

SECRETS of SUCCESS

To celebrate our first anniversary we went around the world to get new kinds of stories, stories that are different from ours, some inspiring, some worth learning from and some intriguing. We reached out to the most reputed CIOs in UK and discussed with them what is at the heart of our magazine — business technology and leadership. In the stories that we finally selected, CIOs talk about their understanding of leadership and share their journey of transforming themselves to transform business

By Rachit Kinger

Design By Shokeen Saifi Imaging By Anil T, Haridas Balan,
Peterson PJ & Shigil Narayanan





COVER STORY
SECRETS OF SUCCESS

CREATING HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

Yasmin Jetha has done it all. She is the CIO of Bupa. She was previously the Chief Operating Officer at the *Financial Times*. She is the first ever female Executive Board member of a FTSE listed bank, Abbey National Bank is now part of Santander. She is also a non-executive director of the East Africa-based Nation Media Group. If that is not enough, she did all this while raising two sons and did it all in a foreign land. She came to London to acquire an education but there is little else that she did not acquire. Rachit Kinger caught up with her to find out what keeps her going

You have had an illustrious career with many firsts. Please tell us a little about your journey and share some important milestones.

Majority of my career has been at Abbey National Bank (18 years) and around 5-6 years into the bank I had gone on a career development assessment program. 3 months later I was hauled up to the Board Director of HR and the Managing Director and they said, "How would you like to leave the IT department and come and run the mortgage service for the bank?" At first I could not get my head around it (the new role) because I had never worked outside of IT and I didn't know anything about the mortgage service – it was a clean sheet for me. I went from looking after 100 IT specialists to 1500 staff spread across the country. There was

a lot of learning for me but it did not last very long because very soon the IT director wanted me back in IT. I lasted only for a year in IT and then the MD wanted me back in the business again. This time around I had a different role – I did marketing for mortgages and had P&L accountability which I enjoyed tremendously. I also did a role looking after customer services for 16 million customers for after sales services. I did 3-4 business roles in 5 years and the IT Director wanted me back again in IT. So I guess what I am sharing is that I was very fortunate to work in a meritocratic organization where I had 11 different roles in 18 years.

It might be simplistic to credit your different roles to good fortune. There must be some-



Yasmin Jetha, CIO,
Bupa. Previously COO
at Financial Times,
Executive Board
Member at Abbey
National Bank



COVER STORY
SECRETS OF SUCCESS

“I was the only person to have knocked on the door and say that I wanted to work on it and I was given a chance. The best way to explain my journey is to think of a game of chess and a game of snakes and ladders together”

—Yasmin Jetha, CIO, Bupa

thing in particular about you that helped you work in so many roles, what do you think it is?

Partly because of my roots, I had left a country (Tanzania) to come to another country to acquire an education. I looked for different roles. I preferred working in different areas. There is one particular incident that I remember, which was very soon after I joined the bank, roughly a year. The government was bringing out new pension legislations and I decided to read about it and remember thinking, “This sounds really great.” So I knocked on my manager’s door, I was a junior IT person (laughs), and I said, “If we’ve got any plans to do this (pension based products) I would love to work on it.” At the time there weren’t any plans but 3-4 months later when the bank decided to have a pension based product he remembered me. It’s a small example of wider reading, having an interest in business as a whole rather than just working on a project. I was given this project and thankfully for me, it was decided that this project would be the number one priority for the bank. I was the only person to have knocked on the door and say that I wanted to work on it and I was given a chance. The best way to explain my journey is to think of a game of chess and a game of snakes and ladders together.

You were a junior IT person and you were most likely to be reading a report on latest technologies at that time but you were reading a business report and the business opportunity excited you. So there has clearly been an aptitude for business right from the start.

I would say so, and it has been like that all the way through. It’s not like I don’t get excited by technology but I make a distinction to think what technology can do for business, what is it through IT that we can do for our customers? If that is the first question then it is relatively easy to transition to a business focused role or to do combined works.

Other than this what do you think contributed to your success?

When you look at my trajectory at the Abbey National Bank, I was seen as someone who could turn things around, a troubleshooter. I don’t settle for mediocrity, it just doesn’t do it for me. My word, keeping promises, meeting deadlines, these are very important to me.

In my later life what has really helped is taking on non-executive Board positions. (Governor at University of Bedfordshire, Vice Chair of the Aga Khan Foundation, Board Member at Nation Media Group).

You have taken on so many responsibilities, concurrently, each of them serious enough to make significant demands of your time. How do you prioritise your day to get the best output?

First of all, I am very clear about the amount of time I am going to allocate to which activity. While I am at BUPA, during core working hours, I do not do any of my other activities. I do them mostly at the weekend, occasionally very early in the morning before I get to work or late at night. I enjoy all the work so I don’t find it taxing. And I am very disciplined so I just get on with it. I do not mix the two up – I keep my business life completely separate from the other work I do. I’ve been a working mother (two sons) so I have had to juggle lots of priorities – the family, work, personal interests, and one has to be incredibly well organised to do it all.

How do you ensure that your high energy and discipline is transferred to your teams?

The first thing is to have clarity on the expectations. I am very clear about what is it that I want to aim for and I communicate that very clearly. I am also very clear about what I don’t want and I communicate that too. It’s also a question of having key people and talent and nourishing that talent. Everywhere I have worked I have hired people from outside along with developing people from the inside. I try to balance the two. People work differently under different leaders. I try to remove fear from the system so that if something goes wrong people can bring it to my notice. It is important to expect setbacks. **C&L**