

# Women For Women – Let’s Make This Work

Women are breaking almost every conceivable barrier today and challenging the status quo. But whilst there has been not much progress made in terms of equal representation of women in organisations, we need to step up and help deserving and competent women, not because of their gender, but for their capabilities.

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Last month, as we celebrated International Woman’s Day on March 8, I had the opportunity to speak at and be part of various forums. Discussions around women breaking glass ceilings, women empowerment, role modelling, work-life balance issues etc. were the usual topics that had been doing rounds.

From entry level to C-Suite, women are underrepresented in organisations, have lesser opportunities to advance than men, face more barriers to senior leadership like biases and stereotypes, experience an uneven playing field and fight biases related to balancing work and family, see a lack of senior or visibly successful female role models and not enough leaders sponsoring highly qualified women- the reasons that hold women back are many. This is what people keep repeating all the time. It’s like flogging a dead horse!

This year I was asked to speak on an interesting topic- “Women for Women- Hit or Miss”. As I was preparing for this talk, I went down memory lane to think of my role models and people who have supported me in my personal and professional life. I call them “Anchors”.

Everyone naturally recounts and talks about family and while that was true in my case too..., I also reflected on books, other people in my environment and what else?

All of us encounter obstacles or face challenges in our lives. As the challenges become complex, quite naturally, we feel the need for motivation. While self-help and inspirational books are available aplenty, most of them sketch the journey of the who’s who or celebrities whose advice, though genuine, is difficult to be followed by common people.

I have always pondered - why should we take inspiration from celebrities alone? Since it is human nature to share and learn from others, why not seek advice from ‘ordinary’ but ‘experienced’ people around us, who can guide us

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effectively and practically to resolve our problems?

In fact, it is with this thought that I have recently written a book titled, 'Between U and Me'. The book portrays the real-life stories of the people around me, who have inspired me and made a positive difference to my life— from my educational to personal and professional life. The protagonists of this book are so-called 'ordinary' people, but each is an achiever in his/her own right. In simple lucid language, they have chronicled their life journeys, the circumstances and challenges they faced with the tenacity to reach the pinnacles of success, for the benefit of the readers.

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crossed my mind all these years. Inspiration is what was uppermost, irrespective of which gender it came from.

I really thought hard about my various encounters and experiences with women professionals, pleasant and unpleasant both but more so,

delved deeper into the learnings from them.

During my career so far, I have had women as seniors, peers and subordinates but have never had a lady boss. However, I have been a lady boss for long. There's so much I have learnt from each of these



women – “what to do”, “how to be” and most importantly, “what not to do” and “not to be”!

Some great lessons I learnt from a very senior lady professional very early in my career –

1. Always put on “YOUR OXYGEN MASK” first
2. Make YOURSELF the NO.1 option in your life
3. BELIEVING IN YOURSELF is mandatory

4. Don't be afraid to be vulnerable
5. Put your hand up and VOLUNTEER even if the task may seem hard
6. Surround yourself with people who will STRETCH YOU
7. Raise your son how you would want to be treated and raise your daughter like the strong boys

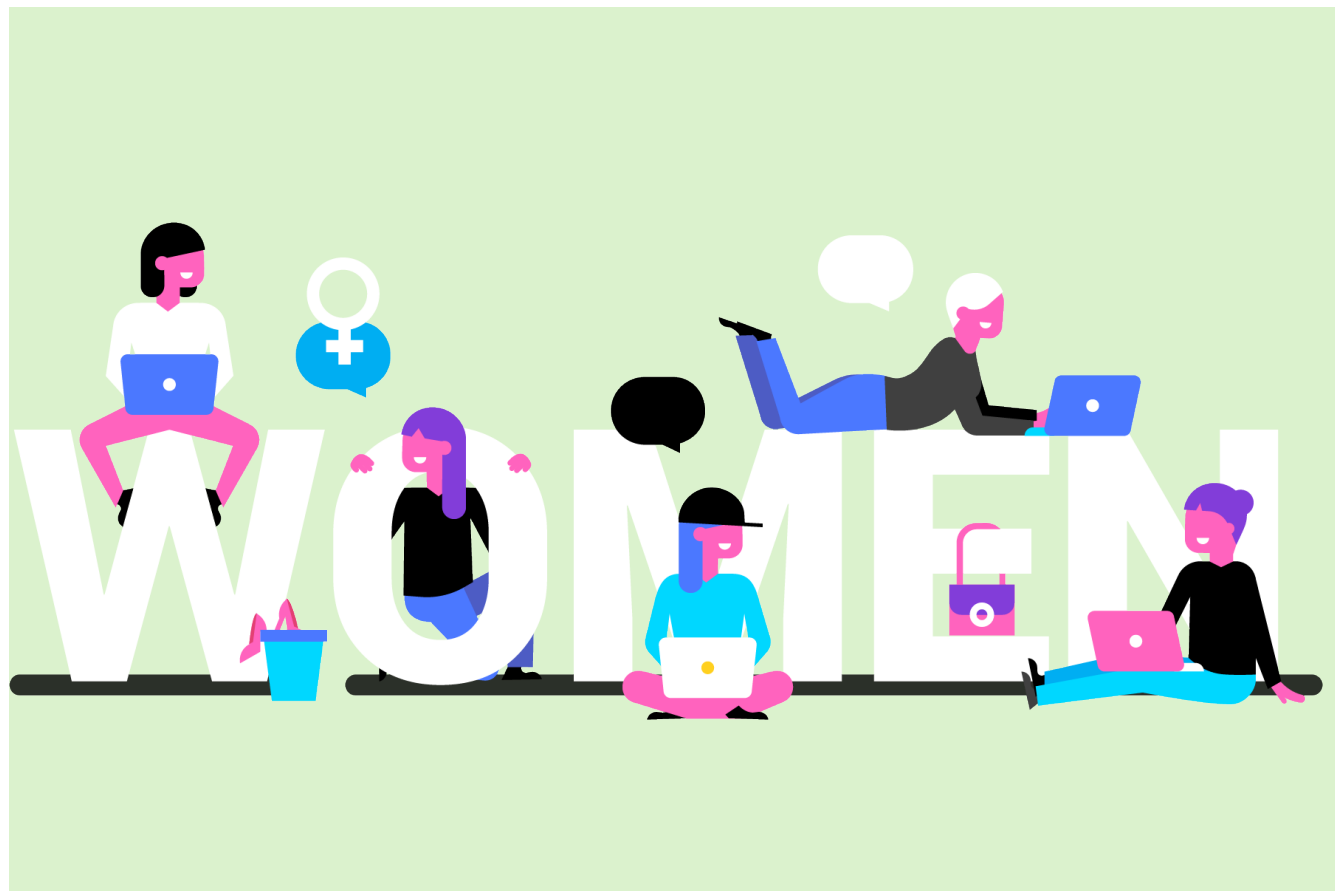
**These are great things to remember and practice as we work hard**

