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Integration is the secret ingredient

MONA ZAKI'S PERSONAL LIFE COMBINES WITH HER CAREER AND COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR A SUCCESSFUL MIX

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CAIRO: You don't need to spend more than five minutes in Dr. Mona Zaki's office to understand who she is. Once you step into the Garden City office, where she operates her self-founded company Global Strategic Consultants (GSC), a drawing of a smiling Egyptian peasant greets you. Once you get past the painting, one of her husband's, you start noticing Pharaonic and Coptic artwork, sports trophies, awards acknowledging her social work, several prestigious academic certificates and, of course, her pictures with her family.

Her life isn't much different from her office, whether on the personal or professional sides. She loves art, music and sports, making contributions to each. Her family is at the center of her attention, she continues, and so is her career. Her love for the country shows in her choice of artwork, her participation in civil society and her business. And all are glued together by a pious belief that God has blessed her life.

"I believe in the blessing of the Lord. You do your best and you trust God for the rest," she adds. "You don't have millions, but the little you have is blessed. This little can be your time, your money, your health."

The packed schedule, combining career, studies, fam-

ily and art, is a habit nurtured since childhood. "I believe in integrated life, a balanced integrated life," Zaki explains. "This is what I've done with my children and my husband and my house as my home, my family and my business [and] my studies."

She says that the secret behind her ability to juggle a successful career, family life and active participation in civil society has always been integration. She recalls studying for her master's degrees with one of her daughters sitting on her lap.

"With my eldest daughter I got my first master's [degree], with my younger I got my second master's [degree]. With both of them I got my doctorate degree," she adds. "I integrated them in my studies, in my business, in my job." Even now, her 16 and 13-year-old daughters are engaged in her business, helping her in research when they can.

Also her husband, Farid Fadel, finds a place in her office. His paintings decorate the place, giving the touch of Egyptian spirit that marks Zaki's work and satisfying her love for art. She already has an expensive collection of French antiques at home.

The Egyptian spirit, however, isn't confined to art. Her professional life and her extracurricular activities are driven by a sense of responsibility toward the country. "I love my country and am proud of being [an

Egyptian] woman," she says. She believes in communication and bettering the country's image and more importantly, the image of women.

She serves as the secretary general of the Egyptian European Council and board member of the Egyptian Austrian Friendship Association. She is also a member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, the International Public Relations Association and Egypt's International Economic Forum.

Often finding herself the only woman in a male-dominated organization or field, she says having a well structured opinion has gained her the respect of all her colleagues.

"Working with her is a pleasure because she has a commitment to what she does," says Hadi Fahmi, chairman of the Trade Holding Company and the Petroleum and Mining Chamber.

The Toshka project has recently led to cooperation between Fahmi and Zaki. Fahmi says Zaki has been helpful on many levels, whether through the Egyptian European Council or by acquainting her students at the American University of Cairo (AUC) with the project through field trips. Fahmi notes that these field trips have served to promote the project. "She really understands what she does."

But this is only part of her professional life. Her work in GSC, which provides research,

marketing and human resources development to local and international companies, integrates her patriotic interests with her business. Pharaoh's KremEzzat-Austria, one of GSC's partners, helps in promoting Egypt by selling herbal wellness drinks based on ancient Egyptian recipes.

"Here you promote Egypt through a product made in Austria, that's the idea. We try as much as possible to position this product on an international level," she says.

She prefers the word "partners" to "clients." She says these partners "are part of us. We get so involved with them. I'm 24/7 available to my partners and this is not a compromise, this is normal."

Her work in GSC is also the integration of 20 years of experience in public relations and marketing. "It's all integrated. Marketing and public relations are two faces of one coin. And the coin itself is business. It's a package. You can't be a good strategic planner or a good strategic thinker without being able to negotiate and market your thinking and your vision," she explains.

Upon graduating from AUC, the university president offered her a job in the university's public relations department. Because of her activities as an undergrad, she explains, the president wanted her to work on restructuring

the department "to portray an impressive image of AUC on an international level."

Her work in the department and her later position as an assistant professor in the university's business school has been met with appreciation. Mohamed Ali, senior halls supervisor at AUC, describes her as an active, accurate and democratic person who loved to hear everyone's opinion.

She then moved to the marketing field and later decided to combine it with her public relations experience into a new field: strategic planning and thinking.

"I felt that I was so good at PR, I'm good in marketing, so what about business administration? I need to be good in business administration. I need to have the strategic mind as well to be able to deliver my vision and implement this," she explains. Zaki received her doctorate in business administration from the Maastricht School of Management, the Netherlands. She opened GSC in 2004.

"I don't feel that I'm competing with anybody because we are consultants, we are not an agency. I have some agencies asking for my advice, consulting services," she says. Her long client list includes the Ministry of Tourism, Ghabbour Group and the Management School of London. She is working with the latter to establish a training center in Egypt for high and mid-level



Mona Zaki has prevailed in a primarily male-dominated business.

executives. Courses will start this November.

Don Lauweryssen, project director of Agrium Interna-

tional Ltd, one of GSC's clients, says, "I have only recently started working with Dr. Zaki on a formal, profes-

sional basis. Despite the brevity of our collaboration, positive and tangible results have already been generated."