

Home Maker to Entrepreneur

by Kalpana Gurram



I'm running late. Yet as I fumbled with the wires for the projector, I checked the clock on the computer screen and saw 9:58 AM, and I was not too concerned about the 10 AM class I had to be ready to teach. All my students were Indians, and as most South Asians know, Indian Standard Time dictates that "on time" means early, and ten minutes late means "on time." As predicted, there I was at 10:05 making the last adjustment to the focus of the projector in an empty conference room. As the letters of my presentation went from blurry disfigurement to sharp lines, I felt a sweet sting of pride. Fifteen years ago, I would never have imagined being where I am now: an entrepreneur and business owner, teaching my trade to four eager employees.

My story started similarly to that of many other immigrants; I moved to the United States in 1998 as a result of my husband's computer software job. New to the country and culture, I was content to stay at home and raise my two spirited, intelligent daughters. When my oldest was starting college and my youngest still in middle school, I decided to take a tax preparation class on a whim to hopefully help ease my husband's distress when he had to file our taxes that year. To my surprise, at the end of the course I was offered a job as a tax preparer at a large national company. I told them no, that I wanted to be home for my daughter and that I could not be at work all day, and I was only at the class out of personal interest. However, the company was desperate for workers and were happy to accommodate my strict 9-3 availability schedule.

And so I began my journey as a tax preparer, working a few hours a day during tax season, growing my knowledge, earning a meager income, while still being available for my children. A few years passed, my daughter became more independent as she joined high school, and I decided I was ready to take on more work. I applied for and was promoted to the role of Office Manager. As my responsibilities grew, so did my ambition. When my youngest left for college, I decided it was now or never – I wanted to

start my own tax preparation business.

My family was not entirely supportive of this new venture, to say the least. They worried I was not ready or capable of running my own operation, but I persisted. Hidden away with one computer in our house's office room, I opened my tax preparation business. In my first year, I earned slightly more than I did at my previous employer, but it was enough that I wanted to continue for another year. As I persevered forward, my business started to grow rapidly; the immigrant and Indian-American community that I had relied on since my family first came to the United States for support and belonging were now coming to me in waves. They felt they could trust me because I am one of them, and I had expertise in immigrant-specific issues that they could not find anywhere else.

Since I opened my business in 2013, I have had the privilege to serve many members of my community and even provide job opportunities to other homemakers and mothers, letting them know that if I can do this, they can too. I am proud of my story, and I believe it is one that many immigrant women can relate to. I came to the United States as a wife and mother, and I have been able to build a business, give back to my immigrant community, and provide jobs, all in this land of opportunity.