

professionals need to be hired back into the organisations as they will also be more stable due to greater maturity and need for continuity.

The topic of this case study is not at all new, in fact it is very common that we have started accepting it as normal. The aim of this case study is to help you have a closer look at the women professional's career challenges. Instead of accepting it as a normal situation it is time that we changed for better.

Omana was a smart professional. She was fairly independent since her school days. Not monetarily but emotionally. She crafted her own professional choice. She knew she wanted to do her MBA and like millions of aspirants in India she too could not make it to the IIM's or the other top leagues. She decided to fund her own MBA program to the extent possible so that she could use her finances judiciously. So she enrolled for a part time three years regular programme. Juggling between work and student life was not easy. Also as per the Indian unwritten society rules, she was already crossing the marriageable age at 24. Her brother said 'think twice. You would be passing out at 27' isn't that a little late?. However she went on to finish her MBA in time with good grades and was just one of the three women in the evening programme.

Omana settled down in her life and found a good partner in Sandeep, an MBA from the top league school along with an Engineering degree from one of the reputed Regional Engineering Colleges. Marriage soon became a rough ride. The transition from a south Indian daughter to a north Indian bahu wasn't easy. However, professionally Omana was doing well. She was in the Corporate HR team of Genpact. Blessed with a darling daughter Omana was quite busy in her life. Her mornings would begin with spending some time with her kid before the house would wake up to the breakfast demands of daughter in law's fresh hot cooked Parantha's. 'It just takes 30 min to cook breakfast for your family and it's not difficult' is what her husband would say. The food had to be served hot. Though she cooked Omana made her maid feed the daughter.

Along with the morning breakfast she had to cook the lunch veggies as she and her husband had to carry it along. Obviously her husband preferred her packing to the maid's. She had to hide from her daughter while leaving for work. Everyday she would promise herself that she would be back on time to spend time with her kid. This rarely happened. Now her daughter was also missing her mom. She would call up mommy as she learnt dialling. Grandparents would proudly say 'she called you up on her own and wants you to be back quickly'. The emotional pressures were just rising. As soon as she would enter home she would be bombarded by the love of her daughter, comments on the bad food taste of the dinner prepared by the maid and unhappiness of her husband who expected hot food to be served by his wife. He

CASE STUDY

HOLDING ON TO CAREER A CASE STUDY OF A BPO EMPLOYEE ON THE SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN PROFESSIONALS TO ENSURE CAREER CONTINUITY.

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ABSTRACT

A lot of talent is lost when the trained and experienced women professionals leave which also hampers sustained growth. This case study attempts to have a closer look into the challenging world of women professionals, their multi tasking roles and the sacrifices required to ensure career progression. It is also an attempt to awaken/sensitise the organisations to this phenomenon and take serious steps to retain this talent pool so that this segment is not deprived of the benefits of economic growth.

Keywords : Career, BPO, Social Challenges, Professional Challenges, Women Professionals.

The business world has witnessed a transformational growth in the past two decades. However, the benefits of this growth are not being spread across different strata of society. In India and many other countries across the globe large pool of women professionals are opting out of their career for various reasons ranging from child care, elderly care, family responsibilities etc. Further, many such professionals are also eager to get back to the corporate world after the career break. Such

would say you have all the time for your kid but not for me. Meanwhile they had purchased the very flat they were staying on rent in her husband's name. It had been a good decision and Omana paid 15000 per month as EMI. Her daughter had grown and Omana enrolled her in a reputed school. She finished all the admission formalities on her own and admitted her kid. Now her mornings even got busier as she had to get her elder one ready for school by 7.45am. Meanwhile she was expecting her next kid.

Omana was in a high visibility role at work. She had moved on to the training team. The current team was led by the CEO himself. The role was leadership facing too. Omana now had to look after all office locations including US, India, UK, China, Hungary, and Bulgaria etc. She had an erratic high pressure work schedule. After the daylong hectic schedule, often skipping meals she had to communicate with US at night. Her health was getting affected. Headache due to lack of sleep, unplanned diet were becoming regular. Her daughter meanwhile had moved to kindergarten. Competitions were being conducted in school on various topics. Her husband wanted that S excel in them. 'You know she would be able to lean well from you. Only you can train her'. Soon Omana had another target, ensuring her daughter won the first prize in school in competitions. Ensuring that her daughter got excellent grades in class tests, homework's, assessments were all Omana's responsibility. Omana hardly had any time for herself. Omana often skipped the networking dinners as her husband found it difficult to put children to sleep at night. Even if she would attend he would be there to pick her up before 10pm. 'You know how you work is important, not whether you attend dinners or not' he would say.

Meanwhile her husband had plans of buying a 300 yards piece of land in the city. Omana had to take personal loan and from her dad to help him. The EMI's started shooting up. Meanwhile Omana was expecting her next child. Her husband had been transferred to Chennai for work. She had to manage alone along with her pregnancy, kid and late night work.

