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INTEGRATE INFLUENCE IMPACT

MANAGING DIRECTOR
Tushar Sahoo
tushar@gecmmediagroup.com

EDITOR
Arun Shankar
arun@gecmmediagroup.com

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Manali Misra
manali@gecmmediagroup.com

CEO
Ronak Samantaray
ronak@gecmmediagroup.com

GLOBAL HEAD, CONTENT AND STRATEGIC
ALLIANCES
Anushree Dixit
anushree@gecmmediagroup.com

GROUP SALES HEAD
Richa S
richa@gecmmediagroup.com

EVENTS EXECUTIVE
Gurleen Roprai
gurleen@gecmmediagroup.com

Ronit Ghosh
ronit@gecmmediagroup.com

Jennefer Lorraine Mendoza
jennefer@gecmmediagroup.com

SALES AND ADVERTISING
Ronak Samantaray
ronak@gecmmediagroup.com
Ph: + 971 555 120 490

PRODUCTION, CIRCULATION, SUBSCRIPTIONS
info@gecmmediagroup.com

**GEC
MEDIA
GROUP**

UAE
203 , 2nd Floor
G2 Circular Building ,
Dubai Production City (IMPZ)
Phone : +971 4 564 8684

USA
31 Foxtail Lan, Monmouth Junction
NJ 08852, Ph: + 1 732 794 5918

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LONG ROAD TO GENDER PARITY

The year 2020 shook the world. People lost lives and livelihoods, but women lost more. The year was a setback for gender equality. Jobs started dwindling and the scale of household chores, childcare and overall unpaid domestic load started tilting more in the direction of the women.

According to PwC's annual Women in Work Index, Covid-19 is causing a shecession and by the end of this year, the progress for women in work will be back at 2017 levels. McKinsey mentions that women make up 39% of global employment but account for 54% of overall job losses.

Where Covid-19 has negatively impacted the progress made in gender equality, some of the existing societal norms and roles expected from women still act as hurdles. Lana Gigashvili of Schneider Electric mentions that we lose too many women to gender-related pressures and issues, such as parenthood. "I am yet to meet a man who has taken time out of his career to raise his children," she remarks.

If we talk about sector-wise inclusion, the IT industry which was historically considered male-dominated has come a long way. Top women leaders from SAP, Palo Alto Networks, Cisco, Epson, SentinelOne and Siemon agree that participation of women in the IT leadership has increased. A lot has changed but no country has yet achieved full gender parity.

The economic impact of Covid-19 on women indicates that even in the 21st century when adversity strikes, women suffer more. Great progress has been made since women marched in New York in 1908 demanding equality but still there is a long path ahead. Due to the Covid-19 fallout, even more efforts are needed than before in direction on gender equality. This is evident from the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 which states that if the current trends are projected into the future, the overall global gender gap will close in 99.5 years.

Alice Grasset of Salesforce rightly puts it that attending many meetings where a vast majority is of males, especially at management or executive level, is a daily reminder that the road to gender equality is still long and will take a global effort.

The world needs to start focusing on talent and not gender, and only then real change will come about.

Manali Misra
manali@gecmmediagroup.com

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ANUSHREE DIXIT,

Global Head Content & Strategic Alliances, GEC Media Group

I strongly believe that being a woman we tend to bring both, the heart

and mind to our work. While it has been an age-old rule that emotion and business do not go hand in hand, I like to contradict it. Being in the media industry, which is heavily People to People, some business decisions are better taken by the heart.



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Enhancing women's employment opportunities



DR ZULEKHA DAUD,
*Founder and Chairperson,
Zulekha Healthcare Group*

Over the years the workplace has transitioned to provide greater opportunities and empowerment to women across all sectors. There has been greater acknowledgement of the women's contribution to their areas of work. The society must accept women, their simplicity, their ease of enabling things, rather than seeing them as dominating or aspiring for power only. Both genders are made to complement each other, and they must work together for a better world for our future generations.



ZANUBIA SHAMS,
*Co-Chairperson,
Zulekha Healthcare Group*

With employees from diverse nationalities, our organisation is an active member of the She Works partnership, a global initiative of the IFC, a member of the World Bank. Alongside other companies we pledged to implement measures proven to enhance women's employment opportunities such as mentorship programmes, flexible working arrangements, and leadership training to enable diversity in management. This helps to ensure gender diversity and drive productivity, competitiveness, and innovation at work. For those who are willing to learn, take challenges as they come and grow, the sky is the limit.



ALICE GRASSET,
Head of Marketing
Emerging Markets, Salesforce

As the Head of Marketing for the Middle East and Africa at Salesforce, Grasset has been leading all aspects of field marketing regionally, including Demand Generation, Content Marketing, Digital Marketing, Events, Executive Engagement and Account-based Marketing. Her team has played a critical role in the hyper-growth of Salesforce in those markets.

Road to gender equality is still long, needs global effort

In my opinion, there is no better time for women of all ages to consider a career in the tech industry. Things have evolved positively over the few years of my career, and equality seems to get higher and higher on many tech CEO's agendas, that can be celebrated. At Salesforce, equality is a core value. Our Equality groups as well as our yearly equal pay assessment are two examples of how Salesforce is addressing the topic.

But there is a lot of work to be done and women are still underrepresented in the industry. To truly advance gender equality, we must consider the entire employee lifecycle, from reskilling the female workforce, to adopting inclusive hiring practices, investing in development and providing leadership opportunities.

MOST ENGAGING

Attending many meetings where a vast majority is of males, especially at management or executive level, is a daily reminder that the road to gender equality is still long and will take a global effort. With some effort, business can be the greatest platform for positive change, and together, we can create a more inclusive society than we had before, where everyone feels represented, heard, and valued.

MOST CHALLENGING

At my scale, being empowered and encouraged to build a diverse team and to support the growth of some fantastic individuals is the most satisfying aspect of my role. I feel that Salesforce provides the right environment to be inclusive and Equality is a core value that drives a lot of decisions. There is still a lot to achieve but I am proud to play a modest part towards this positive change.



DEBBIE FOWLER,
EMEA Marketing Manager,
Kingston

Responsible for PR, Channel and B2B Marketing for EMEA region at Kingston Technology. Kingston has a strong content strategy. The company uses technical experts, influencers, alliances, and trending topics to create insightful content to help customers make decisions for their datacentres, cybersecurity and laptop, notebook estates.

Women leadership in male dominated IT sector

Globally Kingston's workforce is 58% female, even more interesting as we are an IT company which is traditionally a male dominated industry. At Kingston we have so many female role models in management and director levels, that we sometimes forget that in other companies and countries women are still facing being treated different to their male counterparts. As a global company we deal with many different cultures and hope that we do our part to continue the positive trend, where women are seen for the characteristics that they bring to a role.

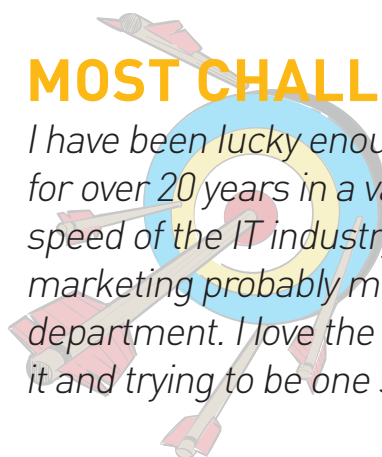


MOST ENGAGING

Seeing all our marketing teams working together on a campaign is very satisfying. Their individual hard work comes together into a successful marketing campaign that all departments are able to use, and the results speak for themselves.

MOST CHALLENGING

I have been lucky enough to work for Kingston for over 20 years in a variety of roles. I love the speed of the IT industry, things change quickly, in marketing probably more than any of the other department. I love the challenge of keeping up with it and trying to be one step ahead.



