



MITROVICA INNOVATIONS



UNLOCKING

YOUTH

POTENTIAL

A **TOOLKIT** TO HELP YOU
PLAN YOUR **CAREER**



International
Business College
Mitrovica

From Theory To Practice



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IBCM is grateful to the generous sponsors of the 2016 Mitrovica Innovations: Unlocking Youth Potential conference.



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This Tool-Kit is your guide to your future. You have in your hands a set of tools which will help you to plan and build a successful career. It has been developed especially for young people from your region.

Read it carefully, and keep it forever!

If you're a young person in the Balkans, you probably know that your journey towards success might not be easy. Challenges include an education system which fails to build skills for the real world of work, a lack of real role models, limited access to career advice, and little support for entrepreneurship. Even when you eventually enter the working world; there are more obstacles: colleagues can be unreliable, fail to honour agreements or contracts, be unaccountable for their actions, or even corrupt.

So, when students and alumni at International Business College Mitrovica (IBCM) came up with the idea for the MITROVICA INNOVATIONS 2016 - UNLOCKING YOUTH POTENTIAL conference, they wanted to use the discussions held between young people, local professionals and regional experts to create a unique Tool-Kit tailored to this specific environment, to help their peers achieve their dreams.

There was no shortage of great advice on the day, and in fact, there were plenty of reasons to be hopeful. The message young people received at MITROVICA INNOVATIONS 2016 - UNLOCKING YOUTH POTENTIAL was overwhelmingly positive. There was talk of the dynamic and changing nature of today's labour market, and the opportunities that are waiting to be exploited in an underdeveloped economy. Professionals and experts reminded their young audience that each one of them is brimming with potential, just waiting to be realized. The headline advice was this: if you pursue clear goals and persevere when things get tough, there is no telling the kind of things you can achieve!





There was inspirational talk from young people, too: we heard from IBCM Alumni who are already pursuing exciting and interesting careers; students who shared stories about what they have learned while volunteering or taking part in youth initiatives; and young business people who have experienced first-hand what it takes to make it. And, as proof of the ability of young people to make a difference, the conference itself was of course driven and coordinated by students and alumni of IBCM.

Unlocking Youth Potential: A Tool-Kit collects the wisdom shared at the **MITRO-VICA INNOVATIONS 2016 - UNLOCKING YOUTH POTENTIAL** conference in the form of a handy guide you can keep forever. If you were at the event, you might even see your idea, story or quote contained within these pages! The Tool-Kit is authentic and unique, and everything on its pages is 100% relevant to young people in this region.

We hope that you will use it to inspire, motivate and assist you in your journey towards unlocking your potential!

SET GOALS

Goal setting is a powerful tool for driving towards your ideal future and unlocking your potential. By knowing precisely what you want to achieve, you know where you have to concentrate your efforts. The difficult part is setting goals that balance both being challenging and attainable. If you can get them right, you will have a powerful tool for achieving the life you desire. How do you do it?

- **Be self-aware:** Being self-aware means being aware of who you are, the way you behave, and the impact your behavior has on others. You don't have to try to be someone you are not! People who are self-aware are bold enough to believe in change, and yet humble enough to see where they need to improve.
- **Decide on your "driver":** Some people value challenging work more than money; some people prioritize working independently over working in a team. Figure out what motivates you!
- **Be realistic about what you can achieve:** Be aware of what you can and cannot do – and be honest with yourself about how much work you will need to do to achieve your goals, and the constraints or barriers of your environment.
- **Set small goals on your way to the big:** This will help you track your progress and give you a sense of achievement to keep focused and motivated in the long term!
- **Don't waste your time:** Life is too short to spend all day on social media! "Everything is possible if we have the will to do it"

"You can't follow a dream if you don't have one!"

TOP TIP: Write it down! Getting your long-term career goals on paper can help you turn them into reality! Then make a list of short-term goals that will help you reach those long-term ones, and check back on your lists regularly.



CONSIDER YOUR EDUCATION

It sounds obvious, but making the right choices when it comes to education really does impact the rest of your life. In a system where it can often feel like schools and universities are focusing on the wrong things, search for opportunities and institutions which will maximize your potential, according to your own personal goals.

Why does it matter?

