

## Faces of the Company: Eva Csiki

"I was standing at a Cork bus stop one day and I was short a coin for my fare; I had notes but bus drivers tend not to like them," says Eva Csiki, chuckling gently at how this might sound to a stranger.

"So I was looking around me to see if I could spot one," she continues, fondly retracing her steps that day "...when I met Hélène Duquin, and she helped me out."

As the bus wheeled them around the city, they chatted and before long amiably twinned their respective countries, Hungary and France. Ever since, they've remained fast friends.

Eva's good fortune rolled on. A very sharp Ms Duquin, the director of Alliance Française in Cork, and a long-standing partner of Interconnection, thought it wise to put her in touch with a certain Natacha Nowack.

And so, what began as a moment of movie-like happenstance became an entrée into a work environment that Eva had been longing to land. It was the kind of introduction only word-of-mouth could achieve.

As she finishes the anecdote, it dawns on me why Hélène was so impressed. When Eva speaks, you notice a charismatically matter-of-fact style, punctuated only by her, as you're too enthralled by her narrative to do so.

Eva pauses only to contemplate if she should have been so forthright on whatever subject happens to be on the table at the time. Her plain speak endears; it draws you into her orbit; her soft voice and easy laugh almost apologise



**Eva Csiki**

### Finance & Administration

for her sharp insights into life, both inside and outside the office.

"Home? Wherever I am. I can make my home wherever I live. It's to do with where your family is," says the married mum whose daughter is fast approaching 10 years of age.

"Life is about going forward. Moving forward," she emphasises. She may speak in concrete terms but she certainly doesn't root herself to the spot for the sake of it. "If an environment isn't right, you find somewhere else," she says.

Eva feels part of the Cork community; she

appreciates the amiability of her neighbours; that sense of closeness. It allows her to feel secure and also to enjoy a freedom she didn't have in her home country. And this extends to her workplace.

"It's a beautiful team. And you've got to like the people you work with. If you don't, you won't stay very long," she says, with her trademark candour. "My colleagues, Fiona and Michael, are very good - they build a sense of team in Interconnection, and they make you feel important."

For someone who heralds the significance of personal appreciation by her peers, Eva does not shift uneasily when talking about the bottom line. "We all have bills to pay but you cannot work in a place where you don't identify with those around you," she says, unequivocally.

Eva's ambition is push herself to become an even more integral part of Interconnection: grasping more the mechanics of financial management while learning to prioritise in a company that moves at a frenetic pace. When asked how, her eyes light up.

"Sometimes I feel, oh my gosh! It is so stressful. There are so many things to do...and so many requests. But it's really about learning to know what's most important," she says, unflustered. "It's just a challenge. And I can do it."

A far cry you might say from fishing for pennies while waiting for public transport. But once you meet Eva, you'll see how that leap's been made.

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## Welcome to InterconnectionforBusiness

Established in 2002, Interconnection is a Cork based Franco-Irish company which offers a range of services to Irish businesses.

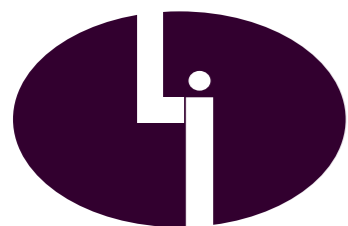
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Dear Readers,

The year continues apace, and so too the natural flux of things.

In this autumn edition, you'll encounter people whose lives have moved in new and welcome directions due to those they've met and the places they've visited.

Anne Lebon, a teacher from tropical La Réunion, returns to Ireland - accompanied this time though by a dozen students from her high school - all here to avail of the Leonardo programme through Interconnection.

Anne's previous encounters here, coupled with an Internet search unearthing us, led to the choice of Cork as a month-long destination for learning.

This theme runs right through pages two and three, where you will meet a former student of Interconnection, Hassan Amarir, and one of our business partners, Hicham Marwane of The Boxing Clinic.

Introduced through a mutual friend, the gentlemen now mentor athletes in the fighting arts, all while coaching a prospering new business. They even have some of our team getting their gloves on!

