



# BUSINESS & PROFESSIONAL WOMEN IN JORDAN

CHOOSING TO LIGHT A CANDLE, INSTEAD OF  
CURSING THE DARKNESS



Konrad  
Adenauer  
Stiftung

## FOREWORD

Despite showing remarkable rates of female education, a factor usually leading to higher levels of employment, Jordan continues to have one of the world's lowest rates of women's formal workforce participation at only 15%. Among Jordan's unemployed women, the majority are university graduates. Many studies have been conducted to elaborate main barriers, such as the mismatch between education and the needs of the labor market, particularly in the private sector; the lack of child-care infrastructure and public transportation; limited employment opportunities and low salaries; and conservative social and cultural norms regarding gender roles in households and society in general. These factors are reinforced by legal and social limits on women, and by a lack of effective policies to promote women's inclusion and participation in economic life. An untapped potential for Jordan's struggling economy, as ILO studies show, is the inclusion of a female labor force which is crucial for economic development.

Nevertheless, success stories of Jordanian women who managed to overcome these barriers and establish their own businesses do exist. How could they succeed? What were the main factors motivating and supporting them? What should be improved from their perspectives and experiences?

With this article we would like to draw attention to positive examples of Jordanian businesswomen, as they have the power to motivate and inspire others.

I wish you an interesting read!

Yours,

Dr. Annette Ranko

Head of KAS Jordan Office

## ON KAS JORDAN OFFICE

Since 1982, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has been present in Jordan, where it promotes democracy and the rule of law as it does throughout the region and other parts of the world. Moreover, KAS Jordan Office aims to provide a sustainable contribution to the development and growth of social and market-based structures. In the Middle-East, KAS is taking part in the political, economic and social stabilization of the region.

## ON THE AUTHOR

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## INTRODUCTION

In time for International Women's Day 2017, I became curious about what it means to be a business or professional woman in Jordan. How does it differ from being a male business owner? Do Jordanian business and professional women struggle to overcome similar stereotypes as women in Europe or North America do? How has the situation of business and professional women in Jordan developed over the past decade, and what are the predictions for the future?

I quickly realised that Jordanian business and professional women are not a homogeneous group. Instead, they have diverse backgrounds, stories, struggles, company positions, and predictions regarding the future. The question I started out with, "What does it mean to be a business woman in Jordan?", failed me in assuming there could be one single answer.

Yet this question started a journey of inquiry that led to two striking realisations. First, the female population-to-employment ratio in Jordan is amongst the lowest in the world.<sup>1</sup> One should not give simplistic reasons for this, however, certain cultural norms and a lack of the necessary infrastructure are often suggested to be crucial factors. Second, although few in number, the business and professional women in Jordan are forces of nature. The women I was able

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<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization (2017): "Employment-to-population ratio by sex and age", available at [[http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/wcnav\\_defaultSelection?\\_afLoop=1529901073888104&\\_afWindowMode=0&\\_afWindowId=null](http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/wcnav_defaultSelection?_afLoop=1529901073888104&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null)] (last accessed 24/06/2017).

to interview are amongst the most highly-qualified, reputable, motivated, innovative, and hard-working individuals in the country. According to a study done by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2016, this is in line with the "selectivity" phenomenon: "the few women who work are the most educated."<sup>2</sup> In addition to education and professional skill, the interviewed women proved themselves to be resilient and determined to overcome barriers. Each one has been following, in their own way, the Chinese proverb, "It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness."

These two realisations led to an idea. After identifying common aspects or driving forces in successful business and professional women's stories, these "drivers" could be used to encourage more women to enter the labour force or take their business ideas seriously. Additionally, these factors may be equally beneficial and inspiring for the male population, as youth unemployment and a passive mindset towards work are substantial issues in Jordan.

