

WOMEN IN SALES

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

**Ensuring Gender Inclusion in the Sales Function
for business leaders and inclusion enthusiasts**



VIEWPORT
2017

WOMEN IN SALES

Critical Success Factors

Authored by

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These are critical, introspection-invoking times for businesses in the country. Add gender diversity dialogues and the introspection becomes indispensable! Especially when stakes involved include 48.5% of the country's people. Yes, women!

I am delighted and humbled, that as an outcome of two successful editions (2016 & 2017) of India's largest gender analytics exercise – the Working Mother & AVTAR Best Companies for Women in India initiative, we have a host of key learnings to supplement these introspections! The most significant one being an unprecedented surge in corporate resolve to ensure greater women's participation in the Indian workplace.

If you are reading this report, then your own personal intent and that of your organization in increasing women's workforce participation in India is proven beyond doubt. The search for that ONE silver bullet which would a) cure the problem of low women's representation, b) allow the entry and retention of more millions of Indian women in our workplaces and c) thereby pave the way for India to become a truly developed nation, is one that stays top of mind for all discerning talent managers. The short answer is that the silver bullet is more a resolute process than a one-stop fix, it calls for sustained effort till we reach the magical tipping point. What could be that function/skill/area which would provide that critical mass required for a 23.5% workforce participation rate to shift to 50%??

From the several thousand gender diversity metrics that the Best Companies for Women in India study gave us, we inferred that a fresh approach was needed. Why only look at industries? Why not look at functions within industries? Thus, we trained the gender inclusivity spotlight on various business functions in corporate India – Finance, Operations, Customer Service, Marketing, Technology and Sales. And the function of Sales caught our attention.

As the year descends into its final & festive month, we now present to you, AVTAR's annual flagship research study - VIEWPORT 2017 – themed 'Women in Sales: Critical Success Factors' – bearing in mind the truth that Sales is undoubtedly the fulcrum of all business functions.

What are the myths associated with women's fit for operational sales? What are the challenges that women overcome to build careers in sales? Is Sales only a function or is it a competency that helps smoothen the path within all functions? What course-correction is required by women to break stereotypes? To make it big, what are the success mantras, the critical skills that could ensure success? This report is basis a national research we undertook on two key social samples relevant to the cause– 1) Senior Leaders in Sales from Corporate India 2) Successful Women Professionals in Sales. This was to get a 360 degree view of perceptions and give these significant stakeholders, indicative directions on the way forward.

Leaders from over 25 organizations from across the industry spectrum contributed to the research while 200 women professionals successful in sales were surveyed to determine these critical success factors. This lead to the creation of the SUPTHAA Competency Model – 7 factors essential for the Indian Woman Professional to a) employing the competency of "selling" and b) being a successful sales professional in the Indian scenario. And these skills are: 1) Survive 2) Urgency 3) Prospecting 4) Targeting 5) Hearing 6) Authoritativeness 7) Approval.

Sales is a function that has the potential to not only exponentially increase the numbers of women professionals in the workplace significantly, it has the undoubted advantage of erasing gender bias. Numbers have no gender. Anyone who meets their sales target does so with gender being out of the equation. Proficiency in Sales is not only a mission-critical requirement, it is also one that has the power to remain relevant for millennia to come. If there is a formula for attracting, training and retaining Women in Sales, then we have a winner on our hands!

I hope this report provokes your thinking and causes initiatives around Women in Sales to engender within your organization. I also hope that such learning efforts, recruitment practices and fresh perspectives result in more women leaders in Sales in India!

