

PODCAST VAAHINI CONNECT: PUSHOVER OR BOSSY: WOMEN LEADERS & CONFRONTING THE DOUBLE BIND WITH ANJALI RAGHUVANSHI

AUDIO 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're 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.

Joining us on the episode today as our guest is Anjali Raghuvanshi is the Chief People Officer for Randstad India. Anjali is a Strategic Business Partner who facilitates, supports and challenges business leaders along with anticipating the much-needed focus and change in workplace dynamics with the ever-evolving business landscape. She has also been instrumental in driving a performance based culture in the organization and moving away from a traditional

performance management approach. An MBA from ICFAI Business School Hyderabad, and a graduate in finance from the Banaras Hindu University. Anjali is passionate about protecting our environment for the future generations and building an inclusive workplace. Listen in as I talk to Anjali about women leaders and confronting the double bind of being a pushover or bossy

Savitha

Hi, Anjali Welcome to Vaahini Connect. And thank you for joining us today. I'm looking forward to our conversation and looking forward to picking your brain on finding that fine balance between being too assertive or being seen as a pushover. So welcome. Let's get started.

Anjali

Thank you so much, Savitha. I'm very excited to be here as well. And ready to get started.

Savitha

I want to begin by asking you this right as a

woman leader. If you're confident and ambitious, you stand the risk of being titled bossy, which some of us have, I've been called for sure. On the other hand, being friendly gets you the tag of being a pushover. Not always maybe. In the world of double standards and microaggressions how have you navigated this delicate balance of being assertive, yet being able to take people along? In your own experience?

Anjali

Yeah, thank you, Savitha. And I think yes, I'm probably on the other side, who are labeled pushovers. So, maybe I'll share my perspectives on that, because I've grown up, you know, seeing and I'm talking about the corporate world. From starting the career to how I've seen leaders, I've largely seen that men are considered bossy as well, because they, you know, they are always getting their tasks done and the way they come and their demeanor and everything. And so many times, I've seen that even my women bosses used to kind of emulate that, because they felt that that was the right way of working with their teams. So when I was given the leadership position, I was a little bit worried because that was not my style. And I had the fear that maybe people won't listen to me, because I am not that kind. And that's the kind of leadership I have always seen around me. And that was my biggest fear and biggest concern I, I think I did have in the very beginning, a couple of people reach out to me and said that, yeah, we met a lot of CHRO'S, and you don't seem to have the attitude that most CHRO'S carry. And I used to be like, Okay, what's that attitude? Like? What is it to carry? And some of my team members used to come to me and say that, you know, sometimes Anjali, maybe it's good to be a little bit more aggressive, because people should not take us for granted. Because people always try have had this helping stance, right, which is why you're growing up in your career. So I used to have these, you know, dilemmas in my mind that how do I kind of get through this, I think what has taken me through this phase is that I realized that I am, who I am, the more I try to pretend someone who I am not, the likelihood of me connecting with people is going to suffer.

Because I won't be able to connect, I'll be mostly pretentious putting up a facade out there to say that, okay, this is who I am. I think that's when I realized that it's best to be your authentic self and be who you are. Because at the end of the day, in a communication, all that matters is whether what you expect to be delivered or done, is it getting done or not, if that is getting done, no matter what your style is, and who you are, as a person should not be, you know, come in the way so if you are looked upon as an aggressive person, also, let's say, you know that all aggression will ever get you all work done. So somewhere, you need to be assertive, but not aggressive about it. Because I tend to not really enjoy working. And the more and more we work with newer generations coming in, they like to be part of the process they like to co-create, they don't like to be told what needs to be done. So in a way that also helped me, you know, be able to carry my own style, and not being told that hey, just because you're not bossy enough, you're not getting things done. I think that's been my experience.

Savitha

That's interesting. And you and I think also because as the new generation is coming in, and Gen Z and millennials, your style is probably what kind of breaks barriers and you're able to build connectedness with them is what I'm thinking, the way you describe your personal style. So I have to ask, okay, doubts are natural. Have you ever found yourself doubting your leadership abilities because of external stereotypes? In that case, If you did, how do you distance yourself from overthinking and trying to be like you said, be this different person, which is not your style?

Anjali

Absolutely. It does happen. And I'm sure if anybody says that they never had self-doubt. That wouldn't be true. Even the best of the people have those. Right. So, I've also had self-doubts when I started on, as I said, I remember one of my managers actually said to me, as I was taking on the role that you laugh a lot. I



think, as you pick up this role, and you move into this leadership role, you should be laughing less because people won't take you seriously, so I was like, okay, ah, now I was a bit worried. And in fact, for the first few occasions, I started watching myself too seriously in terms of was I smiling way too much over there laughing way too enough, because I thought maybe later on because I took that manager's work very seriously thinking that maybe I need to change in my style.

