


# Leading the way at **Volvo**

- Business Leader
- Wife • Mother • Mentor
- Linguist • Runner

Meet Elisabeth Larsson

By Anne Pinto-Rodrigues



**E**lisabeth Larsson is a multi-faceted woman. It's hard to do justice to her incredible personality in a few words. As the Vice President of Vehicle Sales and Marketing at Volvo Asia Oceania, she is the perfect role model, especially as a woman professional in a predominantly male bastion.

### **The thorough professional**

As a young woman growing up in Sweden, Elisabeth felt very strongly about Volvo. After all, her father and brother had long and exciting careers there. An Economics major at university, she was recruited directly from campus and began her career at Volvo with a role in manufacturing. Volvo being a large and global company, additional responsibilities soon came her way. A stint with the Volvo market company in Paris from 1999 to 2001 provided her with an extremely challenging yet enriching experience. She cherished the opportunity to be closer to the customer.

A few years later, she was offered the role of VP of Vehicle Sales and Marketing based out of the Asia Oceania regional headquarters in Beijing. She gladly accepted.

Elisabeth's move to Beijing in 2008 brought with it great possibilities. Asia-Pacific being in growth mode, there was nowhere else she would rather be. She quotes Wayne Gretzky, the Canadian ice hockey great who once said "I do not focus on where the puck is, but where it's going to be." The move to Beijing gave her the chance to be closer to where all the action lay.

Once in Beijing, Elisabeth's love for languages prompted her to learn Mandarin. She took Mandarin lessons twice a week for 2 years and has great respect for the complexity and depth of the language. Her knowledge of Mandarin, though basic, helped in her daily interactions during her 4 year stay in Beijing.

When the decision to move the Volvo's Regional Headquarters to Singapore was made, Elisabeth welcomed the prospect of living and working in a new city. For the past 1.5 years, she calls Singapore home and appreciates the safety, the cleanliness and the high quality of life that Singapore provides. She does miss the Nordic seasons sometimes but Singapore's sunny weather more than makes up for it.

### **Leading Women at Volvo**

Elisabeth started work at Volvo in the mid-90s and the apparent lack of women co-workers didn't faze her. Two of her three siblings are boys. So Elisabeth was already comfortable in a primarily male set-up.

Volvo provided her with a nurturing environment that propelled her professional growth. "There is great respect for the individual at Volvo", she states. She also credits her mentors at Volvo who supported her every time she felt discouraged or disillusioned.

The mere mention of 'women in the workplace' and Elisabeth's eyes light up. She's extremely passionate about the subject and her enthusiasm is evident.

As one of the senior-most woman officers in the company, she is regularly invited to speak at various internal and external forums on gender issues prevalent in the corporate world. She is also one of the initiators of the FAB (Females in Asia at their Best) network at Volvo and dedicates a lot of her time towards coaching future female managers.

Lessons learnt from Elisabeth's own experience along with the advice she has received over the years from well-wishers, puts her in the perfect position to mentor young women professionals.

Firstly, she says "Don't play the victim card. Take ownership of your career."

She also advises against women behaving like men to stay competitive in the workplace. "Women come with their unique perspective and it is highly beneficial to the work environment to have diversified opinions", she adds.

She continues saying "Women should stay positive and believe that things will get better. Nobody likes a whiner." She emphasizes on the importance of having a sense of humour especially when things don't go as planned.

### **The person**

Elisabeth is proud mother to 3 boys aged 12, 9 and 7. Between her work and family responsibilities, she is constantly battling for some down time. She is very thankful to her husband Mikael (entrepreneur and founder of Mikriho Business Solutions) who in Singapore, works from home most of the time. "Mikael's presence at home is invaluable. It enables me to concentrate on my work, when I am there." she gushes.

Her move to Singapore created some interesting changes in her lifestyle. "Everyone here is so health conscious and fit. It has inspired us to eat better and focus on our health."

Before she knew it, Singapore's running bug had bitten Elisabeth and she was training for her very first run. She completed the 10K at the Great Eastern Women's Run 2013 and is very proud of her accomplishment. "I usually hit a wall around 5K. The other runners from the Volvo team egged me on and that helped me compete the race" she adds.

### **The times ahead**

Elisabeth is looking forward to being in Asia for the next few years. Having been away from home for so long, she is fully aware that re-assimilating into life back in Sweden is not going to be easy. But that's something she doesn't need to worry about for some time.

For the moment, she is leading the launch of Volvo's new product range in Asia. And like a true professional, she hurries along to prepare for it.