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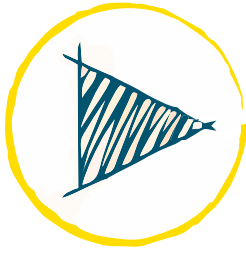


Rohit Shenoy

THE CAREER CHOICES THAT DEFINE US



Shakib Ahmed



FOREWORD

Welcome to **Fulki Unplugged**, our inaugural edition - The Career Choices That Define Us.

Here, every story is a tiny spark waiting to light up your day and linger long after you've turned the page. In these pages, you'll find insights gathered from real-life experiences, shared by people at different stages of their careers. Raw. Honest. Unfiltered.

These reflections from colleagues and friends, look back at the choices that shaped who they are today... Not just at the milestones, but also the messy middles, quiet victories, and brave beginnings.

Here, we celebrate the unscripted. The coffee spills, the stumbles, the sparks of joy, the quiet resilience, the vulnerable moments that remind us that we are all beautifully human beneath the titles and timelines.

Fulki Unplugged isn't merely a magazine.

It's a window.

It's a mirror.

It's the warm campfire where stories are passed around, where voices rise, crack, laugh, and linger.

The experience shared by our contributors are fleeting glimpses of wisdom and warmth. They remind us that while each path is unique, we share the same hopes and questions at every crossroad.

Whether you're taking your first steps into the working world, pivoting toward something new, or returning after a pause... may these insights spark ideas, reassure you that you're not alone, and help you see your own journey in a new light.

So lean in.

Read slowly.

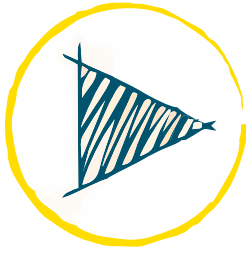
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Because here, we don't chase perfection, we chase what's real.

And real?

Real always sparks.





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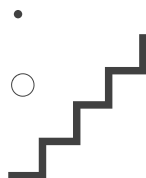
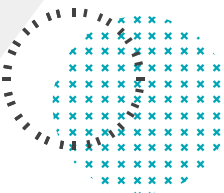


