

Inspiring Women

Episode 33: Maya Inozemtsevam

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to Inspiring Women with Laurie McGraw. I am your host, Laurie McGraw. I have spent the past 30 years in leadership, and over the years, I've come to learn one thing. Women need women, and not just any women, but inspiring women. Tune in every week to hear from women at the pinnacle of their careers, and from others who are just starting out. Episodes can be found at inspiringwomen.show, or subscribe on your favorite podcast app. Thanks for listening and I hope you will be inspired.

Laurie McGraw:

Welcome to another episode of Inspiring Women. Today, I'm speaking with Maya Inozemtsevam. She is a licensed physical therapist with a doctorate in that, and she also is an athletic trainer who started her early career doing physical therapy in Boston, coming out of Boston University. And Maya has been traveling as a physical therapist. She's also a licensed athletic trainer, works in performance sports and post-surgical rehabilitation. Maya, I'm really excited to be talking to you today.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Thank you so much for having me on, Laurie. I'm very much so looking forward to this conversation.

Laurie McGraw:

Terrific. Well, this is great. So you are a physical therapist, so a licensed clinical professional. I am looking forward to hearing about how you chose that profession and what you're doing with it. But as we always get started with Inspiring Women, let's get grounded in what you're doing right now. What do you do day to day for your career? How did you start out there?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Of course. So right now, I am doing a travel therapy contract. It's similar to travel nursing in that you take three to six month contracts or across the nation, depending on where you want to go. I am currently in Birmingham, Alabama. It's my first time in the south, so I'm very excited about this. I came here in January to help out with the COVID crisis. And I am currently doing home health, which I don't think people know is a very common way of doing physical therapy. However, it is when a patient gets out of the hospital and they come home. Oftentimes, they are weaker than they were before and they're not able to independently ambulate, they're not able to independently get dressed or take a shower. So that is where physical therapy comes in to the home. We order anything that's needed, such as a walker or a cane, if they haven't come home with that from the hospital. And then we work with them for about a month or two to get them back on their feet and get them back to being independent.

Laurie McGraw:

And I have to believe there's a tremendous growing need for that kind of service with, we've got the silver tsunami and we've got so many of the baby boomers who are now aging out of the workforce, and those kinds of services are more and more needed. So that's interesting, and we'll talk more about that, Maya. But why don't we just start with how did this begin? Where did your career journey start? You're just a couple years into it, so you're early in the journey. But where did you start and get into physical therapy as your choice?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So I was actually that person where I knew right off the bat I wanted to be a physical therapist, ever since high school. Growing up, I was always in athletics, from track to gymnastics to dancing.

Laurie McGraw:

I don't know anybody who wanted to be a physical therapist in high school, so that's interesting right there.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

I have to honestly say a great big thank you to my physical therapist that I had in high school, because I had a decade of low back pain up until I met that amazing physical therapist. And that person changed my life because they pushed me to a limit I didn't know I could reach. I got stronger than I ever was before, and my back no longer bothers me to this day. So they made up my mind that this is what I want to be and this is the impact I want to make on other people.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, that is great to have somebody that you can aspire to be. And boy, I would love to not have lower back pain myself, Maya. But you also started out in Russia. You're not originally from the United States. You came here at an early age. So tell us a little bit about those beginnings.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So I was born in Russia. Actually, in the cold part of Russia, in Siberia. It takes about two days to fly home if I ever go home. And my parents applied for the green card lottery and just happened to win it, both of them. So they took a chance. They both had higher up degrees in physics. My dad has a PhD, my mom has a master's in optics. And they came to the US. Unfortunately, were not able to work based off of their degrees. And they worked in, I think, a bakery. And I think my dad worked in a men's warehouse selling suits while they were doing their master's of business administration at night school. So growing up, I saw their work ethic and I just strived to be like them. So from an early age, they instilled that hard work ethic in me.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

