

Khushboo Shinagare

Director – Sales and Marketing, Tropicool Car Gadgets

She is simple enough to relate to everyone she meets, and tough enough to overcome her insecurities to explore uncharted territories – quite literally. Amidst hordes of visitors at Prawaas 2019 in July in Mumbai, **Sarada Vishnubhatla** makes Khushboo Shinagare be heard over and above the din to catch the essence of her personality

“There is no glass ceiling in the automotive industry any more. Your children will grow up and move on. Your dream career is for you to make it a reality,” says Khushboo Shinagare, Director – Sales & Marketing, Tropicool Car Gadgets (P) Ltd. She can claim it because it has been her experience. Born in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh in 1981, Khushboo – the tomboy that she was – enjoyed the pampered single-child status for nine years until her brother was born. “I was a topper throughout in school. I was active in sports, debates and other activities. It was my mother, who as a homemaker, always told me to design my own career come what may. She gave up her own job to raise us,” shares Khushboo.

Having finished her post-graduation in computer science from Fergusson University, Pune, Khushboo shone in her first job at an American enterprise data protection company. Around the same time, her father – an IIT Mumbai graduate – left his senior position at an MNC to set up a company dealing in automo-

tive electronic products, which was registered as Tropicool Car Gadgets (P) Ltd. This was in 2002. Surprisingly, throughout her stint with the software company, Khushboo kept wondering about the family business and felt she would be happier working for Tropicool instead. “In 2008, I spoke to my father and he agreed for me to come on board. I was willing to learn from the scratch,” she recalls.

“But it was a shocker for me to leave a cushy job with a predictable routine and now travel constantly across India to meet our clients. Gradually, I started enjoying figuring out our customers’ needs, and began thinking about how to align with them better,” she adds. In the initial days, she did meet clients whose topmost thought was that she was merely an ‘inheritor’ while the real boss was still her father, whom they all knew extremely well. That is when she began introspecting on how to improve her own worth as a businesswoman.

“My biggest challenge was to gain respect from my own team in our company. Inheritance may look easy but is never so. Also, my suggestions on strategies, processes and relevant changes in the company were disregarded initially because I was younger than most of the team members. So, to prove my point I made a list of every single client, dealer, distributor, OEM client, end user of ours and decided to meet them personally and ask them for product feedback. In that process, I drove down about 10,000 km across India and met every client in 2014 and 2015,” she reveals.

It was tough because by then Khushboo had a one-year-old son. “My mother was against the idea, asking me – who does this?” Khushboo laughs before continuing, “But my father and my husband encouraged me. I learnt that Tropicool commanded great goodwill in the market but there was no connect. This shook up our team and my father threw an immediate challenge at me to now make the much-needed connect with our clients,” she elaborates. The basic rule, she says, is to listen to the people. She adds, “They do not want you to just sell them products. They are happier if you make that small change in the product that they have suggested,” Khushboo confides. Her personal measure of success as a businesswoman is directly proportionate to the sparkle she sees in her son’s eyes. ♦

