

WHAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

WITHOUT LEAPS OF IMAGINATION, OR DREAMING, WE LOSE THE EXCITEMENT OF POSSIBILITIES.
DREAMING, AFTER ALL, IS A FORM OF PLANNING. — GLORIA STEINEM



Photo by Kimberley Sheedy

"I HAVE WITNESSED MANAGERS FEELING THREATENED BY TALENTED, AMBITIOUS WOMEN WHO ARE QUICKLY ADVANCING IN THEIR CAREERS... SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY ARE AFRAID TO ADMIT THAT SHE MIGHT SURPASS HIS/HER OWN POSITION."

When a *Woman Today* columnist spoke of the ease with which Christina Zini lead and motivated the members of the Qatar Professional Women's Network (QPWN), we knew immediately that she had to be the key interviewee for our New Year issue.

And she didn't disappoint.

A Professional Development Leader for the Emerging Markets at IBM Global Business Services, Christina is a seasoned management consultant and HR professional. In this role she designs and delivers professional development programmes, career workshops and one-on-one coaching sessions. She is also active in IBM's Women in Blue initiative to support the development of women leaders.

Her 13 years of coaching and developing people, driving transformational change and improving HR services and systems, is just a part of what she brings to her latest passion – QPWN, which she leads.

A vociferous advocate of the rights of the girl child, and a great believer in the power of community, Christina speaks to **Vani Saraswathi** about women and their careers, and the power of dreams.

WHAT DO YOU SAY TO CLAIMS THAT WOMEN BOSSES ARE A NIGHTMARE?

I don't think gender determines whether or not an individual is an outstanding leader. If we want to speak in generalities, women leaders tend to differentiate themselves from male leaders in certain traits, such as empathy and flexibility. However, each individual leader possesses his/her own unique leadership capabilities which help him/her to succeed over the course of his/her career.

Whilst I've had predominantly positive experiences with both female and male managers, I have witnessed managers feeling threatened by talented, ambitious women who are quickly advancing in their careers. This sort of manager often tries to control the talented woman, and stagnates her career – simply because they are afraid to admit that she might surpass his/her own position. I personally aim to set aside my own fears and develop the talent around me

as it's in the best interest of the organisation, for the talented individuals, and for me as a leader.

AND THAT WOMEN ARE THEIR OWN WORST ENEMIES?

Women do tend to be their own worst enemies in the sense that women are often socialised to refrain from boasting about accomplishments, put their own wants and needs last and avoid appearing "ambitious" or "aggressive." Whilst being humble, generous, and gracious are all positive attributes, oftentimes these same traits work against women in the workplace. Talented women are often passed up for job opportunities, promotions, raises and other rewards simply because they don't ask for what they deserve. **Women also tend to engage in negative self-talk, convincing themselves that they are not good enough/clever enough/talented enough/attractive enough/etc to ask for what they want (and what they deserve) or to actively pursue their dreams.** Effectively, we limit ourselves through our assumptions and thoughts. If I could change one thing about myself, I would stop my own negative self-talk, so I'm working on being more accepting of myself, replacing negative messages with positive affirmations, and hopefully, inspiring other women to do the same.

WHEN IT COMES TO WOMEN EMPLOYEES, WHAT IS IT THAT COMPANIES AND HR DEPARTMENTS FAIL TO COMPREHEND?

Companies/HR departments fail to comprehend that women want the same things as men- we want to be treated fairly and recognised and rewarded for our accomplishments. In my experience leading gender diversity initiatives, I've asked numerous women what they want from their employer. Interestingly, many women respond by saying that they don't want to be treated differently simply because they're a woman. They just want to be treated fairly and rewarded equally for their contributions. Perhaps the mistake that companies make is overlooking many women who are quietly toiling away, hoping that someday someone will recognise their hard work and accomplishments. Typically, companies and HR departments

tend to focus on promoting work-life balance to appeal to women. Whilst work-life balance is certainly appealing given the many roles that women juggles, today's generation of men are also very interested in achieving a better work-life balance. Thus, companies should promote work-life balance to both men and women, and share role model examples of both genders. Part-time work and flexible working conditions benefit both men and women, creating a happier, healthier working environment. If companies want to offer special opportunities for women, then focus on developing women's self-esteem and communication styles to enhance their success in the workplace.

QUICK TAKES

The first thing that comes to mind, or a single word response to

Confidence: Self

Career: Life

Companion: My husband

Girlfriends: Blessed with many

Fear: Courage

2011: Full of opportunity

What saddens you: Losing my mom to ovarian cancer; witnessing poverty; women who are repressed, abused, violated

Favourite book: Half the Sky by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl Wudunn

Your idol: Oprah Winfrey

A saying that rings true for you: If you can dream it, you can become it!

EXCERPTS OF CHRISTINA ZINI'S SPEECH AT THE QPWN LAUNCH

Many of you have asked me how QPWN came to be. The story is quite short and sweet. Just over a year ago, a globe-trottin' girl (me!) with a passion for developing women landed in Qatar. Initially, I wanted to start a mentoring ring to pair seasoned professional women with female students or young professionals. I quickly discovered that Qatar needed more than a women's mentoring ring; it needed an open, inclusive network for like-minded women who would support each other's development and deepen cross-cultural understanding. My small dream turned into a bigger dream, and, with the help of several other big dreamin' gals, QPWN became a reality! Fast forward several months and here we are this evening, celebrating our successes in 2010 with 200 amazing women!