We grew up in New Jersey. We did a good amount of traveling up and down the coast. And I saw Boston during one of our random trips and it just reminded me of home. Not only the culture, but the temperature and just being next to the water was very pleasant. And that is how I found out about Boston University in the first place. And then taking a look into their programs,

they had this wonderful accelerated program where you do a bachelor's in athletic training directly into a doctor of physical therapy degree. That was something that you had to apply for in high school, so you had to have known you wanted to end up as a physical therapist. Because otherwise, it's four years of the bachelor. You go out, you take your GREs. You have to do volunteering/observation hours at a physical therapy clinic and then apply to PT school. So seeing that they had this six year accelerated program got me real excited about going to Boston, and I just knew that that's where I wanted to end up.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, I think, Maya, it's interesting to me that you had such a very clear focus on the career outcome that you wanted. More often, what I see in young professionals or college students is they're sorting it out and they're trying out different things. So when you were at Boston University, I'm certain you met all types of new people. That's a general college experience. What did you learn along the way? Did you ever pivot away from physical therapy or was that always the place you wanted to end up? You're obviously doing that now.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Honestly, in the beginning, I don't think I quite knew how rigorous an accelerated degree would be. And the first part of the program was based on athletic training, which is more... You're not only doing rehab for athletes, but you're doing that on-field management of injuries, you're triaging if someone gets seriously injured, and you're really being that liaison between the athlete and someone like a physician, where they might only see the physician once a month maybe. So going into that freshman year, we started off with anatomy and all of those medicine based classes right away. And as a freshman, that's not the typical freshmen experience, if you know what I'm talking about.

Laurie McGraw:

Yep. It's been a long time, Maya, but I remember.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Yep. We were up at 8:00, going to class all day, and then going to clinical rotations immediately afterwards. So there were times where I doubted myself and I thought, this isn't for me. This is too hard. I'm always stressed out. All of my friends are out there partying, or alternatively, they're working and they have some money to spend. Meanwhile, here I am just studying 24/7. But I did meet some incredible people along the way. A lot of them are still some of my closest friends to this day, and through it all, we did it together. A lot of long nights, a lot of tears. But I'm happy we finished the program together because without those peers, I don't think I would have gotten through it all.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, it's great to have a network. And Maya, so when did you actually graduate? It was just a couple years ago, correct?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Yep. It was in 2018. Honestly, I was pretty lucky to have finished the athletic training part of it first because I actually worked through grad school. I was able to do some per diem shifts on the weekends, covering little kids' soccer games or tournaments, just to have a little bit of extra cash to live on while studying and getting my doctorate.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, great. So now let's talk about and then what happened. So you're very passionate about the work that you're doing. It was hard, but you did it and you accomplished it, and you're a licensed professional in the field that you love. And then boom, you're out of school, you're at your first couple jobs, and the pandemic hit. So tell us what happened there.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So immediately after school, I was lucky enough to have been hired by my last clinical rotation. It was a great setting. I had a great mentor who was my age, maybe just a few years older, so we were learning together. And he was really able to be that person for me who I was able to reach out for in regards to any questions that I might have had.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

However, that evolved into a position that was a little closer to my passion, which was more working with athletes. And it was in downtown Boston with Spinal Sports Injury Center. This was a clinic where there were chiropractors and physical therapists working alongside each other next to a functional fitness gym. So a lot of our patients, they were athletes who had gotten injured from the gym. And we had a great rapport because we would also work out at that gym and there was a great network. Unfortunately, COVID hit, and the gyms closed and we lost the majority of our patients. And as the newest hire, I was laid off. We were given an option to continue seeing patients on an as needed basis. But essentially, within a week or two, pretty much all of our patient caseload dropped off.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So I made the difficult decision to move back home. My mom was in New Jersey and she was alone, which I think is hard for anyone, trying to do quarantine alone. And on top of that, my roommate had a friend who was in a not great housing situation and really needed a place to stay. So I saw this as a way out. I said, "Hey, you can sublet my room. I'll just go home. I'll stay with my family." And I won't lie. I wasn't employed for probably four to five months, and that was a difficult time because I tend to be a driven person. I like to have an agenda. I like to be running at 10:00, making lunch at 12:00. And after five months of that, the days all start to blend together.