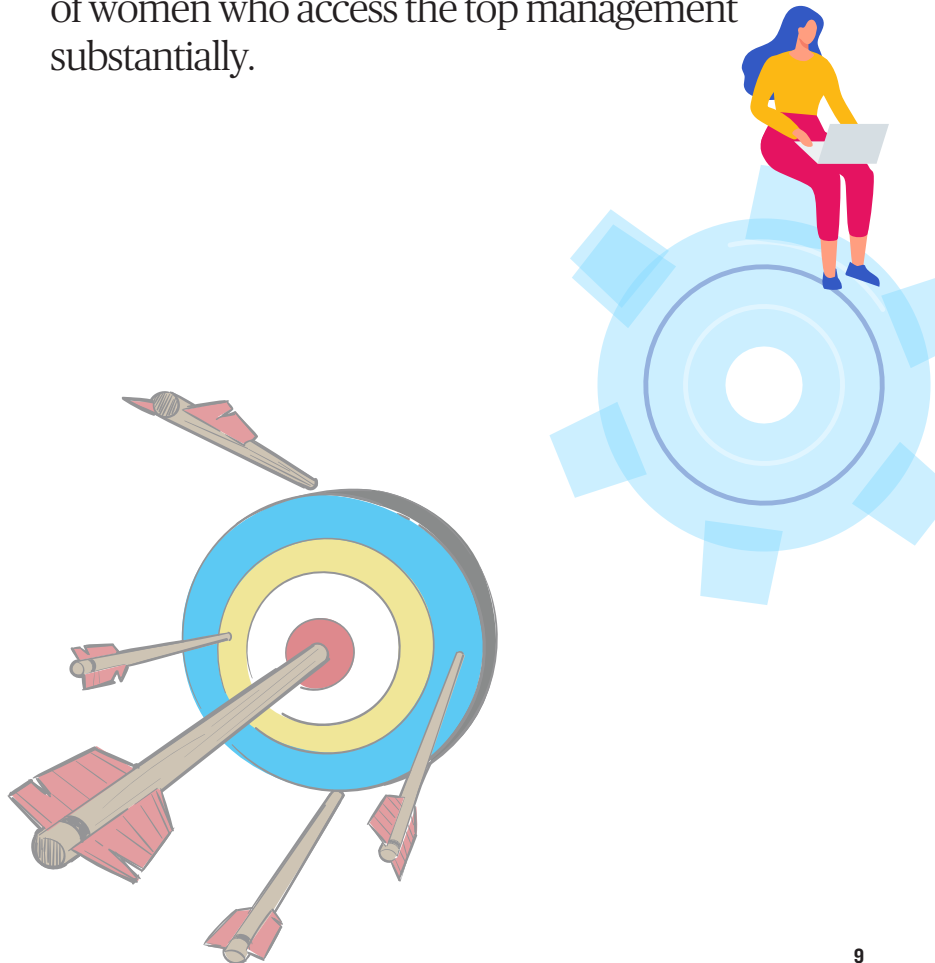
**DINA TAREK,**

*Regional Account Manager
for ME region, Liferay*

Tarek is the Regional Account Manager for the ME region at Liferay and it has been a fulfilling experience for her. Caring for renowned customers across the region, helping them see the benefit, up-selling and cross-selling, as well as sharing the best practices make up the aspects of her job that she enjoys and loves.

Gender equality in IT is a work in progress

Being a woman in a male-dominant industry might sound tough. 8 years into the field and I have always had the support I needed whenever possible. The technology industry has come a long way, where women can excel and flourish without worrying about fear of discrimination. Women inclusivity in this field is a work in progress, and I am proud to see more women take on important roles in the industry. Any talented woman who perceives a safe environment in which to develop, personally and professionally, will have an additional motivation to contribute to increasing the percentage of women who access the top management substantially.





DOAA SULAIMAN,

Robotics Business Development Director at Proven Robotics

Sulaiman's role includes creating a successful robotics business line and develop the go-to-market strategy for a series of humanoid, service and industrial robots. Identifying and ascertain the scope of the applications and software working on those robots for customers. She provides the software and applications use cases and user scenarios to the development team in light of the market requirements.

Making lives easier and convenient through robotics

When I started my career in technology, women had already established their position in the industry in some countries. Over the years, education has become more about attending to the market requirements and universities have started to incorporate specialisations for IT. Gradually the area of information technology widened its scope, responding to the leap in technology. AI, machine learning, and data analysis are now being studied by women. Thus, they have focused and specialised career development plans starting from being undergraduates to MBA and PHD holders.

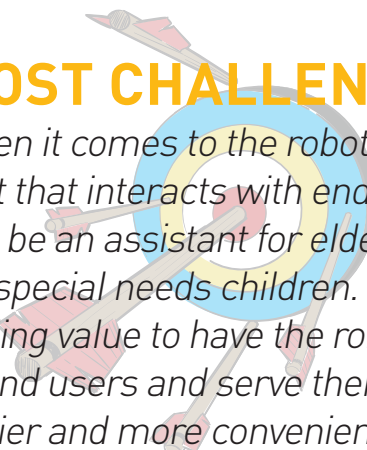
MOST ENGAGING

Time is a big challenge in technology. Every day we have a new update, and you always need to be one step ahead; what we develop today can be automated tomorrow! Therefore, it is crucial to study the market and follow market trends in the sectors I am operating in, from retail to healthcare and education.



MOST CHALLENGING

When it comes to the robotics business, we have a part that interacts with end users, where the robot can be an assistant for elders, a teaching assistant for special needs children. This is where I feel I am adding value to have the robot reach a segment of end users and serve them to make their lives easier and more convenient.





DR ARCHI GUPTA

Chief Administration Officer,
Valiant Clinic and Hospital

Gupta's responsibilities include managing and supervising various departments, including finance, administration, human resources, customer service, sales, and marketing. Additionally, she develops and implements strategic plans and reviews administrative policies along with day-to-day operations. The role also requires motivating 150 employees which are set to grow to more than 200 by mid-2021.

Leading at strategic planning in healthcare sector

I joined Valiant Clinic & Hospital as a strategy and healthcare technical lead when the organisation was just beginning its journey. In the past five years, we have expanded our services from an outpatient wellness facility into a surgical centre. Our hard work has paid off and I am proud to say that we have become the premier healthcare facility in Dubai, catering to the needs of the market in an ethical manner. We take pride in our hospitality services which have been envisioned in a way to rejuvenate and energise our patients.

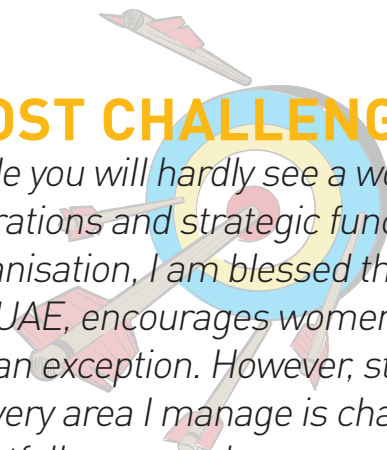
MOST ENGAGING

The most rewarding part of working at Valiant Clinic & Hospital is that we get to contribute towards healing people and alleviating their suffering, ensuring that they revitalise their health in an ethical manner, which is the core of our vision. I am also grateful for collaborating with many of my colleagues who have become friends over the years.



MOST CHALLENGING

While you will hardly see a woman handling operations and strategic functions for an organisation, I am blessed that the leadership of the UAE, encourages women leaders and they are not an exception. However, striving for perfection in every area I manage is challenging because shortfalls are used as excuses for inability to lead.





EVA MATTHEUSSEN,
*Head of Human Resources,
DHL Global Forwarding
Middle East & Africa*

Mattheussen leads the HR team at DHL Global Forwarding in Middle East and Africa and is also the Global Project Lead for Women@DHL Global Forwarding & Freight, an initiative to promote gender diversity by providing a networking and motivational platform for colleagues to collaborate and build their careers together.

