

# WMMF

Women Mentor Forum منتدى مساندة المرأة

JOURNAL IV - 2019



Forum Edition IV:  
Social Entrepreneurship

# WMF

منتدى مساندة المرأة Women Mentor Forum



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Women Mentor Forum Page

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# A B O U T W M F

## WHO WE ARE

WMF is a Kuwait-based project with a vision to support the economy by increasing the numbers of women executives and women entrepreneurs. We aim to achieve our mission by creating development, mentorship and networking opportunities for women professionals, while at the same time providing a platform for data collection and dissemination. The WMF Project operates under the for-purpose company Montada Meem «**منتدى ميم**».

## OUR MISSION

Create a platform for supporting and mentoring women in companies and in entrepreneurship to support their growth in the private sector.

## OUR VISION

Increased women's leadership rates in the corporate sector and in entrepreneurship.

## OUR VALUES

- Be Transparent.
- Be Effective.
- Be Efficient.
- Be Ambitious.

## THE PROGRAM

The WMF Program aims to allow for the exchange of career knowledge and entrepreneurship knowledge between successful women and aspiring young women through forums and mentoring.

Run under different themes, WMF Forums bring successful women entrepreneurs and women executives as speakers to share experiences and give advice to aspiring young women.

Through the WMF Mentorship program, young aspiring women benefit directly as they are personally mentored by women that have succeeded in their careers, whether in entrepreneurship or in corporate and are ready to give advice and consult their young women mentees.

The Forums and the Mentorship Programs are run in partnerships with women entrepreneurs and women executives that participate as speakers during the Forums and as mentors in the Mentorship Programs.

Partnerships are created with women entrepreneurs that have created job opportunities through their small or medium businesses, have maintained the growth of their businesses and are contributing to the diversification of the local economy. As to corporate women, we seek to partner with women that have succeeded in reaching executive positions and in their roles have contributed to sustaining the local economy through adding value to companies as local expertise and as women.

## THE TEAM

The WMF team is managed by its Founder and Manager **Besma Al-Qassar**. Besma has 20 years of experience in managing projects ranging from communications to cultural and corporate conferences.

**Leslie Mouawad**, Operations Manager at Kuwait Supplies, is WMF's Communication Consultant, managing WMF's media and advertising affairs. Leslie has over ten years of experience managing financial media and advertising needs for listed companies in Kuwait.

**Fudha Aboukhamseen** is the WMF's Operations Manager. She oversees the day to day administrative affairs of the workshops and seminars.



# FOUNDER'S MESSAGE



When we held our first forum in May 2016, we were overwhelmed with the excitement and positive feedback we got from attendees. This encouraged us to hold our second forum that same year. With the encouraging feedback we received from both speakers and attendees, we knew that we can only move forward.

Today, with four successful forums, pilot mentorship program and self-development workshops and a growing audience asking us what's next, we know we are ready to move on to the next phase.

This year, we are launching the program that is at the heart of WMF, the WMF Mentorship Program. Aspiring young women will get the chance to take ownership of their own career development and take their first step towards leadership. We also have in store programs and workshop designed to help women develop 'Essential Skills'. Communications, negotiation, presentation, confidence-building, self-brand are just a few of the skills that we know will help women get on the fast-track towards leadership.

If you are wondering how I feel now. One word - Excited!

I would like to thank all the strong and supportive women that helped me establish, develop and grow WMF. A special thank you to my team, Leslie and Fudha, for believing in the WMF Vision and making it theirs.

**Besma Al-Qassar**  
WMF Founder & President

# STRATEGIC PARTNER'S MESSAGE



This forum's theme of social entrepreneurship and corporate social responsibility was especially relevant to women. Our keynote speaker Ebru Ozdemir spoke about "social investing" and relayed LIMAK's many projects to promote women and provide opportunities for young panel not only in their core businesses but in art and music as well. In the discussion with our four panelists each excelled in creating change in Kuwait's socio-cultural space by introducing new concepts that serve a social (and in some cases a financial) purpose. Currently the only woman in Kuwait's Municipality, Maha al Baghli spoke about how her former work in Safira CSR informs her focus on environmental preservation. The CEO of Omniya Sanaa al Qimlas emphasized the need to provide a social service for the community that ensures the welfare of the future generation, while Husna al Humaidhi from Nuqat tackled that from an educational perspective. A former athlete, Balsam al Ayoub spoke about the difficulty to get family members to accept sponsorship for women and all the ladies on our panel echoed the importance of raising awareness around and defining what is meant by social entrepreneurship, since it is a space that provides many options for women's contribution.

