

consultancy firm," she says. "It's taken me two decades to develop the necessary skills, studying and working hard to get what I want."

Mona was awarded a Doctorate in Business Administration in 2004 and her chosen subject was strategic thinking.

This way of thinking has also helped her to prove she has a strong, determined character, great self-confidence and an organised mind. It has allowed her to compete in a male-dominated field, especially with her fragile appearance and delicate attitude.

Mona Zaki advises everyone to plan and work hard to get what they dream of. However, not without the main ingredient for success: faith. She believes that she would have achieved none of this without the help of her Creator. "I always say: Do your best, and trust the rest to God."

Mona thanks her Catholic education, where she was always taught about truth, honesty and hard work, for this mix of traits.

"Without faith you will not be able to keep on going. You will always face problems and people who will distract you from following your vision," she adds, admitting that she would never have overcome her problems, were it not for her belief in God.

"When I was newly married, I was in London organising an exhibition for my husband. Suddenly I became very sick, and they did not know what it was."

At that time, Mona was in charge of the Public Relations, Cultural Programmes and Special Events at the American University in Cairo (AUC), from which she graduated in 1984, majoring in Mass Communications.

"I've always been energetic, but I was felled by a high fever. I lay in bed and my weight plummeted to 46kg. I had to use a wheelchair to go to the bathroom," she remembers.

Her husband, Egyptian artist Farid Fadel, was so worried that he had a heart attack. Mona lay there praying for strength, until she got it. The incident affected her life greatly. It gave her more faith. Her sickness also drew her closer to many people who have influenced both her career and her personal life.

from abroad."

GSC is also working on several other projects, like water treatment plants in poor areas and pollution in quarries.

Part of her job is to do the matchmaking between investors and ministers, whom she believes are very efficient. The problem she finds is the lack of cooperation between the Cabinet and the provincial governors, giving the EAgrium saga in Damietta as an example of this lack of organisation between ministers, governors and local inhabitants.

In April, the people of Damietta started protesting against EAgrium's plans to build a petrochemical plant in the area. EAgrium is a subsidiary, 60 per cent owned by the Canadian Agrium. People called it the 'the factory of death' and said it would cause a lot of pollution.

Last month, the People's Assembly (Lower House of the Egyptian Parliament) recommended that the Canadian company move elsewhere its \$1.4 billion nitrogen facility, which was due for completion in 2010.

Mona, the regional adviser for Canadian Agrium, describes the project as 'great'.

"I really hope it stays in Egypt because it's valuable for us. It's a fertiliser plant and we need this kind of industry more than ever, given the price hikes and food crisis," she stresses.

"What has happened with EAgrium will greatly affect the investment atmosphere in Egypt. International banks have withdrawn, which is very challenging for this particular big-budget project. I do hope this doesn't affect other sectors, because we do have strong real estate and IT investments," she adds.

Yet, as Mona puts it, the country cannot live on real estate, tourism or high technology alone.

"All sectors are important, but we do need heavy industry. Honestly speaking, we were booming in this sector, until we ran into this problem.

"Unless we do something fast to really recover from this, I think it could be fatal," says Mona, describing the project as one that could have put Egypt on the international map as a top fertiliser-producing country.

IN ALL HER MOODS:

(L to R) A portrait of Mona Zaki painted by her husband Egyptian artist Farid Fadel; Mona and Farid; speaking at an event and with her daughters.



"Besides, the environmental standards in heavy industry are very demanding these days. If you go to a petrochemical plant, it is the same as if you go to a pharmaceutical one: very advanced high-tech which leaves no room for a leak or other error."

Mona says that the culture of heavy industry and pollution going hand-in-hand should be changed. She thought the project would have been a nice opportunity for educating people about environmental standards and the impressive safety measures at such plants.

"Here comes the role of scientists and opinion leaders. All they need to know is that they have a responsibility towards people: to tell them the truth and educate them. Each one of us has a responsibility."

As part of her responsibilities towards her country, Mona plays an active role in civil society. She is a member of several non-governmental organisations. Being the head of the International Cooperation Committee in the Egyptian European Council and the Board Member of the Egyptian Austrian Friendship Association, she tries to enhance the relationship between both sides, culturally and in terms of business.

The Austrian Government has decorated her with the "Grand Decoration of Honour". Mona says the decoration has boosted her morale, as she felt they were acknowledging her efforts, since volunteer work consumes much of her time.

"Why do I teach? I feel it's my responsibility; I have to educate my students and teach them experiences of life."

The Marketing and Public Relations Professor at the AUC knows that a theoretical foundation is good, but young people need to be exposed to the practical world too.

Mona has so many things to teach her students, first and foremost strategic thinking. That's why she took some of her students to visit the Toshka project.

"The AUC trip to Toshka was the first-ever university trip there. I wanted to show them the future. It's a great strategic project whose fruits we will begin to enjoy in a decade or two," explains Mona, who tries to instill hope into her students, believing that they should not always be told about the challenges of the present. They should think about the future knowing that there can be fruits to gain tomorrow.

It's what she tries to instill in her two daughters as well. She says she gets them involved in everything, recalling that they were constantly with her when she was studying for her PhD.

"I've tried to bring them up the same way my parents brought me up," she says, talking about her daughters, Dolly and Lilly, aged 18 and 15 respectively.

Her ability to harmonise everything reflects her artistic nature. Surprisingly this strategic-thinking businesswoman is an opera singer, guitarist and art collector.

When you walk into her office, you immediately notice so many portraits, all drawn by her husband, hanging on the walls.

She sang in the church choir and Fadel was the conductor and the pianist. They married in June 1988. Ever since, they've been a team, moving on in life without any problems.

"To be honest, you cannot support a family on art alone. So I asked Farid to stick to his art and I look after the business side of things."

Fadel, who is also an ophthalmologist, works at a public hospital three times a week. "Again, it is about being responsible. For"

feels he has a responsibility towards his patients there.

"The rest of the week he is 100 per cent an artist, spending so much time in his studio. This is how you make a balance and integrate with each other; he always has his stories, I have mine. There is no competition, rather it is a completion," she says smilingly.

Although she says she's had to let go of her artistic side for a while, Mona Zaki still cares for art. She is responsible for marketing her husband's exhibitions and those of other artists, who are also friends.

Mona's never been a painter, but she used to play musical instruments, sing and write poetry. She also writes novels.

In her novels, she defines drama as the exaggeration of reality. "I take what I go through in life, observe and look around for sometime, then construct my own novel through a mixture of imagination and inspiration.

"In my strategic thinking for the coming 20 years, I dream of publishing the colloquial Arabic novels I've written. Maybe at a later date I'll have the time to do so."

If she were asked to give young people some advice on how to develop a strategic way of thinking, she would tell them to be optimistic, truthful, keep their heads held high and have faith in God.

"They should work hard to compete - the competition out there is fierce and if they're not prepared, they won't make it," she says, advising them too to concentrate on their vision, have courage and make the best of their hard times.

"Challenges should not stop you from achieving what you want to achieve, they