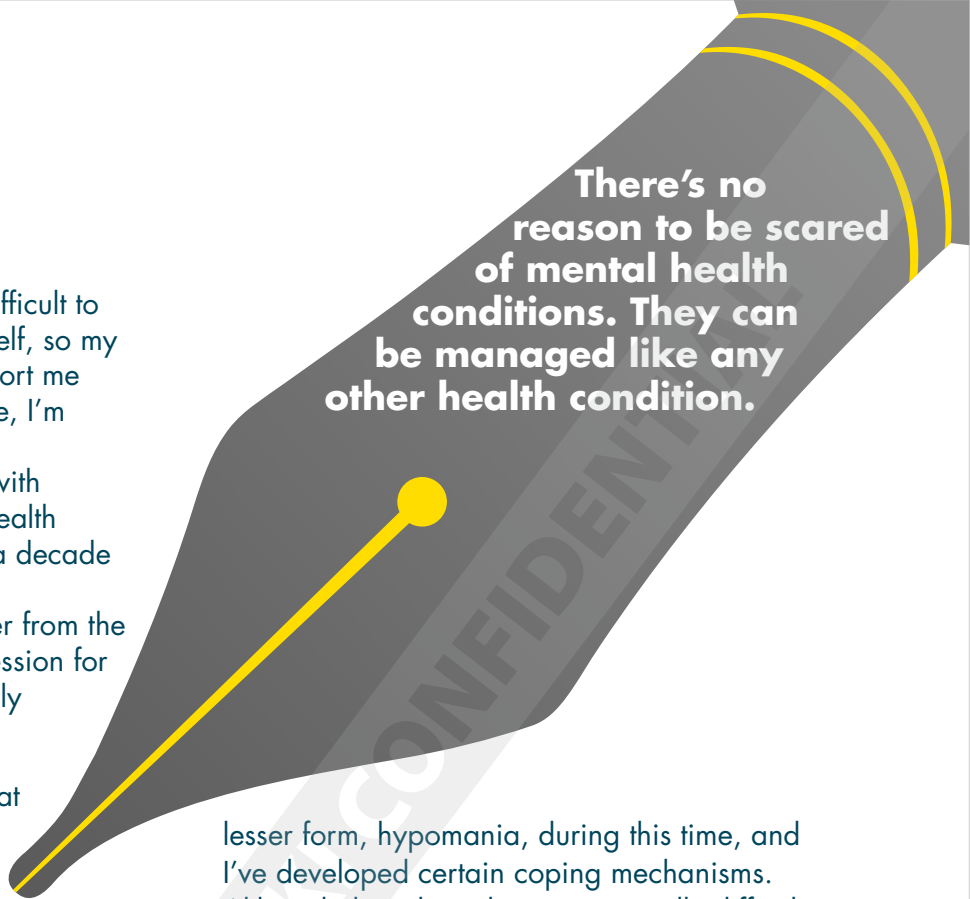
Bipolar Disorder & Mental Health

Aparna Piramal Raje

Resilience, Imagination, Risk

March 2013: I'm in a yoga ashram in Bihar for a weeklong retreat and I'm having a psychotic breakdown. I'm talking to myself, there are voices in my head, my thoughts are completely scattered and disorganized and I haven't slept more than three hours a night in several days.





There's no reason to be scared of mental health conditions. They can be managed like any other health condition.

When the retreat ends, I find it difficult to travel back to Mumbai by myself, so my husband has to come get me and escort me back home. Seeing my disturbed state, I'm taken to a psychiatrist and put onto medication. I'm officially diagnosed with 'bipolar disorder', a serious mental health condition. It first surfaced more than a decade ago in the year 2000, but remained undiagnosed for a long time. I recover from the psychosis, but am plunged into depression for several months, from which I eventually recover.

May 2022. I'm standing on stage in at the Royal Opera House in Mumbai, one of India's most prestigious theatres, in front of an audience of 400 people. I make a speech and my sister and I release my book, *Chemical Khichdi: How I Hacked My Mental Health*. I have been stable for over four years and written a book about my journey of healing and recovery. *Chemical Khichdi* goes on to become a national bestseller and I'm invited to speak at over 100 talks in the next three years, breaking taboos about mental health, all across the country and online in digital media.

Bipolar disorder is a mood disorder caused by psychological triggers and chemical imbalances in the brain. It results in extreme shifts in mood, including "mania" where I have energetic phases of little sleep, delusions of grandeur and psychosis too. At the other end there are depressive phases, where I am low on energy and in low spirits. In between, there are extended periods of stability and normalcy too, although every patient has different cycles. While everyone experiences some types of mood swings, bipolar disorder is characterized by extreme mood swings and very specific symptoms of changes in behaviour – so please don't assume that you are bipolar just because you have some mood swings.

I have been living with bipolar disorder since my mid 20s, for over two decades. There have been about a dozen episodes of mania, or its

lesser form, hypomania, during this time, and I've developed certain coping mechanisms. Although there have been some really difficult times, I have come to understand this "other side of me" and today, I can say I'm happy, thriving and bipolar!

A little bit about me – I'm a 49-year-old woman living in Mumbai with two teenage sons, my husband and in-laws. By profession, I'm a writer, public speaker and educator. Raised in Mumbai and London, I studied at Harvard Business School and Oxford University. An optimist by nature, I always look for solutions. It is these solutions and "hacks" that led me to heal and recover over the last ten years.

As I see it, three essential "therapies" or hacks help one survive: medical therapy, love therapy and lifestyle therapy. These hacks are vital, especially when I'm going through a crisis. Medical therapy means that I visit my psychiatrist, take additional medications when needed and continue ongoing talk therapy with my therapist.

Love therapy is the role of caregivers, which in my case is my family. Apart from my immediate family, I'm also close to my sister and mother. All of them take care of me when I'm unwell and I'm lucky to have their unconditional support and acceptance.



In addition to the role of mental health specialists and caregivers, I have learnt that lifestyle therapy and self-care are just as necessary to live with a mental health condition. I make sure I get 7-8 hours of sleep a night, exercise regularly, play games and have a nutritious diet. A disciplined lifestyle is absolutely vital for all of us, but especially for those living with a mental health challenge. Once again, these three therapies are vital for surviving the ups and downs and cannot be substituted.

To go beyond surviving, to thrive – to be able to write a book and talk to strangers about one's mental health – needs different "hacks". It needs self-reflection, self-inquiry and inner work. As I've written in *Chemical Khichdi*, I relied on journaling, spirituality, and the support of allies, friends, mentors and work colleagues to help me understand myself better, and discover what was triggering me and causing the mood swings in the first place. Mental health is a team sport

and I made it a point to ask for help from those around me. I shared my vulnerability with a lot of friends, mentors and colleagues – and that made a huge difference.

