



WHEN PURPOSE DRIVES INNOVATION

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hi and welcome to the Accenture Vaahini Connect podcast! In Season 1, we talk Innovation!

Everyone wants to be innovative, but how exactly do we bring our more innovative selves alive?

In each episode, join us to hear the true stories and practical know-how of women innovators who inspire us all, along with the latest research on what makes us tick. Join us on the Vaahini Connect podcast where we bring you tangible ideas on how you can stay innovative, no matter what your work consists of.

I'm Padma Priya, an independent journalist and your host on this podcast.

Whether you are a large company, or an individual looking to be more innovative, a sense of purpose when defined well, has the power to make all our actions more aligned to our ecosystem, whether that is customers, team members or partners.

We know 'why' we do what we do, and that in turn helps us do better. In this first episode, we talk to Gitanjali Rajamani, Co-Founder of Farmizen, a company whose purpose is to "build a food eco-system that's better for consumers, better for farmers, and better for the planet."

We speak to Gitanjali today on how a sense of purpose has helped them become more innovative, how it has helped them stay the course (or sometimes change it) when they have faced roadblocks, and what we can learn from it, to apply in our daily work lives, even if all of us are not entrepreneurs.

Welcome to the show, Gitanjali!

So good to be here today. I'm Geetanjali, I'm the COO and Co-Founder of Farmizen and Farmizen is basically an online marketplace for farmers and consumers. Farmers can get their produce

listed on our app and customers can order directly from the app.

Prior to starting Farmizen, there were a few facts that puzzled us right, that why were there so many farmers unable to pay their debts, while at the same time, there was such a low supply of organic produce, even though customers were willing to pay a higher price for it. So, when we dug deeper, we found that our current food system is completely broken. Right, if I have to explain this a little more, there are three facets to it. We as consumers, we eat food laced with poison every day, even as we buy fresh produce which is marketed to us as organic; as most of us know, a fairly large percentage of that is not really organically grown. As we see you know, the increased occurrences of diseases such as such as cancer, etc., are a direct result of this.

On the other hand, our farmers are in great distress; dwindling incomes along with production and distribution and financing inefficiencies have sort of made it impossible for farmers to earn wages predictably. As a result, they resort to use more and more chemicals to reduce their risk and stop their income from falling, you know, further down. And finally, the third one is that our topsoil, which used to be amongst the best in the world has been deteriorating rapidly. And soil productivity has touched an all-time low. Earthworms and soil microbe proper populations have been dwindling, and we need more and more external harmful inputs, like urea, DAPA, NPK and all of that every season to sustain the same production levels as the earlier growing season.

So, our purpose at Farmizen is to make a positive difference in the lives of farmers,



consumers, and encourage sustainable and regenerative agricultural processes that would help save our soil from further damage and enrich it. So the main motivation, and the main purpose for us was to fix this food system, because when we dug deeper, and we saw all the problems that were associated here that we felt that right now, it's very tilted towards the consumer, regarding the price, regarding it being so low cost, but it was also causing the consumer harm by the extensive usage of chemicals. So a balance sort of had to be achieved by which farmers and consumers, they both benefit, and the environment is also left undisturbed.

How do you believe a sense of purpose has helped you build Farmizen in a particular way, as opposed to other ways in which you could have built it? For example, can you tell our listeners what are some of the choices you have had to make or constraints you had to deal with, and how did you innovate around them, given your purpose?

So, Padma, the first thing was, of course, to make consumers a part of the entire production process, right. If we had to make consumers a part of the production process, make them understand the difficulties and how their food actually reaches the table, what is the process related to growing food, then we had to sort of make them more and more involved in the production process, which right now was only the farmers responsibility. So what we did was, we thought we'd introduce something like a 'mini farm' concept or a model where consumers could, through the app, choose what vegetables they wanted to grow, grow them and have them delivered to their houses; they could also visit the farm from time to time, and get hands on and get their hands dirty in the farm and do some of the growing themselves too.

