

Indus Women Leaders Building Community Case Discussion

Roles

Lata: IWL woman

Anil: Lata's husband

Amrita: Lata's younger sister who is single

Kavita: Vinod's mother

Steve: Lata's boss

Scene 1: At home

It is July 14, 2007. Lata is waiting for Anil to wake up on Saturday morning, and she is anxious to share some news with him. They have been married for 10 years and working hard to build their careers and a home in the Bay Area. Their parents have been asking for some time about their prospects of becoming grandparents.

Lata: Anil, are you awake?

Anil: Yes, honey, I was so tired from the week it was nice to sleep in a bit.

Lata: I have some news to share with you (with a big smile). We're pregnant!

Anil: What, oh my God! (He hugs her)...Are you sure?

Lata: Yes, I am sure – I can hardly believe it (she is so overjoyed she sheds a tear).

Anil: Well, we have to start planning; our lives are going to change. (He starts pacing back and forth making preparations and plans in his head.)

Scene 2: At the Hospital

Three months later on October 13, 2007, Anil is waiting in the lobby of the doctor's office for Lata to finish with her OBGYN appointment.

Anil: So, how did it go?

Lata: Everything is normal, and we are having a baby girl!

Anil: Oh, maybe the baby will be born close to my birthday. Honey, I'm so happy – I can't wait to tell Mom and Dad. They have been waiting so long to become grandparents.

Lata: Me too, maybe now your mother will stop nagging me about when I am finally going to have a baby! Although I'm sure she'll be disappointed it's not a boy (she laughs sheepishly).

Anil: Let's call them now (he pulls out his cell phone and the phone rings). Hello, Mom, are you sitting down?

Kavita: Hello, beta (she says with a heavy accent). Why should I sit down? Is something the matter?

Anil: Mom, Lata and I are expecting a baby girl! We are due in April.

Kavita: Oh my god! Beta, I am so happy for you, and I have been looking forward to becoming a grandmother for so long. God has finally answered my prayers (she looks up to the heavens and thanks god). April is only 6 months from now; we have so much to do. Let me speak Lata. (Anil hands Lata the phone.)

Lata: Hello, mummy, how are you? Can you believe the news?

Kavita: Congratulations, Lata, I am so happy for you and Anil. We only have six months to plan everything...there is so much to do. First things first, when are you going to quit your job?

Lata: Quit my job? (Lata looks perplexed). Well, mummy, I wasn't planning to quit my job....

Kavita: Well, beta, your elders know best. In our family the women did not work – we raised the children. I did not work after Anil was born, and you see how he has turned out. And if you want a boy to pass on the family name, you will probably want to have more children. Staying at home to be there for your children is very important, but I know in America things are done differently.

Lata: Thank you, mummy, for your advice, we'll talk more later.

Kavita: Okay, Lata, congratulations, and call me soon. (Both hang up.)

Anil: Lata, you know Mom has a good point about your job. I hope this means you can finally quit and take care of both the baby and me! Although I admire your ambition, I have always wanted you to be more like my brother's wife who is there to support his career and the family. I know we're not in India, but there is a lot of truth in the Indian way.

Scene 3: At the Office

On Monday morning, Lata goes to work. She is beginning to look pregnant, and she needs to cut back on her travel. She has scheduled a meeting with her boss.

Steve: Hi Lata, how are you doing? I'm so glad that you set up time to talk. I have been wanting to talk to you too. I know it has been so busy around here, and I wanted to tell you that we are excited about giving you a promotion to manage the nationwide team. You have done such a great job, and we're so excited about this. It will require some more cross country trips, but nothing you can't handle with your great organizational skills, right?

Lata: Steve...I don't know what to say. I am so honored that you would consider me for such a promotion. I actually scheduled this meeting to tell you... (she pauses)...that I am pregnant and due in April.

Steve: Oh, wow, I mean, congratulations (he looks concerned).

Lata: Thank you, we are very excited about the news.

Steve: Well, how will this affect your ability to take on the new role? We have really been counting on you. I'm sure you can handle it.

Scene 4: At A Restaurant

During the day, Lata is stressed and calls her sister Amrita to have dinner with her and talk about the difficult decisions she has to make. They are at the restaurant.

Amrita: Hey, sis, it's so great to see you. You have that glow...you look so happy.

