



Season 7: Navigating a Global Career Amidst Emerging Technologies Episode 2

Stacie Berdan

*International Careers Expert
(Podcast Host)*

Maureen Murat

*Principal
Crowdie Advisors LLC*

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Stacie Berdan:

Welcome to the global careers podcast sponsored by GW-CIBER – THE source for inspiring stories from seasoned professionals who have embraced a global role and reaped the benefits. We offer practical advice and insider tips across a broad swath of industries and fields around the world. Whether or not you've considered moving abroad or taking on an international role, globalization will impact your career. So join us for a lively discussion as we explore what an international career really means. My name is Stacie Nevadomski Berdan and I'll be your host!

In season seven, we focus on the intersection of technology and globalization across all types of industries and functions. What aspects of tech do we all need to understand to adapt and thrive in the workplace? What types of global tech jobs are out there? And what skills are needed to compete? Join us as we hear from seasoned executives who will help us navigate global careers and emerging technologies around the world. Today, I have the pleasure of speaking with Maureen Murat, an attorney and principal of Crowdie Advisors. It's a business consulting firm dedicated to helping entrepreneurs and small businesses with strategy, planning, and problem solving services when considering equity crowdfunding to raise capital. Maureen has an extensive background helping FinTech companies address legal and cross-border regulation on blockchain and cryptocurrency. She's worked throughout the Middle East, and speaks Haitian Creole and French. Maureen is also a senior attorney in the policy unit of the legal division at the FDIC, where she works primarily on consumer protection related issues. Welcome, Maureen, it's great to have you with us today.

Maureen Murat:

Hi Stacie. Thank you for having me.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah. So one of the objectives of this podcast is to provide a sense of the careers that are out there – more than just titles. Tell us, what is it that you do?

Maureen Murat:

I will be talking about what I do with Crowdie Advisors, my consulting firm. So, as you mentioned in the intro, my main focus is helping small businesses and entrepreneurs strategize and plan for what they want to do. A lot of my clients are interested in raising money via equity crowdfunding, which is a relatively new way for small businesses to raise money, small private businesses to raise money in a very public way. Of course, when it comes with raising money, taking people's money to potentially grow it, etc., there are going to be some need for compliance. So, what I do is I help companies who are ready to take that step. First, we do an evaluation because not every small company or every small business is ready to raise. And that doesn't necessarily mean you have to be income generating, but it's good to be able to show that you have a market for whatever you're selling. In terms of helping them figure out whether they are ready to truly raise money in this, you know, regulatory compliant way we go through what revenue they might be getting, what they want to raise the money for, what their roadmap is, what



they're thinking about doing. And then, also taking into consideration the investors because a lot of the investors in these crowdfunding campaigns are what we call "not accredited investors yet", right. So these are people who are new to investing and might need some help figuring out what it is that they're getting into. They also speak to the businesses and kind of help them strategize how they will kind of make their potential investors more informed, as well as having an offering presented to these investors that's attractive for what they're selling. So then we go through the application process to get on the platform, etc. And then once you're able to raise their money, and you know, go do great things, you know, once they've raised their money, and they're on their way, the only time I might hear back is if they needed some help with, you know, some other issues that might arise after the raise or during the raise. But my main focus is to help them get to the point where they can raise money on a regulated platform.

Stacie Berdan:

Oh neat... So, that explains, obviously, the law degree, the degree in psychology because you have to understand people clearly. And then Homeland Security... I mean, that seems like a perfect combination for global security issues today. So what kind of inspired you to actually pursue that educational path / background and to what you're doing today?

