



Priya Guha MBE

Say yes to opportunities, even when you're not sure where they're going to lead.

Dear younger Priya,

Your journey is far from mapped out. You're going to walk in all different directions – and they're all going to be huge learning opportunities.

Right now, you want to be an astronaut. You dream of flying to space and looking down on Earth. Instead, your career is going to take you across it. You'll live and work in amazing destinations (from Spain to India to the USA), explore interests and opportunities as they come, and build an incredible network of colleagues and friends from across the world.

Some of the most important work you're going to do is within yourself. Never underestimate this work, as it's going to help you break barriers for yourself and others – especially women.

Say yes to opportunities. Have you heard of sliding doors moments? These moments are going to shape how you approach your career and the many decisions that will form it.

You're going to come across many different opportunities in your lifetime. My advice is to take each one, even if you're not sure where it's going to go.

After all, you will always learn something. Even if you end up going back to the route that you were following first, you'll have picked up some valuable insights along the way.

This is exactly what's going to happen to you, time and time again. In fact, here's a great example.

You're going to fall in love with international politics and start a career in diplomacy. Many people are going to tell you that this is a career for life, but it's not the only career for yours.

While acting as British Consul General in San Francisco, after 20 years in the diplomatic service, you'll dive headfirst into the world of tech and innovation and head home to the UK.

So, you don't end up becoming an astronaut, but come on. The route you end up taking is going to work out brilliantly, trust me.

Always take time to reflect. This journey is going to be full of surprises, and finding time to pause is how you're going to figure out what the key lessons are.

(This approach is going to serve you much better than focusing on "mistakes" – a term that you'll come to think of as unhelpful.)

Yes, you're going to have moments where you think: if I went back to that situation, would I make the same choices? Sometimes you'll answer yes, but more often you'll answer no.

That's because the lessons you learn are going to shape who you are and what you go on to achieve.

Here's a little tip for you. Always give yourself space between meetings. Don't jam up your day, otherwise you won't have time to pause and think.

Develop your EQ, alongside your IQ. Listen properly. Read people. Delegate when there's someone better suited to a task.

These might not be the traits that first come to mind when you think of a leader, but learning how to do these well is going to be crucial.

These are also some of the traits that you'll learn to look out for as a Venture Partner at Merian Ventures, a firm that funds female entrepreneurs in tech. You'll learn to consider entrepreneurs' EQ alongside their IQ in this role, with a strong belief that one of the best ways a leader can succeed is to build an empowered team.

Self-awareness is another quality that you'll come to value in others, and yourself. You'll learn the lesson that you don't need to be good at everything. You just need to be aware of what your strengths are, and bring people around you who plug the gaps.

Don't give up on the fight for inclusivity. This is something that really, really matters.

Throughout your career, you are going to experience bias. There are going to be few women who look like you in senior roles, because of very real underrepresentation in the workplace.

This means that you'll need to construct your own role models, and your own idea of success. Look at the people that you admire in your life, personally and professionally. What characteristics can you put together to help you become the person you aspire to be?

These experiences are going to be challenging, but one day, you'll be in a position to advocate for lots of girls and women. Not just in venture capital and non-executive director roles, but also in your position as a Trustee for the charity Tech She Can.

You'll come to realise that bringing everyone's voices to the table isn't just key to a well-performing business, but also to a successful economy. Society's biggest challenges need lots of different voices to be solved – and your voice is going to become part of this journey.

Hold on to your tribe. People you meet from all over the world will stay in your life in different ways; you never know who you're going to reconnect with and when.

That 10-minute conversation you had with someone last week may just open doors for you or for someone you know in the future, so make sure that you treat everyone with respect along the way.

In both your professional and personal life, learning how to have a great conversation is going to help you form brilliant relationships.

Your friendships are going to become one of the most important parts of your working life, in fact. You're going to form an incredibly powerful community of female friends – you'll call yourselves "The Tribe" – who will support you through many decisions, big and small.

You will need people who have your back, especially as a woman in tech.

So, when you find your tribe, hold on tight.

Be proud of who you are. You have so much to be proud of already, but even more is coming your way.

The sense of pride that you're going to develop won't be an accident. It's going to be the result of years of seizing opportunities and developing the self-awareness to reflect on what's gone before and what's next to come.

When you have this inner confidence around who you are, then you'll be able to walk into rooms and make your voice heard. You're going to challenge the bias and systemic barriers that you face, and go on to pave new pathways for others.

In fact, you're going to be celebrated as one of the most influential women in technology one day. You're even going to receive an MBE in recognition of your services to women-led innovation.

That's something to be proud of.

Your older self,

Priya



About Priya Guha MBE

Priya is a Venture Partner at Merian Ventures, investing in women-led innovation, an Advisor to Kheiron Medical Technologies and Gallos Technologies, a member of the Investment Governance Board at Future Planet Capital, a NED at Reach PLC, UK Research & Innovation, Herald Investment Trust, the Digital Catapult & GB Badminton and Adjunct Faculty at the Ashridge Hult Business School. She was previously GM for RocketSpace, launching their UK operations.

Priya used to be a career diplomat, most recently as British Consul General to San Francisco and previously in India and Spain. She sits on the Royal Academy of Engineering International Committee, Althea Foundation Board and Global Tech Advocates Advisory Board. She is a Trustee at TechSheCan. Priya was awarded an MBE in 2021 for services to international trade and women in innovation.

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