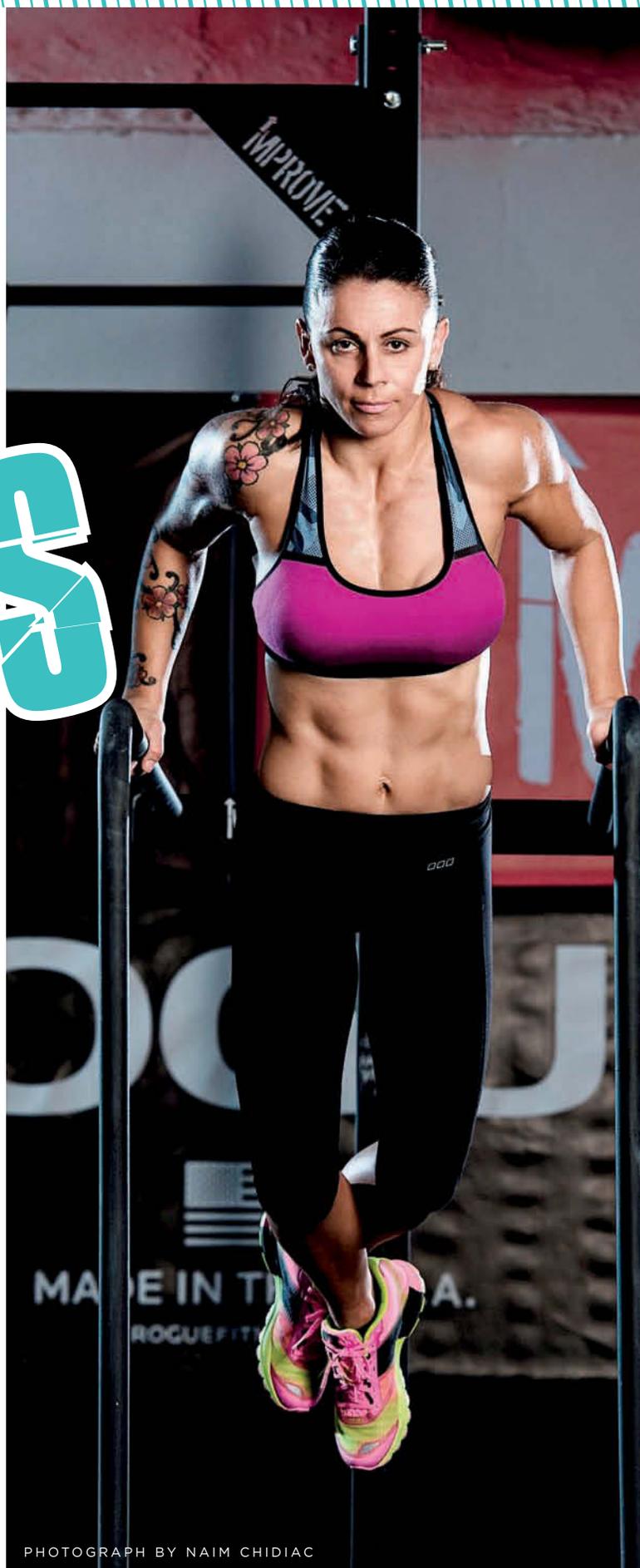


Game Changer

GAME-CHANGER (NOUN): AN EVENT, IDEA, PROCEDURE—OR PERSON— THAT CAUSES A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN THE CURRENT WAY OF DOING OR THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING. THIS MONTH, WE'RE CELEBRATING THESE INCREDIBLE WOMEN WHO ARE BREAKING BOUNDARIES, SHATTERING GLASS CEILINGS, WINNING AWARDS, ACHIEVING FIRSTS, AND GENERALLY MAKING WAVES ACROSS THE REGION. TALK ABOUT #INSPIRATON.

BY YI-HWA HANNA

AS



EVA CLARKE

37, 10-Time Guinness World Record Holder, Founder of HUA Fitness, “Super Mama”, and Coach & Judge on *Fighting Fit Dubai*.

“Giving up” simply isn’t in Eva Clarke’s vocabulary. A fitness expert and self confessed BJJ fanatic, this athlete is a specialist in endurance, having already achieved 10 Guinness World Records—from the highest amount of knuckle push-ups, pull-ups and GWR push-ups in 24 hours to the fastest marathon carrying a 20kg pack (she did it in 4 hours and 34 minutes, in case you’re wondering)—all in the name of charities such as the Malaak foundation, raising funds for war-torn children who have fled from Syria.

She didn’t just take them on for the glory, though: “I try to make the community aware that there are young people struggling in this world, and it makes me feel like I’m making a difference in young lives and the world, a world bigger than my bubble. Doing the challenges shines a light on the foundations I do them for. My hope is that someone with enough power, more than my mere ripple in the ocean, takes notice,” she says. Her own rough childhood taught her about survival, empathy, and courage. “If you hide from your past, it will catch up with you. I was once the child taken away from my unfit mother (she suffers from chronic schizophrenia); little did I know then, she has her own heartfelt story. How could I be upset now as an adult at someone who was broken at childhood? I grew up in housing commission and there were times I had no food; I had a brother who I had to go and steal milk for because my mum would drink our welfare money away. I remember getting up at 4am and collecting milk from anywhere in the neighbourhood so my baby brother and my sisters could have food. You see, I didn’t see that as an offense, rather than as an act of survival. Life back then was what it was, and I will always love my family; they gave me life. I could choose to be victim of circumstance or become a product of my environment, but I wanted to break that mould. I made so many wayward decisions in my teens. I escaped my family by joining the army, then I was pregnant at 19 and married to a man who almost beat me to an inch of my life. It took me years to know my own self-worth; years of someone telling me I was nothing and ‘retarded’ like my family. Yes, it nearly broke me, but it didn’t. It took a lot of courage to let go of the abuse, and believe that someone would love me with all of my baggage. I took ownership of my life and never looked back; to this day, I don’t blame anybody for my past. It happened because it was meant to. If I could change it, would I? No. If I changed a thing, I wouldn’t be right here, right now. Today, I’m the happiest I’ve ever been,” she says.

Eva believes that if the mind is willing, the body becomes able, no matter how tough her training is. Aside from the physical demands, her training regime takes a lot of time out away from her family—but she never sacrifices to the point where her life is unbalanced. “I always make time for family; if they’re not happy, I’m not!” They are her ultimate priority: “Nothing I have done makes me super cool except for the fact that I am a mum—and that’s harder than any record I have ever accomplished. 24-hour records are easier, teenagers are hard!” she laughs. Eva herself is inspired by the underdog; “the one where people think they’ll be nothing,” and regular Joes such as maids, taxi drivers, cleaners, waiters, and teachers. “I define myself as a fighter, a survivor; but I’m just an everyday person, and anyone can do what I’m doing. It’s just having faith in myself. Take many risks—you will fail; I failed! But guess what, it didn’t kill me, and it won’t kill you. Your journey is what you make of it. Take responsibility for that one shot, that one moment on stage, and live it! Being strong is accepting the good days and bad days. It’s what I call being human.”

PHOTOGRAPH BY NAIM CHIDIAC



ISMAT ABIDI
30, Media & Tech Lawyer, and
Founder and Creative Director
of Freshly Ground Sounds.

