

“MY ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNEY”

NAWF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

PHOENICIA HOTEL, MAY 11TH, 2016

When NAWF approached me to speak about **my entrepreneurial journey** (*cover – slide1*), I was intrigued and excited as I am usually approached to talk about my corporate and board experience instead.

Indeed I have had the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder for the last 25 years at Unilever and Fattal Group.

At Unilever, the Anglo-Dutch multinational company I handled Marketing & Sales positions in their French, Argentinian and Levant affiliates; and later on with Fattal Group, my family’s business, based in Lebanon, I occupied several management positions which led to my presence on its Board.

Now, I can proudly say that I am the 1st women from the Fattal family to have reached this Board after 4 generations and 105 years!

What may be more interesting in my story however, is not the position itself but the journey to get there. A journey that was not always linear.

In my career, I have dropped on and off from the corporate world & on and off into entrepreneurship for varied reasons.

In 2006, it was a family matter that off ramped me from the corporate world: my husband was promoted to a position based in Dubai. We decided that it would be best not to split the family (with our then 2 kids - that are now 4!). So we settled in Dubai and I had to let go of my management role at Fattal group and resign.

It costed me a lot... After few months, I was feeling trapped in a golden cage (wonderful kids and a husband that I love, sure, a villa with palm trees and pool, sure) but, I, Caroline, I had lost the sense of purpose that, for me, comes with a fulfilling professional life.

THE SPARK *(slide2)*

But one day, an unexpected **spark** lit in my mind!

I remembered dreaming during those crazy corporate years of the day where I would be able to retire, study psychology or dive into coaching. And I said to myself “Caroline, life is giving you this chance at 35, take it!”

FOLLOWING MY DREAM *(slide3)*

At that time, I **re-connected with my dream**, which was the igniting trigger pushing me to complete all the necessary

leadership development courses and exams to achieve my aim of becoming a certified coach.

GRABBING THE OPPORTUNITY *(slide4)*

And what many of us learn during life, is that when you connect with your dream things suddenly start falling into place and **opportunities** come along your way.

And as a living proof of that, just as I had finished my certification, I coincidentally heard of an executive coaching boutique firm called PRAESTA that was on the hunt for a partner in the UAE to cover the whole Middle Eastern region. When we met, little did I know that I was embarking on my first entrepreneurial experience!

PUTTING MY SKIN IN THE GAME *(slide5)*

We formed the partnership and that is when I had to put **my skin in the game**.

It was very different from working in a corporation. I had to do it all myself: from incorporating the company, to finding the office location, to hiring the Personal Assistant, to finding the clients, to writing the proposals, to closing the deals, to developing the marketing material!

In addition to that, I was also coaching senior clients and speaking in numerous events!

It was hectic, yet exciting, and the incredible feeling of freedom that emanated from deep inside made it all worth every single effort!

TAMING THE GREMLIN *(slide6)*

Of course, I had to battle with anxiety an unaccountable number of times. This “saboteur” – or “gremlin” as we call it in coaching- this voice inside my head that said:

- “Caroline, this will go nowhere”,
- “Caroline, there is so much being done around leadership development already”,
- “Caroline, what will you bring to the table?”

But if there was one thing that helped me tame this gremlin for good, it was my strong unshaken will to pursue my dream.

BEING RESILIENT *(slide7)*

And while my background helped me in so many ways in this new venture, the climb was not quite that easy.

Having been into Fast Moving Consumer Goods for years, I was used to short sales cycles, selling soaps and shampoos on a weekly basis, when actually selling a service is a totally different story.

It might take more than 6 to 9 months for the purchase to materialize, and requires unimaginable effort to convince the client.

But then, entrepreneurship taught me to be patient and **resilient!**

FIGHTING SOLITUDE *(slide8)*

Then with every new challenge I tamed, surged another one. One of the toughest fights I had to make was with myself and... with loneliness.

My partners were based abroad; I missed being part of a leadership team. **Solitude** is a daily struggle felt by so many entrepreneurs who do not have people to share ideas with or even emotions with.

Thankfully my coach helped me in these instances and my husband was of a great support all along the way.

OPENING UP THE STALL *(slide9)*

I had to learn to be comfortable with networking, “**to open up my stall**” and to sell the company and myself.

I had to re-write my habits, from the smallest ones such as remembering to always carry business cards in my handbag, to the biggest like constantly monitoring and spotting the right opportunities.

I was not in my comfort zone initially... BUT...I had to do it! And with time, I even started liking it!

REWARD *(slide10)*

Today, Praesta Middle East is running successfully from Dubai and I have the immense pleasure and privilege to be coaching CEOs and ExCo members from diverse industries around the region.

In 2014 and 2015, I was humbled to be named by Forbes Middle East among the 200 most powerful Arab women in business: the 1st year for my role at Praesta and the 2nd year for my role at Fattal!

Following my dream and venturing into entrepreneurship was starting to pay off and pretty soon, I felt it stretched me more than I could think!

Since then, I have moved back to Lebanon and back into the corporate world. I had to quit Dubai suddenly, when my uncle, Bernard Fattal, then CEO of the family business, passed away and I was called to join back the family business in management and Board roles.

Intrapreneurship is key for Fattal Group and was a core pillar of Bernard Fattal's vision. To keep the flame alive, we have created an award in his name to promote intrapreneurship within the company. The "Bernard Fattal Award for Pioneering & Entrepreneurship" is given every two years and is not only considered the most prestigious award for a team

to win but it also emulates new ideas and promotes thinking out of the box and innovation!

Few years down the road, now in 2016, I still serve on the Board of Fattal Group, and handle coaching assignments at Praesta Middle East, and **additionally I am back into the entrepreneurship mode!** (*slide11*)

STAND FOR WOMEN

Today I would like to share with you another one of those sparks. A dream propelling me onto a new mission.

I introduce you to “**Stand for Women**”, a platform that will advocate for women empowerment and gender equality in the workforce in the Middle East.

A lot is being done about the matter in the US and Europe: quotas, women on boards and in Excocs, equal pay, regularly make the headlines. And I strongly feel that the same should be done in our region, for a more prosperous economy, more job creation and ultimately more peace.

I am excited to be revealing to you all today, as an Avant-Premiere, the logo and identity of “Stand for Women”!
(*slide12*)

You can start following us on all social media channels as we unravel our mission, vision and strategy.

I am thrilled to go over this entrepreneurial journey again: the gremlins, the hard personal work, the solitude at times, and all the tough inspiring challenges.

Even speaking to you all about it puts me on an edge.

But today I am more and more convinced that more women in the workforce are needed in the region and that it needs everybody's help, women, men, corporations, governments and society in general. So I will thrive. I will activate my own network: other leaders, communities, NGOs... and I need your help and support in this new exciting step!

I have made a conscious decision that no matter what are the hardships and the constraints I am faced with, I will always have a choice and I will always bounce back.

I feel privileged being able to evolve and grow into new dimensions, thinking of new ventures; entrepreneurship needs us to dream, believe in something important, chase the dream but it also needs support: expertise, finance, and a core team who believes in your idea!

And my final advice for you all would be, stand for your dreams, stand for your passion, stand for what you believe in and most importantly **stand for women!**