See what happens when a group of women dare to dream? Even more significantly, see what happens when a community shares the same dream?

The ambitious spirit of Qatar is rather contagious. Living here has inspired me to re-consider my own ambitions and dreams. When I was a little girl, I wanted to be an actress, an author and a psychologist. Over the years, I'd occasionally consider other career options: I fantasized about being an astronaut, a journalist, a dancer, a circus performer, a cruise-boat social director and even a trader on the New York Stock Exchange. I wanted to be Princess Diana, Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher, Joan of Arc, Dorothy Hamill, and Olivia Newton-John all at the same time. I dreamt big and expected amazing...

But somewhere along the way... oh I'd say it was around high school... I stopped dreaming big and started expecting average. It's not to say that I wasn't ambitious or goal-oriented--- I was. It's just that my ambitions and goals belonged to someone else. For many years, I pushed myself in directions that I considered socially acceptable, not in the directions that I dreamed about as a young girl.

So here I am at the end of 2010, a year of remarkable accomplishments, but also tremendous change.

All was going well until I received some devastating news. My beloved mom was experiencing another reoccurrence with ovarian cancer, and the cancer had spread into her liver. In April my mom

passed away as I lay next to her with my arms around the belly from which I came and my head next to the heart that gave me life.

A few months after my mom's death, I attended a women's leadership course and was asked with writing down my own dreams. Here's what I wrote:

I have a dream that all girls around the globe will...

- Be born into a loving, non-violent world which believes in the inherent value of their lives;
- Have unrestricted, equal access to education and professional opportunities;
- Posses the self-awareness and esteem to pursue subjects and professions that make her heart sing, her eyes sparkle and her mind fully engaged;

I have a dream that all girls around the globe will feel confident enough to dream big and live boldly.

My challenge to you big dreamin' ladies is this: As you close 2010 and start the new year, think about your own dreams for the future. When you start to limit yourself, then listen to the voice of your mom, your dad, your husband, your children, your best friend saying, "I believe in you." And if you feel that no one believes in you, then I hope you will hear my voice in your ear, "I believe in you."

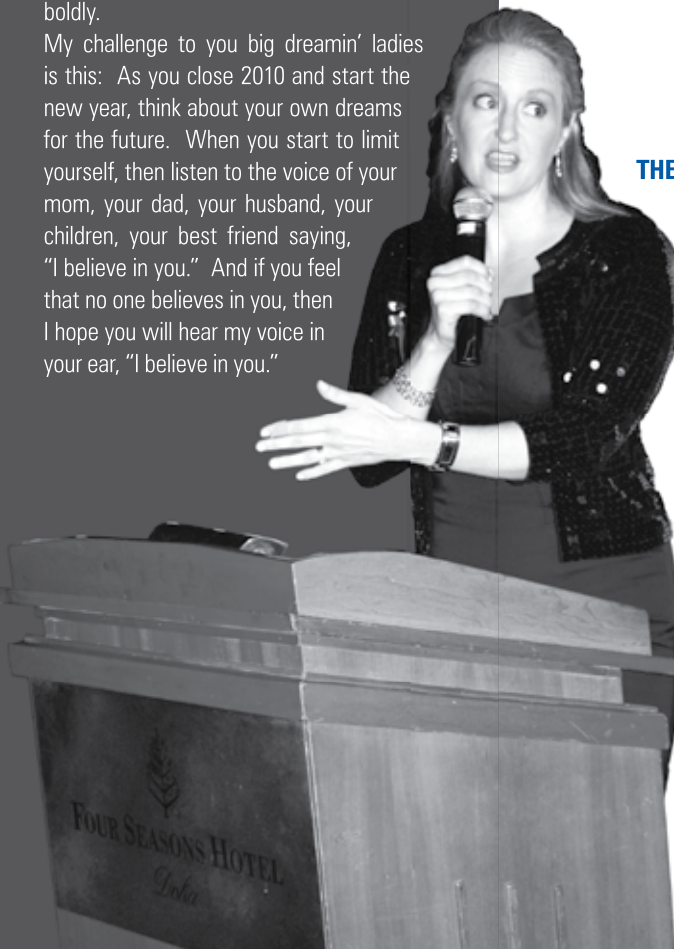
"IF I COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT MYSELF, I WOULD STOP MY OWN NEGATIVE SELF-TALK, SO I'M WORKING ON BEING MORE ACCEPTING OF MYSELF, REPLACING NEGATIVE MESSAGES WITH POSITIVE AFFIRMATIONS."

THERE IS A PERCEPTION THAT WOMEN HAVE TO THINK OR ACT LIKE A MAN TO SUCCEED IN THEIR CAREER...

You only need to be yourself to succeed.

