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BEM talks exclusively to Kavita Oberoi, founder of Oberoi Consulting about her challenging past & determination to succeed in business.



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Amanda Woolley

The Secret of Success

KAVITA OBEROI is the entrepreneur behind healthcare audit and IT training business Oberoi Consulting. A high profile and respected member of the Derbyshire business community, Oberoi also appeared on Channel 4's Secret Millionaire and has since become involved in various charity organisations. **AMANDA WOOLLEY** went face to face.

Fact File



NAME: Kavita Oberoi

AGE: 40

POSITION: Founder & CEO

COMPANY: Oberoi Consulting

HOBBIES: Keep-fit, music, dance.

AMBITION: Health is so important; if I have my health I have my wealth.



Kavita Oberoi comes from an entrepreneurial family; her father came to the UK from India and very quickly set up his own plumbing and bathroom business in Bradford. As a teenager she had to balance the traditional expectations of her family with her desire to work; and eventually realise her own business ambitions.

"My father was very business minded and extremely clever. The business that he set up is now in its third generation of family ownership, which is quite an achievement.

"I definitely think I inherited my father's business mind, though he was very traditional and it was the expectation when I was growing up that I would marry and stay at home to raise children. I was fortunate, in that my mother saw that I had business aptitude and encouraged and nurtured this side of me. She was much more open, and used to sneak me out of the house to ballet and tap lessons.

"My father died when I was 15, which put enormous pressure on my mother. I decided I wanted to get a Saturday job, which brought a degree of uproar in the family! But my mother really put her foot down and supported me and it was with her encouragement that I went on to gain GCSEs and A'Levels.

"I wanted to become a doctor, but wasn't allowed, because of the time it

would have taken to complete the training, which would have seen me qualify when I was 26 and marriage as soon as possible was the priority. Instead I applied to do applied chemistry at Huddersfield University, and commuted from home in Bradford everyday. I was very focussed on what I was doing, particularly as I wanted to prove people wrong. I graduated with a First class degree, and immediately knew I wanted to continue to work within the healthcare sector. Within a few months of graduating I got a job with Bayer Pharmaceuticals. I guess I was a bit of a trail blazer in my family; breaking down the barriers, for others to follow.

“Although, I’d begun my working career, there was even more pressure from my family, who had introduced me to many prospective partners, by this time. A family friend from Derby suggested to my mother that they knew someone that would be a good match for me and it just so happened when they told me who it was I realised that I had been at the same university and knew him.

“We married and within the first month my husband’s mother died of breast cancer, which meant I was



responsible for running the home and also trying to balance the commitments of work, as Bayer had transferred me to manage their region in Trent. It was a huge challenge for a 23 year old, but something that I relished. I remember ringing my mother for cooking lessons; I can now cook like no-one else!

“I guess you do sort of just get on with things. I was just grateful that I had been able to keep working, but I sometimes and still do, work around the clock to fit everything in. I’d been in Derby a little over eight years, during which time I’d had two daughters, and it was suggested that I go for a promotion at work. I was so convinced I was going to get it, that it was quite a shock when I was overlooked. I think it was that afternoon that I decided I’d never work for anyone else again; it was the catalyst for me to set up Oberoi Consulting.

“I’d been working in the industry for over eight years, and there were new guidelines coming out, which doctors were struggling with. The first step was identification of the patients through a computer audit of their systems and I



began to think if I could take the idea to a pharmaceutical company, it could support their brand growth, help doctors to reach their targets and improve patients care.

“About six or seven months after setting up my own business I got an opportunity to pitch the idea to one of the world’s biggest pharmaceutical companies. I was so passionate about the idea, I believed in it completely, which must have shone through, as I walked out of that meeting with an half a million pound contract, and not a clue



of how I was going to deliver it, with no staff and working from a bedroom at home!

“A few months later the government released the new GMS contract and the need for our services went through the roof as everything was tied in to data on computer systems and points mean pounds

“Today, we work with a number of different clients within the healthcare sector, from primary care trusts, doctor’s practices and practice-based commissioning clusters to pharmaceutical companies. We help them meet their targets in a more efficient way.

“I think one of the biggest difficulties for me as an entrepreneur, which continues to be a challenge, is people management. By nature, entrepreneurs are very controlling, so learning to let go and delegate is something that all business owners need to do.

“The business has grown rapidly in a relatively short period of time and it was about two or three years after I launched Oberoi Consulting that I



realised I needed an office. I'd seen the building that we currently occupy on Pride Park and had enquired about it, only to be told by the agent that it had been sold. I kept on pestering and then out of the blue he phoned to say that it was available and was I interested. I bought the building, moved in and rented the additional upstairs space to another business.

