

Simone tata essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Simone N. Tata's pioneering contribution to the cosmetic business in India is reflected in the enduring appeal of Lakme, a trailblazing creation in more ways than one. Lakme is no longer in her care, but Simone Tata continues to display her innovative brand of leadership with Trent, the company that owns and operates the highly successful Westside chain of lifestyle stores. Simone Tata speaks to Christabelle Noronha. When you first came to India, how different was the milieu for women here from what you had seen in the country of your birth?

There was a big difference in the role of young women in Switzerland, the country of my birth, and their counterparts in India when I first came to this country. When I left Switzerland in the mid-1950s, most of the young women there had a job or were studying, especially before marriage. It was not the norm for Swiss women to stay at home and do nothing. In India the situation seemed different. Most young girls and women were at home, apart from a few who went to college. But, interestingly, a few women had entered professions such as medicine, teaching and law.

On the other hand, women in Switzerland did not take up these professions 50 years ago. What was it like to break the stereotype and start a business in India? I never had the feeling that I was breaking the stereotype when I joined Lakme, which I joined by accident. I did not ever intend to have a professional life, but it has turned out to be a very happy development. When I joined the board of Lakme in 1962, it was a limping company; I don't think anyone knew what to do with it. Also, Lakme was far removed from the mainstream activities the Tatas were into and quite small in comparison with the Group's other businesses.

I took over as managing director of Lakme in 1964, when it was a 100-per cent subsidiary of Tata Oil Mills (Tomco). My biggest challenge was to direct a company without having had any past business experience. I had no clue on how to read a balance sheet even, and my knowledge of other aspects of the CEO function was limited. This was at a time when no business schools existed; there were no tools in terms of education, there were no conferences and seminars which one could attend to learn the finer aspects of running a business.

Fortunately, life was certainly less hectic those days and you had more time to learn. The important thing was never to despair. I always believed that seldom can one be an expert in every field of management and hence one has to surround oneself with people well versed in their particular field, be it finance, law or anything else. Delegation, thus, becomes extremely important. You should do it without diluting the vision and goals you set for the company and for yourself. I delegated a lot of work to managers, those I found good, responsible and knowledgeable in their own fields.

Since my forte was knowledge of cosmetic products as also developments in the cosmetics industry worldwide, I was in a better position to forecast the market and the future needs of the company. The interesting thing is that the cosmetics industry did not exist in India then. We created it at Lakme. It was an arduous task, since there were a lot of social taboos on the use of cosmetics and this meant the market itself was extremely limited. Were there a lot of women in senior positions at the Tata Group when you joined? How did you feel being a decision maker?

There were quite a few powerful women in senior positions in some of the Tata companies when I joined the Group. Tomco had women in senior positions, Mrs Vesuga was in charge of the JN Tata Trust and there were several others with a strong character and personality. Each one of them was quite knowledgeable in her field and was capable of taking independent decisions. I hope the Tata Group will have such women as decision makers in the future as well. How much have things changed since then for women leaders? What further improvements do you foresee?

Things have changed a lot. Women today are more educated and you find women in senior positions in marketing, advertising, banking and communications. But if you look at the main Tata businesses, such as steel, automobiles and telecommunications, they seem to be populated by men. Do women have to work a lot harder than their male counterparts to achieve leadership positions? Given that both men and women are equal in their educational qualifications and equal in their intellect, I don't believe that women need to work harder than their male counterparts.

If women are better at a job, they don't have to go out of their way to prove it. The best way to achieve something is to have clarity of thought and purpose and not to lose oneself in details. Thorough knowledge of the discipline is also important; this ensures that no one can find fault with you. Can you illustrate the influences and circumstances that helped you grow into a leadership role? I started at the top in a non-existent industry. I had the great privilege to build the organisation the way I wanted to. The important thing is to have a vision, clarity and the ability to mould people.

It is also important to delegate enough so that people feel they have something worthwhile to do. Last, but most important, you have to encourage the teamwork ethic. 3. Achievements Mrs. Simone Tata honoured as “ Visionary Of the Year” Mrs. Simone Tata, chairman of Westside, was awarded visionary of the Year Award at the 3rd Images Fashion Award. She has worked out an uncomplicated equation to ensure the success of Westside, the chain of lifestyle stores the company set up in 1998. Commenting on receiving the award, Mrs Tata says, “ It is a great honour for me to receive this award.

Images Fashion Awards have become the most sought after awards by the apparel industry and a great achievement for the industry as also for the country. ” IFA, The Images Fashion Awards, instituted by Images Magazine, the sole voice of India’s brand-driven fashion retail market, felicitates the country’s most admired fashion brands, companies, stores and professionals for their outstanding achievements. With recognition from the government and the trade, Images