HOW DO WE ENGAGE MEN IN OUR AMBITIONS AND DREAMS? FACT IS WE NEED THEIR ACTIVE SUPPORT, ESPECIALLY IN THE REGION – BE IT FROM THE BROTHER, FATHER OR HUSBAND.

The best way to engage men in pursuing your ambitions and dreams is to help them see how your success will benefit them. In essence, this is how you "sell" an idea to any perspective buyer, and men tend to particularly respond when you engage them in a discussion about the benefits and end results. Describe the poten-



tial impact of your dreams on you, your family, and the world around you and build trust and respect by being transparent about your intentions. Look for ways you can engage the men in your family as you pursue your ambitions – think of how you can collaborate with them and help them feel a part of making your dreams come true.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CLICHÉS YOU HEAR ABOUT CAREER WOMEN?

The biggest cliché about career women is that they put their families second to their career. Absolutely untrue as many, many women pursue their careers to ensure their children’s education and livelihood, to pay for extended family member’s needs, and, to make this world a better place for their children, grandchildren and future generations to come. Hopefully, their careers make them feel happy and fulfilled, which in turn, makes them a better parent to their children and a better spouse to their husband.

HOW DO YOU SUGGEST WORKING MOTHERS COMMUNICATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR CAREER TO THEIR CHILDREN? SHOULD IT BE A STUDIED CONVERSATION?

Working mothers should be positive role models to their daughters and engage them in discussions at a young age. They should help their daughters see the importance of developing your talents, getting a formal education and pursuing your ambitions. They also should be honest about their own challenges and how they have overcome them. Above all, every mother – working or not – should encourage her daughter to follow her passions and wholeheartedly pursue her dreams.

THE ONE THING THAT EVERY PARENT HAS TO INSTIL OR REAFFIRM IN THEIR DAUGHTERS?

Every parent should instil a strong sense of self-confidence in their daughters, ensuring that their daughters feel valued, accepted and well-supported. Every daughter should know that her parents believe her 110%, and will support her in the pursuit of her unique dreams.

YOU SPOKE OF NOT DREAMING BIG ENOUGH AT THE QPWN LAUNCH (SEE BOX) – OR THAT YOU STOPPED DOING SO – WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER. CAN YOU ELABORATE ON THAT?

Like many other young girls, I started out with big

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dreams for myself- I loved performing on stage. I loved telling stories to entertain my friends and family. I loved writing and giving speeches to inspire others. However, through my high school and early college years, I started to steer away from my natural talents and passions and focus on subjects that I thought would please others and result in a more “stable” career. Fast forward almost 20 years later and I’m now realising how I slowly comprised my own ambitions and dreams, and the ramifications of such choices. I’m now at a point in my life where I want to return to leveraging my natural talents to pursue my passion for developing and inspiring women. I want to inspire other women to dream big by making my own dreams become a reality.

IS THIS FEAR TO DREAM BIG A REASON WHY WE DON’T FIND MORE WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY?

We need to encourage more girls to excel in mathematics and sciences at an early age, and then continue to encourage them to pursue advanced studies and, eventually, a career in these fields. We need to increase our investment in girls who demonstrate natural aptitude in these subjects and cultivate them at an early age by mentoring them, showing them positive female role models and providing special developmental opportunities. Women who already work in science and technology should step up as mentors to these young girls, encouraging them to follow their footsteps and guiding them along the way.

YOUR LOST YOUR MOTHER TO CANCER, AND YOU’VE SAID SHE WAS YOUR BIGGEST INFLUENCE IN LIFE. OTHER THAN HER, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE PLAYED A CRITICAL ROLE IN YOUR LIFE?

My aunt, Dana, has always been a strong supporter of me and was my first role model of a successful business woman when I was a young girl. My husband, Thierry, and I met in 2003, and he’s teaching me the beauty of self-acceptance and partnership.

He accepts me as a strong, independent woman and encourages me to pursue my dreams. He’s the true meaning of a partner!

WHAT DO YOU HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE PRESSURE ON EDUCATED WOMEN WHO CHOOSE NOT TO PURSUE A CAREER?

Every individual woman has the power to decide how she wants to live her life. If she decides not to pursue a career outside the home, this doesn’t preclude her from sharing her talents with her family or with the community through volunteerism. It also doesn’t preclude her from seeking paid employment or starting up her own business in the future.

WHAT IS THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU’VE RECEIVED?

Don’t let your fears limit you. Successful people fail over and over again, but they never stopped trying to achieve their dreams.

WHAT SURPRISED YOU MOST ABOUT QPWN, DURING THE COURSE OF ITS SET-UP AND FUNCTIONING?

What surprised me most is that it became such a huge success in such a short time!

HOW DO WE DEAL WITH LACK OF MENTORS? IS THAT THE NEXT STEP FOR QPWN?

Yes, QPWN intends to launch Circle of Pearl, a mentoring ring in 2011. Now that we have a extensive network of seasoned professional women and relationships with numerous schools and universities, we’ll have an easier time in pairing the professional women with female students or new graduates for mentoring.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST ISSUE WOMEN FACE IN TERMS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

Finding time for self-care- to exercise, write, read, meditate, get pampered, enjoy time with girlfriends, or pursue hobbies. ❧