Lawyer by day, music aficionado by night, it's not every day that someone with such a high-powered career in law can find the time to not only pour her heart into a creative musical community, let alone actually create one—and then watch it thrive into one of the most well-known musical ventures in the region. After spending a few years hopping between her London and Dubai-based offices, when Ismat moved back to the UAE back in 2013, she felt the lack of a community. "I was looking for something similar to how I enjoyed being part of the local live music independent music scene, in and around the bookshop-coffee shop culture in London," she says. Having no luck finding it, she then knocked

on doors, asking if she could play. One place—the Roseleaf Cafe—said yes immediately. She was soon asked to come in regularly, and other musicians began asking her where they could find similar places to play; "Those Saturdays have since evolved into what everyone knows today as Freshly Ground Sounds".

Although the structure of FGS has changed as it's grown over the years, its ethos and core values haven't, yet it now boasts a solid community of over 370 musicians and a steady attendance of around 800 at their regular community gigs. It's also given rise to their consultancy arm, Freshly Pressed DXB, which launches this month. "What I'd really like to see is the wider UAE demographic appreciating the value in local creativity," Ismat says, adding: "It would be great to see Dubai recognised for its live music and independent creative scene as much as its five-star fancies. That's

not going to happen overnight, but it can certainly happen in my lifetime." Having grown up in the UAE, Ismat has a special bond with the country, and is passionate about the positive impact this has on the community.

Balancing this with her full-time job as a lawyer isn't easy, but she's adamant that the most important thing is to carve out time for her friends and family; they're her priority. She also believes it's important to chase your passions, and that's how she managed to handle it all, no matter how busy she can get: "I don't see Freshly as a second job; I see it as fun, and that's the number one rule at HQ. I have the utmost respect for my team, and if anyone is busy in their personal or professional lives, we respect that. Everyone checks-in, checks out, but nobody really leaves Team Freshly. They all come back at some point and pitch in whenever they can. It's the Hotel California model. Even my

mum has offered to lend a hand!"

True to her nature, when it comes to her daily sources of inspiration, Ismat still keeps it local and about the community: "The most inspiring people to me are those I know personally, who have overcome an obstacle or inspired a change in others. My high school friends I grew up with in the UAE have achieved some incredible feats. Some biographies are documented. Some aren't. I also take a lot of inspiration from Yvon Chouinard and his story behind Patagonia; the history and uncompromising ethos of his company. He calls himself a reluctant businessman, and I feel like an accidental entrepreneur, so he's very relatable for me in that sense," she says. In the rest of her free time, Ismat loves to spend time outdoors, be it camping, surfing, playing music—she plays the guitar and has a band called Kudos by Proxy—swimming, cooking, and, of course, listening to live music.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SHARON HARIDAS



**YASMIANN
ALSHARSHANI**
26, First female golfer in the
Qatari national team

When she was 11 years old, Yasmiann was on a family vacation to Cairo when her father's friend invited them to lunch at one of the fanciest golf clubs in the city. She was fascinated, and determined to try it. She asked her mum if she could play too, and her mother persuaded them to let her—and the rest, as they say, is history. But it was only in 2008 that she realised this was more than just a hobby to her, and she decided she wanted to take up the sport professionally. "I feel so proud and responsible [for setting a good example and being a good role model] because I knew I'd be the first woman in Qatar playing this sport, and that there aren't a lot of women doing this in the GCC," Yasmiann says. Her love of sport took her to achieving further studies and higher-education degrees in physical education.

Being a trailblazer does come at a cost, however: "I [do sometimes feel lonely being] the only woman in the atari national team in golf. I've also had problems balancing my daily routine

between sports, studying and my job; and golf is exhausting work, since it's often at least a 4-5 hour part of my day!" she says. It's also hard for her to find regionally-based female inspiration to look up to in her specific sport, since there are so few women in golf here, but globally, Tiger Woods is one of her idols.

Yasmiann is also grateful that her family has been so supportive of her journey: She's part of an enormous family—"Totally, we're 19 brothers and sisters, and 66 grandchildren!"—and she's proud to say that her younger sister Reem is a professional skeet shooter, her nephew Nayef plays junior golf, and three of her nephews are in gymnastics teams. Her late father was also passionate about swimming and horse riding, and as Yasmiann says, "I know he's proud of us." Outside of golf, she also loves sailing, kite surfing, cycling, shooting, boxing, Taekwondo, and running. Yasmiann advises that you always get out there and try new things, even if they look intimidating: "Try anything you want to, and just go for it—don't make a judgement, be it in sport or otherwise, based on how hard or easy something looks. Just always keep on moving forward, and you'll find your way."



**JESSICKA
CHUDASMA**
28, Founder & CEO of the
agenC and International
Model

She may be a sought-after international model who has graced the catwalk at events like New York Fashion Week and for brands such as Carolina Herrera, Sonia Rykiel, Ralph Lauren and Valentino and Furne Amato, but Jessicka Chudasma is much more than just a pretty face. At the end of 2014, after some deep thought and discussions with her family and husband, she decided it was time to found her own agency, using her knowledge of being a model in this region to help others make the correct decisions and drive the business forward. Her unique position as an industry-leading model gave her an insight that many other agency bosses don't have, both in terms of the way she discovered talent, and understood what they sought, enabling her to empower the people she was working with. Starting it up was a risk—she did so on her own, with no outside investment and no prior

experience in running a business, but "I have to admit that the agenC has come on leaps and bounds in its first two years. That being said, none of our success so far would have been possible without the support and business knowledge of my husband Kris, my family, and my amazing team, Manju, Ilyn and Lucy," she says humbly.

It's this personal and hands-on approach that's such a key to her success, with Jessicka working alongside everyone else when it comes to organizing bookings, negotiating rates, and so on. And she still models herself. "The agenC takes pride in delivering a personal and all-encompassing service so that our partners and clients are able to focus on what's important to them; we also find this has enabled us to build great trust all around. We plan on continuing our growth and have our sights set on new markets—recently, we've stepped out of the UAE into the global market, and it's something we'd like to continue to explore. For instance, we've just secured a global endorsement and brand ambassador contract with a major player in the luxury jewellery sector for one of our represented talents,"

she says. Outside of her insider industry knowledge, her work as a model has taught her invaluable life skills, too: "One big part of being a model is being able to accept rejection and negative comments, as well as accepting direction and help. I've been able to bounce back when things were tough. I also haven't been scared to use my contacts and resources to help point me in the right direction," she says. After running the show pretty much on her own for the first 18 months, she now has a 5-person team and is a go-to in the region.

One of Jessicka's greatest inspirations is Naomi Campbell: "She broke down so many barriers and didn't let anyone stop her from accomplishing what she wanted in life. She also contributes a lot to charity and gives back where she can," she says, adding: "Achieving anything depends on your self-belief, the ability to not let anyone or anything get in the way, and not let setbacks put you off. Many people will reject you, your ideas, or tell you that you will not succeed, but they are wrong. You really can achieve anything you want if you commit yourself fully, work hard, and 'roll with the punches.'"

