

AMAL ABDALLAH

Amal Abdallah
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Amal Abdallah holds a Bachelor degree in Business Management and an MBA- Masters in Business Administration and an IFC Certified Board Director. She considers herself a talented leader with mastery in people management, strategic planning and business development. As a mentor, she works with many startups and entrepreneurs to plan and expand their business.

She joined Saba IP in 1997 as an Expert in Intellectual property: trademarks, designs, copyrights, patents, domain names; franchising; licensing; negotiations. Abdallah is a member of various IP communities including APPIMAF, INTA, ECTA and others.

WiB: In Saba & Company Intellectual Property, what are your roles and responsibilities?

I am a Partner in Saba IP Group covering the Middle East & North Africa. I am managing Lebanon office branch, supervising the day-to-day operations, marketing & business development, legal services and relations with customers and local authorities. I am providing IP prosecution, enforcement and anti-counterfeiting services to local, regional and international brand owners.

I am taking responsibility of the branch P&L (Profit & Loss). I overview the quarterly financials as well as the end of fiscal year financials of my office. I do analyze those financials to compare ratios to ensure that we are on the right track; I keep an eye on expenditures and revenues as well as receivables and payables. I also approve and sign the official financial statements presented to the Ministry of Finance for more than ten years now.

WiB: What have your contributions been to the company?

I had a vision for the business development role of our company. I knew that a change should be introduced and shared my vision for the change with the GM and with my team and I involved them by listening to their ideas. I knew there was a risk and that I had to accept the responsibility if I fail; I devoted enough time to achieve a great result. An increase in billings of more than 200% in the first year was the result of my vision and the team who believed in the change and who assisted me to accomplish it.

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Also, I implemented a training program for new employees who are joining the company and are to relocate to our offices in the Arab countries. Coaching them to become what they are now is a real accomplishment.

In 2006, I turned our branch to be a paperless office.

WiB: What motivates you?

My motivation stems from many factors:

Success after hard work and perseverance. When my plans are achieved, they are aligned with the company's goal. Feeling passionate about making a significant contribution to the company's success. Empowering people.

WiB: What's your vision for the future of the company and how do you work to achieve it?

My vision is to create dedicated and ambitious members at the company with the aim to maximize the value of our customers' brands and inventions. I always try to motivate the team to make a difference and be part of something bigger than themselves through engaging them in projects, clearly communicating with them and encouraging them to identify ways to shine. I also host a series of workshops to help align and inspire the team to reach the company's goals.

WiB: As a board member, what are the challenges you face?

I am not a board member; I am a partner and country manager (C Suite Manager). I am also member in many committees at the firm.

In addition to the increased responsibilities and accountability, the main challenge I face is the gender inequality in terms of praise, promotions, and raises. Moreover, being the only women in male-dominated teams, I feel sometimes isolated. Men are respectful and ask my opinion, but they often overlook it while taking decisions.

WiB: What challenges do you face in balancing your work and family responsibilities?

As a single woman with no child, I normally don't find it hard to balance between my family (mainly my mother) and my work, especially that clear flexible hours are put in place in Saba IP.

WiB: Is your company taking any steps to increase the number of female employees, especially in management positions? If yes, what are they?

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Despite the barriers to making change, we, at Saba IP, are trying to close the gender gap in management positions. We are providing mentorship programs to shining women employees who have a high potential for both promotions and leadership roles. When identifying those women, they are provided with the necessary training from higher-ranking members of the company. This creates an environment that is inclusive and encourages others to seek education and improvement.

WiB: (a) How can we engage more men to support women's equal role in the work force?

We will not make much progress towards gender equality without men's support. Although many men support gender equality, some feel threatened by it or even actively oppose it.

In order to engage more men to support women's equal role at work, companies should look into various ways that include men and women:

- Create initiatives that involve women and men as equal partners.
- Educate through training about how to lead change effectively. Make it clear that this is a business issue rather than women's issue.
- Encourage men and women to challenge and change gender-biased policies and practices at work.
- Provide training to understand the root causes of gender inequalities and to change the attitude and behavior.