Promoting gender diversity and inclusive work culture

Developing a future-ready workforce where diversity is celebrated is one of our strategic focus at DHL and a top priority. Personally, I think workplaces have become more inclusive over the years, and I am optimistic that diversity and equal opportunities for all will continue to feature highly in the boardroom agenda. Through our Women@DHL Global Forwarding and Freight initiative, we will continue to encourage dialogues, run mentoring programs, promote talented women to leadership roles and create a workplace culture that is inclusive and attractive for them.

MOST ENGAGING

Recognised as a top employer in the region and bagging the Stevie Awards are definitely some of the highlights! Equally, receiving positive feedback from colleagues and seeing the many countries owning and implementing the initiatives is an added vote of confidence that we are doing the right thing.



The desire to create a lasting impact through work

At Amazon, we believe that building a culture that is welcoming and inclusive is integral to people doing their best work and is essential to what we can achieve as a company. I believe that what is making a difference today is that we are able to see the successful stories from different women leaders in various sectors who are an inspiration to so many. Having role models is important, as it encourages young females to think about their professional careers and to know they can achieve anything. I feel hopeful about the future and the leadership roles that women will have in shaping future industries.



MOST ENGAGING

I am a person who enjoys doing new things and to be challenged out of my comfort zone. At Amazon, we embrace a Day 1 culture, where we treat every day as a new opportunity to think big and innovate. The best part of the job is the ability to be a trusted advisor to our customers and helping them succeed in achieving their set goals.

MOST CHALLENGING

I approach my work with a desire to have a lasting impact, but that requires hard work, determination, and an ability to prioritise. There are key guiding principles for me. First is the ability to outline short-term and long-term plans, assess regularly, and be able to pivot when required with full accountability for every decision made. Second is, you are successful when your teams and your customers are successful. Third, you need to be self-critical, and embrace and learn from your mistakes.



GHADA ELKEISSI

Head of Worldwide Public Sector Professional Services, Amazon Web Services, Middle East & Africa

Elkeissi leads the Public Sector professional services organisation in the Middle East and Africa, working closely with organisations to help them achieve their goals for digital transformation through the power of cloud technology. She leads a team who engages with customers across three verticals.



HABIBA AL MAR'ASHI,
Chairperson,
Emirates Environmental Group

Al Mar'ashi is the Co-founder and Chairperson of the Emirates Environmental Group, President and Founder of the Arabia CSR Network, Vice Chair and Founding Member of the Emirates Green Building Council. Al Mar'ashi leverages these roles to work with the government, the private sector, the academia and other segments of society to improve environmental awareness and engagement in the UAE.

Contributing to a sustainable growth

The expansion of the knowledge economy, increased access to education and social movements have helped women in many parts of the world to find roles in the workplace that may have been earlier regarded as the sole prerogative of men. The UAE Government realises that more women in the workforce, especially as senior leaders, ministers, and entrepreneurs boosts the economy and society. So, while we still have a lot of work to do to empower women in the workplace, I believe that women are more strongly asserting their leadership aspirations and investing in their skills, knowledge, and experiences to grow in high-profile roles and rightly so.



MOST ENGAGING

Knowing that every day you are contributing to the sustainable growth and development of your country, your people and the world makes working for an environmental non-profit a very satisfying job. My typical day will have meetings with government and business leaders, projects with students, and working on ground with volunteers that are equally passionate to protect our natural world.

MOST CHALLENGING

Working in the environmental sector implies that you have to challenge and change organisational policies and practices as well as individual lifestyle behaviours and traditions that are harming our natural world. Bringing about this change can be very challenging, especially when people have a fixed mindset and world view. But this is a challenge that I love taking head-on.

Taking the people-centric approach as a leader

Over the years, women have increased their participation in the workplace to become significant players in the success of the IT industry. This accelerated change has allowed women to confidently speak up about their career aspirations positively. Organisations that have allowed rapid adaptation to best practices in recruitment, development, and retention of women have been the catalysts of this paradigm shift.

Gender equality is an important part of SAP's mission to help the world run better and to improve people's lives. Operating in an industry often cited for its lack of diversity, SAP Women Forward has been working to counter this trend and to be a tech company that is willing to lead by example.

MOST ENGAGING

With the ever-changing market dynamics, among the biggest challenges are businesses changes in strategies, structures, and the need to implement rapid decisions. These changes require HR to translate these business decisions into people strategies and meaningful experiences, while also focusing on transparency and objectivity.

MOST CHALLENGING

Working in HR allows me a chance to create meaningful and long-lasting relationships with colleagues across the globe. This offers me new learning ventures and ability to solve together complex challenges which can impact positively how we run as an organisation.

HANAN ABDULKARIM,
Human Resources Director,
SAP Middle East North

Abdulkarim is the HR Director for SAP Middle East North, which covers Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Critical to her role is to positively influence their business long-term thinking and to help shape the internal customer value proposition, beyond the traditional transactional HR role.



**JANA GUTIERREZ
KARDUM,**

Senior HR Manager for Central Eastern Europe, Middle East, Africa and Turkey, Red Hat

Fostering talent development of Red Hat associates across 8 countries, supporting leadership evolution, promoting Red Hat culture and organisational development in this fast growing territory.

Maintaining a good emotional balance at work

Supporting women's career growth has always been part of Red Hat's broader diversity mission. However, in the recent years there is a visible shift in the mindset of our managers, who are really willing to go above and beyond to find the right female talent for their teams and invest into them. We have a focus on looking for female candidates especially for technical roles, special women focused mentoring and Women's Leadership Community working on education and capabilities building for women in Red Hat. We also organise and support STEM activities focused on attracting girls and young women to technology.

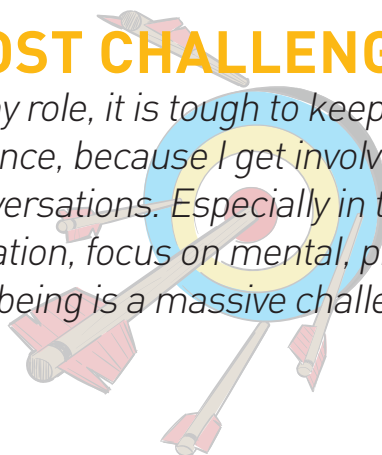


MOST ENGAGING

The most satisfying aspect of my job is to engage with talented people and help them via coaching and mentoring to unleash their talent. It really elevates my spirit to discover talent and help it grow.

MOST CHALLENGING

In my role, it is tough to keep a good emotional balance, because I get involved in many difficult conversations. Especially in the current global situation, focus on mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing is a massive challenge.



**JAVERIA AIJAZ,**

Director Technology and Innovations, Farnek

Technical architect and leader on smart FM solutions for Farnek, Aijaz is an experienced technocrat, passionate IoT strategist, with software development background. She has implemented mobility, cloud, IoT, remote monitoring, artificial intelligence, BI, and ERP solutions.

Women can tackle challenges in a more efficient way

Women are not only appreciated but are successful in almost every industry vertical. It motivates me enough to keep my focus on working and delivering more than what is expected from my role. Man and woman are just employees, what matters is their skills, experience and how they drive their operations to deliver the excellence that make businesses shine.

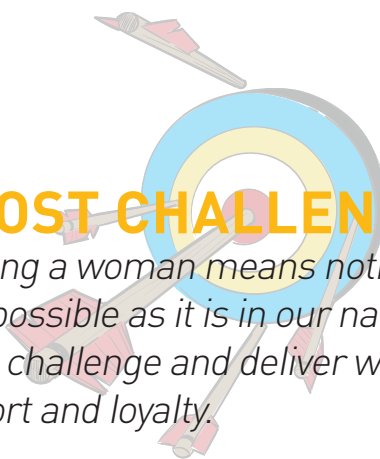
MOST ENGAGING

Business operates on technology, so my skills and operations are at the heart of our business. This gives me satisfaction every day.



MOST CHALLENGING

Being a woman means nothing is impossible as it is in our nature to take the challenge and deliver with all the effort and loyalty.





