

Kathryn: Welcome to episode 48 of Compass, I'm your host Kathryn Hunter. Do you have a nontraditional skill set that gives you a different perspective on your field? Today, Zsófia Bányai and I talk about that and more when we discuss becoming an operations manager. Are you ready to become location independent but aren't sure what you can do? Schedule an hour long discovery call with me, where in addition to figuring out what your location independent career will be, we also work out a plan to get you there and give you accountability along the way. Visit compasspod.com/discovery-call to book. You're listening to Compass, where we talk with location independent womxn about their work and the paths that got them there. We get into their stories of struggle and success, finding clients, figuring out what to charge, and of course, we talk money. Join us and take the next step in finding your direction. Zsófia, welcome to the show.

Zsófia: Hi Kathryn. I am delighted to be here today, with you.

Kathryn: I like to start with your early life and see where that influences you later on. What did you want to be when you were five?

Zsófia: A historian, definitely a historian since the very beginning. My earliest memories are my grandmother telling me stories about history, you know queens and kings and princes and princesses. Sort of but half true-half bedtime stories and I was always obsessed with history.

Kathryn: How had that changed by the time you left high school?

Zsófia: That funnily, it didn't. I went to high school and then I went to university and I studied history. So I have a bachelor's in history.

Kathryn: Is there anything from those studies that you use now?

Zsófia: I think yes. So, funny enough, in university, I was studying history and I was still obsessed with the idea to become a historian, a researcher, maybe write a book. I was very keen to learn as much as possible about the 19th century. That was my main area I was concentrating and I did really want to have a career in the university. And the moment it changed was when I learned that another university student received a scholarship so she could basically get my dream job, to work in the university as a historian. And I was very eager that, "Oh great, I'm going to be the next." And I just learned from, from gossips that her salary was coming from other teachers, a part of the salary because they said that they wanted to hire her. There was no budget for that, so other teachers offered part of their salary to that girl.

Zsófia: And I was like, okay, well that's definitely not gonna happen like in the next 10 years. So this job is, is closed. And apparently nobody wants to pay for the things I want to do. So then I decided to switch to finance. I went to another university and I studied finance and I was so different from the guys studying with me there. So the whole mindset, the whole idea about where whole day of just, you know, touching the problem was so much different that I realized that the fact that I was studying history, that I was trained to solve historical problems, trying to solve research cases, trained to touch resources

with questions in another way, they were trained, apparently different. I cannot really put my finger on how, but it's still obvious in my work that I think about problems in a very, very different way than my coworkers or my clients do.

Kathryn: How did you get into being location independent?

Zsófia: I wanted to become location independent. I really wanted to travel more or just you know, have the chance to maybe stay at home when I want to stay at home so I rather didn't want to go to another institution every day over and over again. It was just became too much, all the education or the school or always being closed in an office. Never see the sun and she's of course not entirely true, but that was my feeling that I am so down most of the time because, because I can't be out that I really wanted to pursue this dream to be location independent. My first idea was to start my own business in taxation because that's where I had five years of experience. I was a VAT expert, so I started to have some clients, sometime little clients of pay to be that could work for them. It was a bit time consuming, was still getting better, but I felt that I don't really have the experience to work with small companies.

Zsófia: I was only working with in the corporate world and my, all my office jobs was in the corporate world. So I realized that I have to gain some experience with smaller companies. And I started to send my CV to firms who are dealing with taxation, dealing with VAT but offering their services to small companies. You know, I wanted to learn and surprisingly I get a call from one of them and I saw during the phone interview that why not try. I asked them that if I can work for them remotely. And they didn't say no, they didn't say yes either. They said that I should move to the Netherlands and work with them half year and let's see how it turns out and then we can talk about that. So I told my husband that, well I think I should move to the Netherlands.

Zsófia: And he was completely okay with that. So he said that, okay, well if this is what you want then just go and try and a crazy period started in my life, I went to this company and I really, really enjoyed working with them. I learned a lot and luckily both of us were really happy to work together, but my job ended to be entirely different. So when you say that I am an operational manager now that's, that's true. And it turned out to be like that because this company had so much work to do, so much clients, so much demand that somebody needed for them to work on their operations, on their processes. I have great colleagues at that company who are also very keen to fix and to create processes. So we started to work together to to make our work our life easier with all the processes.

