

PARENTING EFFECTIVELY**LAILA KHONDKAR**

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A letter to young women professionals

Working in international development for almost two decades has been a truly enriching experience. While my work has taken me to places like Liberia, South Africa and Papua New Guinea, as well as slums and “chars” of Bangladesh etc., the people I met have been inspiring and helped shape me as a person. One of my mentors told me once to “Learn to pick my battles” — which has since remained with me, teaching me the importance of conserving and utilising energy wisely.

Sometimes, young professional women talk to me about their careers. I believe that each person’s journey is unique, and we all need to navigate through lives in our own ways. But as somebody who has been where you will be in a few years, here are my two cents to help you navigate through what lies ahead.

Be ambitious

Dream big and be courageous. Cultivate confidence and take initiatives. Trust yourself to achieve your dreams.

Work with passion

Exceling in any sector and making a meaningful contribution requires working with passion, commitment and sincerity. Choose a profession that you are really interested in instead of doing something for money or prestige, as then you will be able to give your best. Don’t consider gender stereotypes in education and career options; today, your possibilities are no longer limited.

Excel in what you do

Be excellent in what you do. There is no alternative to that. Make yourself indispensable through the quality of your work.

Be a lifelong learner

Continue to learn and grow by strengthening technical, management and leadership skills. Prioritise spending time and energy for your

own development. You may consider completing professional courses, attending conferences and making presentations, or self-study etc. but do not stop. Also, establish a network purposefully with professionals who matter in your field.

Combine vision with pragmatism

Have a long-term vision on what you want to do professionally, and also evaluate that for readjustments (if required) at regular intervals. Remain relevant in a world that is changing extremely fast. Take calculated risks. Grab opportunities when those come your way.

Do not try to be a superwoman

Do not fall into the trap of becoming a

“superwoman,” or being “perfect” in everything. Do not try to please everyone. This idea of being perfect is a myth. If and when you want to have a partner, choose someone who respects your dreams and does not feel threatened by your talent, and will participate equally in performing domestic responsibilities and child rearing (if you want to have children). Patriarchal society places disproportionate emphasis on women’s reproductive and caregiving responsibilities. Be assertive and educate your family so that they learn to value your aspirations and achievements in academic and professional life, and celebrate your success.

Be resilient

You will face many challenges in life and work. There are a lot of discriminatory laws and policies against women in Bangladesh and elsewhere. Many people have derogatory attitudes towards women, and they try to undermine us. Maintain focus even while going through the most difficult situation and face everything with professionalism and resilience. Maintain a support network in your professional and personal life. Nurture your own interests. Take care of your physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

Find contentment and meaning

Do not try to be “successful” according to societal standards. Create a life that has contentment, meaning, peace, joy and beauty. Learn to be perfectly content with your “imperfections.” This is liberating as well as a truly empowering experience. Once you are comfortable with yourself, there will be no need for validation by others, which will give you an opportunity to focus on what is really important.

To all the young women reading this piece, I send you good wishes for a wonderful academic and professional journey. In addition to your achievements, you will face disappointments in life; not all the decisions you make will bring expected outcomes. But own your decisions, learn from the experiences, and rebuild. Never forget that despite the broken promises and the noisy confusions of the world, life itself is precious and beautiful. You have a right to a meaningful existence. I hope you will do everything you can to realise your potential to the fullest.

By Laila Khondkar

Photo: LS Archive/Sazzad Ibne Sayed



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