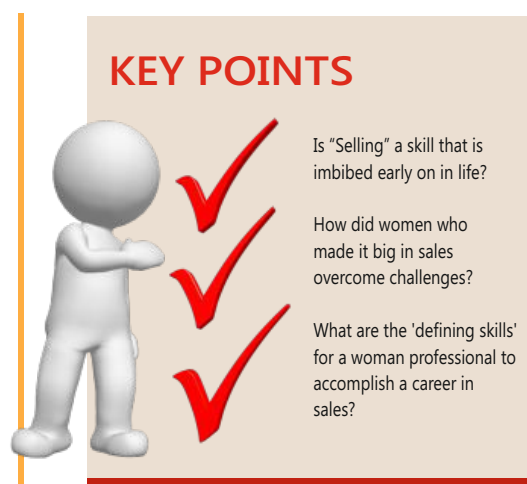
Warm Regards,

Dr. Saundarya Rajesh

Times, they are a-changing. Long gone are the discussions where the business case for diversity was strenuously proven. Discerning corporates have understood, anecdotally, as well as empirically, the value of gender diversity and its role in culture, engagement, bottom-line. Women are a significant presence in many industries, though never close to a majority. Even personally, the woman in the workplace appears more self-assured. She surrounds herself with strategic grids, is assertive in upholding her proficiencies and acts more from a position of strength and depth, rather than resorting to self-pity or victim-speak. All of these are not surprising. Education, the connected world, digital fluency and a naturally inclusive attitude have given women an edge in building careers. Careers, in every field, though Sales still appears to be that lone bastion that women have not yet stormed. Thus, it comes as a surprise to read that women represent 41% of the active sales workforce, globally (*Source: LinkedIn*) and that this number is actually growing at a good clip. How is the situation in India? Do Indian women aspire to a sales role? How do the women who actually succeed, do it? **The VIEWPORT - Women in Sales – Critical Success Factors** looks at what it takes for a woman to succeed in this most glamorous of professions, that also has the ability to create a powerful fillip to women's workforce participation in India. For, as everyone knows, sales figures are never gendered biased.



*While Women represent 41% of the active sales workforce, globally and growing at a good clip. **How is the situation in India? Do Indian women aspire to a sales role?***



The Sales Function: Through a Gendered Lens

'Sales' as a function is indispensable to the very existence of a business. This traditionally male-dominated field, celebrates aggression and fire-in-the belly as hallmarks of successful sales people. However, there has been a gradual transition towards other key attributes defining success in sales from building a resilient relationship to earning clients' trust to eye for details to listening skills. Globally, women influence 70% of buying decisions, yet, translating this into getting on the other side of the table by women actually becoming salespersons, never comes true ^[1]. Women worldwide fall severely short in contributing to the world of sales. And, this also results in a serious under-representation of women in leadership roles and executive boards.

The scenario in India is no exception. The high levels of aspiration midst women employees to reach these levels is not met with an equal number of them making it to leadership positions. So, the question is, 'Is this truly the effect of the glass ceiling?' Not really. As per a research report by McKinsey

titled "Women Matter", there isn't a glass ceiling but a leaky pipeline headed for the top that is dropping women at every strategic point ^[2].

Sales as a field is fast-paced, competitive and fiercely cornered by men. Yet, there is a steadily growing number of women sales professionals who are making a mark in the sales arena. However, the million-rupee question is, how do these women do it? Is there a secret formula that would help them be the actual architects of their success in sales? As research goes, a direct increase in the number of women entering and building a career in sales will have 5 distinct effects: 1) A proportionate increase in women in the workplace, 2) Greater numbers of women rising to leadership 3) Creation of sustainable career opportunities for women in a day and age of automation 4) Business benefits of a better understanding of the customer base and most importantly 5) A decrease in bias, since Sales hath no gender.

Hence, it is important to retain women in sales and inspire more women to join the sales force and nurture them to take on leadership positions where the current work environment is more conducive to this revolution in sales domain.

It is an undisputable fact that success in sales offers amazing growth opportunities. At least 20% of today's CEO's began their career in sales. The Brian Tracy International study says that 5% of the world's richest professionals are sales people. Women in India constitute less than 20% of total sales professionals, while among the women sales leaders, the number is even lesser at around 12%^[3]. However, the gender divide is quite obvious. However, research shows that being in the sales function makes it easier for a professional, whether male or female to rise to leadership.

In India, awareness about sales as an effective career option is regrettably limited to the metro cities. Girls even in Tier I, Tier II cities are unaware of sales as a serious career option. There is barely any focus on understanding what a career in Sales means, leave alone enhancing and continuously refining sales skills. The percentage of women who take up Sales or Selling as a planned step to rise in a career is dismally low. It is an unfortunate that most women end up taking up Sales as a

career due to lack of choices in the market. Till recently, a career in Sales has been perceived as a territory with abrasive, testosterone filled men travelling and tracking down prospective customers and clients, convincing them to make that elusive, lucrative deal. This rather unattractive view of selling has contributed to its reputation as a male bastion.

