



Interview with Mari Nilsson

Location: Stockholm, Sweden

Joined ERA: 2017

Background: Energy Sector, Hotels & Restaurants

Expertise: Data Management, Statistics & Economics

As Expense Reduction Analysts continues to grow in Sweden, several new partners have recently entered the network. Among them is Mari Nilsson, 36, who started in September 2017 and, after her first few months inside the network as an ERA Analyst, she hasn't looked back;

"I have worked as a consultant for many years, but here I find something that I have always missed. Consulting often means that you lack the opportunity to follow up on the work that you have done. But with ERA I can remain with my client for 2 years - following up and ensuring that we deliver on our promises. You also get to create and develop relationships with the client - it's great fun! Very few consultants get to work in this way..."

Mari's career began in the hotel and restaurant industry in Sweden and abroad. At university, she studied Statistics and Economics. She also spent two years at IHM Business School, the Institute for Higher Marketing Education.

"After my education, I worked as an Analyst at the Swedish Quality Index for seven years. I had a responsibility in the energy sector and worked with most energy companies in Sweden. But, even more important to my development, was the experience of management and organizational issues that I received when I joined the management group during the last three years".

"The longer I worked there, the more it was about business advice. My vocational education has been on statistics, but my work was increasingly focused on communication and brand issues, but with basic analysis."

In 2013, Mari had her first child and, after parental leave, worked for three years at HUI Research as an Analyst and Senior Consultant.

"At my first job, the Swedish Quality Index, we collected data through major market research.

At HUI I worked more with macro statistics from Statistics Sweden. ERA is also very much about the same thing: transforming large amounts of data into intelligible information."

"Within ERA, many consultants are specialists in different industries. While my skills are data management, I also benefit greatly from my various industry experiences - from hotels and restaurants to the energy sector and different parts of the trade."

By the end of 2016, Mari became pregnant with her second child and she began to think about how she could develop her professional life. The dream of starting her own business had always been there, but there were reasons why she hadn't taken the step previously.

"You must have an idea for building a sustainable business. It's not the easiest thing. I like to work in teams and with people that I can learn from. For me, therefore, ERA became the perfect combination; You are your own entrepreneur but always have the support and help. There is always someone to turn to if you get stuck. You are in business for yourself but not alone".

For Mari, the involvement with ERA began with a five-day course in England.

"It was great! I have organized major seminars and conferences myself, and I know that it is very difficult to reach a target group where everyone has different backgrounds. During the training there were eleven people from many different countries and with very varied backgrounds."

"One came from the automotive industry, one had been head of a business office. One was a Technical Physicist and very focused on details. Another was the Sales Manager for office supplies, a super-generalist and only interested in the overall helicopter perspective. But even though we were so different, ERA managed to make it relevant to everyone."

"Much of the education was about getting a feel for the brand; what we represent, our corporate culture and identity. This can be difficult but also very important. Even though we are franchisees - or maybe just because - it's important that we represent ERA in the same way. It's important that we know what customers expect from us when we reach them."

"Our business concept is based on the fact that we bill clients based on our performance. This means I get paid according to the savings I deliver. If I do not deliver the savings, the client doesn't pay. It's an incentive that creates very high quality. I like it. It also makes the customer feel safer. And I know that if the outcome of the project matches my initial analysis, I've also done a good job."

ERA's methodology is based on the fact that different consultants, often from different countries, cooperate together. It has created an inclusive corporate culture that Mari has already learned to appreciate.

"There's a lot of that - something that all companies want, but quite few manage to create; a culture of sharing knowledge and helping each other. This is what keeps me interested, because I always feel like I am developing."

So how does Mari feel about her decision to take the step to join ERA?

"Of course, it's tough to start your own, it's a lot of work and can be economically unpredictable. But at the same time, it means greater freedom and the opportunity to control your life, besides the financial risk is something that I anticipated when I decided to take the step of starting on my own.

I have not regretted it one day - it's like a very exciting journey and as a concept it suits me very well."