

CHRISTINA'S

RING OF PEARLS

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PHOTOGRAPHY JESSIE PALANCA

ABODE asks what made Christina Zini to create and lead the Qatar Professional Women's Network two years ago and the importance of creating and mentoring women through a common platform to facilitate their career growth, even as she gets ready for a new chapter in her life.

Since the inception of the Qatar Professional Women's Network in 2010, the organization has become Qatar's leading and largest women's group, with an estimated 2000 members based on their newsletter and social media subscriptions. In fact they are the only professional women's group open to women of all nationalities and professions, as well as students and those currently not employed outside of the home.

It all began when one woman questioned the absence of a forum for women in Qatar two years ago, and decided to do something about it. At the helm of affairs is Christina Zini, the founder of the QPWN who for the last two years has gifted the women of Qatar a platform to share not just their successes but found ways to empower enhance and nurture their individual growth. After a two year run, she recently stepped down as the Leader and shared on her role and the journey that she has been on.

Having had a background in management consulting and professional development, Christina had recognized the significance of empowering women very early in her career. She worked in corporate giant IBM for nearly 14 years and left it only to retrain as a professional coach working exclusively with women and currently



works as a women's leadership coach. It was only natural we ask her 'why women?' as our first question. Excerpts from the interview.

ABODE: What inspired you to work with women?

CZ: It's a passion that I felt for a long time and it has to do with the environment that I was raised in. My mother, a teacher raised my sister and I to be independent. She was active in many women's groups, and took a special interest in the development of women. Growing up and seeing examples of how women are treated all over the world, I knew how important it was for women to have equal rights, to be empowered, educated and that it is important to invest in girls' education as a key to their future and their economic success.

ABODE: What did you do about it?

CZ: Over the years, I have volunteered for different women's groups and different causes. In high school and

university I was quite active in working with women with eating disorders and body image issues. In my 20s, I volunteered in a shelter for women who were victims of domestic abuse. In my professional life I was heavily involved in the development and mentoring of women both as a consultant and professional development leader. I was involved in the gender diversity initiatives at IBM having played leadership roles both formally and informally.

ABODE: Is that what lead you to establish the QPWN here?

CZ: Well, all of this just added to my passion and so when I came to Qatar, I asked myself what's next for me when it came to empowering women in a different part of the world. It was because I was mentoring women in a corporate environment I wanted to get involved in a program in the community and what a great opportunity it was to do here in Qatar. That desire expanded into a larger vision of creating a professional women's network which was open to all women and provide a platform for networking and development and create

a strong sense of community.

ABODE: But there were none when you came here? At what moment did QPWN come to being more than just an idea?

CZ: When I came to Qatar I was looking for a professional women's network to join and was interested in getting involved in mentoring young women however, I quickly discovered there wasn't a professional network for women of all nationalities and professions to join. In February 2010 I invited ten other professional women to my home and we discussed an idea of establishing a professional women's network. I pitched the idea of a QPWN to them who were all enthusiastic about it.

So we formed the initial core planning team and started with a newsletter and raising awareness about the group and our intention to start offering events. Our first networking event happened two years ago in the May 2010 and we have continued with monthly networking events every month at different venues around Doha. In addition to this we offer workshops to develop

women personally and professionally, we also offer panel discussions, keynote speaker events like our International women's day celebrations which we have hosted for the last 2 years.

ABODE: What has been the highlight of this platform?

CZ: In November 2011 we launched our 'Circle of Pearl' mentoring ring which was a part of my dream to mentor young women in Qatar. This program pairs university students with working professional women for the purpose of their learning and development. The first cycle lasted for six months recently concluding with much success. We intend to expand the program in the next cycle, the first being we plan to include entrepreneurs at any age and we would like to help new graduates who have just become part of the workforce and would like to plan their career.

ABODE: What was the biggest highlight in leading QPWN?

CZ: The biggest highlight is the women themselves, who are doing such amazing things in this country, it's powerful to see the things they are capable of. Meeting

these women, building a community together and playing a role in a country that is going through a tremendous change is a highlight I value as the founder and leader of QPWN. We know that we are directly contributing to Qatar's ability to achieve its 2030 Vision which aims to transcend the development of its female workforce, as well as making Qatar an even better place to live and work.

ABODE: What are your expectations from the next leader, Melissa Mitchell, the HR Director for the American School of Doha?

CZ: Future goals would be to focus on formalizing QPWN as an organization to ensure its longevity and that will also include formalizing membership, and building via strategic alliances with other organisations to strengthen QPWN. Building up our brand, making people aware of what we do and what we stand for and, of course continuing to do what we do which is offering fabulous events to keep women engaged, developing and networking into the future.

For more information you can visit the website of Qatar Professional Women's Network: www.qpwn.org.
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The members of Qatar Professional Women's Network