KIM THOMPSON 53, Founder of RAW Coffee Company

Even if you don't know who Kim Thompson is, your life has probably been affected by her somehow—after all, she and her brand, RAW, have been an instrumental part in the region's shift from supporting only internationally-sourced coffee to celebrating the roasted and created. She wasn't always the coffee maestro of Dubai—in fact, back at home in New Zealand, Kim was a registered nurse, who worked in healthcare for six years. After doing an alternative health diploma in herbal medicine and natural health, she opened RAW. Kim used to run a cafe, and in doing so, noticed there was a gap in the market for freshly roasted coffee here. Her daughters were growing older, so with a bit more time on her hands, she thought, "Why not?" It wasn't as easy as that though; it took them more than three years before the business started working. "Looking back, we were running around in circles and achieving very little in the beginning, as we had no idea what we were doing," Kim says. Still, they persevered, putting in every penny they had, and now, Kim is proud to be able to witness RAW as a team excel in international coffee competitions, recognised by international judges. "Visiting origin countries to meet with the farmers that we get our coffee from is also up there, along with getting into the Dubai SME 100 in 2015," she says. They're also involved with the Endeavor Mentoring Program, and are also working on an App to help baristas in Dubai be recognised for what they do, as well as bring support and training to those that need it.

Aside from learning how to run a business from scratch, Kim has picked up many other valuable lessons along the way: "[Like] having more confidence in my opinions and choices. Learning to let go a little bit, and knowing I'm not good at certain aspects of the business that Matt Toogood, my business partner, is really good at, and just accepting it. I surrounded myself with fabulous people right from the beginning, and this has really empowered me. We have a really strong team of employees, who we can delegate to and trust, which has allowed us to work very hard on the business. There [also] isn't a community within the coffee industry here yet, and as an existing business with trained staff, we are often used as a base where people will try and poach our staff, so they can start generating revenue straight away. This has been quite disappointing for us to witness, so we're looking forward to the Special Coffee Association of Europe (SCAE) launching their Middle East Chapter, which will bring the community together.

It's certainly a been a labour of love for Kim: "I think if I knew how long it was going to take, or hard it was going to be to get RAW off the ground, I never would have done it. It's good to be brave, and naive, but no matter how hard or long the journey is, you must finish it. Everyone can have a great idea and business plan, but you have to really love whatever it is that you've decided to do. This is important, because the love and the passion is what will keep you going when it gets very hard. And of course, if you can surround yourself with the right people, who will help keep you going, then you're halfway there." And if you're wondering how may coffees Kim herself drinks a day? Just three to four—mainly a double espresso or a brewed single origin; "I'm also allowed one cup of tea at the beginning of every day, which is no mean feat when you're surrounded by coffee geeks!"





MIRANDA DAVIDSON

39, Founder and CEO of Miranda Davidson Studios

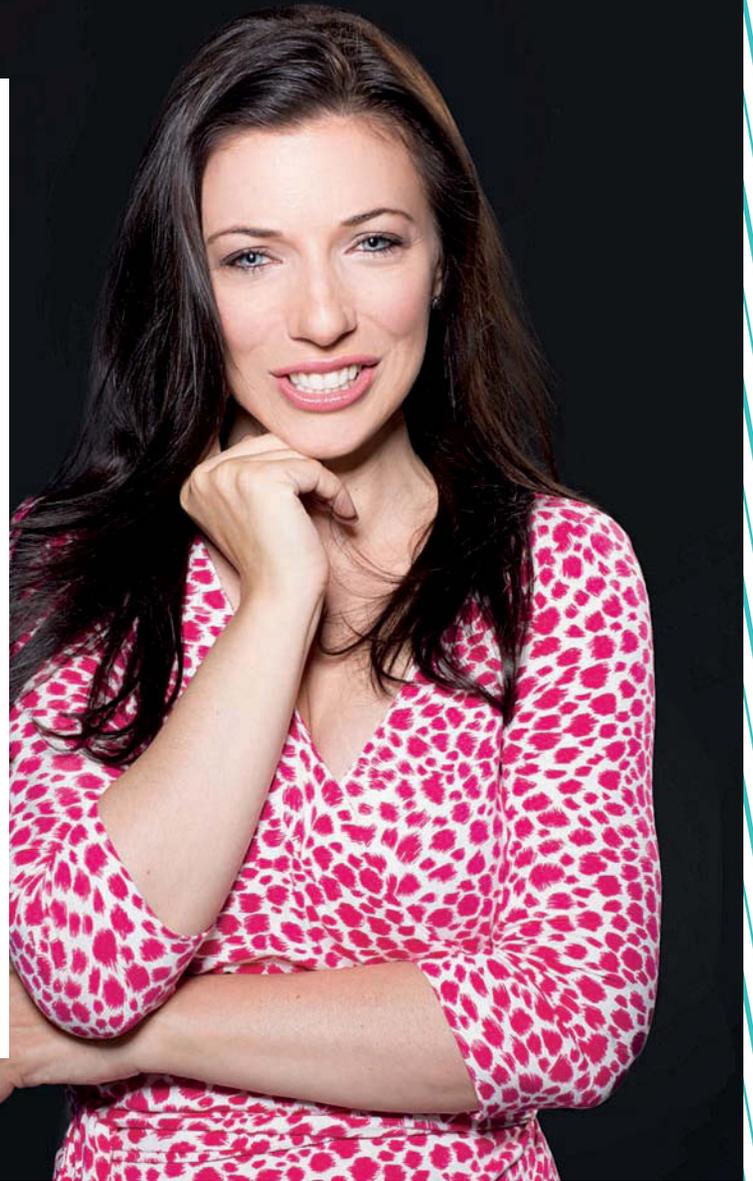
Miranda grew up in the world of sports and entertainment. “My mother was in the theater and I grew up as an elite figure skater and dancer. My father is a PhD and entrepreneur, so it’s always been in my blood. I’ve always been involved with both performing and business; I have a strong intellectual side and a creative side. Society tends to treat these things as mutually exclusive, which is a misconception that is detrimental to the growth and sustainability of both artist and executives,” she says.

One of the greatest challenges Miranda faces daily is being responsible for so many people’s lives: “Your vision and goals must sustain more than just yourself. You have a team, clients, and an entire brand that is affected by your decisions.” After having visited the region for more than 8 years before moving to the UAE, Miranda’s number one goal was to cultivate a skill set and give a platform to the stories and talent of the Middle East. Her company has played a major role, such as casting local talent, in the slew of international movies filmed in the UAE; “That has morphed beyond film into the lives of anyone that

has a dream,” Miranda adds.

Yet for someone who is a power woman by all accounts, Miranda also believes there is strength in being vulnerable: “I think there is a grave misconception that indifference is synonymous with strength. Being able to touch another human’s soul and connect with empathy takes a lot of courage. Being ‘tough’ does not equate with being strong. As a woman, there is also strength in my femininity. [To me], to be strong means to be able to bear the burdens of life without losing your ability to feel others’ plights or deny your own,” she says, saying that one of her favorite memories to date was “working with a charismatic young Emirati girl named Mahra Mustafa who I cast in a short film showcased at the World Expo 2015 in Milan, accompanied by her hosting the entire UAE Pavilion via a virtual 3D hologram.”