"We've been extremely fortunate; the business has never had to rely on bank finance to fund expansion. I'm very much of the opinion that I'd rather have the money before I invest it, which has put me in a good position financially and also enabled me to look at other opportunities, when they arise, especially in the recession.

"In 2010, I became a co-owner of Octavian Security, which is a completely different business to my own. I had known the founder Sukhi Ghuman for some time, I looked at the business and saw the potential and just went for it.

"If you compare the two businesses, Octavian Security has over 500 employees across the UK and is now growing internationally, whereas Oberoi Consulting has around 30. However, the latter has been generating far more profit. For me it's all about the bottom line and I see Octavian as a really good opportunity, particularly if we think outside the box in terms of how we can grow the business and provide innovative services. The potential is enormous and the plan is to grow the business over the next two to three years then exit.

"Getting involved in Octavian Security has helped me realise that I'd like to work with more businesses, potentially investing in them. As I built my business from scratch I've learnt from my mistakes; experience teaches us a lot, which I'm keen to pass on. This type of mentoring also sits well with some of the work that I've become involved in, in the voluntary sector.

"It all started with The Secret Millionaire, which was a brilliant experience, and one which I very nearly missed out on. The programme makers approached me for the first series, but I turned them down. It wasn't until I went on a trade delegation with a group of women to Mumbai, during which I met a woman who had set up the National Spastics Society across India that I realised I'd made a mistake. She really

inspired me and made me realise that I wanted to give something back. Two weeks after I returned, out of the blue, I received a phone call from the programme makers, I said yes straight away this time.

"During my Secret Millionaire experience I gave money to a GP practice, they needed new premises. One of the doctors had a vision 30 years ago to set up advocacy and support services. I could see the impact this would have on the local community and I latterly went back to open the new building for them. The other story that really touched me, possible because of the challenges I had faced growing up, was a group of ladies that were running a programme called 'Sisters with Voices', which aimed to empower women between the ages of 13 and 17. I've actually been involved in rolling out the programme to Derby,

which is something I'm really proud of. Additionally, I've taken on a global role with the Girl Guides, which has similar ambitions to 'Sisters with Voices', just on a larger scale, with an aim of raising £10m over the next five years and empower

women across the globe from the funds we raise

"I'm very fortunate as I have a strong team behind me, although I still retain a lot of focus in order to drive

the business forward. I don't think you can ever lose focus if you want your business to continue to succeed. Any time off I do have is spent with my family, so they can experience the things that I didn't when I was growing up.

"Oberoi Consulting is my baby. It's a very profitable business, which has enabled me to invest in other things such as commercial property. Growth is important and everyday we get new opportunities both from the UK and



"Our reputation has been built on the service we deliver; we're very passionate about what we do."

internationally. It's all about deliverability and making sure you have the right local knowledge to undertake these types of projects.

"When people ask me 'what are your plans for the future'? I say to them 'I've only just begun!'"

Oberoi is also a vocal part of Derby's business community, having recently been a guest speaker at a Derby Embassy event in London.

She added: "I moved to Derby 17 years ago and it's been brilliant for me. I'm very pro-Derby and now I'm ready to blow its trumpet.

"The Embassy events are really fantastic, as they are somewhere to showcase the city to investors and big players. The regeneration money that we have in Derby is still here despite the cuts to the public sector, we've got big players like Rolls-Royce and Toyota and stats show that outside

London, the city has the highest average salary, which means it's an attractive place for retailers to relocate. We're trying to encourage businesses to move out of London and consider Derby. It's a challenge, but things always are. We've got to think outside the box, if something doesn't work one way, we've got to try it another."

Commenting on some of the challenges facing businesses, Oberoi continued: "Everything is so price focused and because of the uncertainty that exists businesses are cutting their budgets. There's more procurement in place and people want the best service for the least money.

"Our reputation has been built on the service we deliver; we're very passionate about what we do. The private sector has gone through all its cuts; some businesses that haven't survived probably wouldn't have survived anyway. It's now happening in the public sector, but my view is that there's no reason why they can't provide the same quality of service with less funding.

"I'm keen to invest in more start-up businesses and other companies of interest, if the right opportunity arose. "Business owners have to keep an eye on their bottom line; finance management is also absolutely critical regardless the size of the business. Becoming a successful entrepreneur is about passion, focus and sacrifice, you've got to realise that a business takes up a lot of time, there's no quick win, just hard work!" 

