

Towards a towering career in telecom

Rubaba Dowla is a highly experienced leader with a successful track record of brand management, product innovation, service delivery and corporate communication. She has been instrumental in building Grameenphone as a premier brand. At present, she is working for Airtel Bangladesh as the Chief Service Officer & Head of mCommerce. She discusses the ins and outs of a career in the telecom industry with Shahriar Rahman from NEXT STEP.

N.S.: How dynamic is the corporate world of Bangladesh, and how does a young graduate cope with the stress of the job, especially in the telecom industry? When we are still studying, we are exposed to a lot of pressure before exams and tests. But you are given only a certain portion of content to study, so if you do your reading, you will feel confident. The reason why I am saying this is because when a graduate fresh out of uni starts out, he or she will feel like they have been cast into the vast ocean. They will find that what they have learned is totally different from the actual work they have to do. I think at that point he or she needs to understand how the whole system works. Also before anybody gets into a job, they need to understand the industry, the company, the roles, and the responsibilities. So after the initial shock, some people persist – they learn and adapt in the short span of time.

To me, there is no alternative to gaining knowledge. Do your research before you actually get involved in a job. Most people rarely do this. Make sure you do not confine yourself to the text only.

N.S.: What skill sets would give young graduates an extra edge in the work force?
Well I have to say getting things done on time is very important when working. In universities, you are given an assignment that needs to be completed within a month or so. In the corporate world, things need to get done right now. So it is always a race with time. Plus, you need to have common sense and believe in your guts. Skills like knowing Excel, PowerPoint, and other basic IT skills are now a must. On top of that you have to look out for what is happening around the world. For gathering knowledge, do not keep confine yourself to the Bangladeshi context. Go global. Especially in the telco industry, we are constantly looking for innovation. The price and services are more or less the same between all the operators. But in order to differentiate from your competitors, you need innovation.

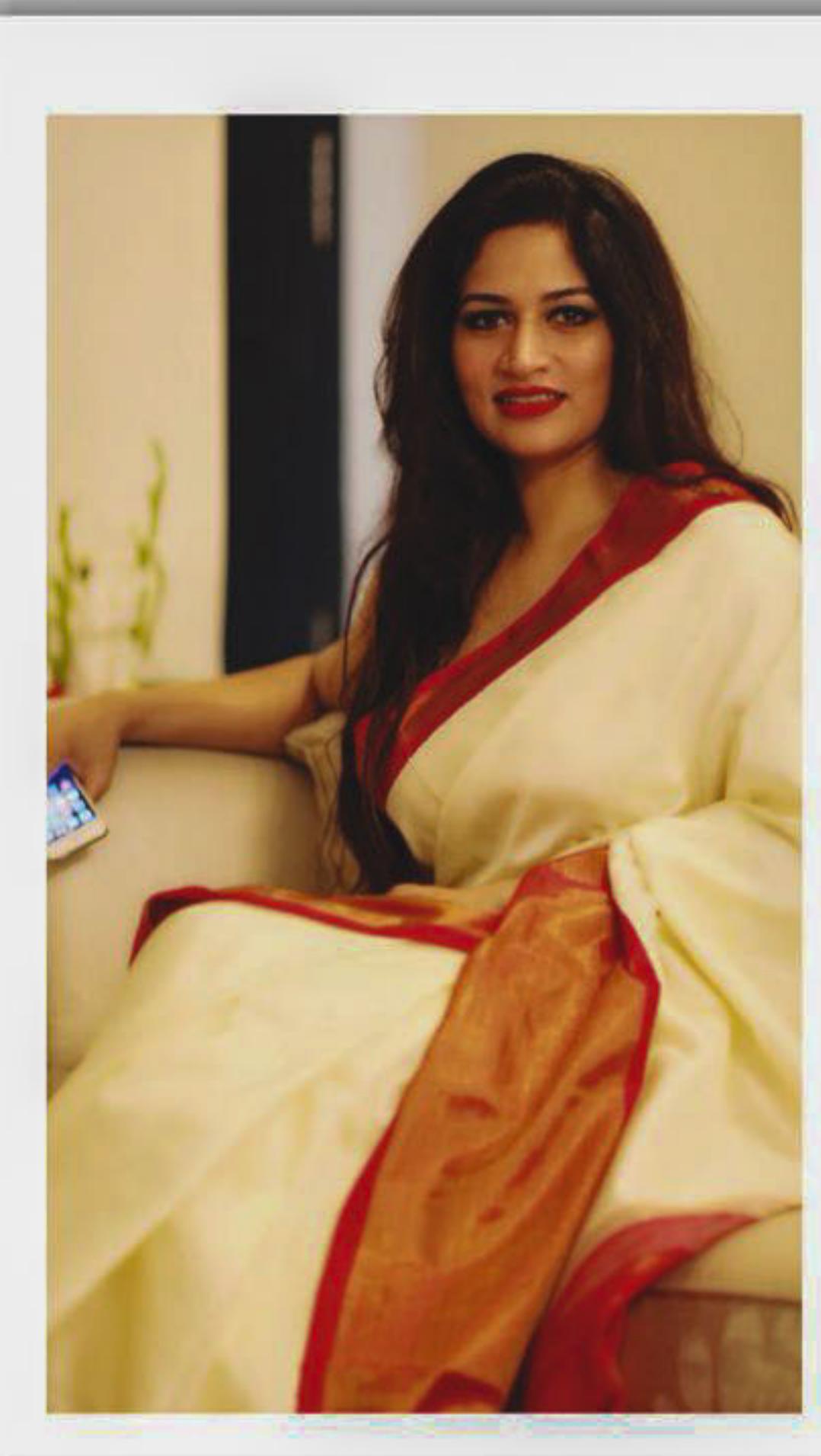
N.S.: You have been in the corporate world for a long time. On top of that you have been a very successful executive with key responsibilities. What are the main attributes that someone has to hold on to in order to climb the stairs of success in this arena? When you are working for a company, it is not only your skills, but also your attitude that plays a role in your success. If you are not able to work in a team then it might be over for you. No company will keep you even if you are the best resource. If you have an attitude problem, if you cannot work with others, if you cannot mix with others, then you are doomed, especially in telcos. One needs to understand what the company stands for and absorbs its values.

