

"Next generation women leaders will be more empowered as they have their own resources and will be givers"



KIRAN BEDI

The country's first lady to join the Indian Police Service (IPS), Kiran Bedi is known to go by the book even in the face of adversity. A former tennis champion, she came into the limelight during her stint as traffic police chief during the Asian Games in Delhi in 1982.

She was nicknamed Crane Bedi for her efforts to bring order to Delhi's chaotic traffic. When given the charge of IG Prisons, Tihar jail, Delhi, she turned the prison into a reform centre and her efforts were widely appreciated; she even won the Ramon Magtaysay Award for Government Service in 1994.

Bedi says that if women are to succeed in corporate India they must have a supporting family to back them up.

Why are there such few women leaders in corporate life today?

Bedi: I believe that the number of women is less today because we are witnessing the first generation of women leaders. The numbers will improve once the second and third generations come into play.

Next generation women leaders will be more empowered as they have their own resources and will be givers. The next generation women leaders will know what they want and will be sharper and more confident. Then we will have a lot more pedestals to put them on. The west already

has an Indra Nooyi and I believe that the day is not too far off when we can have our very own Indra Nooyi.

What are the challenges faced by women early in their careers?

Bedi: The biggest challenge that women face is finding a partner who is a companion and who lends them strength. I believe no amount of work is too difficult but the lady must have a place to comeback to where she can re-energise herself.

Unfortunately this is a support system that is not available for too many people and that is why we have few women leaders today. A home is a place for renewal and a woman must feel relaxed there and not become more stressed. The only people who have a right to demand her energy and time are her children.

There is no justification for any other member of the family including in-laws and her husband taxing her. This is what a woman needs and this is precisely what she doesn't get.

I remember the time when my child was unwell and I couldn't take time off work, my mother chipped in and said that she'd take care of my child so that I could go to work knowing that my child was well cared for.

I also believe that beyond office, networking is purely a man's world. Going to dinners after work is important for them but it is not urgent. They'd rather head back home. But as going back home for men isn't often as urgent, they prefer to do their networking then.

What is the kind of perspective that women lend to corporate decision-making as well as peer relationships?

Bedi: Men and women come to jobs with their own backgrounds. I feel that women lend a more holistic perspective to decision-making. It has been documented in research studies that in decision-making, while men look for structure, women look for utility. The former will add things that they think look OK but are not immediately needed. Women are stronger and also more understanding so

Kiran Bedi: Magtaysay award-winning cop.