



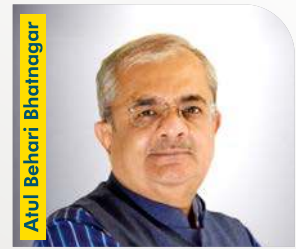
REAL STORIES THAT  
CREATE A SPARK



Anuradha Sharma



Aparna Piramal Rajee



Atul Behari Bhatnagar



Bhavna Batra



Dipanwita Chakraborty



Dr. Geeta Kumar



Girija Bharat



Kulbhushan Gupta



Maneka Sharma



Dr. Mita Brahma



Dr. Neelam Gupta



Nikhil Madan



Priya Dutt

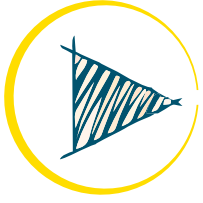


Rohit Shenoy

# THE CAREER CHOICES THAT DEFINE US



Shakib Ahmed



# FOREWORD



Dear Reader,

Welcome to the very first edition of **Fulki Unplugged** - a collection of true stories that spark the magic connect.

This isn't just a magazine. It's a window into real lives. A warm campfire where stories are passed around, where voices rise, crack, laugh, and quietly linger.

Our theme for this inaugural issue is **'The Career Choices That Define Us.'**

Here, you'll meet an incredible lineup of individuals who have generously shared slices of their career journeys. Each story winds and twists, defying convention and dancing with uncertainty. These are not ladder-climbing tales, but deeply human journeys of navigating life's network of choices.

These stories are about the brave, uncertain, difficult decisions that define our careers. The coffee spills and stumbles. The sparks of joy and unexpected revelations. The vulnerable pauses and quiet strength that propel us forward.



While the destinations may differ, one thread ties them all together: the power of relationships. Time and again, it's the presence of family, mentors, and kindred spirits that offers courage at the crossroads. Deciding which path to take isn't always easy. The toughest part is often just making the choice. And for that, one needs self-awareness, confidence, and a circle that believes in you.

There's no single 'right' way forward. But when you choose with intention, that path becomes yours, and that makes it right.

As you read these stories - of choices made, unmade, and made again - I hope they offer you a nudge, a reminder, or a moment of reflection.

Have a story that changed your path? We'd love to feature it. Reach out.

Because Fulki Unplugged is more than a celebration of true stories. It is a tribute to the courage it takes... to choose.

With warmth and wonder,

**Anuradha**

Editor, Fulki Unplugged

[contactus@fulki.co.in](mailto:contactus@fulki.co.in)





# WHAT'S INSIDE

**08**  
**Choosing Courage,  
Crafting Identity**  
**Aparna Piramal Raje**  
Writer, Public Speaker,  
Facilitator & Educator



**04**  
**The Spark That Lit My Path**  
**Anuradha Sharma**  
Founder & CEO  
Fulki Communication Pvt. Ltd.



**11**  
**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



**15**  
**Snapshots of Life**  
**Bhavna Batra**  
Vice President – People,  
S&P Global



**18**  
**In the Quiet Between  
the Milestones**  
**Dipanwita Chakraborty**  
CSR & Sustainability Leader  
ESG Strategist Social Impact Architect



**22**  
**Shifting Paradigms**  
**Dr. Geeta Kumar**  
Founder & Principal Consultant Pragati:  
Partners in Progress



**26**  
**A Journey of Purpose,  
Passion, and Perseverance**  
**Girija Bharat**  
Founder and Managing Director,  
Mu Gamma Consultants



**30**  
**My Journey from  
Confusion to Clarity**  
**Kulbhushan Gupta**  
Head Operational Excellence & Strategy  
Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd



**34**  
**The Choices That Built Me**  
**Maneka Sharma**  
Pursuing a Masters in Information and  
Knowledge Strategy with focus on Business  
& AI: Columbia University, New York  
Ex-Senior Strategy Consultant, EY-Parthenon



**37**  
**Curiosity, Courage, and Change  
A Blueprint for Career Growth**  
**Dr. Mita Brahma**  
CHRO, NIIT Ltd.



**41**  
**A Life in Purpose,  
A Journey in Progress**  
**Dr. Neelam Gupta**  
Founder AROH Foundation



**45**  
**From Call Center to  
Coworking Dreams**  
**Nikhil Madan**  
Co-founder, The Office Pass (TOP)



**48**  
**Learnings of an Ordinary Woman  
in this Extraordinary World**  
**Pritha Dutt**



**52**  
**Not a Ladder, But a Landscape  
My Wandering Career Map**  
**Rohit Shenoy**  
Director HR and Global Head of Learning  
& Development, DXC Technology



**56**  
**Through the Lens, Within Myself  
Between Frames and Feelings**  
**Shakib Ahmed**  
Filmmaker and Editor



THE  
CAREER  
CHOICES  
THAT  
DEFINE US

**Fulki**<sup>TM</sup>  
*Unplugged*



## The Spark That Lit My Path

**Anuradha Sharma**

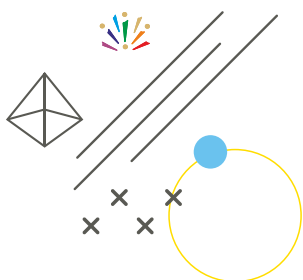
Founder & CEO  
Fulki Communication Pvt. Ltd.

If I had to sum up my life and career journey, I would say it has been defined by one thing: the courage to follow my spark.



[linkedin.com/in/anuradha-sharma-fulki](https://www.linkedin.com/in/anuradha-sharma-fulki)

.....





That tiny flicker, sometimes a blazing fire, sometimes a quiet ember, has always been there. Even when I doubted myself. Even when the world around me seemed to nudge me in safer directions. Following that spark meant choosing courage over comfort, independence over convention, and listening to the mentors that shaped me.

**One of the first times I truly followed that spark was when I was 25.** While my parents moved to Delhi after my father's retirement, I chose to stay back in Calcutta and live on my own. It wasn't the practical choice - I had grown up in a sheltered, close-knit family. But I was juggling an MBA, a job at a top ad agency, and a quiet urge to discover who I could become on my own.

Living independently for the first time was exhilarating and terrifying. I learned to pay the bills, run my own place, and lock up at night. I was growing in ways no textbook could teach, with grit, initiative, and curiosity.

The world of advertising thrilled me. It was where my love for words, aesthetics, and strategy found a perfect playground. It helped that I had a mentor like Ram Ray, the late Founder & CEO of Response, who saw in me what I hadn't yet seen in myself. Ram sharpened my instincts, taught me the value of rigor, and planted in me the seeds of entrepreneurship.

When the opportunity came to move to Delhi and manage the company's largest account Dabur, Ram encouraged me to take the next big leap. I found myself building the Response office from scratch, from identifying the property, to signing the lease and hiring employees.

And once again, the universe sent me a mentor - Sujata Keshavan Guha, design maven and co-founder of Ray+Keshavan Design. In the 8 years that I worked with Ray and Keshavan and Sujata, I developed a love for design, for form and beauty. I learnt that calligraphy, the way letters look and even the way things are



placed on a page can make the whole page look different. I was always an artist, and I thought that was about pictures. From Sujata I learnt that letters can also look beautiful.

### **And then life delivered one of its toughest curveballs.**

Soon after I moved to Delhi, my father was cheated out of his life's savings and our family home. It was a devastating blow. I found myself navigating police stations, filing FIRs, negotiating with real estate agents, and trying to keep everything from falling apart. I was just 28, but I had to become the adult in the room.

That chapter taught me about resilience. I learned how to make decisions in chaos, how to protect those I loved, how to stay grounded when the earth beneath you trembles. That experience became the foundation of my strength and shaped how I approach my business today: with integrity, meticulous attention to detail, and a refusal to trust blindly.



**I was fortunate to work with Anil Sachdev, Founder of Grow Talent and a true champion of culture and motivation.**

Leading the Great Place to Work Survey under his guidance taught me what truly builds strong teams. Though I had led teams since I was 25, this experience deepened my understanding of workplace dynamics.

Anil also gave me the opportunity to run my own division, where I learned to manage a balance sheet, cash flow, and P&L, lessons that shaped my entrepreneurial journey. Most importantly, he taught me to lead with values, celebrate wins, and invest in myself.

Each mentor in my life has brought a unique gift. My mother nurtured my love for beauty and art, while my father taught me resilience.

Robin, my rock, quietly holds the fort while I chase dreams, and our daughter Maneka lifts me with her fierce belief and thoughtful love.

My sister Anjali Raina distils life's chaos into clarity, reminding me that no mountain is too high with the right mindset. And my brother in law Ishan Raina, ever future-focused, inspires me to keep looking ahead - his vision a constant nudge that growth lies in motion.

**Years later, at 45, I made another leap. Perhaps the boldest one.**

I left behind the comfort of a corner office, a steady salary, and a job title people understood, and started from scratch. I launched Fulki, named by my mother-in-law after the tiny spark in a *phuljhari*, the firecracker.

Building Fulki has been messy, beautiful, and full of magic. We started in a garage. Just me, a computer, and my dog. And yet, the dream kept growing. One campaign at a time, one brand at a time. We have partnered with over 50 market leaders and reached more than 26 million people across 85+ countries. From pioneering the concept of designing Mahindra's business-based anecdotes as graphic stories (also known as comics) to reinforcing their RISE behaviors; to cascading company policies in the space of 6 weeks



My Mentor -  
Anil Sachdev



With Sunil Arora, Ex Chief Election Commissioner of India



Startup Stories: Fulki's Garage Chapter



amongst a 32,000 vast employee population for Bharat Financial; to curating a seamless Incredible India experience for a global off-site event for the Election Commissioner of India; to building culture for SKH - an auto component behemoth; to public awareness campaigns during Covid-19, our work has been an exciting melange of building brands, touching hearts and creating impact.





## The entrepreneurial road is rarely smooth.

Tight deadlines, cash flow crunches, and burning questions often keep me awake at night. Most days, I feel like a swan, calm and unruffled on the surface, but paddling furiously underwater.

But nothing tested us like March 2020, when we had to shut down our beautiful office and transition to working from home.

It was unsettling and disruptive. And yet, looking back, I believe it marked a turning point.

A chance conversation with my sister prompted us to shift to remote work ten days before the national lockdown. That head start became our edge. When the world came to a standstill, we were already in motion, tuning into our clients' evolving needs and responding with agility, speed, and empathy.

We learned to be resilient, resourceful, and relentless. Like squash balls, every time we hit a wall, we bounced back – faster, sharper, more determined.

Covid-19 became our catalyst. It pushed us to reimagine Fulki in bold, game-changing ways, giving birth to Fulki 2.0. We emerged from this BANI\* world re-energised and ready to shape what's next.

As we nudge 15 years, what gives me the most pride is this: Fulki wasn't born out of strategy decks or market research. It was born of courage. Shaped by lived experience. And lifted by mentors who believed in me, even before I fully believed in myself.

*\*BANI = Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible*

## Fifteen years of entrepreneurship have taught me that I don't need to be a superwoman.

The real strength lies in trusting others and building a support system that lets me wear many hats without burning out. My team and family make that possible every single day.

Over time, I have also come to see that success is not about having it all, it's about creating a life that feels whole.

For me, work-life integration means carving out space for what nourishes me: The mental stimulation of bridge, the

endorphin rush after a good gym session, the quiet joy of gardening, the meditative calm of painting, and the thrill of exploring new cities and cultures.

Travel opens my mind. Art fuels my soul. And cozy evenings with close friends filled with laughter, games, and unfiltered conversations anchor me in love.

**Along the way, there have been awards and accolades.** I was honoured as Woman Entrepreneur of the Year by the Delhi Management Association, served as its Vice President, and played a part in relaunching DMA as a future-forward platform.