Soon they were blessed with a second daughter. Sandeep was by her side congratulating on their second victory. While she was still in hospital, her husband shared the news that the maid had left due to some differences with his mom. 'You have three months to find another one, as you are on maternity leave'. Within a week of getting back from the hospital Omana was taking care of the cooking, kids, home etc. As she was on maternity leave her in laws decided to go back and her father too left for Hyderabad as they wanted her to enjoy the maternity break. Maid hunting began. It was not easy. She had to look for so many attributes. She tried the agency but was not very successful. Not that she was not able to find them, they wouldn't stick. Some stayed for 1 week, one day, ten days. Her leaves were ending

and she had to get back. She managed with part timers. The part timer would leave by 5 and it she had to call her dad back. It wasn't easy for her. The moment she would come back from work she would with bombarded with complaints from her elder daughter and dad. The house would be in a mess. One such day Sandeep's boss made an unplanned visit that infuriated Sandeep. While serving him tea immediately after entering the house the displeasure was clearly visible on Sandeep's face. Later he said 'You cant manage a home' he said. Soon time passed. Meanwhile a full time maid had joined.

Time quickly flew by her younger one was one yearly old. Omana was looking at an AVP promotion in the coming year. At office her work was being appreciated. She was handling a very key role. She was owning the Employee Engagement Survey. It was a challenging and stressful role. Her promotion to a great extent was also dependant on the results of the survey even though it was not openly admitted by her boss. Her boss was good and gave her plenty of opportunity to lead the role and gain visibility. Omana had to stretch at work for her role. It involved lot of data scrutation though she had teams to do it; there was no chance of any error. It involved her to stretch her abilities too, now she had to understand IT as well as the survey could not be managed without it.

Soon the big day arrived and the survey opened. Everyone was eagerly awaiting the results. She was the first one to receive it and heaved a sigh of relief. It was indeed good. Now she had the mammoth task of sharing the news with each CoE, leader, function, region etc. It meant odd working hours to match the time difference. Omana went on to complete the result sharing without any hiccups. In the next 2 months, her promotion was to be announced. After wrapping up a long day at work she reached home at dinner time. Her elder one had slept off and the younger one was being fed by the maid.

Omana was extremely fatigued. After spending a few minutes with her daughter she got up to freshen up. Her daughter wanted to be with her. As her daughter tagged along with her to the washroom like usual Omana was a little sad that her husband too had slept off. She was excited to share with him that she had been verbally shared the news of her promotion in next two months. As soon as she got out after refreshing her maid picked up her daughter to finish her dinner. It was her chance to watch the serial in the pretext. Her daughter didn't want to leave her side and the maid wanted to forcefully take her. What happened next was something any human would hate. The strength of the maids pull was strong and the little one's hand got detached from the shoulder joint. She started screaming and howling. Omana however was not aware of the damage, she thought it was a mere resistance. She took the child in her arms and quickly closed the door in case Sandeep and elder daughter woke up. All through the night her daughter did not

change her posture and would shriek at slightest movement. Omana impatiently waited for dawn. Her husband wasn't aware of anything and when she sought help at dawn to take her to the doctor he sheepishly agreed. The doctor put back the child's dislocated arm in 2 seconds and the baby was normal and smiling. When she reached home it was already time preparing the elder one to be sent to school. After sending the elder one it was time for the usual morning chores. She looked at the clock, it was 8 am. It was time for her to hurry .But somehow today something had changed. The helpless howling face of the kid kept coming back to her mind. She felt as if she had cheated on her kids. She called the maid and asked her why she pulled so strongly. Without much regret she shared that she wanted to finish her task and it was irritating that the kid would not leave her mother. Omana stood paralysed as he realised that she had become so engrossed in her career and office that she just assumed that things were working fine. Did she ever sit with her kids for 30 minutes at a stretch and try to connect with them except to react! Were they even being cared for? Did being a mother mean to just pay for a maid, school and luxury? Did it mean that she just changed roles from a professional to a home maker, to a mother, to a daughter in law, to a wife and so on? Where was her own life? Or was it perpetual sacrifices starting from sleep, peace, personal space, freedom, expectation? Were the kids even getting clean food? Meanwhile, even Sandeep's mind was going through the same set of questions? Were the children being deprived of care they required? Was his wife stretching herself too far for career?

When Sandeep returned back home he was surprised to see that his wife was still at home. He sensed from her looks that she was upset. Somehow the younger one was trying to seek her attention. Suddenly he had a new perspective. The child wanted to be around the mother even though the grandparents were present. Omana seemed to know her kids mind even before they expressed it. Was Omana sacrificing too much for the family or for career? Both Omana and Sandeep left post lunch for work. They had a long discussion. Omana was feeling guilty that her kids were being deprived of proper care. She wanted to take a career break. Sandeep wanted her to rethink and promised to discuss it the next day. With a heavy heart Omana left for work. Even though the leaders on the floor had started congratulating her, yet Omana was feeling lost. It did not matter. Her kids face in pain kept coming back to her.

