

# “There is no value in leaving one relationship to build another.”

*Dr. Sumathi Naryanan shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on the progression in the family system.*

**D**r. Sumathi Narayanan, President of Creative Communication and Management Center, Chennai- a Center for Personal and Professional Excellence has been in the field of training and development for over four decades and counselling services for two decades.

An ardent learner, she is a powerful speaker, trainer and leader. She enjoys conducting her workshops and her strength lies in innovating and customizing programs to suit organization's culture and needs. Her mission in life is to share Life Skills to the lesser privileged students or institutes serving them. She strongly believes in helping people develop and realize their potential. It is with this goal she is a counselor for the past one and a half decade as this has become her life's calling.

*In an exclusive interview, Dr. Sumathi Naryanan shares with Marie Banu her thoughts on the progression in the family system.*

## **About your education and exposure to training?**

I come from a very humble background. My father worked with USIS and my mother was a homemaker. When my father took a voluntary retirement, we moved to Chennai in May 1972. I got exposed to training as a learner in spoken English to public speaking skills. These skills are not taught in schools or colleges. During my childhood, my father used to conduct the Public Speaking programmes and we used to assist him in preparing the workshop materials as we used stencils then. I used to wonder what these Public Speaking programmes were as I could see the participants very confident/different after the 10-week programme.

I did my UG in Home Science at SIET Women's college. My family wanted me to get married when I was 18, but I was determined to pursue my higher education. Every woman has the right to choose what she wants. So, I convinced my parents and in-laws to allow me to continue my education. It was this decision that changed my destiny. I continued my graduation in Home Science and completed my Master's degree in 1978. My husband and my mother in law and were very supportive and encouraged me through.

I believe that if you want your family to support you, you need to do your bit first. Pay attention to your relationships, else you're going to mess it up. Having people to love and care for you is what matters. All our goals need to be aligned



with our total life, otherwise it becomes an isolation, in silos.

## **Your thoughts on the present generation youth mindsets and their priorities today?**

Today's youth are insecure and immature in their relationships. Many relationships are breaking-up as the girl does not want to live with her in-laws in the same house. I have come across several such cases. I ask the girl: "You want the boy without his parents, but you don't mind benefiting from the education his parents gave?"

They do not see the value of having a relationship. You want to have your space, ask for it. Do not demand to severe relationships. If your spouse can do that, he can do it to you too! There is no value in leaving one relationship to build another.

Everybody agrees that one loses freedom after marriage. They don't see the love and the commitment that comes with it. It's all about Facebook posts and the number of likes and comments.

## **About the progression in family system over the years?**

I have seen the family system progression over the last 40 years. The joint family has its own advantages and disadvantages. The advantage - there was protection; the disadvantage - there was no individual right.

Today, Indian youngsters (all over the world) want their parents to support them and take care of their children. Now, when you want to build relationships, you should realise their worth as well.

When we are getting older, we need to yield for certain things that our children want and also put our foot down at times.

Similarly, we need to allow them to do what they want and express what is not acceptable to us. It is their life!

India has to learn a lot. We do not allow an individual to decide or differ from a group. I see a lot of young girls confused about: 'where do I draw a line?'

## **From being a Trainer to becoming a Counselor.**

I have been a trainer for the past 40 years. I equip myself by updating my knowledge and did my PhD in the middle of my life. I didn't want to be a counselor for a long time as that was not the space I intended to be in. As I progressed in life, many people approached me with their problems and I used to refer them to other counselors. I then realised the need for counsellors and started equipping myself with the necessary knowledge and skills. Now, I have both the trainer as well as the counselor role in me.

Recently, I completed the Australian Counseling Association certification which qualified me to become a professional Supervisor as well as assist young counselors in their career. All these helped me to interact with people at different levels.

As a trainer in hundreds of organizations and thousands of people with whom I have interacted, I talk about the individual taking responsibility for their own progress and overcoming mental blocks.

## **Any challenges you faced as a Counselor?**

Every client who approach me for counseling have their own challenges. Perhaps, I can say that when I address a new type of a problem, my ability is

extended and I equip myself even more. My challenge is in updating, upgrading, and making sure that I am doing my best to every one of my clients in every session. So, that is a big challenge.

Many parents don't understand their children. This is the reason we have counselors in many progressive schools. I am a student of human development and remember reading a quote: "Home is a place where we come and lick our wounds so that we can feel healed and go back to the world again." But, for many children, who do not have freedom of expression in their home, it is a place where they get wounded. I have found this to happen in cases when either of their parents or both were not loving, affectionate, and expressive.

So, in the family structure, there is a dysfunctionality that needs to be addressed. It would be ideal to call all the family members and counsel them, but not all have the luxury of visiting a family therapist.

## **Your view of Work Life Balance?**

I would rather call it 'in LIFE, you balance with work - LBW'. Work brings an imbalance because of physical absence and time duration. It affects every other aspect, for instance, you don't have family time and health regimen.

In India, the workplace has no respect for one's personal life and personal time. So, they think it is okay to ask somebody to stay back after 6 PM and make them work for more. the logic is that they will have to work from 9 to 6 because you are off on Saturday. But, how many companies are willing to provide 5-day week for their employees?

Even companies who have overseas offices and have branches in India or vice-versa have different timings for their staff in each country. As Indian staff are insecure, they will yield to whatever the company demands from them and even work extra hours.

## **Can you tell us about Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP)?**

NLP is not just a technique. It is a way of life; an approach to life and understanding. You always have a better choice. NLP teaches that life is about choices. Take the Covid situation for instance. You can feel bad for being arrested at home or take full advantage of the situation and utilize it for personal development, indulging in a hobby, taking online courses or talking with family members. NLP proposes that you can always choose to be happy without a reason. All our past experiences, which disturbs us, can be re-programmed. We can make sure that we are in the present and we can programme ourselves to succeed in future. In a nutshell, NLP is the understanding of how we have structured experience in our mind and how it is impacting us. It is about modeling excellence and a very powerful tool to make people more competent and realising their full potential.