

Yogas Nair

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YOGAS NAIR describe herself as a small girl from Tongaat living a big dream. She is the KwaZulu-Natal regional executive editor for the Independent Media Group, and editor of The Mercury newspaper. Yogas serves as the group public advocate for the group's internal ombudsman office. She is also the chair of the board of the Mercury Hibberdene Children's Home. Hard work and determination and a bucket list full of goals have shaped her career and enabled her to fulfill her dream of becoming an editor of a major newspaper.

"You set your goals and you go after them," explained Yogas. She grew up in Tongaat in what she describes as a sugarcane farming community away from the bright lights of Durban, the big city. Yogas is proud to say that she still lives in Tongaat.

She says, "I was a big dreamer in my younger days. Growing up as an Indian child, you are meant to live out your parents' dreams." Her father wanted her to study for a profession and become a lawyer or teacher. Although it meant that she would have to work and pay for her own studies, Yogas followed her dream and studied journalism at the ML Sultan Technikon. "It was tough, I had to take taxis and trains from Tongaat to Durban daily, but I persevered, and I did it."

Each individual is unique

Yogas joined Independent Media 18 years ago as a freelance journalist with the Post newspaper. In 2014, after 13 years in the industry, she was appointed as the editor of the Post newspaper. This was a ground-breaking event for women in journalism, as she was the first female editor in the 60-year history of the publication. She broke further ground for women when she became the second female editor of The Mercury in November 2016.

The Mercury, KwaZulu-Natal's leading morning news-paper, reaches 250 000 people a day. Yogas ensures that 168-year-old publication is relevant and viable in a rapidly changing world, which she says is accomplished with a dynamic team of staff. According to Yogas, the executive chairman of the Independent Media Group, Doctor Iqbal Surve, believes in gender empowerment and has given his support to achieve this goal in their industry.

Women do not need to have a different approach to business than men to be successful, says Yogas. She believes that her confidence and ability to lead has allowed her to be successful in business. "I think that each individual is unique in their own stead, whether you are male or female, so it is about what drives you, and to just be you, to be your original self, irrespective of whether you are male or female."

She credits Dr Surve for being a great help on the way to getting to where she is. She says he has taken an interest in her career and believes in her ability as a leader. "When someone believes in you, it grows your confidence and motivates you and that has made me grow in leaps and bounds over the years." He has provided her with constant mentorship, which helped her to meet challenges to climb the ladder of success, quickly and relatively effortlessly.

Yogas is happy with what she has achieved thus far and believes that in terms of work accomplishments that she has ticked the right boxes. "I have lived my dream of becoming a journalist and writing a number of headline stories and now I live my dream of being an editor. Journalism is what makes me thrive."

Something that she enjoys doing in her role now is mentorship. She says, "I understand how difficult it is for someone coming straight from university or a community newspaper to get into mainstream. I think I have a role to play in mentoring and developing young journalists. That will be my focal point in coming months."

Work-life balance

Achieving a work-life balance is something Yogas admits that she is "quite hopeless at" as she has a very demanding career in an unpredictable industry. "I try to strike a balance and try to be fair on everybody, to be a good wife, mother and employee all at the same time, but I sometimes fail in an area." However, her children are growing up and are becoming more independent, which has lessened the demands on her time.

In addition, her husband, Pat, and her two children, Kimeshan (20) and Mayuri (17), serve as a great inspiration for Yogas. She says, "They are my daily inspiration to live my best life and be the best that I can be. I think that having the support of your family helps you grow personally and professionally. They allow me to be who I am and do what I need to do without expectation, and I consider them a great blessing in my life."

Never doubt yourself

Although Yogas had big dreams as a child, there have been times when she has doubted herself. If she could give advice to her younger self at this moment, it would be, "Never doubt yourself, you can achieve. You learn along the way that you have to push yourself through the crowd, you have to get to the front, you have to believe in yourself."

Now that she can live her dream, she would also tell her younger self, as she has told her children, to "dare to dream". "Sometimes success does not come quickly, but if you persist and believe in yourself, you will eventually succeed. Dreams do come true," she concluded.