In the future, Miranda hopes to franchise MD studios, and bring more diversity to the executive side of entertainment. “Passion is what I love for. I love to live, not just survive it,” she says, adding that surrounding yourself with the right influences is key. “My number one piece of advice is to remove anyone toxic from your life. A plant needs healthy, fertile soil to grow, and so do we as people in order to achieve our goals,” she says.



JILL DOWNIE

38, Managing Partner/
Co-Founder of The Media
Network & Managing Director
of Aziza Communications

MICHELLE KUEHN

35, Managing Partner/
Co-Founder of The Media
Network

“During my first five years in the UAE, I worked for some of the largest publishing houses, across some of the best-selling titles and there were a lot of basic industry tools—that are available in developed media markets—that were missing. After setting up my own PR agency in 2008, and seeing what was missing on the other side of the media playing field, I was even more convinced that the industry needed a place for mutual communication. Together with my business partner, Michelle, we set about creating

a media platform that would encourage more open communication, collaboration and fruitful partnerships,” Jill says. In the first year, Michelle says there were plenty of growing pains, from learning how people actually used the service to trying to set up networking events. Now in their third year, they’ve seen memberships increase by 50%. “This organic growth has been encouraging and inspiring,” Michelle says. “Due to the busy nature of journalists and the fact that teams are a lot smaller in the UAE than in many other international media hubs, I am very aware that there is little time for leisurely PR meet and greets. We wanted to create a place where everyone could stay up to date with their peers’ achievements—whether that be a job promotion, an award win or a new account scoop. It’s also really important to keep up to date with trends

and international media news and we love to carry opinion pieces from respected media figures that are thought provoking and start conversations,” Jill says.

And it’s all about teamwork: “Michelle and I are both very similar when it comes to getting the job done. We’re very determined and never give up. If we find a roadblock, we build a new road! It helps that we know each other so well. We are like family and we also know when the other needs a break. When one of us has reached our limit, the other steps in to hold fort while we take a time out! It really does make all the difference,” Jill says.

Michelle is keen to take on any chance to improve, and sees all feedback as constructive criticism. She’s inspired by those that “work hard, [don’t] make excuses, are kind to everyone and have a positive impact on those around them. On a per-

sonal note, I’m inspired by my boxing coach and good friend Roy Gumbs. He is a four-time UK & Commonwealth Middleweight Boxing Champion who has had a very positive influence on my life—not just on a fitness level but on a mental/emotional level. I am constantly reminded by his famous words that he said to me when I first started training with him, ‘Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die!’ After ‘dying’ many times in training and seeing the rewards of never giving up; I understood the meaning of those words better than ever before and use them in every aspect of my life,” she says.

Both Jill and Michelle are keen learners who believe that a key to success is to constantly develop new skills that they can adapt to the rest of their lives. With a partnership this strong, their journey looks unstoppable.

AMNA AL HADDAD 26, Sports Pioneer and Motivational Speaker

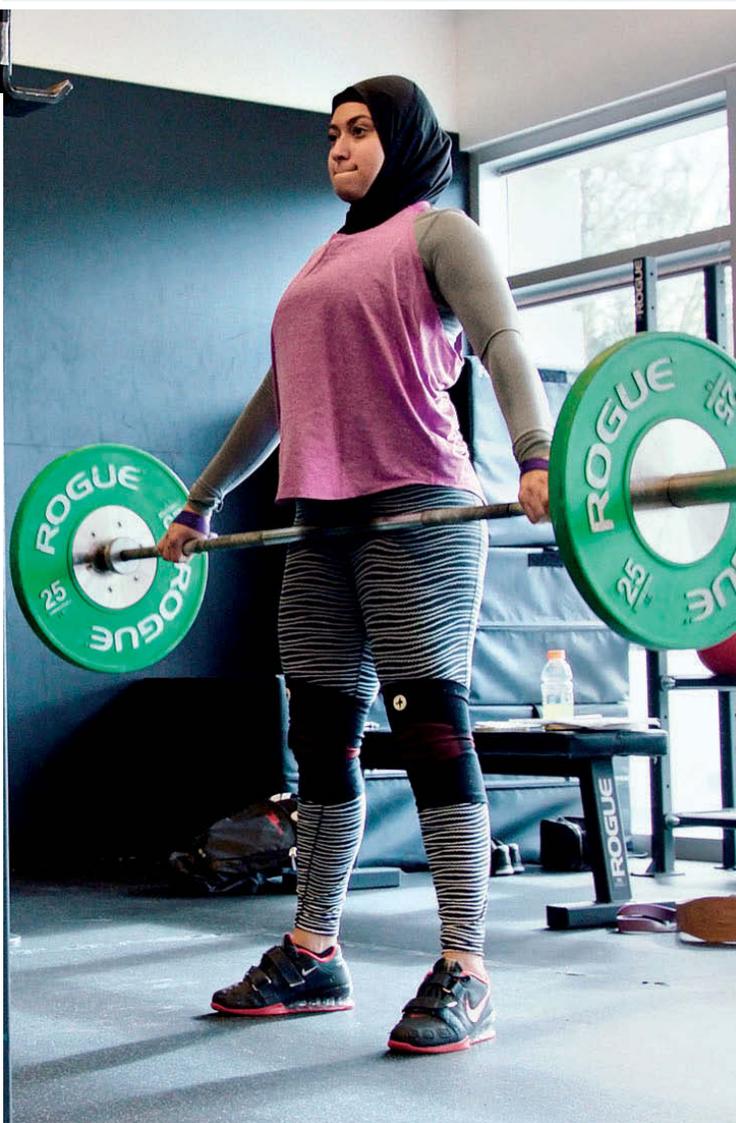
When she was 19 years old, Amna was leading what she describes as an unhealthy lifestyle where she consumed large amounts of junk food. One day, she took it upon herself to take “much-needed action” and went for a walk at Safa Park. “That’s where it all began. Once I got my adrenaline fix, I decided that there was no going back,” she says. She took up CrossFit, and loved it so much that she decided to compete at the CrossFit Games Open. Gradually progressing to the CrossFit Games Asia Regionals in Seoul, South Korea, in 2012, Amna was able to represent Emirati, GCC and Arab women, as she was the first to ever participate. Through CrossFit, she fell in love with weight lifting, and has been focusing on it ever since.

To date, Amna has won nine medals at an IWF event, in which six were gold and three were silver in the Arab, WestAsian and Asian categories, respectively. She was also ranked 12th at the Asian Championships in the -69kg category. Stepping in to her very first competition, Amna couldn’t believe she had come this far: “It all felt so surreal. I felt very proud and excited, but [also] anxious and scared. What if I failed? But then I said to myself, keep going no matter what—crawl if you have to! Just don’t stay still.”

Amna recalls one of her hardest moments during a competition as she trained while injured. “I was advised not to train or compete at the Asian Championships Olympic Qualifiers as per doctor’s orders because I have an L5 herniated disc/S1 injury and I was in pain 24/7. I couldn’t sit and stand, wash my dishes, even for months. But I worked hard for this goal in the 3.5

years prior, and I said to myself, ‘Amna, one more time.’ I went ahead and trained anyway, and the UAE was represented at the 2016 Rio Olympics through one of our teammates,” she says. Amna is proud to have seen sports culture in the region changing. “I’ve [seen] a steady increase in the amount of women weightlifting in the GCC, which is remarkable. I love how many covered women are embracing sports; it makes me happy to see that we continue to break down barriers. And thanks to Apps such as Nike+ Training Club and Nike+ Running, women can now have a personal trainer in their pocket at all times, making it easier to get started. I hope access to such platforms can motivate more women to make sports a part of their lives, and eventually create more professional female athletes from the GCC.”