In recent times many successful organisations are investing in getting more women into sales leadership roles. This is not only beneficial for business as a whole, but also helps women in scaling up their skills to reach executive levels. Earlier researchers on "what makes salespeople successful" focused single-mindedly on masculine characteristics, such as drive and the will to win. Salespeople of former times were expected to be "vigorously competitive", "brash" and "hard-nosed". Conversely, recent researches on sales success stories have ascertained that other qualities such as a genuine liking for people, problem-solving skills, being responsive to social cues are also imperative to success in sales. These are not necessarily only male-specific traits. Today, the very definition of Sales has undergone a big difference and sales directors are looking for managers who are more consultative, thoughtful, insightful and who possess excellent listening skills.

The SELLING story

THEN AND NOW

THEN

NOW

Limited information, customer had zero data

Profusion of information with the customer being very savvy with data

Reaching the target customer was difficult

Relatively easy to reach the target audience

Absolutely manual process of sales, with very limited nonverbal communication

Hybrid selling method which includes a combination of electronic, telephonic, in-person, verbal and non-verbal communication methods

One-size-fits-all approach with little differentiation

Highly customised selling, with customer experience becoming paramount

Brief sales process, which resulted in the sale

Extended sales process with pre-sales, sale and post-sales components being clearly defined with very different skills required for each

Aggressive, in-your-face sales approach

Subtle selling which looks at various ways of influence

Salesman was always seen as a quasi-fraud, a hustler and a sales career not exactly an honourable one

Selling no longer synonymous with pulling a fast one – a respectable industry which produces influencers



Women in Sales: The 'Data' story

- ♦ Studies on Indian women professionals show they are 3% more employable than men with Sales & Business Development amongst the top in-demand job roles in the market^[4].
- ♦ India is slated to add 110 million people to the workforce by 2020 and a safe estimate indicates a proportional increase in the number of employable women owing to urbanisation^[5].
- ♦ A McKinsey Global Institute (2015) study states that if India can increase its women's labour force participation by 10 percentage points (68 million more women) by 2025, then, it will see a proportionate increase in GDP by 16%. If India matches the best-in-region workforce participation rate of 41%, this would add an estimated Rs. 46 lakh crore (\$700 billion) to India's GDP^[6].
- ♦ 35.6% of all enrolled undergraduates in management are women^[7]. 'Sales & Business Development' is amongst the top in-demand job roles in the market. As such, promoting sales as a career option for women will be a definite stride towards greater women's workforce participation.
- ♦ Higher employability and greater availability for a role that is much in demand (and is demanding!) seem like a magic concoction to reverse the trend of declining female labour force participation in our country. The cascading effects include greater social and economic development for the country.

Women in Sales: The 'Natural' story

According to Biz Journals (2015) of the US, 77.4 percent of people in direct sales industry (US) in 2014 are women. Over time, in most of the OECD countries, women have risen to numbers equal to men, if not higher when it comes to success in a sales career^[8]. The natural progression of a developing economy would be to encourage the presence of women in sales, just as it is encouraged in other functional areas. Also, with sales changing into a more sophisticated, process-driven function, it lends itself to greater participation by women

Studies suggest that:

- ♦ *Women are more attentive women listen better than do men.*
- ♦ *Women in sales spend as much as 80% of their "sales time" listening to others and only 20% of their time talking^[9].*
- ♦ *Women are more motivated for success – the opportunity for advancement to a management or leadership position.*
- ♦ *Women are capable of building strong relationships and earn clients' trust.*
- ♦ *Women see the complexities in a business deal and dig deeper to find the best solution for the clients.*
- ♦ *Women are able to create customer loyalty which result in repeat sales and greater revenue per sale.*

Women Careers in Sales: The Impact of Automation

In this era of automation, women's jobs are going to be more significantly impacted by than men's. A World Economic Forum research suggests that for every five female job losses there will only be one job created. However, for men, there will be one job created for every three lost. As for India, automation is set to impact 69 percent of the jobs in India and 77 per cent in China - World Bank research (2016)^[10]. Against this backdrop, careers in sales which involve significant human interaction and communication are predicted to survive the impact.