This was one of the innovative ideas that we came up with, which I don't think was there. So, having something like this, like a remote kitchen garden, was the innovation that we came up with, and we started off Farmizen with.

Currently, there are no effective ways by which farmers can reach out to consumers directly, they have to either go through middlemen,

mandis etc., and sell their produce. So even consumers don't know really where the food is coming from. Now, Farmizen is really an online marketplace for the farmers, right, they can get their products listed. So, when we started off, we started off with, like I just said, the mini farm rental model, by which we said, 600 square feet mini farm is allotted. People could take that for a monthly rental, select what vegetables they want to grow, they'd grow them, the farmers would grow them, and they would get a delivery of it. So, in that, Farmizen provides the farm inputs such as seeds, saplings, organic fertilizers, all of that, we also take care of the logistics part. Farmers then get to concentrate on just their core competence, which is production of the crops. And then we take care of all the other big hairy problems like logistics, like getting the seeds to them, like getting the correct organic fertilizers, pest repellents, all of that. So, when you talk about how we improved the experience for the users, that's what we did by having them this entire Farmville kind of experience, like a real-life Farmville. We've all played Farmville, when it was first introduced or later on as well and it was very exciting to see our farm, our crops grow online, all of that. But then in Farmizen, you actually get the produce delivered to your houses also. You're not only growing them on the app, you're selecting which crops you want to grow, you're selecting, maybe you know, this week, I will put some new neemastra on my crops to protect it from pests. But you're also getting a weekly basket full of vegetables fresh directly from the farm, and you can go visit the farm whenever you want. So that experience for users was just priceless!

As a company, what keeps us thinking and building afresh is that we constantly question ourselves, and our business models to see if there is a better way to do what we are doing right. So, the mini farm model was great for consumers who love to get their hands dirty. And Padma, like you mentioned earlier, people who like to grow things in their balconies, who've tried, tested, grew a few tomatoes here and there, things like that, and who want to now experience things at a larger scale, or who are very connected with where their food directly is coming from and who want to visit the farm; so they are very involved folks and our mini farm



model worked very well for them.

But then we had the other set of consumers who wanted to have safe, organic produce, but were not very involved in the growing process, or didn't have the time for it rather. So, for those consumers, we started off the marketplace, where farmers could put their produce up and then consumers could buy directly from those farmers. So, I would know that, oh, there is a D Mandala farm and I can buy something, there are fresh jamuns coming from there, I could buy it from there. I would also know the farmer and for me as a consumer that that directly connects me to that farmer. I know where it's coming from.

One of the reasons people hesitate about using words like purpose when it comes to their own work is that there is a sense of larger purpose being too idealistic and impact growth or profitability negatively. For instance, in your case you consciously work only with farms that are using natural fertilizer fertilizers. What has setting such boundaries done for your company?

This is a very interesting question and one that I haven't been asked earlier. So yes, having an idealistic larger purpose might come in the way of growth or profitability. But it's also at the end of the day about the brand that you're building, right, and what it stands for, and the long-term vision that you have for your brand. For example, at Farmizen, we often face that question of, should we restrict ourselves to strictly organic? We understand that by doing this, we limit our customer base, we limit our ability to scale and eventually grow.

However, it's a conscious decision that we've made to stick to strictly organic as we believe that there is a market for it. And the more consumers start getting aware of where their food comes from, and more consumers turn to organic or natural produce, the more farmers we will have, who will convert their farms to organic or the more farmers would come into the entire, you know, organic fold, the natural farming fold. So, it's a slow process, but something that we are, you know, very bullish about. At the end of the day, what do you want your brand to stand for? I think that is a question that you have to ask yourself from time to time. So

though this limits us in the short, in the short term, you know, having an idealistic purpose like this, that we will stick to only organic, though it limits us at the short term, we think that in the long run, it reaffirms what our brand's vision is, it also brings benefits to us in the long run. So, though it would be a hindrance in the short term, it would actually be a big positive in the long term, and we would see profitability there.

