



AMBITION WITHOUT *Apology*

Building businesses,
raising children, and
refusing to choose
between them.

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ENTREPRENEUR. MOTHER. DREAMER.

AMBITION WITHOUT APOLOGY

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This is a memoir. It reflects the author's present recollections of experiences over time. Some names and characteristics may have been changed, some events may have been compressed, and some dialogue has been recreated.

First Edition, 2026

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CHAPTER ONE

The First Life I Saw

The first time I became aware of money, I was standing outside my parents' bedroom door pretending not to listen.

I was a few weeks away from turning thirteen and all I wanted was a new outfit to wear on my birthday. Nothing extravagant. Just something that felt special.

My mother had gone into the bedroom to ask my father if they could afford it. The door was closed, but voices carry differently when you're a child. I don't remember the words as much as the pauses between them. Long enough for me to understand that buying me a birthday outfit wasn't an automatic yes.

I walked away before the conversation ended.

It wasn't disappointment that stayed with me. It was the quiet understanding that my mother had to ask.

She was one of the smartest people I knew. Education wasn't simply important to her; she loved learning in a way that made it feel almost alive. She had married young, before she had the chance to continue the life she had imagined for herself. Whether that life would have been different, nobody

can really know. What I do know is that she never wanted her children to wonder what might have been.

I didn't walk away from that bedroom thinking about financial independence or ambition. I was thirteen. Those weren't thoughts I had the language for yet.

What stayed with me was much simpler. I never wanted my choices to depend on someone else's permission.

The truth is, though, my story began long before that conversation. For the first nine years of my life, I lived with my grandparents.

When I was born, my parents were still very young. My mother was only nineteen, and life was financially difficult. My grandparents stepped in and became my primary caregivers while my parents worked towards building a more stable future.

People sometimes assume that arrangement must have been difficult for me. It wasn't. I never felt abandoned. If anything, I felt surrounded by love.

Their home was the first home I ever knew.

My grandfather was a man of routines. Every morning, without fail, he sat with the newspaper spread across the table before the rest of the house had properly woken up. Reading the paper wasn't something he squeezed into his day. It was how every day began. Even now, whenever I see someone completely absorbed in a newspaper over breakfast, I'm taken back to those mornings in Delhi.

My cousin, who was only six months younger than me, was my constant companion. To everyone else he was my cousin. To me, he was simply my brother. We did almost everything together, including the daily trip to school.

One of my uncles would somehow fit the three of us onto his Vespa each morning and drive us there. Looking back, I have no idea how we all fitted on that little scooter, but somehow we always did. It never seemed unusual to us. It was simply part of everyday life.

Delhi itself felt full of movement. The streets were always busy, children seemed to spill outside after school, and games of cricket appeared wherever there was enough space to improvise a pitch.

I loved cricket.

Back then, girls weren't expected to play. Every now and then I'd get an odd look from someone wondering why a girl wanted to join the boys instead of standing on the sidelines. I don't remember caring very much. I wasn't trying to prove a point. I simply wanted to play.

Looking back, I smile because I was such a tomboy. Fashion didn't interest me. Neither did makeup or dressing up. If someone had shown that little girl a photograph of the woman I'd eventually become—with handbags, heels and an appreciation for beautiful clothes—I don't think she would have believed it.

Summer brought its own rhythm. Power cuts happened so often that nobody complained about them. They weren't interruptions; they were simply part of life. We adapted without thinking much about it.

The monsoon was different. When the rain arrived, it arrived properly. The streets filled with water and the little bit of time we had to play outside after school often disappeared beneath days of relentless rain. As children, that was our biggest concern. We weren't worried about traffic or inconvenience. We just wanted to get back outside.

My grandparents were traditional in many ways, but they gave me something that has stayed with me for the rest of my life: a deep sense of stability.

My grandfather had begun his career in the police force, but it was property that changed our family's future. Long before Delhi expanded into the city it would become, he quietly bought land and investment properties. As the city grew, so did the value of those investments. By the time he retired, property had given him something far more valuable than wealth. It had given him choices.

As a little girl, I didn't understand investment strategies or capital growth.

I only knew that my grandfather had built something that created security for the people he loved.

Years later, when I found myself buying investment properties across different countries, I realised how familiar that idea had always been. It never felt foreign to me because I had grown up watching someone quietly demonstrate what patience and long-term thinking could create.

Eventually my parents were in a position to bring me home.

I understood why. They finally had the opportunity to raise me themselves. That didn't make leaving my grandparents any easier. They had been my whole world, and adjusting to a new household took time.

School became the place where everything settled. I've always been competitive, although probably not in the way people imagine. I wasn't interested in beating everyone else as much as I was interested in seeing how well I could do. Two of my closest friends, who remain close friends today, were also among the strongest students in our year. The

three of us were usually separated by a mark, sometimes half a mark. One exam I'd finish first, the next one of them would. We celebrated each other's success, but there was an unspoken understanding that none of us wanted to fall behind. Without realising it, we kept raising the standard for one another.

Life in West Delhi was simple. I walked to school, came home, studied, helped around the house and spent whatever time I could outdoors before returning to my books. We had one television in the house, and it sat in my parents' bedroom. Entertainment wasn't something that filled our afternoons.

My mother also believed that every child, especially every daughter, should know how to look after a home. She taught me how to cook, clean and take responsibility for everyday life. At the time it felt completely ordinary. Only much later did I appreciate how many practical skills she quietly passed on.

By the time I turned seventeen, my world felt both familiar and too small.

Like many Indian families, ours believed deeply in education. Engineering and medicine were seen as pathways to opportunity, security and respect. I had convinced myself that engineering was what I wanted too.

So when the opportunity came to move to Sydney for university, I didn't hesitate. People often ask if I was scared. The honest answer is no.

There were nerves, of course, but they were drowned out by excitement. I wasn't thinking about everything I was leaving behind. I was thinking about everything that might be waiting for me. As the plane lifted off from Delhi, I watched the city disappear beneath the clouds. I had no idea that the

life I thought I was flying towards wasn't the one I would eventually build.

I only knew that, for the first time, the future belonged entirely to me.

CHAPTER TWO

A World That Felt Different

At seventeen, I boarded a flight to Sydney with two suitcases, an acceptance letter to university and a very clear picture of how my life was supposed to unfold.

I was going to study engineering, graduate, build a successful career and create the kind of financial security I had admired growing up. The plan felt sensible. It felt responsible. More importantly, it felt like the life everyone expected me to build. I had no reason to question it.

As the plane descended into Sydney, I pressed my face against the window, trying to take in a city I had only ever seen in photographs. Everything looked unfamiliar, but I wasn't frightened. I was excited.

The moment I stepped outside the airport, the first thing I noticed wasn't the buildings or the roads. It was the silence. Not complete silence, of course, but compared to Delhi it felt almost surreal. The constant chorus of traffic, horns and people that had always formed the soundtrack of my childhood had disappeared. The air felt cleaner, the streets calmer and everything seemed to move at a gentler pace.

For the first time in my life, I realised just how noisy home had been. That feeling didn't last long.

One of my suitcases didn't arrive. Standing in a country I'd never visited before, trying to explain that my luggage was missing, was hardly the welcome I had imagined. Looking back, it's almost funny. At the time, it simply meant solving another problem.

It would become a familiar pattern throughout my life.

The relatives I was staying with welcomed me warmly. They lived in a comfortable four-bedroom home, and although my room was small, it had everything I needed. I never felt like I was imposing or that I had anything to complain about. I was simply grateful to have family there while I found my feet in a completely different country.

Those first few weeks taught me that living overseas wasn't nearly as glamorous as it had looked from India. Back home, I'd grown up with routines that simply happened around you. In Australia, everything depended on you.

My mother had prepared me well. By the time I was fourteen, she had already taught me how to cook, clean and take care of a household. At the time, I hadn't appreciated why she insisted on it. Standing in a kitchen in Sydney, cooking dinner after university, I finally understood.

There were no maids. No household help. No one quietly taking care of the jobs you didn't notice needed doing. If the washing needed folding, you folded it. If dinner needed cooking, you cooked it. If the house was untidy, you cleaned it. It wasn't difficult. It was simply different.

The other surprise was how much Australians walked. Back home, we rarely thought twice about jumping into a car or taking public transport for relatively short distances. In

Sydney, walking became part of everyday life. Before long, I found myself covering distances that would have seemed ridiculous only a few months earlier. Without realising it, independence wasn't arriving in dramatic moments. It was arriving one grocery shop, one load of washing and one long walk at a time.

University was exactly what I expected. Engineering wasn't.

I'd spent years believing this was the career I wanted. Like many Indian families, ours saw engineering as one of the safest paths to a successful future. I believed that too. I wasn't pressured into it. I genuinely thought it was the right choice. But somewhere during my first year, something didn't feel right.