## THE JORDANIAN LABOUR MARKET

In light of the fact that Jordan is one of the most peaceful countries in the Middle East, with a substantial "liberal" front, and with a ruling monarch very sympathetic to "Western" powers, it may be somewhat

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<sup>2</sup> Tzannatos, Z. (2016): "Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Three Questions Answered", in *International Labour Organization*: p. 13.

surprising that Jordan has one of the lowest female labour force participation rates in the world.<sup>3</sup> According to statistics published by the *International Labour Organization (ILO)* in 2016, the global average is 51%, and the average of the Arab region is 27%. Comparatively, Jordan's female labour force participation rate hovers at 15%, and therefore merely surpasses Syria (13% before the crisis), and Iraq and Algeria (with each 14%).<sup>4</sup> Jordan also suffers from a "brain drain". Large numbers of its educated men emigrate in search for better working conditions. According to the ILO, "[t]his makes the female human capital [...] even more precious: its underutilisation implies the economy is smaller than it could be and grows slower than its potential with concomitant effects on family incomes and women's prosperity."<sup>5</sup>

For Jordan, a country with a struggling economy and heavily dependent on foreign aid, the quantitative increase of women in the labour force contributing to economic growth could be monumental. A study conducted by the ILO shows that reshuffling the labour market towards greater gender equality could increase the GDP by 21%

(almost USD 1.9 billion).<sup>6</sup> The growing size of the economic pie also explains why, although women will greatly benefit from the labour market integration, "men's wages need not be reduced."<sup>7</sup>

The success stories of business and professional women in Jordan have the power to motivate others, transform the cultural mindset, and therefore begin to eliminate social barriers regarding work. These factors may help clarify which future steps to take, and prove stereotypes false that inhibit the implementation of business ideas or prevent pursuing professional training. The stories and advice of the interviewed Jordanian business and professional women resulted in these three "driving" factors: the importance of either mentorship or a form of family support; a problem-solving attitude, which enables an individual to see business opportunities, where others see problems; and, above all else, the necessity of being passionate about one's project or work.

## MENTORSHIP & FAMILY SUPPORT

A vocal advocate of women's increased participation in the Jordanian labour force is Ms Tamara Abdel-Jaber. She is the CEO of Palma Consulting, a 15-year old business

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<sup>3</sup> International Labour Organization (2017): "Employment-to-population ratio by sex and age", available at [[http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/wcnav\\_defaultSelection?\\_afLoop=1529901073888104&\\_afWindowMode=0&\\_afWindowId=null](http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/wcnav_defaultSelection?_afLoop=1529901073888104&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null)] (last accessed 24/06/2017).

<sup>4</sup> Tzannatos, Z. (2016): "Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Three Questions Answered", in *International Labour Organization*: p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Tzannatos, Z. (2016): "Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Three Questions Answered", in *International Labour Organization*: p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Tzannatos, Z. (2016): "Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Three Questions Answered", in *International Labour Organization*: pp. 6-23.

<sup>7</sup> Tzannatos, Z. (2016): "Effects of gender inequality in employment and pay in Jordan, Lebanon and the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Three Questions Answered", in *International Labour Organization*: p. 23.



and IT consulting firm, as well as the Board Treasurer of the Jordanian Business and Professional Women Association (BPWA).<sup>8</sup> According to Abdel-Jaber, there are two main reasons for Jordan's prominent and problematic low female employment rate: a weak infrastructure (public transportation, support systems, pay equity, etc.), and aspects of the cultural mindset. The latter encompasses the search for a suitable partner, the desire for a comfortable workplace, and, most importantly, job security. Additionally, there is a limited understanding of why it is important for women to contribute to the work force and the economy in their own country. Abdel-Jaber argues that, "if a woman earns a salary, most of that money will go into the household income, which means better food, a better education for the children."<sup>9</sup> Although she clearly states that the role of the caretaker of the children is noble and important, Tamara Abdel-Jaber believes there are many skills and values that business women can pass onto their children. Amongst these are also efficient scheduling and time management, and the importance of an industrious work ethic.<sup>10</sup> She is certain that women can be encouraged to open businesses, or become professionals in a sector, through programmes like the newly launched BPWA, which aims to inspire women by putting them in touch with role models from various fields in 10 different universities across Jordan; there they can have exchanges regarding the challenges and

opportunities in a particular sector or profession.<sup>11</sup>



Fig. 1 : Ms Tamara Abdel-Jaber

Because of her own experience, Tamara Abdel-Jaber believes mentors are crucial for increasing the female labour force participation rate. Having finished her bachelor's degree at the University of Jordan in under three years, she knew she was not cut out to be an employee, and was keen to open her own business. Her mentor, Mr Khaled Kilani, asked her to work for him and be patient for 5 years, promising he would support her in her entrepreneurial endeavour after that time period. Kilani vastly expanded her knowledge and entrepreneurial skill, and - true to his word - co-founded *Palma Consulting* 5 years and 2 weeks later. His guidance helped her avoid making weighty "beginner" mistakes and gave Abdel-Jaber the necessary confidence in her early years.<sup>12</sup>

Ms Hala Nasser and Mrs Heba Hanna's mentoring relationship is equally impressive.

