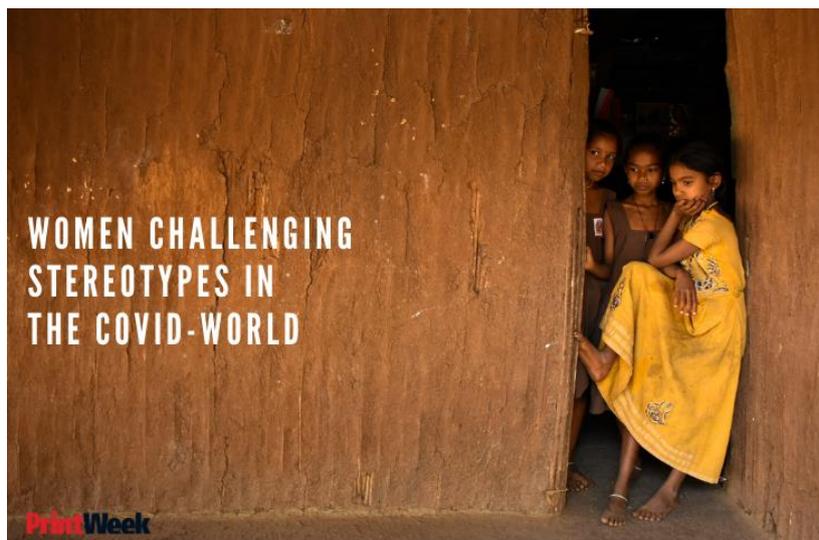


# Women challenging stereotypes in the Covid-world

Charmiane Alexander

*Our industry has an overall 90:10 gender split in leadership positions. The ratio is improving in pre-media, publishing and media. Can we do more to address the gender imbalance in the industry?* [First published in Printweek, March 8, 2021]



Aarti Laxmanan, Uflex Limited



## Gender inequality and the pandemic

Gender inequalities have always existed, but what the pandemic did was to bring out conversations to highlight these inequalities. Women have played an important role, but it largely remained unacknowledged, and now with the pandemic, companies have taken steps

to ensure that they can provide tools that will support them. But of course, this is just one aspect, where we are speaking about women in the corporate world. There are countless women, who as the primary caregiver of their family, lost their livelihood and were left in the lurch due to the pandemic, and this is still left unaddressed.

### **Facing challenges**

The transition of communication with our stakeholders (which increased manifold during the pandemic) from conventional methods to digital mediums came as a challenge but we adapted to it in a short period of time. As a working mother, who shoulders a large part of caregiving responsibilities, the last one year was replete with work running simultaneously with online schools, added educational responsibilities and household workload. Making sure that all fronts remained smooth was definitely a big challenge

### **Work-life balance**

The world that we live in today has blurred all the boundaries of work and personal life. As women, a lion's share of personal commitments lies with us, but that is no reason to neglect work, and vice-versa. It is important that we set these boundaries and learn to manage time in ways that will keep things thriving on both fronts.

### **Message to the industry**

The packaging industry was one of the few industries that couldn't be shut down during the pandemic because we are one of the essential services. The uncertainty gave rise to new ways of working and channelising productivity. The resilience that every person showed during the pandemic has been remarkable. But it does not stop here. Although the vaccines have been introduced, there's still a long way to go and we have to keep the momentum going.

### **Farheen Sana Hodekar, Jayna Packaging**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Women have been oppressed by society for centuries. We try to act as a modern, open-minded society but when it comes to gender equality, we are far behind. In this patriarchal society, most men don't want to work with women or can't stand the fact that a woman can walk with them shoulder to shoulder. Because of this male chauvinist attitude, the majority of women have lost their jobs and had to face economic crises.

### **Facing challenges**

Initially, when the pandemic started, I was concerned about how it's going to be because all of a sudden everything was shut and we were trapped in our homes. It was difficult to manage all my work from home as it was a new concept for me. Conducting online meetings, coordinating with clients via calls was a completely different process altogether. But as time passed, I got familiar with it and learnt that things aren't difficult if we are enthusiastic about our work.

