

Entrepreneur middle east's achieving women 2016: noor sweid

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" If you're looking to succeed, keep your eyes and heart open to opportunities. You'll miss opportunities that come to you if you're not open to them. Success is about that present themselves to you." This is what Noor Sweid told the audience during her keynote address at the , and one look at her impressive career graph so far makes it clear that this is, indeed, a woman who has (and continues to) put into practice what she preaches. Sweid definitely seems to have an uncanny eye for great opportunities- her work profile reads like that if someone who has, really, *done it all* .

She's worked for big-name corporates (these include Charles Schwab and Accenture), she has facilitated her ' (the Dubai-headquartered global interior contracting company, Depa) multimillion dollar growth and eventual US\$1 billion IPO, she's launched and run her own business (the ZenYoga chain of yoga studios in Dubai that she founded in 2006 and ran until its sale in 2014), she's been an investor in and mentor for several startups in the Middle East ecosystem (besides her own portfolio of investments, Sweid is also a member of the Board of Directors at , and she's currently a Managing Partner at , a MENA- based growth stage venture capital firm. So yes -if that last sentence's length didn't make it clear already- Noor Sweid does seem to have *done it all* .

On why encouraging entrepreneurship is good for the MENA region“ It's always good to enable people to do things that they want to do. And that's what entrepreneurship is. It's enabling people to find something they enjoy doing, and then finding a way to use that skill or that desire to do that particular activity to , and monetize that value. That's what it is. So when

you have a youth population and the demographics of the region, if you encourage these people to try to monetize what it is they can add value to, that's a much better way to engage them as productive members of society, than anything else."

On how established businesses in the MENA can actually support the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem" I think that corporates need to start realizing that if they are going to that would be just as good as the ones globally. That will drive those [local] businesses to be successful. So that's what the ecosystem can do- it can provide these companies more opportunities to sell their products. If you are in a corporate, and you know the difference between a global and local player in terms of quality, then hire the local player and give them insights as a client. They will be so much more adaptable and malleable, and they'll be happy to take any feedback on board and incorporate it. So they can get you to where you are happy, and they can [also] learn from your experiences with a global player. So if we want to really up the standards of the local players -if the corporates are saying they are not good enough- then that's the way to do it, not to turn away from hiring them, but rather to hire them and take half an hour and tell them, this is what the global [players] do that's better."

On the need for startups to have a corporate culture in place" I think it's never too early to start thinking about , which drives everything later. So if you want your corporate culture to be like everything is always done in a certain way, then you better do it that way from the start. Because you're the one setting the example. People will do as you do, they won't do as you say. So

it's really important that we think about how we would want our company to ultimately operate."

On the contention that it's easier for startups to find funding in Silicon Valley than in MENA" I don't have any answer for that. Some people could argue it's easier; some people could argue the entrepreneurs [there] are better. I'm not going to argue either way!"

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