In conclusion, I believe there's no reason to be scared of mental health conditions. They can be managed like any other health condition. One needs to recognize the symptoms early and respond to them before escalation. It's difficult initially, but it gets a lot easier with time and doesn't impede a family life, a social life, or a career.

So take charge of your mental health.

Take timely professional medical advice, tell the family what's going on, accept their help, take rest and slow down when you need to, make allies and open up to them. Whether you live with bipolar disorder or any other mental health condition, I hope this inspires you to get help when you need it, and to take charge of your mental health, because you can live the life you want to!





Guided by Grace A Life Unscripted

Atul Behari Bhatnagar

Advisor, at Board Level, to social impact organisations in the field of Skill Development and Green Tech

I've often found myself reflecting on the pivotal moments that shape a person's life - the unexpected turns, the values we hold close, and how we learn to navigate uncertainty in an ever-evolving world.



When I look back, I sometimes wonder: have I arrived here by accident or design? I never set conventional personal milestones - no goals like marrying by 30, owning a car at 35, or retiring by 55. I had no bucket list, no daily to-do chart, despite being surrounded by the chorus of productivity gurus. Yet, here I am - fulfilled, content, and grateful for a career spent in world-class institutions.

Was this divine intervention? Or did I simply go with the flow, guided gently but firmly along a path not of my own making? With each passing year, as I grow more spiritual, I am increasingly certain: I have been led. I have been looked after. And I remain thankful - daily.

There were moments I didn't understand at the time - sudden disruptions, life-altering moves - but somehow, things always worked out. Looking back, I see a pattern of grace, not coincidence.

In the early 1960s, I was adopted by my paternal aunt, my Bua ji - a revered matriarch unable to have children of her own. My biological father, who held her in the highest regard, entrusted me to her care. I gained a new set of parents and became an only child. Born to one mother, raised by another - much like Lord Krishna himself - I was enveloped in love and showered with affection.

Then came a dacoity. One night, our world was upended; everything we had was stolen, including my beloved toys. A warning

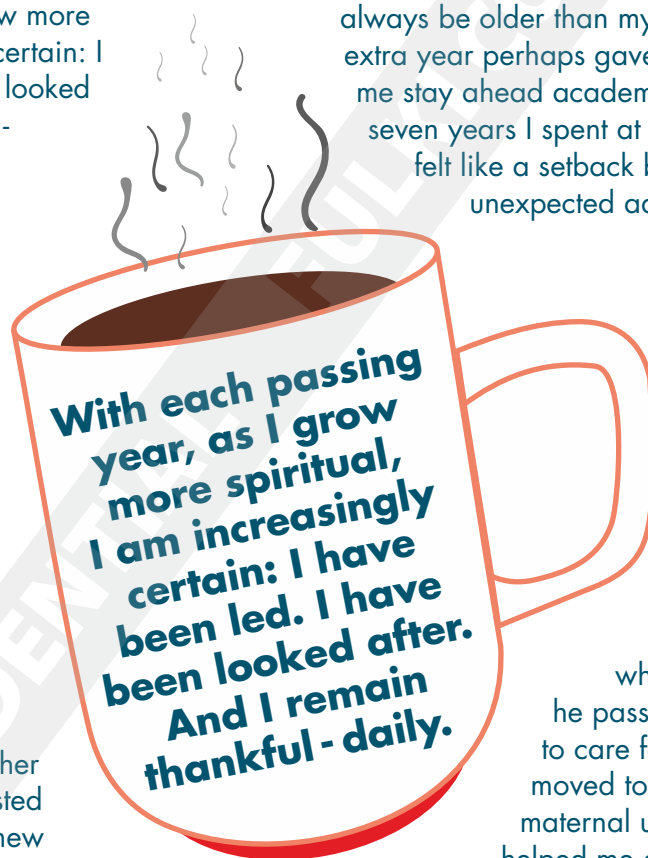
followed: I might be kidnapped if we tried to reclaim the stolen goods. My father took swift action. We left for Nainital - far from the plains and danger. I still marvel at the sequence: adoption, dacoity, relocation - all within a short span. My life path was diverging from my birth family, and I didn't even know it.

Suddenly, I found myself in a convent school - St. Joseph's College - after having been a top student in a Hindi-medium school. I failed the entrance test. I couldn't speak English. I lost a year, unknowingly setting a pattern: I would always be older than my classmates. That extra year perhaps gave me maturity, helping me stay ahead academically - I came first all seven years I spent at St. Joseph's. What felt like a setback became an unexpected advantage.