### **Work-life balance**

In these recent times, managing the balance between work and life has become tough. Although money/career is an important part of my life, I believe my personal life is as important as my work life. Likewise, if we stop enjoying our lives, then there is no point in all the hustle that we are doing. That's why, whenever I get free time, I spend it with my mom and with myself. At the end of the day, one's goal should be living life rather than just making money.

### **Message to the industry**

I just want to convey what Sheryl Sandberg once said: "We need women at all levels, including the top, to change the dynamic, reshape the conversation, to make sure women's voices are heard and heeded, not overlooked and ignored."

### **Hema Java, Java Paper Group**

#### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

I don't agree that women are more vulnerable. In fact, our organisation has almost 50% of women employees. We have seen them rise to the occasion and adjust to the work from home with extreme ease.



For me personally, the initial few months were a bit odd as we were not accustomed to being home 24x7 and working from home to be the primary and only working style. But being a creature of habit, I guess, I'm well accustomed to the work from home format now. To

overcome the challenges, what helped me was making a to-do list every morning, practising some self-care on Sundays and setting up a dedicated workspace even at home.

### **Work-life balance**

There is no point in work if there is going to be no play after. So, I've managed to try to stick to a 7-7:30 pm deadline for work, so that there can be a balance. There are some customers who would even request a call post that time and even some on Sunday since the normal parameters of working hours were blurred during the covid lockdown, but I've respectfully declined and tried to stick to regular working hours even during these times.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

One of the funniest stories I heard was when a colleague said that her children were extremely keen for her to return to work as now due to work from home both parents were at home all day, making life for the children harder since they couldn't fool around as much or skip studying for a few hours.

### **Message to the industry**

My message would be to try to retain as many jobs as possible even during these difficult times. In order to further this goal, we should also try to make our systems as digitised as possible so as to promote working from home wherever possible until the vaccines are received and some normalcy exists.

**Jo Francis, *Printweek*, UK**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

On the positive side, hopefully, the fact that so many companies have been forced to adopt flexible working/working from home will mean that flexi-working will be something that's available to more women in the future as a matter of course.

### **Facing challenges**

I've been incredibly fortunate to remain employed and busy throughout. But it's been very stressful worrying about whether family, friends and industry colleagues will be okay. At one point I realised that the pandemic had created a sort of insidious blanket of worry that was draped over me all the time. I am trying to shrug off this blanket by making sure I appreciate

the joy of small things – at the moment that is welcome signs of spring and birdsong getting louder! I'm also trying to make sure that every week I have a joy-replenishing chat with someone, for no other reason than to have a nice chat and a bit of headspace. It feels like the large-scale mental health impacts of the whole situation will be long-lasting.

### **Work-life balance**

It's now week 51 of working from home for me, so that balance has gone completely out of the window. But I do try to make time to at least get up and look out of the window on a regular basis... I am a news junkie and always thinking about what the printing industry angle might be. That's just the way I am.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

During our daily team catch-ups on Teams, I have been entertained by an array of pets and children making occasional appearances. Nora the dog is a particular star of the show.

### **Message to the industry**

The pandemic has shone a light on the incredible adaptability of our industry, and the absolutely essential nature of various types of printed matter. It has also brought to the fore that old adage "control the controllables" and try not to worry about things you can't control (easier said than done at the moment, I realise).

### **Jyoti Mishra, HB Fuller**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

In India, like in other countries, women who are under the vulnerable employment group have been severely hit. Reports say the pandemic has resulted in greater loss of employment and increased insecurity among women across the world. Some industries, like retail, hospitality, and the services industry, which tend to employ a large share of women, have been immensely affected. Yet, there has been rapid responsiveness and adaptation to the new normal. Agility, widespread adoption of remote interactions across life and work, new ways of working and digital solutions, and the need for an all-hands approach to economic

recovery can be seen as a strong lever for more job opportunities for women.