The lectures interested me far less than I expected they would. The work felt logical, structured and challenging, but it never made me curious. I kept telling myself that perhaps everyone felt this way and that eventually something would click.

So I kept going. For three years, I convinced myself I enjoyed it. Part of me wanted to enjoy it because I had invested so much time into the degree. My parents had invested far more than money. They had trusted me enough to send their seventeen-year-old daughter to the other side of the world. Walking away from engineering felt like letting them down. But I never hid how I felt.

My parents weren't thrilled when I began questioning whether engineering was the right career for me. They had every reason to worry. From their perspective, I was considering abandoning a stable profession after years of study for something with no obvious future. Looking back, I under-

stand why. At the time, though, I was carrying two competing emotions.

Guilt...and relief. Guilt because I'd spent years working towards a career I no longer wanted. Relief because, for the first time, I had begun to suspect that perhaps there was another path waiting for me. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life living somebody else's dream. The problem was that I had no idea what my own dream actually looked like. Like most international students, I needed to work while studying.

It wasn't just about earning money. I wanted experience. I wanted to understand how Australian businesses operated. I wanted to build a life here, not simply earn a degree and leave. So I began applying for part-time jobs, not knowing that one application would quietly change the direction of my entire future.

Finding part-time work wasn't easy, but eventually I was offered a role at Magnus Advertising as a sales rep. At the time, I knew very little about advertising. I certainly wasn't imagining that this small part-time job would end up shaping the rest of my career. I simply needed work that fitted around university.

My first day almost didn't happen the way it was supposed to. Ben, who was meant to be my manager, had resigned the week before I started. Instead, I was trained by the company's Managing Director. Looking back now, it feels like one of those tiny moments that quietly change the course of your life without anyone noticing. Had Ben not been persuaded to return to the business, our paths would probably never have crossed.

Life has a funny way of disguising life's biggest moments as ordinary days. At the time, though, I wasn't thinking about any of that. I was simply trying to learn a new job.

My role was straightforward. I spent my days speaking with business owners, introducing advertising opportunities and booking their campaigns at the available Big-W stores. Like most people starting their first real job, I was nervous about making mistakes. I quickly discovered that I enjoyed talking to people.

Every conversation was different. Every business had a different story, a different challenge and a different idea of what success looked like. Without realising it, I was getting an education that no university lecture could have given me. For the first time, work felt interesting. University had taught me formulas and theories. This job taught me about people.

Before long, I was given the opportunity to put together advertising campaigns for clients.

I loved it.

Not because it felt creative. Not because it paid commission. I loved solving the puzzle.

I found myself thinking about clients long after I left the office. I'd replay conversations in my head, wondering whether there was a better approach or a stronger recommendation. It didn't feel like work in the way engineering had. It felt natural.

When I made my first sale, I was obviously excited. The commission cheque was more money than I had earned before, and as a university student that certainly mattered. But what surprised me most was that the money wasn't what stayed with me. The feeling I couldn't shake was how much I had enjoyed building the strategy itself.

Helping a client solve a problem.

Putting together a campaign.

Watching it all come together.

As I held that first commission cheque, I admitted something to myself that I'd been resisting for years. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life living somebody else's dream. Engineering had always seemed like the sensible choice. Advertising didn't. But for the first time since arriving in Australia, I could genuinely picture myself doing this for the rest of my life.

That realisation was both exciting and terrifying. Exciting because I had finally discovered work that gave me energy instead of taking it away. Terrifying because it meant accepting that the path I'd spent years following wasn't actually mine.

My parents weren't thrilled. I understood why. They had sacrificed enormously to give me opportunities they had never had themselves. Engineering represented stability, security and a respected profession. Advertising felt uncertain by comparison.

From their perspective, I was walking away from certainty. From mine, I was finally walking towards something that felt like me. It wasn't a decision I made overnight.

For a long time I tried to convince myself that perhaps I could finish engineering and simply keep advertising as a part-time job. It seemed like the sensible compromise. But every week I spent at Magnus made the answer clearer. I looked forward to going to work. I never felt that way walking into an engineering lecture.

Some decisions in life arrive with absolute certainty. This wasn't one of them. This decision arrived quietly. It grew stronger every time I solved a client's problem. Every time a

campaign came together. Every time I realised that business fascinated me far more than equations ever had.

Around that time, Ben returned to Magnus. By then I had settled into the business, and we gradually got to know one another. People often ask what first attracted me to him, expecting some dramatic romantic story. The truth is much simpler. I admired the way he thought.

We spoke endlessly about business, careers and where we wanted life to take us. While other couples might have spent hours talking about restaurants or weekend plans, we found ourselves discussing ideas, opportunities and the future we hoped to build.

He respected my ambition. That mattered to me more than I probably realised at the time. There was never any expectation that I should dream smaller. If anything, he encouraged me to think bigger. Looking back now, I think that's one of the reasons our relationship developed so naturally.

We weren't just building a relationship. We were building a shared vision of what our future might look like. Without either of us knowing it, those conversations were shaping far more than our careers. They were shaping the life we believed we were going to build together. As my confidence at Magnus grew, so did my confidence outside of work. For the first time since arriving in Australia, I stopped feeling like a student who happened to have a part-time job. I began to feel like someone building a career. The city that had once felt unfamiliar was now simply home.

I knew which train to catch without thinking. I had favourite cafés where I'd grab lunch between meetings. The twenty-five minute walks that had once seemed long became part of

my daily routine. Sydney no longer felt like a place I was visiting. It felt like somewhere I belonged.

University remained important, and I was determined to finish what I had started. Even though I knew engineering wasn't where my future lay, completing my degree mattered to me. I'd come too far to walk away without finishing.

Outside of university and work, Ben and I spent more and more time together. We were both young, ambitious and excited about what the future might hold. Looking back now, I don't think we were drawn to each other because we had all the answers. We were drawn to each other because we believed anything was possible.

There was an optimism to those years that's difficult to describe. We talked about careers. About financial independence. About building something of our own one day. Neither of us came from extraordinary wealth, and perhaps that's why we both appreciated what it meant to create opportunities rather than wait for them.

Not long after we married, another dream that had quietly followed me since childhood began to take shape. We bought our first apartment in Hornsby. I still remember the day we collected the keys. The apartment wasn't grand. It wasn't the kind of property people stopped to admire. But when I unlocked the front door and stepped inside, I wasn't looking at square metres or finishes or resale value. I was looking at possibility. The rooms were empty. Our footsteps echoed as we walked from one room to another, imagining where the furniture would go and how we'd make it our own. Like so many first homes, it wasn't perfect. It didn't need to be.

Standing there, I felt something I hadn't expected.

Peace.

As a little girl, I'd watched my grandfather quietly build security through property. I never understood the numbers behind what he was doing, but I understood how safe his family felt because of the choices he'd made years earlier. Now, standing in my own apartment on the other side of the world, I realised why that memory had stayed with me.

This wasn't about owning real estate. It was about creating stability. About building a life one decision at a time. Looking back, people sometimes assume buying that apartment was a financial decision. It was. But it was also deeply emotional. As I stood there holding those keys, I realised I was beginning to build the life I had imagined as a little girl. Not the life other people had imagined for me.

Mine. It wasn't a life built on certainty. If anything, I'd already discovered that life had very little interest in following carefully written plans.

I'd arrived in Australia believing engineering would define my future. Instead, I'd discovered a career I hadn't even known existed. I'd expected university to shape my life. Instead, a part-time job had done that. I'd expected to simply earn a degree. Instead, I'd found a profession that challenged me, excited me and made me curious about business in a way I'd never experienced before.

The path had changed completely. For the first time, I wasn't disappointed by that. I was grateful for it. When I think back to the young woman who stood in that empty apartment in Hornsby, I remember how certain she felt. She believed that hard work would always be rewarded. She believed that if you treated people well, life would usually do the same. She believed that she had found the career she would spend the

rest of her life building, and the person she would spend that life with.

There was an innocence in that certainty.

I don't say that with sadness.

I say it with affection.

Because every version of ourselves makes decisions with the information we have at the time. That young woman couldn't possibly have known how many times life would ask her to begin again. Nor should she have.

Some chapters of our lives are meant to be lived without knowing what comes next.

This was one of them.

CHAPTER THREE

Love I Never Knew Existed

The doctor smiled kindly as she looked at my results.
“You’re not pregnant.”

I remember nodding politely, but as I walked back to my car, I couldn’t shake the feeling that she was wrong. A few days earlier, I’d taken a home pregnancy test that showed a faint positive result. Ben and I had decided we were ready to start a family, and we’d been incredibly fortunate. We hadn’t been trying for long at all. The doctor explained that sometimes home tests could be misleading and suggested I come back in a couple of weeks.

It was sensible advice. The strange thing was that, despite what she told me, I never stopped believing I was pregnant. I couldn’t explain it logically. Nothing dramatic had happened. I simply knew. Two weeks later, I took another test. This time, the result was unmistakable. When I returned to the doctor, she smiled again, only this time with different news.