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<sup>8</sup> Part of the "International Federation of Business and Professional Women".

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> International Labour Organization (2016): "Conference Report: Women in Business & Management. Gaining Momentum in the Middle East & North Africa": p. 15.

Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

Hala Nasser is the managing director of her late father's law firm *Elias Nasser and Associates*. Since starting her training in the early 1990s, she has become one of the most reputable and successful lawyers in Jordan. Heba Hanna was one of her interns years ago, and according to Nasser, she was too shy and anxious to be able to face the challenges of being a lawyer. "I was tough on her,"<sup>13</sup> Hala Nasser claims, and with incredible results.



Fig.2: Ms Hala Nasser

Since her internship with Nasser, Hanna attributes her strong and capable personality to her mentor's guidance.<sup>14</sup> Even though Hanna did not formally train at *Elias Nasser and Associates*, Nasser says, "I continued mentoring her [...] working on her personality and character [...] until it became quite sharp. I am proud of her."<sup>15</sup> In retrospect it turns out that Hanna's diagnosis with Multiple Sclerosis was one of the reasons for her sensitivity and fatigue. However, Nasser's mentoring helped her

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with Hala Nasser, 26th of March, 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Hala Nasser, 26th of March, 2017.

overcome this first great challenge as an upcoming lawyer.

What can women do when mentorship is unavailable? Ms Nancy Dabain, Director and co-founder of *Reliance Power Service & Construction Co.* is an electrical engineer, who had to make her own way in the construction and energy field, which is largely considered "a man's world" in Jordan. There were no mentorship programmes available during Dabain's years of education. Nonetheless, through her 26 years of work experience, Dabain has steadily made her mark in the construction and energy field. "I was the only woman in the electrical engineering department at that time. [...] There was no mentor. I did it the hard way - alone - and by learning from experience,"<sup>16</sup> Nancy Dabain recollects.



Fig. 3: Ms Nancy Dabain

Dabain learned how to manage her mannerisms and her attitude, in order to gain the workers' respect. What was more difficult was to maintain the respect already attained. She says, "You have set-backs, bad moments, but you have to keep pushing and reaching. [...] And in a moment you can lose it all. You may receive their

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with Nancy Dabain 29th of March, 2017.

respect, but you need to maintain it.”<sup>17</sup> Although there was a lack of mentorship, Dabain was not without support. She credits her family for pushing her, despite their initial wishes for her to be a doctor. “[Family] shouldn't hold you back, but should provide the support that is required.”<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the support of the family, or lack thereof, is an important factor in a business or professional woman's career in Jordan. Ms Buthaina Abu Roza, founder and managing director of *Qutoof Organisation*, a vocational training centre in environmental sustainability, similarly says she could not have managed her career transition without her family.



Fig. 4: Ms Buthaina Abu Roza

After 17 years of working in business administration and creating refugee camp improvement strategies for the UN, she

made the courageous decision to quit her job in order to focus on her company full-time. “When you quit your job, you know you will not have enough money each month [...] especially when you are working in a growing sector,” Ms Abu Roza states. “Because of [my family] I am now working for *Qutoof* [...] because of them I have enough.”<sup>19</sup> Family support can take on various forms, but whether it is financial or emotional, it is a weighty factor in the development of a Jordanian woman's career aspirations.

There are, however, women in Jordan who have been able to persevere in their desired career path without family support. For Rand Disi, one of the leading nutritionists and health consultants in Jordan, following her dream profession was an uphill battle. Although her family always supported the idea of her working, they did not approve of a degree in health and nutrition. In fact, they thought she was studying biology in an attempt to be a doctor or pharmacist, and were surprised when she presented her honours degree in nutrition on graduation day. Even when she registered with the *Lebanese American University Medical Center* to become a certified clinical dietician, she told her parents she would work in the pharmaceutical industry upon coming back to Jordan.<sup>20</sup> When she began applying for jobs in the nutrition field in Jordan, “there was nothing [...] I would submit my CV and get nothing in return”, Disi states.<sup>21</sup> After three months of daily applications, she was asked to be a food

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Nancy Dabain, 29th of March, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Nancy Dabain, 29th of March, 2017.

