



Role Model Women CMA



Ms. Mariam Khawar, FCMA
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“ Finance, like most of the other professions, is a male-dominated profession, and prevalent mentality is that women cannot grow beyond a certain level. My message to women finance professionals is that it's just a mental barrier. Look at the success stories. God has given a unique set of abilities to both men and women. Identify your strengths and work on them, smartly, and efficiently ”

ICMA Pakistan: The Institute takes pride in the fact that one of its qualified women CMAs is heading a renowned organization as its CEO. Can you please briefly share with us your professional journey and what are your key career achievements?

MK: I am a Fellow Cost and Management Accountant and did my CMA from ICMA Pakistan, Lahore after completing my M.Sc. degree in Statistics from Government College University Lahore.

I joined the corporate sector in 2002 where I started my first job as an Accountant in JGC-Descon (Pvt) Ltd, a joint venture between Descon Engineering Limited and JGC Corporation Japan.

In 2004, I joined Millat Tractors Limited as Assistant Manager Finance where I gained a rich exposure in financial reporting and audit. I was the core member in the successful implementation of ERP system in Millat Tractors Ltd.

I moved to Service Industries Ltd in 2007 as a Planning Manager where I was responsible for planning and forecasting, investment and growth plans, establishment of financial controls, budgetary controls, and working capital management.

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I hired and groomed the team from scratch in the Planning Department. I was the key member in the preparation of feasibility study and making financial arrangement of a Captive Powerhouse & Rice Husk Boiler, instrumental in providing support in Oracle ERP Implementation. Moreover, I initiated various cost reduction strategies which contributed positively to the bottom line.

I joined Lahore Transport Company in 2012 as a Chief Financial Officer and now working as the Chief Executive Officer. During my tenure with the company, I have been involved in developing SOPs, KPIs, financial models for subsidy disbursement to bus operators, ERP systems to integrate the HR department and Accounts department. I have been extensively engaged in negotiations with banks for investments, foreign operators for bus operations and working capital requirements, and government departments, and foreign donor agencies for approval and arrangement of funds for projects.

ICMA Pakistan: What are the objectives and functions of the Lahore Transport company which you are heading?

MK: Lahore Transport Company LTC was incorporated on April 07, 2009, and is registered with Registrar Joint Stock Companies, under Section 42 of Companies Act 2017 repealed with Companies Ordinance 1984. LTC is a not-for-profit company and is governed under its Board of Directors. The objective of the company is to provide safe, affordable, and comfortable Urban Transport on various High Occupancy Vehicles (HOV) and Low Occupancy Vehicles (LOV) routes of Lahore. For this purpose, the Company carries out the tasks to plan, align, classify and re-classify routes, specify and enforce the urban transport on the routes, and to plan, build and maintain infrastructures for the urban transport and related services.

ICMA Pakistan: What special management accounting skills helped you the most in your professional career?

MK: Costing is the area which helped me a lot since my earlier career progression was made in some of the largest production and manufacturing industries like Descon Engineering, Millat Industries, and Service Industries. This skill helped me introduce cost-cutting measures and improvement in the profitability of the organizations.

ICMA Pakistan: What qualities one must develop for leadership. A bit of advice from you for the professional accountants?

MK: Management is different than leadership. As per Steve Jobs, “Management is about persuading people to do things they do not want to do, while leadership is about inspiring people to do things they never thought they could.” The first quality of a good leader, which is the hardest part, is the decision to act. Do nothing is not an option since this also calls for a calculated and informative decision-making process.

The other important qualities of a good leader include integrity, people management, empathy, humility, vision, influence, and positivity. My advice to the professional accountants is to don't let any situation compromise your integrity and trust. Integrity comes first for a leader.

ICMA Pakistan: Do you believe that 'luck' matters in a career, or it is just sheer hard work?

MK: I am a staunch believer in hard work. In my 19 years of progressive career, I have realized that the harder I work, the luckier I get.

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ICMA Pakistan: How do you keep a delicate balance between your family life and your official career?

MK: It's a challenge that I believe every working woman faces. Especially, it becomes even difficult when you are the head of an organization since round the clock availability and accessibility become the main job responsibility of yours. However, I make sure that once I get back home from the office, I spend quality time with my family especially with my baby sister Bazla and my heartbeat my mother, and lend a helping hand in household chores. I have made it a habit to spend maximum time with my mother before going to bed, for words of wisdom, and to listen to each other activities during the day.

