

Anupama Katkar: Pioneering Cybersecurity with Purpose and Leadership



In a world where technology is rapidly reshaping our lives, Anupama Katkar, Chief of Operational Excellence at Quick Heal and Chairperson of Quick Heal Foundation, stands as a visionary leader, driving innovation and social impact in cybersecurity. With a deep commitment to digital safety and empowerment, she has played a pivotal role in bridging the gap between technology and community welfare. Through her unwavering dedication to education, empowerment, and breaking gender barriers in tech, she continues to inspire the next generation of leaders to create meaningful change.

Breaking Barriers in a Male-Dominated Industry

Anupama's journey into the tech world wasn't just about career progression—it was about addressing a critical societal need. "My entry into tech was about answering a key societal need. It was a natural extension of my belief that women don't need permission to solve problems," **she says**. "In 1995, as India's digital infrastructure began taking shape, my husband recognized a critical gap - there were no cybersecurity solutions tailored for Indian users. The industry was male-dominated, and that's where we saw an opportunity to build "technology rooted in empathy" - a homegrown venture addressing both digital threats and digital literacy."

"From day one, our focus at Quick Heal Technologies Limited, intertwined product development with spreading cyber safety awareness. We didn't just work on antivirus software; we sat with families, explaining how to safeguard their digital identities. This dual focus later culminated into the Quick Heal Foundation, where initiatives like 'Cyber Shiksha for Cyber Suraksha' and 'Arogya Yan' emerged organically from grassroots interactions," **she states**.

Overcoming Challenges Through Innovation

Scaling cybersecurity education in remote areas posed a major challenge, but Anupama and her team tackled it with creativity and grassroots engagement. **She comments**, "The biggest challenge perhaps was scaling cybersecurity education in remote areas. It really tested our creativity. Limited internet access and skepticism toward digital learning required unconventional solutions. So, we switched to unconventional methods. While we conducted cyber literacy workshops, we also made use of short plays and other artistic performances in order to reach villages where technology felt

distant. This approach helped us greatly in taking our vision of promoting digital well-being to even the remotest corners of the country.”

Another significant challenge was the gender disparity in cybersecurity. Women’s participation in the industry remained low, but Anupama was determined to change that. “Overcoming gender disparity in cybersecurity remains a significant challenge, which we are addressing head-on. We have launched campaigns celebrating women in cybersecurity, partnering with colleges to recruit female trainees. By showcasing their successes and enabling them through initiatives like ‘Earn & Learn’, we continue to challenge stereotypes and inspire more women to join the field. Every obstacle we have faced so far has become a lesson in adaptability, reminding us that community engagement is the cornerstone of lasting impact,” **she notes.**

Redefining Work-Life Balance: Integration Over Sacrifice

For many women in leadership, balancing professional responsibilities with personal life is a major concern. But Anupama chooses to reject the traditional notion of balance, opting for **integration** instead. “I reject the myth of “balance”. It implies a zero-sum game. Instead, I strive for integration. Early on, we designed Quick Heal’s culture to honor whole selves: families join CSR activities, fostering a sense of shared purpose. During the pandemic, as we brought doorstep medical aid to underserved communities through Arogya Yan, my team’s children often appeared on Zoom calls – a reminder that purpose and parenthood needn’t be mutually exclusive,” **she stated.**

She further adds, “I believe that leadership isn’t about solitary sacrifice; it’s about curating collective strength. Delegating operational tasks freed me to mentor young professionals while being present for milestone moments for both, the company and my family.”

Her message to women grappling with work-life tensions is clear, "Your worth isn’t measured by hours logged but by lives touched."

Leadership Rooted in Purpose, Empowerment, and Collaboration

Anupama’s leadership philosophy is guided by three key principles: **purpose, empowerment, and collaboration.** She believes that technology’s highest calling is to **solve real-world problems**, whether by safeguarding digital identities or expanding healthcare access. “My leadership is rooted in three principles: purpose, empowerment, and collaboration. I believe that the core purpose of technology is to solve real-world problems, whether through safeguarding digital identities or expanding healthcare access. Investing in people’s growth, whether a student in Pune or a rural healthcare worker, creates ripples of change that outlast any individual effort,” **she says.**

For aspiring women leaders, her advice is to embrace resilience and actively seek mentorship. She comments, “To women navigating leadership, my one advice would be to embrace resilience. Early in my career, I faced doubts about my strengths. Instead of shrinking, I immersed myself in learning, proving that competence transcends gender. Seek mentors who challenge and champion you. Also, it is important to remember that true leadership isn’t just about titles; it’s about lifting others as you climb. I believe that when we empower women with skills, confidence, and opportunities, we don’t just transform industries - we transform societies.”

“My leadership is rooted in three principles: purpose-driven innovation, empowerment through ownership, and collaborative legacy-building. Technology’s highest calling, in my view, lies in solving human problems - whether it is safeguarding a business-owner’s digital transactions or ensuring a student’s online exam integrity. At Quick Heal, this philosophy translated into initiatives like ‘Cyber Shiksha for Cyber Suraksha’, where cybersecurity education became a tool for societal empowerment rather than just a corporate mandate,” **she explains.**

“To aspiring women leaders, I always advise to strive for visibility through action. Early in my career, I was often introduced as “Kailash’s wife,” a label I redefined by demonstrating that leadership isn’t about titles but impact. When we launched the ‘Earn and Learn’ program, we didn’t just train students; we positioned female participants as mentors in their communities, challenging the stereotype that cybersecurity is a male domain. This approach mirrors my belief that women must lead with “and” rather than “or” – embracing empathy and decisiveness, ambition and nurture, without conceding to false binaries,” she stated.

“I also believe that leadership thrives on legacy over recognition. The Quick Heal Foundation’s success belongs not to me but to the 1,200+ volunteers who’ve come together to turn our vision of creating equitable communities a reality. To women navigating boardrooms or grassroots initiatives, my advice is this: measure your impact by the ecosystems you cultivate. When we invest in others’ potential, whether through mentorship programs or flexible work policies, we don’t just break glass ceilings; we rebuild architectures of opportunity where everyone rises,” she concludes.