Zsófia: And that's how it turned out that that I became an operational manager. So I stopped entirely stopped working in taxation and VAT. I only concentrate on operations and processes and I went to my manager saying, you came that. Okay, so half year is over and I would want to work remotely. So if you are still happy with me then let's do it remotely. And luckily he was okay with that and it's so far seem successful and also makes complete sense to have a step back from the middle of the office. So people are still working in the same positions when I left. But I can have this other viewpoints not being every time in the office looking at the processes in a more bird's eye view, let's

say. And I can spot the situations, the issues in the process, the gaps, the glitches, what needs to be fixed and and look around the whole picture may in a different viewpoint.

Zsófia: It's not just because I have a different educational background with all this history, history studies, but also because, yeah, well I am, I am not in that position sitting in the same desk every day. I, I guess, think about processes in a more creative way. I had the chance to reflect on what's happening. I don't have to always be on call with the clients and the, and concentrating on the day to day activities. This one step back really helps me to cover the role where I ended up. So basically my employer became my first and biggest client in that way. So now I am a freelancer for them doing this job on the freelancing basis.

Kathryn: How do you describe your job to people who are just being polite when they ask?

Zsófia: I say operational manager and I start to talk about operations. I talk to them about see the big picture in a company. So you cannot lead a company if you lose yourself in details. And I try to tell them that my role is to overlook the processes and the coordinate them. Yeah, coordination is usually a good word to describe what I am doing and also to coordinate the communication between the different areas of the company and usually then if they are asking just for polite reasons and they don't want to go that deep. So it's usually yes, coordination is enough for them to explain what I am doing.

Kathryn: And when you're talking to somebody who really wants to know the details?

Zsófia: Then I can share my passion with them about outsourcing and automation and I can tell them that I strongly believe that outsourcing is not anymore just the right of big corporations. Indeed, if you have a VAT funded business, even in your on your own, you don't have to suffer from a horrible workload. If you see clearly what are your objectives, what do your clients want, then you can really set up processes in a way that you don't have to be always there. You can enjoy what you create as a business owner in a way that you, you have the process set up and it, it can go on its own. You don't have to be always on emergency call. You don't have to always firefight, but you really have the chance to just look happily what you have created. And outsourcing is part of the key for this. But before you start to work with freelancers, before you hire somebody, before you involve anyone to help you, it's key to have a clear picture about what, what needs to be done. Because this is how can you give away tasks. This is how you can be sure that the other guys also in line with what you want them to do.

Zsófia: And in that way you can also give them the room to be creative, to improve together the business you are engaged in. So I really believe in visualization. I always try, I always maybe I just start with some post-its or little scratches. But in the end I try to put it in a nice file where, where my clients can see that what are things they are working on. And sometimes it's really surprising. So sometimes if you put something in a flow chat, then you can really get surprised at, "Oh wow, here is the gap." And then it becomes clear if you don't do that, if you just you know, have a lot of workload and and try to get somebody who just promptly helps you, then you will just get a bigger and bigger gap because the other person will not know either what you don't know yet either.

Zsófia: So the gap will be bigger and bigger and the, you can lose reputation, you can lose clients, you can lose money on these sorts of gaps. So this is vitally important to visualize what, what you are actually doing. And sometimes it's just a photo of the moment and then we can start to talk about how to improve it. Maybe, maybe you don't even have to hire somebody. Maybe a little trick of automation can help. You maybe a little trick of outsourcing can, can already save you huge amount of time and you can get into the breeze and the lead your company with more success with this help. So I really think that those people who start to run their own business, even if it is really small, they do deserve the opportunity to look at this business, in a way, the big corporations look on their business.

Kathryn: You talked a little bit about how you found your first client. How have you found clients since then?

Zsófia: Actually I use only my contacts so my business is not too big yet. I am still working mostly with this one big client and the little opportunities come from basically friends. So I wouldn't say I even use any marketing. I started to just talk to people about I am doing and they became interested. These small projects do come from, from just, you know, talking around what I'm doing and being passionate about what I am doing and a little business does do need, do need this kind of help. So currently I believe in expanding my business, good feedbacks from those who to whom I do have now.

Kathryn: Tell us about your first major struggle.

