

VALENTINA KISLAYA

THE CLUB: ONE YEAR LATER

It's been a year since Valentina Kislaya, Founder and CEO of Phoenix Leaders, decided to set up The Club as a place where members of the business community can go 'for intellectual stimulation, discretion and relaxation in equal measure'. Twelve months on, she is more than happy with the results of her hard work and persistence.

BY PAN GHARALAMBOUS

Phoenix Leaders opened The Club in Nicosia in 2018. What was behind the decision?

Having spent over 5 years living and working in Cyprus, I was very much aware of the geographical divisions within the business community. Living in Nicosia, I had little interaction with the other major commercial centres such as Paphos and Limassol and I knew I couldn't be the only one. The more I spoke to friends and colleagues, the more I realised that there were no real centres for the community to congregate in and engage with each other on the key issues facing the island. So, to cut a very long story short, I decided to design a space which was completely neutral and apolitical – a space which promoted discussion and constructive discourse for the benefit of the community as a whole.

How has the first year been?

It's hard to believe that we have been open for over a year now and I am both proud and delighted by how quickly our concept – which was previously completely unheard of in Cyprus – has been adopted. Our membership base is flourishing and it has been a joy getting to know our members and understand their vision for their businesses and the Cypriot business community. In fact, there really is an excellent cross-section of representatives from all the different sectors and it's

refreshing to see such an appetite for cohesion and collaboration across all areas of the business world. Of course, none of this would have been possible if it hadn't been for my team here on the ground in Cyprus and our incredibly supportive network of suppliers who understood our vision and have worked with us to make it a reality. This has been key to getting past the first year post.

What services are provided by Phoenix Leaders? What are the benefits of being a member?

When I set out on this journey, I envisaged The Club as a place that the Cypriot business community could call home – by this I mean a place where Members can come for intellectual stimulation, discretion and relaxation in equal measure. The Club has been designed to allow for a modern style of professional engagement and we are constantly working with our Members to ensure that we support their own requirements. Through our carefully curated programme of events, they are able to interact with world-class speakers and network with like-minded individuals who have the same vision for Cyprus. But equally, they are also able

to use The Club's facilities and our superb catering team to host their own events, be they dinner parties or seminars. We have created a really fantastic venue and I love seeing it being used in so many different and creative ways!

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How does someone become a member of The Club? The Club is open to anyone who shares our vision for the Cypriot business community and is committed to encouraging dialogue within the community. One of the real delights for me has been getting to know our Members and the challenges facing them in their businesses and wider sectors. Cyprus is such an exciting place to be at the moment and there are so many people working hard to bring it in line with other major European investment destinations.

What makes The Club different from other meeting venues? Why should businesses choose it? Its location against the backdrop of the scenic Presidential Park certainly makes it unique but, more importantly, it is the environment within The Club. From its inception, we wanted to create a space which supports every working style – be that around a meeting table or via a video call from a laptop. As The Club hosts events throughout the year, from panel discussions to private dinners to board meetings, our fully air-conditioned meeting rooms can be set up in a variety of layouts and are all equipped with advanced video-conferencing and presentation facilities. High-speed Internet access is available throughout The Club and Members are free to use iPads and wireless printing services, enabling them to work wherever they feel most comfortable and inspired!

How do you find entrepreneurship in Cyprus? As a Mentor for Bank of Cyprus' IDEA programme, I have had the opportunity to work directly with a group of people who are right at the beginning of their journey as entrepreneurs. It has been an eye-opening experience and one which has shown me the difference that mentorship programmes can really make. I would love to see more members of the community sharing their own experiences, expertise and networks to really help create an effective entrepreneurship platform here in Cyprus.

How do you maintain a good balance between work and family? When I started Phoenix Leaders, I was determined that my company would be one which respected its employees

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and that meant acknowledging that they have lives outside of work. I firmly believe that if you provide your employees (and yourself!) with the right amount of flexibility to manage personal commitments, they will come to work with greater peace of mind and lower stress levels and, consequently, be able to perform to the best of their ability at work.

How often do you visit the island? Where and how do you spend the rest of your time? I work from Cyprus at least one week in each month. With a company based here, it is important for me to be with my team on the ground as much as possible so that I can really understand their challenges and know how to drive the company forward. It also helps having such a fantastic office to base myself from when I come to Nicosia!

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement? I am really proud of how far we have come in only a year. I know that, when we started out, there were a number of people questioning what we were doing and why we were doing it – which was only to be expected, given that it was a new concept in the market – and, needless to say, some of them were probably doubting whether we would last a year. And yet, here we are one year later with a fantastic membership base and clients and an ever-expanding team. Exciting times lie ahead, and I cannot wait to see what the next year brings!

