

Anita Samarth

Making History

Anita Samarth was raised thinking she had three options for her career: become a doctor, a lawyer, or an engineer like her father. While she never felt particularly drawn to any of those professions, her traditional Indian upbringing had influenced her to believe that the best career was one she could count on for stability. "As the only child of immigrant parents, I believed the route to success was only down a tried and true path," she recalls. "Choosing a career in the healthcare, technology, or engineering space felt like a safe choice, since you can assume you will always be employed. It wasn't until later, however, that I realized how much of a people person I am. I had never been exposed to someone in a successful leadership role in business, so I shied away from that notion until well after college because I didn't know much else."

Anita stayed true to the suggestions of her culture by earning degrees in biomedical engineering and electrical engineering, but realized as soon as she was in the field just how successful she could be as a businesswoman. She currently serves as CEO and co-founder of Clinovations Government Solutions (CGS), a company dedicated to bridging the gap between the delivery of health care and other sectors through strategic consulting on the use of technology. With twenty employees serving predominantly government or publicly funded clients, their engagements are centered on policy, implementation, and practice.

Most recently, the CGS team has worked on implementation of the Recovery Act, which gives hospitals incentives to use electronic medical records. "We're interested in making sure doctors get compensated for sharing relevant clinical information electronically," she explains. "For example, let's say you're in a medical office building on one side of town and you have a

practice on the other side of town. You're told as a doctor that you don't get incentive dollars unless you get your radiology results electronically. Your medical office building may have a radiologist with an ultrasound, but that radiologist can't afford all the electronic pieces yet, which means you're going to send your patient across town to get the radiology tests done so they can get a result sent back electronically. Now you're creating the unintended consequence of patient routing. You're making it unnecessarily difficult, not to mention possibly putting the other radiology place out of business, even though your intention was good. We are here to help that problem with programs that support effective use of technology."

Anita started Clinovations in 2007 with the intention of looking closer at policy and national agenda. "There was a lot of strange policy being enacted, and people had no idea what it was like being in the field in the healthcare system," she says. "When we work with the government, we have to simplify everything since there is a certain way it has to be implemented. On the flip side, when regulatory conditions are pushed to the marketplace, there's a demand for flexibility. Most people didn't know where the line between these two considerations falls, since they don't hang out in Washington. I saw an opportunity to inform federally-funded initiatives nationwide through practice, and to educate the practice about the policy."

Anita was born in Toronto, Canada and grew up in Texas, where her father, a civil structural engineer, worked at the nuclear power plant near Fort Worth. Her mother worked in accounting and was an exceptionally strong woman after losing her father at the age of twelve. Anita's parents had met through an arranged marriage in India and immigrated to the United



States for their respective careers, where they raised Anita with a strong traditional Indian influence.

Anita attended a Southern Baptist private school for her first two years of grade school, but transferred to a public school in third grade, where she found her studies extremely easy. "I already knew my times tables from the private school, so I was ahead of everyone else," she comments. "I'm sure I was an average student at the private school, but because of the timing of my transfer, I did very well in public school."

Anita was able to maintain good grades despite undergoing a series of reconstructive surgeries for a cleft palate—the first at only six months of age. The surgeries continued throughout her adolescence, and she had her last just before leaving for college. In elementary school, it had been an even playing field, since her classmates were constantly getting new teeth, but by middle school, she had to have a bone graft that required metal implants and screws that were harder to camouflage. "It was hard to go through that in my early teens," she says. "I would tag along with my parents and their friends' kids on weekends, and I could feel them looking at me. In the long run, I can see how it taught me strategy and how to manage difficult people around me, but at the time, it was very hard."

Anita did exceptionally well in her schoolwork and took extra classes during the summer, so by ninth grade, she was invited to apply to a program at the University of North Texas to work through her final years of high school while concurrently starting her college coursework. "My parents and I went to visit, and I thought it was awful," she laughs. "The students weren't as well rounded as I wanted to be, and they still had curfews. It was college with the shackles of high school, so I turned it down and elected to graduate early instead." At sixteen years old, she moved across the country to Baltimore, Maryland, where she started at Johns Hopkins University and got her first true taste of freedom. "People would say, 'Oh you poor thing, you didn't get to enjoy yourself in high school,' and I thought, are you kidding me?" she laughs. "I was sixteen and living on my own. I loved the freedom!"

Having grown up with the understanding that Indians only became doctors, lawyers, or engineers, Anita thought long and hard about what career she wanted to pursue during her time

at Johns Hopkins. She knew she didn't want to be a civil engineer since she had seen how her father's job had frequently uprooted the family, so she earned two degrees in biomedical and electrical engineering to keep her options open.

