



**COLUMNS**

**HAPPINESS HABITS - THE URBAN  
PROFESSIONAL'S GUIDE TO GOOD LIVING**

- SRIRAM S

**MANTRA OF THE MONTH**

- ANJALI TELANG

**ALAG HAI**

- HARJEET KHANDUJA

**NAINA LAL KIDWAI**  
**AN INIMITABLE LEADER!**

Women employee mix | Breaking the Bias | Women in non-traditional roles  
Achieving balance | Accelerating D&I at the workplace | WFH ...

## Dear Readers,

For the past few years, colleagues in the HR fraternity had been asking me to publish a magazine meant for the Human Resources community. I wasn't sure if that was something I wanted to do, given the existing number of publications in this domain. However, this year we decided to go ahead with it, with one condition. The contributions would be made by senior leaders who have actually implemented what they preach. The content would serve to ignite readers' minds and build further on the ever expanding universe of HR related literature. And the emphasis would be on editorial sanctity rather than being driven by purely business considerations.

We are privileged to have a team of thought-leaders as our Contributing Editors. And grateful to the several featured authors who are experts in their chosen area of work.

We timed our first issue to coincide with the month that officially celebrates Women's Day. The March 2022 edition of the HR magazine therefore celebrates women and their countless achievements.

My pennyworth of thoughts for all the wonderful women out there is as follows:

*Don't let anyone define who you are by putting you in a box. You are more than the sum of your individual parts. You are the employee who helps the organization scale new heights. You are the mother who breathes life into existence. You are the daughter that nurtures those who nurtured you in your time of need. You are the partner who provides counsel when no one else may do so.*

*You are all of this.*

*And yet, you are none of this...in isolation.*

*You are a woman and the only person who gets to decide what it means to be a woman!*

Happy Woman's Day, every day of your life!



**Jagmohan Bhanver**

Publisher and editor-in Chief

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# Naina Lal Kidwai – An Inimitable Leader!

-By Jagmohan Bhanver



**E**very once in a while, a leader comes along who shakes up the fabric of conventional belief systems.

An iconoclastic leader with an independent mind, unafraid to challenge hitherto accepted notions of what and how things ought to be done. Such a leader finds it natural to question the status quo, and becomes a symbol of enduring excellence within an ecosystem too often satisfied with mediocrity. Over time, they serve as a harbinger of change and a beacon of inspiration to others around them. Eventually, after years of toil and sustained success, a legend is born!

Naina Lal Kidwai is one such legend. Recently, I had the pleasure of interacting with her and was blown away with the multiple facets of this inimitable leader. And the simplicity and humility behind the corporate demeanour.

Before I move on to the more pertinent parts of our discussion, it behoves me to delineate the significant facets of the woman who has made a mark for herself around the globe.

## Studying to be a Leader

Naina's quest for excellence started at an early age. Studying at the scenic Loreto Convent school at Shimla, she was foremost in her class, year after year. It wasn't all studies though, as she bagged the *Best All Rounder* accolade too. She excelled at basketball and badminton in school and played these two sports at a State level. She represented the school in debates, elocution and dramatics. Perhaps unbeknownst to her at that time, these skills would come in handy during her higher education and her corporate career. Her brush with leadership responsibility began at school where she held positions like House Vice Captain, Library Squad Captain and eventually the School Captain.

Unlike most people her age at that time, Naina had a fairly clear idea about what she wanted to do in her career. This led her to undertake a Bachelor's degree (Hons.) in Economics from the prestigious LSR college at Delhi University. The drive to excel continued there and she was the recipient of the *Award for outstanding qualities of Leadership*.

The next three years she worked as an Articled Trainee with Price Waterhouse & Co at Delhi while studying to be a Chartered Accountant.

The next step was a Master's degree in Business Administration from the iconic Harvard Graduate School of Business. While a lot of Indian men had previously passed through the hallowed portals of HBS, Naina broke that barrier, becoming the first Indian woman to graduate from Harvard in 1982. It wasn't just the folks in India though who were compelled to contemplate the change. Even at an otherwise diverse institute like Harvard, there were those who were in for a surprise.

## 'In the U.S.

**I may have brokered bigger deals, but here, it's much more at the cutting edge of reform, the ability to influence, to shape.'**

HBS has a culture where students are expected to speak up in class and present their views. On one of the occasions, when Naina had finished making her presentation, a bunch of American students approached her and expressed wonderment at how eloquently Naina had spoken in English. They were curious to know how Naina was able to communicate so well in English. Naina smilingly responded, 'Because I speak in English'. She was amused at their surprise that someone who didn't look like them could speak English as well or better than them.

This was the beginning of breaking of myths for Naina; something she has continued doing over her long journey as a banker and more recently as a social worker.

### A Bankable Banker!

Naina has come a long way from being better known as the first Indian woman to pass out of Harvard. She has to her credit more than three-and-a-half decades of experience in the Banking and Financial services sector.

Her stint in Banking started in 1982 in India, with ANZ Grindlays Bank PLC (now Standard Chartered Bank) where she managed the Western India operations, which constituted over half the Deposits and retail assets of the Bank, through 12 branches and 920 people. She established and directed the Global NRI Services of the Bank, overseeing NRI Centres in New York, Hong Kong, Singapore, Australia, the Middle East and London. She also managed the Investment Banking operations of ANZ Grindlays Bank which ranked among the largest foreign investment banks in India and amid the top four banks in the country.

In 1994, when Morgan Stanley set up office in India, Kidwai was hired to lead their Investment Banking business. Over here, she exhibited exceptional caniness to identify and focus on emerging sectors. This included Telecom and Information Technology, among others. In her role at Morgan Stanley, she managed IPOs and global listings of companies, which went on to become market leaders in their industry. Three years after joining Morgan Stanley, Naina was instrumental in engineering the JV between Morgan Stanley and JM Financial. By the year 2000, the merged entity - JM Morgan Stanley - was one of the leading investment banks in the country.

In 2002, Naina joined HSBC as Vice Chairman and

Managing Director at HSBC Securities and Capital Markets where she was responsible for directing the capital markets, securities broking, trading, research and investment banking businesses of the firm. Between 2006 and 2009, she was CEO of HSBC's Indian banking operations during which period, HSBC's income tripled and they emerged as one of the fastest growing banks in the country also winning awards as one of the Best Employers in the country. She spent a decade-and-a-half with the group in India, eventually retiring as Executive Director on the Board of HSBC Asia Pacific and Chairman of the India operations comprising 34,000 people in the various group entities.

After retiring from HSBC, she joined several boards including the global board of Holcim and was Chairman, Max Financial Services Ltd and the India Advisory Board of Advent private equity.

### The Social Worker

Around the time she joined HSBC Securities in 2002, Naina stated in an interview with *Time* magazine, when she was named as one of *Time* magazine's global Influentials, that she didn't want to work anywhere except India. In her words, 'In the U.S. I may have brokered bigger deals, but here, it's much more at the cutting edge of reform, the ability to influence, to shape.' Powerful words! And in some cases, it might have been just that - words. In Naina's case though, the words ring true even now, twenty years since she made this statement.

The former banker and Harvard educated doyen of the corporate sector is actively engaged in seminal work pertaining to WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) in India. She is the Founding Chair of the India Sanitation Coalition (ISC). Her book, 'Survive or Sink: An Action Agenda For Sanitation, Water, Pollution and Green Finance' has been distributed across more than one-and-a-half lac students across the country to spread awareness about the need for a holistic strategy to the sanitation challenge in India, including factors like urban and rural responses, government and civil society responsibilities.

Naina Lal Kidwai is a frontrunner among global leaders. Closer home, she is an inspiration to women across the country to break through the shackles of social mores and self-imposed limitations in order to realize their dreams. She has proven that there is no glass ceiling but the one that we allow to form over us.

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*Our next issue (April edition) will feature the detailed interview with Naina Lal Kidwai where among other things, she talks about her experience of working with different companies, the need for a shift in the leadership paradigm, workplace redesign, diversity, the five-day week, agility, culture, negotiating strategic deals for tech companies, tolerance for failure, the moral compass within organizations, and the work she is doing as part of the WASH project.*



## Jagmohan Bhanver

*He has a specialization in Organizational Leadership from Northwestern University. He has led national and international roles in the corporate sector. He is Chief Mentor for PeopleFirst (India & ME) and CEO for Talgro. Bhanver was formerly Director and CEO for IIFM. He has authored six books that have been translated into half-a-dozen languages, including biographies on Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai. As India's first Master Executive Coach, he has worked closely with Board members, CEOs and Business leaders across industries in India, Middle East, North America and Asia Pacific.*



# Achieving Balance - The Elusive Tight Rope Walk for Women

Life is a quest for balance. Different aspects of our life tug at us for attention - our health, career, relationships, kids, money, social lives, spirituality, and self-care. Dealing with these while juggling daily activities is a constant tightrope walk, especially for women.

