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There's no Glass Ceiling at Work, It is In Our homes: Kanchan Naikawadi

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Conversations



Ever since she was a little girl, [Kanchan Naikawadi](#) knew she wanted to contribute positively to society when she grew up. She couldn't figure out how, until she had to face a personal tragedy – losing her father to cancer. What she realized was, his chances of survival would have increased if the disease had been detected at an earlier stage. This became the mission of her life, making preventive healthcare available and accessible to as many people as she could.

Such was her determination to contribute towards society and her work that when she felt she wasn't adding much value to a role, she quit. And, soon enough, she was working on what she passionately felt was needed in the Indian healthcare sector. This was how [Indus Health Plus](#), a company providing preventive healthcare packages was born. In this chat with [Women Icons Network](#), she talks about her career graph, her philosophies as an entrepreneur and the female representation at the modern workplace.

Strong Grounding

When talking about the ambitions she had as a child, [Kanchan Naikawadi](#) says she wanted to make her mark in the world by contributing to the society. "This line of thought might have been shaped by the kind of schooling I received in Ooty. We were always encouraged to think freely and look beyond the ordinary," she recalls. However, she was not sure how she would make that contribution.

After completing her education, she found herself being employed by her alma mater. In fact, she says she has worked at every educational institution she has studied from. "They had realized that if I believe in something, I can convince others to adopt it in their lives. I am very passionate about the things that appeal to my heart," she explains. It was this need to believe in the cause she worked towards that led her to quit a well paying job at one of these organizations.

However, at the last place she worked at, she felt like she was not making the right kind of contribution in the lives of the students who came to the institute. That made her guilty to the extent that she started losing sleep over it. Her uncle, who has been a big influence on her life, advised not to pursue anything that takes away her happiness. The next day, she quit her job.

Tragedy Strikes

While she was still figuring out the next move in her career, Naikawadi decided to start her family. At the time she conceived, the family came to know that her father had been diagnosed with cancer. "At that time, I was kept in the dark about my father's illness because my loved ones didn't want me to get stressed during pregnancy. My father was my role model and I was very close to him," she explains.

His death had a deep impact on Naikawadi. She started thinking hard about the situation and realised that it could have been different if her father's disease had been detected early on. That's when she resolved to make it the mission of her life to ensure that no one else would face the same fate.

New Beginnings

Three years after that, she set up [Indus Health Plus](#) to provide preventive health check-ups in the year 2000. As this was a relatively new concept in India at the time, the company found it challenging to motivate people to avail the services. The company decided to start educating and spreading awareness about the advantages of preventive healthcare.

"Everyone's focus was on the cure. No one remembered that 'prevention is better than cure! Healthcare available at that time was genuinely not affordable, accessible, and available to the masses," she says about those days. These tests can not only save an individual from premature death or disability but also save their families from mental trauma and financial distress, she stresses.

Over the years, people took to the idea. Today, they have centres in multiple cities across India with the same cost and experience everywhere. They also provide the latest and intricate preventive healthcare technology like genetic testing.

Work Philosophy

At a confusing juncture of her career, she got her first lesson from her uncle about the guiding principles related to work - not to do anything she didn't believe in. There were many other lessons she learnt from him and holds dear. She believes that anyone who follows them can improve their work life manifold.

One of them says, 'Do not close your doors to the past.' This helped her maintain amicable relations, and freely enter the doors she walked out of in the past, explains Naikawadi. "My uncle explained the importance of achieving financial stability in business. He guided me to keep a part of the finances intact so that I can keep paying all my employees in adverse circumstances for at least 6 months," she said.

Along with the other lessons, the last one was especially beneficial during the early months of the covid pandemic. Despite limited revenues, the company didn't find it difficult to support its employees.

New Normal

Talking of the pandemic, we ask her how difficult it was for her personally to adjust to the new normal. "Work from home came as an unexpected benefit from the pandemic. The travel time that we are saving each day goes into enhancing our family bonds and doing the things we couldn't find time for during the weekdays," she enthuses.

She believes that this situation has finally helped people achieve a work-life balance, since there's less stress and tiredness due to absence of a long daily commute to work. "Women are also closer to their families and they can carry out all their domestic responsibilities while working. Women get the opportunity to be closer to their children, and spend quality time with them and their family," she says. She points out that people can now schedule the work as per their comfort since meetings can be attended from anywhere.

Females in Workforce

Since she brought up women and the workplace, we ask if she feels gender representation has proved at the workplace since she started working. She says it has. "Factually, women are higher revenue contributors than men as instead of focusing on the enterprise as a whole they prefer to watch each

component of business minutely and separately, assisting them to expand to their customer base," she says.

She also refers to research reports that have said companies led by women are generating a 35% higher return on investment than the organizations run by men. "A fundamental postulation for entrepreneurial success is the aptitude to produce unique and unconventional consumer goods for the competitive world. An entrepreneur needs to be creative and innovative to grow and succeed," she says, adding that women surpass men in their novel ideas.

Despite these factors, the number of women in the workforce has not grown by a very large margin in the past couple of decades. Naikawadi believes this is because the society still holds a myopic vision towards feminism. "I don't believe in the glass ceiling at the workplace, it is actually in the homes. Our society finds it quite acceptable when a woman has to leave work or their passion to take care of their families. In the cases where a woman chooses work over family, it is frowned upon!," she points out.

She insists that she doesn't look at people through discriminating glasses while hiring them. She looks at their skills and experiences alone, not their gender.

Maintaining Gender Balance

"I think, to achieve gender balance, it is imperative that all types of harassment are identified and stopped immediately," says Naikawadi. As per some surveys, at some point of their careers, one in four women are subjected to harassment at their workplaces, she informs. The responsibility to identify as well as stop harassment, she believes, lies with the management. Unfortunately, in many companies, such harassment cases are ignored, she says.

Talking about the right manner to deal with such cases, she says, "Any signs of harassment within your workplace - no matter how big or small - need to be stamped out immediately via proper POSH (Prevention of Sexual Harassment) processes. Such processes being overlooked is a clear indication that profound gender inequality exists within the organization."

At Indus, where 45% of the employees are women, most of the department heads are women too. She says the company makes sure to provide a comfortable and conducive atmosphere to female as well as male employees. "There is a special women's cell and policies for them when it comes to their safety and security. We address the special cases as and when required," she informs about the policies at her company. She adds that new mothers can extend maternity leaves without the fear of losing their jobs or avail flexi hours.

Gender Bender

Naikawadi firmly believes that if women safety at the workplace is guaranteed, gender disparity would be an issue of the past. "Women are naturally motivated and born multitaskers; their passion should not be hindered because of safety concerns. Women need to claim their spaces and their due with complete confidence and authority," she exhorts.

Another important factor is the troubles and harassment women face at their homes, she points. "It also affects their work in the office. For women to grow in all spheres of their lives, we need to be emotionally supportive to them at their homes as well as workplaces," she stresses.