



LEARNING FROM OUR PEERS

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the Accenture Vaahini Connect podcast. Season One is all about practical ways to bring our more innovative selves alive at work. In each episode, join us to meet a successful woman who shares her innovative journey, and what we can learn and apply from it.

Whether you're a salaried employee, an entrepreneur, a freelancer, or someone hoping to start work soon, in each episode, we bring you tangible ideas on how you can stay innovative.

I'm Padma Priya, I'm an independent journalist and your host for this podcast. In this episode, we will discuss how to become more innovative by being open to learning from our peers.

Often, we think of innovators as exceptional people who are different from ordinary people like you and me. The reality though, is that innovation is happening all around us. And we too can become more innovative by absorbing more from the people around us. Like our peers at work. That's what we will look at in this episode.

Joining us on this episode is Deepanjali Kanoria, the Founder and CEO of Heyday, a company that makes natural biodegradable sanitary pads, starting a company when she was just 24 years old. Deepanjali says that learning from others around her whether inside her company or outside was crucial to her. We will be talking to Deepanjali about her own journey with Heyday, what being a learner means to her and what we all can adopt from her experience.

So, Deepanjali when you started Heyday in

2017. Were you absolutely convinced that there is a market for biodegradable sanitary pads? Or did you have any second thoughts? Could you tell us what actually helped you arrive at a decision?

When Heyday was launched, there were very few players in the market. It was a highly monopolized segment and we wanted to revolutionize the industry with innovation and better practices. We brought a prototype of a natural and organic plant based sanitary napkin made from a unique patented corn and bamboo fibre. Now whether to understand if this product had an unmet demand in the market or not, we wanted to back it by intensive research. We decided to conduct product research in laboratories. We approached multiple laboratories to learn that 90% of conventional pads in the marketplace were laden with harmful plastics, polymers, dioxins, bleaches, perfumes; raw materials that really should not be in close contact with one's sensitive and intimate skin. This was the pain point that Heyday was addressing because its product composition was completely natural. It did not give rashes, allergies, skin irritation or even the risk of getting cervical cancer.

Not only this, we also decided that while the product is supposed to be very good in its composition, we needed to understand from target group research whether users' experiences during period care were in our favour or not.

Right, given that you were launching something in a very emerging market, I guess learning from your potential users became even more critical for you, in the absence of many peers in the industry. Can you tell us a bit more about this?



Yes. So we also decided to conduct target market research to understand user experiences while using a period care product. We found that eight out of ten women would struggle with some sort of discomfort from their conventional synthetic sanitary pads. But we all know that periods are a taboo topic in the Indian society. And given the limited number of options in the market, they would opt for the conventional brand. Not only this, the environment was also suffering tirelessly.

So, we decided to test Heyday in real life. A bunch of us used the products and actually decomposed them in compost pits. To understand that, the heyday sanitary napkin was decomposing, completely within two years of disposal, as opposed to a synthetic counterpart, which took around 500 years to completely break down.

So the product itself was addressing multiple issues. And, you know, we knew that we were about to build an enduring business with a fantastic product at its core, and service the unmet demand in the Indian marketplace, for safer, healthier and eco friendly personal care. We've come a long way in these past three years, occupying a significant percent of the entire personal care market in terms of sanitary pads, organic and natural actually holds a certain percentage.

How different are your products today compared to the ones you launched? By that I mean, what changes have you made along the way? And could you talk a bit about the role of your team members or any others whom you have learned from? Like, what drove these changes?

Absolutely. So Heyday launched with four regular and heavy flow sanitary pads, right in the beginning, we wanted to test how the market responds to our products. And given our success today, we have over 25 SKUs of sanitary pads, panty liners, baby diapers and menstrual cups.

We want to forward integrate into the baby care and seven hygiene care segments. I personally believe the customer is King, actually Queen, in

our case. So we will try to gather feedback to improve our products and buying experience for the end user. We've added features like anti leakage side barriers, and individual cornstarch disposal covers for each product. We've also introduced wetness indicators on our diapers so that mothers don't have to disturb the baby for a diaper change.

Personally, I had worked as a financial advisory consultancy and had no real time experience in building a consumer product brand, through ecommerce and offline in brick and mortar retail. So what I've learned has been on the job. In the beginning, I literally used to Google things regarding compliance things and reconciliation to find answers. And believe me, it's all there, like Google was my best friend, you just have to look for the answers, and you will find them.