Lata: Well, I feel very confused right now. I went into work to tell my boss I am pregnant and need to cut back on my travel, but before I could get anything out he told me that I was being promoted to manage the nationwide team.

Amrita: Well, that's great, congratulations!

Lata: What do you mean? It will require many more trips from SFO to New York, and I'm already worried about reducing travel and stress. Maybe this is the right time to start thinking about coming off the fast track at work.

Amrita: You can't do that, Lata. You have worked so hard for the last 10 years to become a partner. If you say no to this promotion and then have a baby, they will write you off for sure. Just think how much grunt work you did the first half of your career, slaving away at the office until 10pm so many times and even putting in weekend hours to support the team. This is the time when it all starts to pay off. You are so close to moving from supporting others to leading and enabling them. Why give up now?

Lata: You're right, Amrita. This is going to be such a difficult decision. Anil's mom wants me to quit my job all together in order to raise the kids. And, Anil even shared with me his real desire for me to stay at home, can you believe he has never told me that before? My doctor wants me to reduce my travel. Almost all of my friends from graduate school have had miscarriages, and they have all had stressful careers. My friends from the Indian community have told me that after their babies were born it was clear to them that they wanted to stay home with their kids to really help them develop and nurture them in a way that is not possible with two working parents. In fact, I've heard them gossip about mothers who work after they have children when they don't need to worry financially – they wonder how someone could just leave their child for someone else to raise. But if I stay home, I know it will be difficult financially because the Bay Area is expensive and we'll need extra money for the baby, the nursery, pre-natal care....

Amrita: Whatever you do, don't give up your career now. I'm not saying this would ever happen to you and Anil, but I have some girlfriends who unexpectedly divorced and found themselves in a difficult position of having to re-enter the workforce after stepping out for so many years to raise their children.

Lata: I don't know, Amrita. I have always been the type of person who likes to focus on something and do it well. Part of me thinks that this may be a good time to take a few years off from the workforce, have my kids, and raise them until they are ready for school. I was just watching Dr. Phil last night – and it's amazing how much kids end up like their primary care givers. I'm not sure I want to leave their development up to a nanny I find on Craig's List.

Scene 5: At Home

After dinner, Lata goes home bewildered and finds Anil in his home office.

Anil: Hi, dear, how was your day (he gives her a big hug)?

Lata: Well, I'm okay, but there are so many important decisions to make. Everyone seems to have an opinion – my sister, your mother, my boss, and my friends. I just got a promotion today, and normally I would have been excited – but I'm not sure that's what I want now that we are expecting.

Anil: Sweetie, you need to do what's best for you and for us. People will judge you whatever you choose. Let's talk about your options. My personal dream is to have you stay home and support the family so you can take care of the baby and me -- I could finally focus on building my business rather than running around like a chicken all weekend to get our grocery shopping, dry cleaning and other errands done. Or, I suppose you could continue in your current job, but you would need to probably cut back on travel and on stress – you already have so much responsibility. Maybe they would consider part-time for you?

Lata: The company does not have a good track record for that – the industry is such a tough one for women. That would also mean that I need to find a nanny – which would be expensive. They say the South Asian nannies are all in the South Bay and don't want to drive to San Francisco. I really want my child to speak Hindi since I never learned it. This is a very tough decision...maybe the child and I would be best off staying home together as your mother suggested....and now that I understand that's what even you really want. (she starts pacing).

Anil: Well, what about the approach I have taken of starting my own practice? I am so glad I did it. I wish I had done it years earlier. I can make my own hours and hire people to do what I can't do. That would give you a lot of flexibility.

Lata: That may be a good idea, but it took you several years to get to this point. Wasn't it difficult to get started as an entrepreneur? Building a customer base and finding partners, employees – that all took a lot of time. Well, we don't have to make a decision tonight. Let's get some sleep, and maybe the answers will come to me in the morning. Or, maybe we'll just have to wait and see how we feel after the baby is born. Goodnight. (She gives him a kiss).

Discussion Questions

1. Introductions – work-life situation – married? Kids?
2. How has Lata's professional role changed over time? Supporting, leading, enabling?
3. What cultural factors come into play as Lata makes her decision? How important is Eastern philosophy? How can she effectively plan for the child's exposure to the culture?
4. What are the different career possibilities she could consider? What are the financial implications? Staying with her current job, part-time, entrepreneurship, staying at home full-time
5. What trade-offs are necessary in one's professional and personal life or is it possible to have it all?