



Women bounce back to greater heights



The spirit which that drives a woman abandoned by her husband do odd jobs and bring up her children, the passion of an underprivileged girl who emerged successful to go back to her roots and educate the lesser fortunate, the grit a woman shows in fighting for her rights with none to guard her, the patriotism of a woman who sends her son to the forces after her Army officer husband fights to death for the country... diverse faces of a woman. The quality of smiling away her blues with the fire still remaining in her spirit has made woman synonymous with resilience. Bouncing back from hard times - something which makes Indian women a step ahead of men.

Very often, it comes as a natural ability, but sometimes its qualities need to be discovered. It involves recognizing gifts and talents and finding some meaning in crisis. Many times developing resilience is personal which develops over a period of time. A panel discussion to mark International Women's Day held recently in Bangalore saw successful women interact about the mantras they depended on to achieve the feat. They shared views on empowering women and hence the society. The discussion, jointly organized by The Times of India and Accenture, got deep into the problems and perils that loom large on the society as well as their solutions. The panel consisted of women who proved they can not only win, but can also excel.

In the discussion moderated by Rekha Menon, executive director, Accenture India, saw 300-plus strong women audience from the corporate world accorded diverse meanings to resilience, including strength, courage, positive mindset, confidence, leadership and adaptability and the spirit that never dies.

According to leading columnist Bachi Karkaria, "making your own sunshine and being flexible" will help women overcome several crisis. "If you can bend, you won't break and will be able to spring back," she said. "Clear the clouds yourself and make your own sunshine. Women have great ability to bend and spring back. Every time they spring back, they spring back to a greater height," she said.

Going into the nuances of her profession, she said resilience is much more in journalism than the corporate world.



"Many times you have to make decisions and change them. That's where flexibility comes to play. Journalism is like any other profession. If you are pulled up for a mistake, don't take it as a punishment, but consider it as an opportunity to learn. Take extra time to do things which you could not do when you were busy," she added.

Sharing her success mantra, Viloo Morawala-Patell, founder, Avesthagen, who began her journey as an entrepreneur at 32, said: "I realized I had more to give and I wanted to change the world. And my core competency was science. Managing family and creation of a company was challenging and wonderful. Ultimately, it's decision making all the way. When you take a decision, it should be based on honesty. If you are honest to yourself, success just comes your way."

Dr Indu Shahani, renowned educationist and Sheriff of Mumbai, emphasized on the importance of education to build the spirit of resilience in women. She shared the mantra her mother gave her: "When change comes, respond and don't react. Because when we respond, we will be positive and will be able to manage the change," said the 110th Sheriff of Mumbai, who is the first teacher to make it to the post.

"Once I saw four boys standing outside the class. The teacher had punished them as they were not paying attention in the class. In those corridors records were kept. I asked them to make use of their punishment time by making a database of the students who went through the college in 50 years. To my surprise, they created a database of 38,692



students all in their punishment period! This is innovative resilience," said Indu who is also the principal of HR College of Commerce and Economics, who has more than 31 years of teaching experience.

When Yeshodhara Menon, chief post master general, Karnataka Circle, joined in postal services in 1978, there were very few women in the service and was an uncharted territory. "With the help from my mentors, my journey was enjoyable throughout. Work-life balance is something which you have to achieve for success," says Yeshodhara, who had been a rank-holder throughout her academic life.

"Resilience is not passive, but about bouncing back. Whatever we do, we do with the best of our knowledge. Success comes when we don't repeat the mistake and learn from it," she said.

MP, social activist and actor Shabana Azmi had a different take on resilience. "The true resilience I have seen not in privileged women, but in the underprivileged, those who live in slums. Constantly under the threat of being thrown out of their home, they show the real resilience. In fact, authorities do not realize that demolition creates worse slums," she said.

