

Veolia procurement chief knows how to hit her targets

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Company: Veolia

Job: Chief procurement officer

Industry: Waste, Water and Energy

Headquarters: Boston

Education: Bachelor's degree in commerce, accounting and business management, Sydenham College, 1990; MBA, [Babson College](#), 1993



Born and raised in India, [Nisreen Bagasra](#) got her MBA at Babson College in Wellesley and immediately began consulting, which gave her a broad experience in labor, strategy, process and technology. Procurement interested her because it gave her insights across all business functions and, as she put it, “It’s like having the same view as the CFO, but without the responsibility.” In college, she trained in competitive target shooting and discovered a natural talent for the sport. In her 40s, she competed in the World Cup in Munich and missed being named to the 2012 U.S. Olympic team by one-tenth of a point. The discipline, focus and work ethic she learned on the target range continues to inform her work today.

Why procurement?

At Veolia, procurement is among the top three priorities worldwide. Efficiency is extremely important to us. It has a direct impact on our financial performance. Most people think of traditional procurement as an organization that tries to get supplies and services for the best price. Strategic procurement is about not just price, but value. How do you leverage your supply base to make sure you deliver value to your internal customers, external customers and stakeholders? It’s challenging. Our business units have a fairly high level of autonomy in terms of their P&L. We need to make sure of the right level of autonomy and leverage what each one of them is buying to aggregate our buying power and get a better deal. Those are difficult conversations. You have to tell people, “I’m sorry, you cannot go to Home Depot to buy something today, we have a deal structured with Amazon and you can get it tomorrow.” And maybe they want it now. They want the freedom of choice. That’s a simple example, but you can extrapolate that across a company. It’s bridging those two requirements so we can get the right solution for the organization.

How do you feel about being the first female CPO at Veolia?

It's a great opportunity. It can be hard for my colleagues to say no to a woman. It helps us drive adoption and get buy-in from our businesses. I use it as advantage. The visibility piece is a double-edged sword. With every role, you have a target — we have a savings target. Veolia has been around for three years. In terms of efficiencies, the low-hanging fruit has been picked. Now we're getting into complex spend categories and sensitive areas. We have a pretty hefty savings target. We make sure we have all our facts and business case well-documented to really demonstrate the value of change. It's been very well received so far.

How did you get started in target shooting?

I tried out for different sports in school, but it was difficult for me. Shooting is more of a mental game. It brings the mind and body into focus, and that's what got me interested in it when I was in college. It turns out that I have great eye-hand coordination, which is a gift. I put in [my 10,000 hours](#) back then. It taught me that once you put in the mechanics, the art of it is in how you compete. How do you focus and control your mind? That's a skill that comes in handy in every aspect of life. After college, I went to grad school in Boston and put the sports piece on the back burner. I knew it was important to have a solid education. After I got the MBA and a nice job, I was working and not competing. Another nice thing about shooting is, it's kind of like golf. Once you have the mechanics, it doesn't really go away. It's all about belief. If you believe it will happen, it will happen. There are techniques we can use around visualization and things like that. After 15 years or so, I decided to go back. So I went to local competitions one Sunday a month to shoot a match, and I was having so much fun and I did really well. Then I got invited to try out in national competitions in Colorado Springs and got similar results.

Is shooting like meditation?

The essence is not just the focus, it's also the breath work. It's very akin to meditation. For me, going to the Sunday morning sessions is like going to an hour-long meditation session, because all you're doing is focusing on your breath and let everything else just flow.

Do you bring that focus to your work?

There is so much to draw upon with sports and business. In both fields, high-performance teams are able to play in the zone. Playing in the zone brings three things together in one circle, which I call "the circle of excellence." It's having the focus, commitment and the people you surround yourself with. You need the right coaches, leaders, management and peers to provide the support system you need to succeed.

You bring those three elements together and you create an organization that is able to perform in the zone. Great results are going to happen. It's the natural outcome of that process. If you really believe in what you can do and put in the hard work, then there are no obstacles that can stop you. There's no concept of glass ceiling. For someone like me with limited training to end up at the World Cup in my 40s, or to end up at a C-level job at Veolia, it's about bringing the mind, body and focus together to achieve that. Every day is a new opportunity.