

# Business Standard

## Must Read: Chanda Kochhar's inspiring letter to her daughter

ICICI Bank's CEO and MD's advice to her daughter on how to deal with situations in life

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*Chanda Kochhar, MD & CEO, ICICI Bank at the launch of two women centric initiatives on international Women's Day, iWork@home, a first-of-its-kind programme, allows women employees to work from home. Photo: Suryakant Niwate*

Even as ICICI Bank's CEO and MD, Chanda Kochhar, got featured in Forbes Asia's Most Powerful Businesswomen 2016 list — an achievement for the fourth time — at home she is just a regular mother. Her daughter Aarti had written a mail to Kochhar after her elevation to the post of MD and CEO, stating how she had never realised her mother's stressful, successful and demanding career as she was just 'our' mother at home.

Citing this instance, Kochhar highlighted the importance of having a family, maintaining relationships and balancing work and life, in a letter to her daughter. The letter was published in Sudha Menon's book *Legacy: Letters from eminent parents to their daughters*. It was recently featured in the April issue of *Good Housekeeping*.

She advises her daughter to have the ability to handle any kind of situation, citing examples of her grandmother (Kochhar's mother) on dealing with life after the passing away of her father. "...My mother, who had been a homemaker till then, faced the responsibility of raising three children all on her own. It was then that we realised how strong she was and how determined to do her duty in the best possible manner," she wrote.

Kochhar's message to her daughter does throw up the issue of work-life balance for working women in corporate India. Opinions on this have been varied, with one of the world's most powerful women also stating that it is difficult to do so. "I don't think women can have it all. I just don't think so. We pretend we have it all. Every day, you have to make a decision about whether you are going to be a wife or a mother; in fact many times during the day you have to make those decisions.," PepsiCo chief Indira Nooyi had said in 2014.

But there's another side to the argument as well. [This report in \*The Economic Times\*](#) elaborates on women bankers and how their employers had supported them whenever family took a priority.

While the debate may be open on whether both can be handled simultaneously, here is the entire letter that the veteran banker wrote.

*Dear Aarti,*

*It makes me feel so proud today to see you standing in front of me as a confident young woman right on the threshold of an exciting journey through life. I am looking forward to seeing you grow and flourish in the years ahead.*

*This moment has also brought back memories of my own journey, and the life lessons I learnt along the way. When I think of those times, I realise that most of these lessons were actually learnt in my childhood, mostly through examples set by my parents. The values that they instilled in my formative years gave me the foundation on which I try to live my life even today.*

*Our parents treated all three of us — two sisters and a brother — equally. When it came to education, or our future plans, there was no discrimination between us based on our gender. Your grandparents always had the same message for the three of us - that it was important to focus on what gave us satisfaction and to work towards it with utmost dedication. That early initiation enabled us to develop into confident individuals capable of taking decisions independently. This also helped me when I started out on my own journey of self-discovery.*

*I was only a young girl of 13 when my father passed away from a sudden heart attack, leaving us unprepared to take on life without him. We had been protected from life's challenges so far. But without warning, all that changed overnight. And my mother, who had been a homemaker till then, faced the responsibility of raising three children all on her own. It was then that we realised how strong she was and how determined to do her duty in the best possible manner. Slowly, she discovered a flair for designing and textiles, found herself a job with a small firm, and quickly made herself*

*indispensable to them. It must have been challenging for her to shoulder the responsibility of bringing up her family single-handed, but she never let us feel like it was a task for her. She worked hard till she saw all of us through college and we became independent. I never knew that my mother had such a wealth of self-assurance and belief within her.*

*As a parent with a full-time job, one must not let work affect the way you relate to your family. Remember the time you were studying in the US and the announcement of my becoming MD and CEO of ICICI was splashed across all newspapers? I remember the mail you wrote to me a couple of days later. "You never made us realise that you had such a demanding, successful and stressful career. At home, you were just our mother," you wrote in your email. Live your life in the same way, my darling.*