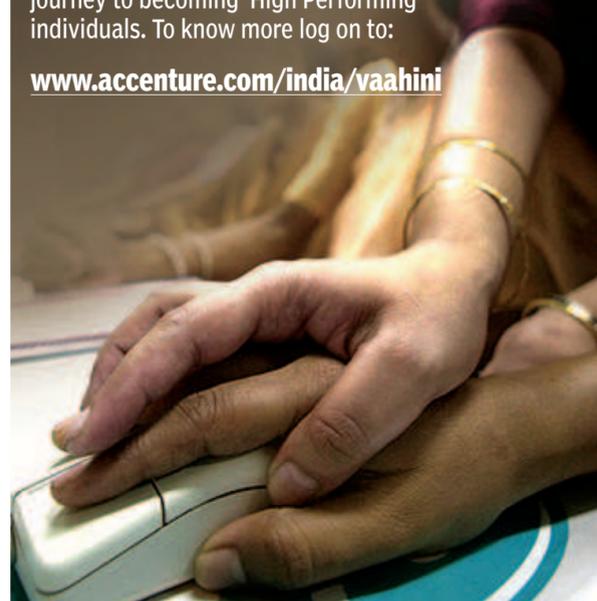
Citing the mantra her poet-lyricist father gave her, Shabana said: "My father who was paralyzed at the age of 53 could not move his left arm and leg. Even in that condition, he went and worked in a small village in Uttar Pradesh and made it a model village. Once, I asked my father: 'Abba, when you don't see the change which you are working for, don't you get frustrated?' He answered: 'When you are working for a change, you should build into that expectation the possibility that the change may not occur in your lifetime. If you work sincerely, the change will happen after you also. Then there is no room for frustration'. We need to inculcate that habit in this world of quick-fix solutions," said Shabana who has proved her mettle as an actor as well as an activist.

Summing up a discussion that was met with many opinions, questions, opinions and much enthusiasm from the audience, the women said what was needed was passion, compassion, respect and the spirit to consider every step a step forward. Bachi Karkaria concluded it saying resilience is not just bouncing back, but bouncing back to greater heights.

Vaahini provides an opportunity for all professional women to network, share and learn from each other's experiences

The forum resides as an online community and will be supported through various on-ground initiatives focused on developing leadership skills in women. The network will showcase women leaders from across the world, research on gender diversity, empowering women as they continue on their journey to becoming High Performing individuals. To know more log on to:

www.accenture.com/india/vaahini



Education, one of the powerful tools



Education is important. But can education alone bring changes in the society? Education as a major tool to empower the underprivileged sparked off a heated debate from the panelists who brought out its various aspects.

Educationist Indu Shahani voiced for educating the girl child saying: "When you educate a man, you educate an individual, if you educate a woman, you educate an entire village."

Shabana Azmi agreed to it but pointed out some other side of it too. "Just education is not enough. It all depends on the kind of education we give our children." To make it clear, she mentioned about a textbook of the primary class which said - 'Where is mother? Mother is in the kitchen. Where is father? Father is in the office'. Expressing her resentment at the present system, she said: "Why can't it be father is in the kitchen and mother is in the office or both mother and father are in kitchen or even both mother and father are in office," inviting supporting cheer from the audience. "If education reinforces gender divide and stereotypes, it is of no use," she concluded. Stressing the importance of re-education, Viloo Morawala-Patell said many principles are lacking in today's youngsters. "Many of them are totally oblivious about behaviour. Re-education is a must," she said.

Countering the generalisation that kind of education that is given now won't help in empowerment of society, Indu Shahani said: "Today 50% of India's population is below 25 years of age. I have seen the power of the youth when we gave training to girls from 34 municipal schools in Mumbai in computer skills and speaking English. Their spirit was amazing." Yeshodhara too opined that education can still be considered the most powerful tool.

Empowerment has to begin at the grass-roots level, felt Shabana who said it all depends on what values children get from younger days. Bachi Karkaria pointed out the survival stories of people of Mumbai who faced several terrorist attacks in the past. The kind of spirit of ordinary people there exhibit is a source of inspiration, she opined.

Agreeing to the panelists, Rekha Menon stated "Education is going to be a key enabler of India's future growth. It is imperative for business and government to collaborate and address the accessibility and affordability of education, starting at the grass root level.



Discussion On Resilience, A Term That Has Become Synonymous With Woman, Shared The Spirit And Mantra To Success

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Bachi Karkaria, columnist

When you take a decision, it should be based on honesty. If you are honest to yourself, success just comes your way

Viloo Morawala-Patell, founder, Avesthagen

When change comes, respond and don't react. When we respond, we will be positive and will be able to manage the change

Indu Shahani, Sheriff of Mumbai

When you work for a change, build into that expectation the possibility that the change may not occur in your lifetime. If you work sincerely, the change will happen after you also.