In a traditionally male-dominated sport, Amna sees our feminine features as an advantage: “The way I see it is, if a woman can give birth, she sure can lift weights too! I think women shy away from it because they don’t understand that there are many different types of strength training—body building, weight lifting, power lifting, and resistance training.” Amna has faced her fair share of negativity, but she simply doesn’t pay attention to the nay-sayers and tries to educate those who have yet to learn that sport doesn’t discriminate. The support of her family has also been an invaluable part of her journey. “My mother inspires me, for being a strong person, and one of the kindest and most resilient,” she says. A proud Emirati and the first hijabi Emirati and GCC weightlifter, when asked what the heaviest she’s ever lifted, Amna simply responds: “I have lifted my nation. My numbers were never truly the goal of this journey.”



SARAH NFIDSA Founder of Nailicious Spa

With her family heritage in the essential oils and perfumery industry, Sarah grew up with incredible scents in her house. They fascinated her. “My friends complimented me about it when they’d come to play in our garden, asking me about the aromas wafting out of my father’s office, which was, in a sense, his lab,” she says. This is what she hoped to emulate when she created Nailicious, her eco-friendly salon in Dubai’s DIFC. “I wanted to create a

beauty retreat that embodies a holistic way of life. I’ve committed myself to building the brand using sustainable practices, in order to leave the smallest possible footprint on the environment. Part of our green efficacy programme is using disposable biodegradable towels for each nail and hair service, and stocking products that use natural ingredients with sustainable packaging, as well as educating our staff and clients about the importance of being eco-aware. I believe that green is not just a word, but a way of life,” she says. Sarah searched the globe for the finest and most sustainable

beauty products that she herself has tried and tested, as she believes in reducing the chemical overload on both the client and environment. She’s had a good role model in her father: “He was a self-made entrepreneur, and his dedication to his craft fascinated me, as a leader in his field in a time where there was no social media and development like now,” she says, continuing: “I think that opportunities come to those who create them; I believe in taking risks, passionately, despite any challenges that might cross our path during a journey. We have the power and will to make things happen.”



HARRIET STEWART

29, Area Sales Manager for PRG Gearhouse, Ambassador for PUMA and Fit Republik, and Fastest Woman in the UAE

Harriet can thank her parents for first noticing that she was fast as a child: "I must have been able to run away from them or something!" she laughs, continuing: "They took me down to my local running track aged 5. However, my first stint in athletics was short-lived, as I turned my attention to gymnastics. It was when I left gymnastics that I returned to sprinting again. Having the level of flexibility and speed [that I did] meant that I was a natural hurdler, so I took up spring hurdles aged 13." As a gymnast, Harriet trained 6 days a week and regularly competed, so her mind and body were conditioned to this. As an adult, she decided to start competing again as she wanted to see a reward from her efforts in training: "There's nothing better than crossing the finish line in first place, or setting a new personal best".

And that she's done, in spades: After a 10-year break and returning to competition right here in the UAE, Harriet's current accolades include first place in the competition for the UAE's Fastest Woman (100m), first place at the Corporate Games 2016 (100m), and first and unbeaten in local Diamond League Race nights from 2015-2016. She's also currently the senior women's record holder (100m). Balancing her training with her full-time job means that during peak season, which is also her racing season, Harriet's training has to be done early in the morning—"at around 5am, so that my schedule permits me to manage both. This means that some days are in excess of 15 hours, which can be a little tiring to say the least. I also enjoy other sports, so trying to fit everything in can be a little tricky," she says. Still, Harriet says training is the best part of her day: "It's the time that I get to just be me and away from the rest of the world. Every session requires 100% effort and when I see my progress and results, I enjoy it even more. Although I have to admit that I never used to be a morning person, so when I first started my 5am sessions, I wouldn't say I was the happiest person in the world before training!" she laughs.

When Harriet isn't sprinting—she's always striving to beat her PB—she's usually doing gymnastics, yoga, boxing, swimming or pilates at Fit Republik. She looks up to other female athletes that excel, as her role models, as well as people who follow their passions. "Do what makes you happy, whether that relates to health and fitness, or in your career," she advises: "Work towards a set of goals and challenge yourself constantly, because only you can make yourself happy."

ZAHRA LARI

21, the UAE's first International Competitive Figure Skater

Believe it or not, it was actually the film *Ice Princess* that spurred on Zahra Lari's groundbreaking career. The movie piqued her interest and curiosity in the sport when she was 12 years old, and for the next three years, she skated for an hour a week. She then started to skate and train more, but Zahra says she's pretty sure the desire for a professional career in the sport started the moment she first stepped on ice: "I immediately loved it, even though I fell down with my first step! I must credit a visiting coach from Romania for making me understand that I had the ability and talent to compete internationally. Before her, I really didn't comprehend that I was good enough. After my first competition in Italy, I saw the other skaters and their talent, and this made me want to work even harder to reach my goals."

Zahra has taken part in many competitions in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, placing first each year, and although competing internationally has been much tougher, she's placed 4th in the interpretative category in Italy, and she's also competed twice in Hungary, and once in Slovakia, Korea and the Netherlands. She still finds early morning practices tough, but despite her exhaustion, during training she feels nothing but determination. "After training, I feel hungry!" she smiles. Zahra says her family is her foundation, helping her get through her bad days and cheering her on. "I really couldn't do this without them," she says. Next, she's aiming to qualify for the Four Continents Championships, then the World Championships; her ultimate goal is to one day qualify for the Olympics. The sport has opened many doors for her, including the chance to work with the Fatma Bint Mubarak Ladies Sport Academy to promote girls insports, as well as collaborate with Tips and Toes as a sponsor. Zahra's sport is unique in that looking good is a part of her performance, so her beauty regime is important to her. "I was a longtime customer before they became my sponsor! At competitions, I always need nice-looking nails and simple but elegant makeup, and they're always there to assist me."

Zahra's role models include Julia Lipnitskaya in the figure skating world, and her mother in her life in general; her support has been priceless to Zahra. "[Your support team] will cheer for you, support you, and wipe your tears away. I'd advise other women [on an epic journey] to expect some criticism and negative words sometimes—when it happens, just let it go and know what you're doing and trying to accomplish is right. Always stay positive and believe in yourself."