The sheer number of things to be handled daily makes every day no less than a roller coaster ride. No wonder women resort to multitasking! And yet, at the end of the day, that sense of satisfaction is missing. No matter how much you do, there is always something that isn't done yet. This pull from different directions, and the unaccomplished activities leaves one with a sense of guilt and low self-esteem. Stress builds up as life goes by, and eventually, it spills over. This stress starts showing up in various aspects of life, eventually degrading the entire experience of life and often leading to burnout.

Are there some strategies to avoid this trap?

Yes, there are. And they are quite simple, really. In just 4-steps, you can change your entire experience of life.

## Step 1. Create a Life Scorecard

The first step is to really do a quick Life Audit. You need to get a sense of where you are today on the important aspects of life - Health, Wealth, Relationships, Career, Parenting, Social Life, Self-Care, Spirituality. Make a chart and rate yourself on a scale of 1-10 in terms of where you are on that parameter. That's a great beginning.

You'll find that you aren't a 10 on most parameters, and that's fine. You don't need to be at a 10. What you do need is to have a minimum benchmark for yourself. Now, this benchmark can be different for each parameter. For instance, you want to be at a 7/10 in health at this point. Or you want to be an 8/10 in parenting. At the same time, you might be content with a 3/10 on spirituality. These benchmarks give you focus areas. Mark these benchmarks on the chart as well. You'll see gaps in where you are as against where you want to be. Remember, you cannot ignore aspects of life that matter. Nor can you always park them for later. If you ignore your health and focus only on your career, all the money earned may be of no use if you don't have the health to enjoy it, right? The biggest gaps on the chart are where you need to pay attention.

## Step 2. Discover your priorities

Now that you know where your gaps are, you need to prioritize your focus. What is most critical to address NOW? Often, we try to address everything all at once, and end up getting overwhelmed.

Before you go further, though, the thing that you need to accept is the fact that you are not a superwoman and that life is filled with imperfections. You need to know your priorities, understand your limitations and do the best you can be at peace with that. The mere act of acceptance; that you are doing the best you can, given your circumstances, and that it is good enough is a huge relief in itself.

## Step 3. Find time for what matters to you

Once you have a sense of priority, try to create some time for yourself. This is important because a frequent complaint is, 'Where can I find time'?

To find time - you need to do two things:

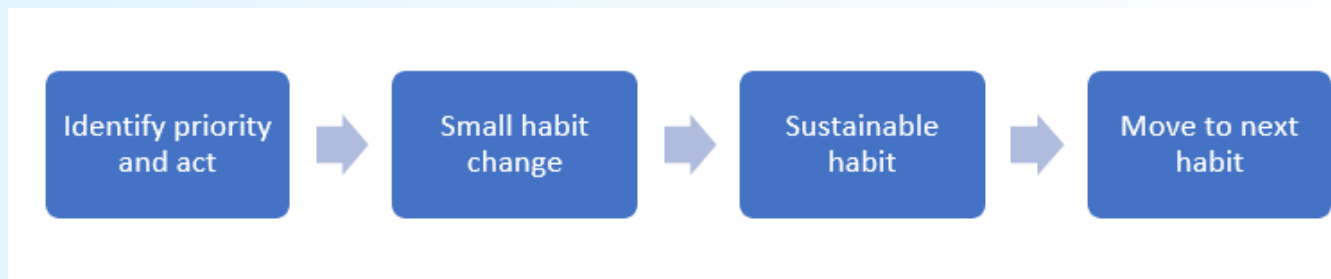
- ➔ *Minimize waste:* Go through your day in detail from the time you wake up to when you get to bed. Find those 10-to-15-minute time wasters that you didn't even realize existed. For example, post your coffee, you may laze around, or you may reach out for your phone and end up browsing for half an hour. You can find out how much screen time you are averaging using the features on your phone. If you take a close look at it, you will find these hidden time wasters. Once you eliminate them, you can create an hour or more for what you really want to do.
- ➔ *Map your energy:* Another way to create time is to map our energy levels to the activities we need to do. Research says that if we have complete focus, we could end up completing an activity in half its time. Also, all activities don't require the same level of focus and energy. For example, coming up with a proposal for something new is best done in your high energy zone while doing regular chores or operational stuff may be best-done post-lunch. Know your peak energy times and use them to do difficult and important things – this will help you do them faster. Lastly, stop multitasking and taking pride in it - our brain structure does not support multitasking in general. In fact, what we do is switch context rapidly when we multitask, and that burns a lot of our mental energy.

**“You'll find that you aren't a 10 on most parameters, and that's fine. You don't need to be at a 10.”**

### Step 4. Take affirmative action

Once you have the time and you know what needs your attention the most, have clarity on what you are going to do NOW. Start acting on that through small habit changes, gradually making that habit stick. Once you have successfully instilled a new habit, move on to the next one.

- ➔ Make it a public commitment – tell your friends and family that you have started this. Get that pressure of accountability working in your favor
- ➔ Track your change and stay on it, gradually increasing your time commitment



Let's see how this works. For instance, let's say that you want to start an exercise routine. Here's how you could go about it:

- ➔ Find your time wasters and cut what you can, especially the ones that have to do with mindless browsing
- ➔ Change some of your daily activities to match your energy cycles
- ➔ Start small, possibly with a 20-minute routine. Make sure that it's a sustainable routine; that is, it's a reasonably undisturbed slot during your day
- ➔ Reward yourself for staying on track

- ➔ Stabilize the routine over a month, and if you miss a day or two, don't beat yourself up for being imperfect; instead, just focus on returning to the routine.
- ➔ Once this is completely stable, then and only then, look at what next new habit you want to add to your routine.

If you follow this overall strategy, slowly but surely, things will begin to improve. You will feel better about yourself, and the much-needed balance in life will start showing up.



## Sriram S

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# Mantra of the Month - an intention setting practice

“My energy creates My reality”

The acronym “VUCA” best describes the time we live in. Volatile, Uncertain, Chaotic, and Ambiguous. As if the pandemic was not enough, the geopolitical situation, rising prices, and energy crisis, among other things makes us feel as if the odds are stacked up against us. Added to this is the constant media narrative of gloom and doom.

The more important question is, “How do we cope in these times of extreme turbulence?” Related to this, “What can each of us do at an individual level?”

Taking responsibility to create our personal reality, distinct from what’s happening in the world, seems to be the best way to stay afloat. For instance, there may be very little we can do about the energy crisis in the world, but we can certainly choose to exercise control over our personal energy. It is all about focusing on things that fall within our scope of influence and control, things that we can do something about and which create a positive impact.

Thoughts, habits, activities and people, are the key components in our personal energy. Imagine your energy akin to soup. The key ingredients in the soup being your thoughts, habits, activities and people. Would you not want to cook the best tasting soup ever? Would you not pay attention to adding the best quality ingredients in the perfect measure? I am certain you would! How would you make that possible? By becoming mindful of how each ingredient - each thought, habit, activity and person is either adding to the aroma of the soup, or taking away from it.

This month’s mantra is intended to support you in stirring up your own special energy soup. And the Mantra is:

“My energy creates My reality”

Embrace all that is creative, desirable, pleasurable and vibrant and observe your energy rising. Let go of all that is

**“Last but not the least,  
slow down and  
remember to BREATHE!”**

crippling, draining and painful and create space for joy, peace and calm to enter into your life. May you begin the journey of mindfulness with what you allow to enter and stay in your life, and what you release and let go of.

Go back to the things that make you happy, spend time in nature, create art, listen to music, watch that favorite movie, call a friend, and enjoy the tastes and flavors of what you eat.

Last but not the least, slow down and remember to BREATHE!

Repeat the mantra “My energy creates my reality”

Let these powerful words support you in creating your new personal reality filled with peace and prosperity.



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## Anjali Telang

*She is an ICF Certified Coach. She leverages a broad range of life transitions and experiences to enable her clients live an empowered life. Along with her private practice, she is a Fellow Coach with BetterUp and does pro bono work with OnetoOne Women. When she is not coaching, Anjali creates colourful Mandalas and spends time in nature. Find out more about Anjali's work through her website: [www.atarotcoach4u.com](http://www.atarotcoach4u.com)*

# Alag Hai

Once upon a time, after Corona,  
I told my wife,  
Now things are coming back to normal,  
Let's start going out.

She agreed.

I pulled out my shoes.  
Dusted them.  
When I wore them,  
I was not comfortable.

I said,  
It's time to change the shoes.

My wife said,  
You are feeling that way,  
As you did not wear them for long.  
They will be fine.

I behaved like a kid,  
That I needed to change shoes.  
Finally, she agreed.

I got new shoes.  
They were stylish.  
They looked comfortable.  
I wore them the first day.

In the evening,  
My wife saw my long face.  
She asked,  
Why are you so sad?

I said,  
My new shoes are not good.  
My earlier shoes were better.

