

'Entrepreneurship is all about knowing what risks to take and what to avoid'

ENTREPRENEURSHIP is gender neutral. However women have natural strengths in management," proclaims Hema Hattangady, 42, the MD of Conzerv Systems, maker of digital meters, which has carved a niche for itself in the market.

Hema says that women can keep egos in check, are practical, resourceful, make quick decisions and hence make better managers. Entrepreneurship on the other hand is about judgement, intuition, experience and intelligence, she adds.

Hema joined Conzerv in '89. It was then a family firm selling electrical meters. She was given small roles in various functions till '92 when the marketing agency through whom they sold insisted that Conzerv be merged with them. Conzerv declined and Hema was in front line selling digital metres till a sales force was set up. In '96, with sales at Rs 1 crore, losses having eroded all the net worth and morale at an all time low, Hema took over as MD. She has since taken the business

from Rs 1 crore to Rs 65 crore in '05-06. Conzerv today has over 23,000 customers with 123 dealers in 22 countries. It has 8 country representatives in south east Asia, Middle east and USA. The company enjoys a market share of 40% in digital meters in India.

What is entrepreneurship? Hema says entrepreneurship is creating something out of nothing. There is an idea, one sees its potential and makes it a reality. What then is management? Hema has an answer to that too. Management has some givens—you optimise resources to get best results. Could one say argue that her success was about management rather than entrepreneurship.

After all was there anything remotely entrepreneurial about Hema's success? Hema defends herself and asserts herself as an entrepreneurial success. Hema says entrepreneurship in context of Conzerv was changing a company selling boxes to creating a company offering energy saving solutions. Point taken.

Hema is considered by many of her peers to be a success—entrepreneurial and managerial. Conzerv's products are certified in many countries of the world. It is the first Indian metering company to get European and American certification. Conzerv is also today visited by groups of students from business schools in the US and Singapore as a model of entrepreneurship.

Conzerv has large corporates such as Pepsico, Unilever, Taj and Lafarge as global customers. Most customers recover their investment in less than one year through savings in energy bills. The com-

pany focuses only on industrial and commercial users of power. The CAGR has been 35% in sales and profits in the last 5 years and annual growth rates range from 35-40%. During the last three years, Conzerv has grown from Rs 25 to Rs 40 crore and will go to Rs 65 crore this year ('05-06). Conzerv's exports have picked up and with the need to conserve power going up every day, the company aims to hit Rs 100 crore by '07-08.

Ashok Hattangady is director - technology development, Conzerv

Systems. And Hema says the success of Conzerv is due in large measure to innovative technological solutions from Ashok.

He also happens to be her husband. So does the husband have a role in wife's success?

Ashok says that husband cannot be an overbearing 24x7 person. He must provide freedom and space. And there is need to let go. Did we hear someone say that behind every successful woman is a man!!!

"Hema has vision combined with efficient execution, drive, initiative, focus, energy and compassion," says T Thomas,

chairman, Conzerv Systems. Mr Thomas had been at the helm of Hindustan Lever and Glaxo. Ashok says "Hema is both an entrepreneur as well as manager." He adds she can take risks and enter new areas. She has gut feel for business. She has entrepreneurial spirit. But Hema also has finely honed her managerial instincts too, he points. And management is important. It is about putting systems in place, Ashok adds. And without proper management entrepreneurship can fail, he points out.

But isn't entrepreneurship about taking risk and embracing change? And aren't women risk averse? Again women do seem to resist change, don't they? Hema has ready made answers. She says, "Entrepreneurship is about knowing what risks to avoid and what risks to take. Women are practical and result focused. They see things as means to end and do not even see things as change, whereas men could be comfortable in status quo."

That was pretty convincing. But then why do men dominate business. Hema says "Men dominate because of the ecosystem of domination by physically stronger species." Stereotypes still rules she complains. But she says that in the new genre of industry — financial and IT based — there are no stereotypes and women can succeed. But she admits that even in European boardrooms, there are barely a few women. "The glass ceiling is even thicker in developed countries."

Hema's final advice to women entrepreneurs — "Think Big, Focus, Never Give Up."

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