



Better for business

Empowering women is key for Welspun

by ERIN SILVER



When Dipali Goenka stepped out of her role as a homemaker and into the corporate world, she was determined to make her mark.

Goenka is currently the managing director and CEO of Welspun, one of the most successful suppliers of high-quality towels and bedsheets in the world, with a presence in more than 50 countries. It's no wonder: The company's patented fabrics ensure sheets are soft and cool, and towels are fluffy and absorbent, wash after wash.

The company started in 1985 when entrepreneur Balkrishan Goenka established the Mumbai-based business with a loan from his father and the bank. His wife, Dipali Goenka, was hired to work at Welspun in 2002. With a background in psychology, she set out to learn everything about the business, from purchasing cotton to the manufacturing processes used to make their premium bedding, towels and rugs. During that time, she also went back to school, earning a degree from Harvard Business School in 2005.

Her addition to the business proved to be a smart decision. "I understood not just what customers wanted, but also recognized the rising influence of women



Dipali Goenka

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as significant buyers," says Goenka, now ranked by *Forbes* as one of the most powerful women in Asia. "We ensured that our product designs and marketing strategies were inclusive and set Welspun apart from other industry players. [That] helped me to lead from the front."

In addition to her dedication to the company's quality, Goenka is also committed to empowering women. "Gender diversity thrives at Welspun, with around 25% of our workforce being females, up from 7% in initial years," says Goenka.

Aware of the difficulties many women face in organizations, she created the program Women of Welspun, which nurtures and prepares women for leadership roles. She's also behind the initiative SPUN—sustainability, passion, understanding and nurturing—which empowers craftswomen from rural areas in India by establishing a marketplace for traditionally designed products. At the SPUN centres, women are trained to upcycle leftover cloth by turning scraps and trims into bedspreads, quilts, rugs and bags.

Knowing that Welspun is making thoughtful, affordable, sustainable and high-performance products while also looking after the people who make the products, Goenka and all her customers can sleep soundly at night. ■

Erin Silver is a freelance writer in Toronto.

REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE

Aware of the fact that water is scarce in the town in India where many of the company's products are produced, Welspun built a sewage treatment plant to ensure every drop of drain water is treated to meet water quality requirements, recycled and reused. Welspun is also enhancing energy efficiency, adopting cleaner fuels and incorporating recycled raw materials in place of virgin resources.—ES

COSTCO CONNECTION

You'll find sheets made by Welspun in Costco warehouses and at Costco.ca.