

Qualities that earned Entrepreneur of the Year award

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November 8, 2015 Updated: November 8, 2015 01:56 PM



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I recently had the pleasure of sitting on a panel of judges for Meed's Gulf Capital SME Awards. My job was to help decide who would be awarded the business accolade of Entrepreneur of the Year. It was there I met a leader in the true sense of the word.

This lady stood out from the crowd. As I was experiencing her vision, drive, innovation and results, it was no wonder that her interviews on the radio had caught my attention. It was clear what she stood for, something she personified within the first three minutes of her 10-minute presentation.

Her commitment to transparency, openness and fairness were most certainly guiding her well. Had she not lived these values, she and the business would not have survived during the start-up phase, a time when her business idea faced much resistance.

In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, the authors James M Kouzes and Barry Posner define leadership as being "the art of mobilising others to want to struggle for shared aspirations". And this lady was a textbook case study of "struggle".

"The art" was the sheer belief and determination I witnessed; no "science" was driving this business. Nothing or no one would stop this lady in her tracks. She hand-picked her team; they simply believed in her cause.

Contrary to popular belief, the business, a financial comparison website, was not venturing into illegal pastures but rather simply exposing the small print on the loan and credit card application forms supplied by banks, allowing the consumer to be more informed. Through education of the masses and access to information in a clear manner, the power was being returned to the consumer through this service and large institutions were now having no choice but to ensure transparency was evident in everything they did.

Leaders identify important issues, and create causes from them. Behind the "monetisation" of this service, a real cause existed, one that many in the UAE struggled with. The frustration of dealing with legal and hidden jargon was beyond the capacity of the average Joe, yet not for this business. This leader saw hope for change and an easier and more ethical way of presenting credit card and loan information; she knew change had to happen.

For too long, bank customers had found themselves in situations that they either did not understand, could not have ever imagined or simply could not interpret because of legal jargon.

Pages and pages of terminology were simply beyond the comprehension of the average consumer. This entrepreneur felt the pain of those who found themselves in debt, saw the damaging effect it had on families and genuinely wanted to help people steer themselves out of financial trouble.

Her leadership success also had a cherry on top. Not only was the change exposing and clarifying hidden and ambiguous information, but consumers

were also becoming more educated through bite-size information. They were now able to make more informed decisions about the credit they took on via this education process.

Leaders live in the land of win-win. Yet this leader expanded that into win-win-win. She facilitated clarity for all consumers. She influenced an entire banking industry to become more transparent. She also facilitated future growth for her business.

The award ceremony took place almost a week ago now, and a highly-commended award was bestowed upon Ambareen Musa of Souqalmal.com for the Entrepreneur of the Year accolade. The company was also named Online Business of the Year.

She and her team have no doubt changed the personal finance landscape in the UAE, leaving a legacy forever. Ms Musa's leadership has been at the forefront, driving sustainable change and affecting lives positively. The role of leadership is well and truly evident in her work. What legacy will be linked to your efforts one fine day?

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