Zsófia: Changing my career. That was a major struggle. So when I had to switch from history to finance and, and you know, just leave my dream behind. That, that was hard. I still do have the dream that at certain point that I would go back to study history a bit more. But but yeah, well, I was, I was still young, but I realized that I don't want to struggle for, for earning my living in all my life. So I had to make some clever decision about what else to study and then I had to sit down to study all the accounting and everything from the very beginning that was really harsh because it was just so different. But first of all, I realized that I can learn literally anything. While it was no, almost 10 years ago when I did this switch. So maybe I became a bit older and a little bit harder, but I still have the confidence that if I need to learn something, I will get the resources and that I will, I will get the enthusiasm to start to learn and, and pick up what I wants to learn. So I still feel the energy in me that maybe if I have to learn something completely new from scratch, then I can do that. But it's not easy. So I went through the steps of, Oh why did I started this? I wanted to give it up. So there were very, very low moments in the process. But the fact that I finally made it and had a degree in finance, this is something I always tell myself that okay, well you can do other things as well.

Kathryn: And how about your first major success?

Zsófia: The first major success for me is, I have to say it now is the fact that I could, I could switch to a remote position because I, I really wanted it. I really needed it. Not just career wise but rather personal wise. Otherwise it was just too hard for me to do manage a life without, with the limited amount of holidays with the fact that I can't go

at a time where I want to go. I was not okay with this lifestyle and the re, the fact that I achieved to work remotely is my biggest success.

Kathryn: If you could go back and give your younger self just starting this business, what would you say?

Zsófia: If I had to give an advice to my younger self, so maybe the person who just started her first job in a corporate field, then I would still say myself that be patient and give yourself the time to learn and actually figure out what you want because the, I do remember that back that time I was not sure what I want. I really needed to go through a moments when I, I was not happy with my life. I had to contemplate on the fact that I'm not happy with my life and in the end of this journey I could realize what is the thing I do want and from the moment I pictured the future I want to achieve. It was so much easier, but I definitely needed the time to go through and digest all the feelings and all the, all the emotions about my life.

Kathryn: Odds are there's no such thing as a typical day for you. Do you want to give us what a random day looks like?

Zsófia: Actually, I do have a typical day because we have a dog and dog makes it a little bit more organized, I think. So, usually we wake up around eightish in the morning and dress up and I usually just prepare a mug of coffee and we go for a walk with the coffee and sometimes it's next to a sea. Sometimes it's more a mountain area, but you always try to work somewhere which is pleasing and nice. So we have this little morning walk together, then we go back to the house. Usually I've worked from home so I rarely go to a coworking space or a coffee. I prefer to be cozy at home, while I am working. So then I, I do work in a standard time. It's works better for me to have this structure. And after then I am done with the work we again, go with the, go out with the dog for a walk and then the afternoon starts.

Zsófia: So I finish usually quite early and we still have time to do a little trip or a little sightseeing, not too much. So I don't do intense sight seeing anymore. But I do like to enjoy the area of where I am and sometimes I even do it when I am at home with my parents. So I come home to my little village where I used to live and I still come off with an idea that what I would like to look in the nearby area, so become a tourist in my own homeland. That's, that's also fun for me, but usually it's very easy and then in the evening we try to cook something, have maybe a nice dinner and weekends are also about about either chill or or go and do some sightseeing, see some culture, dig into the history of the area where we are. That's also important to me and I also try to find little time to learn something. Currently I'm trying to learn Italian.

Kathryn: Do you keep up with any kind of continuing education, formal or informal?

Zsófia: Currently not with formal. I really dream of going back studying history in a formal way, maybe either have a chance for it. I dunno, it's just a dream. But in terms of informal study, I try to concentrate more on the things what I am doing. So I try to listen to

podcasts about operations and processes. I try to find good courses. There are some out there. So I try to learn as much about, about my passion as I can what others to say. .

Kathryn: So now it's time to get into the numbers. What would you say your income range is and how long have you been doing the work?

Zsófia: On a monthly basis, I earn less than €2000, so I don't reach the €2000 on the monthly basis but it's somewhere around. And for me, it's, it's sort of fine because I've worked in a much better conditions than I used to work when I was in an office job in Hungary, but the amount I earn it's more or less the same. I think it's more exciting to share the fact that when I did have my corporate job, I was working in Hungary, then I went to the Netherlands and obviously the salary, as a normal office worker in the Netherlands is much higher than in Hungary. And when I did the deal about working remotely, then I started to earn a little bit less than my salary, which I had in the Netherlands, but I still ended up getting the money a little bit more than I, I used to get in my corporate office job in Hungary. So basically the salary I am in the salary range right now is pretty much the same amount of salary I left here in Hungary when I left my corporate office job.

