

1. Thanks for doing this interview. Who is Christina in a couple of sentences?

I'm an ex-Account Executive who specialized in consumer goods and retail. I thrive in high growth environments and grew my last sales team from 5 to 75 sales reps while building distribution channels from the ground up in both the USA and Canada. I'm passionate about people and leadership - specifically surrounding creating opportunities for female leaders. I love to ski, and pre-pandemic I used to spend so much time on an airplane for work that I met my husband on one - flying from San Francisco to Vancouver!

2. Tell us a bit about your career before IE. What skills do you consider are needed to succeed in your field? Have you encountered any challenges as a woman in that industry?

Prior to my MBA I was the Director of Sales at a mineralized water filtration company called Santevia. When I joined Santevia, it was a start-up, which provided both opportunities and challenges early on in my career. The opportunities were growth-related: I was recognized as a skilled employee and asked to advance quickly as the company grew. This allowed me to gain exposure to leadership roles and experiences early in my career that I likely wouldn't have had access to in a more established environment. The challenges were typical of a start-up: there wasn't a lot of structure. Thus, a key skill I developed was the ability to create structure and clarity in quickly changing environments. Additionally, as I grew my team, my success in my role became less a function of my own personal output and more a function of my ability to motivate and guide a team. This was a learning curve, but one that I loved and excelled at as I was able to combine my people and analytical skills to create sales strategy and deliver results. The challenges I faced as a female were subtle but ever-present. I'm thankful that, for the most part, the work culture that I was exposed to had progressed past the point of overt sexism, but the deeper rooted biases still remained. I was always a minority at conferences and in airport lounges. I learned to quickly develop connection with people as a necessity to overcome the credibility gap I was shouldered with due to being a young female salesperson tasked with negotiating with primarily older, male decision-makers. I have brought men with me to buyer meetings and coached them specifically on what to say as opposed to delivering the message myself knowing it would increase my chances of closing a deal with certain profiles of decision-makers. It's not fair, but it's reality and I believe overcoming these challenges have made me better and stronger.

3. What led you to want to get an MBA? What are your career goals post-MBA?

I had been looking in to an MBA for about 5 years prior to actually doing it. A MBA recruiter turned friend of mine advised me early on to wait for a "wall I couldn't get over on my own" in my career and to use the MBA to climb that wall. I hit that point sitting at the boardroom table with Santevia's leadership team in late 2019. We had built a strong team and my exposure to them made me see clear gaps in my business knowledge - I had deep sales expertise, but lacked a breadth of finance and operations knowledge to be strategic at the company level. I'd never had formal business training prior to my MBA (science undergrad) and knew that I had hit my "wall" that my friend had told me about. Thus, I took the plunge and pursued my MBA with the goal of developing my business strategy skills.

My primary post-MBA career goals are to move into a strategy consulting role. Given my initial goal of improving my strategy skills in the MBA, I now want to integrate what I've learned in the real world. I'm also particularly excited to gain exposure to industries outside of consumer goods and retail, and given that every business has a sales function, I'm looking forward to adding value in revenue generation strategy.

4. You have been in the International MBA for some months now. What student clubs and activities are you involved in? In what ways has the program changed your life so far? How do you feel it is preparing you for your next career move?

I am the Vice President of IE's Consulting Club in addition to my role as an IE Ambassador, specifically in the Women4Women program (which aims to break down barriers for women wanting to join MBA programs at IE). The IMBA has been life-changing for 2 key reasons. First, I accomplished my academic goals of building the business knowledge I feel I need to get to the next level. I have enjoyed the way I've learned to think differently and better understand all business functions. The professors at IE are truly incredible and I feel blessed to have been able to learn from them. Second, I've gained valuable people skills with individuals from a high variety of cultures. A big reason I chose IE was based on the diversity of its class, but I don't think I truly understood the value of that until I was living it. I now have a level of understanding of almost every major culture in the world that I couldn't have dreamed of prior to the MBA. I'm confident this will make me a more effective leader in the future. Additionally, the hard skills are table stakes for senior positions in business, but I believe the soft skills are more rare and increasingly valued by companies. IE does an incredible job of developing these skills both formally (we have an extensive leadership development program as a part of our curriculum) as well as informally through the diversity and culture at IE.

5. What advice do you have for other Women considering an MBA program right now?

Be clear about what your end goals are. I did a lot of soul searching prior to choosing my MBA program. What did I hope to achieve professionally? Personally? What did I see myself being able to become world-class at? In what kind of learning environment do I excel in? Where were my key areas of improvement? I believe to be able to look outward at a program, you have to look inward first. Getting clear on your "why" before your "what" and "how" greatly improves your chances of finding the right fit in a school and ultimately accomplishing your goals.

6. How did you hear about the IE Forté MBA Fellowship and why did you decide to apply?

I heard about the IE Forté MBA Fellowship on IE's scholarship information page. IE has an incredible selection of awards and grants that you can apply for to lessen the burden of the tuition. As I was reading through the description of the Forté MBA Fellowship, it seemed like a perfect fit and so I applied! Thank you to the Forté team for granting me this opportunity.

7. Why is community building important to you, and how can you help inspire other women to make an impact as Community Builders?

I believe it is the responsibility of a good leader to “enter the danger” first and make others feel more comfortable to follow. To me, this is what community building is. I get so much joy in connecting with other bright women and helping answer their questions and dispel any anxieties they might have. This was done for me by others and now I feel it is my turn to give back. In regards to how to inspire others, I believe the most impactful thing I can do is lead by example. In my experience you get by giving, so if I am an inspiration to inspirational women at IE, I know they will continue that legacy.

8. What is your favorite memory from your time at IE so far?

Tough question, there are so many! I think it has to be the opportunity to be able to interview Karen Khalaf, Associate Partner at Bain Middle East. I’d organized an event in conjunction with IE’s Women in Business club and had the opportunity to have a frank discussion with Karen about female leadership in consulting in the Middle East. She was very candid with me and we were able to discuss not just the challenges but also the incredible support and opportunities she received during her career. The feedback I received from attendees was that they were moved by her stories and that we were able to dispel some myths about the female leader's experience in the Middle East. It was eye-opening for me as well. Going in, I did have preconceived notions about the female experience in these countries and it was enlightening and inspiring to see the changes being actively made.