I was going to be a mum. I don’t remember feeling frightened. If anything, I felt excited. From the moment Ben and I decided we wanted children, we’d hoped it would happen quickly. We knew that wasn’t something every couple was

fortunate enough to experience, so we never took it for granted. As the pregnancy progressed, everything began changing in quiet, ordinary ways. We started talking less about ourselves and more about someone we hadn't even met yet. Conversations shifted from work schedules to baby names.

Weekends that had once revolved around us slowly became weekends spent imagining what life would look like as three.

Like most first-time parents, we had no real idea what we were doing. We bought the books. Accepted the advice. Listened to everyone's opinions. And quietly hoped we'd work the rest out along the way.

At the same time, life didn't stop. Work continued to grow.

The advertising industry still fascinated me, and every new client reminded me why I'd walked away from engineering. I found myself thinking constantly about campaigns, business growth and opportunities. Somewhere in the background, another idea had begun taking shape as well. I'd started laying the foundations for an operation in Bangalore.

It was still in its infancy, little more than a vision at that stage, but I couldn't ignore the opportunity I could see. India had an extraordinary pool of talented people, and I believed there was a way to build something that connected that talent with Australian businesses.

For now, though, it remained just that.

An idea.

The bigger focus was preparing for the arrival of our son. Nothing prepares you for the moment you become a parent. People try. They tell you how tired you'll be. How quickly life changes. How much responsibility you'll suddenly carry. What nobody managed to explain to me was the love.

Before Cruz was born, I thought I understood what love felt like. I loved my parents. My grandparents. My husband. My family. Then I held my son for the first time. In that moment, I realised I'd discovered an emotion I didn't know existed. It wasn't simply more love. It felt entirely different. People often say you'll never understand until you have children. I used to think that was just one of those things parents liked to say. Now I understood exactly what they meant.

Looking at him, I remember thinking, "*So this is what everyone has been trying to describe.*"

Everything else faded into the background. The room. The conversations. The exhaustion. None of it mattered. There was only this tiny little person who had somehow made the world feel completely different within the space of a few seconds.

Cruz was a remarkably easy baby. People would often comment on how calm he was, and I remember feeling incredibly fortunate. He settled into routines naturally, slept well and seemed content almost everywhere we took him. He looked exactly like Ben.

Whenever I looked at him, I felt as though I was looking at a miniature version of his father. It made me smile then. It still does.

Those early months passed in a blur that every parent seems to understand. Days merged into nights. Weeks disappeared before I noticed. I was exhausted far more often than I was rested, yet I don't remember wishing any of it away. I wanted to be present for every stage because everyone kept telling me how quickly it would pass.

They were right.

I took thirteen days away from work after Cruz was born. Not thirteen weeks. Thirteen days. Even then, I wasn't working full-time. I'd answer emails, take the occasional call and stay connected to what was happening. After that, I returned to work.

People have occasionally asked whether I struggled with that decision. The honest answer is no. I loved being a mum. I also loved my work. For me, those two things were never competing with one another. In many ways, they strengthened each other.

Working made me happier. And being happier made me a better mother. There was no guilt in admitting that. Only honesty. Cruz didn't seem to mind either. More than once, he'd fall asleep on my lap while I worked at my desk. The sound of my keyboard never seemed to bother him. Somehow he slept peacefully while I answered emails, planned campaigns and spoke with clients. Looking back, I sometimes wonder whether the rhythm of work simply became part of his earliest memories, just as naturally as the sound of our voices.

Those months taught me something I hadn't expected. Motherhood hadn't replaced the woman I was becoming. It had simply introduced me to another part of myself. For the first time in my life, I wasn't just building a future for me. Every decision I made now belonged to someone else as well. Life settled into a rhythm that was both wonderfully ordinary and permanently exhausting.

Every day felt full before it even began.

There were bottles to prepare, nappies to change, laundry that somehow never ended and a baby who depended on us for absolutely everything. Somewhere in between, there was

work. People often imagine those years as a constant balancing act between career and motherhood, but that wasn't how I experienced them. I never felt as though I had to choose one over the other. I loved both. Being a mother fulfilled a part of me I hadn't known existed. Building a business fulfilled another. One never replaced the other. If anything, each made the other stronger.

There were days when Cruz would be asleep on my lap while I replied to emails or worked on advertising proposals. I'd learn to type with one hand, gently rocking him with the other. Somehow, the sound of my keyboard never disturbed him. He was an incredibly easy baby.

Friends often commented on how settled he was, and I knew how fortunate we were. Parenthood is unpredictable, and I never assumed our experience was everyone's experience. Cruz simply seemed content wherever he was, provided one of us was close by.

Those early months also showed me a side of Ben that made me admire him even more. He was a wonderful father from the very beginning. Patient. Gentle. Completely devoted to Cruz. Watching him become a dad remains one of my favourite memories from that time. Cruz looked so much like him that sometimes it felt as though I was looking at two versions of the same little boy, separated only by time. Even now, when I look back at old photographs, I smile at the resemblance. We were a team. People sometimes assume divorce rewrites every memory that came before it. It doesn't. Life is rarely that simple. The truth is that those early years were happy. We were learning together. Making mistakes together. Celebrating every tiny milestone together.

Weekends became family days. We'd pack everything a baby could possibly need—far more than we ever ended up using—and head to the beach or spend a few hours at a local park. Cruz was too young to remember those outings, but we remember them. They weren't elaborate family adventures. They were simple afternoons spent enjoying the Australian lifestyle we'd come to love before heading home for nap time and the familiar routine that every new parent comes to appreciate.

In between family life, another conversation quietly continued.

Property.

It was one of the subjects Ben and I returned to again and again. We talked about buying wisely, investing for the future and creating long-term security. Those conversations felt completely natural to both of us. I'd grown up watching my grandfather patiently build wealth through property, and Ben shared the same long-term way of thinking. We weren't chasing quick wins. We were thinking about decades. Looking back, those conversations were never really about real estate. They were about freedom. About building a life where our choices weren't dictated by financial pressure.

While those conversations continued at home, another idea refused to leave my mind. Months earlier, I'd begun exploring the possibility of building an operation in Bangalore. At first, it was little more than research and conversations. Whenever I spoke to people in India, I kept coming back to the same thought. The talent was extraordinary. The opportunity was enormous. Australian businesses needed skilled people. India had skilled people.

It felt like there should be a bridge between the two. The more I explored the idea, the more convinced I became that it wasn't just possible. It was necessary.

The timing, however, couldn't have been more complicated. I wasn't simply considering starting something new. I was considering doing it with a newborn baby. Most people would probably have waited. That would certainly have been the safer decision. But I'd never been particularly good at waiting for the perfect time.

One evening, after Cruz had fallen asleep, Ben and I sat talking about what the future might look like. The opportunity in Bangalore kept coming up. We talked through every practical question we could think of. How long would it take? What would it cost? Would it work? How would we make it work with a baby?

Neither of us knew the answers.

What we did know was that opportunities rarely arrive at convenient moments. The more we talked, the clearer the decision became. If we were going to build something meaningful, this was the time to do it. Not because life was easy. But because we were willing to build our lives around the opportunities we believed in, rather than waiting for those opportunities to fit neatly around our lives. The decision meant leaving behind the routine we'd only just settled into. It meant taking our young family to India while I built something from the ground up.

On paper, it probably looked like an enormous risk. To me, it felt strangely familiar. My life had already taught me that some of the biggest decisions I'd ever make wouldn't come with guarantees. Leaving Delhi for Australia had felt like that. Walking away from engineering had felt like that. This was no

different. I looked across at Cruz, asleep in his cot, completely unaware that his parents were making a decision that would shape all of our lives. Children have a remarkable way of making you think further into the future. Every decision suddenly carries more weight because it no longer belongs only to you. As I watched him sleeping, I realised this move wasn't simply about building a business. It was about building a life that would give him the same thing my parents and grandparents had spent their lives trying to give me.

Opportunity.

Once the decision had been made, everything moved surprisingly quickly. There wasn't a long period of hesitation or months spent wondering whether we were doing the right thing. We'd talked through the opportunities, the risks and the practicalities, and eventually we reached the point where the only thing left to do was begin.

Looking back, I've realised that many of the biggest decisions in my life have happened that way.

Not impulsively.

Just with quiet certainty.

The operation I'd begun planning in Bangalore was still incredibly small. There were no guarantees that it would succeed. There wasn't a roadmap showing me exactly how to build it, only a strong belief that there was an opportunity worth pursuing.

For years I'd watched Australian businesses struggle to find skilled people while, at the same time, I knew India was full of talented graduates looking for opportunities to build meaningful careers. The more I thought about it, the more obvious the gap seemed. I wanted to build something that

connected the two. At the time, I wasn't thinking about creating multiple companies or building an international business.

I was simply trying to solve a problem. That has remained true throughout my career. The businesses have always come later. The problem comes first.