KAREN KHALAF,

Associate Partner at
Bain & Company

Bain & Company helps senior leaders of large companies, investors and government entities make critical strategic, organisational and operational decisions and then support them to execute against these decisions to realise value for their organisations.

Finding solutions is easy, adopting them is a challenge

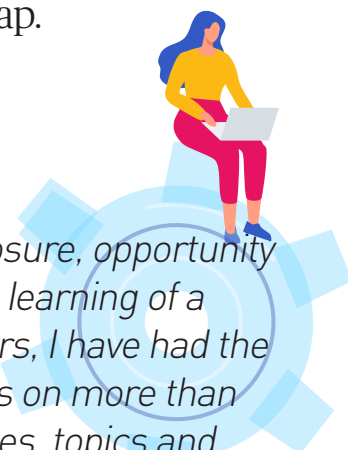
An organisation such as Bain has always been an environment that truly fosters equal opportunities for women. It is one of the firm's top priorities, and a lot of the leadership's time is devoted to making this a reality. I personally have felt nothing but incredible support to thrive and succeed as a woman in what I do. At the same time, I have seen a remarkable shift in the compositions of the management teams of my clients, with a much higher share of women in top positions. While many leadership teams are still male-dominated, I feel we are really at a tipping point where there are all the pre-conditions to accelerate closing the gender gap.

MOST ENGAGING

Few jobs offer the diverse exposure, opportunity to make real impact and steep learning of a consulting career. In only 7 years, I have had the opportunity to work with clients on more than 30 projects in different industries, topics and geographies, each time with different teams. This experience has given me a real sense of fulfilment.

MOST CHALLENGING

Over the past years I have developed a keen appreciation of why it is hard to be a senior company executive or leader in government: finding solutions is the easy part, having organisations buy in to them, adopt and embrace them is the real challenge.





LANA GIGASHVILI,
Human Resources
Business Partner,
Schneider Electric

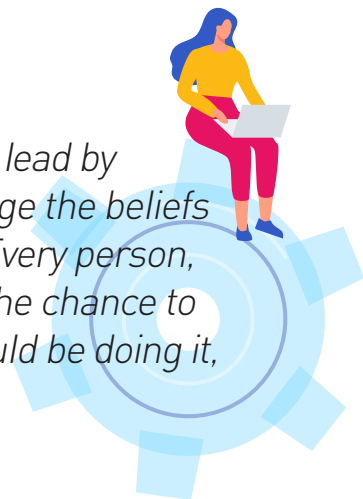
Gigashvili's job as human resources business partner is to focus on the business structure and serve as the primary strategic HR support for the Business Unit and function leaders throughout the region.

Why everyone should be promoting gender equality

The reality today is that you will find many more women at an executive level, and it is easier to find mentors who will be there to support rising female stars. The same is true of women-owned businesses; there are more female business leaders today than there were two decades ago. The truth is also that we are still not at parity. Women are half the population, and yet they are only a single-digit percentage of CEOs or GMs. We lose too many women to gender-related pressures and issues, such as parenthood. I am yet to meet a man who has taken time out of his career to raise his children.

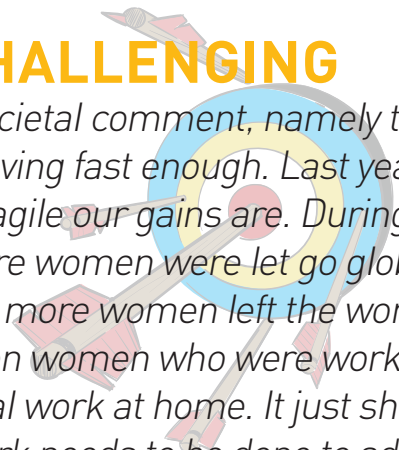
MOST ENGAGING

The ability to get real change and lead by example, as well as work to change the beliefs and views of others around me. Every person, both man and woman, who has the chance to advocate for gender equality should be doing it, no questions asked.



MOST CHALLENGING

It is more a societal comment, namely that we are not moving fast enough. Last year proved how fragile our gains are. During the pandemic more women were let go globally than men and more women left the workplace than men. Even women who were working had to do additional work at home. It just shows how much work needs to be done to advance gender equality.





LANA THERESE ALRICHAN,

*Consultant and Co-Founder,
Kite Partners Consultancy*

Alrichan holds responsibility for all advisory services which Kite offers across its international office network in Dubai, Sydney and London. She is passionate about combining strategy and marketing. She has spent 15 years setting world-class standards in business strategy development and evaluation, business planning and implementation, along with a resilient history in marketing and advertising. She is also the Chair of the Alumni Committee at Strathclyde Business School UAE where she completed her MBA.

Journey from holding executive positions to owning a brand

At the age of 29, I was humbled to hold a management position within a global media agency, sitting across one other female within the management team. Having later worked in a UAE owned company, I was again grateful to be amongst the 7 members of the management team. Both these experiences have proven that as a female, you can be empowered to reach executive positions both in the UAE and globally.

I am now proud to be the owner of Kite Partners, which is led by myself and one other exceptionally talented female. Together we have created a brand that holds its own in the UAE and across the UK and Australia via our global partnerships.



MOST ENGAGING

Being able to manage and run your own agency and having the ability to truly create work to be proud of. I believe the MBA at Strathclyde Business School has allowed me to excel at what I do, especially in terms of strategy and the frameworks we have developed on the back of that knowledge.

MOST CHALLENGING

Balancing the pitch process along with completing work for existing clients. It is challenging to be splitting time among bringing in new business while maintaining the highest standards for current clients and projects.



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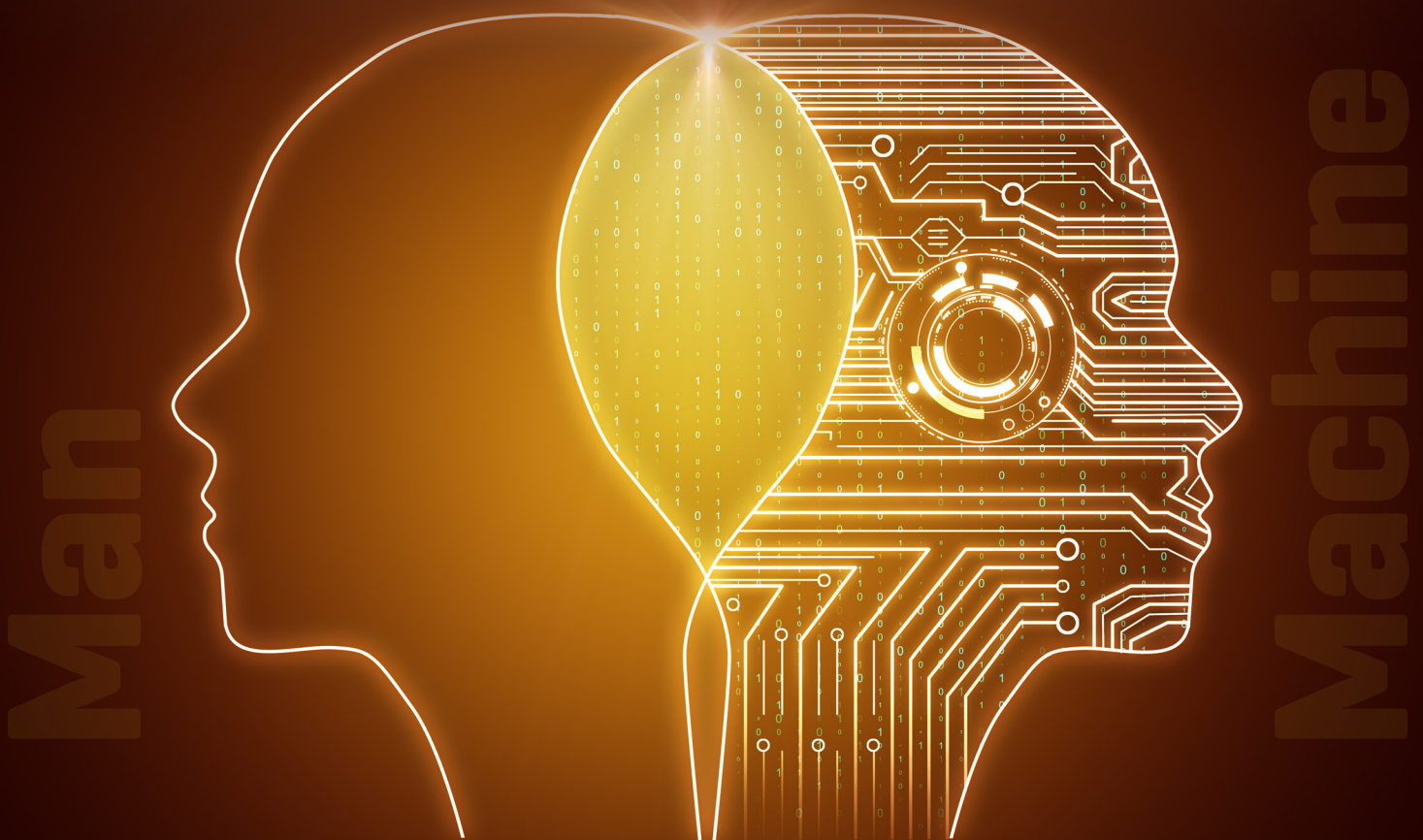
in Association with