### **Facing challenges**

In the beginning, and being a working mother of a toddler, the major challenge was juggling work and home responsibilities. I used to wake up early or work late nights to balance and dedicate some time during the day to my child. At the end of the day, my husband and I looked at our working agendas and agreed on who can play the dual role the next day. Overall, I had to learn to multitask in a more efficient way and I am grateful for the flexibility my company offers — work from home, adjust schedules, leverage IT tools and remote help — and, of course, the family support throughout these crisis times.

### **Work-life balance**

One of the most important things is to set boundaries so that I am not taking on the extra burden, be it office work or household chores. It also is useful to become more organised in managing work-life balance, like setting priorities and creating a flexible schedule.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

One of my colleagues was making an extra effort to buy an electronic device to support online classes for one of his friend's sons who didn't have access to IT equipment.

### **Message to the industry**

At HB Fuller, we have embedded respect for human rights into our policies and workforce programmes. We believe this integrated approach reflects our long-standing commitment to improving the lives of employees and communities where we operate and allows us to manage our business behavior in the right way. Our values are guided by the principles of respect, diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity.

### **Madhumita Chakravarty, Bobst**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

The United Nations released a report on the effects of Covid-19 on women and it was an

interesting read. I have heard stories where women teachers were asked to quit or work on half-pay since only the male teachers were allowed to continue due to commuting ease and the lockdown challenges. I think it is unfair since men are now shouldering equal responsibilities at home while women are doing so at work.

### **Facing challenges**

Communicating with our customers without meeting them was a challenge. We were forced to find alternatives and were pushed to come up with new ways for our team members to work remotely. It has been a great lesson and has altered our way of working today.

On the home-front, I tried my best to avoid my parents going out, so it was difficult to balance work and arranging groceries and essentials. We did not have our house help so we had to manage all the work by ourselves by assigning daily tasks to each family member. The pandemic pushed us out of our comfort zones and made us realise that all of us have a certain level of resilience to help us come out of any situation positively.

### **Work-life balance**

I think I owe the ability to balance work and personal life to my employers and organisation. We have fixed working hours that begin at 8am. I begin my day with a fresh mind and am able to get my tasks done within the week with no spill-over to the weekends. We are also encouraged to take leaves to travel or spend time with family so that helps keep our mental state healthy and positive

### **Inspiration from a colleague**

One of our colleagues went on a round trip from Maharashtra to Nepal on his Royal Enfield bike. Once he was back home, shared many interesting and adventurous stories that brought a smile to my face.

### **Work-life balance**

I feel the pandemic has made everyone realise the importance of good and clean packaging. I have seen companies expand in spite of the challenges and it proves the potential and importance of this industry. Innovative solutions will definitely be a game-changer in the years to come.

**Madhura Mahajan, PVG's College of Engineering and Technology**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Family is always perceived as being separate from work and is seen as the responsibility of

women. So when the pandemic shut down the industries, businesses, schools etc., women were hard hit, with additional daily responsibilities and a host of new challenges to their work/life arrangements. On the other hand, many women who had jobs in the field of agriculture, manufacturing, utilities, and food services were severely affected. Women could either give up jobs or lose them due to a total halt in the activities. So yes, gender inequalities take a toll on the personal and family economy of a woman.

### **Facing challenges**

The pandemic disrupted the normal college life for students and teachers. Schools and colleges were shut down and the lockdown changed the teaching-learning methodologies. We were initially confused and concerned about how to maintain the connectivity with the students to support the teaching-learning process, but slowly, we began exploring new ways. The online teaching method was successful for the first six months, but the learning was a bit languished. Teachers had to then further explore innovative ways to keep the students engaged.

