

Why is it important to have an international dimension and how do you perceive the role of cooperation between women across different continents today?

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International is a word that conjures many thoughts and responses for me personally. I will try and sum up the ideas that immediately come to my mind when we speak of international dimensions.

Firstly, for a company this can mean a variety of things. One of the most valuable aspects of a business can be its R&D department, (research and development), and for an electronics manufacturing and engineering company like mine, this has been a major factor in keeping ahead of our competitors. In other words, keeping abreast of international trends, following international standards, and finding suitable components abroad, are merely a small part of how we undertake research for new products. To do this, our engineers must immerse themselves in website searches and then follow up with emails and phone calls to the relevant personnel, who in turn will send us samples or provide designs in order for us to determine whether they would be suitable for our new products. The engineers need to sight the actual component to see if they meet relevant specifications and we will also probably do a round of tests on their samples to prove whether they are indeed suitable. Without new technologies it would be impossible to be as responsive and quick to design product. Working in this way is only made possible by the internet and modern telecommunications. However, for every positive there is a negative. Because of all the new technology and the way we communicate, the world is growing smaller and we are competing in the same markets and often sourcing the same material as our competitors. Maintaining our competitive edge by continuously improving the performance of our products, is the only way that we keep ahead of all our competitors.

The ability of a company's capacity to grow must then be to introduce exporting their goods into the conversation. If you take my company for example, we began our manufacturing of lightning and surge protection products in the island state of Tasmania in Australia. I believe that Iceland and Tierra del Fuego are more remote than Tasmania and of course Antarctica, but possibly no other country is as far from major cities as we are. That meant that if we wanted to grow our company's sales and revenue, we had to send product to the mainland of Australia and once having achieved success in doing that, we decided it was in our best interests to export internationally. We now manufacture in Malaysia and Tasmania and sell our product globally. For the owners of the business it was a leap of faith and added quite a bit more labour to our workload, not to mention travel, but the rewards have been enormous. I doubt that I would ever have met and worked with people from all over the world if we had decided to limit the sales of our products to Australian markets. How fortunate for us that we have done so, I consider that my life has been blessed as a result of that decision.

This brings me very nicely to the importance of women and their ability to collaborate internationally. I am involved at board level in three international organisations, two for entrepreneurs IWEF and FCEM and one TIAW of which I am the current President, a philanthropic organisation that donates money for the empowerment of women in developing countries. In one of the organisations, I was the Australian president and attended many congresses and president's meetings in many different countries. I discovered in meeting all the delegates in each of these organisations, that all women have similar priorities and challenges in life. That family is a high priority and friendships a very close second and that we often work far harder to achieve the same

results as our male colleagues. There are women who I speak to regularly from friendships that have been made as a direct result from the forums, conferences and congresses held across the globe. Currently I am involved in implementing a project on digital marketing. A group of Australian women are digitizing a Mentoring Project in order that it be made available to be viewed by mentees in the Indian Ocean Islands. I have been working with a friend in Mauritius for five years and the project has been growing momentum. Aline and I met at an FCEM President's meeting and immediately formed a friendship. Aline and I are the catalysts and the founders of the project, but we are currently the delighted spectators, watching others working collaboratively to produce world class documents and presentations. Working remotely is something that a Tasmanian woman and her colleague from Mauritius understands only too well. Aline and I live with the isolation of an island constantly, and it holds no surprises for us of the necessity of communicating with the outside world utilizing our global networks. Regularly zooming and phoning each other is something that we already do as the norm.

The importance of communicating with other countries is paramount. I imagine that there are women and men who believe for example that Asia is behind those of more developed countries in their skills and professionalism. What you will find by connecting with women from these regions is that they are every bit as well informed as countries that formally believed themselves superior in abilities and technology. We in Australasia have known the value of our neighbours for many years and realise the importance of setting all prior prejudices aside and in working and communicating with each other as equals. I expect that if Australia has a higher standard of operations or as is occurring more frequently vice versa, by working together everyone grows in confidence and in their abilities. We level the skills and abilities of those we are collaborating with. I too have learned a great deal, even after thirty years of owning and operating a business, I believe and hope that we have the capacity and vision to always learn new ideas and tasks.

However, there are more important issues at stake than merely networking, for we as women need to be at the decision-making tables to really make a difference. How else will war be prevented, or disaster averted? We all need to work together to ensure that women are included in every conversation at all levels of governments and governing bodies, because women are diplomats and skilled negotiators with an innate ability to plan strategically.

Let us support each other to develop a peaceful world and create a wonderful environment for everyone to live in.

"Alone we are invisible, together we are invincible." FCEM motto

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