



Being a successful woman in a man's world

Especially in an industry like wine, which is typically considered to be a male domain

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I began my journey in the [AlcoBev industry](#) the day I gave up my dreams of occupying a corner office in a Fortune 500 company. I made a career pivot and took a leap of faith, diving into an industry which has traditionally been male dominated and frowned upon in India. I was ambitious, hardworking and a rank outsider, but I had the grit and determination to persevere and pursue my passion in [wine](#).

The hard work paid off, and in 2016, I became the most decorated wine professional in India, bestowed with the world's most prestigious wine title, Master of Wine (MW) with a present count of only 409 MW's across 30 countries. I'm the first and only Indian to have done so, but I am sure I won't be the last.

My message to all the women in India's F&B industry is that they need not curb their ambitions and should tap in to their infinite potential to satiate their ambitions. Also, their career choices need not be reined in to gender stereotypical roles as more women are being embraced into professions such as bartending, sommelier, mixology; that we have known to be male-dominated. A study conducted in the [USA](#) among 208 blind tasters suggested that women are more attuned to discernible differences in styles of wines, making them more accurate tasters than men. Another study conducted in New Jersey suggested how women in their reproductive age or during

pregnancy, could identify smells with greater accuracy than men of similar age. All these studies dispel the notion that that gender, age or one's socio-marital status would be a barrier to success in the world of wine.

It is always a joy to witness an increasing number of women occupying leadership positions today in the F&B space. Even as Masters of Wine, there are now 143 women MW's; a healthy 34 percent of the entire group worldwide.

Here are some lessons learnt and my 7 Cs to succeeding as a woman in a male-dominated industry:

1. Credibility: To paraphrase [Johnnie Walker](#), keep learning. I advise women to invest in becoming domain experts in their line of work and in their personal growth to establish themselves as leaders in the industry. Build a solid foundation to stand on and keep building on it. The 'fake it till you make it' approach collapses under scrutiny. I strongly advocate getting qualified, acquiring knowledge and a solid grounding in practicing the profession.

2. Confidence: Women must wear their confidence on their sleeve and take credit for goals accomplished by them. I realised early-on that people treat you the way you allow them to. It pays to be your own champion at work. Too many women hold back to their own detriment. Never forget that you too have an important contribution to make and have earned a place on the table. So, never talk yourself down or apologize for your opinion.

3. Communicate: I cannot stress more on this point. As a woman leader, you need to communicate effectively and clearly. Regardless of gender, every workplace might have toxic colleagues and bullies to deal with, and you need to be assertive, polite and direct in tackling difficult situations. Sometimes you might need to insist that your voice is heard or that you are given an opportunity. Never give up on a chance because others denied you a chance to participate. So, speak up and speak out

4. Create your own space: In the initial years, I did work with various leading F&B and hospitality companies, but my career took wings once I branched out on my own. In little over a decade, I built ground-up, a unique beverage company with diversified entrepreneurial ventures in wine and beverage

education, consultancy, consumer research, awards and retailing, and reinvented myself, as an award-winning broadcaster, a wine writer, commentator and sought-after international speaker. The journey, I'll admit, has been challenging, but exhilarating. I encourage all women to take a risk and plunge into the world of entrepreneurship. Finding your own feet and being true to your inner aspirations is more rewarding than any job title.

5. Collaborate not compete: One of the key Cs to my success has been the desire to collaborate, rather than adopt a 'male' attitude of competing aggressively. Instead, being inclusive and consultative will help the entire industry to grow together, rather than focusing on a narrow, personal goal. I also believe that women need to support women, right from encouraging young aspirants who wish to make a mark, to serving as a role model and mentor in the industry. My team comprises a majority of women, all leaders in their own right, and nothing is more exhilarating than seeing each other succeed each day.

6. Camaraderie / coolness: A healthy camaraderie within your network of work is essential, and so is an attitude of coolness. When I'm with the men, I like to feel like I'm one among them; sharing the banter and 'chilling' with the boys. This way, you can build rapport and trust and be part of the inner circle gang. Try not to take offence when it's not necessary but also establish healthy boundaries and be ready to push back if they are crossed.

7. Cut out negativity: You've made it so far, why let negativity ruin it for you? There will always be someone who tries to pull you down or undermine your abilities. But as a woman who has now created her own domain expertise, I choose to ignore and walk my path. As a woman entrepreneur in the AlcoBev industry, I had to build my reputation, my business and manage my family. I have the opportunity for me to share my knowledge, my passion and my understanding of it with others. I remain committed to making important and meaningful contributions to the wine industry, representing the country as the wine ambassador on the world diaspora, always ensuring that India has a strong voice at wine tables around the world. There is simply no time for negativity in my life.

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