N.S.: Many telcos have gone through job cuts/downsizing in the recent past. For these, many find that the scope for career growth has narrowed, particularly in the operators. What do you think of that?

Actually it is not downsizing, rather the exact term should be "right-sizing". It means bringing the company to the level at which it can be run efficiently. Every telecom operator wants to operate in a manner where they have the most efficient workforce. So whenever there is a necessity to right-size the company, it will be done – whether by reducing or expanding the workforce. All this depends on the necessity, the long term yield and the focus of the company. The most important part is if you are performing, you do not need to be worried.

N.S.: Some say that the telco industry has reached saturation, meaning new job openings have reduced significantly. Furthermore, getting promotions and stepping up in this field has become difficult. Why is that?

There is no growth opportunity in telco is a total misconception. There are enormous opportunities in every telecom company – even now. Yes, the competition is very high. Maybe 10 years back the field was not that competitive, but today it is. Many, many boys and girls, both educated from local and foreign institutes are joining the force. All have to compete just as hard to make a mark. Growth opportunity is still



talented new recruits. How do these programs work out?

Yes, many telecom operators have these programs. At Airtel, we have regular as well as summer internship programs for students. One particular program, 'Young Leaders Program', admits young and exceptionally talented graduates with one or less than one year of experience. We screen the recruits thoroughly, looking for talented, innovative, team players who have a keen sense of ownership. In this program, we rotate the recruits between the key departments of Airtel to give them a holistic view of the entire operation. This program illustrates how each and every decision impacts all the departments of the company and its revenues.

N.S.: The telco industry is mostly male-dominated. Being a woman, you assumed several key positions in leading telcos. What has that been like?

When I joined this industry, there were only few women and almost none of them were in Marketing. But I never stopped because I was a woman; rather I kept learning. I did not get depressed or worried about what people might say or think. One thing a woman should decide on is: How do you want to lead your life? If you get married or have kids and want to raise your family – that is completely fine. Do not regret that. But if you want to continue your job, then give it a try because many women are working besides raising a family. In this case, family support is essential. I admit, safety and work environment are an issue, but these aspects are getting better. Especially in the MNCs and telcos, the work environment is actually quite positive. What I expect from society is to respect women and to treat

N.S.: Balance between work and personal life is key to a successful career. How one can achieve that, since working in the corporate world can be stressful and demands a lot of time and attention?

