

SEASON 1, EPISODE 7: HOW TO ADOPT NEW IDEAS BEYOND YOUR COMFORT ZONE

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the Accenture Vahini Connect podcast. Season One is all about practical ways to help us be our most innovative selves at work. In each episode, you will meet a successful woman who shares a innovative journey and go back with ideas you can adopt as well.

Whether you are a salaried employee, and entrepreneur, or freelancer, or someone hoping to start work soon, in each episode, we hope to help. We bring you tangible ideas on how you can stay innovative.

I'm Padma Priya, an independent journalist and your host for this podcast. In this episode, we will be talking to Ghazal Alagh, Co-Founder of Mama Earth and The Derma Co., a brand of safe and toxin free skin and hair products. Let's hear from Ghazal, how she steps outside her comfort zone, revisits many assumptions, and what are some of the practices that could work for us?

Hi Ghazal, welcome to the show. As someone who has started a new company in the emerging market space, would you say that stepping outside the comfort zone comes naturally to you? Or is it something you've consciously cultivated? And since this was a big outside step for you as an artist, can you tell us a little bit more about it?

I think stepping out of the comfort zone never comes naturally. You have to make an effort to make yourself uncomfortable. I strongly believe that, only when you make yourself uncomfortable you will grow.

If I have to give an example of my own journey, when I decided to start Mama Earth, I was an artist - a successful one, exhibiting and painting both nationally and internationally, selling my work. I was also a mother to a one-year old. And taking this decision to start a business or be an entrepreneur at that point of time was difficult, It was stepping out of my comfort zone. But I think the cause was so personal that I did not hesitate, I said "the pain might be worth it so let's give it a try".

There would be very few people who would say that stepping out of the comfort zone comes naturally to them. At least for me, I think I had to put in efforts to do that, even till date. But I love the growth that comes once I do that. Like they say "a moment of pain gives you a lifetime of gain". That is one of my favourite philosophies and whenever I think something might be difficult, I just think about the benefit it would provide me in the longer run. And that is how, I convince myself to get uncomfortable.



So in short, you are saying that, if it doesn't come easily to you- one way to make yourself try new things outside your comfort zone is to visualize the benefits that could come to you as the result.

For Ghazal, the journey of setting up Mama Earth was not easy. Her search for toxin- free products for her young son led her to research the products and ingredients. And that's how the idea was born, she recalls. She also realized that this was not an issue faced by just her own child, but there was a larger market of parents out there who were also looking for such products to use. It was at this point that she decided to do something about it and started Mama Earth in December 2016.

Could you give us an example of a difficult time when you had to step outside your comfort zone and how did you do it?

One time that I was really uncomfortable was during the initial years of starting up when I was working to get my 1st product range out. And I was trying to figure people I can work with, to manufacture that range for me. Would you imagine, I approached seven different people; went, met them and got rejected. Because they did not believe in the idea. They were doing something that was really comfortable, using certain set of ingredients across all the brands they were working with. They did not understand the concept of "toxin- free" ingredients.

And to specifically quote example of this one day, I blocked time with a person, we agreed on working together; and agreement was that he would actually allow me to use his laboratory in his plant. This was a manufacturing plant, right? And with his R&D guy, I would do certain iterations and if something fits in, we will take the conversation forward or else we would drop it. I travelled from one city to another at the blocked time and when I reached there, that guy was not available. He was travelling somewhere else. So that's the kind of importance that I got at that point of time which was really discouraging. I just sat there, I said – "it takes you 3, 4 or 5 hours, I will

wait". And I requested him to at least allow him to enter his lab where I brought one Associate, Me and Varun were literally mixing ingredients together, trying and making products with the little expertise of a junior R&D expert we got. And that's how we literally created our first shampoo and lotion.

Working 22 hours out of 24 was literally the best thing I would say I had done in my life till date. While it was all worth it, there was one time where I did not honestly think that it would last thing long or we would be able to create something. There were a lot of doubts, fears, but we did not give up saying let's see. Every day was a new day, every day we used to forgive ourselves and say let's try again. Let's not be so drained down and all of that led us to a better place, to a good place. I think when you overcome your fears is when you progress and that forward path opens up. Until the time, you are learning from all the failures or from all the challenges I would say or the fears you faced. Good things will follow, and the kind of confidence that I gained out of this whole episode is something. If I commit to it, I can actually do anything that I want. So can everybody around us. If you are really committed and driven by the purpose and if you rarely believe in what you are trying to do and give it your 100%, you will be able to achieve what you want; as a bigger picture.

Those are very interesting perspectives you have given us Ghazal. But in situations like this, when you are totally new, sometimes a fear of what say a Managers' think or peers may think, if we fail is one factor that holds us back from being innovative. So how do you deal with such fears?

Our own fears stop us from progressing forward. You might have self-doubt, you might have lack of surety around the question that you ask...whether it is a relevant question or not.

Something that I really ask even my team to do, is ask a lot of stupid questions, it's okay. What that helps you claim is to get clarity for your own mind.



And when you are clear in the way you are thinking or structuring your thoughts, I think that reflects on the work you are doing as well.

My suggestion to everybody is, a lot of times this is something that I tell myself that “even if you not sure of what you are asking, just ask it. What is the worst that can happen?” . People might think that, “Oh my god, why did she ask that question?”. But the more you ask, the more clarity you get and that will help you in the longer turn.

So Ghazal, as part of this podcast, we have a section called – Try this at work. So can you give us one concrete relatable tip from your own work experience which we can all use, which can help us step outside the comfort zones?

I'll say this from my personal experience, one thing that I started doing from very early on was calendarizing everything that made me uncomfortable. You know it is a natural instinct to run away from things that will make you uncomfortable – but the moment you put it on a calendar, that is your first step to committing that you are doing something that will help you grow in future, right? So put that into your calendar and if needed, put one slot for preparation and put the other slot where you actually take that thing live and execute it. I think that is something that I do, even now, till date and every time.

If I have to have a hard conversation with one of my employees, the moment I think about it - I put it in the calendar. Then I have committed to it and will end up doing that. If I have to present to an investor, probably a new idea; very recently I did that for The Derma Co. What I do is, probably 45 days from now I set up a time and block it. So I commit to that meeting and I use the first 45 days to prepare, to be ready and to present the next time.

And I think that is something I would urge all of you guys to do. If you want to read, block sometime of your calendar and at that particular time, pick up a book and read as if it's a meeting with an external person. That really helps and for me has worked in my favour till now.

Thank you for listing to this episode! Remember pushing boundaries are often not comfortable but can lead to success in your journey towards becoming a successful entrepreneur. You can join the Accenture Vaahini Network, a networking forum for women professionals enables by Accenture. The link to join is in the description of this episode. Also don't forget to send in your feedback and thoughts to us!

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