



ONE MAN'S WASTE IS ANOTHER MAN'S WEALTH

Randa El haddad Filfili

Most often than not, we value what seems important to us, forgetting to give credit to the underlying factors that contribute to the uniqueness of the article.



Valuing the left over

When Mrs Randa El haddad FILFILI joined her father in law's enterprise over a decade ago, while she was attracted due to the firm's unique product offering and the will to offer social service, her main aim was to participate in waste minimization because it was a common practice for people in that area to throw the cashew apple after they collected the nuts, which are now prized at their firm.

She has come a long way

Currently holding the grand position of the CEO of Zena Exotic Fruits, which is a processing unit, Mrs FILFILI has come a very long way when compared to the time she had just stepped into this sector. The company was initiated by her father-in-law, who in turn was inspired by his father, who was a farmer in his time. Since it was a family business, she was motivated to do her part as well even though she did not have any prior work experience in this field.

Deriving encouragement from other women

Although she was not aware of other women before stepping into the cashew business, she later got in touch with a wonderful set from whom she had the opportunity to learn innumerable lessons. Elaborating on the same,



she comments that she has always seen these women as brave personalities which sparked the urge in her to help them in their processing activities at the local level. They also motivated her to develop some new cashew-based products intended for export.



She is a well-read woman

Fluent in French, Arabic and English, Mrs FILFILI is a well-read woman with a bachelor’s degree and a number of trainings in management, finance for non-financial people, HACCP, ISO 22000 export programs. While the company was started with only ten workers, it now has more than hundred workers who work with excellence and contribute to the company’s success.

Putting her heart and soul into her work

To manage such a large firm, it goes without saying that Mrs FILFILI is always on her toes, ready to take action when required. She works from 9.00 am to 7.00 pm, sometimes even without taking a break and majority of her work involves dealing with administrative paperwork and the products’ export segment. She also looks into the human resource department in spite of the presence of the new HR manager because the personnel are accustomed to coming to her when they have problems or when they need some service.



She takes pride in her company’s products and service

Speaking of the company’s products, she takes pride in saying that their products are known to be of high quality with good taste and new flavors. Apart from that, they are natural, chemical-free and without additives. They offer competitive prices, a satisfactory high quality service and boast of a very dynamic and ambitious marketing team.

Deaf Employees are uniformed in RED in Zena Exotic Fruits

They’re appreciated for their excellence

Their SME is the first food processing plant created in Senegal and the company’s know-how has been proved and appreciated. The products offered meet food safety standards and flavors are appreciated by all. The packaging is attractive, a professional and experimented team looks after the smooth flow of all affairs. Some of the wonderful policies offered by the firm include job creation for women, the disabled and for young graduates. The willingness for a fair trade approach with the producers and having won several national and international Oscars for quality, the firm promises to be one of the best in the cashew sector.



Offering innumerable benefits to the workers

Since Mrs FILFILI is part of such a large enterprise, when asked about the team and any problem when labor is concerned, she was glad to inform that the workers were attracted to be a part of the unit at the highest degree. As for the women workers in specific, trainings, professional integration, recruitments for open-ended contracts, fixed-term contracts or seasonal, social security care, help for their children's school fees, trainings about health, hygiene are some of the many benefits that their firm offers. They also look towards improving their living conditions by stabilizing their monthly incomes.



Patience and perseverance helps overcome the tough tasks

When questioned about the situation when it comes to dealing with men workers, she admits that at first it was very hard, because they used to act ignorant, pretending to not hear or understand her orders. She also adds that it required a lot of patience and perseverance to own their respect. At this point, she gives credit to her husband and comments that his presence in the company has benefitted her because sometimes when he is not around, employees are difficult to manage.

Gender discrimination is a challenge

As for being denied rewards in comparison to men, in her previous jobs, in her opinion, she and all her women colleagues were always marginalized when compared to men. Discrimination based on gender was and still is in the larger perspective, quite prevalent. This also forms one of the challenges while working in the cashew sector because sometimes, some of the clients, suppliers or bankers do not want to deal with a woman; or think that a lady will not live up the expectations, or it is not in her power to understand how to handle a case.

In such scenarios, the talk ends before it is even started, and deals are lost. In a few cases, she confesses that she is also treated lightly and mockingly! It is gone so far that men even take the liberty to make indecent proposals, just because they see a woman in this position.



She believes in following a ZEN attitude

In order to emerge victorious and rise above the mindless opinions of others, she has adopted a ZEN attitude and gives very firm and clear answers. She does not believe in beating around the bush and maintains clarity, conveying to the person her exact feelings and thoughts.

In cases where the employees pretend to ignore her, offend her or back answer, she adopts the strategy of effective communication and clearly highlights to them that she is not one to encourage such behavior. This strategy makes work easy, for then people know they cannot play around and each person, whether man or woman, needs to be respected.

A step to help women in the cashew sector

In her opinion, lack of financing, initiative and the fact that women don't take interest in the sector are some of the reasons that prevent them from emerging winners in the cashew industry. As for improving the position of women, given their commendable participation in this field, she has a number of suggestions. A lot of awareness and trainings for women, investment for the purchase of material, processing and trading; investment for packaging, non-rupture of the cold chain before the processing (air-conditioned collect center, cold room for the stocking, trucks to carry the raw materials from the collect area to the processing unit) and trainings for marketing in order to propose adequate products are some of the aspects, she believes, that could be looked into.

Working extra during the season

When asked about her personal life and the support of her family, she beams that having her husband in the same company as her makes things a lot easier. Since cashew apple is a seasonal product in Senegal, they manage and try to get an important quantity in order to ensure the annual production of all of the by-products. This implies that, during the season, she spends a lot of time dealing with suppliers and the production and is away from home for long hours.



Organization helps keep things in place

But thanks to her dynamic team, she eventually is able to spend some time with family. Besides, her family is extremely supportive and she works together with her husband, in cashew nut processing, making them into juices and jams. While striking a work life balance at all times is difficult, with effort and organization they manage to do their best.



A meaningful drive

She considers her work in the cashew sector to be a meaningful purpose in her life, and every successful project fills her with joy. It gives her the wings to work towards other great projects and gives her the courage to think of new ambitions.

Hoping for new innovations

And one of her bigger dreams is to build a reputable company and expand it such that along with

Senegal, it has its branches worldwide. She is glad that in the region, theirs is the only company in the food sector that processes cashew apple. With a financing of 120,000 euros max, she wishes to also develop three new processed by-products of cashew apple and cashew nuts.

Scope for improvement and discoveries

She believes that there's a lot more that can still be discovered and improved in this field. While she has received immense recognition for her contribution in the cashew apple processing sector, for this is a rare job when women are concerned, she still has a lot that she wishes to accomplish.



And given her positive attitude despite a competitive market and the urge of men to overpower their female counterparts, we hope that she continues to look at her dreams and focuses on them even when hurdles arise in her path!