Laurie McGraw:

And during that time, Maya, because I think this is very interesting. So many of the, we'll just call it the 20 somethings, the living back home with parents during this crisis time of the pandemic. Your job has pretty much evaporated. Not just you, but so many physical therapists. So how did you cope? How did you fill your day? How was your outlook? Just give us some perspective on that. It's difficult, right? And I'm very interested into also how you're coming out

of it and what your thoughts are about your career trajectory, just to think ahead of some perspective on that.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Of course. I literally drew up a daily planner and I tried to keep my days as organized as possible. That just suits my personality. I know it's not for everyone. But I didn't want to fall into the lull of not having anything to do day in and day out. So I felt like if I stayed driven, if I kept on networking, if I kept on thinking what the next step would be, then it would come along and it would be a good opportunity.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

And that is actually answering your next question. I, in the back of my head, had always wanted to do travel therapy. Having come from Russia, been in New Jersey, moving to Boston, I tend to move around a lot, and exploring really excites me. So I really wanted to see more parts of the United States and as well as help where help was needed. So I got in contact with some recruiters for travel staffing companies. I had already had a few of my friends start traveling, so they were really great mentors to me because they gave me the names of the best recruiters who had treated them well. And it was a long process. I think we were applying for, let's say, two months or so actively to positions. But even during COVID quarantine, the travel jobs all fell off, and there were maybe 10 to 12 jobs in the nation at any one time. And as a comparison, when it's not COVID time, there's probably 10 to 12 positions per state. So there's quite a bit more options.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Luckily, I got a hit in New Jersey. I was able to get emergency licensure in New Jersey due to COVID, which made the process much easier, because otherwise, it's about three to four months to apply for a Jersey license. And I was able to start working in July. We, we being my boyfriend and I, he was working remotely, so he actually traveled down to South Jersey with me and we were able to get an apartment closer to my office. And it worked out. For six whole months, we were just working in New Jersey. And I was able to see my family, he was able to see his. And then that's when I knew I wanted to continue traveling, because the market had started picking up and I already had an in with a great recruiter, and it just seemed like the right decision at the time.

Laurie McGraw:

So you had four to five months, and sounds like you stayed pretty active and being focused on your career. And it also sounds like your passion for what you're doing remained. Were there points in time during that searching that you wanted to just get out and try something completely different? Did you lose your confidence and how did you get it back, if you did? Any thoughts on that?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Honestly, I definitely had moments of doubt, but I still knew I wanted to be a physical therapist. Whether it was choosing travel therapy and just choosing that opportunity that came to me and saying yes to it and making the best of it, or just waiting it out and going back to Boston and accepting my old role back or a different permanent position, I knew I wasn't going to be leaving

healthcare anytime soon. I had hoped that sports would come back so that I could work as an athletic trainer on the side. But unfortunately, it didn't happen at that time.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So I had considered other options, like starting a social network or physical therapy tips or one of those YouTube videos where you're trying to teach people basic stretches and how to fix neck pain and back pain at the home. We all had it during quarantine. I know so many people had bad setups for their working from home stations. But I did not do that, unfortunately. I was just at the moment dealing with doubt, mental health issues, and trying to stay focused through it all. And I was very lucky that the opportunity to travel presented itself when it did.