**Dr. Alanoud Al-Sharekh**  
Consulting Partner at Ibtakar Consulting Services

# A MESSAGE FROM THE U.S. AMBASSADOR



The United States is proud to support Kuwait's Women Mentor Forum in its efforts to advance gender equality and to support women in the private sector. Besma Al-Qassar, with her team and partners, are making important strides for the women of Kuwait - to the benefit of all Kuwaitis. Gender equality is a challenge that every country is struggling to address. The initiatives of organizations like the WMF are critical to supporting businesswomen and empowering them so that they can achieve their goals and help build the Kuwait of the future.

The sustained development and prosperity of Kuwait, as in all other countries, is dependent on the empowerment of women to participate fully in the economic, social and political sectors of society. This is an area where the WMF is playing a leadership role. I was honored to attend both the "Leading the Private Sector" and "Social Entrepreneurship" programs organized by the WMF, and I could see first-hand how the WMF has helped women pursue their dreams and make a difference for society. WMF speakers provided valuable and specific guidance for future women leaders. They inspired the audiences with their approach to life and work, and they showed candor and courage in sharing their experiences. They impressed upon me how we must identify and recognize talent in women and ensure that professional doors are open to them.

I know Besma and her team will set and meet high expectations, and encourage women with whom they come in contact to do so as well. I challenge the WMF to continue fostering connections, lead mentorship programs, and strengthen the talent of women. The private sector increasingly will be the engine of growth for a diversifying Kuwaiti economy. The WMF's efforts to help women achieve their entrepreneurial goals are essential for society as a whole. We look forward to working together with Besma and the WMF to empower women to play an active role in Kuwait's political and economic development.

**Lawrence R. Silverman**

United States Ambassador to Kuwait



With WMF Founder, Besma Al-Qassar

# WMF Forum Edition VI: Social Entrepreneurship

## KEYNOTE INTERVIEW WITH EBRU ÖZDEMİR

*By taking a closer look at the Turkish conglomerate Limak, Dr. Alanoud Al-Sharekh, WMF Strategic Partner, takes the stage with Ms. Ebru Özdemir, Chairman of Limak Group of Companies, to explore how this specific success story manifests itself. Limak is a global leader in the field of construction, and in this interview, Özdemir explores how her support of young women engineers, in Turkey and elsewhere, has proven to be central to her own personal journey within the larger narrative of success demonstrated by Limak around the world.*



## A Leader in Construction, and Beyond

**Alanoud Al-Sharekh:** Ebru, you are now the chairwoman at Limak Group and have recently been awarded Business Woman of the Year in Turkey, congratulations! Your leadership style is very active, you like to be involved not only in the core business products, but also with activities, especially those pertaining to culture. Could you explain to us this 21-year leadership journey with Limak, which is now an international group?

**Ebru Özdemir:** Thank you very much. Let me begin by explaining that I was born into an all-engineer family. My mother is an engineer, as is my father and my uncles. My father's advice was always: Let your children first become engineers, then they can do whatever they want.

Growing up, I recall we would go as a family to visit dam construction sites, or highway construction sites. Even when we went on family holidays, we would always stop at construction sites and take a look. Growing up in this type of environment, I came to love construction. I always knew I would be an engineer, a civil engineer to be exact.

I studied engineering in Turkey, and then I went to New York for my MBA. When I returned to Turkey on February 1, 1997, I got off the plane and went straight to the office to begin working. Since then, it has been 21 years.

Limak Group was founded by my father and one of his university colleagues. My mother was in the same class as they were, and she was the only woman studying mechanical engineering at the time. Everyone jokes with my father, telling him that he is very practical, having met his wife and business partner in the same class.

The company started in mechanical design, and then moved into construction. Soon after that, we began to make investments in energy, hotels and distribution and our operations extended beyond Turkey.

However, regarding Kuwait, this is the first time we are involved in one country to this extent, making Kuwait my second home. Limak is executing here in Kuwait one of the largest projects. In terms of size, it is the biggest contract awarded to a Turkish contractor outside of Turkey. I am also head of the Turkish-Kuwaiti Business Council.



