

THE VOICE OF FEMALE LEADERS

A CONVERSATION WITH SOUAD MASSI



Introduction

Souad Massi is a highly acclaimed artist with an impressive career spanning over 20 years. Born in the 1970s into a modest family in Algiers, she had to leave the country more than 20 years ago when her outspokenness and her singing with a heavy-metal band attracted death threats. Now based in France, she has captivated audiences worldwide with her enchanting voice and unique fusion of musical genres. Souad Massi's songs, driven by a strong belief in freedom and justice, convey messages of love, altruism, and bravery, while also advocating for tolerance and understanding.

With her Algerian roots and international influence, Souad Massi serves as a bridge between cultures, inspiring audiences with her talent and dedication to artistic expression. Her contributions to the music industry have garnered her numerous accolades, including gold discs and prestigious awards. In 2005, she became a United Nations Ambassador for micro-credits, to help women in Africa. In 2017 she was elevated to the rank of "Officier des Arts et des lettres" by the French Ministry of Culture, the country's highest recognition of significant contributions to the arts.

Can you share some insights into your journey and the key factors that have contributed to your success?

Absolutely, my journey as an artist has been shaped by a multitude of experiences and influences that have played a significant role in defining who I am today. Growing up in Algeria, surrounded by a family of musicians, created a nurturing environment for my artistic inclinations. The love for music that permeated our household sparked a passion within me to explore the depths of this art form.

Having musicians like my uncle, two brothers, and parents in my family exposed me to a wide range of musical genres and styles, enriching my understanding of music's expressive power. They instilled in me not only the technical skills but also the emotional essence required to convey a message through music.

When I moved to France, destiny presented me with a pivotal moment when I met an artistic director from a major record label. This encounter proved to be transformative, opening doors that allowed my music to reach a broader audience. It was an opportunity that I seized with unwavering determination.

Throughout my journey, the Algerian culture and rich heritage have also been instrumental in shaping my identity as an artist. Delving into the works of renowned poets like Rumi and exploring the beauty of French and Arabic poetry became a wellspring of inspiration for my songwriting. These cultural influences enriched my music with a blend of diverse elements, creating a unique fusion of sounds and emotions.

“Stay persistent in pursuing your dreams, and remember that success is a journey, not a destination”

During my formative years, I found solace in poetry, which became a sanctuary for my innermost thoughts and emotions. As a shy and reserved individual, I struggled to express myself openly. Poetry allowed me to confide in myself, giving rise to a world of artistic introspection and creativity. This

deeply introspective journey helped me understand the power of songs as a medium to communicate profound emotions and ideas. It was a transformational process that enabled me to transcend my inherent shyness and share my musical expression with the world.

One of my songs, "Hagda Wla Akter", is an embodiment of the ethical dilemmas artists may encounter when touching on personal stories, in this case a story of a tragic, sad reversal of fortune. Through this experience, I grappled with the responsibility of sharing someone else's private life in my art. This introspection and ethical awareness have made me more sensitive to the stories I choose to tell through my music, ensuring that I respect the boundaries of others' personal experiences.

How do you define leadership, and what qualities do you believe are essential for effective leadership in any industry?

For me, leadership is not merely about authority or power over others. Instead, it is the ability to earn respect, inspire, and empower those around you. Drawing from my personal experiences, I believe leadership is rooted in authenticity, sincerity, and the courage to listen to oneself and others.

Authenticity is the foundation of leadership. Being true to oneself and staying grounded in one's values and principles creates trust and fosters a genuine connection with others. Leaders must have the courage to be themselves and lead by example.

Sincerity is equally essential in leadership. When one genuinely cares for their team and their well-being, it fosters a sense of camaraderie and loyalty. This sincerity in building relationships, combined with empathy, forms a strong bond among team members, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment.

The courage to listen to oneself and embrace fear is another hallmark of effective leadership. Fear, rather than being a deterrent, should be seen as a driving force to understand oneself better and empathize with others' struggles.

Leaders who embrace their vulnerabilities and fears create an open and compassionate space for their team to grow and excel.

“To be a leader, you have to trust your intuition and you have to take risks”

In any industry, these qualities of authenticity, sincerity, and courage to listen and empathize are essential for leaders to inspire and empower their teams to achieve remarkable success.

Can you share a specific challenge or setback you encountered in your career? How did you navigate through it, and what lessons did you learn that can be applicable to other leaders?

Throughout my career, I have faced challenges and setbacks that have tested my resolve and determination. One of the most critical lessons I learned from these experiences is the significance of staying true to oneself and maintaining the conviction in one's message.

In an ever-evolving music industry, staying authentic and true to my artistic expression was not always met with immediate acceptance. However, I remained steadfast and continued to deliver my message through my music. This unwavering commitment to my artistic integrity resonated with my audience, creating a deep connection and loyalty.

Navigating through difficulties, I also discovered the power of embracing negative moments as opportunities for growth and self-discovery. When faced with a period without a record company, I found myself at a crossroads. Instead of allowing this to discourage me, I used this time as an opportunity to explore new creative avenues and rediscover my artistic voice.

In essence, the key lesson for leaders facing challenges is to remain authentic, steadfast, and open to embracing adversities as catalysts for personal and professional growth.

How do you maintain resilience and drive during challenging times, and what strategies have helped you overcome obstacles?

Resilience and determination are essential qualities for any artist, especially during challenging times. To maintain resilience, I have adopted various strategies that help me stay grounded and focused.

One of the most effective techniques is meditation, which enables me to find inner peace and clarity amidst chaos. Meditation allows me to reflect on my experiences, past and present, and draw strength from them to navigate through challenges.

