

Tough negotiator in a risky industry

Daisy Krøngaard has built a global trading company from the ground up. Part of the recipe is not thinking like a man.

BY MALENE SEVERINSEN

Five-year-old Daisy Krøngaard is sitting at the kitchen table on her farm in Haderslev. Her father is talking about interests, something that has to be paid. But he seems to have got it wrong.

“Dad, interest is something you get,” says the young lady.

The stiletto heels slam down and send sound waves across the parking lot. With determined steps at a pace that instils respect in people who know about high heels, Daisy Krøngaard heads for the four-wheel BMW drive.

From the address in Nørresundby, she runs dairy product deals worth millions to all over the world and DK Milk A/S has secured her a place in Børsen’s Gazelles newspaper of 2009.

CEO Daisy Krøngaard is probably the only woman in the world who can put her capacity as CEO and majority shareholder of a global dairy business trading company on her business card. And she has built it by herself – all the way from scratch.

And it draws the attention of a lot of the business markets, such as North Africa and the Middle East.

“80% her work, 10% timing, 10% luck and stern cost control.”

The CEO juggles coffee and documents before she takes her seat in the meeting room. Well prepared. I haven’t asked the first question yet, but the explanation to Daisy Krøngaard’s latest success has already been given.

“And I wouldn’t dream of buying anything that I can’t sell for more at a later stage,” she adds laughing. She has turned 40 she says, and then we will not talk about age anymore. But what is good leadership to the CEO?

Every person is unique

“Leadership is exciting and every person is unique. Trading business need people who can think by themselves all the way from A to Z, also in stressful situation. I am rather demanding I think, as we all know that women generally are. And that means that my employees are positively challenged. But good leadership is ultimately when people reach a higher level than they thought they could reach. But that rarely happens without some initial resistance. Good coaching is also to getting people to fight more and better. For example, a no from a potential customer is not good enough. Affecting people and bringing out more fighter instinct, watching them grow with the task.”

What has surprised you the most about being a woman in this position?

“That it is expected of women to always be polite and smiling. It is more acceptable for a man to be tough, not to smile and at times be a “stupid pig”.”

Where do you get your leadership inspiration?

“From my business network of 20 years. Lately I have become very close with architects and designers. That’s a totally different platform. And from my travels. I travel up to 120 days per year and I meet a lot of exciting people. The more open you are, the more you get in return. And it is my belief that women are more attentive than men in general. They pick up on more signals around them. Some men still have trouble maintaining their façade, not losing face. Women are perhaps not so afraid of being seen through or of being more open and seeking,” Daisy Krongaard says.

Fighting authorities

The adventure is a major motivator for the CEO who very seldom gets scared – neither when she is travelling in South Africa on her own amongst corrupted customers and authorities, or when bombs go off during a business trip to Algeria, or when millions fly through the room during a negotiation. About ten years ago, she went to South Africa on her own to fight the African authorities to get 200 tons of confiscated milk powder out of the country again. The DKK 1.8 million worth products were returned.

Daisy Krongaard knows that she is different from all the other men in business suits and uses it to her advantage.

“The first ten years was a “party” in a male dominated world. And I enjoyed the attention I got because I was a woman. In the last ten years, I have seen through the men and I miss having more women on the scene. When a man says he will buy 500 tons, in reality he’s only buying about 200 tons,” she says.