

farah ali

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



Farah is CTO and Co-Founder of a Logistics Tech startup called FreightWeb. Prior to this, Farah has served as Vice President, Engineering at Electronic Arts and has performed Engineering and Engineering Management roles at eBay and Microsoft. Farah did her schooling from Karachi and has a bachelor's degree in Computer Science.

Q. *What practice differences do you see in Quality Management, Team Alignment as well as in inclusion and diversity between local companies and US companies?*

I haven't worked extensively in Pakistan aside from internships. Most of my career has been in the US. The biggest difference I have seen based on my interactions as a student /intern in Pakistan along with some outsourced projects is the (sometimes) lack of big-picture or holistic thinking. In my opinion this is due to a general lack of exposure and not enough focus on building critical thinking skills in our elementary school system.

How do you describe the shift from working for someone to starting your own company?

The biggest shift is that the buck stops with you and there is nobody else to rely on for resolving issues or solving problems but yourself. You have to deal with areas way outside your expertise or comfort zone. You have to make daily decisions with a limited set of data and sometimes in areas you have yet to learn a lot about. But this can also be seen as a more empowered way of leadership. The definite positive is in how much you learn in a very small amount of time and how much you grow from that.

Do you have any advice for people who want to take a leap of faith similar to yours?

I think you must be very clear about your vision and reasons for wanting to build a company/startup completely from scratch. For some, it can be about their passion for an idea and wanting to see it become a reality. For others, it could be about learning in a fast paced environment. Whatever the reason is, there has to be clarity because its going to be a roller-coaster ride and you will have lots of self-doubt and during those times knowing clearly why you are doing this will help you power through.

What are the most important milestones in your career?

I am hoping they are yet to come! I think the single most important one was when I got my first job out of college at Microsoft as an engineer. Nothing can beat the realization that someone at this amazing company you only read about in books, wants to actually pay you for doing something you love to do.

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What're the best lessons you've learned, both personally and professionally?

"Don't wish for it, work for it". I think that is the one lesson that has stayed consistently true throughout my life so far.

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

I do think Pakistan has come a long way since my school days. I believe that society in general has become a lot more accepting of working women and it's not so much of a novelty now. I am very excited about this next generation of young Pakistanis who seem to be much more tolerant and progressive in their thinking and are more open to diversity of thought and action. I think when this generation will be out in the workforce, we will see a whole new level of equity and participation, not just from women but also from other marginalized communities. Where we still need more work is in understanding the need for better division of labor and a better support system for working women. Women are still the primary caregivers for children and other dependent family members; they are the ones taking care of multiple aspects of social and home life and they are the ones taking a back seat when any of these other areas becomes too overwhelming. Better support in the home will mean a more productive female workforce and one that doesn't have to think of work or home as a binary choice.