Shabana Azmi, MP, social activist and actor

Work-life balance is something which you have to achieve for success

Yeshodhara Menon, chief post master general, Karnataka Circle

To me resilience is the ability to rebound and turn challenges into opportunities. It means being confident, remaining optimistic and being flexible - qualities critical to high performance and navigating change.

Rekha Menon, Executive Director, Accenture

Bring the change today



As ordinary people, how can we help the underprivileged in the right way? How far can we bring a difference in the society by doing so?

"Start the change from your home right from today. Be kind to the domestic help or your driver. Lend a hand in educating their kids. Just help one more person other than you and your family. It will bring a great difference," said Shabana Azmi, in response to queries from the audience.

Stressing on the importance of mentoring at work place, schools as well as colleges, Bachi Karkaria said: "Gone are the days when teachers were on a higher plane of a sage. Now they have to be by the side of the students, as one among them."

On how far organizations will be able to help, Viloo said narrating the example when her company faced hard times due to recession. "As many as 400-500 staff stood by me and showed resilience. Be honest with your staff, be an inclusive and transparent leader. Include them in decision-making and energize them to perform," she said.

"We need to work towards building an inclusive culture by recognizing differences, creating equal opportunities for all our people in India that allows them to expand their horizons. This will be the key ingredient in transforming India into a 'High Performance Nation'. Said Rekha Menon, executive director, Accenture India.

Women left the hall with satisfaction and determination to be the change themselves.

Indians have greater adaptability

Adaptability and resilience of Indians (76%) are two important and determining factors in deciding while retaining employees compared with 36% in the Netherlands and 66% and 69% in US and UK respectively.

The facts evolved in a global survey undertaken as a part of Accenture's celebration of International Women's Day 2010 to help fuel the dialogue on key issues affecting working women. The report 'Women Leaders and Resilience: Perspectives from the C-Suite' was released at a function held recently in Bangalore.

In India, Accenture conducted an online and telephone survey with 30 senior executives ranging from Chief Talent Officer to CEOs and CFOs. More than two-thirds (76%) of corporate leaders in India were of the opinion that resilience - the ability to overcome challenges and turn them into opportunities - is an important trait in determining whom to retain. These leaders view both men (40%) and women (41%) as equally resilient. **Women make better leaders?**

Leaders feel women and men in India are equally adaptable and resilient. Keeping this in mind, 14% of the respondents said they had increased leadership programs specific to women while 43% had made no changes. In terms of coaching and mentoring programs for women 18% increased them moderately while 42% kept



them as they were.

Companies in India are taking considerable steps in preparing women for leadership roles. India is the leader in providing external coaching opportunities at 57% while, US: 36%, UK: 37% and China: 20%. Organizations of 50% of the respondents provide work-life balance programs, which is much higher when compared with US (36%), UK (46%) and China (40%). However, India is low in encouraging women to participate in external professional networks or corporate citizenship programs and also providing financial support for relevant education. In India, the ratio of men and women fired was 95 : 5.

Women - New age leaders

Interestingly, successful women are more likely to look for career "stretch roles" - and, in fact, continue to challenge themselves. India was the third highest where 79% respondents, compared to Singapore (80%) and South Africa (100%), said

that their organizations had provided opportunities to women employees to enhance their careers. Countries that came next were UK (66%), US (64%) and China (40%).

Diversity programs of Accenture

Engaging a workforce that spans across cultures, generations, genders, backgrounds and qualifications, Accenture understands that devoting time, money and effort is essential to develop and nurture this distinctive culture.

The companies have invested in building an awareness of unique individual needs and enhance accountability of the entire organization. Gender sensitization training programs like 'Leading a Diverse Workforce' and 'Being Gender Sensitive' are focused workshops for leaders and frontline supervisors.

To support those who need to take care of their children while continuing to pursue career aspirations at Accenture, the company has tied up with several day-care centers. 'Global Flexible Work Arrangement policies' also help people to continue and balance their careers amid changes in their personal lives.

'Employee Assistance Program', an initiative focused on helping the employees with personal and professional issues is another initiative of the company towards providing a friendly work environment.