



## Women shouldn't drift along, putting others' happiness before theirs: Devina Mehra

*'Militant feminist' and the CMD of First Global has always called out gender insensitivity, even as a young teen.*

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Devina Mehra holds gender equality and gender sensitivity close to her heart, and has protested against its absence even as a child.

Young women should treat their happiness and aspirations as a priority, and not drift along with others' plans, Devina Mehra, chairperson and managing director, First Global, has said, suggesting a benchmarking system to ensure that no one runs off course.

“Don't drift along, and put others' happiness and ambitions ahead of yours... As I always say, check with your teenage self if you are going the way you have always wanted to. Do that constant benchmarking,” Mehra said in an interaction with *Moneycontrol*.

She added that it won't be an easy thing to negotiate but it would be a worthwhile exercise.

Mehra, who identifies as a “militant feminist”, recalled instances, even from a young age, when she called out gender insensitivity.

“When I was around 10 to 12, I used to write these passionate letters to the editor to magazines or newspapers every time I thought anything was kind of sexist,” she said.

Today, she does not even let a chauvinist Whatsapp forward go unremarked. “People say that it was just a joke and I respond saying that they should consider this (her rebuttal) as a gender-sensitivity training done for free,” said Mehra, laughingly.

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- DEVINA MEHRA



**She said that she can't think of any explicitly sexist remark made in her presence but has had experiences of sexist behaviour.**

“There might be differences in the way people deal with you. For example, when I was a banker or a research analyst, I found that a lot of men were not comfortable making eye contact. If you are the only person in the meeting, then they have to deal with you, eye contact or no eye contact. But if you went with a man, however junior, they would rather look at him and talk,” she said.

Asked if she holds the gender-equality debate close to her heart, she answered in an emphatic affirmative.

She commented on the weak and falling women's share in India's labour force. However, she said that the issue isn't so much about workplace discrimination.

“It (lack of women's participation in the workforce) is coming more from non-work environments such as society and family. That is why so many women are dropping out of working lives because all the responsibilities they have to bear become too much of a burden,” she said.

**“People may remark that a woman has a cook or other helpers, but the fact is she is expected to manage the household staff, manage the children's schedule and even the in-laws' medical needs,” she added.**

Mehra has often raised a question in her IIM alumni group, whether any of the men know their parents' dietary preferences and medications better than their wives do. “Not one person has ever said ‘yes’,” she said.

She said the problem is there across the world and more so in India. “In US also, studies have shown that household work is more or less equally divided among couples till the children come along. After that, it (the work distribution) gets skewed,” she said.

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