But actually, I realized that I was not enjoying it. Because it was again, I was not bringing my true self forward, I was not who I am. And so I said, Okay, I was, you know, should I try this the way I am. And so I went into my own self, the way I do meetings, the way I conduct I smile often. And I have different questions from people, like, how can you keep that magical smile all throughout the day on your face. But, you know, I started being myself. And I was so happy to see recently that, in fact, some of your back was something in an article in HBR that actually said that leaders who laugh a lot with their teams actually get a lot done in their team. And I believe that because, you know, it's all about energy that you carry in your team, and laughing is the most infectious way of actually transporting energy from one person to the other. So imagine the kind of energy you are creating in the team and the way your team is connecting with you is phenomenal. So then, but it did take me time, it took me time, in the sense when I saw my first success, I saw that getting delivered the right way, is when I started having more, you know, conviction in the way I was delivering the message. So it did take but I think what is important is to have self-belief, belief, believe that if you have been put in a position, there has to be a reason around that. And it's always good to be your own self and not really get bogged down by okay, I saw someone else running this role in a certain way, maybe that was better, what I'm doing is not right, because I believe that you are there for a reason and believe that you have something to do in your life, and be yourself. And I think people just spontaneously connect with you when you are yourself.

And just to kind of quote something very recently

I've been watching, I don't know if some, most people must have already, the crown, which is right. And the very first series, the season one where you actually see the queen. And there is one episode where she is supposed to travel to Gibraltar. And there, you know, and she is on this very hectic schedule of traveling from one place to the other. And she has this sister and she has her husband and the mother, all three of them feel that they are more suited for the role than she is. And after a point when she goes through this whole tussle, you know, tussle in her mind, she actually says that I know I'm surrounded by powerful characters. I know I'm surrounded by people who believe that they are natural leaders. But there is a reason I have been put in this position, and I'm the queen, so I will make the decision that we must go right. And I think all of us should take you in that very well-articulated powerful statement that you are there for a reason. So have self-belief, go for it, be yourself and do what you think is right and your conscience is telling you. And I think you will end up being the right person, if you have a good sense of right and wrong. And you are also anchored by your values, right that you have been born with and you've lived with. I think that anchoring is very, very critical. If you don't have that anchor of values, beliefs, then it's going to be very difficult in the journey.

Savitha

And on that note, I do have my next question for you is around authenticity. When women give it to the coercions of external stereotypes, like if you had, they may not express their leadership skills confidently? What are the affirmations that you gathered from your work in a personal environment that has helped you maintain your authentic leadership style that is unique and a reflection of you as an individual of who you are as an individual? I know you shared about having self-belief and you've touched upon this. Is there something that you'd like to add?

Anjali

I think that in the beginning, in my career, I



always had a lot of people sharing their opinion, expressing their views in terms of how things go and how they should have gone. I think surrounding myself also with the right set of people, people who, who would give the right perspectives and views, mentor me or even guide me and coach me in the process. I think that helped a lot in, you know, in also being my authentic self, because one, of course, my own manager who put me into the role, then, of course, there were a couple of peers who were very supportive of me. So I think you draw a support system from every, you know, strata of people that you meet your own team as well. My team was my biggest supporter. So I think, now I always fall back on a few people who can mentor, guide and coach, a lot of mentoring or guiding or coaching can come from people all over. It is not always above the hierarchy in people outside your life. But I think that did help me in kind of you know it at every step of my life, having surrounded myself with people. But at the same time, you should not surround yourself in a, you know, in an echo chamber, right, which is like sounding like you and saying things like you, that's another conscious point, to ensure that you are also, you know, taking all perspective perspectives, especially in a CHRO position, if I'm really surrounded by people who think or act like me can also be a little bit difficult. Right. So I think that is one thing I've always believed in, that listening to people see what they are saying there is feedback, you can take their feedback, you know that it's actually not valid. So you can kind of discard it. But always be accepting, listening to people, because listening does give you a lot of, you know, views, perspectives about yourself and about life and everything, but do have guide, coach or mentor, if not formal setup, but even if there are people in life who you consider and look upon, look up to please do, you know, have them around you, I think that helps. And as I said, values are your anchor, I think that, to me is a very critical thing. And that they guide you because in life, like how organizations are guided by their values, you are also guided by your own values that you've grown with, with your parents, with your friends, peers, and you know, everyone around. So be

guided by that as well.