Ironically the Expert Input comes from a man who knows a thing or two about defending people: Barry O'Meara of Barry G. O'Meara & Co. Solicitors. Although steeped in generations of legal tradition, he's a rare and clear voice in a (sometimes) fusty profession.

Eva Csiki is the Face of the Company. And hers is a story of serendipity if ever there was - hinging sweetly on how a single cent can open a door.

Enjoy the read.

Natacha Nowack,  
Editor



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## TROPICAL BONDS

"I'm in love with Ireland...the people, the colours...the freshness," says Anne Lebon. Her effervescence convinces you: this is how she genuinely feels. As she continues to extol the invisible Irish virtues of politeness and friendliness - attributes we natives can no longer divine - your mind drifts back to 'fresh'.

A teacher from La Réunion, she has a canny knack of holding you spellbound with tales of her home island. "You have four seasons. We only have two - summer and winter. And they are simply hot and ... em, less hot," she says, in a way that makes you nod in agreement, as if they got the raw deal.

Perhaps this same skill is why she was chosen to accompany a dozen teenage school students on a month-long visit to Cork. "It's my third time in Ireland; the first trip was with my family; the second, I travelled alone," she says, "...and this time I'm like a mother again...stressed with my group of twelve...eleven girls and a boy."

It may sound like quite the handful but if her expression is anything to go by, that's one word that was lost in translation; she's the epitome of togetherness. Anne Lebon loves what she does, and it shows.

Yet you cannot help but wonder - how did a cluster of students from her modest school, Victor Schoelcher High School, hailing from a small island in the Indian Ocean, make it all the way to another much wetter island in the outer reaches of Europe's northwest?

"Simple," she explains to my baffled face, "through the Internet - we did a search and found Interconnection. We were looking for companies that could facilitate our passage through the Leonardo programme...and you fit the picture!"

One of Anne's students, 19-year old Christine Samaria, blushes a little and excuses her English as she explains how she only has five months to go before finishing school. However in a matter of minutes she finds her stride.

"I want to study tourism...and speak to people and give them information about La Réunion... my island," she proudly offers when asked about her future. "La Réunion is beautiful and sunny and warm...and the water is turquoise blue," she says, "and the people are smiling."



L-R: Christine Samaria, Anne Lebon-Teacher, Clemencia Boyer

Christine's touristic intuition has afforded her a winning spiel that takes in volcanic peaks, rainforests and a heavenly blend of ecosystems. If we weren't stuck in a recession right now, she alone could empty the country.

Her classmate, Clemencia Boyer, 20, shares her same sense of wonder. Her naivety is limited though: she's already calculated the relative costs of living and deduced how Ireland is (believe it!) cheaper than home.

"The difference in prices can be double for soft drinks and food...and clothes too," she says. "We have to import a lot in La Réunion; this makes things more expensive." Despite the harsh realities of an island existence, she remains upbeat.

Keenly aware of how both girls are away from home for the very first time, and learning fast, Anne hopes they make the most of their opportunity. "I want them to see another way of life. I want them to experience a different culture and to mature. And speak, speak, speak," she pipes.

Good fortune and fate have benignly conspired to locate them in Cork for a month. They may be wearing scarves already but the weather cannot remove their broad smiles.

## Going the Distance with Hassan Amarir

"My three months with Interconnection weren't enough," says Paris-native Hassan Amarir, "I wanted more so I just had to come back." Inspired by his internship in Cork, Hassan returned to put a full year into improving his English. Two have passed and he's no longer checking his calendar.



**Hassan Amarir**  
Trainer at the Boxing Clinic

Since that decision, he's barely stood still: he has moved from working in the English Market and then Amazon's call centre to becoming an integral part of Cork's Boxing Clinic. Not bad for a man who just wanted to improve his language skills.

It so happened that he also had a passion for pugilism. And ironically it was through a friend's recommendation that he met a professional trainer in Hicham Marwane, who would coach him.