In school, I was gently steered towards IAS or engineering as a career. My father, a civil engineer, dreamed of seeing me at the University of Roorkee. Then,

when I was in Class 8, he passed away. Too young to care for my mother alone, I moved to Delhi with my maternal uncle (Mama ji), who helped me get into St. Columba's School - despite a long waitlist. Luck again? Perhaps.

Delhi was a culture shock. Like the protagonist in '12th Fail,' I too had no safety net, no fallback. The pressures were immense: competition, coaching classes, 8-hour study days. It was overwhelming.



THE CAREER CHOICES THAT DEFINE US

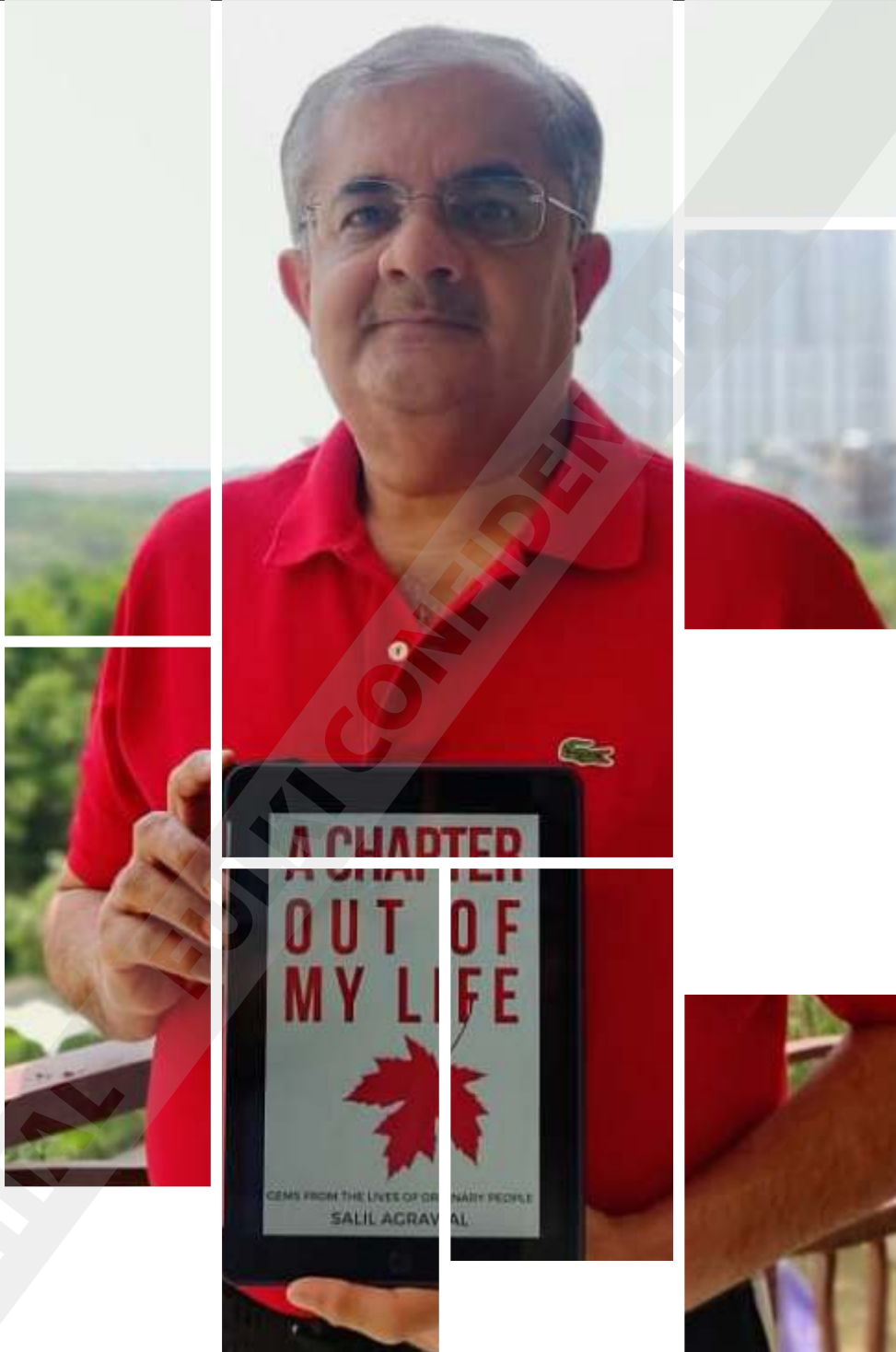
Then came a friend - more like a miracle - who synced his study schedule with mine. We tackled IIT preparation together and both made it to IIT Kanpur. Coincidence or cosmic design?