“School is like a lighthouse: a form of orientation”

- Life-long habits: You are a student for life: education equips you with the tools to keep on learning throughout your career.
- Knowledge is power: Those who know how to utilize it today are the ones who become leaders and decision-makers tomorrow.

“The three main transferable skills I got from my degree were research skills; how to make a presentation; and how to write a report. These are things I do all the time now, in my own business”.

Where to study? Having practical experience can give you the edge in the regional job market. Choosing an educational establishment which values practical experience can be a great step forward. The International Business College Mitrovica learning model – why is it different?



The International Business College Mitrovica learning model - why is it different?

1. Focus on business and management
2. Less describing, more doing: real work experience through compulsory internships
3. Emphasis on gaining analytical and problem solving skills
4. International level qualifications relevant to local context
5. Encourages innovation and independent thinking
6. Opportunity to gain real connections for future career

DEVELOP YOUR SKILLS

Your skills are areas of expertise that tell people what you can do. Employers want to know your skills so that they see how you can help their business. Be familiar with the skills and talents that you have – and remember that “soft skills”, such as being very organized or good with people can be just as useful as “hard skills” like IT or a second language.

What kind of skills are employers interested in?

- Languages, especially English!
- IT and Microsoft Office
- Creative skills – photography, design, writing
- Numbers skills – finance, accounts
- Leadership
- People skills



But all skills are useful somewhere!

TOP TIP: Do a “Skills Audit” of yourself - write down a list of everything you are good at - ask friends and family for their thoughts, too! Which skills can you sell to employers? Compare it with your list of goals and think about where you might need to work on.



How can you build your skill-set?

- Undertake internships with organizations (See page 8)
- Attend local trainings. Many NGOs, embassies, and other local institutions often hold trainings and workshops.
- Join courses! Language courses, IT courses, driving courses - let your hobbies and interests drive your profession.
- Actively participate in clubs and societies. Leadership roles within these groups can be particularly beneficial experiences.

“While I was student at IBCM I took advantage of all the trainings and workshops offered by SPARK and other NGOs. The skills I developed helped me to impress employers and pursue the career I wanted”

“I speak three languages fluently, and this skill set means that I am always able to get work as a translator. Having skills which not many people have gives you an edge.”

GET PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

The world of work is different to school or college. There are different expectations, and ways of communicating. Do you know how organizational hierarchies work? Or how to send a business email? Practical work experience is the best way to get this kind of knowledge, and is often crucial for impressing employers.

What kind of experience is useful?

- Any! Get a job, volunteer, do an internship, take part in events, be active in clubs and societies. This shows you take initiative!
- In small businesses you can work across the board and influence decisions, while big organizations you can see how big, efficient systems operate. Try both!



What do I get out of it?

- Develop your existing skills and gain new ones
- Make good connections (build your network! See Page 11)
- You won't necessarily find your motivation in textbooks – the real world can be much more inspiring!
- It's useful for aspiring entrepreneurs too, as you decide what you want your business to look like.

Where do you find these opportunities?

- Be informed. Watch out for postings on your university or community websites or notice boards.
- Don't be discouraged by unpaid internships - the experience gained will be well worth it.
- Send speculative CVs and Covering letters to organizations you are interested in! Sometimes they work!

"I initially started working at ProCredit as an intern in my 4th Semester at IBCM , and I liked the working approach, environment and vision. After completing my internship, I enrolled on a 6 month training programme entirely in the English language, and am now in full time employment at the bank".

BE PROFESSIONAL

You might know that it's important to be professional if you want to have a successful career, but what does that actually mean? After all, professionalism is rarely taught; you're supposed to pick it up on your own along the way, through observation and practice. Here are some tips for aspiring professionals!

Be reliable: Attitude is important. It's hard to find reliable people. Show up on time, show up regularly, and follow through on your promises. It's also important to let people know if you can't do something – it's far more professional to be honest than to try to cover up! "If you say you are going to call a client at 8am, call him at 8am"

Be responsible: Be helpful, do more than just what is in your job description, and don't rely on others to do everything, or blame others when things go wrong. If you make a mistake or something doesn't go well, accept responsibility – people will be far happier to praise you when you succeed!

