

Newsletter write-up – June 2021

President's address:

The lockdown and its aftermath....

The second lockdown has had its toll on us and on our businesses! Many have been stuck very hard, some will emerge again, and others will sink; this is unfortunately the duality of life and of entrepreneurship. But let's not forget that the end always spearheads the new: the beginning of a new cycle...

Now that we're out of the lockdown, it's time to look at the future and start building afresh. Our new reality, or should I say our new normal, calls for different ways of doing things... And as we step into this uncertain future, it's time to reflect on where we want to go, and how we want to reach there. Strategic planning has never been more meaningful; and before taking impactful decisions and steps, let's really understand – and master – where we actually are, by understanding the dynamics of this new NOW. So let's SWOT – our businesses and ourselves – before making our strategic choices to build our future.

At AMFCE-level, we've tried to keep it very light during the confinement with our lockdown series for members. But as we were surfing through the high Covid-tide, we've also been boosting up openings: AMFCE is proud to have secured its first collaboration with the US-Embassy to launch the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) and drive the first cohort of participants in "The Start-Up Challenge", a one-year program aimed at handholding women start-ups to successfully take the leap.

The debut of AWE is coinciding with the near-to completion of the first batch of "Business-Without-Borders" (BWB), and AMFCE seems to be heading towards a success rate of about 80% on this initiative.

AWE and BWB, our flagship projects for 2020-2021, both feed into each other, enabling AMFCE to close the loop in its endeavor to support entrepreneurs: AWE handholds start-ups and BWB mentors existing entrepreneurs, whilst both simultaneously build-up capacity. And through them, AMFCE walks-the-talk and is developing the required framework and eco-system to support women entrepreneurs from the initial stages of creation of the business to the sustenance of their business activity overtime.

Beyond furthering AMFCE's mission, it's also high time now to roll our sleeves and come up with new solutions to help our members. Watch out therefore for our AMFCE Promos... AMFCE will be providing a social media platform to advertise members' products and increase visibility of their businesses. And this will be our

small contribution to add value and boost up our members' businesses in these uncertain times...

Alone we are invisible, together we are invincible...

Rima Ramsaran

President 2020 - 2021

AMFCE Projects update:

AWE:

The Academy for Women Entrepreneurs (AWE) was established in 2019 and expanded to Mauritius in 2021. AWE provides women entrepreneurs with the skills, resources, and networks needed to start and scale successful businesses. The US-Embassy collaborates with country partners in this initiative and it is in this context that AMFCE fits in....

AMFCE has laid the foundation stone with the US-Embassy in Mauritius, for the launching of the AWE and leading the first batch of participants. AWE is centered around the online training program, DreamBuilder, developed by the Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management; AMFCE brings in local expertise to contextualize the US-based modules for the Mauritian requirements, with special relevance to the local legal and institutional framework, and to handhold the participants through their journey.

Therefore, not only is AWE helping us promote the spirit and culture of entrepreneurship, but the collaboration with the US-Embassy is also enabling us to create and develop a sustainable eco-system that will only serve the fundamental mission we've embarked upon, which is to accompany and support women in their entrepreneurial journey.

BWB:

Launched in September 2020 after 8 months of intensive groundwork, the BWB program has been instrumental in building resilience of women entrepreneurs in the Indian Ocean amidst the Covid-pandemic. 7 modules have been prepared by local and Australian trainers, all specialists in their respective areas, and made available on-line, on a carefully selected digital platform: Talent Learning Management System. 50 Mentees across Mauritius and the Indian Ocean have followed the modules on-line, at their own pace. Dedicated local and international mentors, with proven capacity to identify entrepreneurial weaknesses and assist mentees in overcoming the constraints through real-life entrepreneurial experience, have been guiding them throughout and helping them apply the learning materials in their respective enterprises.

As we reach the end of the 1st cohort of BWB, and start preparing for the graduation, we can only contemplate on the learning experience from BWB, the success stories we've encountered, the downfall of some and their struggle to uplift themselves, the

network we've built with the diversity of mentors across the world, the awareness of the difficulties of being women entrepreneurs in small islands states, to name a few.... But all the hard work pays as we close the program with a sense of achievement and fulfillment that is unprecedented.