Maureen Murat:

So, I should have been a pediatrician. So I did not start out knowing that this was where I wanted to go. And when I decided I wanted to go to law school, I thought, Okay, well, I need a degree that, you know, doesn't matter what your bachelor's degree is in necessarily. So I thought, Okay, well, let me get a degree that I've, you know, that I could finish relatively quickly and then move on to applying for law school. So that's why I did the Psychology degree – something I was interested in and it allowed me to do a lot of writing, which I liked doing. And then I actually applied for law school three years in a row and kept being put on waitlists and it was very discouraging. So I thought, oh, maybe this is not for me then, you know, felt like the universe is telling me law school is not for you, go do something else. So I decided to do the Master's in Homeland Security because I thought, Okay, well, if I can't be a lawyer and I can't get a law degree, then this is something else I was interested in because... This was in 2010 or 2011, so there were a lot of issues going on in terms of global security and the, you know, the Iraq war and all that. And I thought, Oh, I could contribute in that way. Maybe I could go work for DHS or something like that. And then, I ended up applying one last time, because at the time, I was actually a paralegal. And the judge that we were assigned to that my, you know, team was assigned to, he was like, you should apply to UDC School of Law, you should apply to schools in the district. So at the time, I wasn't trying to stay in DC, I wanted to move away, I wanted to go to New York. So I was like, Okay, fine, I will apply. So it's my last time, I won't apply after this, this is it; if it doesn't work, this time, I'm going to stop wasting my money, because you're also spending money taking tests, spending money on applications, you know, that I didn't really have. So anyway, so I did it. And I ended up graduating from my Master's program in June of 2012 and started law school in August. So I never got to use the degree. But it kind of helped, I think, because a lot of the work, you know, you have to do a capstone and all that, but a lot of the work really requires you to strategize and think critically and look at it from different ways – the law degree and the homeland security degree. So I even though I didn't necessarily use the degree, I do feel like what I learned in the program still helps me today.

Stacie Berdan:

I bet, I bet... just from a thinking perspective. And raising a capital, thinking about regulations and what types of investors... Yeah, interesting. Interesting. So you've done a lot of work in FinTech – hot industry. What's trending there, what does everyone need to be aware of when it comes to FinTech?



Maureen Murat:

Well, I think a lot of people, of course, are talking about AI, right, artificial intelligence, and, you know, its baby brother, machine learning. And I think that is trending. And I think what makes it a great opportunity is for, you know, generations that are coming behind me, I guess, that are, you know, what they call 'digital natives', right. So, I remember having a phone at my house, you know, and I don't... none of my nieces or any... you know, my son will never have a phone line at their house. So I feel like some of these generations coming up, will really see the benefit and having all of this technology kind of at their fingertips; I think it's a little scary for some other generations. But I think, when you think about, you know, how we've progressed, right, it's also a natural progression to see that these different tools are available. The other thing is, I think one thing that I've heard on numerous occasions and I guess subscribe to this now is that banking used to be you know, banking was a service, but now that he is kind of is a verb, right. So you can bank from anywhere, and you can bank, you know, very easily from anywhere on the move. And I think that's something that's also going to be helpful... And I know we're talking about FinTech in general; so FinTech is not just banking, right, it's just essentially any, you know, financial technology that is going to make our lives easier. So you can see FinTech products in insurance, you can see FinTech products in security. So like... even we were talking about the equity crowdfunding platforms, they're using a regulated platform online, and that is considered FinTech company, right, they are taking in funds, they have an escrow account, etc. So different ways to make your life easier, but it doesn't have to solely fit under banking.

Stacie Berdan:

So everyone needs to embrace it, and be aware of it, and accept it, because it is here.

Maureen Murat:

Yes, it's here, it's here.

Stacie Berdan:

Yes, I like banking is a verb. That's great. Yeah, that's great. Let me turn to the specific international topic. So you, you are a woman of color and you have worked internationally? Um, can you share what that's like?

Maureen Murat:

So, yes, about working internationally... I think for the most part, it's very exciting. I mean, there are definitely been times where I've been disappointed or maybe felt uncomfortable. But I think for the most part, it is exciting. I think I've had to learn quickly that a lot of times when I experienced discomfort, some level of discrimination, I had to learn that it wasn't personal. I think a lot of times it's really just a cultural difference. And so, because of that, you know, it presents itself as a way that could be offensive. But I think that, over time, especially if... and I had to learn this too, that you really had to really practice confidence, right. Like, I had to talk to myself in the mirror, you know, make sure that I was comfortable in my own skin, so that if someone, you know, did something, said something, whatever, it didn't really affect me maybe in the moment, right, because I, you know, I recognize it. But it didn't affect me going forward, because I know who I am. I know I'm capable, I know what I'm talking about, you know, and all that... It took me a while to get there, you know, I'll be honest. But I think, once I figured that out, then it wasn't so hard to navigate some of those spaces. And, you know, working internationally, you really do have to do a little bit of research to figure out, you know, what it is to work as a woman in those different nations. So like, in the Middle East and in Paris, you know, those are the areas where I've had the most challenges. But you know, it happens. And I, you know, I've found a way to deal with it. But I think that, you know, again, me being confident has really helped, you know, me continue to move in those spaces.