Laurie McGraw:

That's fantastic. That is really fortunate, maya. And to be able to continue to have that passion for something that you've, since six years old, been focused on wanting to do and being able to do it again, that's just wonderful. That's just absolutely wonderful. As you think about this last year, and I know we're not out of the pandemic, we're emerging from it, has the learnings from the past year changed your future outlook? If you think about what you're doing now and what you might want to be doing five or 10 years from now, has anything changed based on this last year? Any new perspectives?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So with travel, it opened up my eyes to different settings in physical therapy practice. So I was always an orthopedic outpatient physical therapist, which is what you would think of as physical therapy. Let's say if you hurt your shoulder, you'd go to a clinic two times a week. The person there would help you go through your exercises, stretch you out, and then give you guidance.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

What I'm doing right now with my current contract is home health, like we had mentioned before, and I've never done this before. It's a little bit more complicated in terms of medical conditions and diagnoses. The patients usually come home quite a bit sicker than the patients that you would see in outpatient who are able to make it to a clinic. And before, I was always really set on being an outpatient therapist, but I've realized how much of a difference you make being in the patient's home and speaking to them or their caregiver. And they're so thankful. And seeing that change in just a few months has been really eye-opening. So in terms of that, I would definitely consider continuing home health, especially for travel. I do think I'm going to continue that.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

As far as my 10 year plan goes, that still has not changed. It is still my goal eventually to actually open a cash based practice. Questionably where. I'm hoping that my travels will lead me to a more concrete decision of where I'd like to settle down. But as a cash based practice, I would be able to treat a little bit more the way I want to while not being controlled by profit margins in outpatient clinics or insurance.

Laurie McGraw:

It's also interesting how your focus has changed a little bit. It's become maybe perhaps at this moment in time a bit more expansive due to circumstances and tapped into something that is enjoyable to you, travel and things like that. Maya, as a young professional, I like to know from young professionals what you think about the tools that you need to grow your career. And often, mentors and mentor networks tend to be important. Is that important to you? If so, how do you build that for yourself?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

I think it definitely is important. Like I had mentioned, my first job out of university, I had a great mentor, and he was really able to show me the way and have me continue down the right track of continuing education and always being a continual learner. So as a healthcare practitioner, we are continuously for the rest of our lives students. So if I ever give up and say, "I don't want to read journals anymore and I don't want to keep up with the evidence-based practice," that would make me a pretty bad clinician and that is against my morals. Plus, I think a continuous learner is just the best kind of therapist.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

So unfortunately, the one thing I think is lacking, and you had mentioned business. In physical therapy school, we, I think, had maybe one or two business classes. And I might be remembering wrong. But it doesn't quite give us the background information necessary in order to start any sort of private practice. And I think that is the interest of a lot of individuals. And personally, for me, I've sought out that information separately, whether it was from online. There are mentors that come out who have opened successful businesses in the physical therapy world, and they go out and they create blogs and they create guides that are meant for other physical therapists. Alternatively, I have considered taking some classes in business and marketing to try and do that in the future. But that is something that I'm keeping on the backend for now as I travel.

Laurie McGraw:

Well, I think also realizing that you're going to need a whole set of skills and learning that you don't currently have to reach the aspirations that you're talking about, Maya, that sounds very smart to me. And I would just encourage you to build the network of people that you can turn to. Classes and learning, always fantastic. But people who have been there, done that, that you can ask the questions that you might not want to ask in a classroom experience is so helpful. But it sounds like you've got your eyes set on the prize there. Maya, this is such an interesting conversation. Listeners, younger professionals like yourself who have great aspirations for themselves, any closing advice that you might give to others who might be listening?

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Of course. My advice would be to just continuously adapt and continuously learn. So if the right opportunity presents, even if it's not exactly what you had envisioned, take it, say yes to it, make the most of it. Because you never know what you'll end up learning and how your view of your future might change. So I definitely think through these difficult times, we need to continuously adapt and continuously learn to be the best that we can be.

Laurie McGraw:

I think that's great advice, and it seems like you are living that advice personally, professionally. It's great to hear. This has been an excellent Inspiring Women conversation with Maya Inozemtsevam. And Maya, I really appreciate talking to you today.

Maya Inozemtsevam:

Of course. Thank you so much. I really enjoyed this.

Laurie McGraw:

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