

Every goal has a human face

For someone who set out to 'serve society', with a career dream in the Indian Administrative Services (IAS), Aparna Sharma's journey from small town Ujjain to a global HR thought leader is worth reckoning. Aparna's gutsy spirit underlines her strong conviction and value system, which have often dictated her career choices.

BY SANGEETA GHOSH DASTIDAR



PIC: YUSUF KHAN

Be it at her very first job at Nocil, her engagement as an expatriate in the Phillipines, or in her multidisciplinary roles at Monsanto, India, each offered Aparna the scope to test her acumen in handling local and global business challenges.

All through her stints with Novartis Healthcare Private Ltd, with UCB India, a Belgium-based pharmaceutical company, or her current role as Country HR Head at Lafarge India, Aparna has stayed tuned into country-specific corporate cultures and business nuances to steer people power and underlying sub-cultures that impact growth and develop-

ment. "If you notice, I have been engaged with companies that directly impact people, be it in healthcare or biotechnology," says Aparna.

An informal chat with Corporate Citizen reveals Aparna Sharma's 'go-getter' appeal, her penchant for 'making an impact' via talent management and her need to 'make a difference' socially by pledging time and companionship for the less fortunate amongst us.

Steely Strides

CC: What has been your experience as a woman in the corporate world, especially in the so called 'macho' sectors of manufacturing and construction?

AS: I have had my share of struggles. While it is not easy for women in any sector, being a 'woman' is definitely not a deterrent. Especially younger women today have the opportunity, but they need to rise above pre-conceived notions about working in so-called 'non-traditional' sectors such as manufacturing or production shopfloors or being posted to remote locations.

Once on-board, women should not demand or expect to be treated any different from men under any given work condition. I have gained from 'roughing it out', rather than asking for special privileges. It is definitely tougher in a hierarchical system, but women should learn to 'bite the bullet'. The "Glass Ceiling" does exist, however, women should not lower their aspirations. Do ask for that promotion, if you deserve it!

Banking on Beauty and Brains

CC: Your thoughts or lessons learnt from working within multi-cultural environments and MNCs.

AS: From my experience, American firms offer more parity, irrespective of gender biases. Women tend to face biases until they prove their mettle. I would like to advocate the adage of 'beauty with brains' to overcome such gender-led pre-conceptions.

CC: Your take on managing young talent, especially women in non-traditional sectors.

AS: Non-traditional sectors such as my current industry, can actually offer more scope for middle-managerial roles, especially as support staff in HR, Finance, Supply Chain and other semi-technical roles. Here, women in mid-career segments can gain more mileage if they enhance and add value in their respective job roles.

CC: Your advice on honing personal aspirations.

"An individual should take charge of his own growth and career development irrespective of the stakes of his organisation or boss"

AS: Continue to dream and never compromise on your set goals. Women should harbour and work towards individual dreams while also working towards a joint-dream with their partner. Identify your passion, differentiate your needs from that of your family and chalk out and evolve these goals separately. Rally around your support network and do not get pulled into a perpetual state of identity crisis between your 'self' and your social bearings as a 'family' person.

CC: Your advice to youngsters on achieving goals and on career survival techniques.

AS: Clarity in setting up career goals is a must, but it is equally important to recognise real-life variables, viz., domain knowledge and skills.

Team work is critical; as is the need for patience in one's drive to achieve results.

While on-boarding transitions need to be honed gradually, youngsters should be self-reliant. An individual should take charge of his own growth and career development irrespective of the stakes of his organisation or boss!

Your personal grooming and networking skills are essential too. Internships are foregrounds not just for cultivating professional assets; they are opportunities to create lasting impressions.

In an organisation, "who knows you", might spell your worth much more than "who you know"!

Timely Managed Goals

CC: How do you define your moment of glory?

AS: Achieving glory is not an isolated goal. It is a continuous attempt to touch the lives of the 2,000 to 3,000 odd staff under the company's fold each day, and to work around company policies that serve employees. My aim is to positively impact the lives of people at work, appreciate the tasks accomplished and give 'due where deserved'. A purposeful chat that enhances positive, passionate and energetic outcomes through people-connect is worth my time. You need empathy to manage people, and how much I respond to workforce-oriented matters becomes the outcome I achieve daily. That is a win-win.

CC: How do you maintain a work-life balance?

AS: I understand the value of my time and differentiate my activities into core and non-core work. Accordingly, I deal, deploy or delegate to bring in competencies whether at work or at home. Women have to realise they are not 'Superwomen'!

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