## Gender Equality - A Way of Life

**Al-Sharekh:** *We are very happy to have you here with us today, and clearly you are turning into your father and trying to turn people into engineers wherever you go. To go back to that story you shared, I think that it is really fascinating that although your mother studied engineering, she did not practice it in practical terms as you did, but she became an academic and that was because she faced some obstacles –being the only woman, and she did not want other women to go through that.*

**Özdemir:** At the time my father and his business partner decided to establish Limak, I had just been born. My mother had an academic career teaching engineering to graduate students, and my father asked her to keep her teaching job in case the business doesn't succeed. Basically, when Limak was established, my mother's salary was the only source of income for our family.

**Al-Sharekh:** *Have you faced any obstacles being a woman engineer and being at the construction sites wearing your hard hat? Did you ever find that it was a problem being a woman in this role?*

**Özdemir:** I have a younger brother who too was trained a civil engineer. Despite him being just two years younger than me, I was always the person leading in the PPPs and doing a lot of the financing; I was always at the site. People did not know I had a brother, and when they found out, they were fascinated. One of the CEOs of a bank in Turkey said to me, "Your father is a very interesting and democratic man, although he has a son two years younger than you, it is always you who we see at the forefront." My father never discriminated against us. I am more of an extrovert, and I want to change things and take on more challenges.

So, to answer your question, no, I have never felt any external pressure or discrimination. I began in construction at entry-level and climbed up the ladder. I was very focused on the work and I never cared about what others thought. Over time, this helped develop my self-confidence.

Of course, I am lucky to have been born into the Limak family. I often think about those who are not given such opportunities, who are not as lucky as I have been. This is one of the reasons I decided to begin supporting Turkish women engineers.



Dr. Alanoud Al-Sharekh leading the interview with Ebru Özdemir



## CSR as A Means to Empower Women

**Al-Sharekh:** *Could you tell us some more about your dedication to corporate social responsibility? It is very inspiring that you focus on this issue not just in Turkey, but also in the countries where Limak operates. I know that you have projects in Senegal, Kosovo and in Kuwait, where you are working with young women engineers. Can you explain why this message of social responsibility travels where Limak does?*

**Özdemir:** Since the establishment of Limak, we have always tried to empower people within a corporate framework. Whatever our scope of work is, we actively support the community in the country we are operate in, especially in terms of education.

In coordination with the Turkish Ministry of Family, we established the Turkish Women Engineers Project, which won us awards not only in Turkey, but in other countries as well. Our aim is to create women engineers on the CEO level or the Board Member level, or even project manager level, where they can, in turn, include other women in the sector.

We offer scholarships, we pair women engineers with mentors, we provide them with internship opportunities, we help them find work. These women work at the largest airport construction site in Turkey. They are also building the longest bridge in the world, located in Turkey. So we are training women that can work in the field, and at the same time create positive examples for other women to follow. In Turkey, Limak has an energy academy where we educate people; our motto is clear. We focus on education and also are invested in the empowerment of women.

In Kuwait, I established the Kuwait Engineer Girls Project here in Kuwait. I paid a visit to Kuwait University, where most of the students are women. Wonderful education. Everyone is fluent in English. Super self-confident. I spend a lot of time with engineers all over the world in different countries, but Kuwaiti women are super confident. Still, their visibility in the work sector, or at C-level, is not strong.



This morning I met with twelve of women in the program. They are working at the airport construction site as quality engineers, electrical engineers, and planning engineers. One of them said to me, "I am happy every morning coming to the airport to work. I am so motivated." This is something that really motivates us.

I believe that we have to continue to positively discriminate for the rights of women until we reach equality. This is our motto. Every now and then, the men at our company will say, "You are doing so many projects with women," and my response is always the same, "We will continue to empower women until we reach equality."

## Offering Refugees an Opportunity to Thrive

***Al-Sharekh:** It motivates us too, and we love that you are supporting women so actively. As a woman leader, you are setting a tone for the private sector where they should be involved in political and social work. Under your leadership, Limak is involved in projects outside of your core business. For example, you are on the Atlantic Council and I know you are concerned about the refugee situation in Turkey, could you kindly tell us some more about that?*

**Özdemir:** People ask me, why do you support refugees? I explain to them, we live in Turkey, a country with a population of more than 80 million people. Currently, 3.5 million refugees are living in Turkey, which is an unbelievable number. Most studies show that 80 percent of refugees do not return to their country of origin, they stay in the country as immigrants.