RAHA MOHARRAK

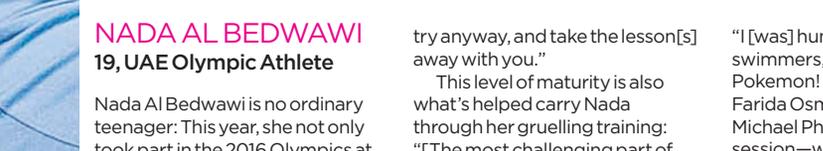
Adventurer, Mountaineer, Graphic Designer, and Motivational Speaker

Most people know Raha, first and foremost, as a mountaineer. The first Saudi woman (and youngest Arab woman) to summit Mount Everest, she describes herself as a graphic designer by trade, and an adventurer by passion, with an insatiable appetite to explore. "I was expected to go down a pre-paved, traditional path. It just didn't work for me. There was a protest inside of me that I had to honour. I'm not one to fight with words and disrespect others to follow my own path. I wanted something that was mine, and I wasn't going to get it fighting with someone else. So I decided to climb. I was told I couldn't. And in that moment, the journey began, and I was at the point of no return. I knew I would no matter what. 'No' is the most powerful motivator, if you let it be," she says; "All I wanted was to prove to myself that I could

attempt the impossible, and maybe even achieve it."

As a "desert-born Arab woman," Raha says almost everything about it was difficult: "From training to gear preparations, societal pressures and even Visa applications, it was all challenging, but it was absolutely worth the heartache. Physically, the most difficult aspect was the cold. Emotionally, it's the time away from home and mountain life; it gets extremely brutal up there. But if I had to choose the biggest hurdle I faced, I'd have to say it was first believing in myself, and then getting my parents to accept my crazy dreams." It was all worth it though—Raha hopes to leave behind a legacy, and to show that it is possible for a Saudi woman to stand on top of the world. "It's a personal dream to live long enough to see a generation where there are no longer any firsts; because all of the firsts with regards to Arab women have been

conquered," she says. Raha is lucky to have worked with some global brands ever since, such as Nike and Coca Cola. "I think the only consistent thing about my day is waking up, going to sleep, and some form of activity," she says. She's tried everything from temple-hopping in Cambodia to muddy trekking in the Amazon, but in everyday life, she adores volleyball. Fear isn't in her nature, or at the very least, her curiosity and zest for life overrules it. "Curiosity is such a powerful trait, and we should always feed it and follow our gut instinct, and find the courage to follow our dreams. Be open to exploring new challenges, and never limit yourself or set any restrictions. To me, being extraordinary is being unapologetically yourself, whatever that entails. Let your dreams be a reflection of the endlessness of your capabilities. Be bold, and be brave—after all, history is never made by the faint-hearted," she says.



NADA AL BEDWAWI

19, UAE Olympic Athlete

Nada Al Bedwawi is no ordinary teenager: This year, she not only took part in the 2016 Olympics at Rio, she also carried the flag for the UAE at the event. "I am so honoured to have [done] that. I was sitting in my room scrolling through Facebook, and then, like two seconds later, my mum called me and she was like, 'Nada, you're going to be the flagbearer.' At first I was really shocked; I never thought they would give me that honour, [and it is] definitely a great honour. This is the greatest privilege that any athlete can be given by their country. It is such a rare opportunity," Nada says. Not too shabby for a girl who started swimming as a hobby, and threw herself into it at a competitive level four years ago. That's when she met her coach, Mohamed Zanaty, and she started trying to put herself out there. "Even if you [might not] win, it's important to

try anyway, and take the lesson[s] away with you."

This level of maturity is also what's helped carry Nada through her gruelling training: "[The most challenging part of training for the Olympics was] mainly mental, because it's the greatest swimming event that we have. For example, the Olympics isn't the most important event in cycling—some cyclists don't even come to the Olympics. But for swimming, it's the greatest event. There is no higher level. So I really want[ed] to represent my country in the best way possible," she says, adding that outside of trying to set a new PB, she now really hopes to become a full-time professional swimmer and win a medal, if not in 2020, then at least in 2024. The call to say she'd be taking part in this year's Olympics came sooner than she thought, and Nada didn't think she was ready. Once there, she was also happy to have the chance to hopefully meet some of her idols.

"I [was] hunting for famous swimmers, like a hunt for Pokemon! I met my role model, Farida Osman, and we saw Michael Phelps in the training session—we were in the neighbouring lane. We also met the first female Qatari swimmer, Nada Arkaji. I just feel so motivated right now to start preparing for the next Olympics," she says. Egyptian swimmer Farida Osman is someone Nada really looks up to, and she says they relate on a regional level. Nada hopes to become a butterfly stroker like her in the future. Outside of the sport, she looks up to Malala Yousafzai—"She's a great role model for supporting women's rights," Nada says. She is passionate about trying to pave the way for other Emirati female swimmers; "Be confident and follow your heart. Once you find the sport for you, commit to it and don't let anybody or anything stop you from achieving your dream."



WITH THANKS TO GARY MEENAGHAN

Game Changers

KARINA BENSEMANN

38, Team Rider for Surf House Dubai, Coach for 1SIX8 UAE, and Brand Ambassador for S Plus Surfboards, Lululemon, and Seakiss Swimwear.

While SUP has found a firm footing with many women in recent years, talk about surfing and it's still more common to see men ripping on the waves than women. Until you see the signature dreadlocks of Karina Bensemamm shredding better than half the dudes out there. As a teenager in New Zealand, Karina borrowed a board from a friend's boyfriend and went out for a reckless first attempt that, in retrospect, she realizes she could have died in—but her natural athleticism and feel for the water kept her afloat, and it was love at first surf. Now, she's a staple in the region's surf scene, from Sunset Beach (where she also runs a Beach Camp inspired by lifeguard and military training) to Wadi Adventure and beyond.

Her background as a competitive boxer and former role in the Royal NZ Navy have lent her an enviably multi-functional physique, but Karina is a waterwoman to the core. "I've probably had more black eyes from surfing than I've had from competitive boxing," she laughs. But this risk-taker doesn't fear much else, outside of possibly breaking her neck—"That

would be horrific!" Although the region's surf is limited, she does love to hit up Sunset Beach, North Beach and Gatsby's, and Fujairah when it's pumping. "The scene here is awesome, with great people from all walks of life," she says, crediting her Surf House Dubai crew, Scott Chambers, Daniel Van Dooren, and Sjaak Van Tunen, among the male surfers she admires most in the region, along with "gurfers" Rachael Sherriff, Donna Masing, and Tala Elajou. Internationally, Karina looks up to Lisa Anderson as a role model for women in the sport.

"Surfing is a very physical sport—people have this romantic idea of it, but the components required to firstly survive in the ocean, let alone master it, are extremely physical. When I first started surfing, they didn't even sell board shorts for girls!" Karina says, explaining that she thinks if more women were physically prepared before starting with the actual surfing, more of them would get into the sport. Karina lists Matakana Island and Maketu in New Zealand, and Little Maui in Lombok, as the top three places she's ever surfed, and J-Bay in South Africa, Swimming Pools in Fiji, and—"If I were a great surfer!"—the legendary Teahupoo in French Polynesia as her dream surf destinations. "Surfing makes me feel like I can live forever, that I'm part of nature, riding creation," she says.



FATMA AL NABHANI

25, Omani Tennis Player

Fatma's inspirational journey as the region's first-ever female pro tennis player in the GCC—one so impressive it even landed her on the June cover of this very magazine last year—has made her the very definition of a trailblazer. "When I first started training to become a tennis player, I was the only one. Even when I was very young, when they used to run junior local tournaments, I had to play against males because there weren't enough females to play against in Oman or even in the GCC. It was really tough being the only one; I didn't have any female peers to push, challenge and motivated me. I also didn't have any role models to look up to or be inspired by. Instead, I had to take on the role of

PHOTOGRAPH BY WOUTER KINGMA



becoming a role model for millions of women back home. Even today, I'm the only female GCC player in my sport out there, and I know people look up to me and wait to see my results, so that gives me inspiration to work harder, get better results, and make my country and my region proud," Fatma says. Training is the most important part of her day, and it makes her feel liberated, focused, empowered and free.