Stacie Berdan:

Great, great advice for all of us, right, do your research, understand the biases and anything, stereotypes that are already out there, and be confident. Great, that's great. Yeah, there are so many, you know, cultural nuances, you know, the business etiquette, things that are layered into these experiences. Can you share some of the lessons you've learned?

Maureen Murat:

So I think one lesson in terms of cultural nuances, I remember when we went to, when I was asked to do a presentation in Bahrain, and it was on regulated crowdfunding, because they had drafted some crowdfunding rules, and they, you know, wanted me to come in and talk about how it's done in the US, so that they could see if there were some of the concepts that they could adopt. So it was a room full of men, and the only other women there were part of the office that we were working with. You know, before going, you know, our host essentially told us, you know, you have to be mindful, these are... the group is mostly men, they are, you know, wealthy individuals, and, you know, in terms of who they see as being able to present certain ideas, especially around money and business, etc., they might be more receptive to having, you know, a male speaker as well. I was like, Okay, fine, I know what I'm dealing with. So I, so we did have, I did have my partner come in and help with the presentations. And it was good, because we kind of tag teamed, so that it didn't seem like, you know, he was gonna do all the talking, or I was gonna do all the talking, we tag teamed so that, eventually, they were able to see that, you know, okay, yes, there's a woman up there speaking, but she does know what she's talking about and she's up there with someone else who knows what you're talking about. So I think, because we had, we did a really good presentation, like it was very, very helpful. I mean, the other thing I've learned is, like, I remember one time, we had a meeting with someone from the Middle East as well. And my colleague, who was male, crossed his leg, and we were sitting across from a coffee table and crossed his leg and the bottom of his shoe was showing. You know, the other person across the coffee table could see the bottom of his shoe. And immediately the guy was like, offended; he was like, put your foot down, you know, you Americans... bla-bla-bla. So, and we were like, wait, what, you know, what is it? And so he said, You know, it's very disrespectful in Kuwaiti culture to show the bottom of your shoe, you know, to someone. And we're like, oh, we, you know, sincerely apologize, we had no idea, we would never have done that, he would never have done that had he known, etc. So there are some things to also be mindful, like, even if the thing is happening in the moment, you know, to immediately, you know, be mindful of that and try to correct it, because you still want to be able to have that conversation with the person, you know, especially if it's about business. And so, you know, situations like that. But one thing I will say one lesson, I have definitely learned in working in that environment and having these different, you know, cultural nuances show up is that everybody think for the most part, most people come to the table wanting to really collaborate. And so these nuances, it's just a matter of just learning what they are accepting them for what they are, and trying to navigate, you know, as best you can. I mean, there are definitely some times where there is no navigating, you know, it's just not going to work and it's just not going to work. Well, where it can work, you know, it's worth it to proceed.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, that's great. What a wonderful story, thank you for sharing. And luckily, they raised it because not all cultures actually speak out and tell you at the moment everything is fine, and then they never call you back and you don't know why...

Maureen Murat:

We definitely have had those issues. You don't know what happened!



Stacie Berdan:

That's great. But being informed, doing your research, some things are the smallest to us, little things that can make the biggest crack in a relationship or break. Yeah, that's great, great stories. Yeah. You have had a great career so far. What are some of the biggest challenges that you've faced? It's one of the questions that our students and our listeners really want to hear about. And how did you deal with it?