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Buthaina Abu Roza, 14th of March, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Rand Disi, 21st of March, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Rand Disi, 21st of March, 2017.

safety consultant for a company with a wage too little to cover the transportation costs. However, that job led to her meeting Chef Markus, who employed her as a Professor at the *Royal Academy of Culinary Arts*. This in turn led to her speaking about nutrition on Jordanian television with the Prime Minister, and ultimately to her own TV segment as a dietician.



Fig. 5: Ms Rand Disi

Taking one opportunity after the other, Rand Disi saved up enough money to purchase her own office and nutrition centre, where she offers consultations, nutrition lessons, yoga classes, belly dancing, and other health programmes. She remembers that, “When I wanted to open my place – everybody said that I was going to fail. Not everybody around you will be motivating you to do what you want to do. People will make fun of you. Others will say you are too young to do something. [...] I said I am not going to fail.”<sup>22</sup> After proving her determination and her passion, Disi’s father ended up being the only person to support the opening of her new office.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Rand Disi, 21st of March, 2017.

Sometimes it takes time for family members to adjust to their daughter’s visionary thinking. Successful and reputable lawyer Elias Nasser, father of Hala Nasser, initially did not wish to see his daughter in the law profession, much less as the heir of his law firm. His associates, too, refused to properly train her, and then quit when Nasser made his daughter senior partner. She states that, “for five years, I walked into the office as if I was going to my own funeral. Everybody was against me.”<sup>23</sup> Her father’s initial disapproval was due to the harsh climate in the legal sector, and correspondingly his desire for a different career for his daughter. After struggling and fighting for years to be taken seriously, she won her father’s respect, and this struggle has enabled her to take on many challenges since.

Much like Nasser, Heba Hanna’s father discouraged her from working in the legal sector. “My father studied law in Russia. He knows the meaning of law. We had a big fight when I chose law school. My father chose to work in a bank and he wanted me to stay at an office,”<sup>24</sup> Hanna recollects. Her mother, however, maintained it was Hanna’s future and her decision. So she became a lawyer. At first she could take on as many cases as she desired. Hanna says, “I was smart and worked at more than one law firm. And no one knew. I was cheating. On one day - I had four bosses, and no one knew. I was independent.”<sup>25</sup> Everything changed when she got married, however, and she needed a different type of family support.

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Hala Nasser, 26th of March, 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.



Although motherhood and a career are not exclusive in Jordan, there are two prerequisites to making both possible: first, the support of the spouse; second, the flexibility or manageability of a given work schedule. Indeed, Heba Hanna points to her supportive husband as the reason she can balance work as a lawyer and care for her baby twins. The second prerequisite is fulfilled by Hanna having her own law firm, which enables her to take on whichever and as many cases as she chooses, and to finish work at 4pm. This flexibility, however, arose out of a challenging situation. Two years ago, Hanna was fired from her previous job for being pregnant. Although Hanna was initially upset, this circumstance led to her founding her own law firm, and giving her the independence she needs to be both a lawyer and a mother. “Don’t hate a bad day, because this bad day will open a journey for you,”<sup>26</sup> Hanna can now advise.

For many other Jordanian women, who may lack support from their spouse, or are unable to flexibly arrange their hours, the desire to have a family trumps or blocks professional aspirations. Indeed, many prefer to work in the public sector, if at all, as it offers “shorter working hours, and a safer, more stable, and culturally acceptable working environment.”<sup>27</sup> The public sector also guarantees social security, health insurance, and maternity leave, amongst other benefits.<sup>28</sup>

During the ILO’s “Women in Business & Management” conference, Ms Susan

Maybud, Senior ILO gender specialist, and Ms Hanan Saab, Lebanese managing director of *Pharmamed*, recommended that conditions for these two prerequisites be improved. Ms Maybud, on the one hand, believes that men should be encouraged to help advance women’s careers. Husbands and fathers would also reap the benefits of their wives’ formal work engagement, since when “men become more involved with family care and with the sharing of responsibilities, they would also benefit more from the joys provided by their close-knit families”.<sup>29</sup> This is also something that is highlighted in Ms Heba Hanna’s case, as she states, “[My success] is not because of me, or because I am a woman. We have good opportunities in this country, if there are good men.”<sup>30</sup> Ms Saab, on the other hand, believes companies should be developing initiatives to support women, offering part-time work and creating mentoring programmes for working mothers.<sup>31</sup>

Improving conditions for working mothers would bolster the efforts of current business and professional women in Jordan while minimising obstacles for the younger generation. With increased cultural support and support from spouses, as well as more opportunities for flexible hours, the founding of a business or professional training would be made more attractive and doable.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Al Jidara (2017): “Lessons Learned for the Pay Equity & Child Care Facilities Initiative in Jordan: Final Report”: p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> Al Jidara (2017): “Lessons Learned for the Pay Equity & Child Care Facilities Initiative in Jordan: Final Report”: p. 6.

