

## Spotlight on... Vrinda Mehra

### Vrinda Mehra

General Manager, Funds,  
Actis



Responsible for fund administration of Actis's Energy and the Infrastructure business and providing transaction support to the firm's investment professionals, Vrinda Mehra has always been fascinated by finance. We asked her about her experience moving through her career and what she has learned along the way.

#### Why did you decide to go into finance?

"Finance was always a natural choice for me because I've always loved working with numbers. I was brought up in Delhi and, when I was growing up, two sectors were booming – banking and financial services and IT. So, given my interest in numbers and accounting, finance seemed an obvious move.

"After completing my degree in India, I moved to the UK to gain international exposure. After completing my masters in finance from The University of Warwick, I joined PricewaterhouseCoopers in their audit and assurance division. I had only planned to be in the UK for a couple of years after my degree, but I really enjoyed my job and stayed for longer. As an auditor, you get to interact with lots of different people and that was a great experience. I was working with private equity clients as well as investment managers and investment banks – I really enjoyed that part of my work."

#### So how did you manage your return to India?

"I stayed in the UK for six years, but then finally decided to move back home. However, at the time there were very few private equity houses based in Delhi – most were in Mumbai and if I'd moved to Mumbai it would have defeated the purpose of returning home to Delhi. To my good luck, the partner I used to report to in PwC knew the ex-Head of Operations of Actis and introduced me to him. I was interviewed in London and a few months later, here I was.

"My role involves heading the Fund administration division of Actis's Energy and Infrastructure business, including capital drawdowns, limited partner reporting, valuations, tax reporting and interaction across all Actis teams. I also provide end to end transaction support to the energy and infrastructure investment teams at every stage of the transaction i.e. during investments, exits and follow-on's as part of my role as a member of the transaction support group to ensure smooth deal execution.

#### What challenges do you think women face in building a career?

"There is a perception that women would not be able to put in longer hours or would be unwilling to travel and that can mean they are sometimes not put forward for certain roles. As a result, to offset this perception, women often have to work that much harder to prove their worth in an organisation.

Also, women especially in their mid-30's-40's find it difficult to manage their career and their family life. Sometimes they need to squeeze 48 hours of work into 24 hours."



## **So how can the playing field be levelled?**

"Organisations need to be deliberate in their approach to achieving gender balance and there needs to be clear leadership from the top on this issue. I've often seen women underestimate their capability and be riddled with self-doubt. That means they may need someone to champion and support them, encouraging them to take ownership of their successes. In many instances, I see men attribute successes to their own efforts; women usually attribute them to a team effort or external factors. The issue is that promotions don't come unless you really believe in yourself. Women need to back themselves.

"Society is not just going to change – it will only change when we do and put ourselves up for opportunities. It may seem unfair, but actually, that's quite empowering because it means it is in the hands of women to set in train shifts in perceptions. I think we're already starting to see this happen – look at where Covid-19 has been more successfully managed, for example. New Zealand, Taiwan and Germany all have female leaders and I think that may help bring about a change in perception."

## **You mention the importance of having a champion in an organisation. How important do you think mentoring is?**

"It's very important. As is having a role model – there is real power in seeing yourself reflected in someone who has achieved success and be able to envision what is possible.

"And you don't necessarily need to have a formal mentoring programme to make a difference – if organisations can be deliberate about ensuring that attention is given to accomplishments and that successes are highlighted, especially if women have been responsible for them, it will make individuals feel valued and build self-confidence."

## **How has Actis supported you in your role?**

"I have two role models here – so I didn't have to look very far. I am always impressed by the way they manage to achieve a good balance between work and life. There is a strong emphasis on personal life and professional fitness here. The way they juggle amidst their various roles is nothing short of amazing and truly inspiring.

Actis has a very inclusive environment. Through the firm, we are also encouraged to talk about issues, such as gender equality, and raise any issues we may

encounter. There is a strong tone from the top that employees are valued for what they bring to the organisation.

"We've also recently had an unconscious bias training – that was extremely helpful as everyone has some biases that they just don't realise they have."

## **What advice would you offer to others?**

"If they are interested in finance, I'd say not to neglect relationship-building skills. It can be very easy to focus on the technical aspects of the job and forget that those skills sit in a larger system-dealing with different stakeholders, managing expectations, understanding the company processes. Hence, being able to communicate and work well with colleagues across the organisation is just as important.

"And for women considering starting a family, the best piece of advice I've come across is not to mentally exit even before the baby arrives. Very often women stop putting their hands up for opportunities or don't take a promotion when thinking about starting a family, but you should never leave before you have to."

Also, women should believe in themselves and own up to their own success. They should continuously seek opportunities and try and grow as an individual.