It’s A Woman’s World too

According to the International Labour Organization only 28% of managers and leaders are women, and only 45% of women have paid jobs compared to 70% of men. Women thus remain the world’s most untapped natural resource. In recent years however, things have been changing in many parts of the world, including Cyprus where, in the legal profession at least, men and women work in almost equal numbers. The upper echelons continue to be male-dominated but a growing number of women have broken through the proverbial glass ceiling to establish and run their own law firms. Five of them spoke to Gold.

By Marianna Nicolaou
Alexandra Pelaghias-Christodoulou was raised in a family of lawyers and, growing up, she realised that the principles of fairness, justice, respect and integrity had been nurtured in her, together with respect and love for the legal profession. The decision to study and then practise Law was easy but, she says, the reality was rather more complicated.

“What I remember most about my early years is the very hard and long working hours, as well as the time spent enriching my knowledge in order to be able to gain status and establish myself in the profession which, at the time, was very male-dominated,” she says. “This is still probably the biggest obstacle and challenge that women have to deal with, as even today, they have to constantly and repeatedly prove their worth in order to gain the respect and appreciation of their colleagues and be able to manage and lead them efficiently.”

The overall legal environment has changed significantly since then, she tells GOLD, noting that it has become very compliance-oriented due to new laws and regulations and the implementation of strict anti-money laundering measures around the world. These measures have also affected the business activities of certain clients in Cyprus and elsewhere. “The legal environment in Cyprus has been viewed with suspicion and scepticism, following recent corruption scandals and events,” she says, and stresses that, “We all have to work together in order to improve this and create a more reliable and sustainable legal environment for the future generations as well as for our country’s reputation.”

How does Pelaghias-Christodoulou see the role of women in such an environment? “Over the years, more and more women are pursuing a career in law and many have gained managerial positions and important roles or even become partners in their firms. There are also many successful women who have become judges or taken on leading roles in the wider public sector,” she acknowledges, but she also sounds a note of caution: “We are still far from establishing a system where women are being appointed to key positions because of their actual worth and capabilities. Instead, a lot of women are being appointed – especially in the political sphere – merely to boost an organisation’s image. Due to the competitive dynamics of the legal profession, the women of the next generation will continue to face challenges in areas such as managing other lawyers, referring business, balancing work, personal and family time, advancing to partnership, client development and financial planning.”

Alexandra Pelaghias-Christodoulou has always striven to improve the quality of work and services provided by the firm: “We remain aware of all developments in law and in the business world, both in Cyprus and worldwide, and we continue to work to achieve the firm’s vision and mission, namely to offer premium legal services and strong support to all our clientele.” She goes on to note that she and her colleagues have always strongly supported any proposals leading to the further development of the firm’s services. Pelaghias-Christodoulou considers that success is a result of hard work, integrity, enthusiasm, love for what you do, lifelong education and training, persistence, credibility and, above all, strong trust in oneself. On this point, she states clearly, “You need to believe in yourself if you want others to believe in you.”