



**Leading Women podcast
Commonwealth Bank Women in Focus**

Episode 9: Shivani Gopal, CEO and Founder of The Remarkable Woman

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Shivani Gopal, CEO and Founder of The Remarkable Woman, on how women bursting with ambition and ability must be the rose and the gardener of their career and continuously stand out while nurturing their growth.

Julienne [00:00:02] Welcome to Leading Women, your place to share and celebrate real stories and access the tools and resources to help activate your leadership. Hi, I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's Women in Focus and Leading Women is just one of the ways we support women at all stages of their business journey. So no matter where you are on your journey, we're here. Enjoy this episode as we redefine the business landscape together. Welcome to Leading Women, the place to ignite your leadership and redefine the business landscape. I'm Julienne Price, Executive Manager of CommBank's, Women in Focus and your host for this special episode, as we turn the table on our host, Shivani Gopal and shine the light on her visionary leadership. Shivani is CEO and founder of The Remarkable Woman. She's an entrepreneur, speaker and advocate on a mission to create a more equal world. From her first spark of leadership to now making her impact as a business thought leader, Shivani has blazed a remarkable trail, leveraging the power of mentoring and technology to make a dent in supporting more women to lead on scale. Shivani shares how women bursting with ambition and ability must be the rose and the gardener of their career, consistently standing out while nurturing their growth. She encourages us to step up and lead, continuously evolve and reclaim our path by normalising financial conversations. Shivani, welcome to Leading Women.

Shivani [00:01:47] Thanks, Jules, it is so great to be here and also a little bit strange to be sitting on the other side of the table, but to be joining you here on Gadigal land and I'd like to pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Julienne [00:01:59] Thank you, Shivani. I'm going to kick right off into why we're here today, and that's to find out more about you and your leadership journey. So, Shivani, you are a natural born leader with a true north of supporting women. Can you share with us your leadership journey to here?

Shivani [00:02:16] That's very generous, Jules, I don't know if I'm a natural born leader, but I do think that we all have an opportunity in our lifetimes to step up and to lead. And that moment can come at any point in our lives. And for me, that moment came very early on, it came when I was about five, as memory thinks it might be, where my very well-meaning aunts and uncles and society overall, you know, I come from a Fijian-Indian society. We're very, very patriarchal, as is the overarching world that we live in. And they very kindly said to me, very helpfully, said to me, hey, Shivani, as a girl in order to survive in this world, there's a lot of things you can and can't do. You shouldn't sit that way. You shouldn't talk that way. You shouldn't present so loudly. And even at that point, I challenged it, and unknowingly I became a crusader for the rights of women and girls. And I would loudly and proudly puffed chest and everything say, well, if boys can do it, then why can't girls do it too? And from that moment on, I had so many opportunities to stand out and to lead. I loved to communicate. And funnily enough, when I was ten years old, in hindsight, I put my hand up to be an emcee at a big dinner and dance gig that, you know, kind of had a couple of hundred people there. And so, you know, all of these little leadership moments, I guess, led me to where I am today.

Julienne [00:03:32] So I think you've just confirmed you are a natural born leader. Shivani, you're a leading advocate and enabler of mentoring.

Shivani [00:03:39] I am.

Julienne [00:03:40] Can you share more about the powerful difference mentoring can make for professional women navigating leadership? I think it's such a key aspect to our leadership roles, but not many of us know how to do that well.

