The Human Side of Business

CHRISTINA KOSMOWSKI KNOWS A LOT ABOUT TEAMWORK AND GROWTH, AND SHE PUTS IT TO GOOD USE EVERYWHERE LIFE AND HER CAREER TAKE HER NEXT.

When Christina Kosmowski (’98) started working at Salesforce as a consultant in 2002, the customer relationship management platform had 200 employees and $20 million in annual revenue. When she left in 2017 as senior vice president of revenue lifecycle management and customer success, she had helped Salesforce grow to 25,000 employees and $8 billion in revenue.

Today, she serves as vice president, global head of customer success at Slack, the cloud-based collaboration software company. During her tenure, the five-year-old San Francisco company more than doubled in size.

“Northwestern Engineering taught us to have this ability to constantly push to be better, to be technical, and to bring smartness,” she says. “We also learned to understand the human side of business and have empathy. People comment that’s what my teams bring to the table, and I completely credit it to my education.”

On a campus visit before her senior year of high school, Kosmowski learned that Northwestern would launch a women’s soccer team the following year. That clinched the deal for the Kansas City teen passionate about both soccer and STEM.

“Northwestern had that perfect blend of academics and the ability to play Division I soccer,” she says.

After a brief stint as a chemistry major, Kosmowski switched to industrial engineering. “I was able to connect the dots between technology and science, as well as the people and the business side,” she adds.

She put the teamwork and leadership skills learned in the classroom into practice on the soccer team, eventually becoming captain. Her junior year, the Northwestern team went to the NCAA tournament, and in her senior year, the team placed second in the Big Ten.

After graduation, Kosmowski worked at Tenneco Packaging, now Pactiv, in Lake Forest, Illinois, focused on efficiently manufacturing and distributing products including Ziploc bags and Hefty trash bags. But during the dot-com craze, tech caught Kosmowski’s eye.

“I knew that technology had all this power to really make businesses more efficient and more productive,” she says.

That led her to Salesforce, shifting her career toward customer success leadership and helping the platform become the largest of its type. After 15 years, however, Kosmowski wanted to take what she had learned and apply it to another new company. She landed at Slack.

Now, while traveling the world, Kosmowski proudly connects with fellow alums. “It feels so warm and welcoming to have such a strong community,” she says.

She stays involved with Northwestern by serving as a mentor for industrial engineering students and chairing her 15th and 20th class reunion committees. Recently, she played in a tournament with former soccer teammates.

“I’m just so thankful for my experience, and I’m excited for the next generation of leaders who are coming through Northwestern, especially in engineering,” Kosmowski says.

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