**to find our way in the corporate maze. Aren't they?**

However, having observed her mannerisms and behaviour for a while, during my impressionable early career years, I engaged in an open discussion with her regarding morals and personal values. This was during the time when there was no awareness regarding POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace) or no trace of the #MeToo movement!

What she shared was shocking. “No one will stand for you in this corporate jungle – deploy all means that you have – don't worry about morals, values. Nobody really cares. All is fair to get what you want!” I am sure you get the drift of what she was trying to convey. This has stayed with me very strongly as

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“what not to do” and “not to be”. It doesn’t matter if no one cares, I surely do – about my values and what I stand for! There have been many occasions through my career all these years but this is one thing I have been firm on and proud of! No compromise for whatever may be at stake!

I posed this question, “Do you care? Are the means as important to you as the end?”, to the audience during the conference I was addressing, and now to you, all those who are reading this article. Again, the question is gender agnostic.

I shared another instance with the participants about another strong lady in the network who introduced the concept of “What Else?” to me. It’s not always about being good at your job, following the rules, working hard etc. “What Else?” is about making an effort to learn and know more about the industry, business, stakeholders, external environment as well as about networking within and outside, understanding the unwritten rules in the organisation. It’s about the stretch efforts you make towards all these which are over and above your job needs. That’s how you stand out.

And in the case of women, it’s not about “looking smart”, it’s about “being smart” that makes you distinct.

One more aspect on which women need to work upon is making themselves ‘visible’ and maximise one’s growth in the corporate hierarchy. While high performance is essential, it is not enough. It is making your accomplishments and your work ‘visible’ that make it crucial to succeed. One must also

know how to promote oneself both internally and externally. One of the best ways to do this is to seek out roles that have a highly visible, stretch and maximizes one’s growth in the corporate hierarchy.

At this juncture, I threw the floor option for the audience to share their experiences – if they’ve had women mentors, bosses, how helpful they have been or otherwise.



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Participants shared various examples. However, most of them were unpleasant, where women were either not supported or backed by women in positions of influence and authority. And reasons they mentioned were many- not to be seen as favouring other women due to gender (in spite of competence) or their own insecurity or even the thought that each one needs to struggle and find their path just like they had.

This got me thinking again! It’s not the first time I am writing around

a subject related to women. Some of my earlier articles are also very topical and relevant to this one. Women in today’s times are breaking every conceivable barrier. Let’s change the paradigm – let’s root for and help other DESERVING and COMPETENT WOMEN, not because of the gender, but for their ability and resolve to make a difference.

The Indian corporates also have to take up the responsibility of creating a pipeline of women leaders by creating a work culture that understands and encourages women to be as active as men by providing them with the necessary training- which will facilitate them with the required theoretical and practical knowledge, stimulating their capabilities by strengthening their decision-making skills and motivating them by working on their overall potential. We have to understand that when women are better represented in leadership roles, more women are hired across the board. The key to closing the gender gap is by putting more women in charge. This will eventually lead to more equity of economic opportunity for women across the country.

Let the tribe grow! Let’s pledge to sponsor other women who want to shine by sharing our light. So that, years from now, when someone like me asks the question in a discussion like this, the audience is full of positive and pleasant experiences and we are able to visibly see the difference around us!