مجمع الشارقة للبحوث
والتكنولوجيا والابتكار
Sharjah Research Technology
and Innovation Park



March 22, 2021

#StrongerTogether



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SHERIFA HADY,
Vice President EMEA
Channel Sales, Aruba

In her role, Hady manages a team of more than 200 members across Europe, Middle East and Africa where she works closely with partners, distributors and managed service partners. The objective is to grow the partner networking business to serve customers.

Bringing out the best in team members

I started my career on a difficult note. After finishing my engineering degree, two multinational companies rejected me because of my gender. But that was 31 years ago. I do believe more women now have opportunities to join the industry they desire. Diversity and inclusion objectives are an integral part of the CEO and boardroom initiatives.

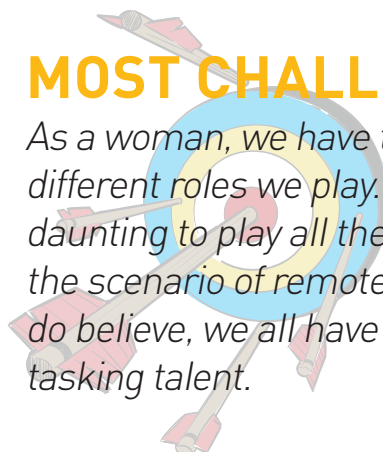


MOST ENGAGING

In every role I have taken on in my career, one thing always stands out. It is the value that I bring to the table. It can be about bringing out the best in each team member or the value I bring to the discussions with each partner on how we can grow our business together. I also enjoy coaching and mentoring female colleagues.

MOST CHALLENGING

As a woman, we have to balance all the different roles we play. Sometimes it is daunting to play all the roles, especially in the scenario of remote working. However, I do believe, we all have to improve our multi-tasking talent.





LEENA PARWANI,
Founder CEO,
LPH Financial Services

As a founder, Parwani had set up the internal management rules and processes. She had hired and trained most of the people in the company. Now she has a well-set team of professionals and processes and systems in place. She manages the team and drives the business development to remain on top of the game.

Helping people and spreading joy is satisfying

Before becoming an entrepreneur, I worked as a professional in human resources in a very efficient organisation, where I learned and grew and constantly upgraded myself. Since I am a woman myself and I had the opportunity of meeting with some great businessmen and see their working environment, especially if they are women-friendly or not, I had created an exploitation-free environment where everyone has equal opportunity to grow and upgrade themselves.

Nothing is easy when you manage a complex business that deals with human mind, uncertainty, risks and how one reacts to it, I think I made it reasonably easy, due to prudent management style that I have and that has worked well. I empower my colleagues with freedom and responsibility, and it has worked well.

MOST ENGAGING

My biggest satisfaction comes from helping people when I see smile on their faces. Dealing with life insurance is not easy. You deal with risks, health, fear, etc. that no one wants to discuss. But when I see the smile on the face of my client after claiming the money, or seeing the benefits as opposed to the costs, I feel a sense of satisfaction. I feel great.



MOST CHALLENGING

Managing expectations of everyone. It is humanly very tough to satisfy everyone. But I try to make them as happy as possible.





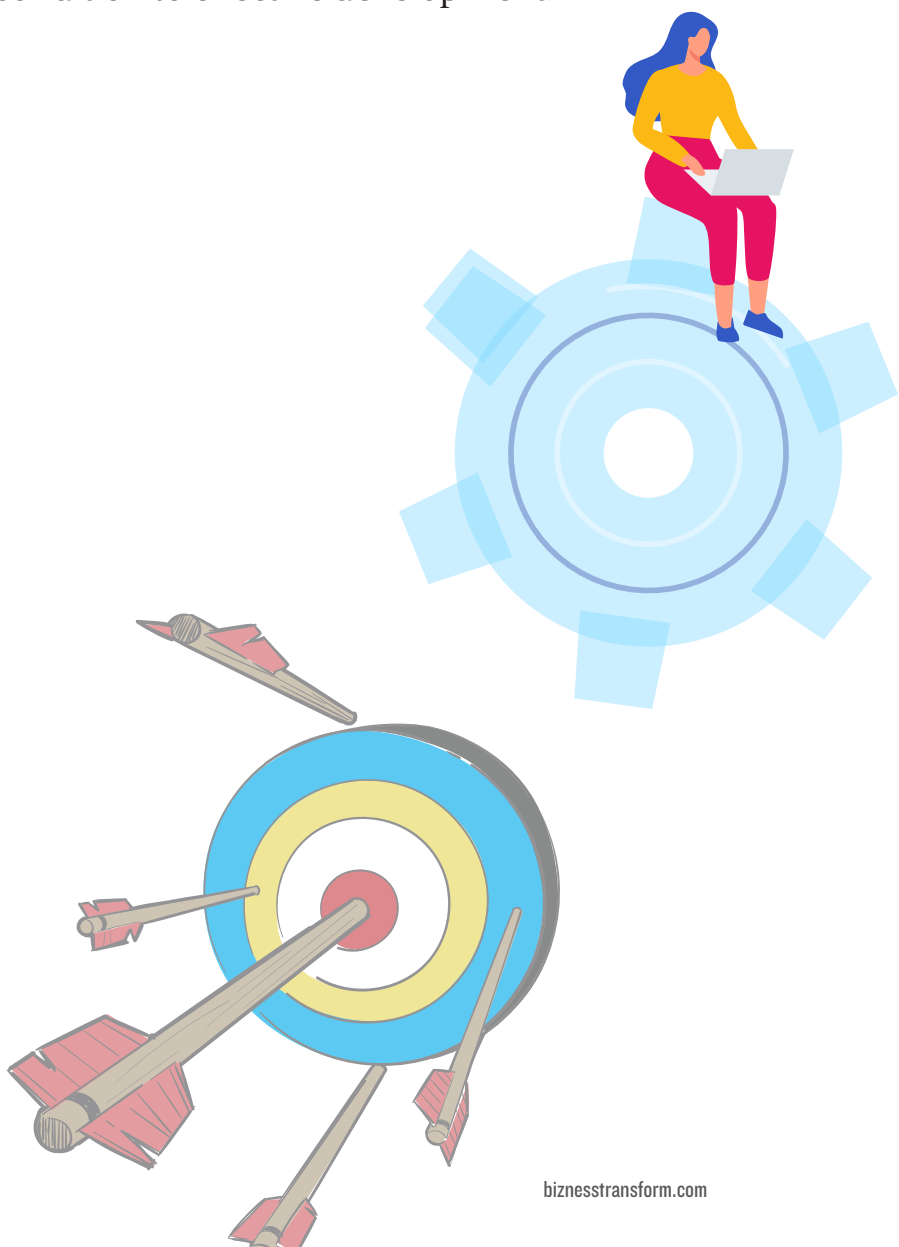
MAJDA BOUALIOUI,

*Business Development
Manager at Pixcom Group
of Companies*

Boualioui is responsible for developing growth strategies and plans. She plays an integral role in identifying and mapping business strengths and customer needs, along with writing business proposals. She engages in negotiating, drafting, and reviewing contracts and assists in the coordination and implementation of marketing strategies. She also delegates tasks to achieve strategic goals.

