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Extending a steady hand to businesses wanting to make a difference

---- by Grace Segran, Istanbul ----

Ever played Mikado or ‘pick-up-sticks’? It’s a game that requires skill, strategic planning and a steady hand. **Serra Titiz** decided to call her company 'Mikado' because it's an unusual name in Turkey, but mostly because that's what her company is there for: to provide skills and strategy and go give a steady hand to businesses which want to make an impact in society.

"We assist businesses in responding to the growing global need for corporate responsibility and effective engagement in the community," she told INSEAD Knowledge.

As corporate responsibility is a fairly new concept in Turkey, Mikado is helping the private sector to understand what it means to become responsible corporate citizens. “We show them how to become more sensitive to the needs of the environment,” Titiz says, “to understand their role as an employer and to see social needs beyond Turkey.”

Mikado develops programmes for companies which are compatible with their mission statements, activity areas and target groups. “These programmes are sustainable, measureable and create social impact. Besides strategic consulting, we equip them through corporate training and CSR (corporate social responsibility) reporting,” says Titiz.



Serra Titiz

Gaining experience in social entrepreneurship

After obtaining a degree in sociology and a Master’s in business studies, Titiz worked for four years in her family’s textile business as CEO. She then left to pursue her passion in social entrepreneurship by working with NGOs (non-governmental organisations), gaining experience in fund raising, developing local projects, and understanding the CSR concept. It was there she discovered her own entrepreneurial potential.

In 2006, she was selected as a participant for the International Leadership Programme on “NGOs and Civic Activism” supported by the US State Department, a programme which trained and invested in promising future leaders. With 17 other NGO leaders from all over the world, she spent a month in the US visiting the country’s 40 largest NGOs and leaders. During the programme, the concept of Mikado took root.

Titiz’s big break came just as she was about to set up Mikado. “The biggest conglomerate in Turkey, Koç Holding, accepted our CSR proposal and gave us the impetus we needed to launch the company,” she recalls.



Mikado also supports NGOs by helping them to integrate sustainability into their business strategies. They advise these organisations on issues of governance and help them set up efficient administrative and operational systems, volunteer and resources management, project development, programme building, as well as monitoring and evaluation.



A mentoring platform

Another focus is its own social entrepreneurship projects, the most important being the GDN (Gelecek Daha Net which means the 'Future is Brighter') project where university students get career guidance from mentors in chat room sessions set up by Mikado. The sessions are recorded and the recordings are made available to both parties afterwards. Titiz believes it's the first of its kind in Turkey.

[GDN](#) is an online platform that provides learning tools such as videos on how entrepreneurs and leaders achieved success, as well as e-mentoring.

According to Titiz, students in Turkey, especially those who live away from big cities, do not have practical information about professions – for example, many do not understand the role of human resources, the career options available, or know how to pursue their chosen career.

“With the availability of a mentor, they get to hear about real life experiences and do not feel so lonely in this important phase of their lives. The tool, in turn, provides professionals and opinion leaders with a proper communication channel to share their knowledge and an opportunity to contribute to society.”

Gokhan Engin (MBA Dec '07), a channel development and innovation manager with Citibank Turkey is a volunteer with GDN and has 'e-mentored' three students, spending at least an hour with each of them per session.

During the session, he gives them tips on self-development, and shares with them important aspects about his industry, what to expect and how to behave, and gives advice about potential graduate programmes and on personal relationships at the workplace. “I also share personal experiences about professional life and self motivation. I try to give as much input as I can so that they can make an informed decision. I believe hard facts about work and soft facts about personal experiences complement each other.”

With a busy professional life, Engin finds the mentoring role fulfilling as he is able to realise his aspiration of contributing to society and helping young people pursue their careers, while incorporating it into his working day. “I schedule mentoring sessions during lunch break so that I can spend a complete hour of uninterrupted mentoring time and focus on the mentoree's needs and personal situation. In return, I get to know new people and learn about the needs and desires of the next generation.”

Challenges and the future

For Titiz, setting up the company and putting systems in place was fairly easy, but adds it took time to be self-financing. “Motivation and patience were crucial at that point.”

“Currently we are sustainable, and make enough to cover fixed costs. We hope to be profitable by the end of the year. We'll then redeploy the profits into growing the company and into other social projects,” says Titiz.

Currently Mikado has four full-time employees and four freelancers in their creative team, plus a pool of trainers.

[Mikado Consulting](#) is currently at the stage where it's about to scale the mentoring platform globally to accommodate an international mentoring network and is strengthening its operations and content through new international partnerships.

Serra Titiz recently took part in the [INSEAD Social Entrepreneurship Programme](#) at the school's Europe campus in Fontainebleau.

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