



Zahya El Amrani

Gabriella Moocarme (G): *“Zahya, what is your message for the next generation of female leaders?”*

Zahya El Amrani (Z): *“Take a challenge as an opportunity rather than as a problem. Never let inequality between men and women stop you from proving yourself in society as a good leader”*

In the summer of 2014, freshly graduated from Al-Akhawayn university, Zahya achieved a full-time position at The Ritz Carlton, in Doha, Qatar as a Guest Relations Supervisor. At the young age of 22, Zahya started the job by leading a multinational team of 6 people. A few months later, she was recognised as the “Employee of the month”. The question that might pop in your head is probably as follows; How did she do it?

Well, what made all the difference are the skills that she has been developing since she joined Al-akhawayn University. Indeed, Zahya proved to be an extremely active student- she was the vice president of the Islamic Club and volunteered at Dar Al Amman orphanage. She helped in many ways on campus and eventually joined the Leadership Development Institute in the fall of 2012, where she polished the leadership character in her.

During her 2h interview for The Ritz Carlton, she realised that she was highlighting all the soft skills that she had learned from her experience at the LDI. For some, a 2h interview sounds daunting, especially when real life situations are put onto the table. It was not the case, however, for Zahya who felt “comme un poisson dans l’eau” answering the intimidating questions. She even remembered the interviewer asking her questions such as:



“How do you handle conflict?”

I smiled at that point because I thought that she must probably have remembered and put to good use the conflict management workshop delivered by Dr Rinehart.

Had Zahya not taken initiatives and faced all the situations she had been through at the LDI and on campus, she would certainly have been unable to handle the interview. In 4 years at al-Akhawayn University, Zahya had seized enough opportunities to develop a strong and confident character and hence prove her abilities during the interview.

Always in search of new experiences, Zahya left her job after one year and once againaced the interview to join Capstone Property, a real estate agency in Doha. Her ability to take initiative and effectively communicate led her to become an Executive Coordinator cum HR specialist after only two months at the company. Two years later, Zahya sets out on another journey, this time as a Business Office manager at Awfaz Global school in Qatar, where she admits that this was the most challenging position she ever had. Zahya was fearless. She had made an almost 360-degree leadership journey in all sorts of industries. I was impressed and wondered how she managed to achieve all this in such a male dominated world, so I asked her.

“It was challenging. I was always accompanied by men to important meetings and always felt underestimated until I proved them wrong”.

Irrespective of both genders, men and women will need to prove their worth in any case when they are put into a leadership position. However, women who lead are still seen as an anomaly at first, sometimes even dramatically underrepresented (Stark, 2003).



Zahya argued:

“Yes, women are driven by emotions, but they can lead!”

She further described how it was difficult for people to accept the changes that she implemented. Zahya strongly believes that change is what allows growth to happen and this is what she has been doing in every company she worked. Her passion to learn new things and making a difference led her to be a risk taker and became open enough to allow change to happen. Although she thinks that the stereotypes are still prevalent, she stated that the situation has improved. In Qatar for instance, she has noticed several initiatives put forward for women in the banking sector.

Today, Zahya is studying a master's in Economics of the Middle East in Germany, after 5 years of honing her professional skills in the job market. She further went on saying that the benefit of acquiring experience was better than studying a masters right after her undergraduate studies. This was an interesting comment as I shared the fear that I saw in senior students concerning the matter -what should I do? Graduate school or get a job? Does my GPA count? How do I get the job?

Zahya confessed that she had the same fear but then she went on saying:

“No one asked about my GPA during my interviews”

Kids, it was all about her soft skills and how she branded herself.

References

Stark, M. (2003, December 15). *Women Leaders and Organizational Change*. Retrieved from Harvard Business School Working Knowledge: <https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/women-leaders-and-organizational-change>