



SEASON 2, EPISODE 8: WHY WORK MATTERS SO MUCH TO WOMEN'S WELL-BEING!

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'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.

In this episode, our guest is HR leader Smita Shetty Kapoor. Smita is the CEO and Co-Founder of Kelp HR and a subject matter expert. KELP HR's flagship offering of varied services under the umbrella of POSH from legal compliance to best practices was Smita's brainchild. She is also tirelessly working towards creating awareness about Diversity and Inclusion and is the only Indian to rank amongst the world's Top 10 diversity consultants in the year 2020. Smita has over 16 years of rich working experience in the corporate world with organizations. As an active blogger, Smita loves hosting interviews and talk shows on subjects pertaining to POSH, Women, LGBT rights, and Empowerment.

In our conversation today we talk about how, while work fulfills economic goals for many women, it is also an important part of self-actualization and holistic well-being. Smita shares with us why work matters to women, beyond its practical benefits. Listen in as I chat with Smita, about this topic.

Savitha

Hi, and welcome to the podcast, Smita. Thank you for joining us today and for making the time to be here.

Smita

Thank you so much for having me. I'm so privileged, and the topic is so close to my heart.

Savitha

Right and diving right into it. The first question for you Smita is- for working women while financial stability is a crucial goal, how does being a working professional help women find something more than financial freedom? How's the idea of work connected to the idea of self?



Smita

Very beautiful question. I think it starts with financial independence. Way back, I remember, any woman would want to come back to work because she wants money in her account. Nobody should question that money- how she spends it or uses it, or leaves it untouched. While having said that it's not the only reason women want to come back. It starts with having those adult or intellectual conversations with people with whom you have gained trust and like-mindedness. You get intellectually challenged when you get out and speak to people. You get a sense of community.

The second most important reason I feel is that many women relate to working with the respect they gain within their households, and also at workplaces.

The third important part is being attached to a larger goal of an organization. Any contribution to a very large goal at the workplace, makes any woman feel connected.

The fourth but most important reason is she's been trained. She has her skills, and she wants to use them. The joy of being able to use her skills and knowledge. I think that makes any woman want to go back to the workplace.

Continuing with your question about how the idea of work is connected to the idea of self, I think the sense of community is very important. A community of diverse coworkers with whom you can strike a camaraderie, with whom you learn while you want to give back. It is through their work and building a sense of self. If you're lucky enough to love what you do, you understand more about the world and about yourself.

Also for your own mental health, just showing up is important. Having a routine is important. Getting up and doing wonders is important. Creating meaning is so important for everybody.

Savitha

You touched upon so many important things. From feeling valued to feeling like you're contributing to the world out there. Therefore, my next question that follows this is- there may be times when we feel stuck or stagnant in our jobs, and that's very normal for all of us. What are things that we can do in terms of career growth to achieve personal satisfaction? How do we move from finding work that aligns with our personal goals, and provides us with a sense of fulfillment? What has been your experience around this?

Smita

While it is quite clichéd, I'm very close to Ikigai. On the concept of Ikigai, I would want to spend a little time for our listeners that if they have not landed up they should pick up a book. It's a Japanese concept about having a fulfilling life. So Ikigai draws up that you should identify what you love to do. What you are good at? What the world needs and what do you get paid for? Put that all together and find that sweet spot- what do you want to really do with your life? I know many people will say, "Smita, it's so much of a theory. You cannot really get what you want. It's very difficult to strike that balance." Yes, I agree it is difficult. But I would want you to take a pause.

While financials are important and taking a pause is difficult, you will have to struggle and get there. I think women of our age would have attained that financial independence and now are feeling stuck. I feel- take a pause. Go back and do a visualization exercise, which actually I run in various conversations with women. Think.



Close your eyes. Imagine your future self. What would your future self look like? How do you want your future self to be looking like? Then pave a path for yourself. It will give you a lot of answers. The calling is within you.

Get hold of a good coach or mentor. It is very, very important, Savitha. I feel we always ignore the most important aspect of getting a coach or a mentor. Have these conversations with them. Put it down on paper. I love the art of journaling. There are times when I didn't get answers to your questions I wrote them, folded them, and kept them. Suddenly sometimes the answers just appear. There are some really powerful tools- go back to your Ikigai, do your visualization exercise, do coaching, and attach a mentor. I think these are some things that you should do if you feel stuck.

Savitha

"Don't go through it alone" is one of the messages that I'm taking away from you. Of course, the book Ikigai is so famous and is available out there. I am with you on all that and I highly recommend all of it from visualization, journaling, reading the book, and finding your purpose. My next question for you is- it is often claimed that the presence of working women contributes to the growth of the country's economy, which is so true anyway. It's not just a claim, what are the measurable benefits? Apart from the obvious one of more spending power per family. You've touched upon this earlier but if you'd like to go deeper into this specific question.

Smita

Of course, as you rightly said, the purchasing power increases. I have a little bias toward working women. I am clearly a big fan. *Sashtang Pranam* to all the full-time moms who are out there. I think they're doing an amazing job. I tried to do it. But I almost lost my sanity. I quickly jumped to the working women space. So with all due respect to them.

