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NETWORKING FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

Bringing women together to share skills, contacts and positive attitudes could help us all to navigate through these uncertain economic times.

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The past months have been a turbulent time. Markets have collapsed around the world and we are left with huge economic uncertainties. Whether in our offices or our homes, it has had an effect on all of us. By gathering women to share inspiration and knowledge, meet potential clients and find solutions to big and small challenges, Women's International Networking (WIN) is developing ways to navigate through these uncertain times.

Over the past ten years, almost 6,000 women from 70 nations have gathered at WIN's global leadership forum to discuss leadership of the future and how to make a positive contribution to the global economy. By exchanging business cards, ideas, ways of operating and actual contracts, the participants are developing strategies for incorporating humanity into business operations and policy decisions.

How women contribute in the economic sphere can make a difference. The organization was founded in Milan (Italy) in 1997, with a vision to facilitate the situation of women working internationally. Over the years it has become known as a forum for change, inspiring women worldwide to develop, empower and connect with a more feminine, authentic and global leadership.

"The conference really inspired me to work harder for a positive leadership in Cameroon: for women's empowerment, women's rights and leadership," says Yotchou Tzudjom Anne Pelagi, programme officer and director of New Human Rights in Cameroon.

The organization has continued to gather women working internationally, propelled by the diversity of the women and the challenges they meet.

Gabrielle Kluck, a field administrative officer for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency fro Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the Syrian Arab Republic, has attended several WIN forums as a participant, speaker and workshop leader. "It empowers women to open their eyes, to be inspired and to take action," she says. "Every year I hear new things that I am able to bring to my work, and create awareness of what is going around globally in equality, diversity and focus of businesses and entrepreneurs to make the world a better place by including women."

New values for governance

Reflecting on our collective and individual journeys, we encourage people, now more than ever before, to develop global awareness and contribute through compassionate values. Caring has a strong quality, implying the quality of both nurturing and defending what we commit to. In the current political and economic climate, WIN has chosen to address and promote the "feminine" or integrative qualities such as empathy, integrity, receptivity, intuition, caring, sharing and resilience, which we hope will provide a balance within the current leadership paradigm.

Developing the future so that it benefits everyone is not only a great chance; it is our responsibility as conscious human beings. Governance needs to be revisited in executive committees, boardrooms, strategies and human resource policies alike. A new set of ethical regulations is needed. How was it possible for leaders of the world's major banks to take out billions of dollars in options and salaries just before the banks went bankrupt? And what about empathy? What if lenders really put themselves in the shoes of a client when granting credit? What would be different?

Most women we know work hard towards reaching future goals and building a life for tomorrow – the horizontal dimension. While we encourage this, we also support an awareness of the need to let life unfold and to work on yourself in a vertical dimension: on who you are and how you act.

These times, challenging as they may be, are interesting and if we can commit to what is important it is possible to thrive on this uncertainty. Listening to our minds, hearts and intuition may all be equally important as we move into the future. At the basis of WIN is the knowledge that we are constantly in relationships – that is the basis of networking. By looking at how we network, we can create an environment that allows women entrepreneurs to succeed.

Women's International Networking

WIN's main event, the annual global leadership forum, stages more than 40 workshops and plenary sessions. There have been 11 such events, the next one will take place in Prague in October. Participants benefit from the inspiration and company of hundreds of women and some men, and a web of contacts that helps them succeed. WIN also hosts a Mobilizing Women programme and a corporate networking group that meets four times a year.

For more information, go to www.winconference.net