We upgraded ourselves to help students online which helped us to network better. We were able to connect with alumni in India and abroad. We also started the Printing Alumni Mentoring Initiative for our students to face the pandemic with determination and positiveness. Challenges are unstoppable, what matters is to convert them into an opportunity to keep moving forward.

### **Work-life balance**

I am passionate about my work and I know I can do it anywhere and at any time. I strongly believe that a good diet can give me the energy to work and keep me positive. Technology saves me a lot of time. I update my Google Calendar with the entire week's agenda and engagements. I also love reading biographies, self-motivating books. A long chat with my family or a debate with my son refreshes me. It also keeps me updated with current affairs

### **Inspiration from colleague**

A good friend of mine and a colleague named Subodh Kulkarni told me that people have become busier as things have started to get back to normal. I hope in the days to come, my students will get back to a regular work-culture with good opportunities for employment springing up.

### **Message to the industry**

Hope has become a rare commodity. We need to develop our qualities. We have faced many challenges in the past and hopefully will let us do it with a sense of ease.

**Nazreen Wadia, Arrow Digital**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

The pandemic has triggered gender inequality. Women are more vulnerable to the pandemic, as we see more women in the field of entertainment, tourism, art/culture and retails. These are the areas where a pandemic has hit the hardest. They are also the most prevalent frontline people and as such most vulnerable.

### **Facing challenges**

We are all going through a world crisis where everyone has faced the storm in their own ways. Positive attitude and handling situations as they come are ways to handle these unpredictable situations. Spend more time on internal training and innovation, as well as working on new technologies and applications.

### **Work-life balance**

2020 has thrown a lot of curveballs at every one of us. Still, if working is your passion, you can easily manage a work-life balance. It just needs some adjustments and you need to prioritise your responsibilities at each level.

### **Message to the industry**

Invest in green technologies and help the environment and future generations to stay safe and feel nature.

### **Radha Ramesh, Dhote Offset Technokrafts**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Over the course of the last decade, we have seen a shift in women's role in the workplace.

They have gained an equal footing in terms of salaries or role. However, the pandemic has brought a unique challenge wherein the women are now required to take the burden of housework and professional work equally, making it difficult to balance and prioritise. So, there have been instances where the woman has to sacrifice her career in the wake of her household responsibilities.

### **Facing challenges**

A big challenge was the timing, since working online entailed long hours. There were other challenges like network issues, not getting the team available at the same time, and so on. However, I was lucky to have not faced many challenges.

### **Work-life balance**

One of the habits I follow is to read a book daily before going to bed, no matter what. Also, I started learning a new language and took up sketching.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

When my colleagues pointed out how they could spend more time with their families and bond with them.

### **Message to the industry**

Tough times don't last but they make you stronger and wiser.

### **Raiza, Komori India**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Women participation in the industry is abysmally low at the key positions. There are many young and talented women waiting to find a place in the industry, and pandemic has hampered those expectations.

### **Facing challenges**

My organisation has been very supportive. We were given training in the idle period of

lockdown which boosted my confidence. We spent three months skilling ourselves and enhancing our knowledge which prepared us for post-pandemic effects.

### **Work-life balance**

I like cooking, it allows me to spend some quality time with myself and has a rejuvenating effect. It helps me to focus on my work and releases all the negativity.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

There are many fun stories to share but the trend of people getting married in a pandemic is fun but good for the print business.

### **Message to the industry**

We need to bridge the gap of gender inequality by offering good opportunities especially at higher positions, so that more women leaders in the print can make the way for others. Merit should play a key role but for that, you need an open door.

## **Rashmi Ravinarayan, Trigon Digipack**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

I don't find gender inequalities in today's job culture. I feel both genders were equally affected by this pandemic.

### **Facing challenges**

As packaging designers, we create many packaging mock-ups. Also, colour plays an important role while printing. Due to the pandemic, I was working from home, so seeing the colours or physical mockups was difficult. My colleagues who stayed close-by to Trigon helped me. They looked into these things and ensured everything was executed well.