I began with two women engineers from Syria, who joined the Turkish Women Engineers. They are very brilliant and successful. One of them has a double major in construction and industrial engineering. They both want to return back to Syria if possible, once everything is over. Their goal is to contribute to the reconstruction of Syria.

Then there is another group of people that probably will not be able to go back, and they will end up staying in Turkey.

I ask myself, what are the next steps? In terms of the private sector, is this going to be an opportunity if it is managed well? Is this untapped human potential that could be used well where it could help the economy? This is what we will be working on. As private companies, I believe we have a responsibility to the countries that we live in, and how the population will shape itself for the next generations or next decades. This is what we are trying to figure out. If migrations are managed well, it is an opportunity. If they are not managed well, it can cause huge issues. We do not want that. We want to keep that untapped human potential and use it for the happiness for the country and for the refugees. So, this what I am working on.

## Investing in Cultural Bridges

***Al-Sharekh:** I think it is fantastic and we should commend you for this. I am also in awe of all the local and international cultural boards that you serve on. I am very jealous of your involvement in the arts and Limak even has its own philharmonic orchestra. Could you explain to us how supporting the arts benefits your business? You are building cement bridges but you are also building these amazing cultural bridges.*

**Özdemir:** Exactly. This is another goal of the Limak Foundation. We realized that despite all the amazing Turkish musicians who reside in the hearts of all Turkish people, the Turkish society was not a fan of philharmonic orchestras. Together, with a friend of mine, who is now head of the Turkish ballet and opera, we thought why not adapt classic Turkish music into a philharmonic version. So, we established the Limak philharmonic orchestra with 60 members, creating classic Turkish music in a philharmonic version. It was a big success! We now play all over Turkey and have performed to date 14 different concerts performing to over twenty thousand people.

**Al-Sharekh:** *Can tell me more about your support of young Turkish artists? I hear that your office is covered with art work.*

**Özdemir:** It is my personal collection. 70 percent of it are by young Turkish contemporary artists and 30 percent are by international contemporary artists.

I am on the board of a foundation that I have co-founded in Turkey that aims to increase the visibility of Turkish art and artists outside Turkey. I am very happy to be part of it. We support artists in various ways, whether to join a show or to display in a museum, or join a residency program or to be featured in a book.

**Al-Sharekh:** *In Kuwait we have inaugurated a vast cultural center, we are excited about the museum and we are excited to embrace art and to see how people like you, working in Kuwait, embrace and appreciate art. But more than that, we want know what is the exciting project on the horizon for Ebru, as well as for Limak. We know that you recently spoke at the UN and you are involved in the Sustainable Development Goals. Can you tell us what is next on the horizon for you?*

**Özdemir:** Yes, I was in New York during United Nations Week, and we are working on the Sustainable Development Goals. We are engaged in an incubator with the UN and Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Gates Foundation, where we will create an incubator, an accelerator, to promote the Sustainable Development Goals across the world.

I am very excited to be involved with social investments. I really urge all of you to be involved in social investments as well. I no longer label it as social responsibility projects. No, they are social investments. We invest in people, in young generations and in women.



## Creating Positive Role Models for Young Women

**Al-Sharekh:** *We are very excited to see these mentorship programs developed. As you know, in the Women Mentor Forum, we are very strong believers in the need for positive role models and mentors for young women, and we are very happy to hear that this is actually part of the development plan that you have with the young women engineers. How important was it for you to have a mentor yourself, while you were going through your process within the company?*

**Özdemir:** It was important to me. I was lucky because I had my father, his business partner as well as my uncles and long-time colleagues as my mentors. Also, there is my mother, who was a very successful engineer and academic, and she was always a role model for me.

This is the reason why I believe mentorship is so important. In Turkey, for women in our engineering program, we choose for each a very successful mentor. If a student is a civil engineer, we choose a civil engineer as her mentor. This is because if you see something, you can do it better. You have to see it with your own eyes. You have to connect with the mentor. You have to see the difficulties she had, how resilient she is and what she did when she saw an obstacle. If you are really seeing it, and if you understand the experience, then you are able to overcome obstacles with more ease.

It is not easy of course. Every day is a new day and you have to make new decisions. You have to sort out problems. But the important thing is that you never give up because there is always a solution. And the best thing is that you make a decision. The worst thing is if you are indecisive and do not make a decision.

