

DIAGNOSTIC DIVA

Sensing a huge business potential in diagnostic laboratories has made Ameera Shah a formidable force in a traditionally male-dominated arena. *Hi! Blitz* checks her business pulse and finds out what makes her tick.



As I wait to meet 35-year-old Ameera Shah, the enterprising Managing Director and CEO of Metropolis Healthcare Limited, multinational chain of pathology laboratories, at her headquarters, I notice a large sign on the wall that says "Integrity is in our veins, empathy is in our blood, accuracy is in our DNA."

Growing up in a family of working parents (her father is pathologist Sushil Shah and noted gynaecologist Duru Shah is her mum), Ameera had no choice but to be independent. "Money was scarce and we were never spoiled. Walking to school and using public transport was the norm. We never even had air conditioning in our bedroom," she explains. As both parents toiled long hours in the cut-throat medical profession to establish a name, Ameera watched with admiration and imbibed the qualities of perseverance, diligence and conscience from them.

"I learnt from them that the pursuit of excellence was paramount. My dad always says that we should do what we love and love what we do. My mum stressed the importance of financial independence. She would advise my sister and me to earn our own money so if we got married and wanted to buy a car, we could do so ourselves. We would resist that we would never wear saris!"

After completing a degree in Finance from The University of Texas at Austin she worked with Goldman Sachs in New York. However, working with a giant corporation and being another cog in the wheel wasn't her idea of a career, as she always wanted to do something that involved exercising her leadership skills. "I decided to come back to India and do something with my dad," she avers. In 2001 when everyone was flocking abroad, Ameera chose to reverse the trend and quit her upscale lifestyle and job. She wanted to take her father's respected pathology practice from a single lab at Gamdevi, Mumbai and build a chain of them across the country.

"I had no blueprint or idea how I was going to achieve this goal as nobody had done it before. The pitfalls were numerous—being a doctor's practice there were no HR, IT and other systems in place. Also working with doctors instead of businessmen was a huge change since medical people just do their job without any idea of the profit they are making or costing, etc."

Ameera was quick to capitalize on the business potential of her father's stellar reputation and the fact that his laboratory, Metropolis Labs, was considered the best for specialized testing procedures. Setting up a sales and marketing team to push the brand and working round the clock soon reaped benefits. The brand started to grow including their first tie-up in 2003 outside Mumbai with a pathologist in Kerala.

"I had a great vision but we were strapped for funds," she recalls. "Hiring staff for ₹15,000 a month was an issue. Also setting up professional and medical teams and getting the twain to meet was tough." However Ameera's mantra that "Entrepreneurship is 99 per cent about how to handle uncharted territory" saw her through the nascent years.

Under her helm, Metropolis Healthcare Ltd has grown from a single pathology laboratory in 2002 to a fully integrated multinational chain of over 125 diagnostic and more than 800 collection centres across South Asia, Middle East and Africa. Today, Metropolis is a household name, with over 50,000 doctors, 10,000 laboratories and hospitals, processing more than 15 million tests annually.

In the past 10 years, Metropolis has expanded into new service lines like clinical research, hospital lab management and wellness solutions and is always exploring and adopting cutting edge technologies and services that contribute new revenue streams.

Outside of the office, Ameera loves the sporty life—hiking, sailing, and playing basketball. "I hate sitting in an air-conditioned room all day and yearn to get physically active after office hours. I love the sun, not the AC," she stresses. She is adamantly silent on her love life and single status.



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and strategically position the company as a leader.

The lady has been on Asia's Power Business Women List 2015 by Forbes Asia where she is one among the only 12 Indian women to be mentioned. Ameera also features on the acclaimed "Young Global Leader" list by the prestigious World Economic Forum in 2015. "What I value the awards I receive as they are bestowed by an eminent panel, it's a satisfied customer that is my real reward," she maintains.

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Ameera describes herself "as a sheep in wolf's clothing," and although she has a stoic exterior, employees say she is a softie. She gravitates towards people who are strategic and action-oriented, drawing inspiration from professionals like Deepak Parikh for his humility, loyal eagle Zia Modi for her sense of humour and intelligence, and Harsh Mariwala for his brand-building skills. On her own future she concludes, "It's a momentous time for the organization and we have lots of challenges and a high growth trajectory ahead."



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