ICMA Pakistan: How important is women's empowerment for national development?

MK: Good governance and women empowerment are closely interlinked. When you talk about women empowerment, you are talking about 50% of the population that can be mobilized for a productive contribution to the Gross Domestic Product of our country. No nation can rise to the height of glory unless if women wouldn't be side by side everywhere with men. Also, in my opinion, the word “Women Empowerment” shall replace with “Human Empowerment”, as we have to empower both genders for best results and outcomes.

ICMA Pakistan: What are the main hindrances towards empowering women in Pakistan? How these could be removed?

MK: The primary and foremost hindrance to women's empowerment and equity lies ingrained in cultural norms. Many women feel these pressures, while others have become accustomed to being treated inferior to men. Even if legislators, NGOs, etc. are aware of the benefits women's empowerment and participation can have, many are scared of disrupting the status of the women and continue to let societal norms get in the way of development. Gender-related barriers involve sexual harassment, unfair hiring practices, career progression, and unequal pay where women are paid less than men for performing the same job. There are also family pressures whereby women are put in a position where they need to decide whether to maintain in the workforce or have children.

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So, to remove the hindrances, we need to stop the discrimination based on gender, something which will bring cultural, social, economic, and educational differences in the society that will push back the growth of the nation. The most effective remedy to this problem is by providing women proper education, providing exact information, and making them empowered by ensuring the Right to Equality from childhood in every family. The implementation of already available laws like whistle-blowing, sexual, and mental harassment at the workplace, etc. should be made more effective to provide an enabling environment for the women.

ICMA Pakistan: You are also a member of the SAFA Women Leadership Committee. Can you share its objectives and few initiatives taken from women's development, especially in improving gender equality in the region?

MK: The SAFA Women Leadership Committee has approved its objectives & initiatives in the last committee meeting and recommended it to the SAFA Board for approval. Main Objectives & initiatives include sharing best practices of successful South Asian businesses which have gone global, Building leadership skills in South Asia, Getting women leaders ready in South Asia to lead global businesses, Role of finance professionals, accountants and auditors in capacity building for

gearing businesses, Women Achievements award, compulsory representation of Women in Board of directors of Pakistani organizations.

ICMA Pakistan: What is your view on increasing the representation of women in the board of directors of Pakistani organizations?

MK: I really appreciate, it's a great opportunity for qualified women to participate in decision-making activities.

ICMA Pakistan: Name two qualities that our students must inculcate before taking jobs?

MK: There are a whole lot of qualities like problem-solving, critical thinking, basic IT skills, soft skills, empathy, and the list go on. In my view, the two most important skills for our students before taking jobs are a) Adaptive Thinking and b) Communication Skills. In our digital age, methods and technologies are changing at an exponential rate. Our students will need to continuously adapt to the changing conditions as well as be able to learn new things quickly and efficiently. We need our students to learn how to learn. Communications skill is a part of adaptive learning. In the digital age, we have access to a wide variety of communication media; video conferencing to social media. This point is more highlighted in the current outbreak of the corona virus epidemic where management and employees are instructed to work from home. Our students must be able to communicate with people within their team, as well as people outside of the team and organization.

ICMA Pakistan: What message you would like to give to the women finance professionals, especially CMAs in Pakistan?

MK: Finance is the only profession that will lead you towards the management of the company, It is an easy path to go for CEO position from the CFO position. Finance, like most of the other professions, is a male-dominated profession, and prevalent mentality is that women cannot grow beyond a certain level. My message to women finance professionals is that it's just a mental barrier. Look at the success stories. God has given a unique set of abilities to both men and women. Identify your strengths and work on them, smartly, and efficiently. Perseverance is a key to success and through it, you can change the world. In the words of Shirley Chisholm, 1st African-American woman elected to the US Congress, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair".

ICMA Pakistan: What the Institute must do to play its role in the economic empowerment of women in Pakistan?

MK: Identify the areas where women's workforce penetration is low. Design need-based specific diploma courses to better equip women with basic qualifications. A working committee of women leaders in key areas may be compromised who could assist the Institute in need assessment and counseling.

The Editorial Board thanks Ms. Mariam Khawar, FCMA, Chief Executive Officer, Lahore Transport Company & Member, Women Leadership Committee of SAFA for giving her exclusive interview for Management Accountant Journal.