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For Young Women

September 12, 2023

Masaba, Why Didn't You Tell Me This When I Was 25?

Masaba may have been talking to all women, but her advice seems personal to me. I wish I had got this advice when I was younger.



Nivedita Ramesh



TAGS: CAREER EMPOWERMENT FREEDOM WOMEN AT WORK WOMEN ENTREPRENEUR

Tweak India, a content platform by Twinkle Khanna released its latest **interview** last week, and its guest was Masaba Gupta.

Between her eponymous designer label, tie-ups with products from watches to cosmetics, her famous parents, and starring as herself in her own story (**Masaba Masaba**), she continues to fascinate us and inspire us in equal measure.

In the interview, Twinkle Khanna asked Masaba what advice she had for other **women who wanted to start their own business**.

Refreshing advice that's also practical

Considering that Masaba was not lacking in money, choice, or access to opportunities, I expected a reality-deaf answer. Something like: 'keep an open mind, throw oneself at risks' and similar eye-rolling stuff. What she said next not only surprised me, but it also felt like the perfect advice for my wide-eyed, terrified, just graduated, 25-year-old self.

1. **Becoming financially independent should be every woman's first goal.**

"When you're financially independent, nothing and no one can come in your way." – Masaba Gupta

Money that you can call your own essentially buys you freedom. It's the freedom to choose the things you want to spend it on, and also the freedom to decide what you want to do in life.

Even though it wasn't much, I had money of my own when I got married. It made a big difference to my confidence in the early, uncertain days of my marriage. My salary was more than enough to support both of us. Because of this, my husband was able to take a break when he was burned out from a high-pressure job.

Be financially independent, for yourself

By the time I had my daughter five years later, I had enough savings to support myself for a year, maybe more. My husband was working full-time then, and he paid for all the household expenses. So I wasn't under immediate pressure to **go back to full-time work**. I was able to take the time I wanted to get back and to choose freelance work that challenged me while being flexible enough to be with my daughter when she needed me. Even better, I could still indulge, buy myself clothes or the occasional meal out, without asking anyone for money or having to justify it. Recently, I became more conscious about investing my money for the future, and the importance of a **fuck-off fund**.

> Being financially independent is more than having money to spend. It's a choice to live your life the way you would like, no questions answered.

2. There's no correct age to start over.

"So Masaba's had many, many failures before she figured out that fashion is her game." Twinkle Khanna sums up Masaba's professional journey.

"Yes! And yet people think I am an overnight success. But I'm not!"

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Failures are not the end

Masaba dissects her **unsuccessful attempts at her previous careers** self-deprecatingly. Before fashion, she played tennis, toured the world with Shiamak Dawar's dance company, and tried her hand at a vocal training school in London. She even wanted to act. Ultimately, she didn't finish the fashion course she had enrolled in either, because she started her own label. Then she got selected at **Fashion Week** as part of the Gen Next program, and there was no looking back.

So it's okay to try something and fail and then to try something else and fail again. Don't be afraid to be wrong. Defeat can feel crushing, but you'll learn more from it and emerge stronger from it than an easy victory.

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"I was able to dabble with fashion for five years without making any money because I had the support. Telling a woman whose earnings are crucial to her or her family to follow her passion instead is impractical." – Masaba Gupta

Beyond our individual financial obligations, it is a sad fact that success has a very narrow monetary definition. But that should not stop you from doing **what your heart tells you** to, as much as practical considerations allow.

Prioritise yourself

I became a mother at 32, when I was financially stable. But my body took much longer to heal, post pregnancy. I also struggle to match my baby's energy, and I wonder if I will be even physically and mentally sound by the time she is an adult. But when I ask women who became mothers in their 20s, and whose children are adults now, some of them regret having children early.

They say that they had to give up their careers altogether. Those days, work meant turning up in the office every day and relying on family for **child care**. So some of them chose to stay at home, even if it meant struggling to survive on a single income. But now, at 40, they are better off, financially, and free to live their lives. Everyone's situation is specific to them, and the best we can do is take pointers.

At 25, you are desperate to have money of your own and to prove yourself (to yourself, as it turned out). So you took a well-laid path into a corporate career, even though your heart lay somewhere between creative writing and the development sector. But this low-risk decision gave you money, which you used to pursue writing, later. So it's okay. You took the first step that had to be climbed. It was also an experience that prepared you for your second career.

4. Peer pressure can feel like the only thing that matters, but its consequences will be yours and yours alone.

"There's no rule book or a fixed way to do things. Everyone's situation is different." – Masaba Gupta

For years I struggled with a tendency to be competitive about everything in life. I put undue pressure on myself to do everything, and sometimes, to do it perfectly also. Now I understand that some people will be better than me at some things. That does not make me incompetent or unsuccessful.

Do things at your pace

I have been able to build a freelance career by focusing on my strengths rather than wringing my hands over my weaknesses. Sure, I took 5 years when others took less than 6 months, and monetarily, my earnings barely cover the rent. I don't have the social standing or the fat bank balance of many of my peers. But I love every minute of my work, and I can spend time with my daughter whenever I want to. I have never had Monday blues, and I am happier than I have ever been. I am not "successful" in the conventional sense, but as far as I am concerned, I have **hit the ball** out of my park. And that is all that matters.

Someone I know once said, "What's she got to do? Her dad has left her hundreds of crores! There's no hundreds of crores. I am building that now." – Masaba Gupta

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Image Source: Screenshot from the series Masaba Masaba on Netflix

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I asked so many questions that I stopped getting answers. Then I started writing. **read more...**

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Workplace Issues

October 12, 2023

Why The Economics Nobel Prize For Claudia Goldin Is So Significant For Women At Work Globally

The Nobel Prize to Claudia Goldin for her work on 'advancing our understanding of women's labour market outcomes' has put the gender inequity in the labour market in the spotlight.

Natasha Ramarathnam

"There are still large differences between women and men in terms of what they do, how they're remunerated and so on. And the question is, why is this the case? And that's what the work is about."
– **Claudia Goldin**

Claudia Goldin became the third woman, after **Elinor Ostrom** and **Esther Duflo** to win the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, and the first woman to be an individual winner. This takes the percentage of women awardees (in Economics) up from 2.17% to 3.23%, which is nearly a 50% increase.

But that is the not the only reason we should be celebrating the win of the 77 year old economic historian and labour economist from Harvard University. We should be celebrating because Claudia Goldin was awarded the Prize for "having advanced our understanding of women's labour market outcomes'.

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Sex & Sexuality

October 15, 2023

Unveiling the Mysteries of Sex Education: A Throwback to High School Chronicles

Has our understanding of what to teach children in sex education changed from when it was all about abstinence and taboo?

Lekshmi Rita Venugopal

Oh, high school days!

A whirlwind of uniforms, friendships, and adolescent curiosity.

Let's turn back the clock to reminisce about those quirky moments from our sexual education class.

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