Tenets of Sales: The Learning Curve for Women Professionals

The tenets of ideal sales are summed up best by the adage "Telling is not selling". This is centred on building resilient relationships and earning clients' trust, infused with intuition and guided by gut feelings. Spotting the complexities in deals and digging deeper to unearth the best solution for the clients' is pertinent for success in sales.

Against this backdrop, can the key tenets of sales be taught to women? India Skills Report 2017 reports that women are more "employable" than men and that in terms of logical and analytical abilities, they outshine men. Moreover, studies on career aspiration of women indicate that 91% of India's women aspire for demanding job roles. Women managers tend to have more of a desire to build than a desire to win, more

patience and show a strong tendency to be stronger when it comes to paying attention to details than do men. Research also suggests that women are more operational in deciphering the emotions of the people whom they are selling to, and are able to build relationships efficiently and effectively.

And hence, with recent research studies on the Indian market indicating that Sales & Business Development jobs are the most in-demand jobs here and organisations in India assertively engaging their gender diversity agendas, it is important that efforts directed to building key competencies in sales for women are initiated. On the basis of focus group discussions conducted at AVTAR, the following 14 competencies emerged that constitute the universe of skills to building careers in sales.

The Universe of Competencies for a Successful Sales Professional

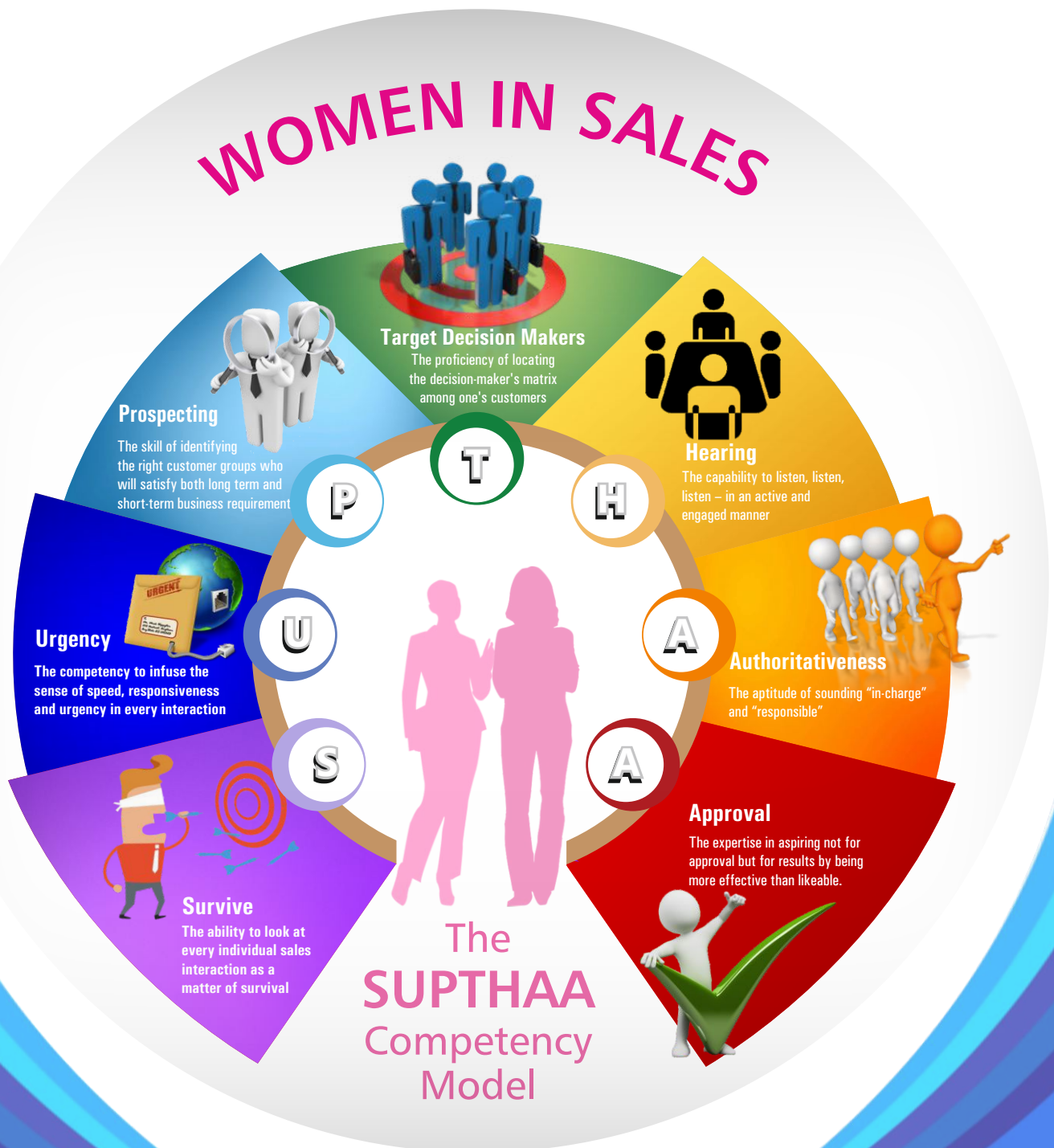


Women in Sales:

The SUPTHAA Competency Model

In a subsequent research to identify the critical success factors for women in sales, AVTAR interviewed over 25 organisations across the industry spectrum. Senior leaders from industries such as FMCG, Retail, Pharma, BFSI and IT – all having different sales modalities, shared their perceptions on what contributed to the success of women professionals

in sales. 250 women professionals who had carved niche careers in sales were also surveyed as part of the study. The SUPTHAA Competency Model that outlines the seven critical skills to build robust careers in sales, was built on the basis of response analyses.



CONCLUSION



The AVTAR study on Women in Sales – Critical Success Factors, unveils several facets of the women in a selling career. Indian women face three prominent barriers in their path to a selling career – 1) Personal barriers, 2) Cultural barriers and 3) Industry barriers. Personal barriers include the underplaying tendency of women, their risk aversion and their pressure to be perfect. Cultural barriers are ingrained via socialization of women differently from men and their inability to break the soundtrack that gives them conflicting messages. Industry barriers are aspects such as the Unconscious Bias that plays out at the workplace, the tough workplace conditions and the equation of men with sales proficiency.

