

From A Top Ranker Chartered Accountant to a Musician-cum-Momtrepreneur: The Curious Case of a Woman CA's evolution!

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What does a performing Carnatic vocalist have to do with the topic of work-life balance issues that women CAs face today? Plenty, if you examine my curious case! Back in May 2000, I was ranked All India 2nd in the CA Final exam with top scores in Financial Accounting and Management Accounting. An ambitious 21 year old literally shooting for the stars, I won a prestigious merit scholarship to pursue my MBA at Boston College, one of the top ranked business schools in the field of Finance. Graduating with top honors, I landed a plum job in an elite consulting firm in Downtown Los Angeles! I now had a glowing resume. Incidentally, I got married around the same time as my graduation from business school. Life was a dream come true until this point!

Then unexpected twists began coming my way. The consulting firm I worked for was a typical white male dominated one, and I, churidhar clad with cranberry juice in hand, found myself totally out of place during Happy Hours and hated the 60 hour work week! After a few months of denial, I came to terms that work-life balance simply did not exist in such a high pressure environment. My scientist husband got a job offer in New York, and I decided that a move to the Corporate Taxes department at a blue chip company would be the magical elixir I needed. The new work place was friendlier, hours more manageable although the work itself was less creative and exciting. Well, one cannot have the cake and eat it too.

I was swimming smoothly in the sea of life when the happy news of my pregnancy came. I managed to hang in there until the measly 6 week maternity break that most American companies offer came along. It was time for me to go back to work when things fell apart again! My heart wasn't in my job. I decided to make the brave decision of staying home with my baby boy until he went to nursery school. I always joke to my family that the rigors of the CA course ensure that one can never ever take life easy again! A few months on, I found myself getting listless at home... I was doing all the right things stay at home moms do – attending play dates, taking baby to library, planning elaborate meals and so on... but I was missing the intellectual stimulus that I had taken for granted over the years.

Ever heard of the author O. Henry? If you haven't, I absolutely recommend that you read his stories. He was a master at weaving in unexpected twists into his stories! Well, there is something I ought to have mentioned earlier. I am a professional Carnatic vocalist and a disciple of the legendary maestro Padmabhushan Lalgudi Jayaraman. With more time in my hands, I started teaching music to a few students at my home. Over time, I realized that online teaching of music was a niche field with significant growth potential. The internet has an unmatched

ability to empower people who have the right mix of skills, motivation and education. My CA / MBA background gave me a unique ability to tap the vast potential in teaching Carnatic music in the online medium. I was lucky to be blessed with a rigorous background both in arts and accounting, and I realized that I could use my skills set to empower other women. I started building a team of music teachers for my online school. I was amazed at the scores of talented women who often had degrees in music but lacked the money power needed to build brand image, an unfortunate prerequisite for artists aspiring to come out of the “thenga moodi kutchery” (free concert) circle. Over the past decade, I have been able to build a team of teachers located in various corners of India, from Chennai to Bangalore to Udupi to Puttapparthi to Hyderabad to Bombay and Delhi. I have built a unique platform that brings an excellent and lucrative work from home opportunity to women musicians. Motivated at the thought of contributing to India’s amazing growth story, my family relocated to Chennai.

My typical day begins at 5 AM as I like to schedule classes when my kids are still asleep and before Chennai’s traffic chaos commence. Again, I schedule some classes when my kids are in school. My afternoons are spent reviewing teacher performance, answering student queries, marketing, planning student syllabi and teacher training. Evenings and weekends are strictly family time.

Today, my online Academy (www.vidyasubramanian.com) has 500+ students learning from all over the world – students aged 5 to 75, of various religious backgrounds, locations and learning levels. My work has bought me several laurels – BBC World featured me in a documentary (<http://www.bbc.com/news/business-22516037>), media houses such as India Today, Kalki, Pudiya Thalaimurai (<https://youtu.be/AM5LrJ2y0rw>) and BigFM (- <https://youtu.be/oPb0s6SM4Fo>) and <https://www.facebook.com/rjgirigiri/videos/934414303260669/>) have featured my work, and Saratoga Arts and NY State Council for the Arts gave me their prestigious artist award (<http://www.timesunion.com/living/article/The-art-of-sharing-551273.php>). It gives me immense satisfaction that I have been able to make my venture a socio-commercial one – while bottom line matters, my goals of sharing our divine artistic tradition with the world and my focus on empowering women remain unwavering!

Does my training as a CA play a role in my current “momtrepreneur artist” avatar? The answer is a resounding yes! Running a small business organization requires tremendous commitment, creative energy, time management and attention to detail.... all precious skills that I learned when training to be a Chartered Accountant. I pursue the art form I love but I get equal pleasure in stating that I am a proud woman Chartered Accountant whose academic training has helped build an e-commerce platform!

Here is my message to my fellow women CAs... be flexible, be creative and think out of the box. Don’t be afraid to step out of your comfort zone! If your current work life imbalance is bogging you down, look for new vistas. This is a knowledge era where sky is the limit for dynamic women CAs!