

A Woman Overcomes a Little Slip That Slowed Her Business Career

Donald W. Mitchell

Ms. Carole Chehab was born into a loving family in Lebanon which pampered her as the eldest child. She was fortunate to be able to attend the finest schools and receive much encouragement at home. With such a sound foundation, it's easy to assume that her life would flow effortlessly forward toward her dream of becoming a lawyer.

Stop for a second, however, and consider where she is from . . . Lebanon. Life has been very hard for the Lebanese. During most of her youth, the country was ravaged by a continuing civil war. Residences that she lived in were even hit with missiles while she was away from home.

When Ms. Chehab graduated from high school, the civil war had recently ended. During the war, the government's baccalaureate exam to decide who could go to a university had been suspended. Ms. Chehab's graduation year was the first year the exam was reinstated. The results shocked many. Poor students passed in some cases while good students failed after being marked down severely for trivial errors. Ms. Chehab was one of the latter, failing to make the passing grade by two points in physics.

Not wishing to waste any time, Ms. Chehab found a school where she could study to become an executive assistant, a far cry from her initial plan to practice law. But we all must move on when a little slip happens that shunts us onto one track instead of another.

Because her school work in learning to be an executive assistant was exceptionally good, Ms. Chehab obtained a position as an administrative officer after graduating. In addition to handling many activities for the company, she developed excellent skills in English, French, and Italian to be able to handle correspondence in those languages. She did well and stayed with the company for eight years.

Deciding that she could handle bigger responsibilities, she applied and was hired to become the assistant to one of Lebanon's most highly regarded CEOs. In that role she handled tasks like ensuring proper implementation of executive decisions, planning and controlling corporate budgets, serving as

project leader in a number of areas, and handling correspondence with the firm's owners and banks.

After performing those duties successfully for five years, Ms. Chehab was ready for a bigger responsibility: Now, she wanted to move into a managerial position with her company. The time had come to earn an MBA. She was happy to find that three universities accepted her as an MBA candidate.

There was a problem. With a busy job that required that she work late, there was no time to attend classes at a Lebanese university. How could she avoid turning that problem into a slip that would cost her another educational and career opportunity?

Ms. Chehab had heard good reports from people who had earned MBA degrees from an online university, Rushmore. After checking out those reports and studying Rushmore, she decided that this school would provide her with the quality, credibility, and good investment she was looking for. She would supplement her MBA studies with seminars in areas where she wanted to build expertise.

Studying online on top of her busy duties at work would be difficult. At the time she started, almost all of her waking hours during the week were devoted to work or commuting.

By writing papers about running her company more successfully, Ms. Chehab developed new skills in applying theoretical knowledge that made her time at work more productive and increased her eagerness to learn more. At work, her accomplishments through these papers earned her recognition, and her responsibilities began to expand.

Because she had been working closely with the CEO, she understood a lot about the company and its markets. She used that understanding to develop powerful strategic insights into new choices for better performance with less risk.

Her world was shaken again, however, when conflict broke out between Israel and Lebanon. Once again, it was dangerous to live in Lebanon. It was difficult to work and her company faced major challenges as business dried up due to war-time conditions. Even if she could find time to work on a

paper, there was no guarantee that she would be able to connect to the Internet to send the paper to a professor.

Would this fighting cause another slip? No! Ms. Chehab was well aware that you have to do your best no matter how difficult life is.

A favorite Zig Ziglar quote inspired her: “You want to soar up where the eagles fly, up there far in the sky, where you can touch the sun with your wings, you want people to know you have the ability and skills that take you to your place up there and appreciate you accordingly . . . No matter what . . . Always remember: It is never your aptitude but your attitude that determines your altitude.”

Despite the difficulties, she battled on and earned her degree in two years. Her company was so pleased with her work and academic progress that she was promoted to being the CEO’s Office Manager and Board Coordinator upon graduating.

What’s in the future for Ms. Chehab? For now, she’s enjoying a little respite from working long hours and studying during her limited spare time.

But there’s possibly a Ph.D. in her future. With her attitude, it’s likely that her career will reach new heights.

Ms. Chehab has demonstrated exceptional talent in solving strategic questions. With her skills, it’s likely she’ll be asked to run a business. When such an opportunity comes, I’m sure she’ll be ready for the challenge.

How can you adjust your attitude and skills so that little slips in the past won’t slow down the progress of your business career?

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