Internationally, Fatma sees Martina Hingis as an inspiration: "The fact that she had her mother as her coach—I [could really relate] to that, because my mother is my greatest supporter, and she is my biggest inspiration as well," she says. Her sport has taken her all over the world, with Mauritius and Mont Blanc right up there among her

favourites, but to Fatma, there's no place like home. It's the women of the Arab world that encourages her to keep pushing herself, too: "We need to know that nothing is beyond our reach, whether that's running a 10K or winning a Grand Slam. It's important to know that we can aim for and achieve the highest honours. Just do it. It's hard, because of where we come from, but it's not impossible. Things are changing rapidly in the Arab world, and it's time for us to ride the wave and grab the opportunities." Fatma is currently pushing herself to raise her ranking to the top 300—she's currently at 375 and is certain she can do it. And with the support of her family, huge brands like Nike (for which she is a sponsored athlete), and an entire region behind her, we have no doubt that she will.



GABRIELE KURZ
Executive Wellbeing Chef at
Talise Nutrition, Jumeirah
Group

Well before healthy eating became a global movement, Gabriele was on a mission to better the world through good nutrition. "Food is the foundation of our existence. Its impact is significant in all aspects of life. My goal is to spread awareness of the impact food has on us, our health, and wellbeing," she says. A pioneer of healthy food in the GCC, Gabriele's relationship with it began long ago: "At home in Germany, we were the first to offer vegetarian and wholesome health food with my mum's small but well-known Bio-Hotel. I was mocked at school when my classmates realised I had muesli for breakfast, while everyone else had the classic jam or cold cuts and butter with white bread rolls, and couldn't imagine other foods. I also chose not to work in a classic hotel culinary environment, which I very much wanted to do for experience reasons, yet I wanted to do something that was meaningful to me. I couldn't imagine myself cookign food I can't recommend." Gabriele was then hired out of the blue to open the first wellbeing restaurant in the MENA region, Magnolia at Madinat Jumeirah resort. Since then, her role led her to becoming the Resort Wellbeing Chef for Madinat Jumeirah Group, to her current role as Executive Wellbeing Chef for Jumeirah Group on a global basis. "It has become chic and trendy to eat and

live healthy; we were the first to start this movement in luxury hospitality here," she says."

Gabriele has learnt as much as she could from her mother, her first inspiration, as well as all of the teachers and the experts she's met along the way. She's also the Patron of the German Foundation of Juvenile Obesity, and has won countless awards, as well as hosting events, presenting YouTube shows, and more. Working as an Executive Chef in a male-dominated business, topped by the fact that the cuisine she is known for isn't typical in the region as well as the luxury hotel segment, has placed a lot of pressure on Gabriele, but she takes it all in her stride, welcoming it as a chance to spread positivity and help educate people. "What I've learned from my life so far is that dreams do come true. The secret is to wish, and then let go of the dream. It then only took two decades for mine to come true! When I was a young apprentice, I so very much wanted to live and work in an Arab country, having studied the language and culture for a while. However, it seemed to not be for me and my goal of cooking healthy, so I let go and was happy and fulfilled with what I achieved otherwise. Then I was headhunted to Dubai in 2007. On a more practical note, being kind is also a strength not too many practice. It costs nothing and makes such a difference in life—and at work. Leave everyone you meet feeling better than before they met you."



DALYA TABARI
43, CEO & Co-Founder of The
Developing Child Centre

"Most people are not aware that 95% of children require some kind of educational, academic, behavioural or developmental support to help ensure they are meeting age-appropriate milestones. When these milestones are not met, children can sometimes feel isolated and lose their natural confidence," Dalya says. And so, in April 2013, TDCC opened its doors with a commitment to empower and unlock the potential of all children by helping to advance their learning and development through building skills. The centre works closely with children, parents and schools, to ensure that no child is left behind, not only within the educational system, but also within society at large.

"Many of the children who have

learning and social differences also have 'out of the box' minds that often isolate and alienate them in standardized systems. These differences are often feared. Lower levels of support services classify a child as 'normal', whereas higher levels of support classify them with disabilities. Who decides where that line is drawn is unclear, leaving many parents frustrated and uneasy, especially if their child's level of support is somewhere in the middle. We call that the 'grey zone.' TDCC is about changing the philosophy, perception and approach we understand and evaluate the development of children with. Given the chance, and as history has shown, grey-zone children have the highest potential to grow into adults that innovate and revolutionize the world. Put simply, TDCC is in search of the next Einstein and Mozart!" Dalya says. A social business, the net

profit is gifted by the founders into The Hibah Fund, a fund that acts as a financial grant service for families who require financial aid to help subsidize the cost of evaluations, therapies, and support.

In January 2015, just 20 months after their launch, they doubled their capacity. They now employ over 60 professionals, providing a range of services for children from 1-18 years of age, including therapy and development of language and communication, fine and gross motor skills, learning and academic support, psychology programmes, behaviour management and support, nanny training, and a full-time early intervention programme for children under the age of 6. They currently service over 830 children of 40 nationalities, 15% of which are Emiratis, and 10% of whom receive assistance from the Hibah Fund.

But Dalya just sees this as the most important job in the world: Helping to raise children. Despite her career having started in Marketing 20 years ago, it was her personal experience as a first-time mother, who felt overwhelmed, disoriented, and "frankly a bit clueless" that helped build the vision of TDCC, with incredible support from her friends and family. "The most rewarding part of all the blood, sweat and tears is seeing the progress and success children experience after using our services. We have clients that come from Oman and Jordan during the summer for intensive sessions, and the mere idea that we can positively impact a child's life in even a small way is intoxicating," she says. "It can sometimes be overwhelming to focus on a bigger objective, and many times I remind myself that the only way to get there is by taking it one step at a time, one day at a time."



PRISCILLA ELORA SHARUK

28, Co-Founder & COO of MYKI

"Funnily enough, [it was] my grandmother's constant need for help in logging into her Skype account that inspired my Co-Founder Antoine Jebara and I to begin creating a solution," Priscilla recalls. She began working on MYKI—an enterprise software that on one hand allows teams of all sizes to access company-owned accounts without having to ever create, manage or remember a password, and on the other hand, allows the management team full visibility on how, when, and where, your teams access accounts from—in 2013, from her dining room table in Beirut, Lebanon. Since then it's been a whirlwind. She's watched it grow from a mere idea to a real world solution, seen her team multiply in a short period of time, and seen early adopters react extremely well to the possibilities they've created, and she now hopes to create value for users on a global rather than just a regional scale.

Prior to this, Priscilla worked as a landscape architect, a role which

she feels prepared her very well for this journey: "As an architect, we take a design from concept to execution, and create spaces that are both functional and aesthetic." It makes sense, then, that one of her greatest inspirations is the late Zaha Hadid: "Her sovereignty in a male-dominated industry, her assertiveness, and her sharp business sense coupled with a unique creative side make for a force to aspire to be more like."

