

By Lubna Qassim

A lot of girls grow up to believe they are princesses, and others even dream of becoming a Queen one day.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth ascended to the British throne unexpectedly just before her 27th Birthday in 1952. This was at a time when she was adjusting to her newly married life as a wife, and also adapting to motherhood to her toddler, Prince Charles.

She didn't even have time to grieve her father's death. She was tasked to immediately take on her new national role. It was even more daunting for her because as a young mother she was not eager to take on this position, preferring to raise her children. This is a painful dilemma that millions of women around the globe have to go through before returning to work soon after delivery, though clearly without the same scale of dilemma as being the Head of State!

Queen Elizabeth quickly showed that she was intelligent and wise, and began to navigate the political aspects of the job adroitly as she attempted to fill the very big shoes of her late father. Just because she was the Queen we should not presume that men didn't underestimate her or didn't try to push her around. In the 1950s many men saw her as a woman first, the Queen second.

It is worth mentioning her first meeting with Prime Minister Winston Churchill. He seemed to think that due to her young age, she would easily agree to all his wishes and demands. He was reportedly taken aback when she politely but assertively made her own list of requests and let him know that she was aware that his position as Prime Minister was in jeopardy. It was clear that he had underestimated her. But very graciously she set a critical precedent with Churchill, which proved an important learning experience for both.

I have experienced two of the Queen's challenges – namely

being a woman and being young in a demanding career – and can understand the pain and frustration when men can't adapt to something they are not used to.

In my own career as a lawyer, I have had different role models who have inspired me at different stages of my career. It was in December

matters.

Even more remarkable than the Queen's fortitude and dedication to service is her resolute authenticity. She has probably attended 300,000 official events since her appointment, and for all of them she does her homework, which comes in a red box every day except for



2015 when I was invited by the BBC to participate in their BBC100 Global Women Initiative, and was asked to write on a placard who my most admired female role model was. It was then that I realised that it was Queen Elizabeth. Occupying a serious office in a male dominated environment, someone with special values and characteristics had to inspire me. There are many iconic personalities in business and politics to choose from, of course, but for me the Queen sums up leadership in the most perfect way, combining grace, duty and determination.

I have admired her most for her commitment despite the various trials she has had to face during the 66 years she has been in the same job. She is visible proof that it's not what you've got but who you are that

Christmas Day, even now at the age of 92. For all of them she is engaged, engaging and a source of national pride.

It is particularly admirable how she has been able to set boundaries but is still very easy around people. All of us can learn so much from her.

In the UAE Her Ambassador and Consul General both warmly celebrated her (official) birthday recently. For me, rather than a celebration of her 92th birthday, it was a celebration of her life and accomplishments as a Queen, mother, wife and the UK's chief networker who gives Britain access in places no other country could imagine.

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