My wife asked,  
What happened?

I replied,  
The new shoes are biting.  
On the very first day,  
Two of my fingers got bruised.

My wife said,  
This happens with new shoes.  
Then they adjust.  
Don't you remember?  
Your earlier shoes also gave you a shoe bite.  
Just be patient.

## Alag Nahin Hai

During the pandemic,  
People had similar experiences with their jobs - existing  
as well as new ones.  
Here too, only patience will help!



## Harjeet Khanduja

*He is an international speaker, author, poet, visionary, inventor, influencer and a HR Leader. He is currently working as Senior VP, HR with Reliance Jio. He is a LinkedIn power profile and is featured among the Top 200 Global Leadership Voices for 2022. He is an alumnus of IIT Roorkee and INSEAD.*

# Improving the Women Employee Mix In Your Workforce

**A**s a business leader I very often (still) come across questions and doubts on why diversity, equality and inclusion have become important business objectives. Queries and comments range from: “*Why is this important*” to “*What do we gain from it?*” to “*Let’s follow the usual initiatives and be done with it!*”

On the other hand, there are leaders who genuinely believe in the business objective but are yet to steer their organizations towards the needed transformation.

It is in this context that I considered sharing a few guiding principles that could be useful to practicing HR & Business leaders in addressing these queries and in achieving positive organization transformation.

## WHY D,E&I?

For the uninitiated, the reason for improving demographic mix (otherwise referred to as Diversity & Inclusion) in your workforce is to effectively cater to the diverse customer base. With a diverse and inclusive workforce, businesses show improvement on various qualitative and quantitative measures including critical ones such as:

- ➔ Access to a larger talent base
- ➔ Access to wider range of skills
- ➔ Broader based innovation and creativity
- ➔ Intuitively a better understanding of customer needs

## WOMEN EMPLOYEES MIX

There are various aspects of an organization’s demographic mix that need attention and improvement but for the purpose of this practical guide, I will focus on how to improve women employees mix in an organization.

Let me pre-empt the unspoken question. Yes, we need to catalyze, and influence conditions and put the extra effort to push this transformation. According to World Bank data, despite the growth in India’s economy, women accounted for only 19.9% of the total workforce in 2020 (as compared to a population mix of 48.1%) which by the way is a decline from almost 26.7% in 2005. India is one of the few economies witnessing this declining trend. A trend that has further worsened due to the pandemic!

## FOREMOST STEP

Notwithstanding the maturity stage of your organization, it might help to examine if you have followed the foremost step in the journey towards achieving a numerical leap in women employees’ mix. The foremost step in this case being a detailed analysis of demographics and people decisions (e.g., promotions, merit increases, awards and so on). In the event that the analysis throws up pleasant revelations, share it with a large cross-section of leaders.

It is my first-hand experience that this step creates a high impact on the organization and results in sudden preparedness to work towards change.

You will now have to begin work on two fronts:

- ➔ Talent Acquisition
- ➔ Existing Talent

## Talent Acquisition

After you have thoroughly studied your organization’s talent acquisition analytics, take the first step of assigning ambitious targets on talent slates. The non-negotiable target for every role should ideally be a 50% women candidate talent slate. To achieve this, you could incentivize recruiting partners for every successful women candidate hire and have tie-ups with specialist organizations/portals like Jobsforher, Sheroes, Vividhitta and Avtar, to name a few.

Along with this, you might want to consider how you can reduce biases during assessments. That will mean a lot of initial hard work for the recruiting unit and the larger HR team. Having said that, there is no substitute to doing this. I have found the following ideas helpful while trying to achieve this objective:

- ➔ Review job descriptions to remove biases and ensure gender inclusive language
- ➔ Reduce number of interviews
- ➔ Have panel interviews that include women interviewers
- ➔ Employ pre-decided customizable interview questions
- ➔ Look-out for potential biases and train interviewers to avoid the same

Once you have achieved the targeted talent slate, start taking aggressive women hiring targets. For instance, at our company we kept a goal of 30% women hires in the first year, but decided on a more aggressive figure of 40% and 50% for Years two and three. Having met these targets has given us confidence to achieve more.

“**Have panel interviews that include women interviewers**”



It is quite possible that you might face challenges and opposition from various corners. You will need to address potential concerns and influence leaders to drive accountability across all relevant stakeholders within the organization.

### Existing Talent

While we are driving people decisions in our organizations using data and analytics, it is important that each of these reports and dashboards carry gender-wise critical analysis too. Bring forward this data in all your reports and dashboards. Create reviews and discussions around the gender-wise cut with an objective of bringing this to every leader's attention.

Here are a few questions you might want to ask:

- ➔ Whether they are aware that there is a differentiation and the extent of it? (obviously they won't if they haven't seen customized data)
- ➔ Whether there are any conscious or unconscious biases at play?
- ➔ How can we remove said biases?
- ➔ How can the variation be reduced (merit-based)?

Keep showing long term trends of variations in people decisions to leaders and prompt merit-based action. Continuous inconsistencies or variations need to be brought forth and discussed. Keep reiterating to leaders the importance of collective accountability to achieve positive transformation. Find specific reasons for systemic variations and solve problems to remediate.

Here are a few things you might want to bear in mind in the context of People decisions:

- ➔ In your attrition data right after 'overall attrition', look at the gender-wise cut before anything else
- ➔ Dive deeper with reference to gender-wise cuts at 'levels', 'tenure', 'businesses', 'location', and other important parameters

- ➔ Tenure analysis of your organization can also reveal variations which can help you find systemic problems that can be addressed. At our organization, we discovered that most women leaders were high tenured and adjusted to our different work timings better than new hires. This helped us create an extensive mentoring and development program to build a pipeline of women leaders
- ➔ Gender-wise analysis of performance ratings and actions will show if there are variations, biases, deliberate actions in particular teams
- ➔ Deeper analysis of promotion cycles might throw up variations in promotion recommendations and reveal underlying reasons preventing increase in composition of women leaders
- ➔ Review merit increase, incentive, and bonus payout decisions for variations. Ask hard questions on whether 'pay for performance' and 'equal pay' are working in your organization
- ➔ Gender-wise analysis of training and development nominations and participation may help you identify variations affecting opportunities provided to women employees
- ➔ If there is a talent review and identification exercise in your organization, analyze gender-wise variations in 'leadership potential' assessment. Highlight variations and discuss possibilities of providing development opportunities to potential women leaders
- ➔ Ensure there is equal representation in 'committees' that your organization creates
- ➔ Do a critical analysis of all types of recognition prevalent in your organization. This data demonstrates variations and biases at a grassroots level
- ➔ Check for variations in 'Leave' data and 'overtime, holiday & week-off working' data. This data may provide you with more opportunities to work at the heart of the matter
- ➔ Do not ignore faintest of variations in engagement scores and feedback. This dipstick will show you cultural elements that warrant change



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## ENCOURAGE CONTEMPORARY WORK MODELS

When you observe that the narrative is changing within your organization and transformation is setting in, ensure that all policies and procedures are reviewed. This will ensure that the organization is not exhibiting any biases or controls that hamper the targeted transformation.

Encourage a flexible, results driven approach to working, where focus is on results rather than work hours, location, and other arrangements. This provides flexibility to both men and women employees and places accountability on their shoulders.

At our organization, for instance, we have found strong

evidence that supports forming a women's affinity group.

The affinity group should provide opportunity for women employees and leaders to discuss personal and professional problems. Multiple studies suggest that women employees hesitate in having these discussions and that these discussions have the potential to help countless women employees in their development and continuing employment.

To sum it up, the road to organization transformation in this context is difficult and you will most likely encounter resistance and face challenges. Encourage discussion, lead with data, create champions and influencers, and build consensus to share accountability of the business objective. Steadily you will achieve the goal!



## Ajay Aurora

*He is a business leader with 21 years of experience in Technology, FMCG and Financial Services and strategic HR functions like talent management, employee experience, OD, TD, C&B, leadership assessments and M&A. Ajay is currently working with Ocwen Financial Solutions as Head of HR for APAC & carries significant global HR responsibility. He is an avid reader, panel speaker and a well-recognized HR leader*

# Women in Leadership roles – A gradually shifting paradigm!

**M**y story starts from a family of four daughters born in Bhopal to working parents. Our parents raised us to be ambitious and independent women who believe in writing the stories of their lives on their own. They raised us in an environment free of gender stereotypes so that we could live out our dreams. Today, we all are successful leaders in our respective fields.

Given this background, I believe it is important to understand the challenges faced by women leaders while acknowledging how the scenario is gradually changing. When I was given the opportunity to pen down my thoughts on challenges faced by women leaders, I wanted to share real scenarios. I spoke to women leaders from diverse fields to understand their perspective. Let me be clear. This article is not intended to start a man versus woman debate but to bring out a woman leader's perspective. For real sustainable change to happen, we need to pay attention to the voices of the multitudes of women! It is undeniable that women in leadership roles face umpteen challenges at home and the workplace. As the popular saying goes, 'Women have to work twice as hard to get acknowledged for half as much'. However, not all is dark and dreary. There is an ever expanding silver lining. The percentage of women leaders in the C-suite is steadily increasing.