Sandeep could see that it was really getting tough on kids to be handled by maids who were insensitive to their needs. Further, Omana he could see was tired of the multi roles she played. Finally after a couple of deliberations it was decided that Omana would take a career break for 2 years. Her dad did not like the idea, but Omana was sure.

At office the organisation refused to give her a sabbatical. The only option was to

quit. Her boss was moving on to a new role after his promotion. He wanted her to stay, but did not have any answer to her work life balance issues. After lot of deliberations she resigned.

Omana left Genpact for the last time. She was given a warm farewell. When she reached home she saw her kids playing at the park. Without thinking much she joined the game. It was so de-stressing to play with kids. When Sandeep came home that night for the first time the family had dinner together. Managing home was not easy at all. From managing wardrobes, beds, flower pots, kitchen the work never seemed to end. Her maid too proceeded for her annual vacations. Looking at the costs it was decided that only a part time help was required for 2-3 hours. Meanwhile the younger one was also admitted to formal school. Sandeep while filling the transport form waited a moment.

'Do we really need school transport'? He asked. They had another car and Omana could do the pick and drops as she was no longer working. So now apart from getting the kids ready, packing their bags she also had the role of the driver. She would come back to see off Sandeep to work. Then the daily chores would begin of managing. Meanwhile Sandeep was also overseeing the construction of their new building in the 300 yards land they had bought. The loan money was being exhausted. The work was running behind schedule. He had to delay lot of decision to weekends which just seemed to vanish at the close of the lid. He needed someone who would speeden up the work. Omana, was available. She did not have much to do and moreover now it was the beautification work left like tiles, flooring, taps, sinks etc. He had constructed a 24 roomed guesthouse. Omana could handle it with directions from him.

He had to really push Omana hard to take on the project. On the other hand she could see that the EMI's, construction, school fee etc were becoming financial issues and maybe it was right to step in as rent would start once the project was finished. It wasn't easy. From a white coloured MNC HR professional to handling blue collared workers in uncomfortable weather, summer or winter was really difficult. She made mistakes and was often scolded by Sandeep. Slowly their discussions revolved less around themselves and family but more about construction and business. Often scolded and criticized Omana found herself in an unfamiliar terrain. After dropping kids she would go to the site and would bring kids also to the site. By this time one room had been made ready. Her kids would play in sand and mud. They also learnt to bear the uncomfortable conditions. They started playing and sharing with the workers kids. She would keep moving up and down between the 4 floors many times throughout the day. Also she had do all the liasoning with the housing department. All utilities, bills and miscellaneous items came under her preview. Sandeep, as he himself would say had to go to office,

unlike her. By the end of the day she would be exhausted. Kids often shared that they wanted to play in the apartment park. The moment they would reach back home, Omana would head for the kitchen to cook for the family. Once Sandeep would come, she had to share the days update with him. He was her boss in this role. Often criticized and scolded at length she normally began skipping her dinner. This was one meal she started dreading. Children would see her crying. At times the anger was passed on to them too. Her relationship with Sandeep was getting strained. He would often accuse her of being dumb and foolish. Omana slowly started losing her confidence.

Fights had by then become a daily feature of their family. In a years time the Guest house was ready. Financially the family had invested everything in the new construction. Still they needed funds to furnish it. Now the marketing was required. Again as asked by Sandeep, Omana took that up. It was a strange vicious cycle. This was something she had no interest in and not done either. Often Omana expressed the desire to get back to corporate.' Why do you want to work for others? Create your ow firm.' Sandeep would say. But it was extremely hard for her to perform in this role. She had a 3 member staff. 1 cook and two housekeeping attendants. She had to ensure that the guest house was spic and span and well maintained. She often did spot checks. She had to visit the guest house at odd hours to do check in and check outs. Her phone would continuously ring. She was twice more occupied than when she was at Genpact.

Omana struggled for 2 years but slowly learnt the tricks of the trade. She is a single handled marketing person and generates on an average 5 enquiries a day. Though she still gets scolded but the reasons are different. But as per Sandeep she should own a chain of guest houses. She was rated poor by him. You are just getting the rent of the property he would say. Meanwhile Omana had applied to many companies for various roles. She did not hear back from most. She did attend couple of interviews but could not justify the 3 year career gap. Firms were looking at continuity. Omana decided to enrol for PhD as academics was an interest area. It was a big decision. She has applied to many colleges for junior academic roles. She has attended some interviews but mostly got the response that you do not have academic experience. While writing this, this was her situation.

Note : Teaching notes will be available on demand.