Empowering women to tackle economic challenges

The collective voice of women speaking up about their experiences in the workplace, has never been stronger. There is a new fearlessness and urgency to address the challenges. I believe that women are now found in occupations, industries and roles previously regarded as the sole prerogative of men. Women empowerment is part of the solution to improve our economic challenges as well as a condition to effective development.





MALOU TOFT,

*Vice President for
Milestone Systems EMEA*

As the Vice President, Toft is heading sales, marketing and customer operations across the EMEA regions, within the offices in 15 countries. Toft also oversees an organisation of around 200 employees.

Positive ripple effect from women in top jobs

It is well documented that there is a direct correlation between gender diversity, more innovation and profitability in the corporate world. Companies with a higher diversity score, gender included, are simply more likely to deliver a strong bottom line. This has helped drive the development, although there is still work to be done.

Role modelling is another element. It is more likely for women to pursue top jobs when they see other women in these types of positions. So over time, there will be a positive ripple effect but it will not happen overnight.

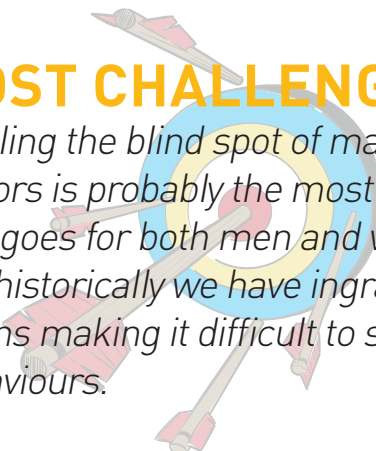


MOST ENGAGING

I am a technologist and a marketer who loves the combination of logic and magic. Building winning teams who know exactly who they are serving, what they are offering and how they will deliver. I also love to see a team member making a beautiful pass to someone else enabling the collective effort or simply the success of others.

MOST CHALLENGING

Tackling the blind spot of many male-dominated sectors is probably the most challenging aspect. This goes for both men and women. Culturally and historically we have ingrained habits and norms making it difficult to spot our own biased behaviours.





MARIA EAGLING,

Director of Marketing and Digital Services, Epson EMEA

Eagling's role is to develop the strategic direction and oversee the development and delivery of all marketing activity across the region. This remit sees her lead a team of over 150 marketing professionals across EMEA who address audiences in many countries, speaking multiple languages and with many differing cultural values.

Adapting rapidly to changing business environment

Historically the technology and IT industry has been a male-dominated industry, but things have been changing for some time. Certainly, in the years that I have been in the industry, I have seen huge efforts made to make the workplace more appealing to women. This is reflected in the number of women now working in the IT industry and in more senior positions which has significantly increased. Personally, I feel a great sense of worth working within a sector that delivers real change within the world addressing environmental and societal concerns through technological development and innovation.

MOST ENGAGING

I take great satisfaction from leading activities that see my team come together to deliver something significant and successful, a major event or a region wide campaign. Over the last year however, my team's ability to adapt to rapidly changing environment and business pressures yet still deliver the outstanding results we have, is something I will remember with tremendous pride.

MOST CHALLENGING

The most challenging aspect of my role is also one I enjoy the most, working with a group of people based across such a large geographical space. At a logistical level, this poses challenges, but it also provides a great wealth of experience, ideas, and views from which to draw and learn.



MARKETA SIMKOVA,
*Partner, Head of People and
 Change, KPMG Lower Gulf*

In her role, Simkova collaborates closely with clients to achieve long-term organisational goals. She helps clients rethink business design, achieve HR satisfaction, sustain improved efficiency and ensure proper leadership practices, which support organisational transformation.

Creating healthy work culture for growth of employees

Simkova joined KPMG in 2011. She has seen diversity in the workplace prioritised over the years, with women from entry-level positions to mid-level management receiving support and encouragement. At KPMG, women are given an equal opportunity, from the recruitment process, to initiatives, to career progression and promotions to senior positions. KPMG's Network of Women, KNOW, encourages women in junior positions to shadow KPMG mentors, thus supporting their career advancement.

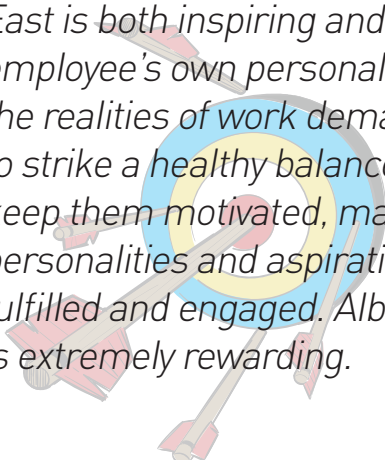
MOST ENGAGING

Marketa finds it rewarding to work with a variety of clients, including UAE business leaders, government officials, and private companies, assisting them in resolving workplace issues. She is inspired to contribute to the creation of a healthy work atmosphere in which employees can grow, as well as to enable an efficient and effective environment.



MOST CHALLENGING

Running a team of over 50 people in the Middle East is both inspiring and demanding. With an employee's own personal and professional goals, the realities of work demands can make it difficult to strike a healthy balance. Marketa's role is to keep them motivated, managing each employee's personalities and aspirations to ensure they are fulfilled and engaged. Albeit challenging at times, it is extremely rewarding.





MAYA EL HACHEM,

Managing Director & Partner,
Boston Consulting Group

El Hachem leads the firm's work in human capital development and social impact strategies and transformations in the GCC. She supports governments, private sector players, and non-profit organisations tackle their most pressing human capital challenges. She also leads tourism and entertainment projects across the GCC.

Reinventing organisations for a real impact

BCG is committed to the advancement of women in business, and we lead by example. We believe in addressing challenges women and talent more broadly face holistically and introducing in measures that support their progress across all stages, starting with recruiting, to retaining, and then advancement. Women@BCG is our initiative to make BCG the preeminent employer for women seeking a career in professional services, and increasing the number, success, and satisfaction of women at BCG.

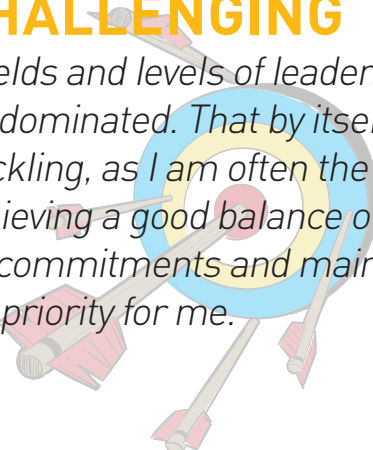
MOST ENGAGING

I enjoy many aspects of my role. Mostly I enjoy working with our clients on shaping the future, on reinventing their organisations and on achieving real impact. I enjoy the dynamic nature of my job, the continuous learning and growth opportunities, and the achievements of my clients, specifically, female clients.



MOST CHALLENGING

Many of the fields and levels of leadership I work with are still male-dominated. That by itself is a challenge that I enjoy tackling, as I am often the only women in the room. Achieving a good balance of my professional and personal commitments and maintaining my wellbeing is a priority for me.