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<sup>29</sup> International Labour Organization (2016): “Conference Report: Women in Business & Management. Gaining Momentum in the Middle East & North Africa”: p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.

<sup>31</sup> International Labour Organization (2016): “Conference Report: Women in Business & Management. Gaining Momentum in the Middle East & North Africa”: p. 15.

## PROBLEM-SOLVING ATTITUDE

The second factor that greatly contributes to women's success in their careers is choosing to maintain a problem-solving mindset. In this environment, women need to be able to view Jordan's unique challenges and social barriers as opportunities for growth.

In the business world, for example, one could easily be intimidated by the statistics. Ms Tamara Abdel-Jaber rarely meets other female consultants in Jordan, much less in a high ranking position. However, she sees this statistic as an opportunity. She states that, "When we are addressing a potential client, we usually talk to C-level people. These people come across entrepreneurs all the time, but they come across male entrepreneurs. For them, getting a request to meet or to talk from a female business owner was always different. I think that helped, in my case."<sup>32</sup> The circumstance made Ms Abdel-Jaber stand out amidst her competition, instead of making her retreat. Further, the scepticism towards her did not make Abdel-Jaber cower, but caused her to do better work instead. "I believe [as a woman] you have to fight more, and you have to work harder to prove yourself. You [therefore] have a greater attention to detail, you put more effort into planning, and your risk appetite is lower than that of a male business owner or founder,"<sup>33</sup> she says. As a consultant, putting in more hours, paying more attention to details, avoiding risky

deals, and working harder on relationships with clients builds an impressive reputation.

22-year-old design and visual communications student, Ms Aya Barqawi is another woman who has chosen to see opportunities where others see obstacles. Barqawi is one of the up-and-coming fashion bloggers in Jordan, having produced a significant social media following in the past three years. The social media outlet was the reason she was offered a photography-based internship for a German fashion label in Berlin, and why Barqawi was able to garner insight and professional experience in the field. Although her Arab background was a challenge in and of itself, there was a greater stereotype she had to overcome: Barqawi was told that, as a woman wearing a hijab, she is too limited to be a fashion blogger, and that it will prevent her from reaching her full potential.<sup>34</sup> Aya Barqawi did not let this stereotype change her values, or prevent her from creating and publishing creative content. In fact, she believes her hijab and her modest fashion makes her stand out even more in the long run.

Aya Barqawi has also chosen to see the currently small Jordanian fashion market as an opportunity for growth. While most Jordanian fashion and design entrepreneurs have decided to emigrate, Barqawi believes there is a lot of growth waiting to happen in Jordan, where perspectives towards creative professions are slowly beginning to shift. "The market for fashion is much bigger [in Germany] than it is in Jordan. Berlin is cosmopolitan with very condensed opportunities. But at the same time,

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Aya Barqawi, 21st of March, 2017.

because it is such a huge industry, you have a lot of competition. So that is an advantage and disadvantage in Jordan: the market place is not that big, but you can get your work out there easier, and it's easier to get noticed.”<sup>35</sup> In this sense, the fashion blogger refuses to be intimidated by the status quo, and is determined to do her part in growing the fashion and graphics industry in Jordan. One reason she believes change is imminent is the growing use of social media. Instagram, for example, makes it possible to connect and work with international bloggers and companies, thereby widening Barqawi's horizon and her possibilities.

However, the digital literacy in Jordan is still a work barrier to many women. According to a recent study by the ILO, “[t]he percentage of Arab female who access and use the internet is just 36.9 per cent compared to 46.2 per cent of Arab males. Thus, if women and girls are less able to access relevant content, they will find themselves at a serious disadvantage in acquiring digital skills and literacy, learning about and exercising their rights, participating in public processes and accessing more skilled jobs, which generally tend to be better paid.”<sup>36</sup> Ms Reema Diab, the managing director of *Nokia/Alcatel* Jordan, and the only woman of this rank in the Jordanian telecommunications sector, decided to use her expertise to help eliminate this barrier and societal issue. Diab received the *Best Woman in Technology Award* in 2013 (presented by the Miracle Foundation) and two years later founded her not-for-profit

*Galaxy Organisation* with the goal of empowering women and youth with the help of technology.



