Why women entrepreneurs continue to be a rare sight in corporate India?

Not very long ago, for the first time in its two-century-old existence, the country’s largest public sector bank offered its topmost job to a woman. When asked by the media why it took so long for a woman to occupy the corner office at State Bank of India’s headquarters in Mumbai, chairperson Arundhati Bhattacharya blamed it on the low percentage of women officers joining the bank.

Clearly, we have come a long way in narrowing professional gender inequality in India. Even then, many argue that the number of women aiming for top jobs across the corporate world continues to be very low and a huge fraction of that miniscule number often quits midway, after getting married or becoming a mother. But even before they quit, they often stop challenging themselves. In her very popular TED talk, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg (author of Lean In) speaks about how women are hesitant about taking on better opportunities or projects, in anticipation of the familial responsibilities they may have years later.

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Barsali Bhattacharyya
A graduate in English Literature from St. Xavier’s College, Kolkata and a post graduate in Journalism from Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Barsali is currently working as a feature writer with a New Delhi-based news daily.
Man makes the difference

What role do you think HR can play in developing and sustaining entrepreneurs in the country? Can HR professionals be an entrepreneur?

Human Resources play a key role of shaping up the future of any organization. As a first step towards sustaining entrepreneurs, it should act as a feedback mechanism for the CEO of the organization and should give right direction. This helps to know the pitfalls of the entrepreneur and receive alerts when things are not done in the right way. After an initial success in the start-up entrepreneurs are getting engrossed and breaking the ice helps them to become an outperformer.

Entrepreneurs can be from any sphere. By all means HR professionals can be an entrepreneur as it is the core function to managing teams which includes communication and team building skills. Nothing can impede someone in becoming an entrepreneur if he/she possesses the bent of mind and passion.

What are the hurdles you face when your organization is preparing to scale up its operations in sustaining the collective will of the individuals and their alignment to the organizational core values/ and how those challenges are being met in the HR standpoint?

There are two sides of this aspect. One is letting go of entrepreneurship. Second is the clarity of vision from the organization perspective and delegating the authority. A fine balance is required between both these aspects. Succession planning and grooming of leaders is imperative. The challenges in retaining talent in the organization is that people join start-ups for learning skills and once they acquire them they go for a more settled job.

What are the ways to empower women entrepreneurs? What are the issues that they are grappled with during start-up and becoming a successful entrepreneur?

One of the challenges that rural women with entrepreneurial aspiration faces is in terms of finance. Rural women can be educated and empowered financially. Government policies on start-up companies by women entrepreneurs can be relaxed to motivate them. For instance, taxes can be lowered. Consultants can play a critical role in giving advice and guiding women on adopting success strategies. Exclusive websites focusing on women entrepreneurs can come up to help them cope up with the challenges faced. Also, it is essential that women are self-supporting, economically independent and have a positive self-image in order to contribute for the nation’s prosperity.

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IN CONVERSATION

An Interview with Gouranga P. Chattopadhyay

Women are today far more independent and empowered than they were a decade ago. It is because of the technological development that has happened. How can this be accelerated? What else can be done to empower more women?

If it is a rather generalized question then I also have difficulty with the notion of empowering others. I don’t believe you can empower anybody. I think frankly that word is a male chauvinistic invention “we empower you”. Brahma (the creator), Shiva (the destroyer), Vishnu (the protector) empower you kind of a thing has always a man behind. What boundary conditions we make so that women don’t feel that they are empowered? So you remove those boundary conditions and create new boundary conditions where a woman will feel powerful. Thus women will feel empowered. What are the conditions that have been created by men and women that make them feel impotent? For example education is one of them, technology is another. BarkhaDutt (Ndtv 24*7) is taking on each and every politician, rubbing their nose metaphorically. Oprah Winfrey is another example. Forget her billions, but look at her brilliance in conducting interviews. These women make me think that I cannot empower them. Just as motivation has to be done by oneself; similarly empowering has also to be done by oneself.