Preparing for the move was completely different this time. When I'd left Delhi for Sydney at seventeen, I was responsible only for myself. Now every suitcase contained tiny clothes, bottles, blankets and all the things new parents somehow convince themselves they can't live without.

Travel suddenly required military-level planning. Leaving the house for an hour felt like preparing for a week away. I smiled at how quickly life had changed. Not long before, I'd been worrying about university assignments and commission targets. Now I could somehow discuss a client proposal while remembering exactly how many nappies were left in the cupboard.

Motherhood hadn't made me less ambitious. It had simply made me better at prioritising.

People sometimes assume that building a business and raising a family pull you in opposite directions. That wasn't my experience. Everything I wanted to build professionally was deeply connected to the family I wanted to create. Success was never about titles or recognition. It was about creating choices. Choices for our family. Choices for our future. The same kind of choices my grandfather's quiet decisions had created for ours.

As our departure grew closer, I found myself thinking about how much my life had changed in such a short space of time. Only a few years earlier, I'd arrived in Australia as a

seventeen-year-old international student with two suitcases and a degree planned out for me.

Since then I'd discovered a career I genuinely loved.

I'd married.

I'd become a mother.

I'd bought my first home and an investment property.

Now I was preparing to move countries again.

If someone had shown that list to the seventeen-year-old who stepped out of Sydney Airport, I'm not sure she would have believed it. Life had unfolded differently from the one I'd carefully imagined. Strangely, I no longer saw that as disappointing.

Some of the best things that had happened to me weren't part of the original plan.

Engineering wasn't.

Advertising wasn't.

Motherhood certainly wasn't something I could have understood until I experienced it.

Perhaps life wasn't asking me to follow a plan. Perhaps it was asking me to keep saying yes when new paths appeared.

The night before we left for Bangalore, the house was filled with half-packed boxes and open suitcases. Cruz was asleep. Ben and I sat quietly for a while, surrounded by the organised chaos that always comes before a move. There wasn't much left to say. We both knew what tomorrow meant. It meant leaving behind the life we'd built in Australia, at least for a while.

It meant stepping into uncertainty again. It meant beginning from scratch once more. Oddly, uncertainty no longer frightened me. I'd experienced enough by then to know that certainty is often an illusion. The moments that shape our

lives rarely arrive wrapped in guarantees. They ask for trust first. As I walked through the house one last time before going to bed, I paused outside Cruz's room. He was sleeping peacefully, completely unaware that by this time tomorrow he'd be on a flight to another country.

Children have an extraordinary ability to remind you what really matters. Every decision suddenly carries a different weight because someone else's future is now woven into your own. I realised then that every opportunity I chased from that point forward would be measured differently. Not simply by what it could achieve. But by the life it could help us build.

The next morning, we boarded another international flight. Years earlier, I'd left Delhi believing I was flying towards the future I'd always imagined. This time, I was leaving Sydney knowing something very different.

The future rarely arrives exactly as we picture it. Sometimes it asks us to leave behind a life we love in order to build one we can't yet imagine.

As the plane lifted off, I looked out of the window once again. Another city slowly disappeared beneath the clouds. Another chapter was beginning. I had no idea that the decision to move to Bangalore would change not only my career, but the course of my entire life.

CHAPTER FOUR

Building Belief

A few years earlier, I'd boarded a plane to Australia with two suitcases and the hope of building a life. Now I was boarding another international flight. This time, I wasn't travelling as a student. I was a wife. A mother. And someone carrying an idea that had grown too big to ignore.

Leaving Sydney wasn't easy. It had become home. It was where I'd discovered the career I loved, where Ben and I had built our first home together and where Cruz had been born. We'd settled into a life that felt comfortable and familiar. Most people would probably have stayed. We chose to begin again.

The decision wasn't driven by dissatisfaction.

Quite the opposite.

Life in Sydney was good. But every time I thought about the opportunity in India, I found myself asking the same question. *If not now, when?* The operation I'd started planning in Bangalore was still little more than an idea. There were no guarantees. No major clients waiting. No large office. No team. Just a belief that there was an opportunity worth pursuing.

Looking back, I realise that's how most meaningful things in my life have begun. Not with certainty. With conviction. When we landed in Bangalore, everything felt familiar and unfamiliar at the same time.

India was the country where I'd been born, but it no longer felt like the country I'd left. I'd spent years building a life in Australia, and somewhere along the way Australia had quietly become home too.

Returning felt different.

We settled into a beautiful gated community in Whitefield, home to many expatriate families and professionals. It made the transition easier than it might otherwise have been. There was a sense that many of the people around us were navigating new beginnings of their own. Outside the gates, Bangalore had a completely different energy. Sydney had moved at a calm, predictable pace. Bangalore pulsed. The traffic seemed endless. A journey that looked short on a map could take far longer than expected, and every outing required a little more patience than I'd been used to.

It was chaotic. Colourful. Full of possibility. At that stage of my life, though, I wasn't searching for a social circle. I wasn't worried about building a new group of friends. My world was surprisingly small. It revolved around Ben, Cruz and the business we were trying to create. That was enough.

Cruz adapted far more easily than I expected. Children have a remarkable ability to accept change when the people they love are beside them. While Ben and I were figuring out a new country, a new routine and a new business, Cruz simply carried on being himself. Watching him settle reminded me that children often take their emotional cues from

their parents. If we approached this new chapter with confidence, there was every chance he would too.

The business, however, was another story. Our first office was modest. There was enough room for around twenty people, and at the time that felt almost unimaginably ambitious. I remember standing in the empty office before the furniture had fully arrived. There wasn't much to look at. A handful of desks. A few computers. Freshly painted walls. The quiet optimism that always fills an empty space before people bring it to life. I walked slowly from one end of the office to the other, trying to picture what it might become.

Would people want to work here? Would Australian businesses trust a team based in Bangalore? Would this idea that had occupied so much of my thinking actually work? I didn't know the answers. What I did know was that every business starts exactly the same way. With someone believing in it before anyone else does.

Our first team consisted of just three people. Three desks. Three careers placed in our hands. Looking back, those first hires carried more responsibility than they probably realised. They weren't just accepting a job. They were placing their trust in a young founder asking them to believe in something that, at that point, existed more as a vision than as an established business. That trust wasn't something I took lightly.

Every person who joined us in those early days made me feel a little more determined to prove that they'd made the right decision. Within weeks, our team grew to five. The office felt different almost overnight. There was conversation. Laughter. Phones ringing. People asking questions across desks. For the first time, it no longer felt like an idea. It felt like a company.

As I drove home each evening through Whitefield's relentless traffic, I found myself replaying the day in my mind. The client conversations. The interviews. The small wins. The problems that still needed solving tomorrow. I was tired more often than I cared to admit. But underneath the exhaustion was a feeling that kept returning. We were building something. Not quickly enough to impress anyone from the outside. Not yet. But steadily enough that, each morning when I unlocked the office door, I believed in it a little more than I had the day before.

The first few months passed faster than I could have imagined. Every morning seemed to begin with a new challenge waiting to be solved, and every evening ended with a list that somehow felt longer than the one I'd started the day with. Building a business from scratch has a way of making every day feel important. Every interview matters. Every client matters. Every new hire changes the culture, whether you realise it or not.

At first, I was simply trying to keep up. One interview would finish, another candidate would arrive. A new client would come on board while another needed support. Somewhere in between, there were countless decisions that nobody else could make. Unlike Australia, where I'd joined an established company, this time every decision rested with me.

It was exciting.

It was exhausting.

And I loved it.

The team of three quickly became five.

By then, I could already feel the little office beginning to strain under its own success. Desks that had once felt generously spaced suddenly felt close together. Conversations be-

came louder, phones rang more often and the quiet office I'd stood in only weeks earlier had taken on a life of its own. The empty space I'd imagined was disappearing. It was being replaced by people. Within six months, we made another decision that would have seemed almost impossible when we first arrived.

We moved.

Our new office could accommodate seventy-five people. Walking through it for the first time brought back memories of standing in our original office. Once again, there were rows of empty desks waiting for people who hadn't yet been hired. The difference this time was my mindset. The first office had been built on hope. This one was built on belief. I could finally see that what we were creating wasn't just an idea anymore. It was working. That didn't mean I became any less cautious. If anything, I became more aware of the responsibility we carried. Every person we hired had chosen to trust us with their career. Some had left secure jobs to join a business that was still in its infancy. Others were beginning their careers with us, believing we could offer them opportunities to grow.

I never forgot that.

People often assume the biggest pressure on a founder comes from clients. For me, it was always our team. Clients could leave. Markets could change. Strategies could evolve. But the people who chose to build the business alongside us deserved consistency, honesty and leadership. Long before I had the language to describe company culture, I knew how I wanted people to feel when they came to work.

Respected.

Trusted.

Supported.

