



*While a lot has been said about management wisdom extending beyond what is taught at Harvard Business School, the system is yet to coin a phrase for Roxana Jaffer, the recently returned Harvard executive, but absolutely down to earth CEO of Holiday Inn Dubai, who has changed the lives of all around her by sheer innovation and attitude. **An attitude that proved to the world that true leaders can earn followers by working with them hands-on and not by managing them from the corporate board rooms alone.***

Roxana
Jaffer

S U P E R 1 0 0

Pioneering the fusion of social responsibility with business strategy

While on the one hand she has worn a builder's hard hat at construction sites and undertaken two building projects simultaneously to fruition, on the other she has also worn the crown of a beauty queen and walked away on the red carpet with a coveted title during her student days in Kenya.

But more than succeeding as a leader and as an outstanding CEO, loved and respected by all, one of Roxana Jaffer's prized achievements was when she redefined Corporate Social Responsibility at her workplace. She made CSR a wholesome and rich experience for all concerned by including all stakeholders: customers, suppliers and employees of the organization in its implementation. A 360 degree approach that entwined social responsibility of the organization with its business strategies. This unique concept saw her emerge as a leader with a heart of gold which later extended to a 'touch of gold' with the

way in which she turned all her endeavors into highly successful and well regarded projects. Her partnership with UN World Food Program saw the project touching 390,000 lives and counting in the last three years, wherein they were able to reach food and supplies to children and the poverty stricken across the world.

Popularly known as a human talent builder, Roxana empowers women to shatter the glass ceiling through her lectures at Business Symposiums and empowers the youth at the American University in Dubai to become ideal leaders necessary for the 21st Century. She has been a panelist on Power Women's Debate – Arabia and a much sought after guest lecturer and a motivational and inspirational speaker, she leads by example and serves with compassion through her philanthropy endeavors.

Roxana is the founder of an NGO - abc 'An advent for building human capital' -operating in the UAE and the Indian sub-continent which through a specially created curriculum 'English for Hospitality Professionals', delivered by trained tutors to discerning un-employed youth engenders an opportunity of employment in hospitality. The NGO - operational in three countries with plans for two more countries - has placed abc trained graduates in first class institutions some of whom have risen to become white-collar workers in large hospitality organizations. It is humbling to find that through Roxana's efforts, that unemployed youth can become sought after human capital by attaining abc certification upon completion of the complimentary schooling, the social entrepreneurship provides.

Honoured with awards

Bestowed with several honors for her proficiency and contribution to social welfare, Roxana has remained humble. Her efforts bagged her 'Global Inspirational Leadership Award 2015' for Outstanding Leadership at the 'Women Leadership Achievement Awards, 2015' by World Women Leadership Congress that identifies and celebrates outstanding Women Professional Leaders who have 'the vision, flair, acumen and professionalism to demonstrate excellent leadership and managing skills' in an organization, making changes and achieving results'. The 'Women Leaders in UAE in association with HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Sultan Al Nahyan' conferred the award 'Best Woman in Hospitality UAE' in Feb, 2015. But never one to rest on her laurels, Roxana is a constant source of positive energy both in terms of physical exertion to make things happen and in terms of ideating and innovating to come up with novel concepts that turn out to be winning projects - an example of her brainchild being the three award winning restaurants that she created at Holiday Inn Dubai -Al Barsha

From Theatre to Corporate Centre Stage

Born in Kenya, but from Indian descent, Roxana spent the formative years of her life in the UK with her parents and three siblings. Excelling in academics at school she was referred to as 'beauty with brains' She often dreamt of having a career on the stage, but fate had something more meaningful for her. When pictures from her amateur stage debut was featured as a news item in the local newspapers her father warned her that that was not the career she should aspire for. The message was clear and Roxana obediently succumbed to studies as her first priority. An exceedingly thoughtful and prudent decision in hindsight, as she excelled at studies and went on to a blazing career in the corporate world.

Quoting Socrates "that learning is a kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel" Roxana is a promulgator of lifelong learning and states " learning should be continued from cradle to death if one has the opportunity". As a mature student, she completed a three year full-fledged online MBA specializing in Leadership

with the University of Liverpool attaining a merit and this year attended an Executive Program at Harvard Business School. Learning is her passion and has diplomas in stage direction as well as in religion studies.

Her education has been applied right throughout her career whether practicing as an accountant or managing building sites or as Restaurant Designer to introduce winning business strategies. She started her career as an apprentice at Dunkin' Donuts in the accounting department. Excelling at her work, she went on to become Finance Director of the company to become the CEO of the franchise, to opening her own wholesale donut manufacturing plant producing 14000 donuts per night and supplying to high end establishments like Harrods and Selfridges. Astute at running a company, she soon became a trusted name in the corporate world and when it was time for her to leave the UK to join her husband Sadruddin Jaffer in Dubai, she carried with her an appointment letter as CEO of Holiday Inn – Dubai, Al Barsha, where she had to learn the ropes of hospitality in a cut-throat industry.

True to her nature she took up the assignment in all earnestness and applied herself to her work like the professional she was. She personally went into understanding the architectural and operational aspects of all the divisions in the hotel. Her manner of working was an inspiration for every employee and soon the staff realized that they were working for a true leader who led by example.