### **Work-life balance**

I usually spend a lot of time at work. Due to the lockdown, I got to spend time with my family along with managing work equally.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

Many people who worked together for a long time had not realised they lived close to each

other. But due to the pandemic, they began to travel together. Some new bonds definitely brought a smile to everyone's face.

### **Ritu Bhargava, HBD Paper Convertors**



#### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Existing gender inequalities are aggravated in times of suffering, and women are disproportionately affected. However, Covid-19 has had a universally negative impact on everyone. It would be unfair to compare the suffering of women with men. Entire households were economically impacted, and homemakers and working family members were impacted differently.

#### **Facing challenges**

As an entrepreneur, the pandemic affected me in the same way as any of my male colleagues. The initial two-three months were difficult as sales and revenue dropped drastically. Yet, we had to maintain our staff and factory employees. For a short period, conflicts with labour unions also persisted, but many employees came forward to provide food and shelter to migrant workers. Eventually, the challenges of our staff were addressed through community mobilisation, and it was heartening to see people from different walks of life come together. Regarding the challenges of the business, we held regular online negotiations with our clients to minimise losses and assured each other of continued association regardless of demand and supply.

#### **Work-life balance**

Initially, it was hard to manage work, which was any way in crisis mode, and then balance it with additional home duties. However, friends and family shared similar stories, so there was some solace in knowing that we were all in the same boat. As a result, clients, colleagues, and employees were patient and understanding as all were trying to achieve this balance.

#### **Inspiration from colleague**

In April 2020, during the lockdown, my team members in Dandeli, Karnataka cooked large batches of food and distributed packets to destitute workers and orphans. This was a great initiative undertaken by my team on their own and was featured in the regional media.

### **Message to the industry**

Risk is a part of the business. Do not get bogged down due to these. Instead consider them as opportunities to do things creatively, innovatively. Next, always bring honesty to your interactions and work. It is an invaluable trait to you and your enterprise. Strategically, put in time and effort to conduct root-cause analysis, and create an atmosphere that encourages the inclusion of employees in the company's vision and mission as primary stakeholders. As a team leader, strive to decentralise authority, delegate responsibility and demand accountability.

### **Shyamala V, Eenadu Press**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Yes, I would say women were more vulnerable during the pandemic because of the barriers they had to cross, including household responsibility and transportation safety, among others. The women's global employment itself is less and when it comes to layoffs or resource reduction, women are the most affected, as we still see women employment as a secondary income to the family.

### **Facing challenges**

As press is an essential service, I used to come to the office during the lockdown period as well. Initially, we were all in a panic, but the management took the essential steps like sanitising our buses, social distancing, making masks compulsory and so on. We were supplied with free ayurvedic and homoeopathic medicines. By following preventive measures, we were able to manage at the workplace without getting affected by the virus. The pandemic taught us the importance of personal hygiene and the importance of cleanliness eventually leading to following 5S at the shopfloor.

### **Work-life balance**

A career woman needs a lot of support from family, workplace management and their policy that empowers women to pursue their dreams. I would like to thank my family, especially my mom and Eenu for their support and encouragement.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

The pandemic created a difficult situation in many ways for many of us. But it has been a little different for a few who got the opportunity to work from home. One of my friends was planning to quit her job due to her maternity, but as this lockdown created an opportunity for work from home, she was able to continue the work.

### **Message to the industry**

This is the time for the print industry to undergo disruptive innovation, such as blending the digital ecosystem with the conventional method of print rising to Print 4.0 as a revolution of industry 4.0. Focusing on this would allow us to sustain the print business for a longer period.

### **Sonal Sheth, Daya Printograph**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

The pandemic has been devastating all around. But yes, initially during work-from-home days, it was the double duty for women, a jostle between time-management vs new format of workstyle. In general, women have borne the economic and social fallout of Covid-19. There has been a disproportionate increase in women's unemployment compared to men as industries overrepresented by women, food service, retail and entertainment, has been hit the hardest.