I wanted them to enjoy coming to the office in the same way I'd enjoyed walking into Magnus Advertising all those years earlier. That experience had shaped me more than I realised. I wasn't trying to build the biggest office. I was trying to build the kind of workplace I would have wanted when I was starting my own career. Hiring became part instinct and part conversation. Qualifications mattered, but they weren't everything. I found myself paying close attention to curiosity.

Did someone genuinely want to learn?

Were they kind?

Could they solve problems?

Technical skills could be taught. Attitude was much harder to teach.

As more people joined, the atmosphere began changing almost weekly. The reception area grew busier. Meeting rooms filled with conversations. The lunch tables became louder. Every new person brought a different personality, a different story and a different energy. Watching that happen became one of the most rewarding parts of my day.

I wasn't simply watching a business grow. I was watching a community begin to form.

Outside the office, life continued at its familiar pace.

Cruz was still little. Family life remained wonderfully ordinary. Our evenings revolved around dinner, bath time and bedtime stories before Ben and I would often find ourselves talking about work once the house had gone quiet. Business had become part of our everyday conversations, just as property had been in Australia. Not because we were obsessed with work. Because we were building something together. Those conversations rarely centred on revenue. Instead, we

talked about people. The next hire. The next opportunity. The next challenge.

Looking back, I realise we weren't chasing growth for the sake of growth. We simply kept saying yes to opportunities we believed we could deliver. The remarkable thing was how quickly the office filled. The empty desks that had seemed almost overly ambitious on our first day didn't stay empty for long. In less than six months, every one of the seventy-five seats was occupied. Sometimes I'd arrive at the office early, before anyone else had arrived. The building would still be quiet. The lights would flicker on one row at a time. I'd walk slowly through the office, remembering how impossible seventy-five employees had once seemed. Now, in only a matter of months, those desks had become places where people built careers, learned new skills and contributed to something bigger than any one of us could have created alone.

For the first time since leaving Sydney, I stopped feeling like we were testing an idea. We were building an organisation. And with that came a different kind of responsibility. Success was no longer measured by whether the business survived. It was measured by whether the people who had believed in us could build meaningful futures alongside us.

As the office grew, so did my understanding of what it actually meant to build a company. In the beginning, I'd measured progress in practical ways. A new client. Another employee. A bigger office. They were easy milestones to count. The harder things to measure turned out to matter far more.

Trust.

Responsibility.

Culture.

I'd started this business because I believed there was an opportunity to connect talented people in India with businesses in Australia. Somewhere along the way, I realised we weren't simply creating jobs. We were creating opportunities. Many of the people joining our team were beginning their careers. Some had never worked in an international business before. Others were supporting parents, siblings or young families of their own. Every appointment letter represented a new chapter in someone else's life. That changed the way I thought about leadership. I stopped seeing recruitment as filling seats. I started seeing it as making promises. A promise that we'd create an environment where people could learn. A promise that we'd treat them with respect. A promise that we'd build something worth being part of.

Of course, not every day felt inspiring.

There were difficult conversations. Hiring mistakes. Clients whose expectations changed overnight. Days where it felt as though solving one problem simply uncovered another waiting underneath. I learned very quickly that building a business wasn't about avoiding problems. It was about becoming better at solving them.

That lesson has stayed with me ever since.

People sometimes ask me whether those years were stressful. The honest answer is yes. But stress wasn't the emotion I remember most. When I think back to that period, the feeling that comes back first is pride. Not pride in myself. Pride in what we were creating together.

I was in my twenties.

I'd moved countries with my husband and our young son.

We'd left behind a comfortable life in Sydney to pursue an idea that had existed only in notebooks, conversations and

late-night discussions around the dining table. Now that idea had become an office filled with people.

Real people.

Real careers.

Real families.

That thought never became ordinary. Even today, it hasn't.

One morning, I arrived earlier than usual. The office was still quiet. The cleaners had finished, the lights had only just been switched on and the familiar buzz of conversation hadn't yet begun. I walked slowly through the rows of desks. Only a few months earlier, I'd stood in another office wondering whether we'd ever fill twenty seats. Now I was standing in a space built for seventy-five people. Before long, every one of those desks would be occupied. Laptops would open. Phones would start ringing. Conversations would drift across the room. Ideas would be shared. Problems would be solved. The office would come alive. I paused for a moment and looked around. Not because I was counting desks. Because I was remembering.

Remembering the uncertainty.

The flight from Sydney.

The tiny office.

The first three employees who had trusted us before we had anything substantial to show them.

The interviews.

The long days.

The traffic through Whitefield.

The evenings spent talking through ideas with Ben after Cruz had gone to sleep.

For the first time, I allowed myself to acknowledge something I hadn't had time to think about while we were busy

building. We'd done it. Not perfectly. Not without mistakes. But we'd taken an idea and turned it into something real. As the team began arriving that morning, the office slowly filled with familiar faces. People greeted one another. Coffee cups appeared on desks. Laughter echoed down the hallway. The quiet disappeared.

Work began.

I stood there for another few seconds before walking into my office. There was still an endless list waiting on my desk. Clients to speak with. People to interview. Decisions to make. Building a business, I was learning, never really became easier. The challenges simply became different.

But something inside me had changed. When I'd arrived in Bangalore, I hoped this business might work. Standing in that office, I no longer wondered whether we could build something meaningful. I knew we already had. I just didn't yet realise how much further the journey would take us.

CHAPTER FIVE

Building the Woman

There are certain moments in life that look significant from the outside.

A promotion.

A new title.

A larger office.

People congratulate you, celebrate your success and assume that's the moment everything changed. Looking back, I don't think the title of General Manager changed me at all. It was simply a reflection of the person I had already become.

By then, life looked very different from the one I had imagined as a little girl in Delhi.

I'd built a career doing work I genuinely loved. I'd completed my MBA while working full-time as a mum of two, helped build teams across Australia and India and found myself sitting around executive tables where I was often the youngest person in the room. Years earlier, I'd been listening outside my parents' bedroom door, worried there might not be enough money for a birthday outfit. Now I was helping make decisions that affected hundreds of employees.

Life has a quiet way of changing while you're busy living it.

You rarely notice it happening at the time.

The moments that stay with me aren't the promotions or the meetings. They're the quieter milestones. One of those came when I realised I could finally support my parents financially. I don't remember making a big announcement about it. There wasn't a speech. There wasn't a celebration. It simply became something I was able to do. For years, I'd watched my parents quietly carry the responsibility of looking after everyone else. They had sacrificed more than I understood as a child, often putting our needs ahead of their own without ever making us feel guilty about it. Being able to ease some of that burden meant more to me than any promotion I'd ever received.

It felt as though a circle had quietly closed.

Without realising it, I'd spent much of my adult life trying to repay something that could never really be repaid.

Not money.

Love.

Around the same time, another journey was beginning.

After Cruz was born, I'd gained close to thirty-five kilograms during pregnancy. Like many new mothers, I barely recognised the person looking back at me in the mirror. People often expect some profound reason for why I started exercising.

The truth is much less inspiring.

I wanted my clothes to fit again.

I wanted to feel comfortable walking into a room.

I wanted to feel like myself.

That's all.

The first time I walked into a gym, I wasn't thinking about discipline, resilience or longevity. I was thinking about jeans.

If someone had told me that day the gym would eventually become one of the most important parts of my life, I would have laughed.

At first, every workout felt like hard work. Everything ached. Progress was slow. There were mornings when I questioned why I'd started. But little by little, something shifted. The changes weren't only happening physically. They were happening mentally. Without meaning to, I'd found the only hour of my day where nobody needed anything from me.

There were no client calls.

No emails.

No meetings.

No employees knocking on my office door.

No competing priorities demanding an immediate decision.

Just the workout in front of me.

Somewhere between lifting weights, counting repetitions and running on a treadmill, my mind became quiet. It was the first real silence I'd experienced in years. That silence turned out to be incredibly productive. Problems that had felt impossibly complicated while sitting behind a desk often became surprisingly simple halfway through a workout.

I'd walk into the gym thinking about staffing issues or difficult decisions. An hour later, I'd walk out with the answer. It happened so often that I stopped being surprised by it. Some of the best business decisions I've ever made didn't happen in a boardroom. They happened while I was exercising. Looking back, I don't think it was the exercise itself that created clarity. It was the space. The uninterrupted thinking. The opportunity to step away from the constant noise of everyday life.

Even today, that hour remains one of the few appointments in my calendar that I protect without apology.

For years, I believed taking time for myself was selfish. Motherhood has a way of convincing you that everyone else's needs should come first. Business has a way of reinforcing the same belief.

There is always another meeting.

Another problem.

Another person waiting for your attention.

The gym slowly taught me something I hadn't expected to learn. Looking after yourself isn't selfish. It's one of the most generous things you can do for the people who depend on you.