## Different perspectives

Let me start with the perspective of Smita, who is a Diplomat. She is a Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs. She says that women mostly have a democratic style of leadership. They have a participatory approach to decision making. However, this shouldn't be construed as a weakness by those who are more inclined towards a hierarchy-based autocratic leadership style. Additionally, traits like assertiveness



that are connected to success in leadership, tend to be typically associated with masculinity and are seen favourably in a male leader. However, the same traits in a woman leader may label her as insensitive and finicky.

Tanushree, who is a Wing Commander with the Indian Air Force, says that women leaders in the military have to face their own set of challenges. During the process of childbearing women go through a lot of physical and psychological changes because of which they become an object of constant criticism. Since fitness is an important aspect of military career, those women who face difficulties regaining their pre-pregnancy fitness may be judged poorly by seniors. Their need to cater to their young children is also sometimes seen as a liability by a segment of officers. However, with the number of women increasing in the armed forces, they have become more assertive of their rights and the establishment too has become more empathetic.

Isha, an IPS officer, opines that police is still considered to be the domain of males, and that there are many units which are yet to see a woman leader.

A majority of the staff is not used to seeing women in leadership positions and this leads to implicit resistance at times. This is best overcome by working hard and demonstrating professional competence. Amidst this, some women may get so caught up in competing with men or being like men that they tend to lose their individuality. This is because they are many times judged from a male centric yardstick and they tend to succumb to it.

**“A recent research by S&P Rating says that women CEOs favoured a leadership and communication style that emphasized flexibility and adaptability during a crisis period”**



## The Silver Lining

Thankfully things are changing for the better. In a recent study by Grant Thornton, the proportion of senior management roles held by women increased from 25% in 2017 to 31% in 2021. Reaching this milestone is predicted to catalyse greater gender diversity in senior management and engender lasting transformational change.

Year	% of Sr. Mgmt roles held by women
2017	25%
2018	24%
2019	29%
2020	29%
2021	31%

A recent research by S&P Rating says that women CEOs favoured a leadership and communication style that emphasized flexibility and adaptability during a crisis period, enabling greater connection with employees and other stakeholders. Examples like Leena Nair (CEO, Chanel), Falguni Nayar (CEO, Nykaa) and Padmasree Warrior (CEO, Fable) are a few examples of leaders who are redefining gender stereotypes and work culture, thereby inspiring others to take up more such roles.

Post-pandemic flexibility has altered the perception around work schedules. The idea of productivity is no longer driven by physical presence in the office and is much more oriented towards deliverables and output. It is therefore fair to assume that this will deliver many more leadership opportunities for women, who in the past, were constrained by traditional approaches to work. This will suit young mothers well and will see lesser number of women quitting to take care of their children. Another important change has been in the parents' mindset. Traditionally, girls were subtly nudged towards more nurturing roles and boys had the option of a vast array of career options. However, an increasing number of parents today are imagining their daughters as future leaders. This has brought more focus on their studies, sports and overall development.

### The need for mentors

Another challenge for women is that they lose out on networking for various reasons. For different reasons, they are mostly left out of the circle of men who happen to be a part of such networks. This has a far-reaching impact on their growth.

The need of the hour is to build a pool of women leaders who can mentor other women. It is high time that women start looking out for each other and have each other's back in order to bring a paradigm shift. Women need to realize the power of networking to expand their connect. We need to have a circle of women who can enable growth and development for each other.

When women are relegated to being a mere statistic, they get pitted against each another to vie for a few top posts. This tragedy of commons will only damage the cause of women empowerment. Instead of pulling each other down, we need to build our own sororities.

Maya Angelou rightly said "Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women." Gender sensitization on the physiological and psychological challenges faced by women is important. In 2022, businesses are prioritising equal access to developmental work opportunities. According to research by S&P Global, most companies are taking this action to promote gender parity in senior management. COVID-19 too has influenced change in the way people work that will have a lasting effect on the ability of women to pursue ambitious career paths.

Women in leadership roles should become the norm and not an exception!



## Divya Pant

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# The Power of letting be - Being a 'lesser' woman

**H**ave you ever felt a pang of guilt consume you when you failed to host a gourmet spread for dinner because you were simply exhausted? Have you been subjected to judgmental gazes across the conference room when an emergency call from school compelled you to leave in the midst of a discussion? Or those innumerable occasions that you missed being with your family while you were on work related travel? More seriously, how often have you felt that your career is at war with your biological clock and you have to make a choice that will stay with you for life?

Hold still for a minute, you lovely woman of today!

## A complete Woman

The time has come when we may want to internalize the belief that it is okay to be a 'lesser' woman at work or at home, in the quest to be a fuller woman in the true sense of the word. It is not about gender conflict, or gender inequality that leads to these heightened expectations and strenuous circumstances for women. More often than not, it is the inconceivably high standards that we create for ourselves, which consequently set us up for failure. Then we beat ourselves up every time we fail to match up to these lofty expectations. We need to realize that our occasional inability to match up to everyone's expectations (including our own) is not a failure. It does not make us a lesser person. Inequality doesn't necessarily come in from outside. The genesis of inequality is within our own minds. Our conditioning leads to unnatural expectations from ourselves. Those expectations subtly compel us to don the hat of a superwoman. Then we attempt to beat the odds to achieve results, which we label in our minds as uncompromised deliverables. Therein begins a never ending cycle of wanting to be everything for everyone, eventually leading to immeasurable stress, guilt and self-castigation when we are unable to achieve the multitude of lofty goals.

Let's think hard for a moment. Why should it bother us if there are a bunch of people judging us for having to attend to an emergency? Is it possible that we are the ones judging ourselves while reeling under that insatiable guilt, and inadvertently passing on the baton of judgement to the others in the room?

Today, every progressive organization is attempting to break the bias, and cultivate a DNA of inclusion.



This would imply that when they hire a competent woman, they are also willing to pay the price of competence. Perhaps then, we should refrain from self-judgment while making choices that are natural for any working woman. The world sees us through our eyes. Unless we stop judging ourselves, we will continue feeling and being judged by others.

## The power of letting it be

As I said earlier, for many among us, there is an inevitable war between our biological clock and our career goals. However, why is it that we feel compelled to choose between the two? Can they not co-exist instead of being an either-or option? Believing that they are not mutually exclusive might help us on the journey of making them co-exist.

This is where the ability of letting a few things be would make a world of difference in our quest towards becoming a fuller human being. Increasingly, organizations are embracing and welcoming women going through motherhood. Efforts in the right direction are being made to engage women at work, keeping in mind the challenges faced by several young mothers.

I see the emergence of balance and harmony in this context. Surely, there is a long way to go and the vast majority of organizations still need to adapt their structure, policy and attitude towards working women. However, recent events and experience have proven that the synergy is possible.

**“organizations are embracing and welcoming women going through motherhood.”**

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Notwithstanding all this, the debate between different stakeholders still continues. There are those who feel that not enough is being done to break the bias. And there is the other side who feels that it is much ado about nothing. This deliberation and resulting tide of emotions associated with such arguments will likely continue for some time. There may not be much that we can do to change that. What is more within the ambit of our own control is how we handle ourselves in the midst of all this.

Hence the need for letting it be! Let things take their own course. Do as much as you can, to the best of your ability. Importantly, take a break from judging yourself when you know you can't do anything more than what you are already doing. Don't feel guilty about your baby having pumped milk when you are not physically available. Your baby will respect you and love you for the resilience and balance you have demonstrated in bringing up the child while managing your work responsibilities. At the same time, don't feel miserable in case you fail to attend an important meeting because of an emergency at home. There will be team members who can pick up the baton if you cannot be around temporarily. And if there aren't any, an occasional miss of a meeting won't be the end of the world especially when people around you see the effort you put in on all the other days to give your best at work. See yourself through a fresh lens and the world will respond to you. The Power of letting be is something that needs to emerge from within. Setting realistic expectations for ourselves, and systematically working to

achieve our dreams is a wonderful balance that can be achieved. Being a woman is not just about what we do at work or how we are at home. We could be both. Not a 'lesser' woman at work or a 'lesser' mom, wife or daughter. But a more complete woman irrespective of the role we play at different times of the day or in our lives.

I am reminded of a few unforgettable lines authored by Rose Milligan.

*'Dust if you must,*

*But wouldn't it be better to paint a picture, or write a letter.*

*Bake a cake, or plant a seed;*

*Ponder the difference between want and need?*

*Dust if you must,*

*But there's not much time,*

*With rivers to swim, and mountains to climb;*

*Music to hear, and books to read;*

*Friends to cherish, and life to lead'*

More Power to all the wonderful women out there.



