

# Passion *to* Empower



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As founder of the Qatar Professional Women's Network, Christina Zini is undoubtedly a woman of substance. Her enthusiasm to reach her highest potential is highly infectious and serves to encourage a host of other women to reach theirs. Judith Jones chats with her about her past, present and future ideals.

With a trail of professional qualities to her credit, American-born Christina Zini is no stranger to the Corporate World. As a professional management consultant she specialised in facilitating large scale organisational change with companies around the world. She holds strong values when it comes to giving something back to the community, so it is no surprise that when Christina arrived in Qatar, she embraced the country and all its opportunities; resulting in the creation of a professional network that encourages women to develop and increase their quality of talent.

#### **Where did your career path begin?**

**Christina Zini.** It began on Capitol Hill, Washington DC. Post-graduation I planned a career in politics and worked for the governor of my home state – Michigan. Despite my political ideals to help the world become a better place, reality struck, and I soon became disillusioned working in this environment. I left to join PricewaterhouseCoopers Consulting as a management consultant, specialised in organisation change and workforce development, working with clients both in the private and public sector. Several years later, I moved into an internal HR role focused on the development and advancement of other consultants, guiding them to excel in



their careers. Inspiring others is a great source of motivation for me.

**Who has been your greatest inspiration?**

**CZ.** My Mother has been my main inspiration and had the greatest influence on my life. As a teacher, she greatly encouraged my sister and I to pursue our goals and become strong independent women. Sadly, she passed away just over a year ago. Observing her courage and dignity in the way she dealt with a terminal illness had a profound impact on how I saw myself, and ultimately, the kind of person I wanted to be. Life is extremely short and I would like to offer something back to my community by helping people realise their dreams and achieve their ambitions. My mother's strength and dedication to helping others is what drives me forward.

**Qatar Professional Women's Network (QPWN) was created in February 2010. How did that transpire?**

**CZ.** I arrived in the Middle East at the end of 2009, employed by IBM as a Professional Development Leader responsible for the Emerging Markets. After exploring what was available with regards to women's groups in Qatar, I discovered several women's associations. However, none were specifically aimed at working professionals and entrepreneurs. The Qatari Business Women's Association offered elements of what I was looking for, but not being Qatari-born, or residing in Qatar for the required amount of years, I didn't qualify to become a member.

Realising the need for a professional women's network where women of all nationalities, backgrounds and professional experience could interact

with each other, I brainstormed with some friends around my dining table and came up with the outline of what is now QPWN. We also discussed the idea of a mentoring programme, whereby we could help women within the community learn from each other, share knowledge and develop professional skills.

**How did you overcome the challenge of working as a full time professional and being heavily involved with QPWN?**

**CZ.** Setting up QPWN is reflective of my own personal journey; wanting to expand my horizons and pursue my passions. My purpose in life is to empower women's voices and help them to realise their dreams. Having worked for IBM for nearly 14 years, I felt that if I was going to empower other women to realise their goals, I should take my own advice and pursue my own dreams. Therefore, in

January 2011, I resigned from IBM to concentrate on QPWN and to embark on a new venture. I am currently studying and working on a business plan to become a women's Leadership Coach.

**Did resigning from an established position make you nervous? Any regrets?**

**CZ.** It was definitely the right move to make, although slightly unnerving initially, no longer being a part of a large corporate machine and walking away from all the perks that accompany such a position. However, I am now doing the kind of work that I was meant to do, and I've never looked back. When I came up with "Dream Big" as the theme for QPWN's launch event, I realised I was sending a message to myself.

**What's next on the agenda for QPWN and Christina Zini?**

**CZ.** Sadly, I'm leaving Qatar at the end of the year and saying goodbye to QPWN. I'm pleased I was able to have a hand in its success, and as the torch will be passed, I'm assured there are enough women interested to keep it going. QPWN supports Qatar's vision for the future and the positive outlook for women in the work force.

**How do you define achievement?**

**CZ.** Achievement is realising your dreams. ■