**Al-Sharekh:** *Would this be your advice? I am sure there are people in the audience, young and old, engineers and non-engineers, who look at you, Ebru, and you epitomize that you cannot be what you cannot see, right? What would be your final piece of advice to them?*



WMF Founder, Besma Alqassar, with Ebru Özdemir

“ *Work hard. Never give up.  
Endurance is the most important thing.* ”  
Ebru Özdemir

**Özdemir:** Yes, a couple of things.

If you do not work, you will not get anything. Sometimes, I meet people who want to be managers from day one and jump to higher positions fast. There is no such thing. Even if this is offered to you, do not accept it. The worst thing is if you accept something that you are not ready for. You have to go up every step on that ladder, you have to really gain experience.

How much do we learn from schools? We learn a great deal from books, but the real experience is at work. Real experience is what you see at work and dealing with issues. There is a saying, “It is not what you encounter, but how you react to it.” You have to work hard. You have to be resilient and never give up.

They ask me sometimes, “What is your biggest fear?” I tell them my biggest fear is that the women engineers that we invest a lot of time in— my time and that of the staff and the mentors— decide to not work because of marriage. So, I say do not give up. Women can multitask. They can organize their life and work at the same time.

Work hard. Never give up. Endurance is the most important thing.

Finally, seek role models and support yourself through sisterhood. I see men supporting each other all the time in every level. I do not see this in women. We have to really motivate women to support each other. We have to encourage it.

***To watch the complete interview with Ms. Ebru Özdemir, please visit the Women Mentor Forum channel on YouTube.***



# PANEL DISCUSSION: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

WMF Forum IV continued its exploration of 'Social Entrepreneurship' in its second session with a panel discussion.

Four Kuwaiti female entrepreneurs discussed the concept of social entrepreneurship, the challenging beginnings of starting their enterprises as well as the opportunities and lessons learned from real experiences.

The Panelists:

- **Maha Albaghli** - Member of the Municipality Council of Kuwait and founder of Safira CSR
- **Sanaa Al-Qimlas** - Co-Founder and CEO Omniya Project for Plastic Bottles Recycling
- **Balsam Al-Ayoub** - Co-Founder Balsam International, Former Kuwaiti Olympian and International Fencing Champion
- **Hussa Al-Humaidhi** - Partner and Managing Director of Raw Design Studio, Co-Founder of Nuqat



## What is social entrepreneurship?

**Sanaa Al-Qimlas:** It is a social service project in which all parties benefit and in which nothing comes at a cost of something or someone. To ensure the success of a social enterprise and that may require a change in social perspectives, we need to establish a strong foundation that supports the project and from which we can move forward.

**Hussa Al-Humaidhi:** Social entrepreneurship is combining two ideas: giving and business. It is a commercial activity but its business model is designed to benefit society.

**Maha Albaghli:** It is building partnerships between the public and the private sector and civil society with the goal of creating sustainable projects and programs that serve society and work to solve its problems..

**Balsam Al-Ayoub:** It is about finding creative solutions to solve social problems at its roots. A social entrepreneur is one that can find creative solutions to social problems without support nor governmental assistance.

## Initiating the first step

**Sanaa Al-Qimlas:** If you to start a social enterprise , you have to keep in mind that you are not above people in your society nor are you going to be their 'teacher'. You have to approach society as a partner and connect with the people in it. You also have to be conscious of the fact that people are aware and knowledgeable of the issues you want to fix and the right solutions. When we at Omniya decided to promote the culture of recycling and encourage waste separation, we found people to be very supportive and already aware of how our work is important to protecting the environment. This approach has ensured us a fulfilling experience.



Balsam Al-Ayoub



Sanaa Al-Qimlas

**Hussa Al-Humaidhi:** When we launched Nuqat, we didn't have clear goals. We were following our instincts to reach our vision of creating a healthy environment in which we exchange knowledge and information, culture, art and creativity. We held our first conference in 2009 and in it we discussed Arabic calligraphy. In 2010 we decided to hold a large three-day regional conference under the title 'Visual Pollution in the Arab World.' We approached private companies to sponsor the conference and they asked us to change its title. They also found it difficult to understand why the conference was only focused art, culture and creativity and how it was connected to social responsibility. We did not give up and were pleasantly surprised by the large number of attendees from different countries in the region.

**Maha Albaghli:** When we began our work at Safira CSR in 2014, we were the first company in Kuwait offering social responsibility projects. We focused on finding solutions for pressing socio-economic issues such as women's economic empowerment, health awareness and developing entrepreneurial skills in children.

