

Atisha Gopichund on how embracing her femininity has benefited her career

 By Jessica Tennant

3 Aug 2018

Atisha Gopichund is a wife, mother and businesswoman working in the interior construction sector. I asked her to let us in on the challenges she has faced working in such a male-dominated industry and for some words of advice to other women facing similar challenges in business...

■ Tell us about your role as head of marketing at Saint-Gobain Gyproc and Isover.

I am responsible for the creation, communication and delivery of a unifying marketing strategy for Gyproc & Isover in conjunction with the relevant Saint-Gobain business entities to deliver a coherent and coordinated approach to markets and customers within our specified sectors. It is one of my responsibilities to position the entity as market leader for innovative and effective solutions in the built environment.

■ What challenges have you faced working in such a male-dominated industry?

Honestly, I have never allowed gender to distract me from my personal objectives. I have, over the years, been inspired and motivated by the achievements of both men and women alike and have been privileged to have been exposed to and worked with many great professionals, both male and female, each adding to my career and personal development.

“ Women have specific strengths and I've learnt that embracing these makes life a whole lot simpler. We don't have to behave like men to have fulfilling careers. In fact, on a primal level, I believe we're wired to be cooperative. We are also naturally inclined towards caretaking and finding positive solutions that allow everyone to benefit. This instinct to collaborate gets the most out of people, which leads to good results, and as women, we should tap into this. ”

■ What are some female-specific challenges you've faced in the workplace in general?

Work-life balance and time. Life, in general, has become incredibly fast-paced. I have also found it more of a challenge to earn credibility.

■ What is your advice in overcoming these?

Across the various roles spanning my career, I have always ensured that I do my best work and this has earned me credibility. I also look to building strong teams, by developing and grooming them by passing on key tasks to trusted team members. The same goes for my personal space.

“ You need to pick your battles and make time for the value-adding activities, and contract out those tasks that free you up to add value elsewhere. ”

I genuinely enjoy what I do as a profession and therefore I find it easier to make certain sacrifices.

■ As a female in this space, what's the least and most exciting aspect of your workday?



Atisha Gopichund

The least would have to be the work commute and traffic, and the most exciting: the team engagement on strategising campaigns, product launches, events, etc., and troubleshooting solutions to improve our overall output.



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■ **Are enough South African women getting a chance to shine in their industry and shatter that oft-referenced glass ceiling?**

I see limited examples across the South African industry.

“ We need to make a concerted effort to support and platform opportunities for other women coming up through the ranks. If one strives to do their best, the glass ceiling shouldn't be the pinnacle, as your aspirations and accomplishments shall surpass this unacknowledged barrier. ”

■ **How can we ensure the next generation results in more empowered females and better gender representation in the creative industry?**

Those women that are in positions to add value, share their journey and experiences must lend their voice to worthy causes uplifting and creating further opportunities for upcoming female talent.

■ **Who's your female role model/business mentor – someone you respect and admire?**

My mother. She has equipped me with many of my positive problem solving and technical skills. I respect and admire the personal and career journeys of Sheryl Sandberg, Oprah Winfrey, Indra Nooyi, Priyanka Chopra to name a few. I try to follow as many fascinating women's experiences as possible.

■ **This Women's Month, what is your word of encouragement to aspiring women in business?**

Reflect and nurture your own being and growth by reading. Also, make a point of learning from the women you look up to in life and business. Try to learn something new every day, make deliberate choices, obtain quality childcare, plan ahead and organise your days, limit time-wasting activities and make time for family activities, and equally make time for yourself.

ABOUT JESSICA TENNANT

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