hundreds of positions, my first job came after an informal coffee, with no professional agenda, with someone I had met at Oodi in one of the Kielikahvila afternoons.

**Henna:** What do you know now that you didn't then that would have made your experience in Finland better and you would like to share with other international students in Finland?

**Valéria:** It might sound cliché, but the importance of networking in Finland; I know everyone talks about “networking” but it is important to know what networking really means in Finland and how it happens. Finnish culture is based on trust, so knowing people is the first step to opening doors, so try and participate in every possible activity you find interesting; also be open to alternatives and changes. You most probably will need to adjust your career and that is ok. So many people do it after their 40s so why can't we? Talk to people, be present, show interest, pay attention and be open.

Don't forget to work on mental and physical wellbeing; Finnish winters may seem difficult for foreigners, but find some of the many options available around. There will be something that suits or interests you. Finally, have a clear understanding of what you want your experience in Finland to be. As the cat in Alice in Wonderland once said: *If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there.* What I mean is: check possibilities, decide what applies to you, go for it, and keep your eye on the ball!

**Henna:** Thank you, Valéria, for your time and for sharing your experience with our community.