## Neelakshi Mukherjee

*She has more than two decades of experience, leading HR and L&D functions in India and international markets. She was Head of HR for Aegis for the East Zone, in her previous role. Given her diverse experience, she is adept at managing issues pertaining to various aspects of HR and Leadership Development.*



# The Indian Woman Bureaucrat

The willingness to listen with empathy is something that is ingrained within most women. One might call it the “Ma” factor. This coupled with their intuitive sixth sense serves them well in either pre-empting potential issues or in dealing with them in a balanced manner if and when the problem crops up.

## Walking the tightrope

Empathy, Intuition and Balance are attributes I have observed firsthand among many women bureaucrats, during my personal and business interactions with them. I have seen them walking the proverbial tight rope, endeavoring to balance their responsibilities at home while being accountable on the work front.

It is not unusual to see hundreds of people in districts and talukas waiting outside the door of the officer in charge. When the officer in power is a woman, the common people wait even more expectantly. Part of this has to do with their belief that the woman officer will be more considerate and amenable to listening to their issues. In some cases, it is almost akin to expectations people have from their mother towards receiving an empathetic hearing and resolutions of their challenges.

## With Power comes Responsibility

The Spiderman movies popularized the adage, 'With power comes responsibility'. I have seen women bureaucrats exemplifying this in their behavior. When they are given due power (empowerment), they go beyond responsibility (to exhibit accountability and ownership). This is visible in the far reaching impact of their actions, including last mile implementation of public beneficiary schemes sponsored by the government. More often than not, their emotional involvement and passion in implementing various schemes impacts their personal life, making the tightrope walk more challenging for them.

The sheer passion with which these superwomen undertake their work responsibilities leaves one

**“When they are given due power,  
they go  
beyond responsibility”**

awestruck. At times, this is at the cost of their own health and wellbeing. I have had the opportunity to observe a lady bureaucrat taking feedback and issuing directions to ensure proper implementation of a program, while admitted in the ICU.

Women bureaucrats who have school-going children and aged parents in their families can be seen juggling their domestic and work responsibilities. In fact, political will management is an extremely challenging underlying task which forms a part of their tackling grievances while overseeing implementation of Government schemes on ground.

Observing a woman bureaucrat at work might remind you of the 'Naurasas' of life being enacted by a single person on the stage of life, before the populace of the district or the state at large.

It is not just work and domestic responsibilities. These women are somehow magically able to carve out time to explore other facets of their multi-faceted persona. Some of them express themselves through their writing. Others find their voice in singing while some of them are accomplished dancers or adept at numerous other literary and non-literary pursuits. This diversity of expression is visible in the holistic approach they bring to the different issues they deal with every day in their professional life.

On a different note, while I wrote this article for women bureaucrats, a lot of this holds true for so many other wonderful women out there in different professions.

A salute to the never-say-die spirit of Indian woman bureaucrats, and women in general!



## Pranav Pandya

*He is co-founder and Chairman, Dev Information Technology Pvt Ltd. He is also Vice Chairman and Director on the Board of GESIA IT Association, apart from being associated with various National and State level industry bodies including NASSCOM, CII, FICCI, Gujarat Chamber of Commerce, and Gujarat Innovation Society. Pranav has done extensive work in public sector computerisation and in acting as a bridge between academia and the dynamic technology Industry. He is actively involved in initiatives for Public Private Partnership in these sectors.*

# Don't Just Break the Bias, Break the Whole Damn Ceiling

There are many among us who take baby steps and celebrate birthdays, year after year. Then there are those who are born on a certain date in a leap year!

## Symbols and taglines are not enough

Reflect on this analogy. I personally think it is high time that we stop making insignificant moves in this direction every year. To me, this subject needs a leapfrog movement in terms of mindset. Something as special must be at the epicentre of things. Of course, while many might say it is symbolic, I think it's the start of a movement. A movement that all of us including you and me need to begin.

Why? Because 8th March can no longer be merely about symbols! It can no longer be just about taglines. We have to move away from that. At a fundamental level, whether we talk about #breakthebias, equality, or equity, the world needs a paradigm shift.

## A leapfrog movement

I didn't choose to be born a boy. Nor did I choose to grow up to be a man. However, when I read about things taking place all over the world; the manner in which our sisters, daughters and mothers are being treated, it pains my heart to no end.

Society and Culture form the fundamental tenets of how gender bias - especially against women - plays out. Therefore, on the eve of Women's Day this year, I would like to share my beliefs on this subject with all of you.

Historically (and sadly), men have ruled women in every sphere of life. We have read this in stories about Kings and their relationship with the women in their life. We have perhaps observed this in the male-female dynamic between our grandparents and our parents. And a flavour of this has been visible at the workplace too.

Undoubtedly, with each successive generation, things have somewhat



improved, even if relatively so. However, it is time to leapfrog. To take giant leaps that lead to significant changes. Time for us to let the social fabric binding us know that we are no longer going to be content with equality; that we aim to leapfrog to the other end of the spectrum!

Why is it that when a woman gets married, she needs to change her surname? How would it be if men had to adopt and embrace the surname of their wife's family?

How would it feel if men were to be a "ghar jamai" (Son-in-law staying at the home of his wife's family)?

What if every single man who got married, had to walk into the house of his wife and embrace a new identity?

**“Historically  
(and sadly),  
men have  
ruled women  
in every  
sphere of  
life.”**

How would it be if the woman didn't have to do all the household chores and the man had to do it while keeping a full-time job, while listening to all the brickbats from different stakeholders?

How would it be, if, we didn't just sit and read this, but embrace it too?

The day a significant number of men begin embracing and accepting this somewhat radical perspective is the day when we will not only put ourselves in the shoes of our women but will also leapfrog into an entirely different paradigm. And perhaps, after a decade or so once we've taken that leap in the opposite direction, let us talk about equality.

I might sound like a revolutionist. The fact is I am extremely passionate about this topic. If I was a woman, I would have said the same thing. I am a man and I echo that thought, because that is how I think. That is what I believe.

I hope my article leaves you with some things to think about. It might seem utopian, perhaps even idealistic. And some might wonder whether it is even practical. However, I believe if we want to change the narrative, we have to stop limiting ourselves to symbolic stuff that appeals to taglines for a day or a month during the year. We need to make quantum shifts in the way we think, the way we work, and the way we interact on a daily

basis across genders. Remember, it is behaviour that actually defines the mindset, and more importantly, the intent!

*With this, I wish every woman out there, of all ages, a very Happy Women's Day not just today but everyday. Let's celebrate the human race.*



## Sahil Nayar

*He is a Certified MBTI and NLP Practitioner, a regular columnist and visiting faculty at leading business schools across the country. Being a certified design thinker, he loves flirting with ideas as he designs prototypes to re-define human experiences. He runs a show called #JustLikeThat on his YouTube Channel and has his own radio show on Spotify*



# Become more



“The challenges might always remain, despite all the noise on diversity and women empowerment.”

It is interesting to note several positive shifts that have taken place over the past few decades. Among the significant ones is the increasing opportunities for women to take up professional pursuits outside home and what they have achieved.

Women have traditionally been as adept at working in corporate and business structures as they have been at managing the complex home responsibilities and the expectations that arose from social and cultural conditioning.

Many among us would have been privy to instances of a mother, a grandmother or even our great grandmothers who might not have had formal professional experience and yet exhibited tremendous sagacity and wisdom through simple conversations. Some of their innate perspicacity might even startle business leaders.

## The initial Change Agents

Most women who are currently septuagenarians or octogenarians possessed the ability, confidence and aspiration to join the work force in their twenties. At that time, the window of opportunity was limited, and taboos ran strong among the social milieu. Yet, some of them exemplified the courage to dream.

The majority however were inadvertently constrained by their conditioning and the deep social bias that dictated what women should pursue, or not. They put their dreams to bed without overt sulking, channelizing their abilities into the multifarious domestic responsibilities. Their attention was taken up in ensuring that the household ran smoothly and their daughters and sons were raised to realize their true potential and live out their dreams. I would like to call this set of amazing women the *real change leaders*.

For every change to happen, there is a generation that sows the seeds, even though they might not get the opportunity to enjoy the fruit of their labour. Their satisfaction is in being an enabler for other women to dream big and achieve their goals. These wonderful women, the initial change agents made peace with their own situation, worked along with their partners to build strong family foundations, and more importantly paved the way for other women to live their dreams in entirety.

## The Pathbreakers

Thence came the next generation of women. They had been raised by the initial change agents. These women had been brought up to aspire for themselves, being open to a professional career, and saying no to marriage till they gave shape to their own dreams. These women had the environment, job opportunities and a sliver of social acceptance at work. However, it wasn't all hunky-dory, yet.

