

COVER STORY

Gomathi Siva Sankaran

FOUNDER & CEO, THE GUIDING LIGHT ART COMPANY, DENMARK

A True Change-leader Working towards Leaving Positive Impact on Society

Change, no matter, for good or for bad, it is never easy, and a leader always knows this. However, a true leader is the one who survives the stumbling blocks only to emerge as a true change leader. One such woman leader who is setting new benchmarks for female entrepreneurs to follow is Gomathi Siva Sankaran, Founder & CEO, The Guiding Light Art Company. Working with a vision to create a positive social impact through art and yoga, Gomathi Siva Sankaran believes that the social and societal challenges that exist today, which are hindering our development as individuals/groups can be alleviated best via such good-old traditional methods as art and yoga. The GLAC Studio has a wide range of products and services that enable this process, and we work with both children and adults.

“Through the art classes The GLAC Studio enables the students to embark on a journey of self-discovery. Children and adults not only learn art, but they also equip themselves with patience, perseverance, and an open mind-set

towards any challenge. You might be surprised to see how much this contributes to alleviating stress, anxiety, and related ailments. To add to this, our 'Change Management the Yogic way' workshops on the other hand, are sessions devised for Corporates, wherein various workgroups come together to identify their inner potential to resolve conflicts, crisis, diversity related challenges with the help of meditation, mindfulness, and visualization techniques”, highlights Gomathi Siva Sankaran, Founder & CEO, The Guiding Light Art Company.

Sharing more about The Guiding Light Art Company and her entrepreneurial journey, Gomathi, recently engaged in an one-one interaction with the Women Entrepreneur magazine. Here's the highlight from the same.

Tell us about your educational journey and prior industry experience that you bring to the table.

Having a Masters in Corporate Secretaryship (India), Certified Public Accountancy (New Hampshire, US) and an MBA (Copenhagen





AT THE GUIDING LIGHT ART COMPANY, WE WILL TRAIN YOU HOW TO BLEND YOUR PASSION WITH PROFESSIONAL LIFE AND MAKE THE MOST OUT OF IT

QUICK FACTS

Educational Qualification:

- 2021 Certified Change Management Practitioner (APMG International)
- 2021 PRINCE2 Foundation Certification (PeopleCert & AXELOS)
- 2012-13 Master of Business Administration (Copenhagen Business School, Denmark)
- 2008-09 Certified Public Accountant (New Hampshire State Board, US)
- 1998-2000 Masters in Corporate Secretaryship (Alagappa University, Karaikudi, India)

Business School, Denmark), I feel I have been blessed with the opportunity to learn from three different countries & cultures. To add to these, I am also PRINCE2 (Foundation) certified and APMG International Certified Change Practitioner.

I started my career as accountant in small organizations in India, and then eventually paved my way up to working with Accenture Financial Services, HSBC Bank, Novartis Pharmaceuticals, and Danfoss, in various accounting, management, and administrative capacities. Over the years, I have learnt how to manage small and medium sized projects and have had the privilege to live and work in New York, and Harlow, Essex County, the UK, before I decided to move to Denmark.

Throw some light on the key business take aways that you learnt through your prior industry experience.

Over the past 17 years of my intense international work experience, some of the key business lesson which I have gathered would be: Firstly, all organizations are super smart when it comes to identifying and

resolving objective issues/showstoppers in their projects. However, there's no accountability as to how much loss we incur due to subjective issues/people-related challenges such as stress, anxiety, conflicts, disagreements. This is exactly where I came up with the business idea for the GLAC Studio.

Secondly, Diversity and inclusion is not just about filling in people with various skin colors. Instead, it is about identifying ways to work with different cultures. Many organizations provide culture training highlighting the differences. This is where we are fundamentally wrong. The knowledge of such differences is only going to further strengthen the lines between us! We have done enough talking about differences and seen the results. The need of the hour is to turn the table around and talk more about the similarities instead.

Thirdly, there's an immense need for leaders to work with emotional quotient. Yes, there are special trainings that support leaders in appreciating this need. However, many leaders go back to their own old ways when they get back to their work floor. Organizations, especially after the COVID situation,



need to build in the culture of working with emotional quotient amongst their leaders and employees.

What is it that motivated you to establish The Guiding Light Art Company? Tell us about the transformation or impact which you are looking to create through your venture.

Being a woman in business is always a challenge, and to top it with racial harassment, it always left me frustrated. I understood that no matter the country, I would always face such challenges. However, despite all the discouragement, I was still able to cope up with these situations because I came back home to paint away or do yoga or meditation.

In India, we have this tendency to look at artwork as a hobby and yoga as good set of exercises. We do name them as 'extracurricular activities'. When I was going through enormous challenges both at business level and personal level, I began to adopt art and yoga as an integral part of my life which gave me the tools to find solutions. All I had to do now was to share with others how to combine these tools to one's professional life. This business of knowledge sharing came to be known as 'The Guiding Light Art Company'.

Today, The GLAC Studio wants to build bright futures through art and yoga. We aim to create a positive social impact in the lives of individuals and work groups such as corporates. This can show you the way to lead a successful and purposeful life using the tools art & yoga, and it all starts with a simple brush stroke or a single deep breath.