Kathryn: What would you see the top income possibility being?

Zsófia: I think once I make my business a little bit more developed in terms of clients, maybe have also colleagues to work together, I can imagine to double this in the long run. I can absolutely imagine, especially if you find the right clients.

Kathryn: And how do you decide your pricing structure?

Zsófia: So something I learned from my previous job experience is that it's, sometimes it's pretty random. So how you feel, what is the price you do feel comfortable about it and then it will be a good price. With my first client, with my first big client, it was much easier because we started the calculation from, from salary he used to pay to me, so it was, you know, just that was the basis of the calculation and then we reduced it and calculated all the other factors to verse it for both of us. For other clients, I try to pick up some nice numbers which look good, but I really don't have a sort of pricing strategy so I know that how much my hourly rate, of course I calculated it based on my previous salaries that how much do I want to earn. I calculated it in on the basis that if I only work six hours a day, preferably only four days a week, I like to still earn a salary. Yeah, I use the word salary. So this is the money I want to give myself and I establish my pricing strategy based on this. So I know how many hours I want to work in a week or in a month and I do know how much I want to pay for myself. So this is basically a very easy calculation to come off with then. What is my, what is my rate for a job? So I find out that this job will take two hours then then I can calculate feed my hourly rate with these two hours. If it's a little bit more complicated, so I don't really know how much will be the actual work. Then I try to assess how much time will I spend onto the project or on the task and the, I really try to come off with a final number which looks good, which sounds funny, but I think you have to think with the head of your clients. So, what you wanted to see as a client that, that seems to be a good price.

Kathryn: Do you work the same number of hours per month where you're your main client?

Zsófia: For my main client, yes. And for the other clients it varies, so if I managed to get a bigger project, then of course I am willing to put more effort into it, into it and work much more. But I can be easy if, if there is nothing big coming up. But no, I really want to dig into opportunities to have a little bit more work.

Kathryn: Is there anything you do to keep your income stable?

Zsófia: Keeping my clients happy.

Kathryn: Are there any tools or software you would recommend beginners start with?

Zsófia: I would recommend to really look into project management tools. So operational management is really close to project management and there are hundreds of tools out there. They have a free, different constructions different way of working with them, different amount of effort to learn them. And my suggestion is that pick up the one you do enjoy to work with. I think that's very important. So even if you have to put a little bit more effort to learn this tool or maybe you have to put a little bit more money to have the software, but you still enjoy to be around this project management software then you will feel happy with is and then your client will feel happy with it.

Kathryn: What's your number one tip for women looking to get into operational management?

Zsófia: Allow, yourself to have a different view. So be confident that the ideas you have, the ideas you form, will help people and like me coming from a completely different area, which was not even business. So I didn't have anything close to business. Until my mid-twenties, I still do have a viewpoint which, which is really, really value added and I could prove it that it's really value added for, for companies. So allow yourself to be different, but it's not just for operational managers. I think it's a good advice for, for every human out there, just to allow yourself to be different.

Kathryn: What are your next steps?

Zsófia: I have to invest more in, in the marketing of my business. So this, this idea to live on reviews and live on clients who tell each other that I am good. That's, that's good. That, that's fine. And it ends up with little projects, but I definitely have to invest more about having maybe less number of clients, but but the ones I can work with in a longer term and have a little bit more stable income from them.

Kathryn: Where can listeners find you?

Zsófia: In LinkedIn, I think that's the easiest.

Kathryn: Zsófia, thank you so much for joining us. This has been great.

Zsófia: Thank you, Kathryn. Thank you for the opportunity.

Kathryn:

If you want your own location independent life and are eager to take that next step, join us in compass insiders where every week I send you actionable tips, inspiration, and motivation so you can take that next step towards going remote. Join us now at compasspod.com/insiders Did you enjoy this episode of Compass? If so, please take a moment to write a review. Leaving a review helps other women find us so they can find their direction too. Thank you for listening to Compass. You can find today's show notes at compasspod.com/048, that's compasspod.com/048. Join us next week when we talk with Kate Birtch, property insurer.