They still had to contend with meeting every expectation on the home front. Responsibilities at both the office and domestic end had to be fulfilled satisfactorily, without too much empathy or real support from either side. This was further aggravated at the prospect of impending motherhood. The latter became a key reason for a lot of women to leave work temporarily or in most cases, for an inordinately long time, if not forever. For instance, maternity leave in the 1990's was around 3 months, often layered with self-inflicted guilt for not being able to contribute at office or for leaving a new-born at home while at work. A lot of families still expected the lady of the house to meticulously meet all the domestic duties while she struggled to prove her mettle at work. The generally accepted notion at the time was that 'allowing' the woman to work was granting her a concession instead of it being

or dropped off the corporate ladder, a significant number of them had the satisfaction of finally achieving their work life balance and enjoying their lives fully.

Cut to women in Gen Y&Z. They are often labelled as the privileged ones. Relatively speaking, they have an abundance of opportunities, the support of most of their family members, and the right to make their own choices. Yet, they have their fair share of challenges too. The current crop of young working women have the invisible yet palpable responsibility of building on the relentless work done by the initial change agents and the pathbreakers. And doing their own bit for those that will come in their wake.

Today, while coaching professional women I find that

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her right and choice.

It would have been rather easy for most women to give up on either their work aspirations or their domestic affiliations. Admittedly, some did too. But a significant segment of women persevered, gently yet firmly. I would like to call these resilient women, pathbreakers. They fearlessly cut through the knots that bound them and paved the way for recognition and support at both home and at work. They demonstrated willingness and the courage to create awareness of bias and communicated the need for a fair world that would eventually help the next generation of women. They created the foundation to sustain women at work.

### Times are changing, and none too soon!

Policies changed. Families learnt to support women with careers. While a lot of working women still faced burnout

**“Times are changing,  
and none too soon!”**

despite the apparent abundance, the fundamental challenges remain. Despite the education, there is limited freedom. This was seen amplified during the pandemic where a lot of women had to give up their career to take care of home or how some of them faced challenges working from home due to the incessant demand by family and domestic chores during work hours.

To be sure, it could have been worse. Families, including the men and the boys at home made genuine efforts to help out. But the onus of keeping the domestic machinery running was silently yet subtly the woman's domain, still!

The challenges might always remain, despite all the noise on diversity and women empowerment. They must be overcome with courage, support, perseverance and passion in order to lead a fuller life. Here is where the gap is. I see some young women assuming that their career is 100 % of their life leaving them no time for anything else like socialising, pursuing hobbies or investing in the self. This is taking them to the other extreme and leading to wellness issues too.

There are many young women who are still scared to dream a full life for themselves; who truly believe that the world has obliged them by allowing them to work. There are others who assume that they need to work harder to keep proving themselves or that they need to delay or sacrifice cherished life goals, e.g., taking a break to travel or getting married or embracing motherhood or pursuing a hobby, out of fear of losing out on their career.

To all young women of today, I wish to send positive thoughts and heartfelt wishes that you stay stronger and confident. Be secure in your abilities and talent. Explore your full potential fearlessly across all aspects of your life. Create your support system. Live your dreams, don't push them away or kill them. Be the woman at home and a professional at work. Lend your hand to uplift other women and men. Practise work life balance so that you are happy, healthy and successful. Carry forward the baton of diversity, inclusivity and equity. You are shaping the future of women at work. Craft it with care.

**“Become more of yourself,  
not lesser.”**



## Sharada Sunder

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# WFH and Working Women

## Challenges & Solutions

Prior to 2019, WFH (Work from Home) was heard of in the IT industry. Occasionally, when work pressures were light, employees used to seek WFH to manage tasks which could be undertaken without taking an off for the entire day. Covid 19 brought in WFH across all sectors and today it has become the new norm. Now, we deal with employees who want the option of WFH or at best, a Hybrid model wherein one can have the flexibility to combine WFH with attending office on certain days in the week.

Let's see what WFH requires at a very basic level. A laptop or desktop, a secure internet connection, chat and conference facility, a dedicated place to work and a mobile smart phone are sufficient to conduct WFH. During the pandemic, companies did their best to provide these facilities to avoid a break in business continuity and sustain employee productivity. Admittedly, it was quite a success at first. Employees were excited and a lot of them even went overboard in meeting their deliverables while working from home.

However, over time productivity began falling as the darker side of WFH began to surface. This included factors like social isolation, loneliness, interminable and stretched work hours, fatigue, and limitations to collaboration among other things.

### CHALLENGES FACED BY WORKING WOMEN DURING WFH

While the flip side of WFH was evident across genders, the brunt of this was borne by working women. After the initial euphoria, women employees had to contend with various challenges. This included the following:

#### Blurring of boundaries

It was a double whammy for women employees. They had to complete their work deliverables and manage domestic chores too. The latter was not new for them. However, during the pre-pandemic period, boundaries had been better defined which allowed them to focus on their work once they left home. Now, it was a constant juggle between taking care of home and work without any tangible line drawn between the two

#### Prevailing social structure

The social structure in India is still not evolved enough to equate men and women when it comes to work responsibilities. This became more evident during the pandemic. Men's work was given more importance. Even though working women couldn't put their work on the backburner, they were still expected to carry the larger share of the household chores. And if they were unable to strike a fine balance, they would face the music at both ends;



from disgruntled managers at work to critical family members at home. This contributed greatly to the emotional health of working women and consequently to demotivation and depression

#### Unannounced visitors

Unannounced visitors and guests at home have posed another challenge for working women during WFH. The difference in expectations from the men and women during these situations has been rather evident and in some cases led to marital issues and long lasting conflict

#### Multiple demands on their time

Managing children - especially the young ones – and their studies has also been a source of anxiety and potential stress. Taking a call from the children's school and helping manage technical issues faced by children undergoing online classes while managing their own work schedule has not been easy at all. In some cases, younger children have needed their mother's presence and the latter may not have been able to manage it due to the multiple demands on their time. The psychological pressure of this has taken its toll on women WFH

#### Absence of Me-time

Going to office gave a feeling of liberation to women. For a few hours at least, they were able to get out, meet friends and colleagues, have heart to heart talks with friends, and vent out frustrations. This became difficult if not impossible during WFH. These frustrations at times were inadvertently vented out on family members which was detrimental to family life, and yet another source of emotional drain-out for working women

#### The need to prove themselves

The subtle yet constant pressure to prove that they were working the required number of hours while WFH compelled working women to stretch beyond normal working hours, fueling the already high levels of anxiety

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## MANAGING THE WFH SCENARIO

It has not been an easy road to tread for working women during WFH. Having said that, a lot of women employees have been successful in managing some of these challenges.

Here are a few suggestions that have proven useful for working women over the past couple of years:

### Set expectations at home

Set clear expectations with family members, including the spouse. Make a routine for work and try adhering to it. WFH provides an opportunity for flexible timings and it will help to set the pace of work as per the deadlines provided by the Manager. Once family members are aware of the routine and schedule, it becomes relatively easier for them too to support the women employees WFH

### Establish boundaries with the Manager

Agree with the Manager on tasks to be accomplished during the day and clearly set expectations on deliverables without the latter infringing on personal time and family commitments

### Communication

Keep the family informed of important scheduled meetings to avoid disruptions and interruptions. This might include a sit-down with children sensitizing them to the needs of the work and letting them know that they are very important and you are there for them, but that you might be unavailable at certain times due to work responsibilities. Communicating with the spouse and the other family members (in case of a non-nuclear family structure) is also helpful in setting expectations and boundaries

### A fixed routine

Follow a fixed routine as far as possible. This ends up replicating the mental mindset of working from office. It also allows other family members to know when you are going to be unavailable for domestic responsibilities for them to plan around the same. You could also establish a separate work space (depending on the size of the house and other factors) to create a more conducive working environment

### Team management and collaboration

Structure and schedule tasks with team members and colleagues to align objectives and deliverables. Prioritize the essentials for yourself and colleagues. Schedule informal conversations with team members and other colleagues to remain connected and engender collaboration wherever required

### Work-life balance

Avoid focusing on work all day. Take scheduled breaks. Let lunch time or tea time be sacred. This could also be aligned with family time. Having short breaks alone or with family works wonders for everyone's morale and ensures the family is connected. As far as possible, finish required work deliverables within business hours. Ignoring the latter is not fair to you and the family, and it will also impact your productivity and motivation in the long run. Spend some time undertaking physical activity or exercise. This will not only be good for your health; it will also break the monotony of sedentary working

“ Covid 19  
brought in  
WFH across  
all sectors  
and today  
it has become  
the new norm.”