**Balsam Al-Ayoub:** When I became a champion athlete, I developed the ability to find solutions for any issue I faced. When I decided to hold the first female championship in partnership with the private sector, I was faced my first social entrepreneurial issue. The enterprise I established aims at supporting women in sport and promote gender equality. I approached the private sector to support my programs, but at that time decision makers in the private sector did not believe in supporting women in sports. I did not allow that obstacle to anger me, nor did I allow myself to regard society as backwards because it did not understand my vision. Instead, I focused on what I need to do to allow society to understand and accept women's sports and worked on that.

## The Challenges

**Maha Albaghli:** I first came across the concept of social responsibility at an IMF conference in Singapore in 2006, where I was representing the Kuwait Economic Society. Upon my return I discussed the concept with CEOs and business people explaining that it is a new business concept in which part of a company's profits goes to benefit social projects. From the responses I received was that companies already make annual donations from their profits to charity, and that was enough. Although it was challenging at the beginning to make people understand the difference between charity donations and social responsibility, I continued in raising awareness and established my social enterprise. At the beginning, I did not reach the results I was hoping for as only one company accepted to partner, yet I did not give up.



## Lessons Learned

**Balsam Al-Ayoub:** In 1998, I approached a company with a sponsorship proposal to financially support my own athletic activities. I believed I was deserving of this being the first female champion athlete in fencing. When I told my father of wanting to be sponsored, we weren't happy with the idea and asked me to drop it. At that time, I didn't understand why he didn't approve of the idea. It so happened that a year after that incident, I decided to organise a female championship for 16 young women and approached a company to sponsor the event. This time, my father was very proud and supportive of the idea. When I asked him why he was supportive of me asking for sponsorship for this project, he told me that the reason was because the first time I asked for sponsorship I was only thinking of myself, but that the second time I was thinking of not only myself but of how to support 16 other young aspiring female athletes as well. That was my first valuable lesson in social entrepreneurship.

## Reaping results

**Hussa Al-Humaidhi:** Since we first established Nuqat 10 year ago, and we have been consistently developing our programs and events to meet our societies' cultural needs across the region. We have many participants that travel to Kuwait to take part in our conferences, which means we have succeeded in creating a cultural tourism.

Recently, we developed into creating knowledge exchange opportunities across the Region. We have held cultural roundtable discussions in different cities creating cultural bridges between our societies.

**Maha Albaghi:** In the four years since its establishment, Safira CSR has so far achieved three projects and eight programs. In addition, we have partnered with more than 20 organisations from both the private and public sectors and civil society.

When I was appointed member at the Municipality Council in June 2018, I remained committed and continued my social responsibility advocacy and work through my new position. I chose to be part of the Council's environment committee and became the Chair. The committee's work is social responsibility as it serves to protect the environment and people's health. Through the Council, I have conducted workshops on



environmental issues with different parties. I also facilitated connections between the public sector and civil society to allow the exchange of ideas and opinions. These connections made it easier and faster for policy makers to make decisions that benefit all stakeholders. In addition, I invite members of society to propose their environment-related suggestions to us Council Member, which makes civil society our true partners.

## The Female Role Models

**Sanaa Al-Qimlas:** My mother was the first independent woman I knew. She raised her seven children after my father passed away, while my eldest sibling was 12 and the youngest was 3 year old. I never saw her asking for help from anyone. She was truly an independent women and this made me become independent as well. My mother became my role model and I too learned to not ask for help from anyone.

**Hussa Al-Humaidhi:** My mother is my greatest inspiration. She is a strong woman who taught me to depend on myself and to manage my personal matters on my own ever since I was a school student. I also find around me thousands of people that I can learn different things from and consider to be role models. I have always been comfortable with asking for the purpose of learning; and the more people we ask, the more we learn.

*To watch the entire panel discussion, please visit the [Women Mentor Forum YouTube channel](#).*



# QUOTES



Balsam Al-Ayoub

“ Failure gives us the motive to achieve. ”

“ The most beautiful message we can send to young women today, is to initiate. ”



Sanaa Al-Qimlas

# QUOTES



Hussa Al-Humaidhi

**“** *The more we ask, the more we learn.* **”**

**“** *Do not allow anyone to tell you that your dream is impossible.* **”**



Maha Albaghi

# INTERACTIVE SESSION BY KATHY KORMAN FREY

## Social Entrepreneurship - From Idea to Execution

The Forum ended with an interactive session facilitated by Kathy Korman Frey, a professor at George Washington University.

