

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S PATHWAYS TO BECOME ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AGENTS OF CHANGE IN PAKISTAN

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Asia Women Leaders Program

October 18-21, 2016

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My Personal Journey

This part will include a story telling format, which will talk about how it all began and will be interspersed with the following personal aphorisms & precepts:

- Start small think big
- Believe in your idea
- Have a clear & strong vision
- Communicate it well
- Build a strong team to cascade results
- Never take “no” for an answer

Humility is lesson Number 1

“I think you have 10,000 explanations for failure, but no good explanation for success.”

Paolo Coelho

Who am I?

- Grew up in Lahore, Pakistan. The world was truly my oyster as I had 3 older brothers to contend with and this was an excellent training ground.
- Like most girls from my background went to the Convent of Jesus and Mary and was introduced to the world of reading!!!
- Did my O's and A's, and went off to study in the USA.
- Decided to opt out of a career at Wall Street, “did not want to spend my life making wealthy people richer” – switched gears and studied Development Economics.
- Returned to Pakistan, worked at the World Bank and met Dr Yunus by “chance”

Chance?

“When you desire something, the entire Universe conspires for you to achieve your dream.”

Paolo Coelho

My Personal Journey 1/2

- Start small think big
 - Started in 3 small villages around Lahore, literally in my back yard as advised by Dr Yunus
 - Worked as a loan officer for 2 years
 - My mom used to joke I know my clients better than my own close relatives, but immersion is important and so is humor and humility
 - Example of community integration: Building solidarity groups across ethnicities
- Believe in your idea
 - But back it by evidence: strategic planning and financial projections
 - Be thorough in your analysis – field research and action planning
 - Leave little to chance, but then take risks – a final balance
 - Listen to nay sayers, for they may help in identifying the many “unknowns”

As my mentor told me:

“And if you fail, tell the world it was Dr Yunus’ fault!”

My Personal Journey 2/2

- Have a clear & strong vision
 - It is not enough to believe in your idea but you must know how to implement it
 - Be a visionary, but be practical at the same time!
 - Do not over commit.
- Communicate it well
 - Transferring your idea to others
 - Motivating them through your vision
- Build a strong team to cascade results
 - You definitely can't do it alone
 - Need to inspire others by leading from the front

Leveraging Opportunities (1/2)

Again this will be focusing on the various phases from start up to maturity and what kinds of opportunities emerged and how these helped to strengthen my work:

- Build on your network
 - At the beginning became very important in terms of choosing the board and the management team
- Seek out your mentors
 - Extremely important as you don't have all the answers and having guidance and advice makes it easier and allows you to make mistakes
- Learn from others
 - You don't have to re-invent the wheel
 - Our reliance on the Bangladeshi MFIs and their generosity of sharing
 - It's ok not to have all the answers.

Leveraging Opportunities (2/2)

- Enhance your knowledge to build systems
 - In the beginning growing organically is fine, but later you have to systemize things. What we called MF meets Mc Donalds
- Invest in teams
 - Like systems this is equally important
 - Invest in creativity, invest in possibilities
- Learn to let go!
 - Don't be like a banyan tree, otherwise nothing will grow!
 - Listen to the people you lead!

Encountering Challenges

This section will highlight some of the key challenges but will also emphasize that these are key opportunities to learn. The question we need to ask is “Can we have it all?”

- Challenge One: Changing mindsets (self and others)
- Challenge Two: Establishing trust and building credibility (with communities and women)
- Challenge Three: Demonstrating results (proving the business case for investing in women)
- Challenge Four: Balancing Empathy with Business Acumen
- Challenge Five: The ominous work life balance
- Challenge Six: Breaking through the old boys network!

The masculine-feminine conundrum

A 2011 Stanford study states that “masculine” women those who demonstrate the following traits:

Assertiveness

Ambition

Aggressiveness

Confidence

were more 1.5 times likely to get a promotion successful than “feminine” women.

(O’Niell & O’Rielly)

- **“77% of women believe promotions are a result of a combination of hard work, long hours and education. However, 83% of men will tell you that ‘who you know’ counts for a lot or as much as how well you do your job.”**

- Jeffrey Tobias Halter, Huffington Post

Promoting women's leadership

Here I will talk about stepping up the game as given the social structures women usually ease out of their careers.

- It has to be done consciously and some times it just requires action
- It has to include building a conducive environment for women leaders
- Building a collaborative organizational structure
- Mentoring, coaching and role modeling within and outside the institution become necessary
- In our culture getting men to promote women as leaders is also important
- Having clear KPIs on gender at all levels
- Not without my mother in law/in laws campaign

Likeability versus Success – HBS research

- Success and likeability in women do not go hand in hand
- But, men and women are liked equally when behaving participatively (collaboratively)
- While women are disliked more when behaving authoritatively
- Women are penalized at the work place when they violate gender stereo-types (eg act aggressively, assertively to achieve results)
- We must have a conversation around this in the work place and also when we mentor others

Mentoring for change

Sharing some of my own thoughts on mentoring women leaders and deriving some ideas from others

- Giving others the opportunity to create themselves – (Steve Jobs)
- Best to Inspire than to direct – (Sheryl Sandberg)
- Guiding but not dominating builds the best leaders
- Establishing challenging goals to bring out excellence
- Sometimes it's a listening ear that is needed

Establishing legitimacy

Again this will be more a thought provoking section delving on some of the following ideas from my experience:

- Being true to one's self
- Walking the talk
- Holding on to one's feminine side as leaders
- Coming to terms with one's "ambition"
- Managing perceptions about women leaders (both negative and positive)

Key Take aways

- Define success in your own terms – it's ok to be different.
- Lead like a woman, balance success and likability
- Establish high standards by building a culture of success
- Be collaborative, use authority sparingly but do use it when needed.
- Build multiple networks and leverage on these to enable you to achieve your goals
- Be value driven, don't lose touch with who you are.