Shivani [00:03:52] Yes, it's incredibly important, Jules, because I think the misunderstanding that we all have about our lives is that we tend to arrive with something. So we arrive once we've done our degrees, with all the knowledge that we need in order to thrive in our roles, or we've gone from one role to another role to another, and now we're in this new job and we've arrived. And we've arrived with all the knowledge that we need in order to thrive and succeed there but unfortunately, that just isn't the case. We must consistently invest in ourselves. My father has this beautiful saying, and that is that in order to be successful in life; we both must be the rose and the gardener. We must have moments where we stand out, but we must have moments where we nurture ourselves, too. Where do you find those opportunities to be nurtured, those opportunities to continually grow because learning and growth is a lifelong relationship that we must have with ourselves. And that's where mentoring comes in and I think that instinctively I've always known that because I was just sharing with you a bit of my childhood journey, that girl with her puffed up chest who wanted so much for the world and for her life and wanted to be and do all of the things. I mean, goodness. Jules, I wanted to be a chef, a teacher, I wanted to be a psychologist, a lawyer, all of those things. How in the world was I going to achieve all of that in one lifetime? Well, I knew, I needed help, I knew I needed mentoring. And so I found myself in a spot where eventually fast forward, I was 21 years old, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed, I had just graduated from my Masters degree in Financial Planning and I knew that I wanted to be the best financial planner there ever was in Sydney. Mind you, I was not only ambitious about it; I was assertive about it too. I told my recruiter as much and a number of other people, so that was the goal. How in the world was I going to get there? So I went on the hunt for the best financial planner that I could find, and walked up to this mentor and I had done my research, you know, I was really vulnerable. And I had said, hey, you know, I've heard and read so much about you and how you are the epitome of what a trusted advisor is. And in my eyes, a trusted advisor isn't someone who gets the most amount of clients or banks the most amount of fees, it is someone who is so trusted that they become the intergenerational advisor for that person, their families, their children, their parents that is the epitome of success to me. And you know what, I'm already an advisor. But how about I come round to your office and I can be your assistant? I'll do the shredding of your paperwork. I'll do your file notes. You know, whatever you need but I would just so love and so thrive if you could take me under your wing. And this person said, too young, too pretty, if you're still around in ten years time then come back and look me up. And I thought in my head, gee, I'll show you and I will do it on my own if I have to. And it will take me ten times as long, but I will get there. And that was my own very harsh experience of needing the mentoring, but not getting the mentoring from someone that I really desperately wanted it from and thought I could do so well under the guidance of, but also putting me on the path of knowing how important it was. Because it was so hard for me to get and you do have to work so hard in the dark in order to be in light and in order to be shown the way. Because if there's anything that I'm aware of and we hear all of these sayings all the time, right, one of those sayings is the 10,000-hour rule. And that is that in order to get really good at something, you've got to do that something for 10,000 hours. And I want to say that if you do the same thing over and over again you're probably doing the same not so good thing over and over again. In order to get really good at it, you need a trained set of eyes and ears helping you and helping you improve. It's all about continuous improvement. So I wanted that, I knew I needed that, and I had to go at a really piecemeal approach to go and get those mentors to eventually get really good at what I did. And I did get there. It took me a couple of years, but I did get there and because I had that experience in myself, it enabled me or enlightened me to the absolute need for that same experience and support and nurturing AKA mentoring for others.

Julienne [00:08:23] Wow, that's quite a significant rejection when you've done all that research on somebody who you at the time thought you aspired to be like. But actually what turned out was the complete opposite because look at who you are now. So with that rejection, did that change your approach to how you looked at potential other mentors or how you went about business?

Shivani [00:08:49] Yes, it really did. Unfortunately, I mean, first off, I started to close myself off from being vulnerable because I was rejected for it. I wasn't rewarded for it. It was so brutal to be spoken to in that way to have someone just look me up and down like I was some object that was going to, you know, drop off the perch any one point in time because I didn't have my priorities straight. And so I really locked myself up in that way. I didn't feel a sense of psychological safety. And I think that that's not just a personal problem. I think that is a problem that is experienced by women globally, that we don't have the psychological safety to say, hey, you know what, I love my job, but I have very little idea what I'm doing and I really could do with some help. But if you invest in me, I'm telling you, you are going to get out ten times as much as what you put in, and this is how much I want to give to the world. I didn't have that psychological safety and it meant that it was really lonely, Jules. You know, we don't talk about these long work hours as often, but they did happen. And for me, it certainly was the case where I would be in the office sometimes till 3 a.m., just really perfecting my craft, just trying to get really, really good at what I wanted to master. It also made my sense of leadership style very masculine because I was rejected in many ways for my femininity, you know, too young, too pretty. What in the world does that mean, right? So to me, what I internalised was that I was rejected for my womanhood because if I was a guy, I would not have been rejected in that way. Now, funnily enough, that moment I came through, I didn't go through the graduate program, but I came with a bunch of other graduates and there was a, you know, a guy friend of mine who was also a graduate and we were both great mates and he got what I would call organic mentoring from that same person because they would go out for drinks, they would go out for lunch, and this mentor would invest in him by sharing sage advice. I didn't get that. So it meant that I felt like I needed to be more masculine. I needed to be more assertive. I needed to be closed up. I had to pretend that I had all the answers and that is massively dangerous in any industry because we never have the answers, right, so many of us don't have any idea what we're doing even now, it's all about continually learning. So eventually I had to go through this journey of un-protecting myself and realising, okay, Shivani, you've had some wins, but you can't grow anymore unless you start making yourself vulnerable, unless you start opening yourself up again and asking for some support because you've gotten as far as you can go.

Julienne [00:11:26] Right and so was there a moment there where you felt that that was a trigger for you, that this was the time for you to be you?