My mother passed away when I was in my third year at IIT Kanpur. I had exams in 15 days. A hostel mate received the news on the only landline and woke me. Not only did he take me to the station and buy my ticket, he accompanied me to Delhi. He handed me over to family and returned quietly on the next train. Who does that? A friend sent by grace.

Back at IITK, I was behind on lectures and emotionally spent. Yet five wing mates spoke to our professors and arranged a 10-day extension for my exams. They stayed back post-finals to help me prepare. Who orchestrated that?

During placements, my dream company was Tata Motors (then Telco). I cleared every stage - tests, discussions, interviews, medicals. I was sure I'd made it. But the final telegram had no mention of my name. I was crushed. Two days later, a batchmate told me my appointment letter had arrived by post. Rushing to the Placement Office, I found it. I was overwhelmed with joy. Another miracle. I was meant to be there.

At Telco, I thrived. I designed a mobile platform - the "Cherry Picker" - an engineering success.



Meanwhile, friends were applying for CAT. I wasn't interested - I was toying with the idea of applying the following year. One friend insisted - he bought me the form, nudged me to apply. I filled it half-heartedly, studied casually using borrowed guides. I cleared the interview. He didn't. I felt torn. Even the General Manager was dismayed that I

chose MBA at IIM Calcutta over M.Tech. But I knew - I hadn't planned this. Someone else had - perhaps the Divine Energy that guides the universe?

In Dubai, I found myself in a tricky situation. I was part of a team of 6 which was setting up the first NBFC in the Emirate. We were recruiting a fresh team for the Cards



business. One of the Call Centre agents came with her Supervisor to me to complain against the CEO of the company. He was sexually harassing her. How does one deal with a workplace situation where the 'Leader turns into a Predator'? The case was escalated to the Board. The CEO was called to explain his situation. He wept and confessed and was pardoned! The axe was on my head for following my values i.e. prevent sexual harassment at the workplace. Suddenly, I became a victim. I was asked to leave Dubai with my family. Luckily, I got a bigger and much better job as COO of Barclays Kenya. How come? Was that a reward from the Divine. Maybe so!

**Time and again,
I've been led down
paths I never
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unforgettable.**

Hold on! During the course of my stint at Barclays Kenya, the women colleagues nominated me for the 'Male Diversity Champion' award. 1500 nominations were received across all Barclays businesses across

the world. I was called to New York - business class ticket - top hotel in Manhattan - VIP treatment. I won the award. It was first of its kind during the Annual International Women Day Award ceremony! The recognition I should have got at Dubai for POSH, came to me in a different form in Kenya as 'Male Diversity Champion' worldwide. Someone was keeping track? isn't it? Who? Grace showered in the most unexpected manner!

Time and again, I've been led down paths I never considered. Doors opened without knocking. People arrived just when I needed them. The unexplained became the unforgettable.

When I reflect, I'm reminded of Wordsworth's lines:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

So many forks in the road. And each time, the decision was made for me.
I may have resisted, but I followed - and always landed where I was meant to be. A Divine Energy has been guiding me all along. Why obsess over plans and goals? Why fear the unknown?

My only responsibility is to do my best - and trust the outcome. The fewer my expectations, the greater my joy. Today, I seek only to serve, to express gratitude, and to surrender to the flow.

And this very piece you're reading - I didn't plan it. The words poured forth, as if guided.

Thank you, God.



Snapshots of Life

Bhavna Batra

Vice President – People,
S&P Global

It's a beautiful Saturday morning in May ... after a hectic few weeks, I'm standing peacefully with my coffee and croissant at Pier 17 in New York watching the waters flow, the Manhattan and Brooklyn bridges framed majestically by beautiful sunshine, fluffy white clouds and gorgeous blue skies.



When Anu reached out and asked me to share my life's journey, I didn't imagine that this would be the moment when I captured my thoughts but now that I am here, it feels just right.