Yes, our nation needs contribution from women. I feel if we have to have an evolved nation, we should have women who go to work and become role models to their own families and children. This is an absolutely 50-50 % partnership. It's not only fathers who put food on the table. It is also your mother and that's why the household is a 50-50% partnership. We have to ensure that we 'role model' this very clearly.

What are the measurable benefits? I have seen working mothers have more independent kids. They take ownership of their own lives much before other children would do so. They see their parents contributing equally to the household in both respects. In fact, I feel a little lopsided. They see mothers being the heroes because they're managing both spaces efficiently. So I feel the measurable benefit is that they clearly see their mothers contributing, and they are very respectful of other genders. If they are boys, they are very clearly seeing women not only as somebody who's doing a backend job but somebody who is facing the workplace with them. And it makes a girl child very confident. I think workplaces are getting safer and safer because women are in workplaces and creating a path for their future generation.

Savitha

Wow, I love your answers because they're so on point. I think it's so true because role models are important. If it's not modeled for you, then you don't know what that looks like. Moving on, a lot of families, unfortunately, still fail to recognize the right to work as a crucial right for women. Is this changing anytime soon? Do you see urban families becoming more supportive of women's rights? What are the top three things families can do to ensure more support?



Smita

I can give you a list. While urban households are evolving I also have a complaint. Men are becoming lazier because the jobs which we thought only men would do are now getting delegated to women. An example is paying your income tax. Your own income tax was always paid by fathers or men in the household. Even going out and paying electricity bills. But now all the jobs are also being shifted to women. They are taking care of all this nitty-gritty. Going to a Parent Teacher Meeting is also still a 'women's job'. You have to really cope. So there is a disbalance, and the urban families have this disbalance.

What they can do is- train your boys. Enough of training your girls on what they should and shouldn't do. Start training your boys about taking on more responsibilities. And not just speech. I mean, a father can't say, "you have to strike a balance" when he himself is not doing it. They will have to show how you strike a balance in the workplace.

We also have to train our girls that they don't need to be Supergirls or Superwomen. I think we have a problem there. We train our girls to be a superwoman and we train our boys to be lazy. I think everybody should go look for extended support. Women should call it out saying, "I cannot be a superwoman." I have taken help from neighbors, and extended family. Take support from your friends, colleagues, or whoever can give you support, just say it. Look for support and ensure that you get that support. Of course, train your partner first.

I think sharing the load is most important. The time spent training the boys is important. And role modeling to have a great balance is important. I think these are three important inputs that I can leave you with.

Savitha

Yeah, bang on. I agree with you there- sharing the load, not trying to be superwoman, and asking for help. Often when women return to work after a break, it needs to match the expectations of both the employee and the employer. It may involve, among other things, a realignment of goals, or else the employee may experience dissatisfaction and discontentment leading them to quit again. What can companies do to ensure that the returning employees are placed in roles well aligned to their own life goals and skills, not discounting their past experience, which we've seen is often the norm.

Smita

Great question. Actually, I would go a little further, not only returning mothers from maternity leave but when they are proceeding to maternity leave, it is called the 'moment that matters'. Every organization has various moments like your first day of joining an organization. I think going on maternity leave, or in fact, announcing that you're going to be on maternity leave are really important stages, especially in women's life. So how are those moments managed by the organization is very, very important. How do you make her feel throughout her journey when she is prior to going on maternity leave, during her maternity leave, and when she comes back? I think this needs a lot of thinking. And many organizations are doing that, Savitha.

I was in a session just last week, and we were discussing moments that matter. And one of the employees stood up and said, "My team arranged a surprise baby shower for me. The most touching part was that I didn't know my husband and my brother were invited to that event. And every time when I'm in a low period, and I talk something wrong about my organization, my husband reminds me, isn't it the same organization, which made you feel so special. Even if I would want to quit, my family wouldn't want me to quit." It's like clued in.



Those are small moments that have to be taken care of. How you make that person feel. Do you feel she's going to go out for six months? Do you really feel that she has to be in the system? She's somebody who has contributed over a period of time and really matters to us as a human. She's not diseased that you throw her out saying now she will be gone for six months. So that is important. And when she comes back what is an ecosystem that you create for her? She is a new mother and has a big responsibility. There's a living being who is going to be dependent on her. So how do we get her to slowly come into the system is very, very important.

I remember the times if we had to express breast milk we had to go to the restroom. So simple things like that. Do we have spaces created? Do we have an ecosystem? Can she go to a creche where she can get her child and feed it? All that is important.

Moreover, skilling her when she comes back. Because six months is a big gap. Is she upskilled to take up new responsibilities because, within six months, there will have been changes. How do you ensure that she's really skilled to take a job?

Also, working on training people around her about unconscious biases, about respectful behaviors. What are those do's and don'ts that you can or cannot ask the person who's coming back from a maternity break? Simple things like "Did you enjoy your holiday?" People don't realize that they are being so disrespectful. These are real statements we hear from returning mothers. It is a maternity break, not a vanity break. She is not on a holiday!

Savitha

I think this is such a moment for organizations to be able to get employees on their side and make them feel valued. I think that's great. You've been so eloquent, you've shared so beautifully so much advice with our audience. I really thank you for spending this time with us to walking us through it. I think you've given so much value to this conversation. Thank you for being here. And with that, we come to the end of our interview and we wish you all the best

Smita

Thank you. Thank you so much

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.