**Shared responsibilities**

Work with your spouse and children to divide household responsibilities among everyone. It will give the children a sense of responsibility and the opportunity to contribute at home. It will also take the pressure off you. Shared responsibilities can also be a great way of not just engaging everyone at home but also bonding together

**Reach out in case you need help**

There will be times when you feel lonely, depressed, or stressed. It does not make you weak if you reach out to a family member or a friend to discuss your troubles. You could also reach out to a work colleague or your supervisor if it is a work related issue that is affecting you and your motivation. These days a lot of companies engage external counselors to assist their employees and it could be a useful option for you too

At the end of the day, WFH has been a mixed bag for everyone; perhaps more so for working women given their multifarious responsibilities and the multiple hats they wear. As with any change process, WFH has had its share of upside and downside. Working women in general have navigated this change too, to the best of their abilities. Some of them have had to contend with unprecedented challenges and a few have found it difficult to grapple with certain aspects of WFH. On the whole though, there have been numerous learnings.

Here's hoping that some of the suggestions mentioned above prove helpful to women employees as all of us continue to straddle between the old way of working and what the future heralds.



## Subir Sinha

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# Women in Leadership | Achieving the Balance

Women are always saying, 'We can do anything that men can do.' But men should be saying, 'We can do anything that women can do.'

- Gloria Steinem

**I**nternational Women's Day - celebrated on 8 March – is an occasion to commemorate the social, economic and political achievements of women across the diaspora. Since the previous century, this day has also served as a platform to highlight issues impacting women across the globe; focusing on obstacles that hinder them from achieving their true potential!

During COVID-19, we saw women rise to the fore to meet this formidable health challenge, donning life-saving avatars as health care workers, caregivers, innovators, community organizers and nation leaders. In fact, this unprecedented crisis aptly highlighted their contributions and the disproportionate burdens they carry. Data doesn't lie. Statistics (in the public domain) demonstrated how women leaders and women's organizations utilized their skills, knowledge and network to lead the response and recovery efforts. Thanks to these developments, the true value and worth of a lady, in terms of offering different experiences, perspectives and skills to the table, became visible to all, leaving little doubt that they can manage any situation as well as their male counterparts.

The leadership dynamic is also reflecting this 'new reality'. Influential women have risen to become heads of state and government across nearly 20 countries worldwide (source: [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)). However, in addition to pre-existing social and systemic barriers to women's participation and leadership, new barriers have emerged for regular working women due to fallouts of the pandemic. Challenges to their safety and prosperity, fuelled by an increased risk of domestic abuse during stay-at-home, employment uncertainty, unpaid care duties, and actual unemployment, are hindrances in the path towards ensuring true gender equality, the latter being critical to ensure sustainable success for women.

To bridge this seemingly insurmountable gap, influential female voices have often raised their voices to address some uncomfortable truths. Resonating the same, I believe that leadership is not defined by age, gender, or colour. Anyone - with the right mission and vision, and a resilient spirit – has the potential to be a dependable leader! The women of today are living those values and becoming unstoppable. With increasing power and influence, they desire a new society, one that gives them the choice to grow, personally and professionally. They are determined to create ecosystems that enable them to achieve this. Shining examples include Jacinda Ardern, Dr. Kiran Mazumdar Shaw, Malala Yousafzai,



Kamala Harris, Arundhati Bhattacharya, and Indira Nooyi among several others. The efforts of these amazing women to smash the glass ceiling reflect the fact that the world is indeed changing for the better.

Until a few decades ago, only a handful of women could be seen in leadership roles. But today, they are everywhere, in parliament, the supreme court, space stations, and the Fortune 500 list. They are leading varied workplaces to strengthen resilience and build back better from this pandemic. The world needs many more such women.

On that note, I'd like to share some key leadership qualities, and behaviours that have catapulted women to the top of the game; and that will define the contours of a more balanced, inclusive future.

## A differentiated PoV

Women have the unique ability to view a situation from different perspectives. It gives them a definite edge to assess critical situations and carve solutions that might be difficult for most others to conceive.

## The Balance

Women are better than men at managing work-life balance. While being C-suite executives, authors, philanthropists or researchers, they also play the role of a sister, mother, daughter and wife. The ability to balance multiple roles and responsibilities makes them truly empathetic & approachable leaders. A survey conducted by Gallup, involving around 27 million employees globally, underlined the fact that women are adept at building strong relationships with their counterparts.

**“Until a few decades ago, only a handful of women could be seen in leadership roles.”**

## Invest in care

The global economy depends heavily on the unpaid and underpaid care work primarily carried out by women (source: [www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)). However, despite its essential nature - especially in light of COVID-19 - this work is not valued in accordance with its inherent worth. While governments have invested in the expansion of care services and supported unpaid caregivers, the private sector also needs to step up by supporting unpaid care work through paid family leave and flexible working arrangements. This is critical to create jobs and foster economic growth.

## Support women leadership

In general, women are more likely to consider their families and communities in decision-making processes which is crucial to arrive at holistic solutions. When making changes to the workplace, organizations must give credence to diversity and representation. Employers have a responsibility to create inclusive teams across their organization, including - and not limited to - the executive team. When women are given access to executive and leadership positions, they often create new opportunities for other women to succeed (source: Forbes Magazine, Nov 2021 issue).

## Fund women organizations

A slew of social constructs ranging from familial reasons, early marriage, to a perennial aversion to girls' education contribute to gender inequality. Moreover, the lack of support, infrastructure and opportunities makes it harder for educated women to enter the formal workforce. These factors also underpin the abysmal representation of women in entrepreneurship. However, times are changing. Investors are gradually realising the potential of investing in women-led start-



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ups for various reasons. This attitudinal shift comes at a critical inflection point. It's time to share a larger slice of the pie with women, as their start-ups account for just 2.2% of the \$150 billion invested in companies by VCs annually (source: Forbes Magazine, Nov 2021 issue). A number that has witnessed downward traction post the onset of the pandemic.

Going back to the basics, I believe that the time has come to re-calibrate our perceptions towards gender being the determinant of a person's inherent ability. We must look at everyone with an objective, clear lens to understand the true value of an individual, beyond traditional, biased & obsolete constructs.

On that note, let's applaud all the superwomen! They have made their mark in whatever domain they have chosen, be it that of a homemaker, teacher, performer, politician, sports person or an entrepreneur. This International Women's Day let us cherish the inherent womanhood within us, and all the amazing women who are part of our life!



## Surbhi Dewan

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# Accelerating D&I at the Workplace by using 3P



Every day we bear witness to women keeping everyone at home constructively engaged, whether it is the domestic help, the children or other family members. They manage all this while continuing to do their own work, irrespective of whether they are homemakers or working women. Irrespective of what they might be doing, they make sure that the family spend “time together collectively” as much as possible.

I am sure the majority of men feel the same way about women, when it comes to respecting and admiring the unstinting work and effort they put at home. Yet, the dynamic shifts significantly, consciously or sub-consciously, when it comes to how we respond to women at the work place.

As per the Network of Executive Women, 24% women opt out of the workforce before reaching the C-suite, as against 7% for men. Why is the number so disproportionately high for women employees? One reason is the difference in expectations from women, at the workplace and outside too. The challenges faced by them are different too. Consequently, most women are

overwhelmed and overworked as compared to their male counterparts. Women bear a larger share of the dual responsibility of working and taking care of the domestic chores. They play a relatively more involved role in running the household, managing the dynamic nature of children's schedules, and taking care of the frail and aged at home. Most of them literally work 'three shifts'. This is over and above the expectation to perform at work. It is unsurprising that a lot of them end up 'choosing' to be homemakers when faced with the dilemma of 'home versus work'.

Increasingly, organizations have introduced Diversity and Inclusion policies and strategies which are proving to be helpful. However, I feel that the 'Policy' needs to be backed by 'Program' and 'People', for it to deliver exponential outcomes. Irrespective of how good they are, the best of written values, policies and programs will not yield the desired outcomes if they are not driven by the right people.

Let us also accept the fact that everyone's outlook may not be the same or supportive of what the organization wants to drive. It is important that companies have progressive and empathetic leaders and managers who are trained, sensitized and passionate to implement the program and policies. Leaders and Managers need to 'believe' in the Policy or Program and move beyond slogans. People within and outside look at the impact on people which can only be driven by leaders who consciously and consistently practice the values of D&I, and are willing to push boundaries and break down barriers to foster a thriving D&I culture.

A working woman might be an engineer by profession. However she also dons the hat of a mother, daughter, spouse, and daughter-in-law, among several others. While men wear different hats too,



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# “How much is too much? We need to make exponential improvements as against incremental progress.”

there are somethings that require the healing touch of a woman, either owing to social conditionings or because the woman inherently feels the need to do so. This translates into more demands on their time. It is heartening to see that most companies have policies related to maternity, WFH, flexible timing, sabbatical and more. Having these policies and programs is important and laudable. However, the critical question is, “How do we make women employees feel when they are availing these benefits?” Are they made to feel any lesser if they avail of these much-needed benefits? For instance, do we protect their performance rating, provide benefits of career progression and growth or do they need to compromise on these if they avail of policies like maternity related benefits, among other things?