Sometimes I like to sit quietly in places of worship. This helps me connect with my spirituality, providing a sense of purpose and meaning during difficult times.

Additionally, fostering a strong connection with my audience has been instrumental in maintaining my drive. Understanding their experiences and empathizing with their joys and struggles fuels my desire to create music that resonates with them deeply.

Engaging in conversations and interactions with my fans after concerts further reinforces the bond I share with them. These interactions offer valuable insights into their needs and desires, inspiring me to improve and connect with them on a more profound level.

Overall, the combination of meditation, spirituality and genuine audience engagement helps me stay resilient, focused, and driven, even during the most challenging times.

What initiatives or strategies do you implement to promote diversity and inclusion within your work?

Promoting diversity and inclusion is a cause close to my heart, and I believe in using my platform to contribute positively to society. While my primary focus is music, I actively engage in initiatives that empower underrepresented groups, especially women, both within and outside the music industry.

In my artistic life, I strive to foster a diverse and inclusive environment that welcomes individuals from different backgrounds and perspectives. I create opportunities for talented artists and professionals, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or cultural background, leading to a fusion of sounds and ideas that celebrate the richness of global musical heritage. Through these collaborations, I aim to break down cultural barriers and showcase the power of music to connect people from all walks of life.

“Leadership is about a choice: Intimidation or Inspiration”

I also collaborate with organizations and movements that advocate for gender equality and women's rights. By participating in benefit concerts and charity events, I raise awareness and provide support to women facing various challenges.

One of my initiatives involves offering mentorship programs for aspiring female artists. I firmly believe in empowering the next generation of musicians and sharing the knowledge and experiences that have shaped my career. These mentorship programs not only provide guidance on the artistic aspects but also focus on the challenges women may encounter in the music industry, helping them navigate and succeed.

Furthermore, I use my music to raise awareness about social issues and advocate for change. By addressing topics such as gender equality, social justice, and human rights, I hope to inspire listeners to become more empathetic and actively contribute to a more inclusive world.

In conclusion, I believe that promoting diversity and inclusion is not just a responsibility but a privilege. As an artist, it is my duty to use my platform to amplify voices that are

often unheard and to champion the power of diversity in enriching our lives and societies.

As a successful artist and leader, what advice would you give to aspiring musicians and young leaders aiming to make a positive impact in their respective fields?

Embrace your authentic self and remain true to your artistic vision or leadership style. Your uniqueness is your strength, and it will set you apart from others in a crowded industry or competitive field.

Challenges and failures are an inevitable part of any journey. Instead of fearing them, see them as opportunities for growth and learning. Embrace adversity, and it will propel you forward.

In the face of obstacles, maintain your resilience. Trust in your abilities, and believe in your capacity to overcome difficulties. This unwavering determination will fuel your drive and passion, even during the most trying times.

Seek the company of like-minded individuals who encourage and inspire you. Having a strong support system will help you navigate challenges and celebrate successes together.

Success rarely happens overnight. Be patient with yourself and your progress. Stay persistent in pursuing your dreams, and remember that success is a journey, not a destination.

Always stay connected to the essence of why you chose this path. Whether it's the impact you want to make through your music or the change you wish to bring as a leader, your purpose will guide you through the highs and lows.

“Your uniqueness is your strength, and it will set you apart from others in a crowded industry or competitive field”

Reflections

In our thought-provoking exchange with Souad Massi, her profound insights carry relevance for business leaders seeking to excel in their respective fields. As we delved into the topic of success, Souad shared a nuanced perspective that goes beyond mere performance and recognition. She reminded us that true success lies not only in the limelight but also in the ability to connect with people and experiences on a deeper level.

One of the notable takeaways from our conversation was Souad's recognition of the inherent solitude that often accompanies leadership positions. Despite being surrounded by a support network of family, friends, and fans, Souad expressed a sense of personal solitude that serves as the cornerstone of her artistry. This resonates with the experiences of many business leaders who, despite their outward success, often grapple with the challenges and complexities of decision-making and responsibility.

Souad's ability to delve into themes of conflict, introspection, and the search for meaning in her music holds valuable lessons for leaders in the business world. Just as she seeks inspiration and creativity in exploring the depths of human emotion, business leaders can embrace moments of solitude to gain clarity, reflect on their values, and navigate the complexities of their roles.

Furthermore, Souad's emphasis on posing thought-provoking questions rather than providing easy answers reminds us of the importance of critical thinking and continuous learning in leadership. By embracing uncertainty and seeking meaningful solutions, leaders can foster a culture of innovation, resilience, and adaptability within their organizations.

In conclusion, our interview with Souad Massi highlighted the profound connections between art, leadership, and personal growth. Her experiences and perspectives underscore the significance of authenticity, introspection, and embracing solitude as catalysts for personal and professional development. By incorporating these insights into their leadership journeys, leaders can navigate the challenges of their roles with greater empathy, creativity, and purpose.

Souad Massi was interviewed by Hagen Schweinitz, Global Board and Governance Advisory Practice Leader, in Paris.



Our Board and Governance Advisory Practice is a highly specialized and discreet group of seasoned consultants. We work with a diverse portfolio of clients, including publicly listed companies, family-controlled businesses (where we often collaborate directly with the family council), and private equity firms seeking our support for their portfolio companies.

We evaluate the effectiveness of existing boards and assist in the development of high-performing boards. We provide guidance to our clients in attracting and selecting individual board members who align with their strategic goals and values. Additionally, we offer comprehensive support to companies in navigating the complexities associated with CEO and C-Suite succession planning.

By leveraging our extensive expertise and experience, we enable organizations to enhance their governance structures, improve decision-making processes, and ensure the long-term success and sustainability of their leadership teams.