

Nurul revels in new role

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IT has been only four months since Nurul A'in Abdul Latif became PwC Malaysia executive chair but she seems to have taken to it like a duck to water.

The global professional services company is after all the only firm she's been at since graduating with a degree in Accounting from the University of Malaya.

To be sure, the "lifer" experience does not appear to have kept Nurul within the confines of any comfort zone.

"What was most daunting when I accepted the appointment as PwC Malaysia's executive chair was not only the weight of filling the shoes of past executive chairs, but also the responsibility of setting an example for others," she tells Star Biz7.

"Being the face of the firm and representing PwC at all times in various capacities, is an expectation of this role, which I do not take lightly."

Like most corporate people, the 52-year-old mother of four starts her

day bright and early, typically at 6.30am.

A jog is first on the list, but only if her schedule permits.

"Since my appointment, my role has become more focused on connecting and building relationships. I still maintain a client portfolio but I have fewer clients these days.

"I still have as many meetings, but with a wider range of stakeholders. The role has become more of a brand builder and market strategist, if I can put it that way, and growing strong relationships are my new bread and butter."

Similar to most who hold leadership positions, one of the issues close to her heart is creating an impact which extends beyond normal business outcomes.

"As a leader, I think it's important to consider how the work we do has purpose. PwC's purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems.

"That doesn't mean we only solve our clients' problems. For example, rapid digitalisation is an issue for businesses and communities - progress can be uneven if we don't look at the issue holistically, for resources to be

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■ PwC new exec chair says has responsibility of setting an example

■ There is a talent crunch within today's accounting profession

■ A future-ready workforce is essential

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channelled effectively to the right groups in society."

Talent crunch, ever-evolving skills

Nurul believes one of the most pressing issues within the accounting profession today is talent crunch.

"As employers, the prospects of a talent crunch are real at any time, but more so today."

She notes being good at what you do and having the right technical expertise or even experience can "only get you so far".

"As priorities and market conditions change quickly, what is more important now is, soft skills, especially as one progresses in their career.

"The next generation of accountants will need to be confident in interacting with clients and providing them the assurance and innovative solutions they need in an environment of constant volatility."

The skills needed to excel in the workplace are ever-evolving, she adds.

"As industries adapt to technological advancements and grapple with global challenges, it is essential for both corporate Malaysia and the government to allocate resources towards programmes that ensure a future-ready workforce."

In this regard, she says corporates hold a unique advantage as they possess the ability to identify and foresee emerging, high-demand technologies and skills.

"Private enterprises also have the power to facilitate the creation of job opportunities for such skills, and contribute to the development of affordable learning platforms that cater to the wider workforce."

She recalls, one to two years ago, "The Great Resignation" was at its peak. And while this situation has stabilised, she reckons the "war for talent" has taken on a different form.

"Accountants, both skilled and fresh graduates, are in high demand, but are they able to keep up with the

pace of change in technology and other emerging issues?"

Nurul says during the course of her work, she has had the privilege of meeting many business leaders who have taught her valuable lessons that she has tried to replicate.

"The first lesson is being laser-focused on trust. The best leaders I've met have keenly understood how tightly linked trust is with corporate performance, and work to build this with their employees, customers and other stakeholders."

In this regard, they share information openly and encourage feedback from people while being aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

They are also not afraid to own up when they've made a mistake because leaders make mistakes too, she adds.

"The second is agility and staying ahead of events as they unfold. Things change quickly, so when new technologies emerge, or when crises lead to new ways of working, I find that leaders who embrace change are quicker to find opportunities in new markets.

"The third is having purpose and being able to communicate that to their people."

When it comes to her own leadership style, Nurul reckons she leads with genuine care and empathy.

"It is also a key aspect of PwC's global and inclusive principle to understand and value diverse perspectives.

"Take a walk around our office and you won't see employees shying away from saying hi, we're constantly engaging with our people to understand their needs."

Whenever possible, Nurul likes to go for jogs and hikes.

"I see the impact physical activity and being outdoors have on my mood and mental clarity.

"I also try to travel when I can. This is no small feat as my family now has competing work, university and school schedules... getting everybody together at the same time is becoming rocket science."