Art, travel, the mountains, Darjeeling tea (sunshine in a tea cup), black coffee, cinnamon rolls and relationships are the heartbeat of my life. As the elder child of an Army Officer father and self-taught Artist mother, my younger brother (who is one of my three best friends) and I grew up surrounded by the wealth of love, integrity and infinite imagination. No dream was impossible, no possibility unreal and in our parent's eyes we were (and continue to be) imperfectly perfect. There was some discipline, since we come from a multi-generational defence background on both sides of the family, but there was an abundance of stories, of colours, textures and flavours, and an underlying abundance that is so much more than what money can buy. In many ways, the biggest influences that have shaped me are the yin and yang of my parents' beautiful relationship and the quiet security they gave us even though we travelled across the country, changed multiple schools and had to continuously adapt; the value and belief system that human integrity and goodness are invaluable and will overcome all odds; and the strong belief that each human being has the right to be happy and that true faith (in the Universe and in Surya Dev, whom I believe in with all my heart) can move mountains.

Kids are a tough peer group and being the newest girl in school every so often was hard, and yet it is that experience that has given me the courage and ability to build relationships

more seamlessly as an adult. I would feel sad to let people and things go, and Mummy would share her favorite lines which simultaneously reassured and taught me a valuable lesson...

*"Softly the trees of memory do fall,
Gently I gather and treasure them all,
Today, tomorrow and all my life through,
I will love and remember you."*

Unlike a lot of people, I have not lived in the same home all my life, I don't remember who I went to school with in my early years but each experience has nourished me and contributed to my being. Whether it was living and

studying in Nagaland when I was 5 years old or going to school in Pune, whether it was playing basketball in Loreto House Kolkata or being President of the Dramatics Society in Loreto College, whether it was summer holidays with Nana-Nani or winter breaks with Dadi, the vicissitudes of my formative years shaped my sense of identity, my value system and who I choose to be as a person and professional.



Career choices were much like the flowing waters... possibilities ebbing and flowing with exposure and conversations. At one time, I was keen to join the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) and serve the Motherland, but that was not to be. Consulting and Human Resources were gifts that came into my life... and I am grateful because, while they were not my first choices, they have anchored me beautifully and helped me blossom into the person I am today.

My time at MDI, Gurgaon was an incredible turning point in my life... it helped me broaden my lens and have confidence in



myself. The opportunity to take risks with my career and work with diverse organisations including Grow Talent / Right Management, SHL, Genpact, PwC and now S&P Global (including the erstwhile IHS Markit) has helped me script the most incredible chapters in my growth journey.

Being an Angel Investor and Advisory Board Member with Eubrics has been another great learning experience. I've had the gift of working with some of the most brilliant leaders in the industry whose diverse styles and rich perspective have helped me craft my perspective.

One of my mentors early in my professional journey, the late Anil Nadkarni who was the HR Head for Siemens in India, always told me that no matter how high one flies, humility is crucial and it is vital to always pay-it-forward. This lesson has stayed with me, and by teaching students, supporting educational institutions to think and be future-ready, being part of the National HRD Network and supporting the HR fraternity, and supporting Friendicoes SECA and the tremendous work that they do in the space of animal care, I am attempting to balance my purpose and values with my professional growth journey.

It hasn't been all sunshine and roses - there have been biases that have been (and continue to be) confronted and worked through, glass ceilings shattered, and status quo challenged each step of the way. Sometimes this has exhausted me but seeking the guidance of mentors and persevering has yielded results, more often than not.



**No matter
how high one flies,
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pay-it-forward.**

I've also learnt that all work and no play is simply boring, and good physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health is my biggest duty to myself and actually crucial if I want to live life to the fullest and grow, as a person and a professional.

On some days this can feel quite daunting... but balancing competing priorities and making the most of them is the fun of the journey!

As I reflect on my life over the last four decades and look towards the future, the possibilities are infinite. I've had the privilege of traveling and working across 43 countries and yet I'm hungry for more. Now, more than ever before, the need to align my purpose and values with my journey drive my choices.

I've never consciously sculpted my career graph, opportunities have come and I've made the most of them, and that's what I'm going to continue to do. Hard work and the tenacity to get things done inspite of all odds, taking risks courageously with the bigger picture in mind, meticulousness and detail orientation, accountability for outcomes, spirit of service, continuously learning/unlearning/relearning, emotional intelligence and building deeply meaningful relationships have been vital to my life, and that's what I'm continuing to focus on.

Veni. Vidi. Vici. I came to this world to make the most of endless possibilities, I saw what I brought to the table and what I needed to do more/less of and differently to create impact, and I conquered hearts and minds as we created shared glories. That's the legacy I want to leave ... that's the ongoing journey of Bhavna! And I'm grateful for each day, each adventure, each possibility!