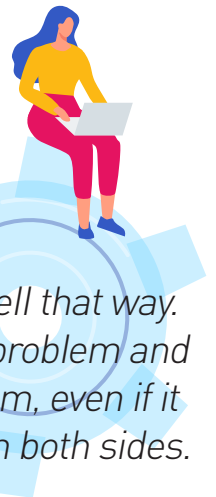


MCKENZIE HUGHES,
Global Cloud-Colocation
Market Manager, Siemon

Hughes has a dual role at the Siemon Company where she is focused on regional sales as well as being a datacentre specialist globally. She tries to help sales teams understand the importance of partnerships within the datacentre space and help grow those relationships.

Building trust and relationships for meaningful sales

I have been in technology for over 20 years and I remember when I first started, you rarely saw women in this male-dominated industry. I love that I can say that this has changed so much, now you see women in every type of role, including CIO, CTO, CEO, etc. It is inspiring to see how much we have changed as an industry, but it is also refreshing to see how many women love working in technology and the platform this is leaving for the next generations coming through.



MOST ENGAGING

I love building relationships. I am not a transactional salesperson, so I don't sell that way. I truly love understanding a need or a problem and helping a client find the right fit for them, even if it isn't something I offer. It builds trust on both sides.

MOST CHALLENGING

Datacentre technology is changing so quickly, so staying ahead of the latest trends and knowing what's coming next is critical for me. This space will continue to evolve at a record pace in the years ahead and making sure I am always growing and learning so I can impart that to others will remain a continual focus.





NATHALIE H BEYDOUN,

*Retail and HR Manager
of BFL Group*

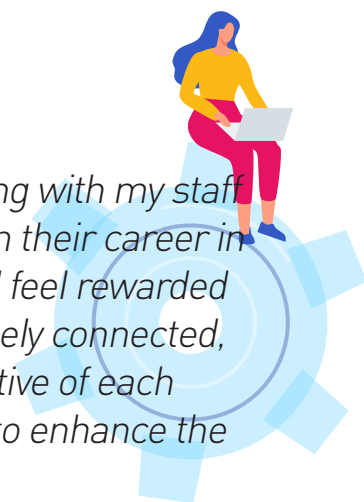
As HR Manager, Beydoun handles key HR functions including hiring and interviewing staff, managing administrative tasks, enforcing company policies, and ensuring staff development. As Retail Manager, she oversees the customer experience and monitor the merchandising process and the stores' financial performance. Overall, she is responsible of 1,500+ employees across 45 UAE stores.

Balancing customer and employee experience

Our business environment offers one of the most supportive and inclusive workplaces in the UAE and the region. 90% of our employees are women and we take great pride in their valuable contributions to the business across all levels and functions. Women are a pillar of BFL Group's foundations. Recognising their efforts is our priority and rewarding them for taking initiative and thinking outside the box is common practice by our leadership.

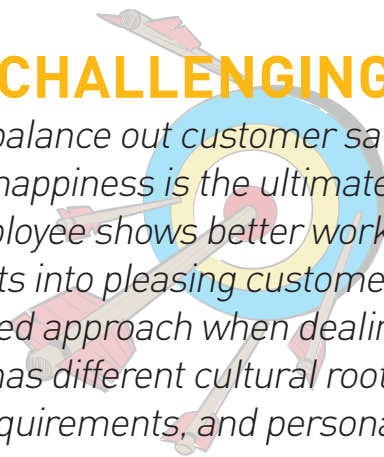
MOST ENGAGING

I am very passionate about working with my staff and helping them move forward in their career in light of BFL Group's family spirit. I feel rewarded when I see our employees genuinely connected, respectful of each other, appreciative of each other's contributions, and united to enhance the overall customer experience.



MOST CHALLENGING

Having to balance out customer satisfaction and employee happiness is the ultimate challenge. A happy employee shows better work results and invests more efforts into pleasing customers, so I adopt a personalised approach when dealing with them. Each one has different cultural roots, social practices, position requirements, and personal circumstances to be taken into account.





NOORAH ALI AL SUWAIDI,

*Organisational Development
HR Department, Ajman Free
Zone*

Part of my tasks is to develop human resources strategy, regulations and policies. I perform manpower planning, review job descriptions and manage institutional change at Ajman Free Zone. Also, I review organisational and functional structures. I'm currently overseeing the AFZ TALKS program and the development of succession planning.

Efficiently balancing professional and personal life

It is encouraging to see that more and more women today are proactively pursuing their career goals with confidence in fields and disciplines of their own choosing. Organisations can provide them with more training support and equal access to opportunities to help them advance in their professions and become qualified to hold leadership positions. Through my 10 years of working at Ajman Free Zone, I have been given an opportunity to improve my experience and knowledge and widen my horizon. I have become more confident and ambitious, still actively going after my career objectives.

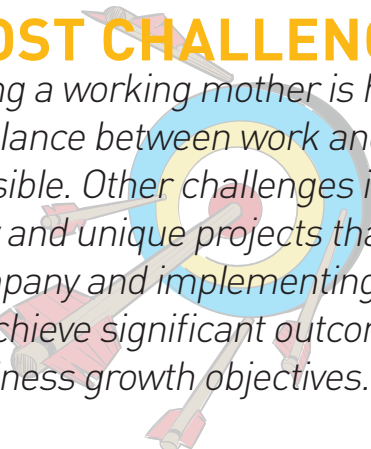
MOST ENGAGING

As an HR team leader, I engage with most employees. This, along with a friendly work environment, is one of the most satisfying aspects of my job. I also feel a sense of achievement, with the top management always motivating us to challenge ourselves by taking on new projects.



MOST CHALLENGING

Being a working mother is highly challenging. Finding a balance between work and family life is difficult but possible. Other challenges include coming up with new and unique projects that can add value to my company and implementing innovative strategies to achieve significant outcomes according to our business growth objectives.





NOURAH SHUAIBI,
Ambassador and General
Manager of Get Wonky, Eltizam
Group

Shuaibi was brought on board the Eltizam Group to execute the CEO's visionary Corporate Culture called Get Wonky. This comprehensive culture framework trickles down to all subsidiaries and is aimed at being the DNA to which we operate by through our day-to-day tasks. Her role is to implement a culture that enhances employees' wellbeing, transforms our operations and create a more inclusive workplace.

Building a culture that enhances employees' wellbeing

The market has been changing throughout the years, where the rise of different jobs and positions have placed a higher demand on skillset rather than gender. We see the change apparent with rising female leaders with the accessibility of the internet and social media platforms which inspires other females to gain perspective on the possibilities of them being in a leadership role. Male leaders have realised that transforming the workplace to welcome females to gain leadership roles is an added value to their success.



MOST ENGAGING

To be able to communicate to a diverse employee cohort that comes from 43 countries with 146 different languages and an array of different preferences on what culture means to them. Culture is dear to all of our hearts and can be interpreted in so many different ways, where one has to be very creative and open to implement an encompassing culture that relates to everyone.

Building positive perception for women leaders

Sodexo is currently leading the corporate industry through illustrating change and setting a benchmark that others may aspire to achieve. Initiatives such as Spirit of Inclusion provide a great platform for an inclusive environment that allow people to remove their unconscious biases and to enhance positive perceptions of gender roles within the organisation while empowering women to grow further in their careers. Furthermore, Sodexo ensures that gender equality is a key factor in succession planning creating a pipeline that encourages women to stay and grow their careers.

MOST ENGAGING

I would have to say one of the most engaging aspects of my job is being on the frontline of negotiations for various transactions allowing me to be deeply involved in the success and growth of the company. Moreover, I have the honour to be an integral part of the decision-making process for the strategic growth of the region which is highly rewarding if we consider that I only joined Sodexo 4 years ago. The company's vision promotes individual growth and empowerment towards a common development goal.

MOST CHALLENGING

The most challenging aspect would be constantly being under pressure and making sure that every single request or task is given the utmost level of attention and care, while trying to respect a fair work-life balance trend. Secondly, as it is part of my role to provide full spectrum advise across our line of businesses, it may become challenging when related to such a wide and diverse geography.