As an entrepreneur or even as a business leader or manager, how can you align your team and other stakeholders to your company's purpose, and also have them believe in it along with you?

I think it starts right from hiring. It's important to hire people that are aligned with the purpose of the company; it might not be a complete alignment, of course, but to some extent, you know, there has to be what we call the right fit. For example, at Farmizen, we are very conscious that we hire people who are passionate about making a difference in the lives of farmers and are passionate about chemical free produce or about organic farming. That's very key. If they do not believe in the whole idea of it, then we might not be able to, you know, make them see the light of it or make them convinced of the purpose of the company. So, it starts right from hiring.

And then once they are in their jobs, it's important to give them roles in which they would be working towards that purpose. From time to time, say in one-on-one meetings or in team meetings, that purpose, that bigger purpose has to be reaffirmed. And also, it has to be made clear what that person is doing to contribute to that purpose, or what that person's role is in contributing that to that purpose. Not just speaking as an entrepreneur, it can apply to anyone, it can apply to a manager, business leader, these things, and in fact, as a business leader, when you're faced with decisions that are critical, you also have to lead by example, by going with decisions that are aligned with the purpose of the company, so that they do the same when they when they are in the same spot; your employees, they do the same, when they are in that same spot of choosing between right and wrong or choosing which to go with. Because you have led by example, and because



you've chosen the decision, which aligns with the purpose of the company, they do so too.

Now, Gitanjali, many of our listeners may not be entrepreneurs themselves, but may have various challenges towards innovation in their own areas of work. Do you have any learnings from your own work on how we can define say personal purpose in a way that keeps us learning and experimenting, regardless of the nature of work?

So, the first thing is, regardless of whether you're an entrepreneur or working professional, it's important to be able to define your personal purpose. Your personal purpose will change over the years, you might not have a purpose also very clearly. But it's important to think about your personal purpose, and to make notes of what it could be. So, having a purpose, a personal purpose, is going to be sort of a decision-making tool or a marker of how you spend your time, how you do your job, how you interact with others.

Your personal purpose could be something as profound as to be a teacher and to be known for inspiring my students to be more than what they thought they could be. This is from Oprah Winfrey, by the way, or something as simple as to have fun in my journey through life and learn from my mistakes - this is Richard Branson.

Our learning biggest learning at Farmizen has been to never stop questioning, like I said, never stop questioning our processes, our marketing strategies, our business ideas, and our business models and to and to constantly innovate and get better at everything we do.

Try this at work today! In this segment, we ask you to give us one actionable thing we should try out at work that can make us feel more purposeful rather than as if we are only moving from one task to another.

So, I wish somebody would have given me this advice, right in the start of my career; I've discovered doing this later on, but I wish I had started it long back. So, that one thing or change that you want to make at your workplace would be to journal; to maintain a journal where you define your purpose or personal purpose, where

you write down organizational purpose, you identify the common factors between them, and see how you can contribute to one another.

And you also revisit this journal from time to time - to reaffirm your purpose, to see how far along you are from achieving that purpose. That would make a world of difference! Usually, we get into the rut of just chasing deadlines and day to day tasks, that we forget the big picture, that we forget what we had to do in the first place, that we forget why we joined this company, or why we are doing the job that we are doing.

So, it's important to pen that down in a journal, write it down, and then work towards it, and see how you can also achieve your personal purpose, and your organizational purpose and how that all ties down.

Thank you for listening to this episode featuring Gitanjali of Farmizen. As you heard, a strong sense of purpose not only guides you but keeps you rooted to the larger vision of your company or your role.

You can join the Accenture Vaahini Network, a networking forum for women professionals enabled by Accenture, to further enrich you with varied perspectives that it offers. The link to join is in the description of this episode. Stay tuned for the next episode, featuring another interesting innovator!

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