

Rhea Leckie will make you believe in the mantra of 'anything is possible'

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DNA Sunday Team

Be it as a storyteller, author, CEO or adventure sports enthusiast, Rhea Leckie believes in living her life to the mantra of 'anything is possible'. JBM traces her journey.



Born in London, bred in India and shaped in UK across 20 cultural stints, Rhea Leckie's (Duttagupta) story has its humble roots in a young girl from a middle class Bengali home with heaps of self-belief and a restlessness, daring to take the plunge in rescripting her destiny. Rhea did not know at the time that she would one day become one of the youngest directors at Pricewaterhouse Coopers in UK.

Success did not fall into Rhea's lap. Far from it... she was three when her parents separated. Her mother struggled bravely with a singular mission of steering her daughter's path to happiness. Her maternal grandfather, her Dadu, a retired lawyer was another sculptor in Rhea's life whose numerous stories left an indelible impact on Rhea's mind.

She promised Dadu that she would write a book, and at 38, Rhea fulfilled her promise by releasing *Leadership: It's in Your DNA*.

She was a good student of a progressive Birla school in Calcutta, which actively encouraged extracurriculars. This widened Rhea's horizons to sports, art, creative writing and public debating which she claims gave her her distinct voice of authority in the boardrooms. This was followed by a scholarship at Miranda House in Delhi where Rhea's foray into English Literature gave her the freedom of spirit to project an opinion and stand her ground with the courage of conviction. Little did she know that these early influences would subconsciously work their magic in her professional life.

Rhea was introduced to the concept of management consulting by cosmic serendipity.

She describes her first transition into corporate consulting at a Big4 firm. "Every client assignment was like a new piece of theatre, a set of strong characters, a complex plot with a beginning, a middle and an end and a crisis to be resolved," she recalls. "I said to myself, 'to make the most of consulting, I believe firstly I need to forget the two words 'management consultant', it means nothing'. Instead, think as a playwright, orchestrator or sculptor to corporates."

The next decade of Rhea's life was a journey that saw her travelling to nearly 20 countries with stints in Japan, New York, Hong Kong, Dubai, Sweden and Italy among other places.

"Living in all those different places taught me more than my MBA could ever have," said Rhea. Three mentors at Pricewaterhouse Coopers, Martin, Mervyn and Paul taught her to never get comfortable with success as learning from failure was just as important.

But Rhea was relentless in her pursuit of life. After working for a decade to achieve her position as a director, she left the corporate giant at 32 and risked all her savings in starting her own venture. "I realised I wanted to work for myself and I wanted to create a brand. It was a very difficult time and a year after I started, London, Middle East and the US crashed! Many of my friends who had encouraged me to be an entrepreneur told me to 'undo my madness' and return to corporate safety. But I persevered." Rhea went ahead to create *Corporate DNA Consulting*, which was a semi-finalist for the HSBC Start-up Star award in 2009. She was also a finalist at the Women of the Future Awards in Corporate Britain.

Rhea's book, published recently by Bloomsbury London, titled, *Leadership: It's in Your DNA*, uses human storytelling from a range of leaders across CEOs, chefs, filmmakers (Yash Chopra), sports stars (Roger Federer) and musicians to relay her message that everyone has ten inherent qualities that can make them a leader. These include self, focus, expression, resilience, emotion, instinct, fear, dark side, creativity and luck.

The book shows how every person has these ten qualities which can be best used to become a leader. Another piece of serendipity brought a zestful Scotsman Philip Leckie to Rhea's life. As her husband, Rhea sees him as a best friend, mentor and playmate. "My marriage is giving back all the years of play I missed out in my childhood," she says.

Corporate **DNA** Consulting, headquartered in London with a team of 18 **DNA** practitioners, as Rhea calls them, has recently opened in Singapore to serve the Asia Pacific region and will now set up base in India. Rhea also serves as a guest lecturer at London School of Economics, Chicago booth Singapore and IIM Kolkata on topics of entrepreneurship and leadership.

What's next for this avid adventurer? "This is all happening fast. Yet the hunger continues and I am planning an extension to serve my passion for leadership. I want to make films and inject positive disruption in people's minds through questioning their assumptions, beliefs and habits. I want to shift mindsets."

A quote from her book says "the starting point of believing in any story is to first believe your own story is worth telling", rightly summing her life's philosophy.