AMFCE-EVENTS

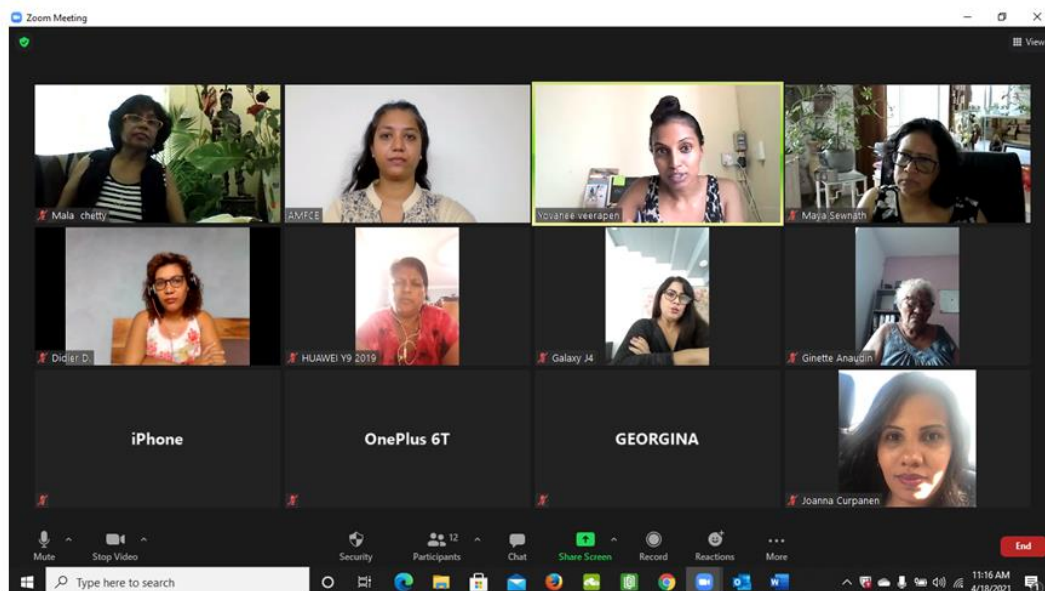
Stepping out of the lockdown 2.0, some invigorated and ready to resume the work routine and others, with more apprehension, AMFCE emerges stronger after a light 3-months of trying to keep members entertained, yet informed.

With the collaboration of the MCCI, AMFCE has been instrumental in assisting its members to get their WAPs. Simultaneously, AMFCE organized its Sunday lockdown series, on zoom, on subjects of varied interests:

18th APRIL: Confinement - Healthy Lifestyle Guideline.

Our first zoom event was presented by Dietician and Nutrition Consultant- Yovani VEERAPEN.

Being stuck at home has an inevitable incidence on our lifestyle and daily diet. Whilst idleness can often be equated with food cravings for the whole family, Yovani stressed on the importance of maintaining a well-balanced diet supplemented with a good dose of activities such as sports, reading, painting, family games etc... And we couldn't but agree with her tips and advices as she raised awareness on the balancing process, especially during these complex times!



25th April - Mindfulness for Entrepreneurs

As a follow-up on our session on “Developing Mindfulness to achieve Excellence in Entrepreneurship” in January by Past President Vimi Appadoo of Dale Carnegie, a special zoom session on **Mindfulness for Entrepreneurs** was organized during the lockdown.

“Mindfulness is one way that many entrepreneurs choose to combat the toll wrought by round-the-clock emails, long working hours and other aspects of our accelerated business culture,” says Virgin founder Richard Branson.



As an entrepreneur, your life is often riddled with stress, anxiety and lack of sleep. While a never-ending, fast-paced environment is often what leads an entrepreneur to success, over time, this very thing is what can cause you to burn out.