Maureen Murat:

I think one of the greatest challenges I faced is deciding whether to, like, continue on the path that I was going on or to do something else. I say that because when I first started Crowdie Advisors, my goal was to just help small businesses and entrepreneurs figure out how to raise money with REG CF (regulation crowdfunding). It never occurred to me that there were international companies who wanted to come over here and raise money here, right, create an American business and all that. But when I first started, I was trying to work with people and it just dawned on me, like people didn't even have some of their basic stuff together, right. They didn't even have their business documents, they weren't necessarily registered, they didn't have a tax ID number – all these things that you need to be considered a legitimate business. And so, I started helping people do that and I kind of got sidetracked. I felt like I started, ended up helping people do that and not doing what I really set out to do. And so, I had to take a moment and be like, Okay, what is it that you want to do? Where do you think that you're the most valuable, because there are so many people who can help people create their businesses and all that, and you can even go online (although I, you know, I wouldn't recommend it, but you can go online, there are all these online services). So but where I think I knew that my specialty was, was, you know, on the REG CF side. And so my challenge was, like, yes, it was easier to get clients get, you know, helping them, you know, get their documents in order. And, you know, that was easier, and, you know, helped me make money on that side. And it was harder to get people to be writing for REG CF, because it's a process. But I had to make a decision, like what it was that I wanted to do. And I eventually decided, okay, if someone comes for certain things, I'm just going to refer them out, instead of trying to do everything, because that's all that was overwhelming, and it's too much, and you don't have to do everything. So I had to learn that too, right, you don't have to do everything just because you can. So I had to, you know, find a way to kind of make it clear, you know, there was a line of demarcation or delineation, like what it was that I wanted to do and what it was that could be farmed out – or not farmed out, but um, referred out to other people. Which was really great, because that also helped me create a network with someone who knew how to do trademarks, and, you know, couple CPAs, and things like that. So that I think was one of my challenges, because it was like, Oh, I'm changing the purpose of what Crowdie was intended to do. And I didn't really like that, I felt like I was being pulled away. But anyway, I was able to come back. But it took a little time. And of course, you know, took me more time to find clients. But I think that was okay, because I ended up getting more quality clients, you know, and I didn't have to work with as many clients to make the same amount as I did just doing the business registration stuff.

Stacie Berdan:

Yeah, good for you that you recognized... Yeah. You could have done it all, but yeah, it sounds like it was pretty heavy and a lot, and if it wasn't what you wanted to do, that you've spotted it... That's often one of the biggest challenges, right? You're talented in so many things and other people want you to do all kinds of things. But you need to remember as you kind of did it yourself, rein yourself in and say, why am I doing this and what excites me about it, right. That's cool. That is cool. How do you balance? Maureen, you've got Crowdie Advisors, you have the, you know, your day job, and you have a family. How do you balance it all? How do you make it all work?

Maureen Murat:

I don't know, we could say that anything is balanced. I think that pre-pandemic, you know, I was just on the run all the time, which was fun, too, I, you know, I'll admit, it was fun. But I think the pandemic like forced people to slow all the way down. And at first I struggled because I was used to moving around and traveling and all that. But eventually, I think I, you know, started to really think about, okay, what was more important to me. And I think one



of the things that I, you know, really realized during that time was, even though I was still doing stuff online, you know, virtually, that I had to also set boundaries because I ended up doing more work I felt, like at home, because I was home, but I never left and did anything. And so it was taking over my time with family and friends, I guess, because I don't think it's balanced. I had to accept that there will be some weeks that it would be great, I'll be super productive and all that. And then, other weeks, I would just need to take my time and relax and it won't be as productive. Or at least I don't think it's as productive, even though, you know, in the moment, obviously, I'm still doing things. But I think we think that, you know, things should be closing, things should be moving, and all that all the time. And because of that, I think it helped me realize that it does... it's not going to be equal, like my career and my family are not going to get equal time all the time. Sometimes more time will go to work. And sometimes more time will go to, you know, my personal life. But I think, in the end, it eventually balances out because if you can still meet some of your goals, I think that's good. But I don't think it's a day-to-day type thing. It's more like a week-to-week or month-to-month situation.