### **Facing challenges**

The first challenge was the workforce and the second was the revival of the business as we cater to capital goods machinery which is last in priority for investment for anyone, as everyone was facing financial crunches. We started with identifying our strengths — looking out for gaps and reinventing our business model. Preventive health measures were put into

practice as building up the confidence of our employees was of foremost importance. The company has also turned around its manufacturing strategy to lean structure. Also, customised solutions for special need equipment has given us a lot of edge over competitors.

### **Work-life balance**

We should not forget other important aspects of life in the wake of work. Sometimes, you need to introspect, kick aside everything, get some air and just relax and enjoy nature. The pandemic has certainly taught us the importance of life in totality, other than work.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

One of my colleagues quit her job to balance her life and turned a new leaf. During the pandemic, irrespective of fear of contracting the virus, she formed a group of youngsters, started collecting rations from locals and freely distributed them to migrant workers and provided shelter to the homeless. Later, she reskilled herself and joined a premier school to teach specially-abled children. That's a life worth living.

Message to the industry. Our industry hardly represents a sizable percentage of women. We need to have a platform where more women are attracted to join the industry. There are definitely more women in support functions like QC, R&D, testing labs, and a few in sales and marketing, etc rather than in core manufacturing or in the production line. Thus, women should be encouraged to study STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). As more and more women study STEM, there will be a shift. At the entry-level, large printing houses need to create strong links with schools and colleges to attract young women into the sector. At industry events, the panels are usually dominated by men. It is just not cool anymore. We need diversity... now.

### **Sukriti Mendiratta, Cosmo Films**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

Women have traditionally been more vulnerable to crises than men and Covid-19 was no different. Along with working to contribute to the household, they also have the

responsibility of running the house and are also primary caregivers. Due to the lockdown, women suffered the most as their roles meant additional burden and responsibility. Due to this, many women opted out of the workforce. This will cause far-reaching economic effects on women. More women got hit during this pandemic because the industries which got impacted the most had a big percentage of women working for them.

This included industries like tourism, food service, retail, entertainment and the informal sector of household help. According to one figure, 40% of all employed women, 510 million globally, work in hard-hit sectors, compared to 36.6% of men. I see some of the global socio-economic outfits working to tackle the far-reaching impact. This includes direct income support to women, support for women-owned and led businesses and support for informal workers. But I am yet to see such mobilisation being initiated by local governments.

### **Facing challenges**

The first few months of lockdown were taxing for most working women because it meant balancing full-time employment with online classes for kids coupled with reduced availability of outside household help and the increased anxiety that the pandemic brought about.

For me personally, I found having a couple of extra hours that were saved because of the commute, allowed me to spend that time on my physical and mental well-being. I started most of my mornings with meditation and exercise on the terrace in the company of my plants and birds. Having the mornings to myself helped me prepare myself for the packed days ahead.

### **Work-life balance**

I maintain the work-life balance by giving my 100% to the task at hand. So, when at work, it's work time only and vice-a-versa. We, as a family, also take frequent holiday breaks to connect with nature and create some fond memories.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

I have one interesting story of my own. My entire family contracted the virus, including my three-year-old son and old parents staying with us. So, the initial apprehension about how to isolate my son and monitoring parent's parameters on a daily basis was a challenge with everyone exhibiting independent symptoms. My parent's complete denial of the situation also added to the woes. Later, my mother had to be hospitalised. But now that we have gotten over it, thinking of the days gone by brings a smile to my face. The sigh of relief that came in the aftermath of the episode was worth the trial.

### **Message to the industry**

Times like these come to teach us all. The taste of getting back to basics and stories of humanity, hope and helping hands that came to the fore in these times should not go in vain.