Be engaged: Focus on building long term relationships and keeping customers happy. This is crucial to business success but often not a priority for young people and businesses. .

Be pragmatic: Be pleasant and polite to people, even if you don't like them. Realize that getting feedback on your work is good for your development. Be flexible. Yes, your workday might formally end at 5 p.m., but if staying late will ensure the job gets done, then do it!

Start early: Think of everything you do now as preparation for the future. This includes interactions with your teachers, your boss at your part time waitressing job, your community leaders, even your friends and acquaintances, all who might be future colleagues or partners!

TOP TIP: Do you know anyone who is always professional, and commands the respect of everyone they work with? Watch them carefully. Think about how they conduct themselves and how they respond to certain situations



INNOVATE

Innovation is doing something new, or making changes to something already established. In under-developed markets, there are plenty of chances to be the person who does something differently – you just have to be brave enough to seize the opportunity!

Look for problems that need fixing: Consider the world around you. What works? What doesn't work? Do you ever think: "if only someone did that!" or "someone needs to fix this!"? That someone could be you!

"Agriculture is a really under-valued segment of the local economy. There are loads of opportunities to innovate, and ultimately to be successful and make money, but it often isn't recognized. I want to be the person who take this chance!"

Break the rules! Businesses won't grow doing the same thing, and neither will you. Of course, you need to know the rules pretty well before you break them, but once you do, pushing boundaries and doing the unexpected can be exciting and lead to very interesting places!

"You have no chance to change the game if you don't know the rules"

Act quickly and decisively: It's no good just having ideas – you have to be willing to act on them. Sometimes the simplest solutions can have the greatest impact!

"I saw a gap in the market, and I decided that I was going to be the one to fill it"

"New technology offers countless new possibilities – the challenge is doing it before someone else does"



BUILD NETWORKS

“Networking” can often seem like abstract business jargon, but really, it’s quite simple. Networks are simply about meaningful connections with people who can advise, co-operate and support you in your business or career.

Networks help you to fill in the gaps: You alone might not have all the skills you need to do be successful – but others do! *“I set up an agricultural business. Agriculture was my area of expertise. However, I did not have the business knowledge or the marketing knowledge that I needed to make sure that my business survives. I needed a network of people who could provide these skills”.*

Understand your landscape: Networks can help you get a better understanding of the working world while still in education, and help you to stay ahead of the crowd when you do get started. *“Networking is highly important, everything is connected. In business you have to follow the trends; to know what other businesses are doing”*

Where can you meet people who can become part of your network?

- University
- Internships
- Jobs
- Trainings
- Volunteering

But - you can make great connections anywhere! You should always be on the lookout for interesting people to connect with (which is why acting professionally is important - see page 9!).



“Youngsters need to create strong networks so that they can overcome the pitfalls they will face regarding lack of resources, either in terms of finance or skills”

Networks not nepotism: Remember though – connections are NOT everything! Businesses are increasingly looking for quality people who can prove their skills, not just people who arrived through the back door.

TAKE RISKS

You might find that you need to decide to do something different or difficult in order to meet your goals. Taking risks can be scary, as there is always something at stake – but there is even more to gain! The benefits of taking positive, calculated risks will enrich your life and make your business or career much more rewarding.

“Sometimes you have to risk everything”

Of course, there are big risks, like investing money and time, or moving to a new place, but there are also smaller risks that we have to take in the course of our careers.

Sticking to your values: There are times when colleagues, or circumstances will put your principles to the test. It might seem riskier to stick to what you believe, but in the long-run, people will respect you more.

Challenging norms: Don't accept the status quo! If you think that things should be done differently, fight for it!

Working outside of our comfort zone: It's easy to do what you know – but you won't develop or grow doing the same thing over and over. Take on challenges, do things that seem beyond your capacity.

Do something that you don't feel qualified to do: remember that you are young and have a different skills and perspectives which are valuable!

Have confidence in your own unique contributions: Employers that are not smart enough to see the value you can add to their business are probably not worth it!

“In the early days of my career, I was asked to give a presentation to people way more qualified than me. I was really nervous, but then a colleague reminded me that my youth meant that I had a fresh and different perspective to offer, and this helped me to believe that I was worth listening to.”

