

Just a Man from Lebanon



Antoine Choueiri

(1939-)

Legends never die.*

Antoine Choueiri has passed away. This is headline news for people in the media, as the departure of a major pillar of this sector has closed a chapter in the history of our industry. When I was preparing for the launching of Lebanon Opportunities in 1996, I visited a number of people in the field seeking guidance. Most of them discouraged me from embarking on my venture, citing a lack of interest in English-language publications, a weak economy, and an aversion to reading on the part of business people! However, they all directed me to 'The Man,' who would have the best words of wisdom on the matter, which turned out to be the only good advice that they gave me. Antoine Choueiri was encouraging, and his advice was invaluable. "Many people will be curious to read this magazine - at first," he said. "The challenge will be to keep and strengthen that interest. If you succeed in doing that, advertising will follow, and you won't even need the helping hand of someone like me," he advised. I listened and set sail on my own. The rest is history. I maintained a cordial relationship with Choueiri and his organization, with which we collaborated on several occasions. A few years later, the opportunity to begin the Arabic edition of BusinessWeek presented itself. Unsure of my plans, I went again to seek reassurance from the person who knew the most about the pan-Arab media business. He was very encouraging, even excited about my project, and spent hours discussing it with me. I was amazed that a man with so many titles under his belt would still harbor such passion in his guts, even for someone else's project. For me, this explained the reason for his success. He was maliciously dubbed 'The Godfather' by envious competitors. He preferred 'Grandfather,' and more humbly, 'Just a man from Lebanon'. Nothing is humble about the size of the organization that he built, the clout that he wielded, and the titles that he represented. He was fabled for his toughness in negotiations and his fairness to his partners and adversaries alike. Much has been written about Antoine Choueiri, his media businesses, and sports endeavors during his lifetime and after he passed away. But not enough has been said about the extent of his charitable giving and benevolent activities, which he always undertook quietly, despite his stature as a media king. He epitomized the self-made man who created an empire through smarts and hard work. If 'just a man from Lebanon' can achieve all this, just imagine the thrust it gives those in this industry who looked up to this role model. His words of advice did so much for me.

May God bless his soul. To his family and the members of his various organizations, we offer our most heartfelt condolences.

* Slogan borrowed from the memorial campaign by AAA, IAA, and Quantum

By Ramzi El Hafez