## **Sulochana Pathak, Weener Empire**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

We know for sure now that women have been affected a lot; in terms of job losses, pay cuts as well as domestic violence. This goes to show how women are still vulnerable in terms of getting a permanent seat on the table. Sure, there should be policies to mend the gap as swiftly as possible, but the one thing that cannot be stressed enough is bringing women to decision-making places. That's when we can get a diverse perspective and fair representation. This has become more urgent than ever.

### **Facing challenges**

Honestly, looking around, I think I was quite lucky and privileged. A lot more people had it worse. But sure, getting the hang of working remotely, especially in an industry like ours which thrives on in-person exchanges, was a challenge. Eventually, you figure out a way to cope up with the change.

### **Work-life balance**

This is a very fine balance which is necessary to keep a check on mental health. For working wives and mothers it has been the most challenging, and probably, this would go on to help us rethink gender-defined roles and redistribute them a bit. For me, I followed a lot of online blogs to make sure I don't overwork and get burnt out. Luckily, I have great colleagues who gave me space and helped me manage the scales.

### **Message to the industry**

I wish we take a detailed look at how this pandemic has changed the industry and hold on to the things that have changed for good, like recognising the most indispensable resources, our labour being the most important ones and offering them security and taking a serious look towards sustainability in our processes. Not to forget, it's high time we opened up our mental horizons and gave a level playing field to women. We have numerous surveys indicating better growth just by bringing in the other half of the population to their deserved seats. Lastly, I would request the women of the industry to not settle for anything less than they deserve.

**Swati Aggarwal, Yash Pakka**

## **Gender inequality and the pandemic**



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It doesn't hold true for all, as in many organisations now there isn't parity between men and women. But yes, there were few instances where the vulnerabilities of being a woman played a significant part. For example, a friend faced the threat of losing her job as she got pregnant and there were major layoffs in her company.

### **Facing challenges**

I have a one-year-old son, so when I resumed work after pregnancy leave during the lockdown, it was difficult to manage a baby whom I was still breastfeeding, doing household chores and managing work. There were various Zoom calls where my colleagues could either hear my baby crying or the whirling of a mixer grinder. But my husband was my rock and we divided each responsibility equally and that's how we managed to sail through. My boss and friend, Ved Krishna was also quite accommodating and understanding of my situation and gave me the leeway of not necessarily having my camera on and also giving me the freedom to leave by just informing him in a text.

### **Work-life balance**

I am still learning the art to strike the balance, but one thing I make sure of is to take out an hour of exercise — walk, jogging, yoga or just breathwork. It's this me-time that gives me the sanity to perform at every level. Also, I think family plays a big role as it's important to have a conversation with them about your priorities and manage expectations to be able to manage both work and personal life.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

My cousin, Rachna Goyal, left her job to raise her two beautiful girls, and now wanted to get back to work. It was lovely to hear that when she approached her boss after seven years, he was more than accommodating and welcomed her back to the company. This made me think that there should be more programmes to encourage and empower women back to work even

after long breaks.

### **Message to the industry**

Women are empathetic, they feel more, express a lot, good at nurturing relationships and also give attention to details. So, there should be a target gender ratio to include more women at the decision-making level, have lenient maternity policies and no bias in salaries based on gender.

### **Swati Singh, Robus India**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

This pandemic was indeed a challenging time, but challenges come with opportunities. I am extremely optimistic, and I realised this pandemic has given an inspection to a business in the virtual world.

### **Facing challenges**

Women are supposed to be homemakers and the office coming home was a tough nut to crack. It was a herculean task bridging the balance between home, child and office. But I realised there lies a Hercules in all of us and I discovered mine.

### **Work-life balance**

I believe we all should understand the priorities. While working, my focus is completely on my work and if it is my family then everything becomes secondary. The main thing is to maintain the proper balance between the two.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

It's when a close associate of mine told me that the pandemic has made her understand the importance of relations, be it with family, friends or associates.

### **Message to the industry**

Charles Darwin said, 'survival of fittest'. This pandemic indeed was a very tough time but hard times make you stronger. Believe in yourself, trust your potential and execute.

