



# Bank Managers

Some women's denial of discrimination against them in the banking sector is striking especially since their number in managerial positions lags behind men. Thus, based on a preliminary investigation to identify women bank managers to be interviewed for Al-Raida, I noticed that some banks did not have any female employees what so ever, and others did not have any female managers compared to yet other banks that had a few women in management. It would seem that managerial positions for women are directly related to individual banking policy as opposed to a general one throughout the country. One specific bank had an explicit policy not to recruit women at any level. The only ones working there are the telephone operator and the receptionist. Why? The manager said that it was intended to protect women from the career-home conflict and to protect the bank from absenteeism and personnel changes caused by marriage or maternity leaves. A couple of other banks insisted on having as many women on the staff because they felt that women are better equipped to deal with customers and are more dedicated in their work. One of these banks even prepared a special room for the children of employees and consequently exercised leniency towards tending to them during working hours. A uniform employment policy for women in the banking sector does not exist. The same seems true of all other economic sectors. What this really means is that there is a free hand for discrimination in the labor market. On one hand, there are no obligatory laws for employing women or no gender quota in the labor force are set. Still on another hand, there are no laws which categorically deny women the right to work. And Lebanon has not yet ratified the

Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Finally I succeeded in gathering enough names to conduct a few interviews.

I called upon three other women in three different banks. The first immediately agreed to sit for an interview, but I was to go to two appointments only to find her in another meeting. I eventually left the questionnaire for her to fill at her convenience but she never did.

The second woman's initial response to my call was that she was not "into these issues", but she agreed to sit for an interview, nevertheless. Nadwa Khatib is Operations Manager. She insisted that gender differences and discrimination are totally absent in all matters regarding pay, promotion and colleague and customer relations. When I asked her her opinion on issues of women's rights she replied: *Women have more rights than men. Women can have jobs or careers and still be in charge of the home, while men do not have that advantage. Women are the only ones who can bear children and still participate in the world of men (work). Men cannot have both.*

The third respondent, Ghada Shujah, a Branch Manager and General Head of Commercial and Foreign Trade Department offered to have the interview over lunch, the only time she could afford in her busy schedule. She acknowledged that there was a definite distinction between men and women in society, but insisted that on the professional level they were irrelevant to the subject matter of her work. *Of course, it took people time to adjust to women being in charge, they*

*would walk into my office and ask me to see the Manager thinking I was the secretary. However, the situation did not cause anybody any harm neither on the personal level nor on the business level.* She insisted on professional skills over and above gender issues. Consequently, she criticized this line of questioning saying that most of the journalistic encounters she has concentrated on her status as a successful woman but none approached her to discuss professional issues and her knowledge of the business.

Her point of emphasis regarding women's achieved status in the banking sector was professional qualifications as well as the extent to which those in charge acknowledge women's skills and allow them a fair share of opportunities. *It is very important that the people you work with and your bosses appreciate your efforts. Recruitment is egalitarian, promotion is fair and women are encouraged to stay on the job even when circumstances like marriage or maternity may otherwise create difficulties. For instance, ours is the first and only bank in Lebanon that has a children's day care room and facility for its employees in every branch in the country (except for the two most recent branches where the day care room is in process).* It exists since 1986. I asked if the women themselves asked for this facility. *No, the bank's administration realized the need for it she replied, in fact it was a man who suggested it.*

In conclusion, the focus of the women approached here was on their role as bankers not as women. Their attitude implied a clear distinction between professionalism and professional women •