When I left the gym, I was calmer. More patient. More focused. A better leader. A better wife. A better mother. The hour I'd originally carved out to lose weight quietly became the foundation that helped me carry everything else. At the time, I thought I was rebuilding my fitness. Looking back now, I can see I was rebuilding something much bigger. I was learning how to look after the woman behind all the responsibilities.

By the time I became pregnant with Skye, fitness was no longer something I squeezed into my schedule. It had become part of who I was. I wasn't chasing a number on the scales anymore, and I certainly wasn't exercising to fit into a particular dress. I trained because I loved how it made me feel. I had more energy, my mind was clearer and I found I could handle the demands of work and family with far more patience than I ever had before.

Exercise had become less about changing my body and more about strengthening my life. So when people hear that I

went to the gym on the day I was induced with Skye, they usually laugh in disbelief.

It's true.

To me, it didn't feel unusual.

It simply felt like another day.

I'd listened to my body throughout my pregnancy, stayed active and felt stronger than I ever had during my first pregnancy. Walking into the gym that morning wasn't about proving anything. It was part of my normal routine. A few hours later, our daughter entered the world.

Skye was born on 27 December 2012.

Holding her for the first time felt different, not because I loved her more than Cruz, but because every child brings something completely unique into your life.

She arrived with her own personality from the very beginning. Calm one moment. Determined the next. Although I didn't know it then, many of those little glimpses of determination would only grow stronger over the years. Less than twenty-four hours after giving birth, I checked myself out of hospital. When I tell people that today, I usually get the same look.

Half surprise.

Half concern.

The truth is, I genuinely felt well.

I was healthy, I was moving comfortably and all I wanted was to get home and settle into life with our new baby. I've never been particularly good at sitting still when I don't need to. Because babies aren't permitted to fly until they're seven days old, Skye spent her first week of life in Sydney. On day eight, she boarded her very first flight.

Most babies spend their first weeks adjusting to one home. Skye was already beginning an international life. Looking back, it sounds extraordinary. At the time, it simply felt like our normal. By then, Australia and India had both become home in different ways.

Our lives flowed between the two countries, and our children grew up believing airports were simply another part of family life. People often ask me how I managed to build a career while raising two young children. The answer is that I never tried to separate the two. They were simply different parts of the same life.

Living in Bangalore while working Australian hours unexpectedly gave me something I don't think I would have had if we'd remained in Sydney. I started work early each morning while Australia was beginning its business day. By around one o'clock each afternoon, my workday was largely finished. From that point on, I was simply Mum. Those afternoons became some of my favourite memories. There were school pickups, homework, playtime in the garden, family lunches and ordinary moments that probably seemed insignificant at the time but have become some of the memories I treasure most today.

People sometimes imagine successful careers are built by sacrificing family life.

That wasn't my experience.

Did I work hard?

Absolutely.

For most of the past two decades, I've worked six or seven days a week. But work didn't have to consume every waking hour. It simply had to fit around the people who mattered most. Even on weekends, work found its place around family

rather than replacing it. If Cruz was napping, I'd answer emails or finish a proposal. Once he woke up, the laptop closed. Children don't remember how quickly you replied to an email. They remember whether you were present.

Looking back now, I realise I wasn't consciously trying to create balance. I was simply creating a life that worked for our family. There were seasons when work demanded more. There were moments when family needed all of my attention. The balance wasn't perfect every day, but over time it evened itself out. I never believed becoming a mother meant putting my ambitions aside.

Equally, I never believed building a career meant sacrificing my children.

I wanted them to see something different. I wanted them to grow up knowing that purpose and family could exist together. That ambition didn't make someone less present at home. And that loving your children deeply didn't mean you had to stop pursuing your own dreams.

Looking back, I didn't realise it then, but I was quietly redefining success for myself.

Success wasn't a title.

It wasn't a salary.

It wasn't the size of the business.

Success was finishing work each afternoon, walking through the front door and hearing two little voices excited to tell me about their day. No boardroom has ever been able to compete with that.

People often ask me whether having a daughter felt different from having a son.

The answer is yes.

Not because I loved her differently.

Love doesn't divide itself between children. It simply grows. What changed was the way I thought about the future. When Cruz was born, I found myself thinking about the kind of mother I wanted to be. When Skye was born, I found myself thinking about the kind of woman I hoped she would become.

Growing up in India, I'd been fortunate to have parents who encouraged me to dream big, but I'd also seen enough to understand that many women weren't given the same freedom. I had watched incredibly intelligent, capable women quietly put their own ambitions aside because that was what was expected of them.

I wanted something different for my daughter.

I wanted her to know that she never had to ask for permission to build the life she wanted.

I wanted her to understand that financial independence wasn't just about earning money. It was about having choices. It was about being able to make decisions because they were right for you, not because circumstances left you with no alternative.

Those thoughts began long before she was old enough to understand them. As I held her in my arms, I found myself imagining the woman she might become one day.

Would she be confident?

Would she be kind?

Would she be curious enough to keep learning?

Would she have the courage to back herself when life became uncertain?

Those were the qualities I hoped she would carry into adulthood.

As I write this today, she's thirteen years old and already has a personality that keeps all of us on our toes. She has a wonderfully strong sense of justice and isn't afraid to argue her case when she believes she's right. There are moments when I listen to her confidently explain why my decision should be reconsidered and think to myself, *I've definitely created this.*

On the outside, I sometimes sigh and pretend to be exasperated.

On the inside, I couldn't be prouder.

If she grows into a woman who isn't afraid to question things, I'll consider that one of my greatest achievements.

Of course, having a daughter didn't change how I felt about Cruz. He'll always remind me that he's my first baby, and I always tell him he'll forever be my favourite son. Fortunately for me, he's my only son, so that joke still gets a laugh.

Our home during those years was busy, noisy and wonderfully ordinary.

There were school lunches to pack, birthday parties to organise, swimming lessons, family dinners and weekends that somehow disappeared far too quickly. Looking back, those ordinary days are the ones I miss the most. At the time, they felt routine. Now I realise they were the moments that quietly built our family.

People sometimes ask how I managed everything.

The honest answer is that I didn't always.

There were days when work demanded more than I wanted it to. There were days when parenting felt harder than any board meeting. There were moments when I questioned whether I was giving enough to any one part of my life.

I don't think those feelings ever completely disappear for working parents.

What I learned, though, was that perfection was never the goal. Being present was. Some days I was a better leader than I was a mother. Other days I was a better mother than I was a leader. Over time, I stopped judging myself for that.

Life isn't lived in perfect balance every single day.

It's balanced across seasons.

When I look back now, I don't remember feeling as though I had to choose between building a career and raising a family. I remember building both, often at the same time, each making me better at the other. Motherhood made me more patient as a leader. Leadership made me more confident as a mother. Fitness gave me the energy to show up for both.

Without realising it, each part of my life was strengthening the others.

Looking back, I can see that this chapter of my life wasn't really about becoming stronger physically. It wasn't about becoming General Manager. It wasn't even about learning how to juggle work and family.

It was about becoming comfortable in my own skin.

For the first time, I stopped trying to prove that I could do everything. Instead, I focused on building a life that reflected what mattered most to me.

A career I loved.

A family I adored.

The freedom to make my own choices.

And the confidence to know that if life ever asked me to begin again, I could.

At the time, I thought I was simply raising two wonderful children. Looking back now, I realise they were raising me too.

They taught me patience.

Perspective.

Joy in ordinary moments.

And they reminded me every single day why building a meaningful life was always far more important than simply building a successful career.

Without realising it, I wasn't just helping shape the people my children would become.

I was still becoming the woman I was always meant to be.

CHAPTER SIX

Building Again

The turning point didn't come because our team failed. It came because the Australian company our Bangalore operation had supported for more than thirteen years closed its doors.

For more than a decade, our Bangalore team worked alongside the Australian business. While the Australian company owned the advertising inventory and managed the physical production side of the business, our team became the operational backbone behind it. From Bangalore, we managed much of the day-to-day operations and built the majority of the sales engine that brought those advertising solutions to market. Over time, what began as a small offshore team evolved into a mature operation with experienced leaders, robust systems and hundreds of people working across sales, operations and customer support.

When COVID changed the world, it changed businesses too. Like many companies, our Australian partner faced challenges it couldn't overcome. Eventually, it made the difficult decision to close.

For the first time in my career, I found myself standing at a crossroads.

The business relationship that had shaped so much of my professional life had come to an end. Yet when I looked around our Bangalore office, I realised something important hadn't disappeared.

The team was still there.

The leaders we'd developed were still there.

The knowledge we'd accumulated over more than thirteen years was still there.

The systems we'd built still existed.

Everything we'd spent years creating was still ours.

What had disappeared was the client.

That realisation changed everything.

For years, I had thought of myself as someone helping to build another company's success. Standing in that office, I realised we had been building something else all along.

We had built a team.

We had built capability.

We had built a business that was ready to stand on its own.

All it needed was a new beginning.

Walking away from something that had shaped so much of my life wasn't easy. But what surprised me most wasn't the sadness. It was the clarity.

