

## TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH CEO REBECCA ANDERSSON<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Sweteach*  
*CEO, Sweden*

Research and Development Department  
*Victoria Gálvez<sup>2</sup> \* Flavia Cáceres<sup>3</sup> \* Pablo López<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>2</sup>*Project Manager*

<sup>3</sup>*Project Coordinator*

<sup>4</sup>*Research and Development Coordinator*

(April 19th, 2021)

00:02 **Flavia Cáceres:** Okay, so is it okay for you to record?

00:05 **Rebecca Andersson:** Yes.

00:06 **Flavia Cáceres:** Thank you.

00:10 **Flavia Cáceres:** So first, let me introduce the company. We are a startup company in the IT sector, whose main goal is to provide global teams with supporting solutions, to enhance synergy and productivity among them. And our purpose with this interview is to gather information, relevant knowledge, and hopefully create new knowledge to enhance the performance of remote teams. And so we are going to start with the interview.

00:51 **Pablo López:** Okay. That's my part. Hello! We would like to start with this interview by saying that we went through your website, we learned about your company and we would like to congratulate you because it looks really nice. It looks really good. Now, we will be discussing some topics related to business and remote work and global virtual teams. And we would like to know your opinion,

we think it is very valuable. So, let's start with the first question. We are a remote team too, so we face problems that are different from conventional in-office teams. So our first question would be in your experience, what do you think are the main or biggest challenges that a remote team faces while working remotely?

01:52 **Rebecca Andersson:** Well, I would say for my team, I have identified two challenges that are the main challenges that we face. One, I think many companies can recognize, and one is a little bit more specific for this type of business that we're doing. I would say that in a remote team, communication is a big challenge. We have different people involved in different parts. All of us are working with a little bit of everything, but we still have some people, mostly me, more involved in that sales and marketing part. Then I have one or two other colleagues teaching and then another colleague more responsible for admin and contact with customers afterwards. And I would say a big challenge for us is to make sure that we communicate in between ourselves and with our customers and that we make sure that we don't forget to respond to any messages, but then at the same time that it's the right person responding at the right time. So I would say that is a big challenge for us.

03:15 **Pablo López:** I think we can all agree on that. At the beginning, we also experienced the same situation with communication, we dealt with that for a while. But in the end, we came up with solutions that suited our needs as a team. I would like to ask you, in your case, what have you identified to be the solutions that had the biggest impact on this problem to resolve it?

03:38 **Rebecca Andersson:** I think that it's important to be transparent and to create structures and routines, so that it's clear for everyone, even though we help each other out and that we might not have specific titles, like in bigger

companies, that we all know what responsibility I have, what responsibility you have, and that it's clearly structured. And I think that it helps a lot with communication and possible communication issues.

04:15 **Pablo López:** Okay. It's interesting you mentioned that because yes, in these kinds of teams, we wear a lot of different hats as you said. That's one thing. Thank you. Let's move on to the next question, please. Okay, let's talk about culture in a company. Culture in the company is always important, especially when working remotely, as it helps to maintain productivity and to keep the team on the same mindset to reach our goals. So our next question would be what strategies have you identified to enhance your work and your team's productivity while working remotely?

04:59 **Rebecca Andersson:** I believe already from the beginning we adopted a culture of freedom with responsibility. We work more or less normal hours during the working day, but we don't check each other, we are not counting hours. We all take mutual responsibility in the tasks and what we need to do in our company. We also encourage each other to - today, for example, it's a very sunny and warm day for being in Sweden. And so we encourage each other to go out for walks, taking longer breaks, we have discovered that this helps our productivity, that we get more done by encouraging each other to take breaks and to enjoy more freedom.

05:56 **Pablo López:** So, you are saying freedom and having a more flexible schedule within a remote team could help productivity. In fact, it's very interesting you mention this because we have tried that ourselves. While we're working remotely, as you mentioned, even though we're not together, we try to get the things done and all that, but the difference with this is that we do not have a fixed schedule, so we do not have a break, as you can say. We just think:

“Okay, there's this hour and I go on a break.” So it actually is very important to have that as you mentioned. So how do you keep that? How do you, I don't want to say force, but maybe how do you encourage a team member to take a break, as sometimes they may not want to take a break?

06:45 **Rebecca Andersson:** I think that could be done in several different ways. So I think one aspect that helps is that in Sweden, we have a kind of outdoor culture. So it's very common to take phone meetings while taking a walk at the same time. People, in general, like to enjoy the sun whenever it's out. So it's easy to motivate people to do so. When ending a meeting saying, “Now we're going to go out and take five minutes of sun” is something that we value a lot, but I think by trying to avoid scheduling back-to-back meetings, by making sure that you have time within your day, which is not booked or reserved for a specific task, I think it's possible to encourage team members to actually get them to take breaks.

08:00 **Victoria Gálvez:** You mentioned how people in Sweden have this in common, so I wanted to know if all of the people in your team are from Sweden.

08:11 **Rebecca Andersson:** Yes, they are. And also all of my team members are fond of going outdoors and enjoying physical activity. So I guess this might not be the case for every team.