Fig. 6: Ms Reema Diab

One of her favourite programmes is teaching women how to create their own businesses online. “It is difficult for women to work outside their homes, so we train them how to develop their own ideas and create sustainable projects,”<sup>37</sup> Diab explains. Another *Galaxy* project takes a portable computer lab to remote areas in Jordan, and therefore provides people with the opportunity to do research or create presentations. Diab states, “It is my mission to make technology available for each person in Jordan.”<sup>38</sup> This problem-solving attitude is what allows Ms Diab to be successful in a highly competitive field, and within a company intent on reducing costs.

Ms Buthaina Abu Roza went a step further by leaving the comfort of her previous, stable job to help solve a structural and societal problem. She set her sights on transforming Jordan's infrastructure for recycling, waste management and environmental sustainability via vocational

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Aya Barqawi, 21st of March, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> International Labour Organization (2017): “Achieving Gender Equality in the Arab Region amidst the Changing World of Work”: p. 5.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with Reema Diab, 7th of March, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Reema Diab, 7th of March, 2017.

training programmes. As a woman, she faces the cultural challenge of contacting and developing working relationships with various factories' managers, almost exclusively male. Abu Roza explains, "First, you have to gain their respect. And then you can start working on attaining their interest in your work. At the same time, you have to make them see you are only offering a work or business relationship."<sup>39</sup> To date, her company is not yet backed by the Jordanian legal system, however, this may soon change. "I'm being proactive. The government may approve a new law, stating that each factory must have at least one employee specialised in waste management. I am already training staff and youth, so that once the law is approved, we will be ready."<sup>40</sup>

Instead of being discouraged about work barriers, societal problems, and gender inequality, these business and professional women have found ways to manoeuvre around these issues, viewing them as opportunities. Women of all ages could better prepare for entering into the work force by developing this problem-solving attitude and staying focused on their decisive purpose. When individuals shift from a passive attitude regarding work to a more active and increasingly industrious mindset, employment rates will increase. This determination is the last factor I would like to discuss.

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<sup>39</sup> Interview with Buthaina Abu Roza, 14th of March, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Buthaina Abu Roza, 14th of March, 2017.

## "YOU HAVE TO LOVE WHAT YOU DO."

Despite their different backgrounds and stories, one factor connected all the interviewed business and professional women: each stated that the love for their work keeps pushing them, and proves vital in situations when they must overcome challenges.

When asked whether she would recommend working in the nutrition and fitness sector, Rand Disi stated, "I would definitely recommend it, but they need to want to do it. If you don't want to do it, you won't succeed. There are a lot of new findings, new articles you need to read, a lot of medicine you need to know about. [...] They need to want to keep educating themselves, and they need to love what they do. [...] If I have to do something, I am not going to do it as well as if I love it. [...] I don't wake up every day with butterflies. Sometimes I wake up tired, hating what I do – because I am tired. But it pays off, when you see yourself, when you see what you have achieved."<sup>41</sup> For Disi, seeing her own office and the changed lifestyles of her clients gives her renewed energy and motivation.

Along similar lines, lawyer and senior partner Hala Nasser believes that "whether women or men, if they don't love this profession, then there is no way you can continue or continue successfully. You can earn your living, but you wouldn't be really great. That's why maybe I wanted to

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Rand Disi, 21st of March, 2017.



become a lawyer since the age of 8. I really loved it.”<sup>42</sup>

When I asked Tamara Abdel-Jaber to describe her day as a consultant, she shared, “I work for 12-14 hours a day and I enjoy every minute of it.”<sup>43</sup> According to her, the diversity in activities and the challenges are what keep her passionate about her projects. The determination to make a change in society led Abdel-Jaber to her degree of choice. “We have the Tawjihi exam - the secondary school examinations. And I scored quite high on that exam. My parents wanted me to do medicine or engineering. But I decided to do accounting, because I knew that I was not meant to become an employee. I wanted to start my own thing. I felt that finance and accounting would give me the right background.”<sup>44</sup>