Professor Korman Frey invited a young woman from the audience to participate in an onstage exploration session for a social project. The participant pitched an idea for a social project and the audience was invited to mentor her and help her develop her idea into a project plans and goals.

It is worth noting that Kathy Korman Frey is an award-winning entrepreneur, community leader, educator, and curriculum developer. Frey teaches Women's Entrepreneurial Leadership, a nationally award-winning course of the George Washington University School of Business. She is also the founder of the Hot Mommas Project, the world's largest women's case study library, providing free online access to stories of diverse female role models and mentors. The Project is the recipient of a national Coleman Foundation Case Award and is both housed at and included in the mission of the George Washington University Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence (CFEE).



# WMF Workshop ‘Tell Us Your Story’

## CELEBRATING THE CHALLENGES THAT SHAPE US THROUGH STORYTELLING

By Eman M. Al Awadhi

When men talk about the challenges they faced in life, we are left in awe of their strength and perseverance. When women bring up the hardships they live through day in and day out, many think, “So what? Been there, done that.” The reason is oftentimes because of the way we, women, tell our stories. Research has proven that women’s confidence and courage increases up to 200% when they are exposed to the success stories of other women.

This is why when WMF Founder, Bisma Al Qassar, told me that she would be hosting a workshop for women entrepreneurs with Kathy Korman Frey as the facilitator, I knew that this was something that we had to support. Through the Hot Mommas Project, an award-winning women’s leadership and mentorship program, Kathy has been working since 2005 to fill a gap in the education system by creating a library of stories of female role models. It is the format and template she has the women use when writing their stories, however, that helps turn the tales of challenges from venting into a source of inspiration. And this was exactly what the workshop, hosted by KIPCO at the Chairman’s Club, was geared at.

*Pictures courtesy of KIPCO*



I had first heard of the Hot Mommas Project back in 2013, when I was approached by their Middle East representative to contribute my own story. To motivate women to take part, a competition had been set up and case studies were awarded prizes per region, category and worldwide. I visited the online platform and started reading the case studies, and I was overwhelmed by how these women could turn hardships, failures and challenges into opportunities for growth and career success. Unlike other stories I'd read about, my case study consisted of a defining moment in my life that led to me take a strong position on many things later on in my career. I was ecstatic when Kathy contacted me to say that my case study had won me second place worldwide!

Back to the workshop. By creating an environment where women felt safe to share their stories, and helping the entrepreneurs think back on their lives and remember the experiences that define who they are today, Kathy facilitated a discussion that helped guide the young women in the room to be better equipped to tell their stories with pride and inspire other women to follow in their footsteps. For WMF, this is the first step towards raising awareness among women on how they can mentor and support other women on their own journeys.

For KIPCO, WMF's activities are a natural extension of two areas of focus: entrepreneurship and women empowerment. We are proud to have female representatives at all levels of KIPCO's business and across industries, and we hope that initiatives of WMF and other organizations can help companies lay down a blueprint for gender diversity and creating the ideal corporate work environment for women in Kuwait.



As part of its efforts to support women's development, KIPCO and its Group companies actively take participate in seminars and events that serve as a platform for successful female role models to share their experiences and inspire the younger women to develop in their careers. KIPCO invests in the training and development of its women employees, particularly in the area of leadership and management. The company encourages open discussion about what more can be done to empower women in the workplace, and believes that this is a step that must be taken in order to ensure progress in achieving gender equality, and creating a merit-based environment where gender plays no role in the assessment of an employee's skills and capabilities.



# MY SISTERS IN KUWAIT: COMMUNITY AND CONNECTIONS FOR A LIFETIME

by Kathy Korman Frey

From our first event upon arriving in Kuwait City, the energy around the women's community was apparent. At the WMF Forum at the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce, I witnessed dynamic panelists, speakers, and audience members. The interest from the press was astounding, and speaks to the "buzz-worthiness" that WMF, and the people investing in the women's leadership community, are creating.

**Big Takeaway:** The importance of equality. Ebru Özdemir's response to questions she sometimes receives "When will you stop focusing on women?": Ebru says (paraphrasing) "When we have equal numbers of women and men in key positions."