**But those titles don't define me.** What does is the spark - the quiet, persistent call to keep growing, creating, and evolving.

**When I look back, I see a winding path, full of detours, self-doubt, belly laughs, late-night calls, impossible deadlines, joyful wins, and slow Sunday mornings... a testament of what's possible when you listen to your inner voice.**

A big thank you to the mentors who held up mirrors and maps for me. Cheers to the moments that looked like endings but turned into beginnings.

And to anyone reading this: your spark is valid. Follow it. It may just lead you somewhere extraordinary.





## Beyond the Label

### Choosing Courage, Crafting Identity

#### Aparna Piramal Rajee

Writer, Public Speaker, Facilitator  
& Educator

*In this deeply personal essay, Aparna Piramal Rajee - award-winning writer, educator, and former CEO - invites us into the most defining choice of her life: to confront, understand, and ultimately thrive with a mental health condition.*

*Her journey from boardrooms to breakdowns, from Harvard to healing, shows us that career choices are not always about titles or milestones. Sometimes, they're about choosing courage over stigma, honesty over silence, and crafting a new identity from lived experience. This moving story is about navigating life with bipolarity, and just as much, it's about leading with authenticity, and redefining success on your own terms.*



[linkedin.com/in/aparna-piramal-raje-4752491](https://www.linkedin.com/in/aparna-piramal-raje-4752491)





**M**arch 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.

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

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



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-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.

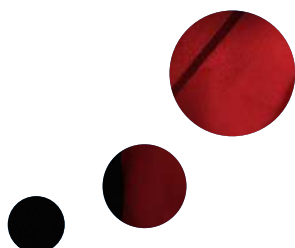
In addition to the role of mental health specialists and caregivers, I have learnt that lifestyle therapy and self-care are just as necessary to live with a mental health condition. I make sure I get 7-8 hours of sleep a night, exercise regularly, play games and have a nutritious diet. A disciplined 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!





THE  
CAREER  
CHOICES  
THAT  
DEFINE US



## 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.



[linkedin.com/in/bhatnagaratul](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bhatnagaratul)



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.

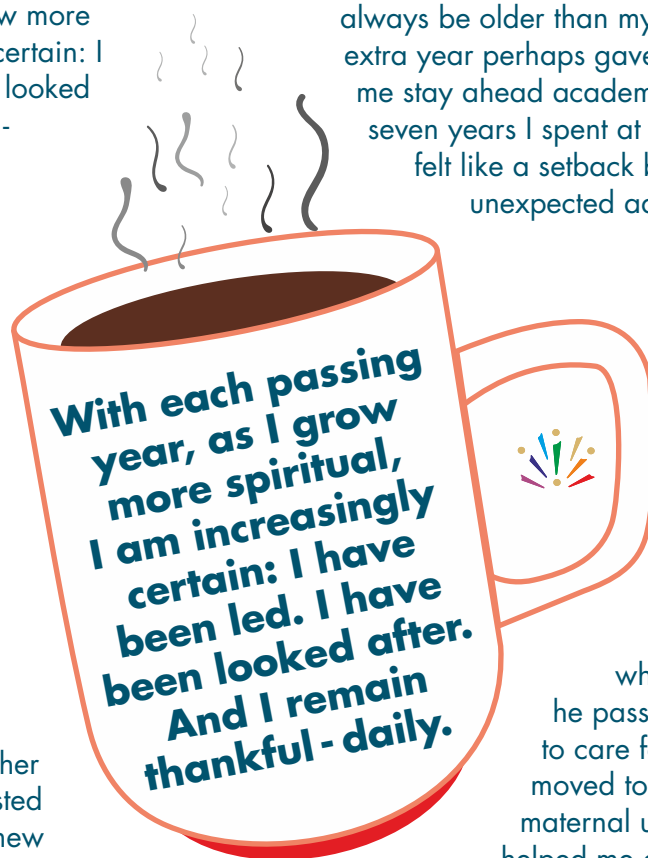
There were moments I didn't understand at the time - sudden disruptions, life-altering moves - but somehow, things always worked out. Looking back, I see a pattern of grace, not coincidence.

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 '12<sup>th</sup> Fail,' I too had no safety net, no fallback. The pressures were immense: competition, coaching classes, 8-hour study days. It was overwhelming.





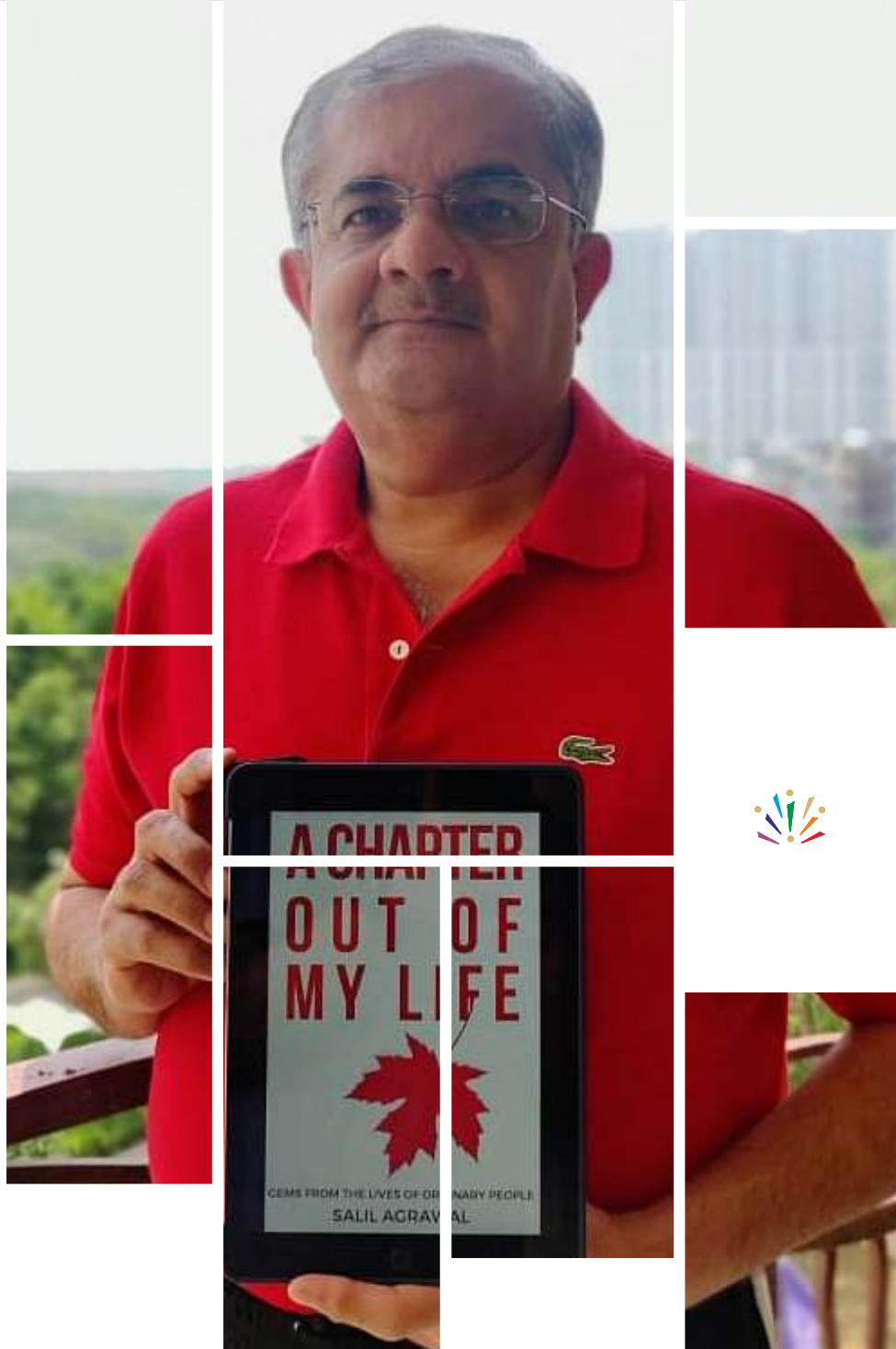
Then came a friend - more like a miracle - who synced his study schedule with mine. We tackled IIT preparation together and both made it to IIT Kanpur. Coincidence or cosmic design?

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  
considered. Doors  
opened without  
knocking. People  
arrived just when  
I needed them.  
The unexplained  
became the  
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.



THE  
CAREER  
CHOICES  
THAT  
DEFINE US

**Fulki**<sup>TM</sup>  
*Unplugged*



## 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.



[linkedin.com/in/bhavna-batra-she-her-9b35bb4](https://www.linkedin.com/in/bhavna-batra-she-her-9b35bb4)



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,  
 humility is crucial and  
 it is vital to always  
 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!





## In the Quiet Between the Milestones

**Dipanwita Chakraborty**

CSR & Sustainability Leader  
ESG Strategist Social Impact Architect

Every now and then,  
I pause to look back - not  
just at the big milestones,  
but at the quiet spaces in  
between. The pauses. The  
detours. The moments that  
didn't make it to a résumé  
but stayed with me anyway.  
That's where the real story  
lives. This is a little window  
into that story - not polished  
or perfect, but lived and  
still unfolding.



[linkedin.com/in/dipanwita-chakraborty-9423a577](https://www.linkedin.com/in/dipanwita-chakraborty-9423a577)



I spent my childhood moving across little towns and hamlets in the mountains of Arunachal Pradesh along with my parents, my little brother and aunt. Life was simple - story books, handwritten notes, playgrounds, occasional riverside picnics and vacations with grandparents. We grew up among people from all over India and alongside the indigenous tribes

of the region, who taught us - through how they lived - to honour the land, share generously, and carry quiet strength. I didn't know it then, but those early years shaped the way I see the world: with curiosity, care, and deep attention to the small things.

the way I see the world: with curiosity, care, and deep attention to the small things.

My first brush with responsibility came when I was 18. My grandfather asked me to take charge of planning and managing my uncle's wedding. There was no formal 'training' - just his implicit trust in me. I was suddenly responsible for everything - managing over 700 guests, logistics for each function, décor, gifts, food, rituals. It was overwhelming, but it also gave me a sense of purpose. I learned how to organise, to manage chaos, and to stay calm when things didn't go to plan. More than anything, I learned how much love and effort goes into holding something together for others.



A few years later, I interned with Cox & Kings. My very first assignment was to plan a Europe trip for 15 retired schoolteachers. They were all women who had spent their lives in classrooms, and for many, this was their first time travelling abroad. I didn't travel with them, but I was with them through the entire process - answering their questions, sorting out the paperwork, making sure they felt supported. I remember receiving their postcards and excited phone calls from cities they'd only seen in textbooks. When they

came back, one of them said, "This was my dream, and now it's our shared memory." That moment stayed with me, and still fills me with a warm, fuzzy feeling of accomplishment.

In between these early experiences, I was pursuing my graduation in Science. The fascinated its how it of the taught how change begins and know would but deep gave me a language for justice, equity, and public good

Political subject me - not just for theories, but for helped me make sense world around me. It me how power moves, systems are built, and how - real change - often quietly, through people participation. I didn't then how exactly it shape my work, somewhere down, it



that has stayed with me through every role I've taken on since.

Coming from the hills of Arunachal and the warmth of Assam, stepping into Gurgaon and Delhi felt like arriving on another planet. I still remember the train ride - full of nervous energy, heart full of questions. I had a suitcase, a few phone numbers scribbled on a notepad, and more hope than I could carry. At first, the city felt loud, fast, overwhelming and indifferent in ways I wasn't used to. For a while, I felt invisible - like I didn't know the code, like I was always catching up. Even

heard the phrase SEWA BHAWNA - the spirit of service. Not out of obligation, but out of care. That phrase stayed with me. It helped me understand that the how of what we do matters just as much as the what.