Priscilla herself is a force to be reckoned with, and while nobody expected her to quit her job and delve deep into a space she had no experience in, she's now thrilled to have seen a ripple effect in inspiring others to take action with their dreams. "Support from friends and family changes everything, but don't despair if they aren't on board right away. It's only a matter of time," she says. Priscilla also possesses a secret talent: She writes, composes and produces music. "I learned early on, and perhaps the hard way, that all criticism is constructive. Everyone will have an opinion about the choices you make; only you can really know what the right path for you is, and what you're truly passionate about, so just go for it," she says.



ANDREA MICHELLE BROOKS
32, Head Coach at Parkour DXB

"I have been moving since I can remember. I was 3 years old when I would lift these little dumb bells with my Dad and would just follow him during his workout. At age 4, I got stitches in my lip for jumping from one boulder to another. In kindergarten, I was trying all sorts of daring maneuvers that my teacher urged my parents to put me in gymnastics to channel my energy. I was a competitive gymnast from age 6-11 while also playing football. I grew up in a sports family with two older brothers and a Dad that coached multiple sports. I was constantly challenging boys on my Dad's teams to push-up competitions, foot races and arm wrestling. I never wanted to be a princess. I always wanted to be strong.

After gymnastics, I was a long

jumper and sprinter in Track. I was also a collegiate cheerleader and started coaching tumbling and gymnastics full-time for work. I then got into Parkour at the age of 26 as a way to channel my constant passion for athletics and expression through movement. I fell in love and knew that doing parkour would forever change my life," Andrea says.

Training in a male-dominated sport isn't easy, but as one of the first and most qualified female parkour coaches in the UAE, Andrea is on a mission to change that: "There's a perception of parkour being for young males so I believe that deters women from training. It is for everyone! Every demographic; 1-101, every gender, fitness level and body dweller. Most of its representation has also been male dominated. Many women are working to change that. Julie An-

gel and her project *See & Do* is one of them. I am privileged to be a team member of the global project whose aim is to normalise images of women training. The more women that actually see other women training, the more likely they would be to join the party. It also shows real practitioners in their true element in a world where female athletes are sexualised. The website features resources, amazing photos and blogs connecting parkour and movement communities all over the world."

Parkour isn't just about the gravity-defying tricks that people imagine it to be— "Because Parkour gets this reputation for being only high flying stunts, people picture that I am constantly jumping from rooftops right up to the point that I first shake their hand or that I am from *Assassin's Creed*," Andrea laughs—it's also taught Andrea

some valuable lessons about life itself. "Parkour is a way to get over fear and doubt and I am learning to apply that in all aspects of life. The mental blocks that stop us from trying are always far worse than the literal bumps and bruises that come with trying," she says, continuing: "I love parkour because of the relationship between vision and follow through. I can see a jump I want to do but then I have to figure out how to do it. Your mind will seek the opportunities that are close within your grasp. It's not some adrenaline-pumping sport but rather an honest assessment of your abilities in the most calm and present way possible. There is no cheating it. Parkour is about finding the holes in your training to strengthen them. I love learning who I am through playing. Physical empowerment is life empowerment."



PHOTOGRAPH BY EFRAIM EVIDOR

TARA ROUX
43, Managing Partner, Kalm Holistic Beauty

"I visited a fortune teller about eight years ago and she told me one day I'd have my own business; something to do with a spa or similar products, and that I'd succeed. It planted a seed in my mind. I have always wanted to help people and I love charity work. I don't run a charity today, but I do feel really inspired that I can give out jobs which in turn helps people and their families. That has been a huge driving force for me coupled with the want to succeed. The day I die (hopefully in the very distant future!) I want to know I made a difference in a few peoples lives," Tara says.

She already has made a difference: She's passionate about trying to hire as many single mums as possible. "When I first started Kalm, I started looking in Dubai to find staff but also I found two amazing agencies in Bali and the Philippines. I always asked potential employees what they would do with their children if they came to Dubai. I realized very early on that the reason why many women come to Dubai is because they needed money badly to educate their children and look after their families. Then I found that the reason many had this challenge in front of them was because they were single mums. As soon as I realized this, it drove me to focus on women who needed my help more. Today, if I have an available job at Kalm and I have two candidates in front of me, a single mum versus a non single mum, I take the single mum

hands down even if she needs more training. They are so hungry to succeed and do well because they only have themselves to rely on," she says. She should know—Tara was a single mum herself in her early days, and her son was also born three months early: "He was incubated and hospitalised for 3 months. He had a lot of learning challenges as a child and although an amazing 18-year-old today, he has suffered hugely with severe dyslexia. He has needed a lot of help in his education and this has cost a huge amount of money. But it has driven me to succeed so I could give him the best education I could find to make sure he had a chance at life. In September he will be going to university. This has made me very proud because if he didn't have the education he has had, he wouldn't even have a GCSE to his name. He is my inspiration and he is part of the reason I push myself so hard."

To Tara, being strong means being determined, and being a good leader. "Handling staff in particular has it's challenges because we are handling human beings with emotions and feelings. It's important to be a leader that people respect and for me I lead with kindness—but its important to be firm and fair. You can't have a successful business if your staff are not engaged and happy. Happy staff pass on their positivity to clients. If they are unhappy the clients feel it! I have to find the strength inside every day to motivate my staff. Most of my time goes into mentoring them," she says, continuing: "It's so easy just to say 'It's too hard, I give up! One day, all the hard work pays off. And be an honest person. If you give out kindness it comes back to you."

AIDA AL BUSAIDY
33, Communications and PR Professional, Entrepreneur, and Full-Time Government Employee with the TDCC

With over 13 years of experience, Aida is a renowned expert in the communications field. She's written professionally, hosted events, and appeared on several major TV and radio shows. She's also a passionate advocate for women's rights—as well as being a dedicated mum of two. In her full-time job with the government, she currently oversees the PR and Communications for all the Events and Festivals at Dubai Tourism. "It's a lot of work and we work all year round because as Dubai Tourism we need to achieve 20 million visitors by 2020, so understanding Dubai and what makes it a successful city and then translating that into various markets, groups of people, through PR, is what we work on all together as a team and as a department," she says, continuing: "Although the world wide web has brought us closer, decluttering the clutter of information to choose what is relevant for your job, time, team, and project delivery can be time

consuming. Still, it's really rewarding to be able to tick off as many things as you've done—nothing is mundane. Rewards come in different shapes and forms and it doesn't always have to achieve one big goal but build towards it," she says.

Despite her vast amount of work accolades, Aida says her greatest achievements in life are her two sons, Daej and Zayed. "Through them growing, I will have to impart my knowledge, my learning, my wisdom, virtues and there's no better success than to watch the next generation take forward what you have taught them and become better than you and change the world. [To me], being strong is about looking at things differently and first overpowering your own demons first. It's really how you overcome your mind to take the next step, even if that step is a small one," she says. As an Emirati woman who has been instrumental in helping to Dubai on the map, Aida says pride is too small of a word to describe how she feels: "Most people read about their cities or country's successes through history books, where we are redefining and making history every day and being a part of it as well."