Initially I used to have two joint bank accounts with my wife, when I had enough money to open bank accounts. She was a teacher. In one bank account she was the first account holder and in the second I was. Most of the salary in the early years went in maintaining the household expenses. Later, when I got a U.N. job, I saved enough to put in my wife’s bank account all the money that she had spent from her salary towards household expenses. She was happy and felt she was able to do more and more things than in the past with her own money. When an offer came to her from the Anthropology survey of India, (they all knew she knows better English than many Bengalis since she had an English mother she was asked to edit papers written by Bengali anthropologists for publication, she was aware of the common mistakes which the Bengali people commit), she took to the work happily. When she was offered a job by the UNICEF, she refused it saying she didn’t want to take any job that would not let her be present at home when the time my children came after school.

She was a devoted mother. By 4:30 or 5 she had to be in home. That kind of mental power she had. In her mind love was more important than buying new clothes. That is empowering. Our financial boundary was so narrow then. Now that I got so much extra money, I don’t know what to spend those on. So I donate to charities.

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Why women entrepreneurs continue to be a rare sight in corporate India?

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Closers home, Apurva Purohit, CEO of Radio City FM, has been vocal about the adventures of women at work. In her book, Lady, You’re Not a Man, she talks about how working women in India lacked a good role model – an excellent female boss who would inspire them to rise high, instill in them the confidence that they can.

Purohit as well as other corporate insiders, however, are a firm believer in the rapid progress women are making across the corporate world. The number of women seen in boardrooms has gone up, as have their success in managing a demanding career and a fulfilling family life. What has not changed, however, is women's appetite for entrepreneurship.

According to data released by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, there are 126 million women operating new businesses and another 98 million at the helm of established ones. Yet, in India, the gender inequality gap is wide enough in this respect. The reasons are many and varied. Investors are less likely to take a woman seriously and risk their money on her. Women are socially expected to be more responsible and hence less prone to take risks. A start-up requires years of devoted work and that can be difficult to afford when you also have a family to take care of.

But most of all, women lack mentors and motivators in this area. Examples of those who have dared to start something on their own are few and far between. While some are notable in their efforts to do so, they are mainly concentrated in areas such as social work, fashion, design, media and publishing. Media and entertainment has especially seen many ventures by women. There is Ekta Kapoor - the queen of Indian soap opera, thanks to whom our entertainment industry is no longer male dominated. In the sphere of publishing, there is Urvashi Butalia, who after working as an editor in London, came back to India to start Zubaan and Kali for women, India’s only feminist publishing houses. While there are many such names in the fields of arts, design, fashion and media, one might run short of such examples while looking at industrial or banking sectors. In the end, the number of women venturing out to start something of their own is still insignificant when compared to the number of working women in the country.

It is time more women followed in their footsteps and not only aspired to get a good job with a fat salary, but to live their dreams. And the society, women leaders, employers, colleagues and bosses need to do just that. For it is not enough to join a job and just rise up through the ranks. To actually decrease the gender inequality gap, women need to be liberated enough to dream and build on their own.

Women are often more creative, composed and meticulous. Studies have shown that they are emotionally more attached to their work, which increases their work productivity. We need talented, visionary, women to come out and lead our industries and businesses into newer directions. Women entrepreneurs are the need of the hour. We need them. They in turn, need us and all the support we can offer. Can we give them that much?
An Interview with Abhishek Gupta
Contd. from page 2…

i3 has a global presence with offices in five locations. How different or difficult was it managing global presence across wide variety of cultures. What do you think are the key HR challenges in building and nurturing diversity of human capital?

Organizations face different working styles when it extends its boundaries globally, the impact of the challenges related to which are significant. It is paramount to ensure competitive and stringent quality measures in order to meet the expectations on deliverables. Nurturing diversity of human capital can be facilitated by the way of functioning and orientation. Having a global presence, it depends on how well any organization can differentiate its operations based on the region in which it operates.