My career trajectory then took me to Cargill, where I spent 17 and half years and wore many hats. I began as a brand manager for edible oils - crafting stories around everyday essentials and learning how to build trust with consumers. I moved into project management next, where I learned how to bring structure to vision, solve complex problems, and navigate scale. These roles grounded me in execution and built my business acumen. And then, when I transitioned into Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability, something shifted.

It felt like the world opened up - and my work could finally meet my values in a fuller way.

At Cargill, I led global and regional sustainability strategies, working closely with diverse stakeholders across sectors and geography - policymakers, customers, communities, non-profits, and internal business leaders. My role was not only about designing impactful programs but also about building and nurturing high performing teams, making everyday

decisions that aligned with our purpose, and leading cross-cultural teams with empathy and intention.

It was about holding complexity with clarity - understanding different contexts, bridging perspectives, and ensuring that our sustainability work had roots and resonance in each geography. I saw first-hand how alignment between values, people, and systems could unlock real impact.



simple things - buying groceries, asking for directions, showing up for interviews - felt like tiny mountains to climb. But people helped, people held space. Some became friends for life. And slowly, I found my rhythm.

One of the first places that shaped me in the city was Grow Talent - a purpose-driven strategic HR consulting firm that worked toward helping human beings realise their full potential. It wasn't just my workplace - it was my learning ground. It was there that I first

Cargill became a chapter of deep growth - for me and for the work.

What moved me most were the quiet, grounded stories I got to witness:

- A young man in Karnataka who grew marigold on his small farm and began to earn steadily with a little agronomy support.
- Water springs in the hills of Java, Indonesia, returning to life through agroforestry, thanks to local wisdom and collective effort.
- A little girl in Cao Bang, Vietnam, proudly showing me the school library, we helped build - one of 120 across the country, where over 17,000 children found a space to read and imagine.
- Women in Mayurbhanj, Odisha, who created income by rearing poultry in their backyards, speaking with quiet confidence about their independence.
- Food banks across Asia - people working quietly, consistently, to make sure surplus food reached those who needed it most

These weren't stories of charity. They were stories of agency, of people doing their best - and of what becomes possible when trust meets opportunity.

After more than 17 years of working at Cargill - years that gave me numerous opportunities of growth, learning, and relationships I deeply value - I recently decided to step back. Not out of restlessness, but out of a quiet clarity. I had reached a point where I wanted to pause, breathe, and make space for what was next. Not in a rushed or dramatic way. Just a gentle decision to listen inward and trust what I was hearing.

I didn't want to jump into something right away. I had spent years building and moving fast. Now, I wanted to slow down.

To create with intention. With joy. On my own terms.

These days, I'm exploring. I'm learning to trust my rhythm again. To follow what feels aligned, not urgent.

Some of that looks like coaching. Some of it looks like conversations and collaborations. Some of it just looks like breathing room.

What I know is this: I'm drawn to meaningful work, to collective purpose, to spaces where values are lived and not just stated.

I haven't walked away from ambition - I've just redefined it. It no longer looks like chasing. It looks like choosing with care.

I'm open to aligned opportunities - whether they unfold in a boardroom, a village, a classroom, or a quiet conversation.

It's not about the size of the role. It's about the sincerity of the purpose.

These days, success looks like:


- Having the freedom to prioritise what matters
- Being able to create and contribute while trusting the process
- Using what I've learned to support others on their journey - whether that's through coaching, building something new, or simply showing up fully where I am

Because at this point in my life, success is not about proving. It's about aligning.

And if that alignment opens a door, I'll Walk through it—not because I must, but because I want to.

At every phase, I've learned to ask: What feels true now?

And for me, that's enough to begin again.



**I haven't walked away from ambition - I've just redefined it. It no longer looks like chasing. It looks like choosing with care.**







## Shifting Paradigms

**Dr. Geeta Kumar**

Founder & Principal Consultant  
Pragati: Partners in Progress

Curiosity, resourcefulness, and a willingness to learn are qualities that define me and have enabled me to reinvent myself countless times. Along the way, I've accumulated diverse work experiences and qualifications, leading to a continual forward and lateral integration of my knowledge, skills, and attitude.



[linkedin.com/in/geetak](https://www.linkedin.com/in/geetak)

Three decades ago, I began my career in HR at the Eicher Group. The first role always holds a special place in one's heart, and it was no different for me. It was a transformative first role—professionally enriching and personally grounding. Living alone in a town where I had no family, I had to create a healthy ecosystem. My colleagues and their families welcomed me with open arms. As the only woman executive at the Pithampur plant, I experienced immense learning, challenge, and support. Even before terms like “psychological safety” became popular, Eicher's culture had it embedded in its DNA.

After marriage, I moved to Delhi and joined The Times of India Group. Unlike Eicher, TOI's culture was steeped in politics and resistance. I was one of the youngest Deputy Managers with team members in their 50s reporting to me. I spent the initial months trying to leave, until I reframed my experience as a learning opportunity. This became a pivotal moment when I recognized the need to unlearn and relearn in order to stay relevant within the organization's specific context. Slowly, I gained credibility and introduced impactful HR practices. When I left two years later, I felt accomplished and stronger.

Soon, life took another turn. I moved to Chandigarh for my husband's career, and fortunately, I landed a position with CII in its Northern Region headquarters. I was thrown into the deep end—managing committees, adapting to ambiguity. As luck would have it, within six months, my husband was transferred

back to Delhi. I managed to secure a transfer to Delhi, stepping into a completely new role as Head of the Delhi State Office within CII-NR.

The role, undefined and ever-evolving, required me to make decisions on the fly and tackle challenges head-on, completely contrary to my preference for structure and stability. In hindsight, this ambiguity stretched me far beyond my comfort zone. I also informally took on HR for the region, introducing structured practices which were well-received. But just a year in, motherhood called. A high-risk pregnancy prompted me to choose my baby over my career.

For the next five years, I embraced full-time motherhood. I ran a household, raised two children, and built a fulfilling domestic life. Returning to work wasn't even a discussion at home—we didn't think it was possible with a nuclear setup. I don't regret that phase. I leaned fully into it and found joy in its simplicity. By then, the world had witnessed Y2K and the IT revolution.

Mobile phones, emails, Excel, PowerPoint, and Google had become ubiquitous, transforming the way work is done. Yet, I was entirely oblivious and disconnected from it all.

Then, a dear friend and CEO of a British not-for-profit pulled me back into the workforce. I was thoroughly shaken and stirred out of my comfort zone! Encouraged by my husband, I agreed to build their HR systems with her personal assistant supporting me. It reignited my confidence. I worked part-time, three half-days from the office, and continued tasks from home for the rest, balancing home and kids.



**Self-reflection led me to process work, a deep, foundational approach that integrates and reconciles the outer and inner self.**



From doubting my capabilities, I slowly regained my confidence. Each day brought a newfound sense of purpose and excitement. This six-month stint not only reignited my professional spark but also underscored the need to upskill myself.

I picked up visiting faculty assignments at local B-schools, briefly considered a PhD, and eventually joined a senior management search firm led by a former Eicher colleague. It was flexible, intrapreneurial, and rewarding. The role provided an insider's view of industries, functions, roles, and trends. Leveraging my corporate contacts, the next four years were an exciting journey filled with flexibility, camaraderie, and financial rewards. I enjoyed the work, but a quiet restlessness grew. I began questioning my purpose and asked myself: What was next for me? Why was I postponing myself while being available to everyone else?

That search led me to **process work**—an approach that aligns, integrates and reconciles the outer and inner self. To begin this new chapter, I left my lucrative search consultant role and started from scratch to build a career as an Organization Development (OD) professional. I found my guru, a pioneering mentor of process-centric institutional building, and interned under him. I immersed

myself in philosophy, mythology, fiction, scriptures, and alternative management schools. It was a time of intense learning, debate, and self-reflection. My guru called it "re-engineering and R&D work at the mind and emotional levels."

I soon participated in impactful OD projects, including global assignments. During one overseas workshop, I sensed deeply ingrained, unspoken gender biases. It pushed me to explore inequality more intentionally.

I pursued a master's in Women and Gender Studies—an audacious decision in my forties. I quit OD consulting, focused on academics, and took up occasional assignments to stay grounded in the industry. The degree inspired me to attempt a PhD, though the path was anything but smooth. I faced rejections, struggled with coursework among twenty-somethings, and battled financial and emotional pressures.

But it was a period of deep growth. I learned to shed assumptions, embrace vulnerability, and rely on my strengths. My husband's unwavering support and the kindness of mentors and peers helped me find my footing. As I

neared the end of my PhD, I began to ask: What now? How do I integrate all my experiences into a meaningful next chapter? I didn't want to be confined to a single domain. I reached out to my networks and built a path aligned with my multidimensional interests.





I identified five core pillars: **research, consulting, coaching, mentoring, and facilitation**, with a strong desire to contribute to advocacy and policy work. Giving back through pro bono work was non-negotiable. Brick by brick, I built a portfolio career that demanded planning, discipline, and the courage to navigate ambiguity.

Today, I thrive in this fluid journey. My consulting firm, Pragati: Partners in Progress, and my empanelment with various organizations allow me to support individuals and systems in realizing their full potential. My

focus areas—**Women Leadership, DEI, Mental Wellbeing, and Sustainability**—all reflect my inner purpose.

Looking back, my life and work have been deeply intertwined. Growth often requires starting from zero. It wasn't easy; I grappled with financial questions, self-doubt, and uncertainty, but my hunger to stay relevant and keep learning propelled me forward.

Overall, my journey has been rich with change, challenge, and growth. Reinvention isn't a one-time act—it's a way of being. And I wouldn't have it any other way.

## My Career GPS

Rerouting  
Recharging  
&  
Running

My Own  
Race

Here are my key takeaways from three decades of experience:

- **Clarity isn't always the starting point:** Embrace ambiguity while keeping your North Star in sight.
- **Personal and professional lives are intertwined:** Choose the "and" over the "either/or" where possible.
- **Build a strong support network:** This is vital and often under-recognized.
- **Work with sincerity:** Every decision has consequences—own them with grace.
- **Define success on your own terms:** Doing so liberates you from external expectations.
- **Stay current:** Expect 3–4 major pivots in a four-decade career.
- **Your career is a marathon:** Build endurance, not just momentum.
- **Own your journey:** No one else can walk it for you.
- **Ask for help:** Support often comes when—and from where—you least expect it.





## Going with the Flow

### A Journey of Purpose, Passion, and Perseverance

#### Girija Bharat

Founder and Managing Director,  
Mu Gamma Consultants

#### What inspired my career choice?

Starting my career as a Scientist in Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) was by chance and not by choice. Little did I know what was in store.



[linkedin.com/in/girija-bharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/girija-bharat)



Since childhood, I was passionate towards Environmental protection and hence chose to pursue Ph.D in Chemistry from Laxminarayan Institute of Technology (LIT), Nagpur in 1992. My study was on water quality and wastewater treatment. This was by choice and like water, I kept flowing, finding my path. I am still going with the FLOW.

### The turning points that shaped my journey

There were several turning points. The first one was when I lost my father at fourteen. It made me an adult overnight. I became very responsible, setting high goals and standards for myself and got into an achiever mode.

The next turning point was when I chose B.Sc. Chemistry in college despite preferring Mathematics since the options available with Mathematics were limited at that time. I struggled with the subject throughout my time as a BSc student. I thought, I would not get any opportunity for higher studies. But as luck would have it, very surprisingly I got admission in Utkal University for M.Sc. Chemistry. I decided to 'take the bull by the horns'. It was much later that I fell in love with the subject and went on to do a PhD and Post Doc in Chemistry.

