

WBL-PRO Professional Peer Network: The team talks with the professionals – Veneta Uzunova, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

Today we are happy to present to you **Veneta Uzunova** from Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. Veneta is an assistant at the Department for Information and In-Service Teachers Training at the Tracia University, Stara Zagora. She takes advantages of her experience as a psychologist, career advisor and trainer in her lectures as well as in her practice as a consultant and trainer in programs for career and personal development. Her professional priorities are the acquisition of social and emotional skills by young people, their career orientation and their successful realization on the labour market. Veneta strongly believes that everybody possesses the power and the potential to live a good and happy life and feel effective and satisfied with one's professional fulfilment. She is convinced that this can be achieved through the acquisition of taking decision skills, clearly set goals, responsibility for own actions and the most important - belief in oneself and in the meaning of everything one strives for.



Please review below what she has shared with us:

"Work-based learning is an inexhaustible resource and we can take out of it exactly as much as we want and as much as we are motivated to. From the very first steps in a new working environment we have the chance to get to know different people, the encounter specific situations which cannot be found explained in the books and to solve problems for which our university and school education have not provided us with knowledge and preparation. The dynamics of the events and the development of every life aspect do not skip the work place. Learning there is ongoing and inevitable. Its main advantages are: authentic working conditions and problems that have to be solved in real time, available mentorship or in other words benefitting from the source and learning from the best, chance for personal development through facing and overcoming challenges at the work place, communication with colleagues, managers and clients and achieving professional objectives.

According to me there are three main aspects of the work-based learning challenges – unhelpful working environment, internal personal barriers against work-based learning

and time shortage due to too intense dynamics. The unhelpful working environment is characterized by a high degree of competitiveness and unwillingness to share experience on behalf of the colleagues as well as lack of tolerance towards any possible mistakes made by the trainee. This can create insecurity and feeling of unprotecting atmosphere. Such situations make it very difficult for the trainee to search for answers, to advance adequately in the work essence and to conduct purposeful learning process. The internal personal barriers against work-based learning are related to the trainees' lower motivation or too high self-assessment as well as certain psychological difficulties - they feel embarrassed to ask questions or are afraid to make mistakes and be considered incompetent. Time shortage nowadays can put too much pressure on the trainees and thus can prevent them from taking advantage of the process of professional and personal upskilling at the work place, to make self-reflection, to get feedback and to identify their achievements and competences that need to be further developed.

I think that preliminary set clear and precise rules for the work-based learning process will create more security for the trainees. The effective communication within the organization, the team work and the establishment of feeling of belonging, shared values and the respective organizational culture will facilitate the WBL for the trainees, their colleagues and the managers.

The mentors should develop and improve their coaching skills, skills for designing of WBL programs, their knowledge on adaption at the work place, their motivation, goals setting and decision making.

At the moment I am case manager in the program Direction Profession implemented by Workshop for Civic Initiatives Foundation, Social Alternative Trust and YouthBuild. It is an educational program (<https://www.youthbuild.org/>) for school drop-out young people development and integration on the labour market created in the USA thirty years ago.

The program offers:

- motivation for change - personal and professional for young people between 18 and 25 years old;
- enhancing their qualification and connecting them with potential employers;
- volunteer work and implementation of small community projects;
- establishment of a supporting circle of individuals and organizations/institutions who help young people rediscover themselves."

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