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Survival of the fittest, not man or woman: Sonica Malhotra Kandhari

Joint Managing Director of MBD Group speaking on women in the hospitality industry shattering all stereotypes and taking up major roles.

Sakshi Singh • ETHospitalityWorld • Updated: December 16, 2020, 21:17 IST



For Sonica Malhotra Kandhari, skills and multitasking are all that is needed for a woman to really succeed in any given field including the hospitality sector. She strongly believes that at the end of the day, it's about the survival of the fittest not about man or woman.

She is currently the Joint Managing Director of MBD Group and is overlooking the company's key projects in hospitality and real estate. Kandhari credits her accomplishments to her mother, Satish Bala Malhotra and her father Ashok Kumar Malhotra who from childhood did not create any stereotypes as being a girl child, instead allowed to seek her passion and pursue it.

"As an entrepreneur, my father Late Ashok Malhotra guided and inspired me to expand and add new verticals to the business. It was under his aegis that MBD Group, an education company forayed into the field of hospitality segment in 2003 with the launch of a luxury hotel in Noida, Radisson Blu MBD Hotel Noida," she started with.

After the grand success of MBD's maiden hospitality venture, the group expanded to Ludhiana, Jaalandhar and Bangalore. Currently, the hospitality company is in a joint venture with the Stelgenberger Hotel Group, Germany-based chain of hotels and resorts to manage and franchise hotels under the brand "MBD STEIGENBERGER" for the Indian Territory.

Kandhari believes that women in the hospitality industry are shattering all stereotypes and taking up major roles. "The hospitality sector is witnessing a growth of successful entrepreneurship where today women are leading with their natural instincts and business acumen," she added.

For many decades, women have occupied only the frontline positions such as receptionists, travel assistants, housekeeping and public relations personnel in the hospitality industry. "Women weren't considered skilled enough to grab managerial positions even while possessing the required skills as perception played a major role in women losing out on well-deserved opportunities," Kandhari mentioned.

In the changed scenario, women are now increasingly occupying managerial positions in the industry along with setting their own travel and hospitality ventures. Women are seen in mid as well as senior management including having board positions, although the ratio of women in task force has improved, still it is a long way to go.

According to Kandhari, there is a need to exercise mindset change at the grassroots level and also organizations should encourage and execute strategies to encourage women to actively participate and take up positions of leadership.

"I strongly believe that being a woman neither carries any advantage or disadvantage in business as eventually, it is your skill, competency and the hard work which matters. People have preconceived notions about you being a woman and to actually break that preconceived thought, you have to get out of the mould and prove themselves," she said.

The hospitality industry is considered to be one of the safest industries to work with and many hotels are taking stern in-house initiatives like car drop after working hours, flexible timings and maternity benefits etc to keep their women employees safe and organizations are accommodative to their specific needs. However, the retention of female employees in the hospitality sector has always been a challenge due to altered and long hour shifts.

Commenting on the same, Kandhari said that the industry should be more proactive in dealing with the problem of female attrition and should frame realistic policies to curb the same. "The hotels should devise a more employee-centric approach while designing their employment policies with an aim towards holistic development of the female employees. Additionally, apart from the industry initiatives, the overall sense of security at the country level is also important to attract women working at odd hours," she added.

Kandhari is a firm believer of the fact that achieving anything and in any vertical requires working with best teams and hence attracting good talent requires creating a culture of self-development and well-being at all levels.

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