



Women in Leadership Seminar Highlights

January, 29, 2016

Topic- January 29: “My Path to Entrepreneurship and What I Learned about Leadership” featuring Anisa Telwar Kaicker, President & Founder of Anisa International.



Anisa Telwar Kaicker came to speak at Women in Leadership on “My Path to Entrepreneurship and What I Learned about Leadership.” Anisa is the President and Founder of Anisa International, a global design and manufacturing firm of private label cosmetic brushes, bags, & accessories for brands like Sephora, Estee’ Lauder, etc. She is known as a business leader, entrepreneur, activist, trend setter, and visionary. Anisa’s story shaped how she became the leader she is today – and hers is a story worth knowing!

As a first generation American, her family faced challenges that were unlike many of her peers’ growing up. Her father was traditional and had the expectation that women should stay home and raise the children. While her mother filled that role for a time, after a while, she wanted to go back to school in order to work and help provide for the family. She began to work after earning her CPA, but didn’t necessarily enjoy the work she was doing.

Anisa made it clear here that she got her entrepreneurial spirit from her mother. Her mom realized there was a gap in the market for materials – specifically from Turkey where she grew up. She wanted to begin her own business and got materials from Turkey and began to sell those products where they lived in Nashville. Her mom was driven to constantly improve herself and her work, and she grew her small business into an import/export business in 1978. By 1987, she was traveling most of the time to handle her business that had expanded to have international reach. Since she was a woman who was an entrepreneur, then called “self-employed”, she had to fight for many of her business opportunities. Her mother was also working tirelessly as she had divorced by that time and was raising 4 children.

At the age of 17, Anisa began working for her mother as the company got more and more international contracts. As the import-export business continued to grow, her mom was traveling often to ship and negotiate food and oil contracts. Anisa was the home-base connection for her mother and was able to monitor the progress and operations of the business from Nashville. She began to look at her mother as a mentor figure, and she learned much about how to build a business and work for what you want.

“My mother knew she had value, and she had the confidence to ask for her value,” said Anisa in describing her mother’s confidence in business.

However, Anisa said in working for her mom, she learned that leaders can have blind spots regarding their weaknesses. Her mother struggled with people management, infrastructure, operation management, and financial planning, and these shortcomings struck a fatal blow to their company when the Gulf War began in 1990. The company had many import-export contracts in the Middle East that year, and the effects of the war destroyed their business. While Anisa had previously mentioned to her mom that she thought they needed to better plan for the future, business was going so well that the company had not planned accordingly. This led to the eventual demise of the company.

After this, Anisa joined another family company that made cosmetic brushes. Though she had no interest in cosmetics herself, she had a great respect for the President of the company because he had such a passion for his goals and products. In working with him, Anisa realized that she had to develop the passion for her product because she was selling herself and her enthusiasm, not her product. If the people she was selling to could see that she wasn't passionate about the business, how could she expect them to buy from her?

As Anisa created her own company, she began developing a passion for the products and her work. In hiring the right people and surrounding herself with people who were passionate about her company, Anisa grew to love and feel empowered by the work she was doing. She began to realize her value and her products value – not unlike her own mother – and became more selective about who her clients were in order to sustain her business. She also realized very quickly that if she wanted to survive, she had to differentiate herself. She built her brand around the principle of collaboration, conversation, and innovation as a way to distinguish herself and to have fun with her branding. Anisa stated that she now gets more pride and contentment and balance of life because in addition to building her brand, she's built a great and successful team around her.

Anisa wrapped up the seminar by pointing out the main lesson she's learned – leadership is trial and error. She said in her time as an employee and a leader, she's made so many mistakes, and to overcome that and move forward, you need a balance of power and leadership with humility and humanity. Anisa stated, "I have sensitivity growing up and growing older to what is happening in the world, but we are so lucky being a part of the world today. There's so much more of a conversation about different groups of people and the impact they are having on the work world and how we need to be open to everyone and recognize everyone. There are thoughts that can permeate the heads of women that we are not able to do something, but there are men in business and in the world that are so open and excited to women being in business. As women, we should have direction in our professional path to create the reality we want."

Q&A

As a female business owner, one of the things that scares me is hiring someone and being responsible for their lives? How did you do that?

- That is something I think of often. When I hire someone, I am dedicated to working to keep them going, I try to be my best. Now what really keeps me up is that I want to have the control to make decisions that will keep us in a good place. So that's why I so often had trouble with hiring early on because I was so worried about the bottom line.

As an entrepreneur, how do you establish trust?

- You have to have trust in the business world in general. But you can put metrics in place for trust. You have to be able to have a reference for trust and build that with strong metrics in place. If you want to start something, start slowly so you can measure the risks you're open to.

Fatima – your mom – what were her parents like?

- She was born in a refugee camp in Germany. Her parents were Russian and fled to Germany. They left Germany and went to Turkey but never learned Turkish. My mom had to help them translate Russian to Turkish and adjust to the culture around them because they chose to not learn the language or the customs. Early on, she was exposed to the difficulties of cultural differences, and I think that was a huge asset in her future business endeavors.

How can we buy a Anisa brush?

- We have an active Facebook and Pinterest page because we don't have our own brand – we provide for brands. So through those mediums, we send our recommendations.

From a global standpoint, how are you with market penetration? And are markets better in the States?

- We sell to Fortune 500 companies and ship globally to different branches of companies. The margin is better right now when we ship to a US launch versus a European launch. The US is still very strong as far as the market, and Africa is growing as a market. We are also doing skin care accessories which is a bigger market in other parts of the world.

You mentioned that you have a very supportive husband, how do you balance the business with your family life?

- I was previously with someone for the last 20 years and he was a part of the business and then we married and divorced. I was the more masculine of the partnership, and I realized that wasn't what I wanted in my relationship. I was alone for a year which was a very good thing for me, and I swore I'd never get married again because of the mess. Then I met this wonderful man who traveled a lot for what he did because he was an architect. We traveled back and forth for a while, and after a while, I just couldn't do it anymore because of the stress it put on me and my business. He ended up quitting his job, and we are so much happier now that we're in one place. But I have to remember every day to be thankful for this person who has made my life so much easier and less stressful and has been such a support system in my life for me and my company.

In the States, a large portion of our workforce is female. What can I do as a male to be there more for women who especially are starting early in their career who I don't have that much in common with?

- The men in our company have to deal with this demographic of women all the time. I would love for someone in our company to talk about it.
- Younger worker at Anisa International said, "I'm a recent graduate. In my experience in working with Gary and Scott, a lot of the time, they relate to me just by asking about my interests. Unexpectedly, I'm involved in pageantry, and they've asked me so many questions to understand why I'm passionate about my hobbies and what I plan for the future. This has led them to care for me as an individual and to be interested in my career. Even asking questions that may be out of your realm speaks volumes to wanting to build that relationship."

You talked about masculine and feminine traits, and women in business tend to get rated by their personalities. What are your thoughts on that?

- I feel that for me, I've had to evolve my way of running a business. I appreciate more than ever the women who work for the business and are mothers and seeing how much they bring to the table. Everyone is different and everyone has value. We need to be measured on what the expectation is. We should measure people on what the expectation of their role and responsibility is. Not everyone is treated the same based on many different measures. We all don't get a trophy, you have to perform. We have a culture of openness, but I also want people to perform.