

BLACK VS WHITE

The fine art of Abaya management

People often talk about developing leadership among women. When it comes to Qatari women, the word is 'Abaya Management' says Dr Kholode Al-Obaidli.

At Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), hers was the only abaya among a committee of thobes – a situation that led her to emerge as a distinct black amongst the white.

She talks to *Cassey Oliveira* about the 14 laws she devised to evoke a leader within every Abaya wearing Qatari woman...

There exists a glass ceiling for Qatari women in the corporate world which Dr Kholode surmises is born out of a patriarchal society. "Paternalism acts as an impediment when it comes to providing equal opportunities for women to shatter this ceiling. Because women are late arrivals in the management sector, the balance of Qatari males and females in managerial positions is significantly out of sync," she says.

This visible dearth of women, she feels, is because male managers usually recruit other male employees. "Men are more comfortable working with men rather than women due to cultural conditioning. Of course, there are exceptions," she says.

THE GOLDEN RULES...

1 KNOW AND UNDERSTAND YOUR WORK-ENVIRONMENT

All managers develop a particular management style while working with subordinates, management peers, and upper management. I tried to understand my environment and all the elements within it, particularly the way I related to Qatari males. This approach provided me with an insight of how to manage better.

2 ESTABLISH YOUR PRESENCE

First insert yourself in the management world and then assert yourself through your values. Take every opportunity to surface on a committee; make top notch presentations or attend meetings where Thobe management congregate.

3 ALWAYS REMEMBER NAMES

I usually like addressing people by their first name to break the ice. Men especially like it when women address them by their first name. This is how Abayas build the "likability factor".

4 BE INNOVATIVE AND SHOW NO FEAR WHEN DOING SO

Don't accept your job as it is. Try to implement it differently. Read up on cutting edge ideas and share them at Thobe dominated management meetings. Let your voice and opinion be heard.

5 USE YOUR FEMININE SIDE AND HUMOUR TO ESTABLISH YOUR AUTHENTICITY

Don't be an open book; don't openly talk about your plans. Use your feminine mystique to manoeuvre through a thobe-dominated work environment. Also, don't take life too seriously. Use humour to your advantage.

6 WHEN A VOID OF LEADERSHIP EXISTS – FILL IT!

Show that you are capable of resolving a key issue. Take on more management responsibilities above and beyond your current management position. Women are by nature problem-solvers. Don't just give solutions for a problem, solve it.

7 WHEN ATTENDING PRESENTATIONS, SIT FRONT ROW AND CENTRE

During presentations, change a monologue to a visual dialogue by writing notes, nodding head, eye contact, asking questions to the presenter. The more attention he pays to you, the more he validates your importance to the Thobe audience.

8 ALWAYS CONGRATULATE PRESENTERS AFTER THEIR PRESENTATION

When you congratulate men after their presentations, they most often will support you later. This will go a long way toward building a credible ally.

9 DEVELOP A POWER WALK AND A POWER POSTURE WHILE SEATED AT MEETINGS.

A good walk and posture reflects confidence, preparedness and knowledge. It has been said that an ounce of image is worth more than a pound of effectiveness. Develop a walk of confidence by walking erect and smiling as you pass others.

10 CONSCIOUSLY USE SUBCONSCIOUS IDEAS.

Consciousness is your actions and subconscious is your thoughts. Begin by telegraphing your thoughts and desires to others, and then gradually turn them into self fulfilling prophecies.

11 NEVER GIVE UP!

When you want something strongly, you usually get it. But you won't get it if you are easily discouraged and take NO as the final answer. NO is not the end, it's always the beginning of something new. Do not let minor losses deter you from your objective of being successful.

12 SEE NO BARRIERS OR OBSTACLES – JUST CHALLENGES

Do not be daunted by what you perceive to be barriers or obstacles which prevent you from doing your job. Obstacles are a valuable opportunity for you to reinvent yourself.

13 DON'T ASK PERMISSION TO DO YOUR JOB, RATHER ASK FOR FORGIVENESS, BUT ONLY WHEN NEEDED

Qatari women are smart and intelligent. However, they often lack confidence. They more often will ask permission to do something. Your boss cares about your result, not your approach. So do it! When asking for permission you empower others to say "NO". It's also okay to commit mistakes, but not repeat them. Learn from them.

14 USE THE 'CRUCIBLE' TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

Crucibles are difficulties that you face at work – political, financial or personal. They are growth opportunities that test your ability to solve problems while demands are placed on you in terms of accountability and positive outcomes. Try to twist difficulty to your advantage.