After a couple of sessions, they forged a bond. Today Hassan mentors at the Clinic too - thanks to having nine years of boxing to his name. "I also have seven years of Judo...which really helps," he adds, unprompted.

Hassan's natural energy is irrepressible; especially when he speaks about his sport. "Touch your opponent and don't be touched. It's like a game," he says, as if it were tag rugby.

"Bigger and stronger opponents, it doesn't matter, you can be better," he enthuses, "I know - that is unbelievable. But that's it - the key is to be smarter and faster."

Sitting at the Clinic's reception, as I pepper him with questions, Hassan skillfully copes while fending off a flurry of enquiries from newcomers and old faces coming through the front door. You begin to imagine how he promulgates his gospel of bobbing and weaving to the assembled boxing masses.

And you come to realise that his gregarious nature has won him friends throughout his stay in Cork; it has also maintained ties with those he first met on arrival, Interconnection included. Imed Seghaier, Office Manager, is a regular sparring partner at the clinic.

"Imed's faster and stronger than me," Hassan says of his friend. I raise an eyebrow and Hassan cracks an enormous laugh - maybe it was the image of chasing a suit around the ring. Quickly he gathers his thoughts on Interconnection.

"They're very good if you want to experience something new in a different country; afterwards you won't return home with the same perspective; it gives you another aspect," he says, detailing how Interconnection has helped him make a significant step in his life's journey.

"Irish people open their arms, like a big brother. Big respect. Thank you for that," Hassan says, of his time here. "There are some...bad people too... but that's not important," he says, laughing off, yet not revealing, whatever abuse he may have had thrown at him.

"You have them all over the world. But seriously, your people have...a very big heart," he says, almost at pains to ensure the positive overshadows any mention to the contrary. He deftly moves on, as if reinforcing his abiding memory.

Before leaving, Hassan insists I take a fistful of flyers. He also offers me a week to try out the myriad mixed martial arts available under the Boxing Clinic's roof, for free. It's that very approach that has increased footfall through their door. Already, in my mind's eye, he has me looking for my old gum shield. Now who's laughing?

international company, EMC<sup>2</sup>.

They gave him responsibility for sales to half the world. Instinctively, he knew how to take on the role.

"When you're doing something, you've got to make sure it's done right," he explains. "You have to give people what they've paid for."

Any professional businesses investing heavily (in their data storage as it happened to be) would want to meet a straight-talker. And Hicham was their man.

All the while, he maintained his training regime. He had fought as a semi-pro but a serious injury had curtailed his career.

"I found a place to train in the city centre and trained alone," he says. "When the



"I am real with people," Hicham Marwane says, looking you straight in the eye. "That's the way I am." Not for a moment do you doubt the man; he's the one responsible for establishing the Boxing Clinic on the outskirts of Cork City.

"I grew up in Paris, in the suburbs; you know 'les banlieues'? They're tough," he says, recounting his early years. "I had my jaw broken by a friend," he says, then pauses "... ex-friend, I should say."

"I wasn't looking," he continues, as if he ought to have been. When I nod quizzically, he allows himself a faint smile. Hicham's no-nonsense style is probably the key to his success. You meet him; you listen to what he has to say; and you trust him.

A young man, making his way in the world, Marwane boxes clever in all senses. When he first came to Cork, only three years ago, it was to work in IT. And he did so, very successfully - taking charge of clients for an

## Expert Input: Barry O'Meara

"I should have done it ages ago," says Barry O'Meara, of his almost two-year old decision to move out of a busy metropolitan legal firm. Two decades of experience inside what was once a family institution had proved a veritable fortress to creating a practice of his very own.

It was time to foster a fresh culture. Still only just into his forties, O'Meara has the demeanour of a certain, sprightly airline boss; not quite as grey or in any way brash and confrontational, he possesses a vigour and belief in doing things differently. And therein lies the end of the analogy.

"Respect. Treat people as human beings...don't tell them what to do. Listen to them," he says, deferring to advice his father imparted to him early in his career.