Lawyer Heba Hanna similarly scored very high in her Tawjihi. “I could have studied engineering, but I chose to be a lawyer. [...] I chose less, because I wanted it. If a young girl wants to be a lawyer, she should follow her dream.”<sup>45</sup> Regarding the compatibility of a family and a career, Hanna believes that, “If you want it, nothing is hard. [...] It’s a decision. Your life is a decision, day by day.”<sup>46</sup>

For women seeking to work in the telecommunications sector, Reema Diab

also states that, “If you work with passion, life will be easy.”<sup>47</sup>

Buthaina Abu Roza highlights that not every day will be glorious, and there will be difficulties. She believes that it is crucial for young environmental entrepreneurs to “encourage yourself first”.<sup>48</sup> The motivation has to come from within, since she describes days of fatigue, confusion and discouragement. “If you are not going to encourage yourself, and look at the brighter side, you are not going to move forward.”<sup>49</sup>

Electrical engineer Nancy Dabain similarly states that her job is full of challenges and requires sacrifices. “But if they have the passion, if they want these kinds of challenges, this kind of job - why not? They should go for it! [...] Don’t settle for anything less than what you want.”<sup>50</sup>

Design student and fashion blogger Aya Barqawi believes that the right mindset is the most important aspect to make it in any creative profession. “It’s important to get into it because you like it, because you are willing to create the content. [...] And if you are good at what you do, then opportunities will come with time. [...] You are not going to make money when you first start. Know that it will take time and a lot of work to put something actually good out there. [...] If you like doing it, then it’s worth it.”<sup>51</sup> Barqawi encountered many who wanted to have a blog for the goal of making quick

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<sup>42</sup> Interview with Hala Nasser, 26th of March, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Tamara Abdel-Jaber, 23rd of March, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Interview with Heba Hanna, 28th of March, 2017.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with Reema Diab, 7th of March, 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Buthaina Abu Roza, 14th of March, 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Buthaina Abu Roza, 14th of March, 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Nancy Dabain, 29th of March, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Aya Barqawi, 21st of March, 2017.

money, or to gain followers for boosting their own self-confidence. This, however, defeats the purpose of creating out of a passion for the created content.

As a last contribution, Lina Hundaileh, founder and CEO of the *Philadelphia Chocolate Factory* states that, "Quitting is not part of the culture of an entrepreneur. To be successful, you have to have passion, be able to adapt to change, and be a continuous learner."<sup>52</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It is important to clarify that women in general, and business and professional women specifically, are not a homogeneous group. They will have very unique struggles, opportunities and mindsets depending on their background. In Jordan there are great differences between women living and working in Amman, and those outside of Amman. In Amman there is a difference between those from West Amman and East Amman. There will be differences between Jordanian, Lebanese and Palestinian women; between Muslim and Christian women. According to Lina Hundaileh, "each needs to relate to their respective role models in harmony with their own contexts and environments."<sup>53</sup> The factor of coming from a privileged background cannot be underestimated. However, men and women from contrasting circumstances can learn

from these "best practice" examples and the values underlying their work. Hala Nasser, for one, emphasised the struggles she had as a lawyer's daughter, stating that having a privileged background comes with its own set of challenges.<sup>54</sup>

There is no simple formula to success or to a healthy work-life balance. However, these business and professional women seem to have identified three factors that can contribute to a greater number of women in the work force, and a healthier work ethic for Jordanians in general. Taken together, mentorship and/or family support, a problem-solving attitude, and passion for one's work are crucial for women seeking professional training, or those desiring to implement their business ideas. These factors can be equally helpful for men in Jordan who are trying to find their place in the world of work, struggling with unemployment, or who are unhappy in their current job.

If these three factors are encouraged and developed, I believe more young women and men in Jordan would look at the economic challenges and their abilities, saying, "Instead of cursing the darkness, I choose to light a candle."

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<sup>52</sup> Jenkins, P. (2015): "Lina Hundaileh: The Willy Wonka of Jordan", available at [<http://sheinspiresher.com/lina-hundaileh-the-willy-wonka-of-jordan/>] (accessed 24/06/2017).

<sup>53</sup> International Labour Organization (2016): "Conference Report: Women in Business & Management. Gaining Momentum in the Middle East & North Africa": p. 23.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Hala Nasser, 26th of March, 2017.