Everyone these days seem to be putting their own spin on the practice in the workplace, the classroom and at home. However, no matter how much we read about it, talk about it or study it, **putting mindfulness into practice can be challenging, especially when first starting out.**

Sradha is a Certified Coach in Mindfulness Yoga. She is also a Couple & Family Counsellor. She has completed both her trainings in USA and is currently a lecturer at UTM.

Her expertise in Mindfulness comes from years of rigorous personal practice, following participation in dozens of silent 10-20 days' retreats under renowned teachers.

16th May Event – Live cooking show with Kobashini Pillay

Our May event has been a delight to everyone. We were indeed lucky to have our national Master Chef online for a live cooking, of the famous Indo-Chinese dish: The Chicken Manchurian.

The list of ingredients was sent to members and under the guidance of Kobashni, the daring ones gave it a try. Hereunder, maybe the most appealing picture of the Chicken Manchurian prepared by one of our members....



AMFCE Success-story

Maya...

Maya Seewnath has been an active member of AMFCE for several years and an Executive member of AMFCE since 2019. She has recently been elected as the President of the SME-Chambers. This Newsletter pays tribute to a charismatic lady, who has paved her way upwards, against all odds...

As soon as we start interacting with Maya, there are 2 things that strikes: First, she is a born fighter; she is confident and masters each step she takes, whether it is in her career or personal front. And second is the bond that she shares with her partner; just one look at them and you know these two are two love-birds.... So, lets get to know Maya better through this small interview, relating her career, achievements and successes...

Maya, you are today at the head of SSS Furniture, how and when did you decide to set up your business?

I was really passionate about wooden furniture-making from a very young age. It happened that I got a job at TFP where incidentally, I met my better-half. After getting married, we got an opportunity to take over a company specializing in solid-base furniture, which was going into bankruptcy. And we went for it!

What was the main drive towards acquiring a business and moving into entrepreneurship?

Initially, the idea of entrepreneurship was to provide us with financial stability; we were a simple middle class family with three children to support. However with the company came our motivation to learn, grow, and gradually acquire business acumen, knowledge and experience. I grew with - and as much as - the company as it pushed me to living my passion to the fullest, whilst at the same time, make a better life for the children and the family.

As I developed the required skills and talents to drive my passion - and my business - to greater heights, I took on the challenge of completing tertiary education in business management. Sales and negotiation quickly became my major strength, and I soon started getting media attention through SME Associations

What makes SSS Furniture unique?

Undoubtedly, it's the personalized attention that we give to our customers but also the passion, love and the bonding that my husband and I share for the business. Even our household conversations revolve around the business, the improvements we can bring and solutions we can find to daily challenges.

You have recently moved into a new location, with a better and extended set-up. What made you take this bold step? And how are you faring amidst the Covid pandemic in your new business environment?

It is probably all due to luck. I saw an opportunity, which I seized. I must also admit that the new location is much closer to my place of residence and this was a major motivating factor.

In the context of the Covid, I'd like to share that the larger set-up has allowed my husband, myself and my son (who has joined us in the business) to spend the confinement in March in our office itself. We had practically shifted residence to our office. This happened in the unfortunate circumstances of finding our place of work stuck in the red zone. Commuting to and fro would have been very complicated and drastic situations demanded drastic measures. This would not have been possible in our previous, smaller office.

What have been your major challenges as a woman and business owner?

My major challenge, as a women entrepreneur, has been to share my time between my business, my family, my social commitments and myself. But I believe this is a challenge that most women face, whatever be their line of activity.

As for me, when I look back sometimes, I feel that I have not been able to give as much time to my children as I wanted; I did not see them grow. Worse, my social life has also been very much neglected. All my focus was on constant learning and improving my business.

Not to mention the potential for conflicts when husband and wife are business partners in addition to being married. Sometimes arguments degenerate and it is very delicate to keep things afloat. But I believe that if the foundation is strong, the couple can make it, despite the odds. I'm still married, with the same dotting husband, a flourishing business, and wonderful children.

Do you believe in helping the community?

Of course, as you gradually move up the ladder in society, people come to you for help. But we have to choose our battles and our involvements. As for me, I have always been involved in various non-remunerating

responsibilities, for example the PTA in my children's schools, most of the time as president. This allowed me to keep in touch with my children's progress at school, and at the same time, affirm myself as a woman.