(b) How can women grasp this opportunity to advance from there?

Women should believe that the work/family narrative is not true. When given the opportunity to grow in a company that advocates gender equality, women should seize opportunities to accelerate progress.

Women should commit to continuous learning for self-improvement, high achievement and self-evaluation.

Women should show trust, mutual respect and should involve themselves in decision making to make an impact.

WiB: Should the government institute policies that ensure more women given the opportunity be senior managers and board members of companies? What could be in your opinion a useful measure? (Legal quota or recommendations, data base, more data transparency, etc. Why?

I am not an advocate for gender quotas. The reason is that it would lead to selection of possibly unqualified women. Women constitute 50% of the workforce, yet less are managers and a handful number sits on the Board of Directors. Transparency, professional and formal approach to board selection is key to give women the opportunity to be senior managers and board members of companies.

WiB: How can companies be motivated to add women on their boards?

Boards of Directors and companies should amend their mindset to assert that women on boards are truly beneficial for the business. Motivation to do that should come from their admission and realization that a need is there to have a woman on board. Companies should recruit from the inside and develop and nurture the talent they already have; alternatively, they should target and tap into the places that have high-performing women.

WiB: How can we prepare women in general for a board position? What are useful measures or networks?

We can help shining women seeking to hold a board position to be seen in action: speaking at a conference, assuming a highly visible leadership role, or making a name for them by contributing excellent work in their current positions.

We should encourage women to be ready to identify gaps in the skillsets they need for the boardroom; and establish mentoring and coaching programs to prepare them for boardroom service.

WiB: Why do you think it is important to have women on boards? How could women on boards help other women in business?

It is important to have women on boards as they have some characteristics that add to the board room productivity:

- Women build better workplace relationships. Better relationships between board members are created when a woman is present in the board room which will improve productivity.
- Women make better decisions: Female directors are more inclined to make decisions by taking the interests of multiple stakeholders into account.
- Women reduce company expenditure as they can see more possible solutions to a problem.

WiB: What are in your opinion the strengths of female leadership and the possible impact of this leadership? Can you please give us examples?

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Women are great at sharing information and delegating. Women tend to use cooperation and collaboration effectively. They tend to consult others in the decision-making process, leading to a more cooperative feeling in the firm.

WiB: Many highly educated, intelligent and motivated women are pushed aside in managerial positions. How can we put women on the radar of companies and people with power to become noticeable for these positions? Who are important players to involve, from the public and private sector, to help accomplish that?

An intelligent and motivated woman should work to be visible in her company to be able to get a managerial position. Women need sponsors who will give them visibility, talk about their accomplishments behind closed doors, and promote them for opportunities. Such women need to create a network. They need to be able to reach out and seek advice from other women. One way is to become members of Leagues for Women, Associations or similar networking setups which may open an opportunity for them to get a managerial position.

WiB: Women represent more than 40% of the global labor force, yet they don't have proper representation in business decision making. How can women step up to overcome the stereotype that only a certain gender and profession can get on boards?

To change mindsets and to overcome the stereotype, women should do three things:

- Learn: empower women through awareness, education and support.
- Speak up: Women in male-dominated environments can help raise awareness; they can play a crucial role in promoting gender equality and fighting gender stereotypes.
- Prepare to react: Women should prepare to react to inappropriate or discriminating comments.

WiB: What do you advise young women who want to become entrepreneurs and reach their potential?

I advise young women to always seek a mentor advice at the beginning of their journey. They should work on having a clear vision about their entrepreneurial project and to work hard to achieve their dreams.

WiB: From the professional qualifications, what are important qualities and/or skills for success in management positions? What are useful measures or networks?

The most important qualities/skills for success in management positions are: Good communication, delegation, strategic thinking, decision making, problem solving, mentoring and leadership.