



Kiran Maharaj A warrior, not a worrier

FAYOLA K J FRASER

Kiran Maharaj is a multitalented, versatile leader in the business community, whose career has spanned many professional pursuits, including business leadership, media, events management and film.

At present, she is the President of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, the past president of the Greater Tunapuna Chamber of Industry and Commerce, and the past president of the Trinidad and Tobago Publishers and Broadcasters Association (TTPBA), having served three consecutive terms. Maharaj has claimed her rightful place as one of our 23 Women to Watch in 2023 charged with the tenacious pursuit of her goals and her impressive achievement across a range of disciplines.

Maharaj was raised in Lange Park, Chaguanas, attended Holy Faith Convent in Couva and studied English Literature and Political Science at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine.

After completing her MBA at the School of Business and Computer Science, her curiosity and yearning for knowledge led her abroad, to New York University, where she received a certification in Events Management, and to Harvard, from which she received certificates in Effective Media Strategy and Business of Entertainment Media and Sports.

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One might wonder how Maharaj has consistently managed this broad spectrum of interests, but she remains

adamant in her curiosity, “wanting to know as much as I can about anything that piques my interest”.

Having been bitten by the media bug while she worked at a radio station as a summer job during her university days, Maharaj lasered her focus into journalism, and began working at a radio station, Radio 90.5 - The People’s Station. After a short stint working at the station, Maharaj decided to hand in her resignation, as the station was not performing well and she had received another viable offer. Her resignation took a 360 degree turn, however, when she was offered the position of General Manager of the same station at only 23 years old.

“This was the biggest decision of my life,” she remembers, “giving up my stress-free early twenties to take on such a big responsibility.”

Indeed, this was no ordinary task for such a young person, but Maharaj rose to the occasion fearlessly, knowing that the potential reward would be greater than any risk.

The success of revamping Radio 90.5, which ultimately became the leading radio station in T&T in the Indian/Bollywood format is one of Maharaj’s career highlights, but did not come without its challenges. She recalls having a very small staff, limited resources, and gaining recognition and respect as a young, female manager as three of the major obstacles.

“As a young professional woman, you have to have a lot of belly,” she asserts, and encourages women to employ her own ethos of “being a warrior not a worrier,” which has been her North Star in difficult times.

Learning from older staff, and simultaneously challenging the system where necessary are both ways she recommends young women stay true to themselves in their professional pursuits.

Maharaj has also survived many challenges by staying connected to her God and creator, who has given her the strength to face difficult circumstances.

In 2004, Maharaj began brainstorming her next pivotal project, Heartbeat Radio for Women, which was launched in 2005, as the world’s first women’s radio. The desire to launch this station came from her family, which consists of a lineage of strong, independent women, her mother having nine sisters.

“My family is a real Trini callaloo, diverse women both religiously and ethnically,” who, although diverse, faced many of the similar issues. Thus, Heartbeat Radio was born, to cater to all women, and connect with women in their real day-to-day lives through programming.

The station’s tagline “Radio for women...and the men who love them” was developed after a man called in to express how much better he understood and was able to support his wife and daughters because of the station’s programming.

Learning about women’s issues in the mental and physical spheres was an opportunity for him to develop greater grace and patience in his family unit, and consequently improved his relationship with the women in his family.

Kiran Maharaj is not a woman who fits neatly into any specific category, and she prefers it that way. Recognised by the US Embassy in 2018 for her dedication, passion, and sacrifice, Maharaj was awarded the Embassy POS “Woman of Courage” award.

Maharaj also received positive feedback internationally, from the American Women in Radio and Television (AWRT), a nonprofit organization for women in broadcasting industries. The organization, awed by her station, invited her to be a guest speaker at their meeting in Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.

Aside from her impressive professional pursuits, Maharaj is a dedicated mother to her now 24-year old son, who she describes affectionately as an “amazing young man.”

“I completely enjoy motherhood,” she says, “I knew it would require sacrifice, but my son is worth it.”

Although she is a single mother, Maharaj has leaned on the support of her own mother in raising her son, and credits her mother’s assistance with allowing her to strike a balance of assurance that her son was well taken care of, and continued pursuit of career advancement.

Describing her support system as her “personal board of directors”, Maharaj has found emotional, mental, physical and spiritual balance by surrounding herself with a loving community of friends and family who bear her up in so many ways.

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Dedicated to mentoring young people, she advises women to “believe in yourself, find a good balance, and don’t let anybody bring you down.”

Maharaj continues to serve her family, community and country by working relentlessly to break new ground and carve new paths for women in T&T.

FAYOLA K J FRASER is a professional in the international development arena. She has a BA in International (Middle Eastern) Studies and an MSc in International Relations and Diplomacy from the London School of Economics.