For the first time in years, there was silence. No meetings waiting on Monday morning. No executive decisions. No long-term plans. No familiar rhythm that had quietly structured my life for almost twenty years. When you've spent that long moving at full speed, the silence can feel unsettling.

For a little while, I simply sat with it.

Then I started thinking about everything those twenty years had given me.

The company was gone.

The experience wasn't.

Nobody could take away the years I'd spent building teams across Australia and India. Nobody could erase the lessons learned through difficult clients, hiring decisions, leadership challenges or years of solving problems that never appeared in any job description.

The office had disappeared.

The knowledge hadn't.

That realisation changed everything.

I'd always thought of myself as someone who worked inside businesses. It had never really occurred to me that what I actually knew how to do was build them. Looking back, the signs had always been there. Every role I'd enjoyed had one thing in common.

I loved the beginning.

I loved the blank page.

I loved taking something that didn't exist yet and slowly turning it into something that did.

The titles never mattered very much to me.

The building did.

Around that time, I found myself thinking about a conversation I'd had with a friend several months earlier. He had left a successful corporate career to build a business he genuinely believed in. At the time, I'd admired his courage, congratulated him and carried on with my own life. After the company closed, that conversation came back to me.

Not because it had planted the idea.

Because it had quietly given me permission to recognise something I'd been feeling for years. I wasn't frightened by the thought of building a business. I was excited by it.

The more I reflected, the more obvious it became.

For almost twenty years, I'd been helping other people build their visions. I'd built sales teams. Customer service departments. Offshore operations. Reporting systems. Leadership structures. Processes that allowed businesses to grow without losing themselves along the way. I'd spent years teaching managers how to lead, helping businesses solve operational problems and watching organisations evolve from small teams into much larger ones.

One afternoon, I found myself laughing at a thought that seemed so obvious I couldn't believe I'd never seen it before.

I already knew how to build a business.

Not because I'd completed an Executive MBA in entrepreneurship, although that had certainly given me a stronger framework for thinking about business. And not because I'd suddenly discovered some secret that everyone else had missed.

The truth was much simpler.

I'd spent almost two decades building teams, developing leaders, creating systems, solving problems and helping grow businesses every single day.

The conversation with my friend hadn't taught me how to become an entrepreneur. It had simply made me realise that, in many ways, I'd already been thinking like one for years.

The title was new.

The work wasn't.

Because I'd been doing it nearly every day of my career. The only thing that was changing was whose name would be

on the front door. That thought felt strangely liberating. For the first time, I wasn't thinking about finding another executive role. I wasn't updating my résumé. I wasn't wondering which company I wanted to help build next.

I was asking myself a completely different question.

If I could build anything, what would I build?

The answer came surprisingly quickly.

Throughout my career, I'd watched large companies gain access to brilliant marketing teams, experienced consultants and sophisticated strategies.

Small businesses rarely had those advantages.

Yet they worked just as hard.

Often harder.

Many were family businesses built on courage, long hours and personal sacrifice. They deserved the same quality of thinking and support as the organisations with much larger budgets.

That idea became the foundation for Shopa Marketing.

At the beginning, the vision was refreshingly simple.

Help small and medium-sized businesses access marketing that was honest, practical and focused on results rather than jargon. Nothing more complicated than that. Looking back now, I smile at how modest that original vision was. I thought I was starting a marketing agency. I had no idea I was laying the foundations for something much bigger.

Launching Shopa Marketing felt very different from anything I'd done before.

Throughout my career, I'd been responsible for building businesses, but there had always been an established company behind me. There were existing systems, recognised brands and decades of history that gave clients confidence.

This time, there was none of that.

There was simply an idea.

Our experience.

And a belief that we could build something people genuinely valued.

I never set out to create just another marketing agency. If anything, I'd spent enough years working in the industry to know what frustrated business owners. Marketing had become filled with jargon, complicated reports and promises that often sounded impressive but meant very little to the person paying the invoice. Most business owners weren't asking for more marketing terminology. They wanted more customers. They wanted someone who understood the pressures of running a business because many of us had lived them ourselves.

That became the philosophy behind Shopa Marketing from the very beginning.

We weren't interested in selling individual services. We wanted to solve problems. Our first clients reminded me why I'd fallen in love with this industry all those years earlier. Every business had a different story. A family business trying to compete with national brands. A local retailer wondering why foot traffic had slowed. A healthcare provider trying to reach the right patients. An e-commerce business growing faster than its systems could handle.

On the surface, they all came to us for marketing.

The deeper we looked, the more I realised marketing was rarely the real issue.

One client needed help recruiting the right people. Another had a customer service team that was struggling to keep up with demand. Someone else had outgrown their internal

systems and was spending more time fixing operational problems than serving customers. Again and again, I found myself having conversations that had very little to do with advertising. We'd begin by discussing Google Ads or SEO and somehow end up talking about staff structure, workflow, technology or business strategy.

At first, I thought it was a coincidence.

Then I realised it was happening with almost every client. One afternoon, after another meeting that had wandered well beyond marketing, I sat back and smiled.

I'd seen this before.

For years I'd helped businesses solve exactly these kinds of problems. Marketing simply happened to be the conversation that opened the door. The real challenge was usually hidden behind it.

That observation stayed with me.

The more businesses we worked with, the clearer the pattern became.

Many founders didn't actually have a marketing problem.

They had a capacity problem.

A people problem.

A systems problem.

A process problem.

Sometimes they were simply growing faster than their business was equipped to handle.

It reminded me of something I'd learned years earlier. Businesses rarely fail because of one big problem. More often, they're slowed down by dozens of small ones. I found myself drawing on experiences I'd accumulated over nearly two decades. The offshore teams we'd built in Bangalore. The leadership programs. The operational frameworks. The recruitment

processes. The systems that allowed businesses to grow without losing consistency.

I realised I wasn't approaching these conversations as a marketer. I was approaching them as someone who loved building businesses. Marketing was simply one piece of a much larger puzzle. Looking back now, I can see that Shopa Marketing gave me something much more valuable than another business.

It gave me clarity.

For years, I'd described myself as someone who worked in marketing. That wasn't entirely true.

Marketing was the vehicle.

Building was the passion.

The more I understood that, the more exciting the future became. I wasn't interested in creating a business that did everything. I wanted to create businesses that each solved one problem exceptionally well.

At the time, I didn't know what those businesses would look like.

I only knew that I kept noticing gaps. And once I noticed them, I found it almost impossible to ignore them. I've often been asked where my business ideas come from. People assume there's a grand strategy or a notebook filled with plans stretching years into the future.

The truth is much simpler.

Almost every business I've started began with the same question.

Why doesn't somebody fix this?

Eventually, I realised that if I kept asking that question, I had to be prepared to become the somebody. Without realising it, I was no longer just building one company. I was be-

ginning to build an ecosystem of businesses connected by a single idea.

Find a genuine problem.

Build something that solves it.

Then move on to the next one.

As Shopa Marketing grew, I noticed something unexpected. The business itself wasn't changing me. It was changing the way I looked at the world. I'd always been naturally curious. Wherever I went, I found myself asking questions that most people seemed happy to ignore.

Why does this process feel so complicated?

Why does this business struggle while another one thrives?

Why is there such a gap between what people need and what's actually available?

Those questions followed me everywhere.

The more businesses I worked with, the more I realised something else about myself. I wasn't just drawn to interesting ideas. I was drawn to passionate people.

Throughout my career, I'd always found myself gravitating towards people who cared deeply about what they did. The ones who asked more questions than everyone else. The ones who stayed back because they wanted to solve a problem, not because someone had asked them to. Curiosity has always been contagious, and whenever I found people who genuinely wanted to build something meaningful, I wanted to help them do it.

That instinct shaped many of the businesses that followed.

Brand Vantage was born because I kept meeting founders with the same challenge. They weren't struggling because they lacked ambition. They were struggling because growth

had outpaced their people, systems and capacity. They didn't just need marketing. They needed operational support, infrastructure and talented teams that could grow with them. Creating Brand Vantage felt like a natural extension of everything I'd spent years building in Bangalore. It wasn't another company for the sake of having another company. It was an opportunity to help other businesses build with confidence.

Not every idea, however, came from clients.

Some came from much closer to home.

Like many parents, I assumed my children would follow the traditional education system because it had worked for me. I loved school. I worked hard, chased good grades and believed education opened doors.

Cruz challenged that belief.

Traditional schooling simply wasn't where he thrived. As difficult as that was to accept initially, I realised he hadn't stopped learning. He had simply stopped believing that learning only happened inside a classroom.

We made an agreement.

If he wanted to leave traditional school, he couldn't leave education. Instead, he would design his own. He began homeschooling while interning within our businesses, learning through projects, online courses and real-world experience. Marketing. Artificial intelligence. Operations. Accounting. Investing. The very skills modern businesses increasingly rely on but that many young people don't encounter until years after they leave school.

