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#SheInspires

Pawan is a veteran IT leader with over 20 years of experience in IT. She is experienced Global Sales & Thought Leader of Customer Success and Advocacy with a demonstrated history of driving and enabling strategic business vision for large global enterprises. She loves mountain climbing and applies the learnings from the sport at work.

In this conversation with the editorial team, Pawan talks about how she happened to get into technology, the challenges of being a woman in STEM field, and what it takes to get ahead as a female tech manager.

You have been working in technology for a very long time and have amassed a remarkable level of expertise. Can you please tell us about your journey? How was your experience amid the slowdown of the early 2000s in particular?

I've been with HCL for over 10 years, based in our office here at Sunnyvale, California. It's been a very, very exciting journey for me at HCL. In my current role, I head Customer Advocacy function managing provider and payor client base. I am part of the Life Sciences and Healthcare vertical leadership team.

As Like they say journey of thousand miles, begins with a single step, that is how it feels like for me thinking of early days. When I graduated from management school I got picked at campus placements and had three job offers. I was consistently a very bright student through my years in school and college. And, of course, that did give me a lot of confidence in what I could do in my career. But as I moved out and became ready to join the job market, which was my first job, a slowdown happened; if you remember the 2001 slowdown. And by the time I was ready to move into the industry, I had nothing in my hand as companies started to either defer or cancel hiring of management graduates besides layoffs across the enterprises.

At the time, then I was at the crossroads to either go back home and settle into a nonprofessional life or take the path that would be much steeper but that could help me carve my journey. I picked the hard path and started my journey all over again. . I actually didn't even know where to start or how to go about it. Campus placements was my only option and that got completely derailed. I didn't have any connections in the industry that I could leverage.. Our family background was that of armed forces, so I could not draw upon my parents' connections to navigated this rather new world for me. . It took a lot of conviction, hard work, courage and tenacity to go on with what I really wanted to achieve, that and the immense support of family, friends and mentors has helped me get to where I am today.

How difficult is being a woman in the technology industry? What are the things that one would need to succeed?

I've been in the technology industry for almost 20 years now. I have done various roles, but a larger part of my career has been in sales. And interestingly, within the frontline sales function, I see very few women specially sales in technology, which sometimes can get very intimidating. I've been in conferences and board rooms full of men in blue and I'm the only lady in the technology group. There are times when you go through the gender bias, there are times of added pressure to perform and to prove that you can be as good or better leader in what you do. So, it's about being able to build your comfort, have a strong PoV, continue to be curious and learn and keep charging along and it's also about being able to take some risks and take that journey forward. You won't know how far you can go unless you start that journey. You've got to have belief in yourself and celebrate the small success and those one day collectively become large and significant.

There are many women in IT who tend to compromise their professional journey, or end it too soon. It's important to take some risks, find the balance, be ready to go that extra mile and things eventually do fall in place. Do not be afraid of talking about your successes or about your aspirations or to ask for what you truly deserve. And if you are able to do these things, you're certainly going to be able to see the success that you dreamt off.

What is your philosophy about balancing between your personal life and your professional life?

Being part of the sales team is a fairly demanding job, it involves extensive travel and long odd hours of work as well. . So, I live by the philosophy of finding that right balance, by no means an easy task . And that balance could mean different things for different people. Throughout the day, we do multiple roles and, therefore, we are wearing multiple hats. When we are in the office, we have our role and responsibility to play. As we move from the office to home, there's a different act that that we need to perform. It is very, very essential to really be able to identify what that balancing act is.

How do you prioritize things? And then, when you're moving between one act to the other, how do you really navigate? It requires a lot of planning, thinking ahead, sometime even anticipating situations. It requires being able to be very focused, diligent in what you do and when you're doing it because there is only that much time to get it done before the next act. Each of the different acts that you perform, are all very demanding. Above all of this, not being afraid of asking for help and not being afraid to say 'no' are mantras which have worked well for me as I find my balance in this complex world.

Can you tell us the reason you got into technology and what excites you most about it?

What really excites me about technology is the art of the possible. If you look at technology, it's shaping our lives in so many different ways from very, very simple to very, very complex things. And that is what is so very exciting about technology. There is so much more to offer when we look at what's possible. The number of women in technology is much less than what it should be, and if there are more women in technology, they will be able to bring in a different thought process leading to greater innovation. They would be able to bring in a different way of analyzing things, to problem solving and add a lot of color to what's possible and how it can benefit the world. And that's where I think young women should really venture into, looking at technology as a serious option. Because they're not missing out, but the technology industry is missing out on not having these varied perspective to draw from..

How do you connect nature back to your personal and your work philosophy?

One thing that I really enjoy doing outside work is hiking and being close to nature. And nature, of course, is the creator of all things. It gives immense opportunity for 'learning without walls'. And I believe by going out there and spending time in nature you can draw inspiration that help you grow each day —My passion is around mountain climbing at high altitude, which is more challenging, requires much higher degree of planning and preparation, is risky and about pushing your limits to get to greater heights both literally and figuratively. The learning from such expeditions are immense, because each time you set your goal to summit a mountain, it's not the mountain that you're conquering. You're conquering yourself trying to get to that summit. And that's how the work is today. You have goals and you need to get to your goals, these goals are tough, require planning, require acquiring new skills, require persistent effort, patience and ability to keep moving along till you are able to achieve them. And sometime you may not achieve them, which is okay, but you then draw from the learnings of your failed attempts to conquer.

In my view all of the skills are so applicable to our work today - from planning, preparation, skill improvement, training, teamwork, collaboration, getting out of your comfort zone, taking some risk all of this and more make for success on and off the mountain. If you continue to take those small steps and deep breaths, you do get to your goals. All these learnings can be easily applied to driving strategic business goals as individuals and team. I really love doing that, and bringing that back into my work gives me joy.

In the course of your career, has there been a failure from which you learned a valuable lesson?

Sometimes, you really try hard to attain a goal that you have set for yourself and you end up not achieving that. And you feel that you have been a failure in that sense. But it's important to learn the lessons from your failures and stand up and walk and then run because the ability to do so is what differentiates the great from the average. You know, you've learned from the bad judgments or the bad experiences that you've had, and the good judgments really come from these experience. So, you should continue to learn from your failures and move forward rather than getting demotivated with the fact that you failed in a particular project or a task that you had undertaken. Do not fear failure but rather fear not trying, is the mantra that I would follow both personally and professionally.

How important is creating a holistic ecosystem for women in the technology industry?

It's important for women to be able to identify the ecosystem and establish a personal board of directors who can guide to find the balance between professional and personal decisions. A lot of women move out of technology/mainstream workforce because they either get married or they have compelling events in life where they are the ones who end up sacrificing their journey. It's important to build the ecosystem such that it can help you firstly take a balanced decision on the choices when need arises, secondly ensure they can support you when it's time to get back into mainstream in case leaving was the only choice.

I draw my support from multiple channels, my family- husband and kids being the nucleus, that not only supports but provides feedback, motivates, inspires and continually challenges to be a better version of myself each day. My board of directors also includes mentors, teachers and friends who are constantly helping me smooth out the rough edges and help make the right choices, show a different perspective and continuously encouraging to take that additional risk. All of these form a solid ecosystem that's help the journey through its low and high tides.

"For there is always light if we are brave enough to see it, if we are brave enough to be it"

-Amanda Gorman



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