The third turning point was when I got admitted for M.Phil. in Applied Chemistry at IIT (ISM) Dhanbad. I not only came out with flying colors but also got the love of my life, whom I married.

The fourth turning point was getting a job in CSIR and thereafter there was no looking back. I was able to stabilize my family and instill confidence in my mother.

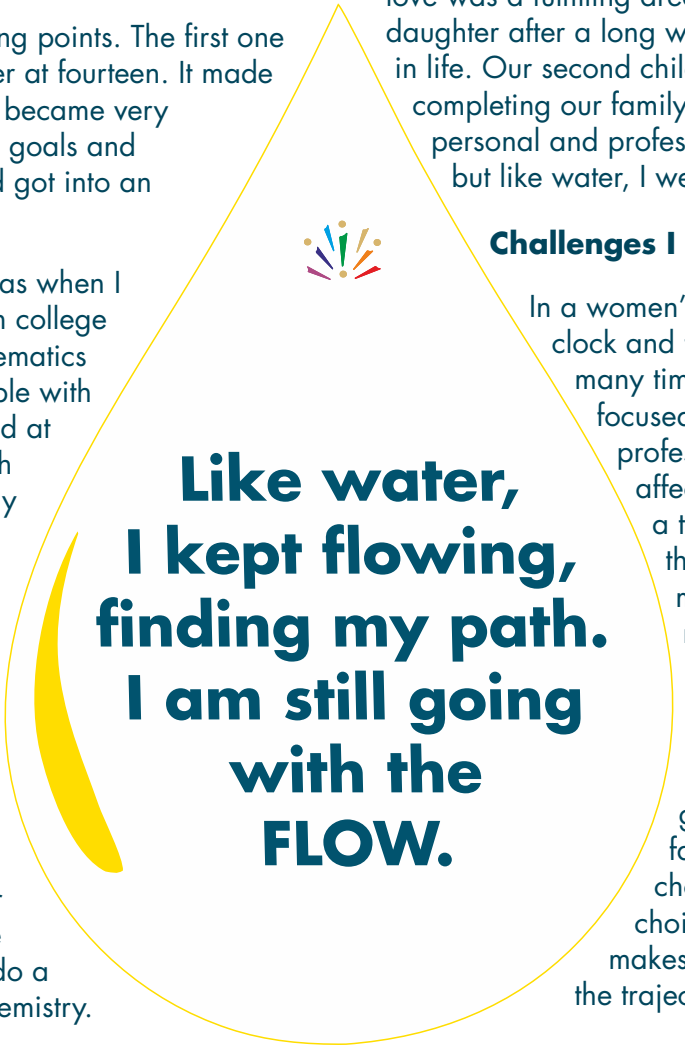
The fifth turning point was when I got the Presidential Fellowship at George Mason University (GMU), USA in 2007, which was a highly coveted fellowship.

On the personal front, getting married to my love was a fulfilling dream. Getting my daughter after a long wait was a big milestone in life. Our second child came soon after, completing our family. Juggling between personal and professional life was not easy, but like water, I went with the FLOW.

### Challenges I overcame

In a women's career, the career clock and the biological clock many times conflict. When I focused on the family front, the professional front would get affected, and vice versa. It's a tight rope walk and there are a lot of management skills needed to navigate and balance. The mantra that carried me through was: "When the going gets tough, the tough get going". One is faced with an array of choices, and it is the choices one adopts that makes a huge difference in the trajectory of life.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was pursuing a career after a break that I took for raising children. Returning to work was not easy. I was full of self-doubt and thoughts like, "Am I still relevant?" or "Do I have the right skills?" would keep me anxious. I pursued



**Like water,  
I kept flowing,  
finding my path.  
I am still going  
with the  
FLOW.**





higher studies, so that I was able to re-brand myself. I enriched myself with new skillsets and honed my leadership, problem-solving, negotiation, and multitasking abilities in ways that many employers highly value. The key was to shift my mindset. Instead of focusing on what I lacked, I highlighted what I would be able to bring to the table. Confidence is not about knowing everything, it's about trusting in one's ability to learn and adapt. The book: **StrengthsFinder 2.0 by Tom Rath** was instrumental in this regard. I read a lot of self-development books and would often give myself a positive re-affirmation. These really helped and then there was no looking back.

After the US education, I was able to rebound and get into a steady career.

By then, our children were also a bit grown up and independent and my sustainability journey continued in India. I joined another premium research organization: The Energy & Resource Institute (TERI) in New Delhi. The journey in the water sector, which began in LIT in 1992 continued through GMU in 2009, TERI and beyond.

In 2015, I founded Mu Gamma Consultants, a private limited company that works in the

Water and Waste management sector, Circular economy and Climate change both in India and internationally. We are an ISO 9001 certified, internationally recognized organization and have been undertaking projects for The World Bank, United Nations, The Royal Norwegian Embassy in New Delhi, GLZ, European Commission, Norwegian Research Council, Swiss Development Cooperation and several international agencies. We have been actively promoting the Safe Reuse of Treated Water (SRTW) in India by contributing to the national framework for SRTW. Our organization has received several national and international awards such as the **Women Transforming India Award** from NITI Aayog (2023), **Women**

**Led Climate Action Award** by Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Government of India, **Women Entrepreneur of the Year Award** by Delhi

Management Association (DMA) in 2024, **Golden Pinnacle Award, 2023** from Indian Achievers Forum in Dubai, **Global Environment Award 2020, Aqua Excellence Award 2021.**

**Confidence is not about knowing everything, it's about trusting in one's ability to learn and adapt.**



For further details, please refer to the website: [www.mugammaconsultants.com](http://www.mugammaconsultants.com)

### The values and attributes that have defined my growth

My parents were extremely hard working, and they believed in education, discipline, perseverance, and independence. They took a keen interest in educating their children in the applied aspects of science. Sundays were for gardening, a family activity that gave me a preview of chemistry and made science a fun and integral part of life. Sustainability, Circular economy was part and parcel of my upbringing, it was my default setting. It has been my core, and I feel so satisfied that I got the opportunity to align my passion, purpose and profession for the people and the planet.

### What's next?

I am building an organization that knows no boundary. We are building up a team of Green Warriors, who are the next generation of thought leaders in the sustainability space. We are expanding in other countries. We are working with several Ministries at the National and State levels and have strong collaboration with international agencies to further our work towards environmental pollution control. We have also set up Mu Gamma International in Canada.

This journey is filled with excitement, and, at times, uncertainty. But we believe in ourselves, we are focused on our goal and are marching towards it with determination, dedication and a strong drive. We have a big dream, and we are strongly committed towards our goal.



## A Lifelong Pursuit of Purpose

### My Journey from Confusion to Clarity

#### Kulbhushan Gupta

Head Operational Excellence & Strategy  
Dr Reddy's Laboratories Ltd

If there's one word that can summarize the early part of my career, it would be "confusion." I started as a mechanical engineer working in the electronics industry. While I was technically equipped, I found myself wondering where I truly belonged.



[linkedin.com/in/kkulbhushan](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kkulbhushan)



**M**y journey began in Germany, a fantastic place to start, surrounded by cutting-edge technology and scientific innovation. But despite the environment, my job was not about building or designing these marvels, it was about creating markets for them.

Initially, it felt exciting - travel, international exposure, learning to sell highly specialized equipment - but something was missing. I realized very early that selling isn't about pushing a product; it's about understanding what the customer values. And that understanding doesn't come from presentations or sales pitches. It comes from living their life, shadowing them, walking in their shoes. Only then can you create a pull, instead of pushing something they don't need.

But the more I succeeded in sales, the more a part of me remained unsatisfied. I missed the "engineer" in me. The urge to solve, to build, to be hands-on. So, I made what many around me thought was a foolish move - I shifted from sales and marketing to operations.


Operations had no glamor. I was suddenly working in factories with 45° to 50° celsius shop floors, often without air conditioning. It was raw, intense, and unrelenting. But it was

also real. I was back where things were made, not just marketed. I was in GE at that time, and I saw this as my opportunity to prove not just to others, but to myself, that I had made the right choice.

I threw myself into my work. I handled a critical tech transfer project from the U.S. to India. With the project lead stepping away, the responsibility landed squarely on my shoulders. I had to prove that the technology worked, improve productivity, and ensure output. And I did it by being available 24/7, troubleshooting issues at 3am, eating meals with the operators, and making sure not a minute of production was lost.

That's when I learned the first real lesson of transformation: You cannot define boundaries if you want to succeed. Ownership means doing whatever it takes.

The turning point came when Six Sigma entered my life. Because of the impact I had created through the tech transfer, I was nominated for GE's Six Sigma Black Belt program. I was the most serious student in the class, soaking up every concept, every



**Leadership isn't about solving the same problems better each year. It's about solving new problems differently every time.**



case study, every methodology. I remember thinking, “Why did no one teach me this earlier?” I was hungry to apply what I learned, and soon enough, I was solving high-impact problems, driving transformation, & earning credibility across GE.

People across businesses began to recognize me, not just for my technical skills, but also for my ability to train, to influence, to lead change. That’s when I learned another powerful lesson: As leaders, we are not meant to be daily firefighters. Our true job is to lead transformation.

My journey led me to the GE corporate team, driving Six Sigma across all GE businesses in India. Those three to four years were among the most fulfilling in my career. I interacted with business leaders across industries, learned the nuances of stakeholder management, and discovered how the same methodology could take different forms depending on the context.

I understood that leadership isn’t about solving the same problems better each year. It’s about solving new problems differently every time.

That reputation eventually brought me to Jubilant, where I led Operational and Business Excellence.

This was a stage of rapid growth for me, I got to work across functions: HR, capital governance, mergers and acquisitions, global supply chain, and more. I realized that transformation cannot be function-specific. If you want to create meaningful change, you have to work across the entire value chain—end-to-end.

Post Jubilant, I moved into roles like Head of Innovation at Max, and today, I lead Operational Excellence and Strategy at Dr. Reddy’s. But if you ask me what has stayed constant, I would say my impatience. Yes, my impatience with improvements.

Improvement cannot be slow. If you’re patient with it, you risk watching great ideas die out. You have to be bold, act quickly, and generate value fast. Fail fast and fail cheap; don’t wait until the failure becomes costly and irreversible.

Over the years, I’ve learned to approach every problem with a clean slate. I never go into a situation thinking I already have the answers. I read, I research, I reflect. I explore how others have solved similar challenges across industries and geographies. Then I blend that insight with my own experience to develop tailored, effective solutions.

But I also understand that not every innovation effort will succeed. That’s why



breakthroughs are so critical. Incrementalism doesn't lead to transformation. True transformation requires the courage to rethink the way we work, discard what no longer serves us, and redraw the canvas altogether.

Each of these phases, be it sales, operations, Six Sigma, or strategy has been a stepping stone in shaping who I am. But my journey isn't just about where I've been. It's also about where I want to go.

