

My improbable journey

Gita Patel describes what inspired her to set up Trapezia, a fund dedicated exclusively to investing in companies led, managed or founded by women.



school, who had singled me out for LSE back in 1974, in part because he had aspired to study at LSE himself. Having people in my life who gave me the courage and educational vigour to apply to LSE, and succeed there, helped me mark the first stepping stone to achieving my future career success. I personally gained so much from LSE – including meeting my husband (who went on to become an actuary).

After graduating from LSE I joined Arthur Andersen, at a time when only five per cent of the accountancy profession graduate intake were women. I then entered the corporate world – first in the oil industry, followed by 15 years in banking. Eight years ago I chose a portfolio career and became an entrepreneur, business angel investor and fund manager. I also specialised in women's

businesses and to give better access to markets and to business networks. LSE has been a key stepping stone, with its strong brand name, its reputation as a centre of excellence, the contacts and networking opportunities offered and the global perspective I gained from its international reach. These have all been invaluable in developing my corporate career and entrepreneurial ventures.

Throughout my career I have met people who have studied at LSE and have gone on to hold senior positions in corporates, and others who have been in very influential positions both in the UK and abroad. It has been interesting to note the strength of the LSE brand, which earns immediate respect, rapport and connection in many spheres of work. At times I have come across leaders who have really inspired me. These were people who valued hard work, were not afraid of change or challenge, and had clear convictions and the strength of mind to challenge conventional thinking. One such person from whom I learnt much and who left a mark on my thinking was Richard Goeltz. He is on the Council at LSE, and our paths crossed when he was the director and group chief financial officer at NatWest. Many years later it is an honour for me to serve in the Court of Governors and on the Finance Committee, as well as participate in a number of initiatives at the request of the students.

Looking back, however, there are things I wish I had realised earlier in my career, particularly the importance of self-confidence and self-belief: if the odd thing does not go well it can drain self-esteem, so resilience is key. I have found this to be especially true for women. Also, chosen wisely, a good mentor can be priceless in providing a reality check and becoming part of your personal navigation system. Finally, the most important thing of all is to build your contact base. I cannot emphasise this enough! Whom you know and whom they know are the unwritten rules that exercise power, influence and control – and that's not just in business. I wish someone had given me this single piece of advice early in my career. ■

As Michelle Obama said in her campaign speech “each of us is here today by way of our own improbable journey”. My family arrived in the UK as immigrants expelled from East Africa. Overnight we went from an educated and well-off family to rebuilding our lives from scratch in a new country. In the face of this, my parents' generation had incredible strength and vision and should be applauded for instilling in us the value of education as a means of creating opportunities.

There have been certain key individuals in my life who have inspired me and given me the courage to aim high. In addition to my parents, this began with my Australian economics teacher from my grammar

markets and the female economy, which has taken me to many parts of the world where I have shared insights and learning on international platforms.

My research into women's increasing influence and affluence identified market opportunities in a segment vastly underserved by traditional providers, who were relying on historic trends for decision-making and were blind to emerging developments in this segment of the markets. We therefore created a venture capital fund called Trapezia to target companies that were led, managed or founded by women.

Today Trapezia has become the international inspiration for other countries to set up similar funds to improve access to capital, to mentor and nurture

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