I must say that my husband is also very engaged. We've always been involved in community life within our area, especially for religious festivities, temples events amongst others. For instance, my husband has previously been the president of the community centre where we lived.

Have you ever turned down a client?

Just like any other entrepreneur, I have. Normally we assist customers to the best of our ability, but sometimes customers are too demanding, especially when they ask for both heavy discount and very high quality product. I believe it is better to turn them down at the very beginning, than take the risk of disappointing customers.

What do you attribute your success to? And what did you learn from failures?

I've reached where I am today because of my passion, my commitment and also because I never take no for an answer. On top of that, the love and support I've received from my husband has been invaluable.

Some difficulties I've experienced as an entrepreneur and the lessons I've learnt:

- Trusting people blindly
- Over-delegation – you must know your business and not be so much dependent on your staff
- Lack of control on the production-line: a proper control strategy is important to avoid theft and mismanagement and increase discipline.
- Lack of adequate knowledge in accounting and company laws – only constant learning and networking can help you take good decisions.
- Mismanagement in Human Resource – it's vital to have a strong HR-system and structure
- Keeping a capital reserve in case of financial crisis – It is very important to keep at least 5% of your income every year as capital reserve

What challenges Covid has brought to you?

Instead of challenges, I'd rather talk of the positive impact of Covid for me: It has given me the opportunity to enjoy my time, to relax, to be with my family; I'm grateful to have had the time with my kids, to share small nothings but at the same time, so meaningful...

Business-wise, after very long, I've taken the time to organize and file my papers. It seems basic, but long overdue... More importantly however, I've learnt to control waste and spillage in my organization.

You are now the president of the SME-Chambers, please tell us more about your involvement and especially, how you've reached there

Well I have always stood up for the cause of SME throughout my entrepreneurial career. I have forged my leadership personality and knowledge in the field of entrepreneurship, and gained a lot of experience through my involvements in SME-development. Gradually, my work has not only been recognized, but the team has started voicing out that I can contribute more by being President. And now, I want to do my best to live up to their expectations...

As SMEs are a major economic pillar, it is imperative that we voice out their importance for wealth and job creation, and that tools be devised to make them more resilient to outside challenges.

With so many hats, do you ever think about retirement?

Of course, I do. And I know it will not be easy for me. But now that my eldest son is interested to take over the business, I am preparing the succession plan. I will be the mentor and eventually leave the business to him when he is ready for it.

If you had one piece of advice to someone just starting out, what would it be?

I have several pieces of advice:

- Be ready to take decision, risk and challenge.
- Be passionate, committed, continue learning, having network, take failures positively as a learning process.
- Develop your leadership potential, negotiating skills, knowledge of financial and law, and most of all, your PR.
- Enjoy each step of your life and move forward.

Upcoming events / activities:

Save-the-date:

- **Our AGM / SGM** in July 2021, followed by our networking dinner. Brace yourself for a small surprise during the event...
- **Induction of new members and of the new Executive team** in August 2021: long overdue, the Induction of new members will be open to all as a refresher...
- **Launching of AWE** in September 2021, setting the foundation stone of a year-long project for AMFCE, and for which, we will need the maximum contribution of members
- **Graduation of BWB – Batch 1** – August / September 2021, to celebrate the achievement of an important milestone for AMFCE
- **68th FCEM World Congress** – 3rd to 5th November 2021 in Turkey.

Watch-out-for:

- Our AMFCE promos in an attempt to boost our members, their businesses and their products on-line...

Keep the faith!

The Covid-19 pandemic has significantly affected our businesses but as soldiers we shall rise up stronger.

As Richard Branson says “If somebody offers you a new opportunity, but you are not sure you can do it, say YES, then learn how to do it later”. It was with that comment that he marked history in July as he successfully rocketed to outer space on board of his Virgin Galactic towards a new business - Space Tourism! So let’s follow on his footsteps, keep the faith, dare, and the sky will be the limit!



Alone we are invisible, together we are invincible...