Shivani [00:11:34] That is such a deep question, I think, Jules, what we really struggle with ultimately is to give ourselves permission to just be ourselves, to own ourselves, to stand up in all of our glory. I mean, first off, so many of us don't know what our glory is. You know, what really makes us shine? What are our strengths? What makes us so unique? And so, yes, it put me down this path of self-discovery, of understanding what makes me different, what makes me shine, what makes me unique because of those differences and going out and getting enough external pieces of validation from people I knew, loved and respected. You definitely don't want to get a clipboard out and ask everyone what they think of you. I think that's a huge no no and very dangerous for your sense of self-esteem and worth. But I think getting the right pieces of 360 feedback is so important. And when I did that and I felt I had this really enlightened sense of self-awareness, it fused within me almost, you know, gold pumping through my veins of I know who I am and this is darn awesome.

Julienne [00:12:45] That's fantastic. So, Shivani, you did make it in your financial services career, but continued to see women lacking in financial understanding, confidence and independence. So can you talk to us about what you did about that?

Shivani [00:13:01] Yes that was incredibly heart wrenching, Jules. I would be sitting across the room from incredible women, and I would hear things like, I'm so glad, Shivani, I've got you to tell me what to do with my money because I don't have a man in my life to be able to take control of my finances. Or I would see incredible women earning up to \$100,000 less than their male counterparts. I know that WGEA, which is short for the Workforce Gender Equality Agency, actually talks about this, that women in executive levels will earn up to \$100,000 less, especially because of bonuses. I saw that at the coalface, and so I found myself coaching these women and mentoring these women, not just on structuring their finances, but also owning themselves like you and I just spoke about and asking for their worth and how they might do that. Because when you start to ask for your worth, you start to adopt your own value and be unashamedly emboldened in asking for it.

Julienne [00:14:02] And so how did you go about managing the demand that no doubt must have come your way, being a successful female financial services professional, helping so many other women?

Shivani [00:14:16] Yes, you know, you're on to something when you just start doing something organically and eventually you get so busy because someone is telling another person then someone is telling another person. And eventually, you know, time is finite and you just don't have enough of it and you've only got one of you. So because I didn't get the kind of mentoring early on that I wanted and needed, and I eventually started mentoring so many other women, I got to a point where I had maxed out and I realised that, you know what, there is so much more to offer in the world than just me. You don't need a mentor. You need mentors because no one mentor can give you everything that you need. And so I decided that we needed a network, you know, a marketplace, for mentoring, where women could go out and be able to work with other executives, other professionals, other leaders to get the kind of support they needed.

Julienne [00:15:08] That's fantastic, Shivani. I think as a professional woman, you're always going to be on the leadership journey, learning how to do things better, differently to what you have maybe done in the past because times change, leadership evolves. Do you have a process or a theory around how to best manage that? I've heard about this concept around boardroom leadership. It's something that was taught to me and something that's helped me in my career. Is that something that you adopt or do you have a similar philosophy around your leadership journey?

Shivani [00:15:44] I do, and I really agree with it. The boardroom of mentors, the boardroom of leaders, so you need your trusted circle, you need your own advisory board if you like. And I think that a lot of people wait for a time or a title in order to get that, right, oh, I'm not a leader, so I don't need an advisory board or advisory boards are boards that people have when you're an executive or you're a startup founder. No, you get to choose and you are the director and the producer of your own life. You get to choose when you're going to create and bring these people into the ecosystem that is your life. And so you must have an advisory board of people who keep investing in you and giving you various levels of advice across various walks of life. But the twist that I would say to that is you've got to keep changing those chairs or keep changing the people in those chairs and that's so important because you will get to a point where they get comfortable with you and you get comfortable with them. It starts to move into a conversation of friendship and of support, but also you'll start letting each other off on things eventually. It's so important that you start rotating that trusted circle and expanding it. I'm not saying move some of those people out of your life. I'm saying complement it with other people so that you are consistently evolving. It's all about being ever growing, and it's about consistently moving yourself out of your comfort zone.

Julienne [00:17:06] That's such great advice. So, Shivani, I know you have some ambitious and altruistic plans. Can you share more about what's next for you and The Remarkable Woman?

Shivani [00:17:15] I do have very ambitious plans, and I think that as women, you know, we need to be, I'm certainly not here to play small and I encourage all women to do and think exactly the same way. When I look at the marketplace that's there for women right now I see so many talented women who are bursting with not just ambition, but capability and capacity and the kind that is untapped and unnoticed. And so I think the next thing for me is to make sure that I can help foster a world where women can better match with the kind of role that they are made for, but they never, ever thought they would ever apply for and that companies would also go, you know what, I would love to hire women in a way where I am moving away from bias and actually doing the stuff that I really wanted to do. But I acknowledge that, you know, we live in a bit of a clunky world where I'm always kind of hiring the person that I thought is the mould of success, which generally is masculine leadership. So I really love to make a dent in using technology to get more women into more diverse roles, more technological roles and more leadership roles. But ultimately, I want to see women lead in the world of money, in the world of finance, because I know we don't talk about money so often and we don't love this saying, but money does make the world go round. Money makes your world go around a little bit easier and so it's okay and to acknowledge that, to own that, and to want more for yourself, to want more money for yourself, that shouldn't be shameful thing. And so I'm very ambitious about making strides in that area.