**Uttara Kaushal Bhalla, Provin Technos**



**Gender inequality and the pandemic**

For sure, the job losses are not due to gender inequalities or due to the responsibilities took up by women. Many women I know are paid higher than men in their fields and some companies could have taken such decisions purely from a cost-cutting perspective. The pandemic has not differentiated on the basis of gender.

**Facing challenges**

The pandemic has forced us to live a minimal life, and in a way, it's good. As I look back, even as a Covid-19 survivor myself, I think my major challenge was this: How can I, with my limited resources, help families connected to us survive better. We focused on communication. We spoke to every employee and understood the challenges faced by their families. We 'communicated' with our customers to understand their challenges. We conducted training and demo sessions online for customers and their engineers. I think the level of collaboration we achieved during these times is exemplary, and I think we must continue these efforts even when a pandemic is not looming over our heads.

**Work-life balance**

If I am healthy, my family is healthy and only then I can ensure that my work helps others stay healthy and wealthy. So, I prioritised the 'life' aspect and 'work' just happened smoothly.

**Message to the industry**

We all are facing the biggest turbulence of our life. Survival, regroup and rework for sustainable growth with mutual support is the key now. Our way of life may be inspired by minimalism from now on, but our hearts have opened up to maximise the smiles we bring on people's faces.

## **Vrinda Suneja, Pulp Society**



### **Gender inequality and the pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic has intensified the already existing gender differences, with significant repercussions for women. With the closing of offices and educational institutions, as well as the increasing trend of working from home, online education, and the shortage of domestic staff, the need for domestic duties has risen. The burden of household work falls overwhelmingly on women due to the gendered division of labour and gendered responsibilities and social expectations of performing domestic and care work.

### **Facing challenges**

When the lockdown was first announced, I woke up to the reality that I would not be able to walk down the Pulp Society galleries, or exhibitions for a while. The more I thought about it, the more I understood the meaning of the term, ‘the new normal’. At this moment, I saw the need for new approaches and a digital turn of art. Art reflects life, and what better way to reflect the current reality than to organise an online art initiative for artists which transformed into an effort to raise funds for the Covid-19 relief. I found myself redoing our entire business model. We finally came up with an online programme, ‘This is (now) online’, where 78 artists, illustrators, writers and first-time makers collaborated in a unique digital programme to make 16 zines.

As an attempt to combat the loneliness and creative isolation resulting from the lockdown, Pulp Society x TIRAF created two digital games — Exquizine and Blind Date — in hope of energising the creative community through the power of collective action. With an aim to raise Rs 2,00,000 for the people suffering the most during the ongoing pandemic and associated lockdowns, we were selling 20 editions of each zine against the receipt of donations made to an organisation of the buyer’s choice.

### **Work-life balance**

I’ve always struggled with finding a sense of balance. My personality is to keep working until I get the project done, no matter what. My inability to maintain balance came to light recently. I was overweight, tired, and depressed. My body had basically burnt out. For me, the most crucial element that triggered a shift was time management. I have set working hours after which I play tennis or go for Yoga, which has greatly aided in stress relief. I recently started a gratitude journal at night. Instead of feeling down on myself for what I

didn't have time to complete, this keeps me focused on what I did well.

### **Inspiration from colleague**

One thing my colleague once mentioned was whenever we settled into our Zoom call, the first few minutes are spent inquiring about each other's health, mental status, families, workdays, etc. None of this was essential to our conversation, but there is tenderness and patience that we rarely experienced in working collaboratively in real life. We showed each other our workspaces, and spoke with open vulnerability about the challenges we'd been facing adjusting to our 'new normal'.

### **Message to the industry**

It is crucial to understand the idea of having allies in your career. I've been lucky to have worked with such strong women in whom I might confide and seek advice. It's vital to speak to people who understand what you're going through. I urge all women to look out for one another so that no one feels vulnerable.