

ammara masood

This March, P@SHA brings to light the women making the world brighter with their hardwork, determination and persistance.



After doing her MBA in early 1987, Ammara Masood was hired as a Management Trainee by a multi-national company, NCR Corporation. It was her first introduction to Technology and she grew comfortable immediately. It opened a new world for her where she could see her potential take off in all areas whether they were technical, sales, marketing or managing clients. During the 3+ years there, she went on to become a manager responsible for NCR Strategic Clients Businesses. In 1990, Ammara moved to Los Angeles upon getting married and pursued another Master's Degree in Business; majoring in Information Sciences from California State University under the USAID program. She then went on to work in a couple of telecoms in the US for 3 more years, ultimately co-founding her own IT company in 1995 in Irvine, CA. This company became her lifeline and provided many opportunities to partner with some of the most high-tech companies of the time, including IBM and Microsoft. The business grew from a 3 person company to 300 people in a short span dealing with a number of Fortune 1000 companies in several industries as clients. In 2003 while continuing the business, Ammara pursued executive education at Stanford University Graduate School of Business in Strategic uses of Technology which opened a whole new network for her. After coming back to Pakistan in 2006, Ammara continued to operate the business in the US but divested after a year to create another startup in Electronic Gaming in Karachi by the name of WiredUp. In 2010, she joined National Data Consultant "NdcTech" and since then became CEO and President. Ammara now has ownership in NdcTech employing 175+ people in Pakistan while doing business in 13+ countries providing Financial Technology Services to Banks and FI's across these countries.

Q. *What difference do you see in our local tech scene and the way the international tech ecosystem works?*

Although we are still catching up with the international tech industry which has at least two decade long head-start advantage, Pakistani Tech industry has developed with a surprisingly fast pace in the recent years. In fact, it has emerged as a big factor in the overall social economic growth in Pakistan. Pakistani firms such as ours have partnered with global technology solutions leaders like Temenos to bring the latest cutting-edge, universally recognized solutions and platforms to Pakistani business market - consequently improving the operations and bottom-line of businesses and in the process have created an internationally acclaimed talent pool who can demand high rates for the services they deliver as well as value added license-able solutions.

I believe Pakistan has a chance to be a player in the International IT ecosystem if we focus on "high value consulting" and "solution based consulting" where we can charge a premium. Indian and Chinese companies are known for their scale and low price and for us to try and catch up in that space is probably not realistic but we have to look for opportunities where we can leapfrog. Therefore if Pakistan starts to build its digital infrastructure through large digital projects we will have a lot of talent which gets created as well as exposure to high end technologies which have a high demand internationally as well. In addition we should continue to create our own IP in the form of value addition to already existing internationally acclaimed products and technologies. This will give us the much needed niche to increase our IT exports as well as have a place in the international eco-system.

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What made you choose Fintech as your niche?

My first job was in a technology company and a large part of their revenue was from products and services related to Financial Technology. Later while running my own companies, a large part of our clientele was from the Financial and Banking Sector. I was fascinated by the fast evolving space and the scale of investment going into large transformational programs which was a unique feature of this industry. I am an entrepreneur and a business person at heart so I am naturally attracted to the chances of maximizing both my passion and wealth!

Other than the above I have always found that technology is a great space to be in for a woman. It is almost natural for her to get into leadership positions, demonstrate her vision and utilize herskill-set for being in an industry which is ever so dynamic.

What do you think about the state of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Pakistan?

I believe the entrepreneurial ecosystem has always been there in Pakistan as culturally we are the kind of people who like to be their own boss. However we are lacking on the basics for any kind of support to keep flourishing this. Lack of available credit, venture capitals' appetite to invest in Pakistan, our own elitist business communities' appetite to invest their money in their own country in local entrepreneurs is very limited. Plus our mindset is also very individualistic and not communal. It takes an ecosystem to support and nurture entrepreneurship and we have several examples of countries before us.

What are the most important milestones in your career?

The most important milestone for me is that despite all odds, I have always been consistent and able to prioritize my career. I have never left work since the beginning of my work life, despite personal and family situations and pressures. There were many times in my life when I had to make a choice and I was always clear that being financially independent and having an expertise will always take you far and should be the most important focus for me. I have managed to keep that. Another milestone has been creating an enterprise from scratch or putting life into an existing one which luckily I have had the chance to do several times in my work career. Learning from it, the excitement of seeing your clients use your ideas, products innovations and services and excelling their businesses from it and bringing impact-ful change in your ecosystem are all milestones I can never forget.

Do you think Pakistan has changed as a society, in terms of accepting women's careers and professional aspirations? What are your observations?

Luckily, times are changing and women are more independent and share an equally competent role in our society than just a household manager. They are contributing to the financial responsibilities; taking career not just as means of providing for the family but as source of professional and personal growth and independence. However the numbers are still extremely scarce and far in between. By putting in place pretty basic things, we should be able to make progress. As an organization we need to make diversity a business priority. If every organization whether public or private looks at it this way we will soon make progress. At NdcTech we believe that diversity ignites creativity, problem solving and innovation. Our diversity helps us bring unique perspectives and skills to the table. And our culture ensures we can leverage these unique contributions to the benefit of our clients and our communities. As equals, anything is possible!

Disclaimer

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