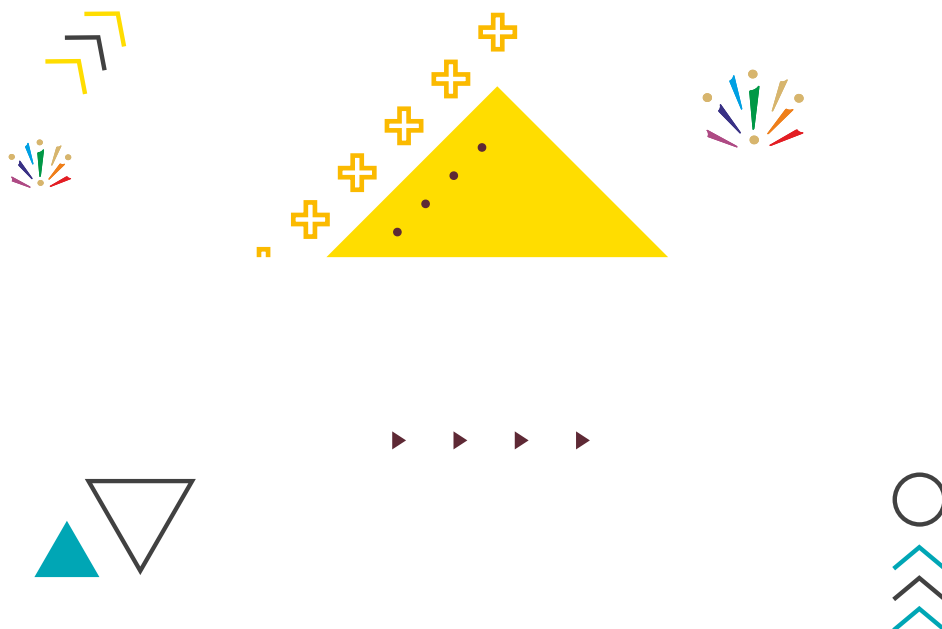
As I look toward the future, my deepest aspiration is to teach. To inspire. To guide the next generation. I want to be a lighthouse for young professionals - especially those who, like me, start out confused about their place in the world.

I want to share my mistakes openly, so they know what to avoid early on. I want to help them understand that success is not about chasing glamorous roles or titles, it's about finding purpose, solving real problems, and making an impact. I want to mentor those who are driven, but unsure, helping them connect the dots faster than I could.

If even a handful of aspiring minds can find their direction earlier because of my story, then I'll consider that the most meaningful success of all.

At the end of the day, this isn't just a journey from confusion to clarity. It's a journey of staying true to the core - of being an engineer at heart, a problem-solver by passion, and hopefully, a teacher by choice.

Because success is not about how far you go alone. It's about how many you take along with you.







## The Choices That Built Me

### Maneka Sharma

Pursuing a Masters in Information and Knowledge Strategy with focus on Business & AI: Columbia University, New York  
Ex-Senior Strategy Consultant, EY-Parthenon

If I had to pinpoint a single moment that defined my career path, I'd have to say - it wasn't a moment. It was a belief. A quiet, persistent one instilled in me by the strong, kind and inspiring women in my life: my mother and my grandmothers.



[linkedin.com/in/manekasharma](https://www.linkedin.com/in/manekasharma)



Growing up in a household where ambition wasn't just accepted but expected, I learned early that I could dream big, work hard, and take up space.

I didn't start out knowing exactly what I wanted to do. But I always knew I wanted to create and problem solve – whether that be ideas, teams, systems to make them work better. That instinct led me into strategy consulting, where I spent nearly seven years at EY and EY-Parthenon, advising education and tech organizations across India. I joined as an Analyst, fresh and curious. I left as a Senior Consultant, carrying not just a title but the weight of hundreds of decisions made under pressure, late nights turned into breakthroughs, and clients who trusted me to help them transform.

### The Turning Points

There were many. The first time I was asked to lead a cost optimization project for a newly merged tech giant. The first time my recommendations were challenged, and I had to hold my ground. The moment I realized that the systems we build aren't just technical or financial - they're human. They impact how people learn, work, and live. That realization shifted how I worked. I began listening more closely, looking beyond the spreadsheet, and fighting for solutions that were both smart and sustainable.

But perhaps the biggest turning point came when I

**This journey isn't mine alone - it is built on belief, bold choices, and the women who told me I could be anything.**

stepped away from a comfortable career trajectory and moved to New York City to pursue a second master's degree at Columbia. It was a leap into the unknown: new city, new field, new me. I didn't do it to start over. I did it to evolve. To understand the intersections of AI, knowledge,

and leadership. To explore how strategy can be deeply human and technologically bold at the same time.

### The Challenges I Carried—and Overcame

Consulting can be but it's not weight.

a thrilling ride, without its There were days I worked 12+ hours straight, toggling between cities, clients, and deliverables with little time to breathe. There were moments of doubt, of being underestimated, or being the youngest in

the room and needing to prove I belonged. But every challenge was a teacher.

One of the most challenging projects I've led involved changing the internal talent supply chain of a large tech firm that was resistant to change. The client didn't agree with our suggestions, and my main stakeholder had just returned to the industry after a 10 year sabbatical. Communication was rocky. Progress was slow. But we stuck with it. Piloted, adapted, listened, and earned trust. We didn't win every battle, but we moved the needle - and that was enough.

### THE CHOICES THAT BUILT ME



#### Growing Up...

I was inspired to dream big and work hard by my mother and grandmothers.



#### Strategy Consulting Career The Challenges I Overcame

Despite long hours and difficult projects, each challenge was a teacher.

#### The Turning Points

I took a leap and moved to New York City to pursue a second Master's degree at Columbia.



#### Where I'm Headed

I'm focused on building smarter systems that combine data AI, and strategy.



INTEGRITY



RESILIENCE



CURIOSITY

#### What's Guided Me

My Journey has been defined by my core values of integrity, resilience, and curiosity.



## What's Guided Me

If I had to name the values that define my journey, I'd say: integrity, resilience, and curiosity.

Integrity - because it's tempting to take shortcuts when timelines are brutal, but the work that lasts is built on truth.

Resilience - because not every win comes easy, and the ability to stay in the game is often more important than being the smartest in the room.

Curiosity - because I've never believed in arriving. There's always something new to learn, a new way to grow, and I truly believe that I am a continuous learner.

These aren't just words on a poster. They've shaped how I lead teams, mentor others, and choose the opportunities I take on.

## Where I'm Headed

Today, I'm working at the intersection of data, AI, and strategy - bringing together my consulting background with emerging technologies to build smarter systems. Whether it's optimizing how organizations use data or designing GenAI-powered tools for process improvement, I'm drawn to challenges that require both analytical rigor and empathy.

What's next? I'm still figuring it out. But I know I want to keep building, keep creating - companies, cultures, classrooms where people feel seen, heard, and equipped for the future.

This journey isn't mine alone. It's built on the shoulders of women who told me I could be anything. It's built in boardrooms and quiet 2 AM brainstorming sessions. It's still unfolding. And if reading this helps someone believe that change is possible, that growth is nonlinear, and that they too can leap - then I've paid it forward.







## A Blueprint for Career Growth

**Curiosity,  
Courage,  
and  
Change**

**Dr. Mita Brahma**

CHRO, NIIT Ltd.

**"...A career is not a straight path,  
but a tapestry woven from diverse  
threads..."**

I have been guided throughout my  
life by a deep curiosity about the  
world and a passion for exploring  
its many dimensions.



[linkedin.com/in/mitabrahma](https://www.linkedin.com/in/mitabrahma)

## What inspired my career choices?

I was fortunate to have grown up with an exposure to the best of science as well as art. I was taken in my childhood to visit science museums as well as to see art exhibitions. I was enchanted by the brush strokes and the use of light and shade in the work of the Old Masters. I was equally awed by the logic and complexity of physics, man's journey to the moon, and the rapid advances in science and technology.

This love of science and art has stayed with me ever since. I like to explore the connections between creativity and logic, and to try and get a balance between imagination and discipline. I studied engineering physics in college, as well as explored various mediums of visual arts, with equal enthusiasm. When I completed my Masters, there was an unexpected opportunity as often happens in life, in the area of banking. I joined the State Bank of India, with its promise of a great workplace, and being able to contribute to society, learn and grow.

My years at the Bank were ones of rapid professional growth, challenge, and reward. I had a lot of talented work colleagues, an excellent work environment, and I really enjoyed learning more about the entrepreneurial firms that the Bank was lending to and contributing to the growth of the Bank's clients.

### The turning points that shaped my journey

For a period in life, I needed more flexibility: I wanted to be available more at home for both childcare as well as elder care, while the banking career required long working hours and frequent relocations. I turned at a new fork in the road, and the world of teaching became my new path. I gathered a whole new universe



**Each experience,  
whether in banking,  
teaching, consulting,  
or creative  
exploration,  
has enriched  
my perspective.**

of friends and had the opportunity to shape and grow young minds. It also ignited in me the passion for new learning and new experiences.

Around this time, the internet world was dramatically changing how we did banking, how we collaborated, learnt and played, and I was eager to be a part of this transformation. I changed course again, and joined an organization making banking software products, where I had the opportunity to manage various facets of HR. The organization, Nucleus Software, was at that time in an exciting stage of high growth, and each initiative was an opportunity to blend analytical thinking with a people-centric approach.

To broaden the impact of my work, I transitioned into the consulting world. I joined a firm, Grow Talent, specializing in large-scale change management, leadership assessment, and development initiatives. The work was exhilarating and complex, requiring me to help organizations navigate transformation, define



their vision and mission, and articulate the values and behaviours that would shape their culture. I later founded my own consulting firm, guiding companies as they set strategic goals and built cohesive, purpose-driven teams.

Each experience, whether in banking, teaching, consulting, or creative exploration, has enriched my perspective. I have learned that a career is not a straight path, but a tapestry woven from diverse threads, each contributing to the journey.

My present responsibilities at NIIT include shaping organizational strategy, driving talent development, fostering a culture of inclusion, and ensuring operational excellence in HR processes. Having navigated multiple career transitions and supported teams through change, I bring a holistic perspective to leadership development and organizational growth. My background enables me to align people practices with business goals, mentor emerging leaders, and create an environment where individuals and teams can thrive.

### Challenges I overcame and what led to my success

**Balancing career and family:** One has to acknowledge to oneself the need to focus more/less on the career outside the home/ or on home affairs. The needs at home and work keep changing. It is important to be self-aware and prioritise.

**Reinventing myself professionally:** Career transitions happen due to various reasons. It is important to equip oneself professionally for each change, and to grow in the new, unfamiliar territory. I was fortunate to have been able to leverage

well the prior experiences, and I worked hard at acquiring new skills.

One thing that really helped me was that amidst these professional pursuits, I honoured my creative and entrepreneurial spirit. I took time off to immerse myself in painting; I spent time hiking and trekking; and I completed a fellowship in corporate entrepreneurship. The art journey and trekking experiences were a reminder of the beauty and resilience that life offers. The fellowship program deepened my understanding of innovation and strategic growth.

### The values and attributes that have defined my growth

**Curiosity and lifelong learning:** My early fascination with both science and art, and my willingness to embrace new domains like banking, teaching, IT, HR, and consulting, were due to a deep-rooted curiosity and openness to enjoy new experiences. They have given me a depth and width of experiences and a network of friends and colleagues that I can draw upon.

**Adaptability and resilience:** I navigated major life transitions, moving from banking to teaching and returning to the corporate world as technology was transforming it. Each pivot made me resolve to thrive in changing circumstances and provided exciting new challenges and opportunities.

**Empathy and responsibility:** My decisions have been guided by a strong sense of empathy and responsibility, whether for my family, colleagues, and friends. At work, it is empathy that guides my approach to people management.





Strategic vision: In my role as HR, consulting, and while doing a fellow program in management, I have consistently focused on thinking about the big picture and on creating a strategic impact.

### **What's next?**

I have embraced each phase of my career as an opportunity for growth, pursuing professional, personal, and creative interests, and maintaining a balance. My experience in banking gave me an understanding of organizational dynamics and operational rigor, while my years in the classroom sharpened my ability to communicate, mentor, and inspire. My experience in HR and consulting has sharpened my abilities to prioritize what matters most at each stage and being able to contribute and make a difference in people's lives.