The way I see it, your work and your personal life are not two separate things; rather combined, these two define a person. In order to survive and thrive, you have to work – whether you work for yourself or you work for somebody else. But yes, when you have a very demanding job it gets difficult time to time to focus on personal aspects. Additionally, when you are passionate about the work that you do, it stops feeling like work, it becomes a part of life. Another practice that I do and recommend others to do is, never take your work home. At home, make sure you spare time for your family and friends. They deserve your attention. It refreshes you too. So basically, the balance is never 50-50. The average person meets it at 60-40 or 20-80. There is never a perfect balance.

there too. For example in Airtel, we do something called internal job posting. This helps to connect people with new jobs, which they might find interesting.

N.S.: Most of the telecom operators have grooming programs or accelerated training programs for the

them as equals to men. Since all the companies are now performance-driven, if a woman is capable, she is bound to succeed.

INTERVIEWED BY SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

The other side of academics

PARTICIPATED IN CLUBS AND COMPETITIONS



WOWED EMPLOYERS WITH MY EXTRACURRICULARS

recently conducted a seminar hosted by the International Association of Business Communicator's (IABC), at BRAC University. He provided an interesting overview of the job market for fresh graduates, revealing the common recruitment practice of setting CGPA cut-off points for positions. After the cut-off point came in the role of extra-curricular in setting individuals apart in a sea of fresh graduates. The overarching message was that extracurricular activities work well in helping individuals realise the work they can perform, and in building personalities through practical experience rather than undertaking them simply for the resume.

We cannot choose a career prospect relying on our studies or our hobbies solely. It must be a combination of the two. Extracurricular programs and internship programs offered by notable organisations obviously can help create a better resume and paint a clearer understanding of an individual's career aspirations. A good career prospect relies on passion and dedication, just as Bill Clinton once mentioned, "You want to change the world? You want to make an impact on people? You need a few things then and that does not involve your career or your GPA. You need to have to find a way to be brave. If you really want to do what you want to do, you need to find out a way to learn what it takes, even if it means failing 1,000 times before succeeding."

So necessity or option? Well, that is for each individual to decide.

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The author is an Associate in Content & Analytics at GradInsights, the career intelligence service of GradConnect. Please visit www.grad-insights.com for more articles.

More than just books

Grand opening of the new library

The British Council Bangladesh has inaugurated their new and refurbished library within the Fuller Road Office in Dhaka on 20 September.

Honourable Speaker of the Parliament, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury MP was the chief guest at the inauguration. Baroness Prashar, Deputy Chair of British Council, and His Excellency Robert W. Gibson, CMG, British High Commissioner to Bangladesh attended the event as special guests and delivered address notes.

The British Council Library has expanded their services into the digital arena by introducing e-membership facilities and by providing access to online information products, a vast collection of over 80,000 e-books and 14,000 e-journals, newspapers and magazines. Members will now be able to gain access to the new e-library from anywhere in the



world.

The British Council library in Dhaka has long been reputed as a cultural centre, an information hub and an activity venue for audiences, members and partners. The new services are also extended to benefit school teachers and administrators, English learners, Higher Education and Education UK faculty, alumni and students, participants of Society and Arts Programmes and regular families in Bangladesh. The new collections reflect British Council's core priority areas of English, Arts, Education and Society and their resources include publications and enriched material on Professional Development skills. The new library has a wide collection of classical and contemporary English literature, authoritative guides of management, business, IT and the Arts, GCSE and A level text books, DVD collections of films,

documentaries, British TV series and more.

Country Director Brendan McSharry, OBE said: "The opening of our newly refurbished and modernised library in Fuller Road is a fitting marker of the 60th Anniversary of the British Council in Bangladesh. Our new library is bigger and has more books, digital resources and study areas than ever before. It provides quick access to global information and gives an opportunity to meet and network together, and participate in a range of interesting talks and exhibitions."

Sarwar Reza, Manager of the British Council Library said: "Our new Library in Fuller Road, Dhaka is beginning its journey with a fresh look, enriched resources and improved services, where we focus on creating opportunity for the young audiences of Bangladesh by providing state-of-the-art access to



both physical and digital information, creating active networks and communities of interest, and by supporting our core areas of work in cultural relations – English, Arts, Education and Society. We will soon be launching our Chittagong Library in partnership with Chittagong Independent University.

Our libraries will be used as spaces of information and innovation – they will have in-built cafes and Wi-Fi access to help enhance customer privileges. The libraries will be safe and convening places for dialogue, cultural exchange, knowledge etc. experiences which are not readily available in most parts of Bangladesh. In short, these will be cool places for people to hang out at."

The library will be open 7 days a week, from 10am to 6pm on weekdays (Saturday to Thursday) and from 3pm to 7pm on Fridays.