**Wish I could put it in a bottle:** The energy and buzz in the women's leadership community of Kuwait.



With US Ambassador to Kuwait



With Ebru Özdemir



With MLP 'Women and Entrepreneurship' Alumni

In our closed-door pilot mentoring session the next day at KIPCO, we used Eman Al-Awadhi's award-winning case study as an example for the attendees. The story of overcoming challenges to achieve your goal and vision resonated deeply with the room full of female entrepreneurs. Next, I asked for a volunteer to share a challenge and what they learned in our "Heroine's Journey" exercise. Then there was another volunteer, then another. The feeling in the room changed, connecting us all, as we learned how struggle can evolve into strength.

**Big Takeaway:** One of the most important mentorship lessons of all: Real examples of how our struggles can turn into strength.

**Wish I could put in a bottle:** The incredible depth and richness of the experience – both in life and work – of the women entrepreneurs in that room.

I had so many other incredible experiences in Kuwait City. This short write-up could easily be a book! From the Souk Al-Mubarakiya, to dinner at Stephanie McGehee's house, to visiting the pop-up shops of women entrepreneurs, to The Avenues mall, to breakfast at Noura Al-Ajmi's restaurant Bräk, to Al Shaheed Park and so much more. Getting to know the wonderful women of Kuwait, and the WMF team, was an experience I will always remember and have shared with many in the US here already.



Mubarkiya Visit



Dinner at Stephanie McGehee



Breakfast at Noura Al-Ajmi's restaurant

# WMF shares its insights with EBSOMED Academy

## DIVERSITY TAKES CENTER STAGE IN THE GLOBAL HUMAN CAPITAL DIALOGUE

This year, WMF had the pleasure of participating in two EBSOMED Academy events that aim at capacity building and experience-sharing. The Academy comes within the framework of the EBSOMED project (Enhancing Business Support Organisations and Business Networks in the South Mediterranean region). EBSOMED Academy events are co-organised with ASCAME (Association of the Mediterranean Chambers of Commerce and Industry) and funded by the European Union.

*Pictures courtesy of ASCAME*



## MedaWomen Forum

2-3 October, 2018

Amman, Jordan

### “The incorporation of women entrepreneurs in the digital economy”

WMF's Founder and President, Besma Al-Qassar, was invited to chair a roundtable discussion on the 'Use & creation of digital marketing: An inside look at influencer marketing, e-mail marketing, social Media, web presence.'

During the discussion, two case studies were presented.

**Case study 1:** CIFE (International Women Council for Women Entrepreneurs) in Tunisia, collaboration with a telecom company to wcreate 'digital rooms', through which they offered women of small businesses with digital support and training to enhance their small businesses.

**Case study 2:** The use of social media platforms by Kuwaiti women entrepreneurs as a cost-effective, quick and easy means of marketing that enabled them to reach markets beyond their borders and enter regional and international markets.

The outcomes of the discussion were a set of recommendations to enhance digital marketing skills for women entrepreneurs. This includes: sponsoring 'digital spaces', training on e-marketing, use of the different digital platforms and on how to use each platform to boost the marketing of women services and products.



## MedaWeek Conference

22 November, 2018

Barcelona, Spain

### Mediterranean Human Capital Meeting 'Mediterranean Talent-Diverse: Mobile and Connected'

WMF Founder & President, Besma Al-Qassar was invited to participate in the Meeting's roundtable discussions: 'Diversity and Talent Mobility: key aspects for competitive organizations'; and 'Digital transformation of Human Resources: a must for talent and processes'.

Besma shared insights on the business advantages of diversity. In addition, she shared solutions for promoting diversity at the leadership level within organisations

She pointed out that it has become common knowledge that diversity within businesses lead to more sales, hence increased revenue and ultimately higher profits. These results naturally mean happier employees, shareholders and investors alike. Achieving this goes back to a simple equation and that is a company's team and decision makers need to represent the business's market. This means they should be as diverse as their market in order to create and produce services and products that as many people as possible within their target market would need, want and use.

She commented on the widespread misconception, or excuse, that it is challenging for businesses to achieve diversity at the leadership level, and especially gender diversity. Besma, explained that it is only a challenge when companies do not invest in diverse teams. She added that companies need to hire, invest in and retain young and diverse teams. She pointed out the importance of applying digital technology and flexible work space and time. These HR methods empowers young team members and allows them to manage their own time and take ownership of their jobs, ensuring higher retention. So when the time comes to find leaders, the pool of qualified talent already exists within the organisation. Basically, if the company invests in diverse young talents and supports their needs from the start, it won't face challenges in having a diverse team of leaders later on.





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