These experiences have given me a nuanced understanding of both the challenges and

aspirations that leaders face. My work as an executive coach allows me to draw upon these insights, offering not just advice but authentic partnership and support to those seeking to grow.

As I look ahead, I remain committed to learning, growing, and helping others do the same. My journey has taught me that careers are not defined by a single choice, but by our willingness to adapt, to embrace new challenges, and to stay true to our values. Whether through executive coaching, consulting, or creative pursuits, I hope to continue making a positive impact, empowering individuals and organizations to realize their potential in an ever-evolving world.

Ultimately, it is this tapestry of diverse experiences that will guide my next steps, as I strive to inspire others to chart their own unique paths.



## Forty Years Forward

### A Life in Purpose, A Journey in Progress

#### **Dr. Neelam Gupta**

Founder AROH Foundation

As I near the milestone of forty years in professional life, I find myself drawn not to the grand achievements or accolades, but to the quiet, defining moments - the silences between the noise, the people who left a mark, the crossroads that demanded a leap of faith. In these moments lies the real story of my journey - a journey not merely of a career, but of a cause, a conviction.



[linkedin.com/in/neelamgupta](https://linkedin.com/in/neelamgupta)

I began, as many do, with a path well-laid and aspirations academically defined. A doctorate in Agricultural Sciences had promised me a place in the structured halls of research or administration. It was a logical trajectory. But something more visceral pulled at me - something sown not in the fields of academia, but in the emotional landscape of my childhood.

I must have been around ten, visiting my father's ancestral village in rural India. The air was heavy with the scent of burnt grain and monsoon earth. It was here, away from textbooks and routine, that I first saw her - a girl around my age, drawing water from a rusted handpump. Her thin arms strained against the iron lever, her bare feet caked in mud, and her eyes - those eyes - held the weight of centuries. In them, I saw a quiet resignation, a muted plea. We didn't speak. But in that fleeting moment, a vow was etched into my heart: one day, I would do something for girls like her.

It would take decades for that promise to find its form. Years of education, of stepping into roles I thought were mine to play, only to find the pull of that vow growing louder. The turning point came in 2001, when I chose to leave the predictable and plunge into the unknown. I registered AROH Foundation - an act that felt less like a decision and more like a reclamation of purpose.

Those early days were anything but easy. Skepticism clouded every conversation. Why leave a promising scientific career for uncertain fieldwork? Why chase rural transformation when urban success was within

reach? But I had seen too much to look away. I had seen women bend like willows under generational burdens, children drop out of school because they had to fetch water, and youth drift into despair or extremism for lack of opportunity.

We started small - with basic literacy classes, vocational training, health camps. And slowly, AROH grew. We ventured into Smart Schools and Anganwadis, transforming early childhood and young child care. We trained women entrepreneurs who today run successful businesses. We built sustainable livelihoods in forgotten corners of India. We brought dignity where there was previously only subsistence.

What truly shaped my mission, however, were the countless encounters with women across India - from the tribal belts of Chhattisgarh to the urban slums of Delhi, from the deserts of Rajasthan to the flood-prone plains of Assam. I met women who had survived domestic abuse, child marriages, trafficking, widowhood, and abandonment. Each

story was a mirror, reflecting both the brutal inequities of our culture and the boundless courage that often goes unrecognized.

There was Laxmi, a widow from Uttar Pradesh who lost her husband to alcohol and was left with three children and no income. She came to one of our skilling centres and learned tailoring.

Today, she employs five other women in her microenterprise. There was Meera from Rajasthan who was denied schooling as a child but now teaches adult literacy classes. And there was Rupa, trafficked as a teenager and rescued through one of our intervention programmes, who now counsels other vulnerable girls.

**The journey ahead still stretches far. The road is still dusty, still long. But I've walked it before. And I know the way.**





These women didn't just strengthen my resolve. They redefined the word "resilience." They showed me what it meant to fight every day, not with weapons, but with will. They taught me that Indian culture - while rich, layered, and deeply rooted - is also burdened by patriarchal structures that often silence half its population. But it also holds within it the seeds of its own transformation - seeds that must be nurtured with education, opportunity, and dignity.

One of the most humbling moments in my journey came during a field visit to a remote village in Jharkhand. I was sitting with a group of tribal women under a mahua tree, discussing the new sanitation project we had launched. One of the elder women, wrinkled and wise, held my hand and said, "You're the first outsider who listened to us like we mattered." That moment reinforced what I had always believed: development is not about charity - it is about respect. It is about walking into a community not with solutions, but with open ears and an open heart.

But impact never comes unchallenged. Along this journey, I faced trials that would shake even the most seasoned change maker. One such moment

was a wrongful tax demand slapped on our organisation a staggering sum of eight crore rupees. The anxiety it brought was not just financial; it was existential. We had to wage a long legal battle just to prove our innocence. I remember nights of sleeplessness, of questioning whether righteousness had any

real place in this world. But we persisted. And eventually, we prevailed.

Yet, perhaps the most unforgettable test of courage came deep in a Naxal-affected region where we were setting up a skill development centre for local youth. The area was raw, neglected, and scarred by years of violence. One morning, while inspecting the site, our team was intercepted by a group of armed Naxalites. The moment froze. But instead of threats, we were met with a question: "Why are you here?" I replied with honesty: "To help your children build a future." They watched us in silence and then said, "If your work is true, we will not stop you. We will protect you."

And they did. That day taught me that even in territories marked as 'dangerous', humanity still flickers. That trust, when born of truth, transcends fear.

Through these decades, what kept me grounded were the values I held sacred: integrity, empathy, resilience. I learned that empathy is not softness. It is strength. It is walking into homes without electricity and sitting on mud floors with mothers who have

dreams for their daughters. It is listening more than speaking. It is knowing that transformation is not transactional - it is emotional, spiritual, lived.

I have also come to understand that a woman's empowerment is not just an outcome; it is a revolution. When a woman learns to read, her family learns to hope. When she

**A woman's empowerment is not just an outcome; it is a revolution. When a woman learns to read, her family learns to hope. When she earns, she redefines worth. When she leads, a community awakens.**

earns, she redefines worth. When she leads, a community awakens. I have seen this again and again - in a girl who once missed school due to shame but now tutors her peers; in a widow who now owns a tailoring business and sends her children to college.

Forty years have taught me that progress is not a graph. It is a story. And each life changed is a chapter worth telling.

Today, as I stand on this milestone, I am not closing a chapter. I am widening the narrative. I am writing - literally and metaphorically. I am documenting stories that need to be heard. I am amplifying the voices that have long been silent. And I am walking alongside the next generation of changemakers, women especially, who will not just inherit this mission but transform it in ways I cannot yet imagine.

To those just beginning: Your career need not follow a script. Listen to the stirrings of your heart. Your defining moment may not arrive in a conference room; it might come from the eyes of a stranger at a village handpump.

To those returning to the workforce: You are not late. You are right on time. Your lived experiences are your greatest credentials.

To those questioning their path: Ask yourself not what the world expects of you, but what promise you once made to yourself. That promise is your true north.

The journey ahead for me still stretches far. There are more villages to reach, more classrooms to build, more women to stand beside. The road is still dusty, still long. But I've walked it before. And I know the way.

And I know that somewhere, a little girl is watching. And this time, she is not alone.





## A Journey of Grit, Growth & Guts

### From Call Center to Coworking Dreams

#### Nikhiil Madan

Co-founder, The Office Pass (TOP)

In today's ever-evolving business landscape, success rarely travels a straight line. Mine certainly did not. What began as a practical decision to join a BPO post-graduation became the unlikely launchpad for a career that would eventually lead me to co-found a thriving coworking space company.



[linkedin.com/in/nikhilmadan81](https://www.linkedin.com/in/nikhilmadan81)





Each chapter, no matter how humble, shaped not only my skills but the very mindset with which I approach entrepreneurship.

### The BPO Chapter: Where it All Began

It was 2002. Fresh out of college, I stepped into the fast-paced world of business process outsourcing, not out of passion, but out of necessity. With free transport, meals, and a steady income, the BPO offered exactly what I needed most at the time: stability. I was supporting my parents and two younger brothers, and the financial security this job provided was crucial.

What I didn't expect was how this role would become one of the most significant foundations of my career. Day after day, I navigated complex client conversations, resolved conflicts under pressure, and built connections across continents. I wasn't just answering calls; I was learning how to listen deeply, how to manage expectations, and how to turn challenging conversations into opportunities for connection. I learned to negotiate, to stay calm under stress, and to adapt quickly in a high-volume, high-demand environment.

Looking back, that headset wasn't just a job. It was my classroom. It sharpened my confidence, built my resilience, and taught me the value of consistency and grit. These were not just workplace skills, they became life skills and the very qualities I would later rely on to build something of my own.

### The Real Estate Leap: From Execution to Empowerment

Five years later, in 2007, I joined Makaan.com — a pivotal decision that propelled me

beyond day-to-day execution and into the realm of leadership. At Makaan, I was no longer just part of the process; I was now building and leading them. I was entrusted with setting up teams, designing processes, and driving performance in the highly competitive digital real estate space.

Here, I truly began to understand what leadership meant. It wasn't about micromanaging or having all the answers. It was about creating clarity, building trust, and empowering people to perform. It was about flawlessly balancing strategy with execution, while continuously learning and evolving.

Makaan leadership taught me that about can step where they are working from "building is about enabling others. It's stepping back so that your team up. It's about cultivating a space people feel ownership, where not just working for you but with you. This shift in mindset, "getting things done" to something that lasts", fundamentally changed the way I approached every challenge thereafter.

### The Entrepreneurial Chapter: Building from Scratch

In 2017, driven by the cumulative lessons of my journey and inspired by the growing shift towards flexible work, I co-founded The Office Pass (TOP). This wasn't just another business venture for me. It was a mission to reimagine the way professionals work, connect, and grow.

Starting from scratch was exhilarating and terrifying. Every lesson from my BPO days and my real estate stint came into play. The empathy, patience, and people skills I had developed while on the phones helped me build a community-first

**Leadership is not about command, it is about creating clarity, championing ownership, and trusting your people to rise.**



culture at TOP. My real estate experience gave me the confidence to identify the right locations, design inspiring workspaces, and understand market dynamics.

Entrepreneurship is never a straight path. There were hurdles, moments of doubt, and decisions that kept me awake at night. But the grit I built early in my career helped me push through. Today, when I see TOP standing tall as the largest flexi workspace operator in

Delhi NCR, it feels surreal, but it also feels earned. It is a testament to the power of persistence, belief, and continuous learning.

### Looking Back to Leap Forward

Every role, every phase of my journey was a stepping stone. What once felt like disconnected career moves now feel like carefully laid bricks in a much larger structure. That's the beauty of hindsight, you realize you were always preparing for something bigger, even if you couldn't see it at the time.

### A Note to Aspiring Professionals

If you are at the start of your career, here's what I'd like to leave you with: Don't chase perfect paths. Chase growth. Take the job, even if it doesn't seem like your 'dream' role. Immerse yourself. Learn everything you can. Trust the process. Embrace the detours and the doubts; they are not signs you're off-track, they are part of your making.

Keep showing up. Keep learning. One day you'll look back and realize: every step mattered. Every challenge shaped you. And every twist in the road was quietly leading you home.





## Learnings of an Ordinary Woman in this Extraordinary World

### Pritha Dutt

Chairperson CGEIL (Centre for Gender Equality and Inclusive Leadership) XLRI & Founder MerabizNet

In the spring of 1997, I was all set to leave for the University of Leeds on a British Chevening scholarship. It did not happen. I could not get leave from my workplace. We were in the middle of a hectic expansion spree in the large hospitality chain I was working for, and my work was cut out. It's one of the many misses that turned into unexpected adventures and life journeys, allowing me to pick up a host of experiences, gain new skills, and contribute to new areas.