Savitha

I think like you rightly said it does not always have to be from outside or from above you it could also be around you and your peers and from your team. And I think I really like what you also mentioned is don't let it be an echo chamber. Because then you don't really hear different ideas. There's no room for creativity. Great share. Anjali, I have just one more question for you. If women find members in leadership positions following a narrow minded approach to women leaders, which is very possible, what are some best ways to confront them?

Anjali

Yes, absolutely. And one experience I already shared with you well, my boss had told me that don't laugh as much. I mean, I see women, sometimes even sharing in the roundtable conferences or talk and speech saying that, no, we've come the hard way and the world is like this, it is about survival of the fittest. But at the same time, think about it as a leader, you have grown through difficult, you know, through difficult times you have become a leader and you have had a tough life. While make it easy on the other ones who are coming in, isn't that all about leadership isn't that that's why you've been given an opportunity to be at the place that you are.

I always tell my women leaders that you might have come in a time that flexibility was not something which was welcomed. A woman was supposed to work as many hours and maybe more to prove their point in a man's world. But today, now you have an opportunity. And there are women who have the potential, but all they need is a little bit of a support for them to shine in their career. Why to stop them? Because you feel you need a 24/7 running person? Is that really a necessity? Is the question I sometimes ask them, sometimes they don't hire women saying that, Oh, it's a traveling job, then the question is that, does this job really require a ten day travel? Or just because 10 years, it's

been happening like this, you want the same format? Maybe question your ways of working and see if it can be managed with more virtual formats. And once in a while here, and there are some traveling can be involved so that some women can take up roles like these.

I think it's about questioning our leaders to say that don't look at things in the same 10 years, 20 years, the way you've looked at it. So I think keep the role outside and the gender whoever is there, whether it's a man or woman or anyone from LGBTQI community, I think that needs to be kept separate. And give people an opportunity irrespective. So I think I used to be very surprised when I used to see women leader telling for other women that Oh, no, they are not working as hard as we worked in our past, we had to work very hard to come to this position, they need to start looking at things. I didn't have a six month maternity break, I only had a three months maternity break. So I think, you know, other women should also consider facts like these. And I say if the government has given six months maternity break now and that is a feasibility why not let them have that opportunity and come back and join the workforce in the same role or in tough role if they are okay, as long as the woman in question is okay, how does it matter what you and I think, and we should not be a problem, but we start assuming and we start planning things for other people, without even asking the person in question whether how comfortable they are, or they are not.

I think we need to also, you know, think about how we want to position ourselves in, you know, in situations like these, I think, one of the days when we have to be hesitant and not be as courageous as we actually are, I feel that women have a lot of courage to speak, in forums and in, you know, in leadership discussion that sometimes I feel men hesitating. And I have always found that women are much more courageous, and many things that comes as a very good strength, like I was talking to someone just today in the morning. And they said, actually, if you just put few women into the follow up piece, I think women do far better follow up and get things done. Right, they negotiate better,

or some things they can do better. So I think about those aspects, think about what other strengths they can bring into the role rather than, you know, again, going back into that, can they travel? Will they be available? 24/7 Even men are not available 24/7 these days. So why women have to prove themselves in situations like this. I think these are some I would say conversations that work. And it's about conscious inclusion. And constantly thinking about that, and being very, very conscious and very mindful about what are you deciding, what are you saying and how is going to land? You know, and that's why we talk about micro aggressions right, at the end of the day, these are micro aggressions the way you say certain things you don't realize, but it's actually landing in a very, very different way on the gender. The other side, so

Savitha

That's very insightful. And I'm smiling because some of the things that you're sharing is what so many of us or if not all of us have heard, you know, can they travel, can they do this. But there's so many more opportunities for flexibility today. And I think, very nicely shared by you that you have to see how it lands as well. And that's important. With that, we come to the end of our interview. And those are the questions I had for you today. So thank you for sharing your experiences and learnings with us in such a small, quick, short nutshell. I have personally taken away so many insights and learnings to apply to my own career. Thank you for joining us today. And it's been a pleasure all the best and keep smiling. I think. Yeah. That's something that I'm going to remember from this conversation, of course.

Anjali

Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much. Savitha for this opportunity. It's been great.

Thank you for listening to this episode. Remember, we may not turn into change makers overnight. But all of us hold the power to



lead small, incremental changes that can eventually make the world a more equal and fairer place. You can join the Accenture Vaahini network, a networking forum for women professionals, enabled 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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