What the study reveals is that all the barriers faced by women can be broken with skilling and intentionality. While women in sales do concede the challenges of their work in a male-dominated world, the changing nature of the sales function also creates more opportunities for women. Today, the selling function is more conducive for women professionals than ever before. The VIEWPORT - Women in Sales – Critical Success Factors study reveals that there is serious concern over the under-representation of women in leadership roles and executive boards in sales while also seeing a concerted effort being made to change this. Among the key challenges are the fact that most ambitious young Indian women professionals so not consider Sales as a serious career option. This and the lack of in-house sales training which can convert would-be sales aspirants into sales professionals are glaring gaps.

Today, many successful organizations are focusing their energies on including more women not only into the workplace per se, but also into specific functions – Sales is one such. In order to create more successful women sales professionals, the VIEWPORT has identified the “SUPTHAA” skill model which enables the channelizing of the aspiration

amidst women to create a successful, sustainable, economically rewarding career. The SUPTHAA model lists the following skills of 1) Survive, 2) Prospecting, 3) Hearing 4) Urgency 5) Target Decision Makers 6) Authoritativeness and 7) Approval, as being imperative to the success in sales of a woman professional. The formal training of women professionals in these 7 skills not only allows building of competencies to hone their convincing and closing skills, but also ensures that women leverage this outside of a formal Sales career. Facing the onslaught of automation, which is likely to result in the loss of operational, transactional and non-value-adding jobs, Sales is likely to emerge as a skill that cannot be replaced by a machine. The competency of selling, which involves significant human interaction and communication will prove to be a non-negotiable one in the years ahead.

India is slated to add 110 million people to the workforce by 2020 and we can make a safe estimate that this indicates a proportionate increase in the number of employable women. If this also includes more women in sales, then the impact is threefold: 1) Greater economic contribution by women via additional compensation from a career in selling, 2) Larger numbers of women rising to leadership through comprehensive skills gained from a sales career and 3) Increase in women's workforce participation rates through the option of a sales career which is not likely to be challenged by automation.

