



SEASON 2, EPISODE 9: BEAT YOUR INTERNALIZED BIAS!

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the Accenture Vaahini Connect Podcast. In season two, Meet the luminaries, we bring to you the unique stories of women Luminaries who share how we can all play a role in furthering big goals that impact society. Whether you are a salaried employee, an entrepreneur, or a student, or just someone looking for a way to contribute to society, in each episode, we hope to bring to you inspiring stories and effective ways on how each one of us in our powers can make this place a better place for all. I'm Savitha Nanjappa, Success Coach, founder of Success with Savitha and your podcast host.

At times, due to the messages we receive, women too internalize biases that hold them back at work and prevent us from being our most innovative and ambitious selves. Our guest on today's episode titled "Beat your Internalized Bias" is Sutapa Sanyal. Sutapa is a Consultant, Advisor, Trainer and Speaker on Leadership, Gender & Diversity, Social Inclusion and Public Policy. She was the first woman IPS officer to serve as Director General of Police in UP and is the recipient of the police medal for distinguished services from the Honorable President of India. Join us as we talk to the Sutapa Sanyal about working in a male dominated industry and combating Internalized bias.

Savitha

Hi and welcome to Vaahini Connect. It's an honor for me to have you here for us to have you here and to be able to interview you about your inspiring life in Career. Welcome aboard.

Sutapa

Thank you, Savitha. And thank you to your team for having me.

Savitha

Let's begin. And I want to start by asking you this question. As a Director General of Police, you have primarily worked in a very male dominated setup. Did you ever feel the pressure to prove yourself more than your male counterparts? Especially in a physically demanding profession, like the police force? What were the biases you encountered from your colleagues or even from the general public?

Sutapa

Yeah, that's a very deep question. Everything is I think, as women born in this country, and that too way back, right,



when you hardly had many women in these in the forces, or in other male dominated professions – Yes, you know, I did find that I had to work doubly hard to prove myself, right. So, I think it's a common feature, even today, women actually have to work doubly hard in most of the places to prove themselves. And especially and this is a specialty, with those organizations like mine, you know, like the police force or the army or where you don't have too many women.

Initially I didn't choose to understand and then you know, gradually, you know, when you do some self-talk, you come to understand that when you start seeing from the other person's point of view – it is not to say that you should always keep seeing and justifying the other person's view, but then at some point of time, I did realize that, look, even the officers, my seniors, or the police force itself didn't have too many templates to judge me against, right?

So, yes, so I don't know what they expected of me. But somehow, I felt that I have to work doubly hard to prove to everybody around me in the force, especially to my seniors, and to my colleagues, that look, I have undergone the same training, as any of you has, right. And I've also been subjected to the same kind of pressures as you would have been in the police academy. But somehow I find myself that I have the need to prove myself all the time. So it's okay. And then you know, gradually Savita, when you try, when you get to understand what goes behind that, as I said a moment ago, then you kind of, again, you talk to yourself, and you say, okay, it's fine, you do your best. And wherever you are, in whichever profession you are doing your best means what it means that you know, your craft very well. Right.

And you respect others, so that eventually, they understand that whatever we are trying to judge her against, she's doing it pretty well. And then gradually, that thing wears off and you kind of become your natural self. And so from that point, things become okay.

But yes, initially, when you are entering a male dominated profession, that psychological churning keeps on happening inside. Now, so far as you're saying, biases you encounter from your colleagues, well, yes. Even during the training, period. And incidentally, you know, I was the only woman officer in my batch with 74 other male officers, 74 male officers, I should, right. But then yes, coming from a middle-class family, a middle class Bengali family, you know, which was more towards academia and all you do find yourself because I was and I admitted very freely, you know, I wasn't that. What to say is, you know, sporty kind of person, right? I wasn't into too many sports. I mean, in those days, girls were kind of not encouraged also, and so academia music, gardening, These were my forte, right? So that was in the physical training part was very difficult. I, of course, fell short of all the standards that were set for my colleagues.

Nearly all of my colleagues were much more physically stronger than me. But there were a lot of things, whether it was the outdoor training or the indoor training, right, that I was good, maybe even better than some of them. So that was a kind of, you know, self-boosting thing, which actually kept me going. And so and I think you also asked me from general public, ya know, Savitha, from general public at that time, that is an 80's, early 80s. Yes, there was a sense of all was not so much of a judgment, whether she could or whether she's that that judgment came from inside the department, right?

Because the public wouldn't know, they will just see you. And they would be in awe, feel they would come to see a woman in uniform.



So all those things were there. But that judgment, wasn't there. It was a state of, you know, surprise that how are women coming into the police forces, which is male dominated all those biases, and second guessing and all those things? They came from the people who were well versed in policing, and who were males.

Savitha

Moving on. And on the subject of biases. As women, we often face biases at work. How easy or difficult was it for you to express your concerns and challenges considering you're one of the few women in the Force? How did you deal with them? Especially to you know, your senior management, your senior reporting officers? How did you deal with them? And how can other women who are in similar positions, learn from your experiences, which I'm sure holds true then and holds true today as well?

Sutapa

It should be easier for women now, because sure, they have a lot of mentors, they have role models; we didn't have many, we didn't have too many. And our senior officers didn't have too many templates to use to judge you again. So that gap would always be there during those days. And yes, I spoke of the biases, then you realize that you are doing your job well. And if you're being fair to your subordinates and if you're treating everybody equally, they accept you in a very big way. Do they accept your leadership? And it's very surprising that your subordinates look at you, as you know somebody who commands a lot of respect because you have chosen a kind of approach but there aren't too many women.

