



TOP OF MINDS

CAREER ADVICE FOR STARTERS



Tomas Doppenberg & Emma de Wit

A conversation with: Research Assistant Tomas Doppenberg and Associate Emma de Wit

What should you consider when you make the move from student life to working life? When does it make sense to keep studying? And how do you make the most of your newbie status in your first few months as a professional?

Tomas is studying Commercial Economics at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and also has a part-time job as a Research Assistant at Top of Minds. He's sitting down with Emma, who has grown from her role as a working student to be an Associate at Top of Minds. How did she experience that move, and what are her tips for other career beginners?



Tip 1: Consider the added value of a master's or pre-master's degree.

"I'm curious as to why you decided to earn a pre-master's and a master's after you graduated," Tomas said. Emma doesn't have to think long, "After Hotel Management School, I wanted a little more challenge, and I wanted a course that focused more on theory. But if I had to do it over, I'd still go to Hotel Management School because it gives you a combination of theory and practice, and I feel like that that adds a lot of value for me now."

Tomas nods and asks if that's helped Emma in her professional life.

"I use so many of the skills I mastered in Hotel Management School on a regular basis. For example, being assertive, listening to the customer, and being service-oriented. But when I'm talking to a client, I can also listen to what's being said between the lines and translate that for the candidate. Looking at a company as a whole is something I learned more during my master's in organizational studies. It's an approach to thinking and working that you can really apply in practice."

Tomas continues, "Do you feel like a master's degree made the step from studying to working smaller?"

Emma says, "I think you're a little more sure of you yourself. Most people earn their master's alongside a real job, so you take studying a little more seriously and working on projects with other students is almost like working with colleagues. I think that that does make the step into working life smaller. At the same time, I think if I'd started working right after Hotel Management School, I'd have learned those skills here."

Tip 2: Prepare for a different rhythm and more independent direction.

Tomas builds on that question to ask Emma what she felt was the biggest shock when transitioning from student life to working life.

“The rhythm is really different. You can’t schedule your own time as flexibly as you did in your college days. I really had to get used to that in the beginning, and I was physically tired for a while. And in this job, you have so many different projects running simultaneously that I had to keep a lot of lists in the beginning. ‘I’ve proposed one candidate for this role. I need to give the client an update on this project.’ When you’re studying, everything is much more pre-planned: ‘Now you need to do this; then you have to be there at that time.’”





Tip 3: Ask questions and be clear about what you need.

Tomas asks, “How did you make the most of your newbie status in your first three months on the job?” Emma thinks it’s particularly helpful to ask as many questions as possible and be clear about what you need. “In the beginning, I thought it was important to focus on one project and do that as well as possible. Someone else may actually enjoy being thrown into the deep end and having to tread water for a while. It’s good to know what you need to accelerate your learning, and don’t be afraid to say it. And what’s really nice about working at an executive search firm is that you can easily pick a more experienced colleague’s brain about how to approach a job listing. It helps if you’re at a smaller company with a more relaxed culture. That was something that did stand out when I joined Top of Minds—it’s professional AND friendly at the same time.”



Tip 4: Be assertive to accelerate your own growth.

Tomas continues, “Yes, it’s great to learn at a slightly smaller company like this. Mainly because it’s easier to go to someone who’s already a little further along in their career and in the company to ask things like how does this work or what about that?”

Emma adds, “Taking that initiative is also helpful when you’re in the process of moving from Associate to Consultant, for example. Because when you see for yourself that you’re ready for the next step, that you’re responsible for a lot of your own work and already bringing in clients, you need to be assertive and have the courage to speak up. At the same time, management also really considers your career path, and there’s guidance from the associate program to make sure you keep developing.”

Tip 5: Invest in diversifying your network.

Tomas finally asks, “Have you benefited a lot from your network?” Emma answers, “Yes, without even realizing it. Quite a few people end up here through people who already work at Top of Minds.”

That’s a familiar story for Tomas. “I actually ended up here through someone I knew. Someone I knew who was moving on when I was looking told me, ‘It’s a really great place.’ And I’ve also referred new colleagues since then. So everything’s come full circle.”

Emma adds, “But the great thing about Top of Minds is that your network becomes more and more extensive and diverse. This job introduces you to so many interesting people with a range of backgrounds and perspectives. And you’ll often stay in touch through LinkedIn, which can be very helpful in the future.”



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