Despite her diligent focus on the career paths her family had envisioned for her, Anita's natural tendencies conflicted every so often with her intended professional aspirations. Whereas most of the libraries on campus were "quiet", there was one that was known as the "social" library, where students could talk and collaborate as they worked. Anita always chose the social option and frequently found herself abandoning her biomedical engineering work to network from table to table, catching up with old friends and making new ones as she went. She had never once considered a business major, mainly because she had never been formally introduced to the field. "My friends used to tease me in college for only going to the library to socialize," she says. "That's when I started to really notice that maybe I was in the wrong field, since I was at my best when I was able to surround myself with people and bring together their ideas. If I had been exposed to the business or information technology worlds earlier, I think I would have found them to be my forte since they are so much more focused on relationships and collaboration."

After finishing her majors and graduating a semester early, Anita received several acceptances into biomedical engineering masters programs, but after visiting the campuses, she realized the career did not feel like a good match after all. With that, she deferred her acceptances and started working as a consultant at Accenture, a management consulting and technology services company. After a year there, she realized she wanted to shift her orientation to business, so she forewent her deferrals and spent another three years with the company.

In 1998, Anita left Accenture to manage consulting and patient safety at First Consulting Group, a midsized consulting firm (now Computer Sciences Corporation) where she worked for five years before it was acquired. During the company's transition, she left to join GE Healthcare as a National Practice Manager. In her third year with GE, she attended a large conference for IT and healthcare, where she was introduced to Trenor Williams. "I always say, 'Those who can't do, manage.' In this field, that translates to,

although I'm not a clinician, I manage clinicians," she says. "Trenor gave me his resume, so we called him in, and immediately, we hit it off." At the time, GE was paying physicians extremely low salaries, so Anita used Trenor as her case study to get the salaries realigned and further evolve the profile of physician consultants at GE.

Shortly after Anita met Trenor in 2005, she decided to venture out on her own for the first time by starting ASTECH Consulting. "When I started that company, my notion was that I had a unique set of skills living in D.C., in the fields of healthcare, technology, and policy, and I wanted to see what I could do with that," she says. "My initial goal was having my own freedom and independence, and just to be able to take care of myself. Eventually, however, I wanted more. I still had that fire in my belly to find out what we could change and what we were capable of, so we decided to push the limits."

Anita and Trenor ended up reconnecting in Washington, D.C. a few years into founding ASTECH Consulting. A year and a half into their professional relationship, they decided to start a new company together, fueled by their mutual affinity for connecting people. "We started 'geeking' out over Health IT, building our networks and discussing why healthcare is broken and how we can fix it" she says. "Healthcare costs are bankrupting our nation, and we saw a way to make a difference—and, in that sense, to make history. I decided I wanted to get off the road and learn a little about the policy space, so we started asking people who they knew like it was an extracurricular activity." In a natural effort, Anita was able to roll the work she had accrued at ASTECH Consulting over to her new company with Trenor, thus creating Clinovations in 2007 as a collaborative and consulting firm in 2008.

Looking back, Anita credits her success as an entrepreneur to having always had a strategic plan in place, even when she craved the freedom to explore her options. "I don't think my gut has ever been wrong," she says. "I let the lessons I've learned and the challenges I've faced define me. In earlier days, when I encountered things, I would persevere and move on. Today, when I see a red flag, I deal with it sooner. That kind of foresight is what really gives you freedom in whatever career you choose."

When she's not focused on the company, Anita spends time with her husband, Bob Filley, whom she married in 2003. Like his father and grandfather, Bob works in commercial real estate, where he earns 100 percent commission. "I am type A, and he is type B, so his commission always drove me crazy," she says. "He's very mellow, and I think that's good for me. He's extremely supportive, but we are very independent. We very rarely ask each other for advice—instead, we say, 'Go find your peers and I'll find mine.'"

While she may not have chosen the exact path her parents laid out for her, Anita maintained the values they instilled in her and opened new avenues of progress for future generations to come. "I'm kind of in the none-of-the-above category," she says. "I'm not a doctor. I'm not a lawyer. And even though I have two engineering degrees, I've lost my ability to do any actual engineering. What I really am is a culmination of the things I have learned and the things I have worked for. You are a factor of your surroundings, so you take a piece of it all with you as you build who you are." By trusting her instincts and letting her natural abilities lead her away from a prescribed path and into a life where her interests and passions are redefining an industry and helping to solve one of the biggest problems our nation faces, Anita is not only happier and more successful—she's reshaping tradition and making history.

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