...with husband Sadruddin Jaffer.



Unleashing her entrepreneurial zest and spirit by adopting the organization as her own, she worked hard and ensured that the hotel was among the list of top hotels in Dubai. The three restaurants in the hotel were the results of Roxana's extensive research before she zeroed upon on 3 elegant concepts: 'Gharana' based on the classical rhythms of historic India, 'The Royal Buddha' inspired by spiritual Thailand and 'Xennya Terrace' with an exquisite touch of Arabic culture. Each of the restaurants went on to win awards for their respective categories, vindicating Roxana's strategy and foresight.

Giving back in style and substance

As a social entrepreneur, Roxana considers victory as when one is able to do something that can change the lives of others for the better. Her NGO - abc Advent for Building Human Capital a philanthropic enterprise that worked with the motive of enabling people in developing countries secure employment in the hospitality domain is a proof of this ethos. It has given an opportunity of growth to the unskilled to transform themselves to become professional employees in hospitality thus giving rise to a new generation workforce. This has been a 'dream come true' for many struggling with the challenges of modernity and being unable to make ends meet.

The same goes at her workplace. To make the hotel truly socially responsible, an ethos of putting each employee to put 'self above others' was her drive. Each member of her 300 strong workforce are dedicated towards creating social awareness. Roxana has enthused them to implement path-breaking initiatives that have helped make a difference to society; be it by raising awareness and funds to feed

the hungry in the world; or by helping to reduce carbon footprint from work processes as well as learning to save energy. 2014 statistics are staggering as through joint efforts consumption of electricity and water had dropped by 7.% and 7.6% respectively from previous years. Reducing carbon footprint in Dubai was an incredible achievement in itself. Dropping by 7.07% enabled the hotel to attain the coveted award from Dubai Green Tourism Awards as 'The Best 4Star Hotel with Best Waste Management Practices for 2014.

While most companies struggle to handle teamwork issues and inter-departmental synergies, Roxana came up with a unique idea to address an age old problem. She got her team to work together for a common cause outside the organization and in the process enabled a bonding that not only helped the cause they were working for but also instilled a work culture within the organization. A culture of trust and mutual respect. Unique initiatives like these have helped Roxana distinguish Holiday Inn Dubai, Al Barsha and position it as a brand within the global brand that Holiday Inn is. Being staff-centric was her main strategy as she wanted to make sure that every employee was happy to work for the company and that they thought of ensuring the welfare of the company as the best means of enabling their own welfare. No mean task considering that she had to hold together 23 diverse nationalities.

The challenge was to find common ground that brought the diverse workforce together and for that Roxana drew inspiration from her mother who had taught her that anything shared doubled the pleasure. It gave birth to Roxana's brainchild, the 'Holiday Inn Loves You' campaign. It



carries a message to themselves as expatriates in a foreign land, having left families back home, that their best bet was to hold hands and make life comfortable and meaningful by working together for a common cause. And that they were helping themselves by helping other people along the way. An initiative that went on to prove highly successful and become a case study in corporate team building.

This drive initiated by Roxana for constant social awareness and empowerment has enabled a highly committed team working towards a common objective, attaining several awards that decorate the lobby But the feather in the cap for Roxana is to be recognized as a partner with United Nations, consummated through a partnership agreement from December 2012 to date.

Behind the corporate life of Roxana is a relaxed and easy-going person who recharges and rejuvenates through a routine of early morning meditation, setting aside time daily to thank the sustainer, followed by a brisk 3 to 6 KM walks on the beach before breakfast. Playing Bridge with friends, and music is an indispensable part of her free time as she listens to melodies from the piano played by her talented husband, Sadrudin.

Ever ready to inspire others Roxana can easily be spotted advising youngsters to excel in their field, mentoring them to become entrepreneurs or having meaningful discussions at social gatherings. Connecting with people opens opportunities to share her vision with like-minded friends and colleagues, so that they too can be empowered to give back to society with substance.

The virtue of inclusion

Roxana feels that her helpful characteristic is something instilled in her by her upbringing and that it has a strong influence on her nature today. As a teenager Roxana learnt to help children with special needs from her mother, a UK qualified teacher for deaf and dumb children, who taught her the value of diversity in people through the school she ran in Mombasa for these special children. Roxana learnt to include others less better off in her pursuits with the virtue of inclusion, helping those less privileged being well ingrained in her.

At the outset, a few months after opening the Hotel, Roxana threw a Valentine tea party for physically challenged children from the Al Noor Training Centre for Children with Special Needs to make them feel exceptional and has since employed challenged children in the housekeeping department, so they may be given an opportunity in the mainstream. Apart from seeing happiness of these children, the initiatives help Holiday Inn staff to discover an understanding of diversity and the pleasure of inclusiveness as they learn to give of themselves as they executed an Iftaar lunch partnered with Citi Bank for low income earners, who were treated in 5 Star luxury for the first time. "Since this initial act of inclusiveness we haven't looked back, as can be seen in growth - both in our people and our bottom line" says a content Roxana as she ponders on her next act of kindness while handling an important business issue and planning of the event she is presenting at and thinking of domestic issues, all at the same time.....

Indeed a CEO with a difference, a leader with a conscience, an award winning social entrepreneur, a pioneer of novel ideas, an educator and a life-long student

