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Leading the way: How women executives are redefining leaders



Entrepreneurship, historically a male-dominated field, has presented women with numerous challenges in initiating and expanding their businesses. According to the Sixth Economic Census, conducted by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation in 2014, women represent just 14% of the total entrepreneurship in India. Moreover, a Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) study indicates that only 20% of women-led MSMEs have access to institutional finance in India. Despite these significant hurdles, women-owned businesses are currently responsible for creating millions of jobs and contributing billions of dollars to the global economy. Over the past few decades, women entrepreneurs have made notable strides in the business world. This is due, in part, to their increased access to education, funding, mentorship, and other enabling facilities.

Women entrepreneurs have demonstrated remarkable success and innovation. Dr Vibha Tripathi, a graduate of IIT Kanpur and founder of Boon, echoes similar sentiments about her entrepreneurial journey. Boon is a technology-driven company that focuses on social and environmental impact regarding drinking water. The enterprise has created IoT-enabled WaterATMs® and WaterCubes, which are commercial premium drinking water machines for 100+ people. Many of Boon's designs are also solar-ready. "Female entrepreneurs are quickly gaining recognition in the nation's entrepreneurial ecosystem. While it is encouraging to see more women in business leadership roles breaking down barriers, it is vital to ensure that this upward trend remains unimpeded," says Dr Tripathi. "I envision female business owners in 2023 advancing their personal growth, expanding their comfort level with risk-taking, and pushing their personal boundaries. I hope to see more women in water-tech or other technology-oriented start-ups in the near future," she added.

Sheena Sakhuja, who restarted her career after a sabbatical as the custodian of Aye Finance, a growing brand in the fintech domain. Serving as deputy vice president and head – corporate Impact, Sheena was able to not

just build a positive image for the brand within three years, but also positioned as a thought leader in the MSME lending space. "While it was not unusual to see women take an active role in the urban economic landscape, it has now started to get mirrored in the rural scenario as well. Women running grocery shops, tailoring shops, and managing their dairy farms are common sights in Tier-2 and beyond locations," Sheena said. Leela Suvada, Manager of Software QA Engineering at Barracuda Networks, was drawn to a career in technology because of its constant evolution and potential for positive impact on society. "I am passionate about using technology to make a difference in the world. One of the most effective ways to encourage more women to pursue careers in technology is to provide them with relatable role models," she said. Employers can showcase the significant contributions made by female professionals to the success of the company, highlighting successful women by displaying their work, acknowledging their achievements, and increasing the visibility of their accomplishments. All of these efforts can serve as a source of inspiration and motivation for other women.

Suvada also believes that training and mentorship programs tailored to the needs of women can help support and recognize their potential and career goals. Such programs can be particularly helpful in enabling women to progress into more senior or managerial roles, where they can become role models for others.

Leaders like Dr Vibha Tripathi, Sheena Sakhuja and Leela Suvada are paving way for numerous other women to showcase their entrepreneurial and leadership abilities, that too early in their life. Krutika Lal, Co-founder and CMO of Aretto, is one such example. Named frequently amongst most successful female entrepreneurs under the age of 30, Kritika has been associated with startups and established brands in senior leadership positions, including GroupM,

Backpacker Panda, and Play Design Labs in her decade-long career. According to her, digital innovation and technology have immense potential to create a level playing field for women entrepreneurs.

"By providing access to education, eliminating bias in recruitment and hiring processes, encouraging entrepreneurship, and improving work-life balance, we can break down traditional barriers and create opportunities for women to excel in fields that were previously dominated by men. As a female co-founder of a tech and design-led kids' footwear brand, I have witnessed first-hand the transformative power of digital technology. We need to continue pushing the boundaries of what's possible and work together to ensure that everyone has an equal chance to thrive in our digital world," she said.

Business Icon Devita Saraf, too, delved deep into the world of entrepreneurship at an early age. She founded Vu Televisions, an LED TV and display manufacturing company, at a young age of 24 years. "The business industry has been transformed by the incredible contributions of women leaders. Despite facing numerous obstacles in a world that has traditionally favored men, we have shattered barriers and achieved success. Our unique perspective as leaders values empathy, collaboration, and inclusion. Our leadership style prioritizes listening, relationship-building, and community, which leads to a workplace culture that fosters creativity, productivity, and engagement. Through our efforts, we have disrupted outdated systems and transformed industries, advocating for equal pay, better working conditions, and increased opportunities for women. We strive to ensure that future generations have a more equitable and just world. As we continue to lead, we must remember the power of our voices and actions, and inspire and uplift one another.

Our goal is to ensure that every woman has the chance to reach her full potential, and together, we can create a brighter and more prosperous future for all" she said. Female leaders are often considered to be 'soft' in nature. However, it is the same 'softness' which can be leveraged by women to create a holistically growth-oriented environment within organizations and outside. Anupama Katkar, Chairperson, Quick Heal

Foundation and Chief of Operational Excellence, Quick Heal Technologies Limited, has been doing the same for more than 25 years. The driving force behind Quick Heal Foundation, the CSR arm of Quick Heal Technologies Limited, Anupama Katkar strongly believes that women have a knack for excelling at everything they put their minds to, with their natural talent for multitasking, they have time and again proven themselves to be capable leaders across sectors. “Traditionally, running a household was no less than an entrepreneurship as we know of it today – managing it all, from chores, complex relationships, expectations, and finances – basically all! Therefore, they are naturally trained to excel at it. However, what is most important is, that they need to step up from their comfort zone and own their journeys – they need to be determined enough to leverage opportunities,” she said. “Women today are conquering new frontiers through their innovative, solution-centric bent of mind. There are several examples within the cybersecurity sector as well where women, through their able leadership, have taken businesses to new heights. Also, it is my strong belief that every woman and young girl in India holds the potential to become a successful entrepreneur, given the right set of opportunities and resources in the form of right education, nutrition, and health. At Quick Heal through our CSR initiative, we fully understand and acknowledge this, which is why many of our programmes are aimed at providing young girls and women with better healthcare, skills and cyber education, a combination that can open up several new avenues for them,” she added.