08:32 **Victoria Gálvez:** It's great because you do have that common ground and everybody's on the same page which of course benefits it. Okay, great. Thank you.

08:40 **Pablo López:** Awesome! And that could help us too, you know, this game of mix of Culturology, that's what we're looking for. So this helps us a lot. Thank you. Let's move on. So now let's talk about culture. You mentioned something about your freedom of a schedule, no fixed schedule. So what are other aspects that

maintain or enhance the team's culture? We know that in a remote environment, team culture is crucial.

09:12 **Rebecca Andersson:** Exactly. I think that one thing that it's really important for the team culture is to find the balance where everyone feels involved, but not overwhelmed with meetings and information. And I think this might be even more important when working remotely than when you work in the same office, that you need to balance in between, making sure that everyone is updated, that everyone's driving towards the same goal, but at the same time, not having a meeting just to have a meeting, to always have an agenda. So I think that is a balance, which is important for keeping a good team culture and focusing on the same thing.

10:00 **Pablo López:** And that also goes with communication. If you want to enhance your team and make everyone feel like: 'you're part of the team', and you also have to be very communicative, you also have to schedule things with them. So, it all comes down to communication.

10:16 **Rebecca Andersson:** And I might be a bit biased here since communication is what we work with.

10:24 **Pablo López:** Well, that's the beauty of working in a remote team. That's the beauty of that. Okay. Thank you. Great. Let's move on. So there are some skills that are needed to work remotely. Some people mentioned, for example, cultural intelligence, when they work in a global environment, people need to be more culturally open, accept differences, and all that. But in your opinion and in your experience, what are the skills that an employee needs to have to be successful working remotely?

11:01 **Rebecca Andersson:** I believe that motivation and to be able to motivate yourself is an important skill because sometimes it might feel a little bit lonely or you might not always have someone to chat with, so to be able to find your inner motivation and to motivate yourself, but also to be independent, be able to make your own decisions, to be flexible. And then I would say to communicate also, but I also think that remote work might be suitable also for people that can do with less communication if you understand what I mean, that it can suit two different types of people with different skills.

12:00 **Pablo López:** Because as you know, when we work remotely, we can work with everyone and everywhere. So, as you mentioned, these two types of communication can correlate with each other, so that can help us. That can help a lot.

12:17 **Victoria Gálvez:** Yes. Another question I'm curious about. So, the thing is I engage in recruiting a lot, so I was just thinking what strategies you could give us in order to identify which candidates actually have that set of skills that you desire and that help you be even more successful in a remote team.

12:40 **Rebecca Andersson:** What an interesting question. I've never thought about that in such specific terms before, but I would say, coming back to communication again, the key here could be a little bit looking into how much responsibility the person takes into recruitment process himself or herself. If you are a person that does not need reminders, I would say that this is one thing that is a good sign about this person and that they are good for remote teams. You take responsibility, you're punctual for your interview, you deliver whatever documents you're supposed to deliver in time, and you are proactive. So to say in doing this, I think that is one way, but it's difficult because recruitment should be or have to be unbiased and you need to take different things into consideration.

So I think it's difficult, but if I would say one thing, I would say to be proactive.

14:18 **Victoria Gálvez:** Definitely. Thank you. You know, when you mentioned those words, like, a person that does not need so many reminders, a person who takes the initiative and is proactive. It just came to mind. When we were in the middle of a recruiting process, scheduling second interviews, actually first interviews -you know how time zones are different- Well, we use the New York time zone, for example. And so a lot of people missed the interviews because of the time zone issue. They did not research or convert the time. So that, as you say, it gives you enough information of how this person will probably perform if they were to join. So thank you.

14:58 **Pablo López:** Okay. So before moving on, now that you're mentioning this motivation before moving on to something else, do you consider that it is more difficult to keep and maintain the motivation high in a remote setting? Do you consider that having a physical office is important to do that or not really?

15:19 **Rebecca Andersson:** I think it's maybe also a bit related to what we're used to or people that are not used to working remotely and the habit or the routine is that you gain motivation from your colleagues, from your managers when you meet in person at the office. But I think that you can motivate your colleagues and that you can get the same amount of power and motivation from a remote team, but that it might be more related to what you're used to from before and that you might have to work more actively with it in a remote team.

16:11 **Pablo López:** Okay. Thank you. That's really good information. Actually, one of the initiatives we have to keep motivation high is we have a happy hour once a month, and we all get together at the same time. At the beginning, it was a bit awkward, not going to lie, but then we started developing stronger relationships

and started talking more. And that also helped us a lot. These quick chit chattings that we have, that people have in a physical office, for example, that's something that is missing on remote work. Asking things like, What do you think about maybe chatting a bit before? How is everyone doing? What are you doing? and questions like those.