Watching that journey changed the way I thought about education.

Every year we interviewed bright, capable graduates who wanted to succeed, yet many arrived without the practical skills businesses were desperately looking for. It wasn't a lack of intelligence. It was a gap between education and employment. Brand Vantage Academy grew from that observation. Not to replace universities, but to help bridge the space between formal education and real-world business.

Around the same time, another opportunity quietly began taking shape.

For years I'd worked alongside Neil, our Chief Marketing Officer, and Vignesh, our SEO Technical Lead. Both shared something I deeply admire in people: genuine passion for their craft. They didn't simply work in SEO. They lived it. They debated it, challenged each other, tested ideas and constantly wanted to understand where search was heading next.

Then Cruz joined those conversations.

What fascinated me wasn't simply that he was younger. It was that he searched differently. His generation moved naturally between AI, video, social platforms and search engines without thinking about where the answer came from. They simply wanted the best answer, as quickly as possible. Watching those conversations unfold between three people with completely different perspectives made me realise something.

Search itself was changing. More importantly, the people best placed to build for that future were already sitting around the table.

SEOOnly wasn't created because I wanted another business.

It was created because I wanted to give passionate people the opportunity to build something they genuinely believed

in. Although I own the business, I deliberately stepped into the role of Chief Growth Officer rather than CEO. Neil, Vignesh and Cruz bring the ideas, the curiosity and the vision that continue to shape where the business is heading. My role is simply to help create the environment where those ideas can become reality.

In many ways, that's the part I enjoy most.

Helping talented people build something bigger than they imagined possible.

A similar thought eventually led to Ads Near You.

For years I'd watched local businesses struggle to afford advertising while valuable media inventory sat unsold. It seemed like such an obvious mismatch that I couldn't understand why nobody had solved it. Once again, the question was familiar. What could we build that would help? Ads Near You became the answer.

No Filter Club came from a much more personal place.

As Skye grew older, I found myself thinking about the pressures her generation faces. Filters, social media and impossible standards of beauty had become part of everyday life. Around the same time, my sister and I often spoke about the skincare traditions we had grown up with in India and how little of that heritage seemed to exist in modern brands.

Those conversations eventually became No Filter Club. Perhaps one day Skye will decide she wants to be part of that journey. Perhaps she won't. Either outcome will make me happy. I've never wanted my children to inherit my ambitions. I've wanted them to discover their own.

If one day they choose to build alongside me, it will be because it brings them joy, not because it was expected of them.

Looking back now, I realise there has always been a pattern. People often think I've built several businesses. I see it differently. I've built opportunities. Opportunities for founders who needed support. Opportunities for graduates looking for a better start. Opportunities for talented people whose passion deserved a bigger stage. Perhaps one day, opportunities for my own children if they choose them.

When I look back over everything we've created, the companies almost feel secondary.

The people never have.

Because, in the end, I don't think I ever fell in love with building businesses. I fell in love with helping people build the lives and careers they imagined for themselves.

And when I think about it now, I suspect that's what I was really building all along.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Next Chapter

As I write this, I am about to turn forty.
For a long time, forty felt impossibly far away.

When I was seventeen, boarding a flight from Delhi to Sydney with a student visa, two suitcases and far more confidence than experience, I imagined adulthood would follow a fairly predictable path. Study hard. Build a career. Get married. Have children. Work hard enough and, eventually, life would fall into place.

It seemed like a sensible plan.

Life, I've discovered, rarely pays much attention to sensible plans. If someone had shown that seventeen-year-old a photograph of my life today, she would recognise parts of it immediately.

Australia.

Two beautiful children.

Businesses.

Long hours.

She would recognise the determination in my eyes because that determination has never really changed.

But so much else would surprise her.

She wouldn't expect to fall in love with marketing after believing she was destined to become an engineer. She wouldn't imagine spending almost twenty years helping build someone else's business before becoming a founder herself. She certainly wouldn't predict that one of the happiest chapters of her marriage would eventually become a respectful friendship centred around raising two extraordinary children.

And yet, if I've learned anything over the past two decades, it's that life rarely asks whether we're ready before it changes direction.

It simply changes.

Looking back now, I don't think my life has been defined by the moments when everything went according to plan. It's been shaped by the moments when it didn't.

Discovering advertising almost by accident.

Moving to Bangalore.

Becoming a mother.

Starting again after nearly twenty years in one company.

Each time I thought one chapter was ending, another one quietly began.

For years, I believed success was something you could measure.

A promotion.

A salary.

A home.

A growing business.

Those things mattered, and in many ways they still do. They created security. They gave me opportunities I never take for granted. They allowed me to support my parents after years of watching them put everyone else first. But

somewhere along the way, my definition of success became quieter.

Today, success looks different.

It's finishing a workday and hearing Cruz tell me about something cool he learnt that day. It's watching Skye passionately argue her case over the dinner table and secretly smiling because I know exactly where she gets that determination from. It's seeing someone who joined one of our companies as a junior employee confidently lead a team of their own. It's boarding another plane, not because I'm trying to escape where I am, but because I genuinely enjoy discovering what's next.

Age has changed me.

Motherhood has changed me.

Building businesses has changed me.

Losing chapters of my life I thought would last forever has changed me.

But perhaps the biggest change has been learning that ambition and contentment aren't opposites.

For a long time, I thought ambitious people were supposed to be restless. Always chasing the next goal. The next milestone. The next mountain.

I still love building.

I suspect I always will.

I still wake up with ideas that refuse to leave me alone until I explore them. I still notice problems and immediately begin wondering how they could be solved. That part of me hasn't disappeared. The difference is that I no longer believe happiness lives somewhere beyond the next achievement. I've learned to appreciate the chapter I'm living while I'm still living it.

That may be the lesson it took me the longest to understand.

People sometimes ask me what I'm most proud of.

They expect me to talk about businesses.

Awards.

Growth.

Revenue.

The truth is much simpler.

I'm proud that my children have grown up knowing they can build lives on their own terms. I'm proud that my parents were able to enjoy a little more comfort after spending so many years sacrificing for ours. I'm proud of the people who have built careers alongside me, many of whom have gone on to achieve things they once doubted were possible. Those achievements feel far more meaningful than anything that could ever appear on a balance sheet.

When I think back to the little girl growing up in Delhi, I realise she spent a lot of time wondering what life would become.

She couldn't possibly have imagined every twist that lay ahead.

But I think she'd recognise something that has remained constant through every chapter.

The belief that if something doesn't exist yet, you can build it.

Sometimes that's a business.

Sometimes it's confidence.

Sometimes it's a family.

Sometimes it's a second chance.

Sometimes it's simply the courage to begin again.

As I turn forty, people often ask what's next. The honest answer is that I don't know. There are still businesses I'd love to create. Places I want to explore. Books I hope to write. Ideas that keep me awake at night in the best possible way. There will almost certainly be chapters I can't yet imagine. Life has taught me not to be too confident about predicting the future. And perhaps that's one of its greatest gifts.

At seventeen, I thought success meant knowing exactly where I was going. At forty, I think success is having the confidence to keep moving, even when you don't. Because, in the end, this book was never really about the businesses I built. It wasn't about the promotions, the countries, the titles or the milestones. It was about learning, one chapter at a time, that every ending carries the possibility of another beginning.

The story isn't finished.

If anything, I have a feeling it's only just getting interesting.

About the Author

Preeti Kennedy is a founder, entrepreneur and business builder who believes that ambition should never require an apology.

Born in Delhi, India, she moved to Sydney as a teenager with a student visa, a suitcase and a determination to create opportunities wherever she found herself. Over the next two decades, she built a career spanning sales, marketing, business operations and entrepreneurship, leading teams across Australia, New Zealand, Dubai and India.

Today, she is the founder of Shopa Marketing, Brand Vantage, Brand Vantage Academy, SEOOnly, Ads Near You and No Filter Club. While each business serves a different purpose, they are united by a common philosophy: solve real problems, create meaningful opportunities and help people build better futures.

Beyond business, Preeti is passionate about leadership, education, artificial intelligence, operational excellence and helping ambitious people realise their potential. She has spent much of her career building teams, mentoring future leaders

and creating environments where others can grow with confidence.

She is also a proud mother of two, an enthusiastic traveller and a lifelong student of both business and life. Whether she is exploring emerging technology, developing new ventures or spending time with her family, she remains driven by curiosity and the belief that there is always a better way to build.

Ambition Without Apology is her first memoir. More than a story about entrepreneurship, it is a story about reinvention, resilience, motherhood and the courage to keep building when life changes direction. It is an honest reflection on success, setbacks and the unexpected paths that often lead us exactly where we were meant to be.

Preeti writes regularly about entrepreneurship, leadership, marketing, artificial intelligence and personal growth. You can read her Founder Insights, explore her businesses and follow her ongoing journey at www.PreetiKennedy.com.