And that, is a definite WIN-WIN for a country seeking to bridge its gender gap.

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About the Authors

Dr. Saundarya Rajesh, Winner of #100Women Achiever's List 2016 by Government of India. India is ranked 123rd in the female-male ratio with one of the lowest female labour force participation in the world (World Economic Forum – Gender Gap Report). India has also one of the highest rates of women quitting the workplace because of work-life related issues. World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index (2011) reports that 48% of Indian women abort their careers mid-way which is almost 20% more than the global average. Many of these women (**almost 18 lakh in number**) desire to make career comebacks once their responsibilities of child/elder or household care have been well attended to. Besides, the **2.8 crores** Indian women who are currently working, also face multiple challenges while trying to remain employed, productive and contribute economically to our country.



*Every single one of these 18 lakh women on a break and the 2.8 crores of working women has a reason to thank **Dr. Saundarya Rajesh**. But for her unstinting efforts, women's careers and workforce participation would still be languishing as a nice-to-have, but not a critically important imperative in the priorities of talent managers of India.*

In 2005, when Saundarya first embarked upon the idea of creating a community of women who had taken breaks in career, little did she know that it would be a game-changer for women's careers in India. Her first brush with corporates who summarily rejected the CV's of women on career breaks, taught her that the problem had to be approached differently. Saundarya did exactly that – she turned the challenge on its head and convinced corporates that women who had taken breaks were more likely to stay on the career track longer and were also a source of highly skilled personnel. The idea worked. Corporates that were hungry for good talent, decided to try out Saundarya's suggestion – engaging "Returning" women professionals. The very first recorded instance of a 'second career' program in Indian industry, took place in July 2006, under the stewardship of Saundarya. Over 400 women re-entered the workplace for the first time. Realising that corporates needed a sustainable strategy to engage not just returning women professionals but all women in their workplace, Saundarya began coaching and counselling organizations to develop a Gender Inclusion plan. Using research and analytics, she proved the rupee-value that organizations would accrue if they invested in women's careers. Not stopping with merely pitching this talent pool to companies, Saundarya went one step further and ensured that the women who got in touch with her also benefited out of the interaction. Creating an online platform called www.avtariwin.com in 2005, Saundarya developed a simple profiling method which helped the women assess their own employability and also their readiness to re-enter the workplace. She devised a Career-Enabler system that women could easily implement in their own homes and work-places that would prevent them from aborting their careers.

Saundarya travels extensively speaking in various conferences and forums on the benefits and importance of engaging with women on career breaks. She has conceptualized and designed several programs and training interventions to bring women back into the workplace. One such program is SEGUE Sessions, India's largest networking and career creation program for women returnees in India. More than 11 SEGUE Sessions events have so far been conducted in cities such as Chennai, Mumbai, Bangalore, Gurgaon, Hyderabad, Pune and Jaipur, benefiting over 10,000 women. Turning the attention of every corporate recruiter to this pool of immense talent was achieved by Saundarya through the medium of SEGUE Sessions.

Today, almost 10 years later, thousands of women have benefited out of the free counselling, career strategy creation and mentoring that Saundarya and her team give women everyday. The AVTAR I-WIN network has grown to about 40,000 women professionals and is a destination not only for women professionals who take breaks and then decide to re-create their careers, but also for organizations that want to leverage this gender inclusive talent strategy.

About the Authors

The benefit accrued for India, as a country, via this effort, is significant. More than 8000 women have re-entered the workforce thanks to the untiring efforts of Saundarya and her team. These 'second career women' have contributed an estimated Rs. 250 crores by way of economic participation. Several hundred organizations have filled critical roles with women – second career women. Many organizations such as Hindustan Unilever, Axis Bank, Godrej, Goldman Sachs, Axis Bank, Fidelity, HCL, Godrej, Philips and Microsoft have started their exclusive second career programs to welcome back women into the workplace.

The Indian Woman's contribution to the national GDP is at 17 per cent, much lower than the global average of 37 per cent, and the lowest among all 10 regions in the world. If India's women's workforce participation rate can be increased to 41 per cent by 2025, add an estimated Rs 46 lakh crore (\$700 billion) to India's GDP. One of the key requisites for this is to create an environment that respects and understands women and actively engages and encourages them to pursue their careers. This is the focus that Saundarya aims to create. A woman entrepreneur with a vision, Saundarya believes that women's careers will be one of the foremost success factors contributing towards India's development in the coming years. Her work has ensured that corporates, educational institutions, families and the women themselves are educated about the unique nature of women's careers and the steps to be taken to engage women professionals, in order to deliver all-round benefit.