"It's about looking after them; it's about honesty...and hard work, of course."

As he lays bare his approach to the profession, you cannot imagine that he occupies even a significant minority. O'Meara is a select breed, within a rarefied field. As a matter of course, he puts himself in your shoes.

"I believe in proactive law," he explains, "...it's about reducing the costs that you, the client, can incur. People should know where they stand vis-à-vis what a case is going to set them back...at the very outset. And that's not always how it is." You draw closer as he levers the lid



**Barry G. O'Meara**  
& Co. Solicitors

off what ordinarily would be an impenetrable vault.

"People usually only turn to solicitors when their backs are against the wall, and they've nowhere else to go," he says, bothered in being cast as a last chance saloon, by the label his job attaches to him. "I want them to lift the phone and know that it'll save them money."

"And you can't have people walk out of your office bewildered," Barry says, "you've got to give people time and show that you're more interested in them than in trotting out how much law you know. Don't preach to them... about how great you are and all that nonsense."

You've got to see it from their point of view."

"The vast majority of what I do is based on common sense," he says, without a hint of irony. "Of course, I have to know the law but most of it is to do with applying logic to problems, and figuring them out. Making sense of them."

O'Meara embodies a natural affability and an innately analytical mind. The combination could have taken him down many different roads; he narrowly missed a place in medicine on leaving school. Yet he harbours no regrets. In law, he found a furrow he was happy to plough.

And so, anxious to get on with things, he motored on, and hasn't looked back. Whatever O'Meara was to turn his intellect to, he would've acquitted himself. Now he's excelling in going it alone; striking out on a path where more ought to follow.

It takes a lot to invest in this approach. O'Meara could go no other way though. "I've set down goals; where I want to be within certain time frames," he says, aware more than ever of what it takes to steer an entire practice.

His conversational élan hints at that first threshold being just over a year away. It's one of those 'watch this space' moments.

A venerable partner of Interconnection's, we, amongst many others, will be watching closely O'Meara & Co.'s upward trajectory.

others in the gym saw me coming with my boxing boots, they were wondering - who is this guy?"

"But after they saw how I trained, they started asking for advice - how to do this; how to do that...I showed them." It would open a door for him.

"I began to train others and I took it from there," he explains, "now I have my own place...which is so much better." And it is very impressive. A short spin out of Cork City to the foot of its airport hill, you'll find The Boxing Clinic inhabiting a sizable unit in the nearby business park.

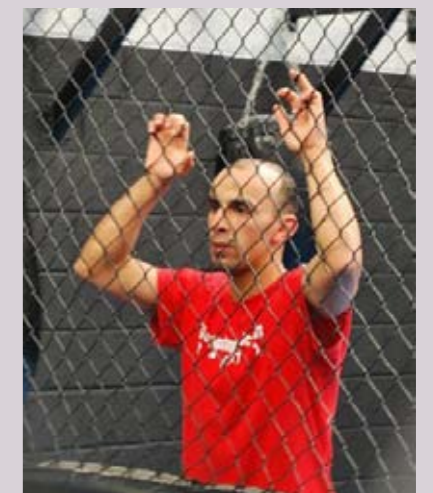
As we speak, a bunch of boxers troop into the building for Hicham's evening session. He doesn't blink; he's a man at ease with what he's doing - comfortable in the integrity of the physical pursuit.

"My old trainer's words are always in my ears," he says, "I'm old-school really. Making sure the basics are right and the work's put in."

"Boxers are smart," he adds. "The sport is about defending yourself." His argument is convincing. Not yet thirty, Hicham has the smarts to see an enterprise opportunity and grow it, and do so on his terms.

"Am I a tough boss?" he repeats my question; pauses; and then allows a broad smile to smother his face, perhaps remembering the Interconnection interns who have passed through his hands "...no, no, no...I'm a fair one."

You believe him, and contemplate the real world schooling they've gotten at Marwane's clinic. Respect.



**Hicham Marwane**  
Manager  
The Boxing Clinic