PAMELA DI BENEDETTO,

General Counsel Africa and Middle East, Sodexo

Di Benedetto has spent most of her career in male dominated environments for various companies, but during her past few years at Sodexo, it has been clear that Sodexo is determined to ensure that gender equality is always a key focus for the organisation.



RAQUEL LOPEZ,
VP of Sales & Marketing
GCC, Barceló Hotel Group

Lopez is a passionate professional with a forward-thinking mindset. Through her dedication and walk the extra mile attitude, she has held several senior leadership roles in the hospitality and entertainment industries in different countries, mastering an array of faculties from strategic planning, business development, marketing and sales to brand positioning and revenue management.

Mentoring team towards a successful career path

Over the years, women are increasingly being recognised in various industries and the social mindset is changing in the global space. Technology and new innovations have played a big role in transforming the social stigma, resulting in higher education opportunities for women and the way organisations conduct their hiring processes.

Barceló Hotel Group functions on a very inclusive business model, which does not discriminate against gender but seeks highly passionate hospitality professionals and focuses on the future, constantly improving, advancing and evolving to changing market realities. BHG never settles for the status quo and is dedicated to enhancing its employees' skills.

MOST ENGAGING

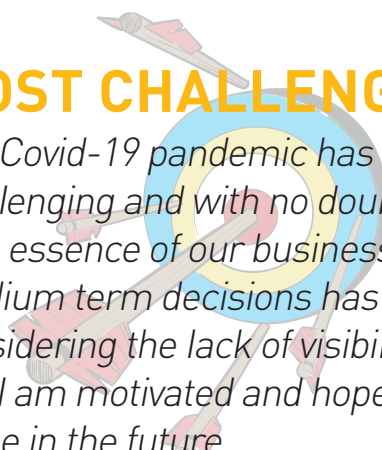
Hospitality is about creating unique experiences and building long-lasting memories, and this applies to our staff and stakeholders as well.

Mentoring my team towards a successful and progressive career path, is a gratifying aspect of my job. This coupled with the need for constant innovations and happy guests, makes me love my job even more.



MOST CHALLENGING

The Covid-19 pandemic has made the past year very challenging and with no doubt staying focused on the core essence of our business and balance short and medium term decisions has been a real challenge, considering the lack of visibility over market trends. But I am motivated and hopeful for better things to come in the future.



Bringing in a positive change through technology

While in the past, senior level positions were primarily held by men, we are certainly seeing a shift towards greater equality and fair representation. There is still a degree of work to be done, but in countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia, equal opportunity is being written into the very fabric of the national agenda.

As the first female and local leader in the role of Vice President for Cisco MEA, I know first-hand that this is the type of representation women and young girls need and deserve to see. Of course, this should only ever be solely based on merit, and not simply a ticking the box exercise, but we must never underestimate the impact that visibility can have on current and future employees.

MOST ENGAGING

I have always been fascinated by technology's ability to transform industries and in fact, whole livelihoods. There is nothing more fulfilling than working alongside governments, businesses and communities to enact positive change. I also particularly enjoy spending my time not only mentoring employees, but also learning from them. I find that being curious and open to learning is always beneficial, no matter your seniority or title.

MOST CHALLENGING

Given that I am tasked with managing such a large region, I have to think very carefully about how we can drive a united vision forward, while also tailoring decision making to best suit cultural nuances and areas of interest by country. However, this is not something that I would class as a negative, our teams actually thrive in such environments and we welcome the challenge this brings.



REEM ASAAD,

Vice President, Cisco
Middle East and Africa

Asaad is responsible for overseeing the work of 2,500 employees and contractors, while driving the company's position as a leading technology provider and consultant across 74 markets in the region. Asaad's role focuses on strengthening collaborations with governments, customers and partners, underpinned by Cisco's portfolio of advanced solutions to accelerate their digitization agendas.

Women taking leadership roles in tech sector



CHARLINE FAHED,

Field Marketing Manager MEA, Turkey at SentinelOne

I have been working in the sales and marketing functions in the technology industry for almost 10 years and in my experience, the workplace has changed considerably. We can observe that women are increasingly empowered, and many are taking up leadership positions in the technology industry or are embarking on their own entrepreneurial ventures and founding tech start-ups.



HEBA ELFADALI,

Commercial Sales Manager MEA at SentinelOne

Working in the technology and service industry for 8 years has been a rewarding experience, even more so as a woman. The cybersecurity security field is challenging, and skills like problem solving and technical aptitude are impartial to success. Women in the industry work hard to push against the stereotypes and break the glass ceiling.



NEZHA SEKKAL,

Business Development Representative MEA at SentinelOne

In today's workplace, women are quickly gaining success in the tech space as they move through the ranks in organisations and lead teams in multinational companies. The workplace has become more accessible as industries consider talent, grit, ability as core qualities in potential employees. To that end, women are proving themselves as hard-working and are well-skilled, able to take on any challenge in the workplace.

**WADAD KAFKA,**

*VP, Customer Services, EMEA,
Palo Alto Networks*

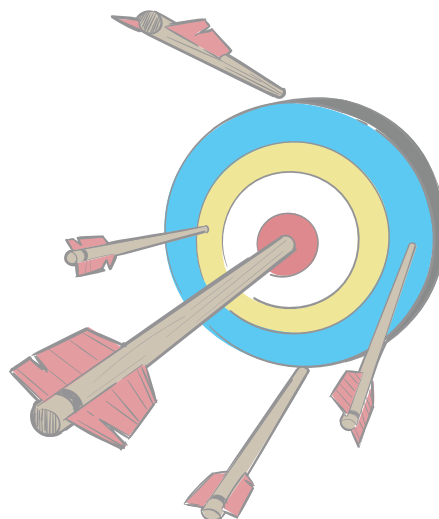
Kafka leads the team with her strategic vision and leadership to ensure client's needs are successfully met. In this role, Kafka carries out beneficial interactions between clients and internal teams to overcome any issues, create a positive working relationship, and increase customer loyalty.

Believing in the power of diversity in business

I truly believe in the power of diversity in business. The more diverse we are, the stronger we are together. Through my career in technology, I have often been the only woman in the room, but I am pleased to see this is now starting to change and I am passionate about encouraging diverse candidates to join the IT industry.

Growing up, I was fascinated by what was inside the big TV sets and radios we had at the time. I liked taking them apart and understanding what they were made up of, and I went on to study telecommunications and computer science.

For me, career development is about having a clear vision of where to go and working hard to achieve it. But also, being part of a company that believes in the potential of its talent and working with great leaders are key for success.





WIDAD HADDAD,

Vice President & General Manager, UAE, Oman, Yemen & Lebanon, Emerson Automation Solutions

Haddad manages over 100 employees in the region from sales, service, operations, to administration. She oversees Emerson's multi-million business in the region, and also manages the external sales channel of local business partners, while continuously developing customer relationships and ensuring the voice of the customer is brought back to Emerson's headquarters.

Leading the team with empathy and collaboration

With a greater focus on diversity in the workplace, many corporations displayed deliberate efforts to bring in and promote women to executive roles. Women are given the chance to be at the high ranks of a business and have proved to be successful in providing different perspectives and managing teams with unique leadership styles. The increased visibility of this positive diversity outcome stemming from successful women, created a snowball effect. Today there is no disagreement on the benefits and importance of gender diversity in organisations. There is more to be done, but it's going in the right direction.

MOST ENGAGING

Dealing with people is the role's most engaging aspect. This includes mentoring and guiding employees to further develop, grow, and manage other people, as they show high levels of empathy, collaboration, and team spirit. Seeing them promoted to higher positions as they become my peers is very satisfying.

MOST CHALLENGING

There are many variables and levers to pull when growing a business, some related to the market, product and services offerings, or people. Balancing all these variables and pulling the right levers at the right time is challenging. Add a pandemic and economic crisis and it becomes substantially more challenging.



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