I also believe that it is important to transition beyond employee engagement to family engagement. The pandemic has made us realize the importance of family and being there for each other. Can organizations support and facilitate specific needs pertaining to children, the spouse and parents? Can we explore ways of including them and taking care of their wellness and engagement? Extension of initiative or new programs like hobby community, wellness tools, and facilitating medical needs could provide a new dimension to traditional engagement. The feeling of being wanted, loved and appreciated is as important as the policies that aim to further this.

This can only be done if managers across the organization demonstrate belief in the diversity and inclusion agenda, instead of D&I being limited to the leaders at the top. Metrics to measure the impact of policies will positively influence decisions spanning hiring, career development, performance evaluation, promotion, pay and benefits. Although things are beginning to change, the fact is that discrimination in some form or the other continues. Assertive D&I champions will go a long way in reducing discrimination and creating awareness of the same. Key metrics for hiring, career progression, leadership development opportunity, and engagement must be applicable for all managers, especially where the opportunity is high and progress is less.

How much is too much? We need to make exponential improvements as against incremental progress. Research shows that organizations with high diversity yield financial results that are 15-30% higher than others who do not. This itself should help establish a compelling business imperative to invest in a diverse workforce to gain competitive advantage.

Being good multitaskers, patient, perseverant, resilient, systematic, empathetic, adaptive, agile, innovative and collaborative, women employees also bring in intellectual and cultural diversity which immensely benefits organizations. Once they join the organization, they are more loyal, committed, and engaged than their male counterparts. It is important for organizations to have a clear focus on this agenda throughout the year. It is not just about the organization supporting women. It is also in the organization's interest, whether it is about having a healthier and diverse culture or about the upside in the context of productivity, performance, competitive advantage and a more engaged workplace.

I strongly feel that synergy between 3P – Policy & Program supported by passionate People – will enable exponential growth for organizations.

*(The views expressed in this article are personal)*



## Subir Verma

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# Women in Industrial Relations/Employee Relations



Industrial Relations!

A profession that has historically been perceived to be male-only. In fact, the term 'IR' unwittingly conjures up in our mind a function replete with gents with a poker face, pragmatic, and devoid of overt emotion. They are thought to be 'Gurus' of their profession; people who are aware of sections and subsections of the ID Act, and the Factories Act among other apparently abstruse domain specific information. A lot of these people might even spew some of this knowledge in their conversations with stakeholders. They come across as people who have developed deep knowledge of the *modus operandi* of Unions and who can proactively plan their movements a step or two ahead of the Unions. You might even consider them as people who not only know the members of the Union, but their families too, including what they do, where they study, and their source of funds. In the informal hierarchy, IR Managers are respected as "*aukaad hai*". Today, this is viewed as the ER (Employee Relations) discipline.

Unions, IR & ER!

The instant and sub-conscious image is one of blue-collared employees who want to get justice for the not-so-privileged class of employees. The people who stand for the rights of employees to ensure fairness. People who stand for a cause. On the other hand, there is also the impression of Unions as the epitome of violence; people who will pick up fights with the management for no apparent reason, destroy company property and go on a rampage and be responsible for the closure of plant and machinery.

We might also want to distinguish between ER and IR. IR is still plant dominated where the IR lead has a connect with the Unions. They bargain and negotiate on behalf of the company and are responsible for the memorandum of settlement, charter of demands and are responsible for harmonious working between the union and management. ER on the other hand, encompasses a

larger canvas of grievance handling, managing employee related issues, industrial relations as well as handling of POSH related matters. Contemporary ER experts may not necessarily know the intricacies of the Bare Acts or the sections of the law.

## Biases

The typical biases that women have had to deal with is that they are weaklings who require constant support in everything and anything that they do. That they are incapable of handling Unions since most Union members and leaders are mostly men. The perception to some extent has to do with 'male ego', the feeling of being superior and more able mentally and physically as compared to women. The mental barrier also pertains to questioning how a woman can sit at the helm of the table to negotiate CB (collective bargaining), COD (charter of demand) or a MoU (memorandum of understanding).

In the present context, these perspectives are somewhat outdated. IR/ER is no longer a 'male only' profession. The glass ceiling has given way as the male bastions have been broken and women have forayed into this profession and achieved tremendous success while at it.

## Enablers

It is essential to reflect on some of the enablers that have made it possible for women to enter this hitherto 'male only' profession and to acknowledge and thank those who made it possible. A big aspect is the faith, trust, and support that organizations and senior leadership in these companies have provided to back this cause. There are a number of sticky situations that one can encounter during negotiations.

If there is a CB where the Union demands the moon, the lead from the management side can refer the number she has been given so she knows what is the extent of leeway she can provide to the union during the bargaining process.

**“In the informal hierarchy, IR Managers are respected as “*aukaad hai*”. Today, this is viewed as the ER (Employee Relations) discipline.”**

Safety is the other big one. There potential threats and risks that one has to contend with as part of this role. Organizations have left no stone unturned to protect their women employees. Knowledge of the law, relationships with the office of the Labour Commissioner, and networking with local political leaders through PR has been a great help too.

Most companies have also ensured a good backup system by investing in lawyers, law firms, and reputed IR consultants in case there are legal hassles and litigations. The D&I cause has helped increase the number of women in this role, even though the numbers are still on the lower side.

### The changing face of Union members

Union Members these days are very sharp and in most cases, well-read professionals. A lot of them perhaps understand IR related aspects better than the IR experts. They are aware of their entitlements, and which levers to press within the company for the intended results.

Office bearers of the Unions like the President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer are usually well connected and have strong political affiliations which they use to their advantage. They have awareness of what is happening within the organization and track official movements. More often than not, they are a step ahead of the management. The other interesting fact is the kind of funds they have access to. Their demands are usually beyond imagination and backed with sufficient reasons in a lot of cases. The one thing that stands out though is the scant number of women who are key office bearers within the unions. The latter is not too different than what it was in earlier days too.

### Women in IR/ER

These days, women working in the IR/ER function are doing extremely well. They possess patience, perseverance and an understanding nature, which they

use to their advantage. They painstakingly go through the various connecting threads and put together each piece of the jigsaw puzzle to arrive at the true picture. While they might appear to be gentle on the outside, most of these women have nerves of steel and grit. They are empathetic but are able to perceive the finer nuances through their gifted sixth sense.

### Recommendations for IR/ER professionals

There are quite a few things that have helped me while donning an IR/ER hat. I am listing the salient ones here:

- ➔ Treat Union Leaders and Office bearers with respect. They are human too.
- ➔ Informal catch-ups go a long way in building relationships. An informal interaction over an occasional cup of tea helps to proactively gauge potential future events. In my stints as an IR/ER professional, there have been occasions when I have been privy to confessions about what a particular Union member might be planning. In some cases, these could have been damaging to the organization. Having a sense of this in advance has helped me and the management to proactively address such issues.
- ➔ Be there for them and with them. They too have ups and downs, tragic incidents and celebrations. A personal visit on such occasions builds solidarity.
- ➔ Honesty, transparency and being reasonable helps. They know when you are taking up for them and putting their cause to the management. On the flip side, they also know when they are in the wrong even though they may rarely admit it.
- ➔ Being in touch goes a long way. A simple wish on the occasion of a festival is a step among many to build camaraderie.

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Many years ago, during my stint as Chief People Officer at ACC, some of my male colleagues laughed behind my back, saying “A woman in IR”. I had the last laugh as my team and I consistently resolved Union issues at our plants spread across Bangalore, Chennai and Kolkata.

Later, as the ER APAC Lead for Accenture, we successfully managed to make ER a desired function from the 'scavenger function' that it was informally called. We successfully closed negotiations with the 'Male only' Union” at Bangladesh. During the closure and negotiation discussions I had the female version of my 'James Bond' moment. Our GAP (global asset protection) lead, an ex- US Marine actually thought I should take a

helicopter or private charter to Dhakka, complete the negotiations, and in the event of a life threatening situation, jump back into a waiting chopper. Of course, our global CHRO very firmly said “I will not risk her life”.

Today, in my role as the global CHRO for Strides, I continue to work on long term settlements with my Union members, with my other very capable ER/IR colleagues.

Nothing is too difficult to surmount, especially for women. Everything is possible. Even the word Impossible when read carefully suggests I am possible!



## Dr. Tanaya Mishra

*She is global CHRO with Strides Pharma. Prior to this she has worked as MD HR, APAC at Accenture, and as global CHRO for Essar. She has a PhD in Manpower Planning and a PG degree in HR, along with a degree in Law. She has been Member and Facilitator with APERG, served as board member of NHRD Network, CII, and a subject matter expert with SHRM, She was part of the prestigious CSC Commonwealth Leaders and invited to Oxford and Buckingham Palace. Among her many accolades, the most recent one is the Women Super Achiever award 2021. She has been identified as one of the 40 most aspirational HR Leaders of Asia.*



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