You know, being a young startup, we have grown from a team of three members to 20. And every single day, I learned something new from them. Each person brings in their own skillset and expertise. And I think all of us it's like a learning ground where we all huddling together, and bringing our ideas and experiences together to build a final product that is better for the end users. And I will quickly tell you about an interesting anecdote.

So being a young startup, you know, having the right team members is really important because each person brings their own skill set to the table. And that directly translates into an end result. And faith is also very important. Because if you need to cater to a certain demand, you have to be able to service it in the right manner. We started with a group of three members, building the brand. And now we have come to 20. And every single day, we are learning something new from each other. In fact, right in the beginning, when we just about launched in October 2017.

By December, a CNBC journalist picked up our product from the shelf. She tried it, and it rid her off her monthly period rashes, which would really hinder her work. So she decided to do a story on Heyday. And the story went viral. It got over a million views on social media. And suddenly, we had inquiries coming in from all



over India, about the products and its availability. Now to be three of us, we really had to put our everything together to ensure that we seamlessly carried forward the brand and also brought the product to life and took it to different regions within India. So the scaling obviously happened over the course of three years. But getting the right expertise on board, whether it was by the way of hiring new talent, or getting the right consultancies, for SAPs, operationally, cloud-based systems to really bring the startup to life, from all angles, is where I think our team really helped to bring it together. We were all over the place in the beginning. And now we have really evolved into a well-structured startup with a very solid working culture and reporting style.

Deepanjali while we may all learn sometimes even unconsciously, right, by talking or working with colleagues, what are your thoughts or your experiences with consciously engaging with each other as colleagues? How can one make this happen more effectively, if you have any anecdotes or interesting insights you can share with us, that'd be great.

I think it is extremely important to keep an open channel of communication, in order to learn in order to grow, and at the end of the day, maximize each one's potential in favour of the company, as a brand.

Each person comes with their own set of skills, own set of strengths and weaknesses. And this string of perspectives to the table, which is very unique. At a start up, I think that is a constant problem solving, you know, you're constantly huddling to support each other and come to a solution. And we do exactly that everyday there are moments where they are at a stake. But if there is more than one head in the game, we're able to solve this.

We do the same every Monday, where we do a weekly recap. And we go into each and every thing, that a member has to discuss. We do this thing every Monday actually where we recap for weeks. And we kind of discuss what each member has achieved in the past week and what our goals are for the coming week in order to improve efficiency and know where

everybody stands. And if one person needs help from another function or another operation, then they're able to fix the gap. I think that has really helped us over the years. And we hope to continue learning from peers in order to grow effectively.

Besides colleagues, do you have any examples of learning from others who are doing similar work in other industries or say in other countries? What do you do to keep up with such ideas?

In the past three years, I think the personal care space has evolved drastically, both in India as well as globally. I constantly work towards educating myself by keeping an eye out for new innovations, new products and new practices. I think that comes with running a startup. I'm also part of a few women entrepreneurs cells and leadership groups. That helps me stay up to date with high performers and others, other industries, and other workloads as well. And I'm also totally guilty of binge watching Shark Tank. There's just so much more to be done and always so much to learn and inspire yourself with.

There's this interesting segment in the podcast that we call us the Try This At Work segment. In this segment, we ask our guests to give us one actionable thing we should try out at work that can help us learn better from our peers. Deepanjali, what is that one thing that we can do?

Yeah, sure. Absolutely. When I was invited on the Vaahini podcast, I asked seven members of my team, and we've collectively come up with an interesting try this at work segment for you. We suggest a fun practice that involves constructive feedback from each team member, wherein every person on the team anonymously writes down what they love at the firm, and what they want to see improved. It will give you great insight to mould one's managerial style for the betterment of the workplace, based on key learnings from peers, which is really so important to grow effectively.

I hope you enjoyed listening to this episode. Thank you for listening to this episode!



Remember, having an open mind truly helps us learn from our peers and from the communities we are part of! 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. Do send in your feedback & thoughts to us!

Copyright © 2021 Accenture
All rights reserved.

Accenture and its logo
are registered trademarks
of Accenture.