[linkedin.com/in/pritha-dutt-6b1b4621](https://www.linkedin.com/in/pritha-dutt-6b1b4621)





As I shared in a TEDx talk organized by XLRI recently, I started my career in a factory in Sahibabad, UP, then notorious for union militancy and labour unrest. I was probably the only one from my batch who did not pick up a campus job, opting instead for a large role in a small firm. It gave me in the bargain, a hands on, ring side view and experience of handling unions, understanding industrial dispute issues, hiring blue collar workers, mediating in shop floor conflicts and putting in place a Works Committee all in the span of 2.5 years what takes many seasoned IR professionals a decade or more to acquire. I learnt from my first boss an invaluable lesson: 'we can't change our bosses nor our colleagues. The only person you can change is you.' So, to get work done, make things happen, and get your way, the only one who has to make the effort and change is you. Good interpersonal communication, an empathetic ear, and an ability to identify the 'hot buttons' (another phrase I picked up from another great boss) of another person are crucial professional competencies one needs to pick up.

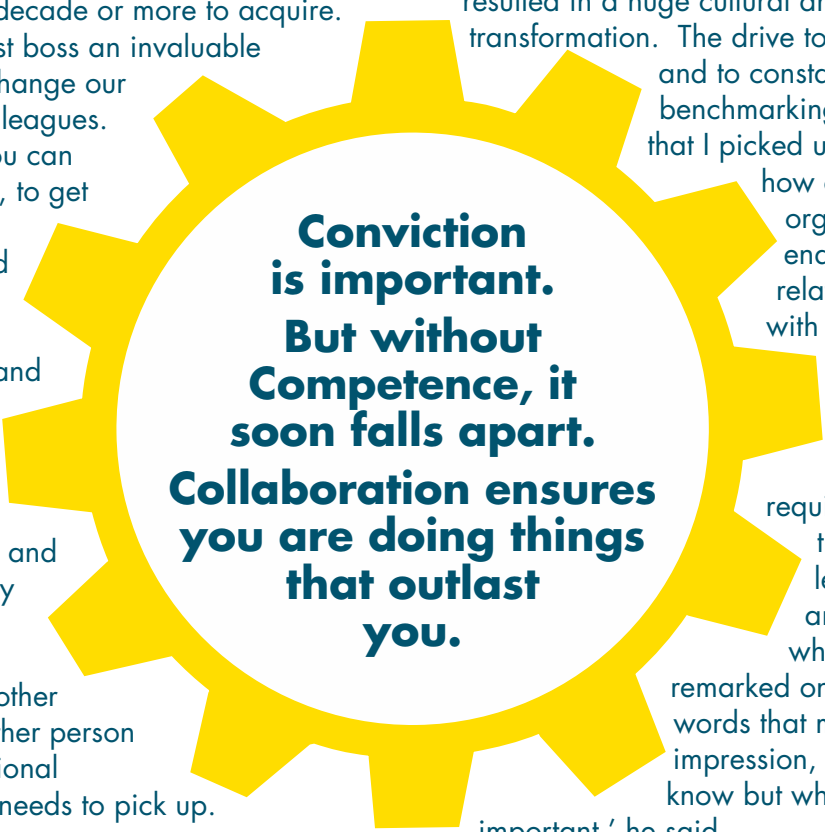
My first job led to my second job, almost like it was beckoning, and from an HR role in an electronics assembly line set up, I moved to the service industry. Those were safer times, or maybe we were not aware of our rights, or social media had not exploded, as I travelled to work alone in Punjab and Assam during the years of turmoil, Operation BlueStar, ULFA Agitation, and so on. The independence it taught me and the understanding it gave me of our country were immense. Those roads, train journeys, and working in an industry that

would years later morph into the logistics and last mile e-commerce delivery was a learning into how India moves, India delivers, India lives.

Nothing exemplifies the height of service industry standards than The Oberoi Hotels. The obsession that the group has towards quality, guest service, and attention to detail is legendary, and lots of anecdotes and tales have passed off into industry folklore. It was wonderful being part of this group during the interesting McKinsey intervention, which resulted in a huge cultural and business transformation. The drive to deliver one's best

and to constantly keep benchmarking oneself is a trait that I picked up from here. So, how can an organization create enduring relationships? Not just with its customers, but employees, even after they left. Building an effective network requires investing in the relationship. I learnt this from another Mentor who casually remarked one day, these words that made a deep impression, 'It's not what you know but who you know that is important,' he said.

Very soon, however, somewhere deep within, both the Christian values embedded in my convent school education, of thinking about the poor, and the XLRI motto of 'for the greater good' became an urge to do my bit for the world outside. Citizen activism, community development, and social work are far more professional and structured today. One can do several graduate and postgraduate studies in subjects related to this field and land a job.



**Conviction  
is important.  
But without  
Competence, it  
soon falls apart.  
Collaboration ensures  
you are doing things  
that outlast  
you.**



One afternoon at the Airtel Office, along with Pankaj Bansal, we prepared the draft outline for Beyond Business, an initiative to build capacity for the NGO sector through volunteers from the corporate sector. We launched this through the HRD Network, and it was a big success, helping us reach out to more than 15-20 NGOs and about 30-40 corporate volunteers. Our passionate core group, supported by a bunch of organizations, academic institutes, and staff hired on nominal remuneration, loved and learnt through each of the learning programs and projects we undertook for the NGO's. It sparked a deeper desire to actively pursue a career in the 'social sector', except with only passion as the qualification, it was a tough ask.

Paulo Coelho's memorable, inspiring, and soul-uplifting quote, 'When you want something, the universe conspires in helping you achieve it,' is a dictum I not only live by but something I have seen manifest time and again. There is a caveat, though. My twist to this famous line is ... When you want something **badly**, the **whole** universe conspires in helping you achieve it. The want has to be intense. It's something that you want and not just a fleeting 'desire.' The 'whole' is important. It's then that suddenly you come across news or information that helps you in your goal, people who miraculously appear who connect you with the right source, an opening that appears, a letter that arrives. I have seen this manifest whether for something like wanting to be a theatre artist or wanting to work abroad, or wanting to move into a niche area in the social (now known as the development sector) sector.

My venture into the development sector, something that I wanted 'badly', was facilitated by an acquaintance who gave me a number and a name that changed my career track instantly. Talk about the whole universe conspiring! It was an easy decision for me. It confounded and surprised those who heard about it. Who leaves a corporate job with its pay packet? To get into the NGO space with a 1/3rd cut in pay?

The first area of work I got into was in Resettlement & Rehabilitation, which in the early 2000s was just gaining currency as several projects requiring land acquisition for 'public purposes' meant that companies had to follow the requirements of the then provisions of the Land Acquisition Act. That included doing a social audit, holding a Gram Sabha, identifying Projected

**When you  
 want something  
 badly enough,  
 the whole universe  
 conspires in helping  
 you achieve it.**



Affected Families, and getting the R&R plan accepted, approved, and implemented. The learning was immense. Everything was new. From understanding that every 'gram' need not have a 'gram panchayat' to concepts like 'community,' mobilization, transect walk, to discovering that a focus group discussion is not what participants at a training program do, and how development can be a destructive as well as a constructive force. What is needed is the right information, sincerity of intention, uncovering needs and aspirations, guidance, and handholding. And one size does not fit all.



Those 5 years were a window, no, a door, to the India that is Bharat. Then Singur happened, and the work came to a grinding halt. I took a sabbatical, finished an MA in Development Studies from IGNOU, launched a company to get adults to pick up a hobby, and collaborated with a couple of others who a connect turned friend connected us with to launch another firm, an advisory company for corporates wanting to undertake CSR projects. This was in 2009 when the CSR Act was still taking shape!

Moving from there to the TVET Sector was serendipity. Been part of the TVET Sector since the inception of the entire ecosystem of vocational skilling -NSDC, Sector Skill Councils, MSDE. It is with some sense of satisfaction that I have in sharing that the model for strengthening women entrepreneurship that I put in place in a skill company I was on the Board of, won a national-level award after I left. Their entrepreneurship program has since then supported hundreds of women in starting and scaling their nano enterprises. Of all the other areas where I may have left some little work of worth, this is really close to my heart.

If you look at the data, the rate at which jobs are getting added in the economy is far lower than the number of people seeking jobs, even if you add the casual, gig, informal, and unorganized sectors. The situation for women seeking employment is bleaker. Gender inequality is a shocking reality. I believe entrepreneurship needs to grow far more. Specially for women.

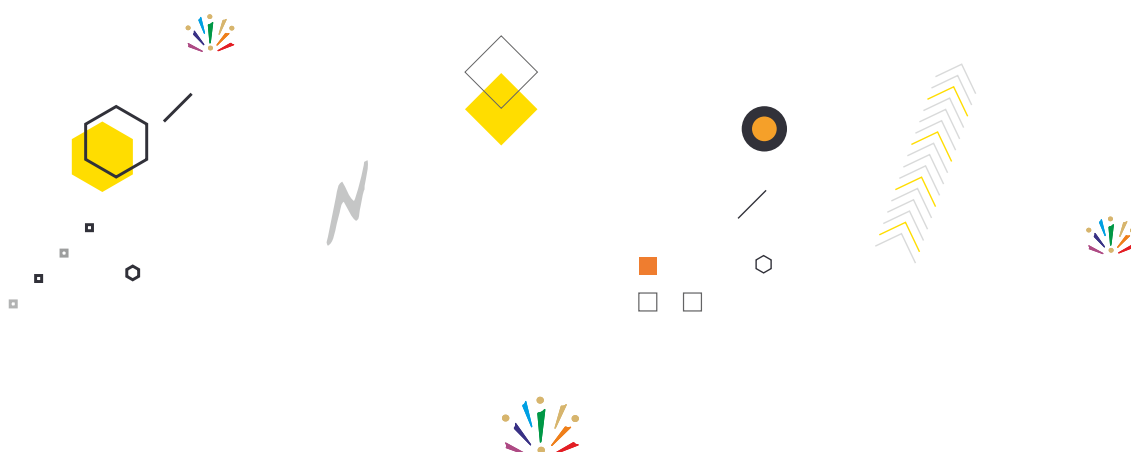
I launched MeraBizNet ([www.merabiznet.in](http://www.merabiznet.in)) in 2023. In our small way, we are trying to make a big, deep impact. We provide information, training, and mentoring services to women from low- and middle-income backgrounds who aspire to or are doing business to help them stabilize, grow, and give them the wind beneath their wings. Both through the digital portal and offline. We provide both on-demand' ad hoc' support and structured products like MBN Learn, MBN Grow, and others. Pro Bono or for a small charge, or occasional funding.

I am also the Chairperson Centre for Gender Equality & Inclusive Leadership, XLRI. With the credibility of our brand, the backing of our enormous alumni group, and the support from the Board and Faculty, we are doing multi-pronged interventions to help bring in gender equality. Across the formal and informal sectors, through research, education, capacity building, and large-scale programs.

Conviction is important. But without Competence, it soon falls apart. And Collaboration ensures you are doing things that hopefully outlast you. Knowledge can only be doubled if shared. Expertise is best demonstrated when you help others develop and not become the sole hoarder. These are my guiding principles.

I volunteer my time as an Advisor or Board Member to several social enterprises.

**If you are curious, open-minded, and willing to step out into the unknown, your life and not just your career will be hugely rewarding and satisfying. What is it you want badly enough?**





THE  
CAREER  
CHOICES  
THAT  
DEFINE US

Fulki™  
Unplugged



## My Wandering Career Map

### Not a Ladder, But a Landscape

#### Rohit Shenoy

Director HR and Global Head of  
Learning & Development  
DXC Technology

#### What defines a career?

In my case, it wasn't a five-year plan. Or a mentor whispering clarity into my ear. Or even a sudden lightbulb moment. It was more like a series of slightly awkward dance steps; some forward, some sideways, and yes, a few backwards, each one teaching me a little more about who I am, what I love, and what the world needs from me.



