

Your space • *looking back*

# My career, my marathon

By Leena Nair, HR honcho

**It's all about making the mind run the body. Never let the body tell the mind what to do. The body will always give up. It is always tired in the morning, noon and night. But the body is never tired if the mind is not tired. In my life, progress came when I dreamt big; and when I stopped listening to the voice that worried or critiqued.**



Is it just me or does everybody talk about the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon when it happens each year? What a high that is! Running marathons is a passion—I have been running the half marathon for years now. And as I sit to write about my leadership journey, I can't help but recognise the parallels between these two worlds. Somewhere along the marathon route, as my feet pound the pavement, it all comes together: the four cornerstones of running a marathon successfully and being a woman working her way to the top.

Dreaming big is the first step. It's all about making the mind run the body. Never let the body tell the mind what to do. The body will always give up. It is always tired in the morning, noon and night. But the body is never tired if the mind is not tired. In my life, progress came when I dreamt big; and when I stopped listening to the voice that worried or critiqued. Way back in 1992, when I was a fresh management trainee at HUL, I had already put down 'becoming the director of human resources' in my wish list (much to the amusement of my fellow trainees)! Visualise it, imagine it and believe it. Remember, what the mind believes, the body will accomplish!

Building endurance is the second step. While running, it helps if I mentally divide the race into sections since 21 km is a long way. 1,000 m, 10 km, halfway and then the whole hog. Once you finish one section, you aim for the next. It also helps to pace yourself correctly; if you start too quickly, you will never complete. There are many times in my life when I've had too many balls in the air—hectic schedules, children's

demands, unwell parents... Most times I just take a deep breath and remind myself to take it one day at a time and put all my energy into the present. It really helps and the pace eases up eventually. Remember that the average person cannot complete a 15 km walk, much less a run. So hang in there.

Meticulous training is the third step. The marathon is a culmination of year-round, back-breaking training. Getting professionally coached is a huge help. I owe my fitness success to my husband Kumar, who got me going, and Savio, my trainer, who ensures I do the right things; just as I owe my professional successes to my leaders and colleagues. In turn, I look for opportunities to pass on my learning to my team. This is quite contrary to the popular belief that women often sabotage other women's careers (the queen bee syndrome, or the mother-in-law syndrome). Remember to work with people who help you grow.

And last but not the least, try walking some of the distance. Periodic walking breaks will give your legs a change of pace. You won't add a whole lot to your finish time either. I am very particular about my downtime and ensure that I fill my life with other interests and passions, such as playing the keyboard (I must confess I am not great at it, yet), dancing the salsa and watching movies. Even in my career, there have been moments when I have walked slowly and carefully to ensure that my emotional, physical, spiritual and familial needs are fulfilled. So there you have it ladies, my personal mantra, up for grabs. Happy running!

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