PERSEVERE

“Don’t give up!” This is the message from the experts that we heard time and time again. Everyone faces challenges or difficulties – it’s unavoidable. But whether you are just starting out, well in to your career, or trying to build something on your own, being able to get up when you fall down is essential for success.

There are two ways: the hard way and the very hard way: Don’t expect it to be easy. Being realistic about the fact that you will face obstacles and setbacks will help you to deal with them as they arrive.

You might need to knock on 100 doors in order to open one or two: Don’t be disheartened by rejection – there will be an organization which is willing to open its door to you. (But, if you knock on 200 doors, it might be wise to change your strategy!)

You have to make mistakes in order to learn: The difficult times are the times often when you can learn the most. “I had to fall many times in the process of setting up my company, but I didn’t give up because I have passion and commitment, and in the end, those experiences helped me to create a better business”

Pursue your goal until you succeed: To keep going in the face of adversity or knockbacks is often what defines a successful person. “In the beginning, of course it was hard, but the only talent that I have is that I don’t give up”

“The most significant challenge I experienced when establishing my business was obtaining financial support, as many institutions did not take me seriously. I overcame this obstacle by being persistent in persuading and proving to financial agencies that the idea is sustainable and solves a significant problem for youngsters”



OPPORTUNITY AWAITS!

Although many young people dream about making it big abroad, there are strong arguments for staying at home and using your skills and talents to help build the local economy. The energy needed to adapt to a new country is enormous, and it's not always easy to find a job where you can contribute meaningfully to that society. Just think - if you invest that energy into your own society, you can bring success not only for you, but for your family, community and beyond!

- **Underdevelopment means opportunity:** For those who are committed to finding it, the current market in the Balkans is bursting with opportunities for entrepreneurs to bring and deliver new goods and services.
- **Stand out:** the marketplace in the Balkans is sales-oriented. There is a huge gap for an increased focus on the customer. Those who commit to the principles of a customer-service oriented approach stand a chance of standing out.
- **Think outside the box:** Opportunities are often not in the most obvious places. Agriculture and food processing have huge potential for growth in the region but the market is under-exploited. Those who are brave enough to explore those options might be able to reap real rewards!
- **Solve problems:** Look for problems that need fixing, services that would make your life easier, products that are missing from the shelves, ways that technology could speed things up. These are your chances to make an impact.
- **Proactively search:** There are plenty of job, internship and training opportunities at home, but if you want to find them, you will need to proactively search for them.

And finally: **Believe in the possibility for success!** As a young person in the Balkans region, you have a great responsibility - it is you who decides what the world your children will grow up in looks like. Believe in a better future. You have to.

About Mitrovica Innovations 2016 – Unlocking Youth Potential: MI2016 was an interactive conference which aimed to inspire young people to think critically about their careers and prepare for their future.

The event brought young people together with regional and international experts, stakeholders and partners from diverse areas, including the private and public sectors, academia and education, to provide a platform for innovative thinking. Young people had a chance to question, learn, and explore opportunities with both their peers and superiors. The conference aimed to inspire and encourage local and regional networking and future-oriented career development.

About IBCM: The International Business College Mitrovica, or IBCM, is an internationally registered not-for-profit foundation operated under the auspices of the organization 'SPARK'. IBCM is financed by the governments of Sweden, Denmark, The Netherlands, Switzerland, the European Union and the United Kingdom. As a result of our strong connections in Europe, IBCM's programmes are designed to prepare you for whatever future career you envision for yourself – either locally or internationally.

We offer internationally accredited 3.5 year Bachelor degrees and 2 year Academy Profession (AP) degrees in:

- International Sales and Marketing and Marketing and Management
- Public Service Management and Public Administration
- Environmental and Agricultural Management

<http://ibcmitrovica.eu/>

About Mitrovica Innovations: Mitrovica Innovations is a conference series hosted by International Business College Mitrovica. Previous conferences hosted have included:

- Mitrovica Innovations 2014 - Agribusiness Opportunities Unlimited?
- Mitrovica Innovations 2015 - Skills, Skills, Skills!
- Mitrovica Innovations Scientific International Conference 2015: The Role of Business in Sustainable Development in the Western Balkans

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