And I'll tell you a very small incident that really, I really teared up that day. I was sitting in my office I was SSP Kanpur, it's a place in UP, it's a big, big district, right? Yes. So this elderly gentleman comes in towards the evening, it was around six or seven o'clock So he comes up, and he told me something that my children stay abroad, and I'm staying here alone, and then somebody was trying to grab his house or something. So you know, I just said that here's an application. So I said, just give it to me. And so I just wrote the margin. That's where we write the orders for the next person to look into it, inquire into it. And so he said, thank you. And then he went, and after two, three days, he again comes in, and he sits there; So he says, I'm so grateful to you, because of the intervention, police intervention, things have been set right. And you know, then what he said, so then he looked at me, and he said, I wish I had a daughter - that coming from a stranger whom I don't even know.

And so that was my moment when I thought that look, people accept you. They don't care about whether you're a male or a female, if you deliver, right, because what is our service at the end of the day? It's a service delivery system, and what do you deliver? You deliver justice? Right, so that is something which struck me, and I understood that no, people are not going to hold so much bias against me. My department was holding biases against me because they were apprehensive that if we send her to a district posting, XYZ things will happen, but yes, if you do your work, if you know your craft, if you deliver justice, and you do it in a fair, impartial manner, I think you will be respected, you will be accepted, you will be respected. And that is what I did.

Savitha

Okay, so now let's flip to the other side. Let's talk about internalized biases that we have absorbed.



When we constantly face bias, do we tend to internalize some of the stereotypes people have about women? What were some things you unlearned or learned and disregard an active police officer?

Sutapa

It's like the tip of the iceberg beneath the waters is a huge lot of bias. And let me tell you, nobody, not even me, nobody's free from these biases. So the only thing is how much you connect with yourself. How much you're able to look at your own thoughts and your actions as a bystander, right? That you will understand what biases you have.

And in, that all those unconscious biases start there, play becomes the playground, and then you get those gender discrimination, right? Discrimination, or bias for somebody who's coming from the rural area, somebody who has a disability. So those things then creep in. So where continuously, you know, you're given a message, that look, you are not good enough, you are not capable enough of competing with the men around you, somebody does sink into yourself, in your psyche.

So what happens is, then it's then you start getting what is called the imposter syndrome. Then you start self-doubting, you know, second guessing "Oh, am I good enough? Why am I all the time because as human beings, we are all looking for validation?" Because XYZ, ABC, everybody's saying that everybody's giving me that message. And remember, more than verbal conversations, the nonverbal conversations are so important. You start getting those things, unless you unload it every day. And you actually, as I said, you have to actually view yourself, your emotions, as if you were looking at yourself from a distance. Otherwise, you don't get that objective perspective, your self-image, you know, your self-respect is hazy, right? And then the problems begin, so you have to know where you stand, you have to have a good self-image. I'm not talking of being vain. That is not the idea.

But yes, you have to kind of categorize yourself correctly, objectively. And then what the world says, does not matter. So, if you are saying, how do you deal? How would you deal with these stereotype concepts about women? Well, first of all, put your self-image, objective self-image, character, self-image, neither more nor less. And then, you know we have to build our tribe, people who are like us, right? Who you know, build each other up and not pull each other down. Because see, when you're internalizing those biases, you're pulling yourself down. You don't need anybody else, then you need somebody to lift you up. And that is very important. And that is my kind of that is what I would like to tell every woman, yes.

Savitha

Yeah. I think what you described about building your own self-image, being able to stand apart and look at you from a distance is quite challenging. It's not easy to do either.

Sutapa

Not easy Savitha. But then if you have people around you, the right people, the right people who tell you these things who have themselves gone through it, like I didn't understand these things initially.



Savitha

Yeah, And on the same conversation about learning and being able to, you know, identify where where are certain places that you need to kind of evaluate? I want to ask you this question. Is there any space to admit to mistakes and failures, especially in the male dominated industry? If yes, or no? How does a woman create the space to make mistakes and grow in her own eyes? And in the eyes of others? Because women are held up to a different standard?

Sutapa

Hmm, yeah, that is absolutely there I guess, I guess you have to create that space. First, I think you have to understand yourself, you have to connect with yourself, otherwise, like I said, it'd be kind of taking everybody's energy at the end of the day, and it is a game of energy, right? So if your energy, your core is stable, even if you make mistakes, you are not going to punish yourself, right? Because somewhere, you've understood that as a human being, I will make mistakes, just as everybody else is making mistakes. But I'm going to learn from mistakes. I'm not going to repeat them.

That is the differentiator. And that is the space you create. So you know, I will tell one other thing Savitha. Many people are very afraid of confident women. Yes. Yes, very much afraid. So once people see that, you have your stuff sorted out, right, then most of them will lose interest in nitpicking. Yeah, I'm telling you, that's been my experience.

You have to find out your via media where you are not offensive. And yet, you are putting your foot down because you know what you're doing. So you have to be clear about your goal, your role. And then things become easy. The entire world falls into place. If you are sorted with yourself, and you know, that what you are doing any of the best of intentions, you're not doing anything out of some ulterior motive. Actually, nothing else matters - beyond a point that just melts away.

Savitha

That's great words of wisdom from you. And with that, we come to the end of our interview. I appreciate you giving your time and sharing advice and your own learned experience with us

Sutapa

Yeah, thank you Savitha, thank you to your team for having me. And stay safe everybody. Until soon. Bye!