GEORGIANA POGONARU

Passion for Entrepreneurship

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GEORGIANA POGONARU is a Forbes Business Hero and one of the top 50 most influential women in Romanian business, also nominated as one of the "Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the world." In more than 25 years in business, she has founded several top performing companies, as well as left an important mark on promoting arts and heritage.

Her achievements, her civic involvement and, most of all, her address, all emanate the passion she has invested in every enterprise and an attention to details that almost meets perfection. Georgiana's story is that of leading with dignity and care, of pursuing with wisdom and determination to create durable projects that benefit communities and people. It is also a story about hard work and honesty, and about giving back and supporting big dreams that could change the world.

How did your entrepreneurial journey start?

> Usually, women become entrepreneurs in order to provide a better life for their families. In the '90s I was a scientific researcher and assistant professor at the Faculty of Chemistry in Bucharest; I wanted my children to be able to study in better equipped laboratories and access the most modern educational methods. To acquire the necessary resources, I gave up the academic mirage and enthusiastically took on the opportunity to become an entrepreneur and the founder of Romcolor 2000 SA, a plastics colors and additive company.

Why did you choose chemistry? What does chemistry have in common with art?

> I chose chemistry in school long ago, possibly because my first teacher in chemistry was nice and competent... Regarding the comparison with art, chemistry is a science, precise, analytical. At the same time, while art is seen as being creative, expressive, it also has a precise edge to it. A lot like in chemistry, you learn the basics and afterwards you can build new ideas, be innovative and creative; but always with clear, predetermined notions.

What was your greatest lesson?

> I don't think I have one great lesson; but during my professional journey I did learn a lot of small lessons. Maybe it's because it was more useful to me to focus on a given problem at a time and compartmentalize. In this same context, the phrase "there is no elevator to success, you have to take the stairs" comes to mind. Actually, I must confess I never built big dreams. Instead, I wholeheartedly targeted smaller objectives, on shorter terms and tried to do my best, as close to perfection as possible. Time had reshaped all these small objectives into a significant whole, just like a mosaic, since we mentioned art.

What about your greatest challenge?

> Well, any problem can be seen as a challenge and used to strengthen ourselves. Inner processes can be hard - for example determining the right career path, balancing professional and personal lives, being able to find joy in small things, and building a strong internal coping mechanism. All of these are growth steps that transform us into mature and responsible adults.

What are you most proud of?

> I am glad to see my children happy and set on their own and professional journeys. It is also comforting to know that the companies I am involved in are strong and flourishing, in a way they are my offspring too

How do you keep up your enthusiasm and motivation? What inspires you?

> Projects with enthusiastic people inspire me the most. Namely people willing to improve things. I feel at ease around good and passionate people, who are willing to "change the face of the world," regardless of the project's scale, without arrogance or superiority complexes. I join those who are set out to "bend" and solve difficult situations.
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> From an entrepreneur's perspective, you need to act on multiple levels (both micro and macro), to come up with ideas that develop well-being and produce new jobs, eventually leaving a positive mark on the community. Therefore, your motivation needs to exceed revenue, it has to be about more than just numbers, you must enjoy problem-solving and be comfortable with having a slightly more difficult and less predictable life.

Which skills/abilities do you believe were essential for your success? How did you develop them?

> I remember, at the beginning, I used to focus on identifying my weaknesses and improving them. After a while, I changed focus more toward my strengths and finding the right people for my team, people who would be stronger where I was weak; I started reading more psychology to understand people's reactions, because understanding the people around you is essential.
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> I also found that a good degree of self-awareness is fundamental – knowing who you are and what you want in life is a prerequisite of success. Intuition plays a good role here and women should be more willing to follow and to nurture it, it is an important asset in business. Otherwise, adaptability, resilience, humbleness, taking initiative and good networking are just as important to achieve your mission.

How hard is it to make it as a woman in a competitive entrepreneurial environment?

> In my daily work I did not give too much importance to this aspect. I was far too busy. There were targets and performance indicators to be achieved, quality problems to be solved and I was overseeing everything. Luckily, in business success can be measured via figures and numbers and those qualified us as a successful company. The fact that a woman was managing the company was perceived by clients as an advantage; from this perspective I found that trust levels were higher.

What abilities do you think are essential for women's' success?

> Perseverance. Step by step, I understood that I do not have to stop when achieving something; that the initial achievement is just the beginning. And

achieving one goal is not enough, afterwards I began to create a process; so, creating procedures became my main preoccupation.

Who were your role models? How important was it to see other women succeed?

There were women I admired. For example, my professor used to arrive at the laboratory early in the morning at seven and stayed in until nightfall, at ten. She valued conclusive results. She didn't care much about her personal success, but valued more the relevance of the research team's results. I think her attitude shaped me a lot.

I am glad to see women that succeed in whatever they plan. I think Romania holds a strong base of leaders – professional women. We should focus more on what happens to women on different levels in the organizational chart as well. To a certain extent, we become role models for them and we have to show empathy and solidarity. They must become aware of their worth and values, pass them on to future generations accordingly.

Who were your mentors? Were any of them men? How did they influence you? What did you learn from them?

I didn't have mentors, but I did have friends with whom I was able to share my ideas, convictions and problems. On many occasions, by asking the right question, their answers opened new horizons for me. As an entrepreneur it is important to have people to bounce ideas with, people who can stimulate your inner idea and solution generation process.

What is the greatest barrier women face to holding a leadership role today?

> A major barrier is that women still have to choose between family and career. When promotion is on the line, companies tend to take into consideration the time spent at work. Currently, the work quantity is more important than its quality...
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> Maybe a better way to audit productivity and performance in companies would be a solution; I am sure that a lot of women will demonstrate their skills in producing quality work in shorter time instead of quantity work... Women do tend to be better organized and more efficient.

What can we do to promote the next generation of women leaders?

> Those who make it into this category must be fully aware of the fact that the results of their work need visibility, especially media attention. It might be useful to invest in developing their skills for brand construction and communication. Social media is a harsh judge, but it can successfully promote valuable businesses, and, in our time, it is an essential tool for any business

What else do women need to level the playing field and have more opportunities to serve in a leadership role?

> They need to firmly express their points of view. I believe honesty is essential. Don't try to please everyone, it's impossible anyway and you will end up pleasing no one. They should try to focus on getting the best outcome, not the perfect one. And avoid thinking in absolute terms. Real business professionals think in probabilities, always be ready to adjust your plan or your strategy, according to opportunities.

What is your advice for young women who aspire to have successful careers?

> I think it's important for them to try to maintain two types of balances. Firstly, the balance among the roles they each play in their lives: leader, wife, mother, daughter, etc. Secondly, the balance between what NEEDS to be done and what they WANT to do. This requires careful planning and might not be reachable if they want to remain in their comfort zone... And, of course, be aware that in ANY circumstance, the attitude is what gives you the altitude!
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> At the same time, when it comes to their career, I think women should listen to their hearts. Advice is good, if you want to learn from someone else's experience, but too much advice from too many directions cand lead to confusion. It is important to know yourself and what you want, to follow your vision, to have courage, resilience and integrity. A good dose of self-irony is always helpful, it keeps you grounded and smooths the learning process.

How can you characterize yourself in a few words?

> Upright, empathic, efficient.

Is there a question I should have asked, and I haven't?

> Is there? Questions unanswered are ideas we haven't thought of (yet) ...