Stacie Berdan:

That is great practical advice. And you mentioned the pandemic, globalization... kind of, I mean, a lot of people who didn't really see or weren't as thinking globally, realize that how interconnected we are... You're clearly a global thinker. What do you say to listeners or people that you meet maybe why preparing and to work in this global world matters?

Maureen Murat:

One is because I think, when you think of especially, you know, FinTech is really one of my... FinTech industry is my focus, when you think of FinTech, it is a global industry. There's no... I mean, when you're using the internet, and you're using these different technological tools, it has to be global, right? Like, there's no... it's not confined. So I think one thing that, you know, people who are entering into this workforce or thinking about like, what they should be aware of, I think one thing to really recognize is because it is global, that even if it's not apparent in the beginning, that, you know, where your place is or what your role is in the ecosystem, that there is a place for you, you just got to find it, you know. So, I am not a techie, if you will, I don't know how to code or anything like that. But I have taken the time to, like, go to different events, sign up for classes, etc., to understand the technology so that I can talk about it enough. So that I could provide the service that I am good at providing, right. So, like, if I understand what your product is, and I can help you figure out how to market it maybe, or how to write some of your executive summary about it, etc. So I think that that's one thing, to just be open, to be flexible, especially in the beginning. But you know, being focused on finding your place, but not being discouraged if you don't find it right away.

Stacie Berdan:

Because sometimes it takes a while. Sometimes you hear people and they're like, Oh, I did this in college and then I'm still doing this now. Because, you know, luck, what have you... and others, Yeah, it takes some time. It sounds like you've done a really good job of just kind of working through things, thinking about what you wanted, going through education, setting up your own... So that's great. You know, kudos! It sounds fabulous.

Maureen Murat:

It sounds easy, because... in two minutes....

Stacie Berdan:

Absolutely. Everything sounds easy when you describe it in two minutes. And also, it sounds really nice and easy and smooth when you're looking back and you're describing how. But it can be really messy. Yeah. Is there a piece of advice you'd like to go back and give your younger self?



Maureen Murat:

Well, yes, I'd give myself two pieces of advice. So the first piece of advice I would give myself is that you can change your mind, that even if this is something that you wanted today or you wanted for years, if you have another opportunity presents itself and you really want to pursue that – it's okay to do that. I do think I missed on opportunities, because I thought no, I've already invested too much time or energy into this, I should do it this way. So, one, I can change my mind. And then, two, I think the other thing that I would tell myself is 'you belong'. I think it was, um, it might have been Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who said something like, you know, women should be in every room where decisions are being made. So I would say to my younger self, you know, whatever room you find yourself in, you know, because you've been invited into that room, you belong there. So there's no reason to feel nervous, or I shouldn't say nervous, but no reason to feel inferior or feel like you don't belong. When clearly you do, because you wouldn't be in that room if you did.

Stacie Berdan:

Great. Great. Yeah. Be confident. Yes. As you said, you're invited. You're invited, so you belong in there. Yeah. Great. That is wonderful advice. Good. And I agree. You can change your mind. No, no reason to dwell on sunk costs, right. I mean, you can change your mind. It's an important thing. This has been a wonderful, wonderful conversation with you, Maureen. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you want to add?

Maureen Murat:

Um, it was great chatting with you, too, thank you. It also kind of brought me down memory lane, so I appreciate that. But I guess the last thing I would say, is that working internationally, sometimes people think, you know, you have to be jet setting and you have to go to all these different places... I didn't start... I think the way that I was connected to international projects, and all that was by meeting and connecting with people here, who then referred me, you know, for these different international projects. So I think if going international is a goal, you know, use the resources you have here at your fingertips, to kind of leverage for an opportunity overseas or internationally.

Stacie Berdan:

That's great advice. Yes, it does not have to be... you don't have to pick up and go somewhere. You actually... we all live within these global networks... and that's wonderful, wonderful advice. Maureen, thank you so much for your time today because I know you're a very busy woman. And it's been wonderful having this conversation with you. So thank you.

Maureen Murat:

Thank you. I appreciate it.

[Music]

Stacie Berdan:

You have been listening to the GW-CIBER Global Careers podcast. Join us again next time, and in the meantime – go global!