

< Interviews

The WFEs Women Leaders 2020 - Narjes Farookh Jamal, Chief Operating Officer, Bahrain Bourse

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1. Can you tell us about your work experience journey? Has it been a linear path to reach your current position?

My experience at Bahrain Bourse dates back to 1998, right after my graduation from the University of Kuwait, College of Science. My experience was more focused on Information Technology, which was not very common for women.

Personally, I think IT-related roles are perceived as a back-office function. Generally the job isn't client facing or customer facing, and that's usually what the business cares about. However, making yourself relevant in multiple roles is what shapes an individual for future career paths.

Outperforming my peers in a male-dominated role was a challenge, and balancing work-life as a parent was another challenge. Hence, my progression has not been a linear path leading up to my current leadership role, nor was it smooth. However, my progression was never hindered due to my gender. In fact, I was able to understand the business opportunities early in my career.

2. Have you worked with any mentors or coaches during your career? And do you mentor or coach anyone at the moment?

I was not assigned a direct mentor of my own, yet I have always utilised the people around me to seek their guidance and mentorship. My superiors were and still are very helpful in providing the right advice when needed as I believe that when it comes to gaining knowledge and experience, the sky is the limit. Ultimately, that made me reflect on the opportunity and consider this as my next step. I was always willing to do whatever it took to stretch and learn and expand my knowledge.

I've seen people who are technically brilliant, they know the capital markets business model better than most people in the meeting room, but they don't know how to translate that power of knowledge and insight into something relevant. It's a unique skill to take all the context and complex concepts, whether they're financial or technical, and boil complex processes/thoughts to a simpler form, which can be easily digested. Hence, I take it on board myself to mentor younger professionals joining the exchange, in order to guide them and deliver the right messages to them and they tend to seek my advice on various matters.

3. Who is your most important role model?

At a personal level I have always looked up to Bill Gates as a role model, learning from his perseverance while building his empire including the businesses he invests in, his philanthropic direction, as well as the book recommendations.

At a professional level, Adena Friedman, President & CEO of Nasdaq, the first female CEO to lead a global stock exchange in 2017. Friedman has been busy modernising Nasdaq, setting the standards higher for all exchanges to follow. She has joined the Board of the NY Federal Reserve and is the only exchange CEO to ever have achieved this level.

4. How did you know you wanted to work for an exchange or CCP? Was this always a career aspiration?

I believe that 'deep curiosity to learn' played a key pivotal factor in my career. Growing up, the morning economic broadcast shows featuring the stock market always caught my attention. Working in the exchange always had a 'prestigious' impact on me. Curiosity, whether innate or cultivated, is vital to motivating experiences that build the diverse knowledge required of a leadership role. But curiosity is also an essential trait that constantly offers new and challenging situations that need to be mastered.

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Narjes Farookh Jamal, Chief Operating Officer, Bahrain Bourse