

EARNING THE RESPECT SHE DESERVES

Rasila Hamzah Proves That Women Can Be Leaders In Consulting, With The Right Mindset **By Loke Poh Lin**

Rasila Hamzah is not only managing director of RUSS Consulting, RUSS Advertising and but of late, she proudly presented her latest 'baby', the Reputation Institute, ASEAN. Her latest venture makes Kuala Lumpur the first Asean city in the global Reputation Institute (RI) network.

RI, with a prominent presence in 29 countries, is a world leader and pioneer in helping businesses benchmark and manage their corporate reputations. The partnership between Russ Consulting and RI raised the bar for Malaysian companies in reputation management.

Rasila has a BA in English Literature and two Masters degrees under her belt (in public administration and journalism) and is an accredited member of a number of professional bodies. She is currently working towards her doctorate in business administration (DBA) in Reputation Management.

Throughout her career as an employee, Rasila admitted to having it good. She has scaled all the way up to the highest level of her corporate career, enjoyed a big salary with all the perks-bonuses, a company car and chauffeur, club membership and annual family travel overseas.

Then she took the big plunge. She said, "when I left the corporate world and went into consulting, I lost all the perks. I didn't have a salary. All the income I received went to paying staff salaries first, then settling outstanding bills, rental. Life was very hard. I had to depend on my husband for my initial capital. He is my banker. "I persevered. When we started, I had three staff, now I've ten. Initially, staff turnover was also very high as not many young professionals would like to work for a start-

up. They would rather work for established companies with better benefits. I didn't blame them because I would do the same if I were in their shoes.

Gradually, her company stabilised and staff retention became high. Another factor was Rasila's belief that "A happy employee will create a happy customer".

She said, "I wish to emulate Google. I wish to create a pleasant work atmosphere. I have a relatively well-stocked pantry with bread, biscuits, Nescafe, tea, Milo. We try to find opportunities for meals and celebrations together.

She also encourages a work-life balance for her staff, making sure they have enough flexibility to run errands and enough time for family and rest. She even has timeshare properties within Malaysia which staff is entitled to use after a year of service in the company.

"I am relatively happy now and I have good support from all my staff and we are a cohesive team." She said.

"Another strength that I observe among many successful women entrepreneurs is their humility, the ability to go out there and ask for help and advice from people who are already successful and more experienced. This is a strength for women; I do not find this in men as I believe they have a bigger ego. Anyway, this is just my personal opinion and may not reflect the general thinking of other women.

"I also believe that as a result of being more patient, women are better listeners than men and that make them better leaders and bosses."

While at work, maintaining the professional front is all important. Rasila thinks that



Rasila Hamzah

women are special creatures created by God. "She is a multi tasker; a mother, a nurturer, a teacher, a disciplinarian, a chef, a tailor, a cleaner, a driver, all rolled into one," she explained. As a result of these roles, a woman leader finds it easy to balance a no-nonsense attitude at work yet remain a woman at heart.

When it comes to respect, Rasila believes that respect has to be earned. "As I often tell my staff, show sincerity; by this I mean even if you have to reprimand a male subordinate, you sincerely show him that it's because you want him to improve; that action can be seen and transparent. He will respect you even more after that." she said.

In her current line of work the biggest challenge is to educate clients that time costs money because "that is how we do business based on time charged." Another challenge is "the perception that just because we are a local company, it does not mean that we offer a level of service which is inferior to that of MNC consultancy."

Consulting is a good industry for women leaders. Women have all the sterling leadership qualities and managerial skills to excel in this industry. In 10 years' I would certainly see more women; possibly a further of 30% - 40% more women. **SI**