Julienne [00:18:51] It's such a good point, Shivani. As women, we don't talk a lot to each other about money. Why do you think that is?

Shivani [00:18:59] Overarchingly, I think it's a cultural thing. As Australians overall, we don't talk about money. We are cultured to cheer for the underdog and the person who is really successful but just doesn't sound or act that way. And as women, not that by numbers we are the minority, but by influence and by power, we are the minority. And so when we're already the minority that way, we're not already supporting even men who talk about their influence and their wealth, then how could we feel safe in doing so? But it is so important for that very reason, in order to claim our power, the path to reclaiming our power is to make sure that we are financially successful. Now, what takes us off the beaten track is secrecy and that plays into us being small. We're often cultured around this stuff of, you know, oh, you know, just grin and bear it. The person who doesn't say anything is the person who has the most strength. You know, all of that it's designed to keep us to play small. And it's the same with the notion of secrecy around money, that it is shameful. It's distasteful to talk about how much money you earn. All of that is designed to keep us small financially so that you and I don't talk about how much money we make and go, hey, you know what, there's a massive disparity here, because if we did that, Jules, you might say to me, you know what, Shivani, if you just did these three things and had that conversation with your boss, I reckon you'd get paid that extra 50 grand or that extra five grand, whatever that may be for my world. And I think that if I got that kind of advice from you, that might just happen. So we've got to move away from secrecy, we've really got to embrace financial conversations and find a way to have comfort within that for the purpose of growth. So sometimes it's just about changing our mindset, think less about the process, which is this murky, uncomfortable conversation about money to the outcome that is you and me feeling really strong and empowered, supporting each other, talking about money, but also, hey, we're both going to earn a lot more if we just did that, what would our lives be like then? How could we then work towards our dreams, our opportunities, provide for our families, whatever motivates us in order to achieve that, if we just did that.

Julienne [00:21:18] I love that, thank you for sharing that, Shivani. So I think, as you know, at Leading Women, we're committed to activating women's leadership. What tool has ignited your leadership that you can share with us in the Leadership Toolbox?

Shivani [00:21:32] I've thought long and hard about this one, of course, because I have asked this question many times. And for me, what I'd love to leave our listeners with is a way in which they can craft their own purpose statement because I have so many mantras that I live my life by, you know, to forever be pursuing my ever growing potential is one of them. My purpose statement in life, Jules, is to be fearless in the pursuit of a greater tomorrow, to live a fully expressed life with courage and compassion. Now, how do I come up with these things? How do I live my life by that compass? I follow a little process that we teach at The Remarkable Woman, and it's around how to find your purpose statement. And I want to leave a couple of nuggets on how women can do exactly that and that is think about your childhood. Think about your early life. What are those beautiful moments and stories that have still stuck with you? How did that make you feel and why was that so important? For me, having courage and compassion and being fearless was one of them. Have you had any hard or tough experiences in your life that have really shaped you? You know, for me, in leaving my early adult arranged marriage was by far the hardest thing I have ever done and because of that, I know that I'm fused with fearlessness, because if I can overcome that, I can overcome anything. So I traced those two things together, and then I've paired it with my passion for the future. What is it that I want? What emotions are going to drive me there? Those three things have been fused together to create my purpose statement. And it's great to just have a line that you live by because no matter what opportunities come your way, you're able to then put that up against a mirror with your purpose statement and say, is this something that is meaningful for me? Is this something that I'm going to pursue? If the answer is yes, you make it happen no matter how fearful or uncomfortable you may be, if the answer is no, you step right away. There's no guilt in line.

Julienne [00:23:29] Shivani, we were so excited to hear from you today on this podcast, and you have not let us down. Thank you so much for your generosity, your honesty, sharing what you know, sharing your vulnerability with us. I think we've all learnt so much from this conversation and for that we are so grateful. Thank you.

Shivani [00:23:47] Thank you, it's been such an honour and can I just say, time flies when you're in the guest seat.

Julienne [00:23:53] Thanks for listening to Leading Women, where we can all activate and redefine the business landscape. So now it's over to you, access the links, tips and tools discussed in this episode at womeninfoocus.com.au and subscribe to leading women so you don't miss an episode. Leave a review, spread the word and let's commit to keeping the conversation going at #leadingwomensaus

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