*For relentlessly championing the cause of career re-entry opportunities for women who have taken breaks after marriage, childbirth or relocation, and for her indefatigable focus on women's workforce participation, **Dr. Saundarya Rajesh** was selected for the #100 Women Achiever's initiative by Government of India (Ministry of Women and Child Development) and had the opportunity to have lunch with the Hon. President of India and the Minister for W&CD at Rashtrapati Bhavan, Delhi on January 22nd 2016.*

***Dr. Saundarya Rajesh**
is the Founder-President, AVTAR Group*

Mr. Umasanker Kandaswamy holds a Masters in Public Administration from the University of Madras, is an Electronics & Communication Engineer and has done an MDP from Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. With 20 years of experience in Recruitment Consulting, Umasanker is a prolific headhunter, with over 1700 closures in his career, comprising of top management, senior management and reporting-to-board positions. One of the founder members of AVTAR and also the senior most member in the team, heading the business for AVTAR Career Creators with multiple branches across India with his team helping him achieve the desired results. Umasanker has spearheaded large mandate recruitment projects for a variety of industries. Sourcing of any kind comes naturally to Umasanker – he manages IT sourcing with as much versatility as Non-IT. Every year, Umasanker has, as a personal goal, been training young generation in the path of Leadership and has been invited by many colleges to be the Chief Guest to address the young graduates & post graduates. His passion for people is equaled only by his passion for music and cricket - Umasanker is a great singer and is a fast bowler. He is an active Rotarian and has been recommended as President Elect for the forthcoming year to manage Vocational Services and recently he got the Voice of District Award in Chennai.



***Mr. K. Umasanker** is the Co- Founder
AVTAR Career Creators & Chief Recruiting Officer*



Mr. Karthik Ekambaram, Vice President Diversity & Inclusion Consulting, AVTAR Group

Karthik is a Diversity and Inclusion specialist who has completed several seminal projects successfully for various organizations. An MBA, with over 19 years of experience in business analysis, talent strategy and workforce diversity consulting, Karthik has devised flexible working policies and created diversity-ready workplaces for several fortune 500 organizations. He brings with him a rich experience of managing a wide range of requirements for creating futuristic workplaces.

As one of India's pioneering workers in the field of Second Career programs, Karthik has been a key architect in the re-entry of women into the workplace. He has worked on many research studies on Diversity & Inclusion, Second careers for women, Generations in the workforce, Flexible working and Work-life balance. He has also conducted Diversity & Inclusion audits for a number of organisations.

Karthik has also co-authored several papers that have been published in Journals of National and International repute. He has been conferred the DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AWARD by World HRD Congress.

Mr. Karthik Ekambaram is the Vice President
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Ms. Anju Rakesh, Lead – Research & Analytics, FLEXI Careers India

Anju Rakesh, a CBSE national topper is a Computer Science Engineer from BITS, Pilani – one of the premier institutes of technical education in India. Research had always been her passion and in her career spanning 10 years has published several papers on women careers in national and international journals. In 2010, she was chosen to present her research paper at AAAI (American Association for Artificial Intelligence), a highly prestigious Artificial Intelligence conclave in Atlanta (USA). A listed co-inventor of two patents at the USPTO, Anju's tryst with 'gender analytics' started about half a decade back when the 3 Ms in her life – Marriage, Maternity and Motherhood reshaped her approach towards women's careers.



As the Lead – Research & Analytics at AVTAR, Anju (a second career woman herself) has played pivotal roles in several women centric studies undertaken in-house - on career intentionality of women professionals, on generational diversity amongst Indian Women Professionals and economic centeredness of Indian women, to name a few. She is also the focal point at AVTAR for Corporate India's largest gender analytics exercise – Working Mother & AVTAR Best Companies for Women in India study, which recently concluded its second successful edition.

Ms. Anju Rakesh is Lead – Research & Analytics at AVTAR

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