*I also learnt from my mother that it is very important to have the ability to handle difficult situations and keep moving forward in life, no matter what. Even today I can remember the equanimity and calmness with which she handled the crisis on hand when my father passed away. You have to handle the challenges and emerge stronger from them, rather than allow them to bog you down.*

*I remember how, in late 2008, we were faced with a situation where ICICI Bank's survival was in jeopardy in the face of a global economic meltdown. The situation was being*

*analysed with a hawk's eye by major media platforms and debated widely in the public space... I got down to work, systematically communicating with all stakeholders - from the smallest depositor to the sophisticated investors, and from regulators to the government - the bank was sound and its exposure to these institutions involved a small portion of its assets.*

*I understood their concern because so many of them feared that their hardearned savings in our bank could be at risk. I also advised staff across the bank's various branches to lend a sympathetic ear to those depositors who turned up to withdraw their money, telling them to also offer the depositors a seat and a glass of water while they waited.*

*And though, depositors were welcome to withdraw their money if they wanted to, our staff also took care to explain to them that it would not help them to take their money away, because there was no real crisis situation.*

*It was during this period that I took a couple of hours off one day to attend your brother's squash tournament. I did not know it then, but my very presence at the tournament went a long way in reinstalling customer confidence in the bank. A few mothers at the tournament came and asked me if I was Chanda Kochhar from ICICI Bank and when I replied in the affirmative they said that if I could still find time to attend a tournament in the midst of a crisis, it meant that the bank was in safe hands and they need not worry about their money!*

*It was also from my mother that I learnt the importance of adapting to circumstances and not being afraid of the unknown. While working hard for my career, I looked after my family, and have been there for my mother and in-laws when they needed me around. They reciprocated in kind with their unconditional love and support for my career.*

*Remember that relationships are important and have to be nurtured and cherished. Also keep in mind that a relationship is a two-way street, so be ready to give a relationship just as you would expect the other person to be giving to you.*

*My career would not have progressed the way it did were it not for your father who never once complained about the time I spent away from home. Your father and I nurtured our relationship despite the fact that we were both busy with our own careers, and I am confident you will do the same with your partner, when the time comes. If you had complained and whined about my extended absence from home, I would never have had the heart to make a career for myself. I am blessed with a great and supportive family and I really hope you too will be as fortunate when you set out on your own!*

*I remember the day your Board Exams were about to commence. I had taken leave from work so that I could take you to the examination hall myself. When you realised I was coming, you told me how you were used to going for your exams alone for so many years. It hurt me to hear you say that, but I also think in some ways, having a working mother made you much more independent from a very young age itself.*

*You not only became independent, but also stepped into the nurturer's role for your younger brother and never let him miss my presence. I learnt to have trust and faith in you and you have now grown into a wonderful, independent woman. I now use the same principle at work to make our growing population of younger talent take on larger responsibilities.*

*I believe in fate but I also believe that hard work and diligence plays a very important role in our lives. In a larger sense, we all write our own destiny. Take destiny in your own hands, dream of what you want to achieve, and write it in your own way. As you go ahead in life, I want you to climb the path to success one step at a time. Aim for the sky, but move slowly, enjoying every step along the way. It is all those little steps that make the journey complete.*

*As you go forward, you will sometimes have to take difficult decisions, decisions that others might scorn at. But you must have the courage to stand up for what you believe in.*

*Make sure you have that conviction to do what you know is right, and once you have it, don't let sceptics distract you from your path.*

*Aarti, there is no limit to what a determined mind can achieve, but in achieving your goal, don't compromise on the values of fair play and honesty. Don't cut corners or compromise to achieve your dreams. Remember to be sensitive to the feelings of people around you. And remember, if you don't allow stress to overtake you, it will never become an issue in your life.*

*Remember that good times and bad times will be part of your life equally, and you have to learn to handle both with equanimity. Make the most of life's opportunities and learn from every opportunity, and challenge that life brings along.*

*Lovingly yours,  
Mumma*