<https://www.linkedin.com/in/meetrohitshenoy/>

Over the last 20 years, I've held roles across 4 industries, working with colleagues from over 50 countries, from high-stakes corporate headquarters to dusty sales offices in remote parts of Kutch. I've been a consultant, facilitator, HR business partner, and strategist. Today, I lead Global Learning & Development at DXC Technology, responsible for shaping the learning journeys of 130,000+ employees across 60+ countries. But if there's one truth I've come to believe in, it's this: *A career isn't a ladder. It's a landscape. You don't climb it, you explore it.*

### From Machines to Minds: The Unlikely Start

I began as a Mechanical Engineer, trained to solve problems with torque and tensile strength. Somewhere along the way, I discovered that what fascinated me most wasn't the machine itself, but the people who designed, operated, or misused it.

That curiosity (along with a recession started by 9/11) led me to SIBM Pune for an MBA in HR, and eventually into the corporate world, where I began asking different kinds of questions: What motivates people? Why do some teams thrive under pressure while others collapse in comfort? How do we put the human back where they belong, at the heart of organizations.

How do we create systems that empower humans without dehumanising them?...

Those questions have never left me. They have simply evolved.



### The Tipping Points

Looking back, my career has pivoted on a handful of deliberate (and sometimes foolish) decisions:

- **Choosing to broaden, not just deepen.**

In the early years, I moved across domains; sales, key account management, recruitment, HR business partnering, consulting, L&D - when many said I should "settle down." But every lateral move expanded my toolkit, my empathy, and my usefulness to the business. I was learning to speak not just the language of HR, but of strategy, operations, and people.

- **Leaving comfort to chase complexity.**

Joining DDI exposed me to world class processes and clients across countries. Sterlite Power taught me to build systems from scratch. DXC challenged me to lead transformation at a truly global scale. None of these were obvious or easy. But risk, I have learned, is the tuition we pay for growth.

- **Finding flow, not just function.**

There's a special kind of joy in doing work that's not just valuable, but energising. As Marcus Buckingham puts it, "Make your best role your everyday role." For me, that's when I am designing learning journeys, facilitating leadership

interventions, or simplifying the complex into elegant frameworks. That is my flow state. And the closer I stay to it, the more impact I create.



## Know Thyself. Then Build Around It.

One of the most powerful truths I have learned is this: **you don't find your strengths, you test your way into them.**

I have taken every psychometric I could lay my hands on. Gallup, Hogan, DISC, Big 5; you name it. Not because they give perfect answers, but because they sharpen self-awareness. I have asked colleagues, sometimes awkwardly, "What do you trust me with?" Their answers helped me build a map of my personal brand, inside the organisation and beyond it.

So if you are starting out or starting over, I would say: test often, reflect more, and listen to the feedback that makes you uncomfortable. It usually holds the key to your next chapter.

## Be Interested Before Trying to Be Interesting

People often ask, "How do I build a brand in HR?" My answer: **don't start with self promotion, start with service.**

I volunteered with the International Association of Facilitators, volunteered for projects at work and outside, contributed to books, collaborated with researchers and learning designers, and showed up for every panel, event, or podcast where I could learn or help someone else learn. That has led me to be on multiple national and global panels, events,

podcasts, Jury of awards like the Brandon Hall Award, mentor for professional bodies and many more.

In today's world, your LinkedIn page is often your handshake. Share ideas. Ask questions. Join communities. Show your thinking. And remember: you don't have to be the loudest voice, but make sure yours is distinct.

## The Values That Kept Me Centred

No matter the role, these are the anchors I return to:

- **Curiosity over certainty:** the best work is born from asking better questions.
- **Generosity over genius:** success, I have found, is less about brilliance and more about helping others shine.
- **Systems over slogans:** culture isn't what you preach; it's what your processes permit.
- **Delight in progress, not perfection:** transformation is messy. That's where the fun is.
- **Collaboration over competition:** I have always believed in being easy to work with. You can't do much alone but with many minds from different areas of expertise, you can move mountains. Collaboration is not just a soft skill (what I call 'power skill'), it's a force multiplier.

**Test often,  
reflect more,  
and listen to the  
feedback that makes  
you uncomfortable.  
It usually holds the  
key to your  
next chapter.**

## What's Next?

I want to build learning systems that are not just efficient but enchanting. Learning journeys that respect adult psychology, reflect diversity, and actually result in behaviour change. I want to mentor more, write more, and perhaps one day,





return to academia to teach what I have learned and unlearned.

But mostly, I want to keep showing up with curiosity and care. To stay useful. And to help others do the same.

### In Closing

If you are at a career crossroads, or returning from a break, or contemplating a pivot, let me offer this:

There is no “right” next step, only right enough. Take it. Reflect. Repeat. Over time,

you will notice your own voice growing clearer. Your own map taking shape.

And remember: when it’s dark all around, you don’t need to see the entire path ahead, just take the next step, based on how much you can see in front of you. That’s enough. Trust that more of the road will reveal itself as you move.

And one day, you will look back and realise: this wasn’t a random walk at all. It was a perfectly imperfect, deeply human path.



## Between Frames and Feelings

### Through the Lens, Within Myself

**Shakib Ahmed**

Filmmaker and Editor

I started my journey as an commerce/marketing student, but deep down, I always knew numbers weren't the language my soul spoke. The moment I picked up a camera, I felt a kind of freedom I hadn't known before - like I was finally doing what I was born to do. I wasn't just capturing frames; I was chasing untold stories, hidden emotions, and the beauty of fleeting moments.



[linkedin.com/in/shakibahmed1](https://www.linkedin.com/in/shakibahmed1)

**Choosing filmmaking  
wasn't a decision made  
overnight - it was a  
slow-burning fire.**

*Curiosity has always been my North Star  
Stories live in stillness  
Trust your inner voice  
Honesty over perfection  
Presence fuels creativity  
Resilience shapes growth*



Since childhood, I've been that kid who made up imaginary stories just to keep people engaged - living in daydreams and wild what-ifs. I used to lose myself in strange, vivid scenarios and feel strangely alive in those made-up worlds. Over time, I realized I didn't want to just imagine stories - I wanted to live them, feel them, and share them with the world.

Growing up, I was always drawn to the stories that didn't scream for attention but quietly waited to be found. Choosing filmmaking wasn't a decision made overnight - it was a slow-burning fire. I studied art direction in Milan, but it was behind the camera, out on the road, amidst real people

and raw emotions, that I truly found my voice. I realised I didn't just want to create stories - I wanted to live them, document them, and share them with the world. The chaos, the silence, the movement, and the stillness - all of it inspired me to turn storytelling into my life's work.

That's when filmmaking stopped being just an interest - it became my way of existing.

One of the most defining turning points was the moment I chose to step away from the world of commerce and fully immerse myself in film and storytelling. That decision wasn't easy, but it felt like coming home to something I had always known deep down. Fulki, both as a

company and a family, became the place where that inner voice was validated - where my passion was given purpose. It was more than just a platform; it was a turning point that changed everything. From there, things started to align, and the journey truly began.

Another turning point was leaving home and moving abroad. It taught me discomfort, independence, and most importantly, how to listen to my inner voice. Every struggle - from financial uncertainty to creative doubt - shaped me. And through all of it, it was the human connections, the stories I encountered, and the raw truth in people's lives that constantly reminded me why I chose this path.

There were also moments I almost gave up - burnt out, misunderstood, unsure of my place. But instead of quitting, I went back to making films just for myself. No expectations, no clients - just raw, honest storytelling. That act alone saved me more times than I can count. And every time I lose my way, it brings me back.

The biggest challenge was believing in myself when the world around me didn't quite understand the path I had chosen. Coming from a family of doctors and engineers, I had to navigate not only my own doubts but also the societal expectations that came with choosing something unconventional. There were moments of financial instability, cultural displacement, creative burnout - and times when even my own films or the process felt unfamiliar, like strangers.





I wouldn't say I've reached "success" in the traditional sense, but I've learned to find it in the micro victories: finishing a project that felt impossible, meeting tight deadlines, getting a full night's sleep before a big shoot. I've come to measure success not by the scale of a project, but by how real and honest it feels.

Every time I chose honesty over perfection, and presence over pressure, something inside me shifted. That mindset - along with a kind of stubborn consistency - is what has kept me going.

Curiosity has always been my north star - it's what first led me to pick up a camera and ask, "What's their story?" That sense of wonder, paired with empathy, has helped me form deeper connections with people and places, allowing me to tell stories with truth and care.

Resilience has been another defining trait. Whether it was adapting to new countries, navigating uncertainty, or recovering from creative burnout, I've learned to keep showing up, even when things felt heavy or unclear.

Humility has also played a big role in my growth. I've learned to listen more - to people, to silence, to my instincts - and to accept that I don't always have the answers. That's made space for collaboration, growth, and unexpected beauty in both life and work.

Lastly, I value presence. In a world chasing speed and scale, I try to stay grounded in the moment, to honour the small details, the pauses, and the in-betweens. Because often, that's where the most powerful stories live.

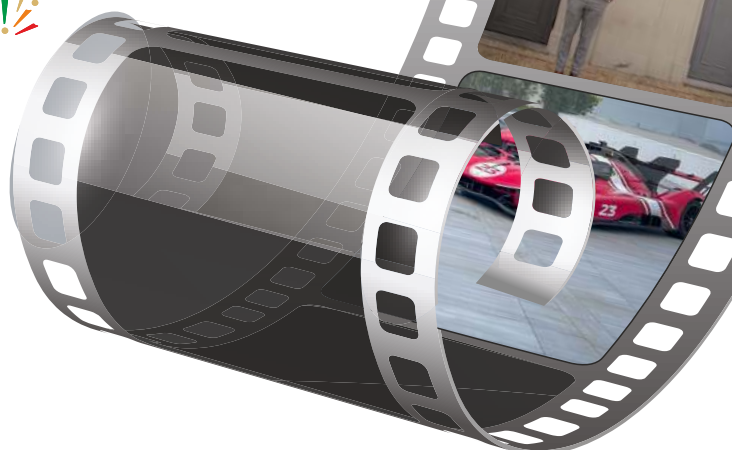
To be honest, I'm in a moment of reflection. After years of chasing dreams, crossing borders, working with brands I once admired from afar, and becoming the version of myself I thought I wanted to be - I now find myself questioning everything again.

I've checked off boxes that once felt like distant dreams, but now I'm peeling them back to see what still feels true. I'm learning that growth isn't always about pushing forward; sometimes it's about pausing, questioning, and redefining what success really means. This time, the confusion doesn't feel like fear - it feels like experience. A deeper kind of knowing.

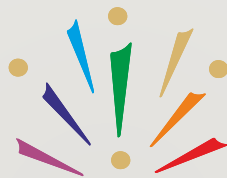
What I do know is this: I want to live a life that nurtures peace, keeps me rooted in my body through sports and movement, surrounds me with people I care about, and allows me to keep working in film - telling stories that matter.

What's next might not be another destination or milestone, but a more honest alignment with the stories I want to tell and the life I want to live while telling them. I want to stay curious, stay grounded, and stay open to becoming - whatever that may look like.

There's no map, but there is a compass: truth, connection, and storytelling that moves both me and others.







**Fulki Communications Private Limited**

911 DLF City Court, Sikanderpur, MG Road, Gurgaon 122 002  
+91 9811156199 | [www.fulki.co.in](http://www.fulki.co.in)