17:06 **Rebecca Andersson:** Related to that, I can just quickly add that I think all over the world, but here in Sweden, more or less all office people have been working from home for a year now. And the thing that people discuss is the lack of *fika*. I'm not sure if you're familiar with this concept, but *fika*, spelled F-I-K-A is a Swedish concept of having a cup of coffee or tea with a sweet, but also it's a social activity, and this is a big part of working in a Swedish workplace. You meet your colleagues in many offices daily or two times per day, but at least it's common to have one big *fika* every week, and people feel that they work perfectly fine remotely. They have all the tools that they need, but they miss this daily or weekly get-together. And I think this can be a concept to be inspired by when you're studying remote teams, to see how sweets in COVID times dealt with the lack of *fika* opportunity.

18:27 **Pablo López:** Absolutely. That's something that it's missing still in the literature, but hopefully, we can find a way to maintain our *fika*.

18:51 **Victoria Gálvez:** I just wanted to add that that is closely linked to, and it's a very important part of our research, how to prevent burnout, and now with most people working from home, I guess it's become a bit more common and therefore dangerous. Now, here's a curiosity, did your team start remotely, was it fully remote from the beginning?

19:17 **Rebecca Andersson:** We have always been working remotely, but before the



COVID pandemic we also had in-person meetings, so we mixed a little bit before the pandemic. Now we are actually still everyone living in the same city, but we never ever get together in person only virtually, but it has also opened up for us to be able that next time we will recruit, we are looking into recruiting from other cities or even out of parts of the world. So, yes and no, I would say.

19:55 **Victoria Gálvez:** Right. And do you believe that the fact that you met in person before, in a way, helped you create or build a sense of trust before going into remote work, maybe that also helped you be more successful?

20:12 **Rebecca Andersson:** It's difficult to answer, of course, but I would say, we are working with communication and teaching, and with many of the clients that we have been working with for more than a year and I never met them in person. And I wouldn't say that -in terms of client relationships- I can not tell the difference between the ones that we actually met in person and the ones that we only met remotely, so I think I've seen discussions on LinkedIn and for some people, this is really important. But for instance, we also had another teacher hired just for a project and she only met her colleagues remotely while I met her in person and I felt no difference in building relationships and trust. So I would say maybe for some people, but not for me personally.

21:13 **Victoria Gálvez:** Okay. Great. Thank you.

21:15 **Pablo López:** That's very interesting in fact. We're also trying to get to know each other. We are also making some plans because we have never met each other in person, our team is fully remote since the very beginning. We're planning to do something together for one time at least, and try to know each other better and see if this can help us build more trust and more things for our purpose, but as you mentioned, it all depends on every single person on how they see it, for

some people is more difficult than for the others. I believe this is our last question.

21:59 **Rebecca Andersson:** It's the last question I have, at least [laughing].

22:06 **Pablo López:** Before we finish, if you have any questions for us, let us know, please.

22:13 **Rebecca Andersson:** Well, I just want to say that I think it's a really nice thing what you do and that I would like to hear more about it in the future, how it goes with your research and how you develop this startup idea.

22:27 **Pablo López:** Thank you so much. This helps us a lot. We're trying to build something here. Try to come up with common patterns and hopefully come up with the best solutions to help remote and global teams, because this is the trending. This is going to be the future, this is going to be everywhere. Before we finish, we would like to thank you again for being here, for taking your time to be here, and we really appreciate it. This is of great value for us. If you have anything else to add Victoria or Flavia.

23:03 **Victoria Gálvez:** I actually have myriad questions, but I'll just add these two linked questions. First, how long have you had your business, Rebecca?

23:17 **Rebecca Andersson:** I've been working with this since 2018. So just for about three years or so and then I have had a team since 2019, so only for a little bit more than two years. So it's quite new.

23:39 **Pablo López:** That's awesome.

23:42 **Victoria Gálvez:** Right. And I guess over the course, there's been ups and

downs, as usually happens with a business, so my question is, if you could give yourself from, let's say two years ago, a piece of advice, what would that advice be?

24:08 **Rebecca Andersson:** Well, I would say focus more on what's unique with our company, how we want to do it, and what we need, than trying to see what everyone else does. Because, when I started, I looked up what everyone else did, what their priorities were, and then, along the road, I realized that we might have different priorities. We might want to do things in a different way, so that I will tell myself, to look more at what we have and less at others and what they do.

24:50 **Victoria Gálvez:** This is great, thank you.

24:55 **Pablo López:** Anything else to add, Flavia?

25:04 **Flavia Cáceres:** I think that, as you mentioned, there should be a balance in communication. That is also good because nowadays that everything is online, we have a lot of platforms where you are working and they contact you by WhatsApp or maybe they can call you. Our team uses Slack, for instance. So it can feel overwhelming for the person, but I do think that communication is everything. So thank you for all your information and knowledge.

25:50 **Rebecca Andersson:** Thank you.

25:54 **Pablo López:** Okay. I think with this we will wrap up the interview. Again, thank you for being here, and if you need anything from us, please contact us. We will be there. Thank you so much. And we'll see you soon.

26:13 **Rebecca Andersson:** Sure. Nice meeting you all.

26:16 **Flavia Cáceres:** Nice meeting you.

26:18 **Victoria Gálvez:** Thank you very much. Bye.

—End of Interview—