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Letter

Believe in yourself, and enjoy the ride

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From the very beginning of my life, I always wanted or have been expected to run for excellence. I do not know whether it was the way I was raised or it was just who I am, but perhaps this was the base that actually shaped my career – my upbringing. Growing up in the Middle East, a part of the world which does not culturally support professional careers for women, I was lucky to have an exceptionally forward-looking father who, despite his strong personal reservations and cultural barriers surrounding him, accepted and, together with my mother, encouraged and helped me to leave home at a young age to pursue my education. My journey began in Great Britain. At first it was lonely and tough but failing or returning home were neither an option for me. It was there that I started learning about myself, about what I love and want from life. I was determined to achieve something, and I believe that determination is a factor in my success today.

Passion is another one, and played a huge role in my growth. After several years of studying and training and facing challenges, I feel that I am now in a position to make a difference. As the head of a center of experimental therapeutics in the Swiss Cancer Center, not only do I manage 130 collaborators in bringing innovative therapies to cancer patients, but I also get to mentor young scientist and clinicians, touch patients' lives (and their families), and contribute to the advance of the field of immunotherapy. I am lucky to have such an opportunity and to work with so many brilliant minds around me.

Passion is not enough though. Like everyone, I face challenges every day, and these include managing people, budgets, projects, politics and balancing my family and my job... It would be easy to use those challenges as excuses. Furthermore, it is also a man's

world at the top (that is a fact), and being a woman by itself has its unique set of challenges. What I learnt during the years is be true to myself, to embrace my feminism (and everything that comes with it) and not to try to become someone I am not [1]. It has been shown that companies with more than three women in managerial roles tend to have better return on equity and assets [2]. Perhaps that alone is enough of a reason to think positively and stay focused. We can do a lot when we focus on our full potential and trust in the people around us instead of focusing on the difficulties or the negative.

I am woman, a wife, a mother, a leader, a doctor, a translational scientist and a competitive tennis player. Balancing is a challenge, but I 'will not be myself if I give any of those up. I choose to maximize every minute of the day and give 100% to everything I do. Every day I face the choice to follow this path and I believe every woman can do the same and be more. Every woman has a choice to make every single day.

Disclosure statement

Prof. Kandalajt has nothing to disclose.

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