What are some of the most pressing challenges that you face in your role as the founder & CEO? How did you successfully overcome them?

An entrepreneurial journey is always full of stumbling blocks and this one was no different. Some of the major challenges which we had come across includes -

- **The TIME Challenge:** Until the first quarter of 2020, I was working full-time and working on further developing my ideas. However, time posed a huge challenge in coming up with viable product and service range. It was only after I had moved completely into The GLAC that I was able to create the complete value chain, find suppliers and customers.
- **The Technology Challenge:** Though I had great ideas, putting them out there for the public to see, wasn't clearly my thing. In the Leadership Discovery Process at the CBS MBA program, I had learnt how to identify one's strengths and weaknesses as a leader and to delegate roles & responsibilities to appropriate individuals/teams. With support from my network, I found the perfect business/technology partner – Priyanka Asawa, SanviTech Solutions that could handle all the technical matters and guide me through the process of bringing the GLAC Studio to this virtual world.
- **Fixed Cost Challenge:** This is something every business owner fears. The sessions that I take – art and yoga, do need space. When I was struggling for space, local organizations (Sønderborg International School & Sønderborg Andels Boligforening) came to the rescue by providing spaces at concessional rents. They saw the benefits that these sessions could bring to the society/community, and immediately agreed to support. The COVID lockdown, also gave the opportunity to go online bringing the fixed cost down.
- **Resource Challenge:** At present, I'm the only one doing the teaching for both art classes, yoga sessions and conducting workshops. As we scale up, we will need more resources to train. Therefore, I began training my students also to be teaching assistants. When I am conducting summer camps for kids, some of my current

students also play the role of teaching assistants. One of the product lines that we offer 'superhero series' of coloring worksheets for kids, is actually managed by 13-year-olds now. Slowly and steadily, I want to train so many students as possible to become independent tutors, so I don't have to hunt for resources as and when the GLAC studio grows.

- **Existing Challenges:** There are still many challenges, for example, finding the appropriate printing partner, so I could outsource the printing, packaging & logistics of art prints. I am still working on identifying a partner. I guess, it is a part of the learning process of being an entrepreneur – as we grow our business, we will always face new challenges and it is this journey towards the solution that makes the life of an entrepreneur interesting.

Beyond your role as a business leader, what are some other important facets of your life? What has been the driving force behind your success as a business leader?

Today, I believe, enjoying life means enjoying every aspect and every moment of your life to the fullest. Our ancient education system in India was based on the yogic way of life and creative thinking. So, everyone lived a healthy, happy, and fulfilling life. The moment we got into splitting subjects as academic & non-academic, we lost the yin-yang balance. The structural/analytical thinking mind (SHIVA – the masculine energy) and the creative energy (SHAKTHI – the feminine energy) need to co-exist to create the balance in life and thereby the balance in the ecological system. At The Guiding Light Art Company, we will train you how to blend your passion with professional life and make the most out of it.

Some of the key factors that have contributed towards my success are:

- **Consistency** – Being consistent is always helpful. People will always respect you for your consistency even if they aren't interested in buying your products/services. They might even connect you to your next customer, just because they appreciate your consistency
- **Adaptability** – There's amazing learning waiting out there for you when you are being flexible/adaptable. I've been able to build so many revenue streams only because I have listened to my customers and tried to adapt my products/services to their requirements.
- **Openness** - This goes along with consistency. Being open about your business strategy, plans,

ideas, and failures, helps in building the trust with the viewers/audience.

- **Network** – This is great learning from the CBS MBA and life in Denmark. You are only as strong and powerful as your network. Never stop growing your network!
- **Never give up Attitude** – Oh! I think, this is a mandatory requirement for all entrepreneurs.

Owing to your years of experience as a business leader, what would your advice be to young women and girls who also aspire to become entrepreneurs in the future?

While gender disparity is a global issue that might take many years to resolve, it is to be treated as work in progress and each one of us needs to have a part to play in bringing this change about. Instead of waiting for the change to happen, be the change maker! Becoming a business leader is also about learning how to look at the big picture. It doesn't happen in a day. However, certain routines can be put in place so as to ensure that you do, such as -

Reading the newspaper – Read the same news from 10 different papers globally, so you get to how people interpret the same thing so differently; Networking – Try to network with people from different professional/academic backgrounds. For example, a footballer would think differently about leading when compared to a surgeon on an operating table. Yes, both are completely different, yet both have a goal to achieve, and time is of essence to both. Hence, they emote a different leadership style; Practice solution providing - Every problem/challenge has a solution and it's already on its way. You just need to grab it! This takes practice. When you read the newspaper, or network with people, you will have access to many more challenges. Start writing down your own thought process relating to possible solutions and discuss with people. Who knows? You might have hit the next best idea for business!

Once you know that you've hit the best business idea, don't wait for someone to recognize you. You own this idea, and you give yourself the title Business Owner/Entrepreneur/CEO. However, it is important to remember, 'Beneath the CROWN lies the head that holds it!' So, own up to your title – take responsibility for your actions and be sincere to this business idea. Use the tools such as business model canvas, to create your value chain. Be consistent and flexible in your approach, building on the work ethic. Success is just around the corner! [WB](#)