By Kalaivani N, Zetetica, HR Club, BIM

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There is this difficulty in establishing loyalty from Gen-Y and how has this evolved?

There is a difference between commitment and loyalty. Commitment has to do with something you have thought out, you have explored your feelings. Loyalty is individual oriented. You cannot be loyal to a task but your loyalty is toward the person who has created that task. So, in case of loyalty, the commitment is to the wishes of the person and not directly to the task.

Do group dynamics change with demographically diverse teams and is cross cultural team a good option?

There have been studies in the west, about the quality of decision making when the decision makers have been demographically different. The decisions tend to be superior because the people can work out what are the shortcomings in one's cultural background. There is a metacultural thread running through all cultures spread over India that hold some commonalities. What are the appropriate things in that metaculture, that one can pick up and create a cross cultural team where the boundaries are provided in such a way that people can look at each other's cultural strengths more than cultural weaknesses.

There is this yoga fever among celebrities and leaders, what do you think about this. Should this be introduced at the organization level?

Depends on what one's understanding of yoga is. It has been tried by some organizations like ITC. There are enough books that are written by Bihar school of yoga based on texts of speech, for example by Swami Shivananda, and Swami Satyananda. I encourage people to read those and understand what yoga is. It is not just about standing upside down or wrapping your legs around your neck! Yoga is about detoxifying your body, maintaining physical balance, some times for internal things like liver, kidney, but the real thing is removing mental energy blocks. Theoretically it is compared to kundalini which rests in the lowest possible ganglion called mooladhara and it rises through the backbone to Sahasrara at the cortex. If you can make it rise there, you have mastered yoga.

By Vaishnnavi Dhevi N and Anurag V.R, Zetetica, HR Club, BIM
The First 90 Days

The First 90 Days – Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels is one of Michael Watkins best works. This book explores the possibility of adoption of a standard framework for accelerating transitions that can yield big returns for organizations.

Transitions are periods of opportunity to start afresh, establish momentum and realize the full potential of the job. The goal of transition acceleration is to achieve the breakeven point as rapidly as possible. The breakeven point is the point at which new leaders have contributed as much to their new organization as they have consumed from it. From the breakeven point they are net contributors to the organization. The challenge is transitioning talented people into the organization from the outside.

- Executives from outside are not familiar with the organization structure, corporate culture and informal networks of information and communication.
- New people are unknown to the organization and therefore do not have the same credibility as someone who is promoted from within.
- Tradition of hiring from within makes it difficult for organizations to adjust to senior-level managers who are viewed as outsiders.

Road map for creating a 90-day acceleration plan:

1. Promote yourself – making the mental break from your old job and preparing to take charge in the new one.
2. Accelerate your learning – understanding your organization’s markets, products, technologies, systems, and structures, as well as its culture and politics.
3. Match strategy to situation – Diagnose the business situation accurately and clarify its challenges and opportunities.
4. Secure early wins – Identify ways to create value, improve business results. Early wins create credibility and create momentum.
5. Negotiate success – Builds productive new relationship with your new boss and manage his or her expectations.
6. Achieve alignment – Align organization structure with its strategy and develop the systems and skill bases necessary to realize strategic intent.
7. Build your team – Upon inheriting a team it is essential that the team is evaluated and restructured if necessary to meet better the demands of the situation. Both systematic and strategic approach can be used to build the team.
8. Create coalitions – Ability to influence people outside your direct line of control. Supportive alliances, both internal and external, will be necessary to achieve your goals.
9. Keep your balance – Maintain your equilibrium and preserve your ability to make good judgments. The right advice and counsel network is an indispensible resource.
10. Expedite everyone – Help everyone accelerate their own transitions. The benefits to the organization of systematically accelerating everyone’s transitions are potentially vast.

By Vaishnnavi Dhevi N, Zetetica, HR Club, BIM
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