(The above was part of Dr Kholode's presentation at the *How Women Work* conference, powered by *Woman Today*. See page 56 for details)



Q **UICK TAKES**

YOUR THOUGHTS IN A LINE

<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">ABAYA</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">CAN BE USED AS A SWORD RATHER THAN A SHIELD</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">OBSTACLES</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">LEADER</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">EFFECTIVENESS</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">YOUR STRENGTH</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">CAN SOMETIMES BE YOUR WEAKNESS</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">WOMAN</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">RESERVOIR OF POTENTIAL POWER</p>	<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">HOBBY</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">READING BOOKS ON MANAGEMENT AND WOMEN'S ISSUES</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">FAMILY</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">FIRST PRIORITY</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">FEAR</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">A TEMPORARY SENSATION TO OVERCOME</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">OBSTACLE FOR WOMEN LEADERS</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">SUSTAINING THEIR LEADERSHIP</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">WOMEN'S DAY</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">A DAY OF RECOGNITION</p> <hr style="border: 0.5px dashed red;"/> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: 0.8em; color: grey;">AGEING</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">AT 30 YOU GAIN MATURITY; AT 40 YOU GAIN WISDOM. WAITING TO TURN 40!</p>
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LEGAL SPEAK

Though promotion of women's rights in Qatar is on the national public policy agenda, legislation will be required to put these rights in motion says Kholode.

She suggests two laws:

The first would address affirmative action for Qatari women in the workforce. This could include goals and time tables for each ministry to assure that women achieve parity in top level management positions over a slated time frame.

The second is the formation of an Equal Employment Commission that addresses grievances when women feel that their rights in the work place have been violated.

DR KHOLODE'S BOOK *EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN QATAR* IS A STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN ESL TEACHERS REGARDING QATAR'S EDUCATIONAL REFORMS. THE BOOK IS AVAILABLE AT AMAZON. AFTER RESIGNING FROM QOC, SHE IS CURRENTLY ON A CAREER BREAK TO LOOK AFTER HER BABY DAUGHTER.

"From a cultural perspective, men usually view women as mothers, daughters or sisters. They rarely have had experiences working with women at their same administrative level. Hence they are unappreciative of a woman's skills such as team building and critical analysis."

It was these skills that catapulted Dr Kholode to the level of a Curriculum Design and Assessment Manager at the Innovative Leadership Centre (ILC), Director of Scholarship Office, and Director of Planning and Development at QOC, a government entity. Her 14 laws stem from her experience in working with her male counterparts. And she hopes that these rules would give Qatari women a paradigm on how to engage with "Thobes" on a daily work basis. "Black and white are both powerful colours. But the power lies in mixing the two to form a grey. We need to see this grey when men and women work together."

HER ROLE MODEL

For Dr Kholode, "Any person who shows tremen-

dous progress to benefit the larger society in a short amount of time is a role model." While she names many, HH Sheikha Moza bint Nasser Al-Missned ranks first. "Her Highness is an advocate for women rights, cultural dialogues, education and research both nationally and internationally. She has made a positive attempt to shatter the glass ceiling."

Others include Sheikha Al-Mayasa and Sheikha Hind, Maha Al-Ghonim, CEO of Global House Investments in Kuwait, and Dr Hanan Al-Kuwari, CEO of Hamad Corporation. "I try learning something from each of them," she says.

"Women can inspire other women by showing respect, confidence and harmony in their work/life balance. Each woman has a story to tell, and you can learn from each."

BORN A LEADER

"I believe everything can be taught if you are willing to learn," says Dr Kholode who attributes her leading personality to her father. "My father always

raised a competition among us siblings. But it was never about competing with others; it was about competing with myself."

Another influence on her strong personality was her experience in UK. Dr Kholode had moved to the UK with her family in 2002 to pursue higher studies. It was then that she learnt to be independent. "I learnt how to balance between being a full time mother and full time student."

Interning with RAND Corporation in Santa Monica Headquarter at summer 2007 further gave her insights of the business world of the West. "I was introduced to the world of research, work values of time management, meeting deadlines, respecting and relating to colleagues – both men and women, the HR system and critical analysis. I tried to bring these values to the Qatari work culture at QOC," she says.

Her innovative ideas have led to people describing her as a 'liberal conservative'. "But I am neither of them. I am an advocate of change in a conservative environment," she says 🇵🇸