

'Workplace is changing for better, is more sensitive to gender now'

Smitha Rao, Cofounder, Utthunga Technologies.



For women, career clock and biological clock ticks at the same time. However, if we build a good support system around us, we can definitely manage and excel in both of them.

What was the inspiration that prompted you to pursue a career in engineering?

My father, Prabhakar Rao Mangalore, is my mentor and role model. He has won

many state awards for his contribution to society. His life journey itself is very inspiring, as at age 16 he had managed a family of 5 siblings and a widowed mother. Starting from just a small rented shop, in the span of 20 years, he became a well-known, honest, rich businessman.

He never insisted on any career. Instead, he always told me to give the best in everything you do and rest will be taken care of by almighty. So, I chose to be an engineer, as Infosys was my dream company during those days and Sudha Murthy had become a household name. I earned a Scholarship, and got merit-engineering seat in MIT, Manipal.

This is no ordinary day job – travels, projects, deadlines – any pressures handling all this?

I grew professionally and personally in 14 long years of my journey with Utthunga. I am still in the learning phase to manage all this smoothly. It's challenging, but with all the experience of ups and downs with Utthunga's journey, I can see myself emerging as a better version of myself each day.

A woman also has a greater role in managing the home – how supportive is the family?

My Utthunga's journey would not have been possible without unconditional support from my family, especially my husband Manohar Rao.

For women, career clock and biological clock ticks at the same time. However, if we build a good support system around us, we can definitely manage and excel in both of them. I live with my 78-year-old mother-in-law, Shambhavi Rao, who always believed in women empowerment. She wanted me to work for my own identity, which was her unfulfilled dream. I have my mom, Jayanthi Rao, who travels almost 400 km just to give an extra comfort to my family, whenever I travel.

Often projects demand stay away from home. How is that experience?

I almost travel 8-10 times a year for 2 to 3 weeks and I have visited more than 20 countries so far. It's very tiring!! Now I have accepted it and trying to find happiness in it.

But whenever I am at my home, I spend very quality time with my family and kids. My daughter is very supportive. We both share painting and sketching as our hobby. I learnt that quality time with kids is more important than materialistic gifts.

Was there a time when you thought, you would like to change your career, if yes, what would you have chosen?

Yes. When things go out of our way, thoughts of giving up crossed my mind. I always believed, money is important but it is not everything. Even though many start the entrepreneurship journey to make money and gain fame, but after some time, it is the passion that drives you to stick to it!

If I had to choose another career, that would be the travel, which shows the beauty of Indian history and culture. After seeing 20+ countries, I have realised that India is very beautiful, culturally extremely rich that you do not get to see anywhere else in the world.

Have you ever missed a career opportunity of promotion due to the gender?

Not really. I am fortunate to have Krishnan KM – founder of Utthunga in my career life.

But in most of the meetings I attend, I will be the only woman. However, it does not matter to me and the value that Utthunga believes in.

In Utthunga, we have a woman in most of the leadership positions. Another co-founder of Utthunga is a woman –

Sanmangala MS. Our Delivery, HR, Training, Quality teams are led by woman leaders. 35% of Utthunga's workforce are women and all are integral part of Utthunga's journey.

Are workplaces today more sensitive to gender issues than say, a decade ago?

Yes. Workplace is changing for better and is more sensitive to gender issues now. There is lot of encouragement for Women to move up the corporate ladder. Companies are coming up with interesting policies like flexible working hours, extended maternity leave, in-house

leadership behaviours (people development, expectations and rewards, role model, inspiration and participative decision-making) that improve organisational performance.

What would be your message to the youth, your children for that matter, in career choices?

Passion and striving for excellence in any career we choose yields the result. We need to believe in what we do and stick to it for long. Failure is part of the journey, not destiny. I was amazed to hear the ID Fresh Food story of making Indian cuisine and driving the business around that.

Passion
Gratitude
Accomplishment



childcare facility, mother friendly workplaces, etc., that cater to the moms-to-be and women resuming work post-pregnancy.

Are there areas at work that still restrict women when it comes to a leadership role?

In corporate world, women can easily make it to the entry-level and mid managerial level positions; however women will have hard time advancing through the pipeline to leadership role due to the fear of compromising the motherhood responsibilities.

By nature women possess all the leadership qualities required to excel in the leadership role. As per the research by McKinsey, women leaders tend to use five of the nine most important types of

If you can mention your career, or life in 3 words, what will they be?

Passion, Gratitude, (Sense of) Accomplishment.

Smitha Rao is cofounder of Utthunga Technologies – Research driven Industrial Software and Solution provider. Incepted in 2007, Utthunga now is family of 500+ professionals serving Industrial leaders in USA, Europe, Japan and Asia market. Smitha is skilled in business strategy, customer acquisition, brand building, Industrial standards and specification. She has written various publications and presented whitepapers in USA, Europe, Japan, Singapore and India. She holds master's degree from BITS, Pilani. She was honoured with prestigious – "Woman Entrepreneur of the year – IT" award from STPI, Govt of India.