



STEPHANIE MEHTA
FAST COMPANY

ON THE BALL

She's revving up business journalism with her bold new approach, which includes male cheerleaders and unconventional cover choices.

Aarti Virani meets *Fast Company's* editor-in-chief, **Stephanie Mehta**

When Stephanie Mehta, a 25-year veteran of the business journalism arena, was tapped last March to run *Fast Company*, America's unofficial innovation bible, her exhaustive punch list included revitalising its editorial voice. But ironically, when we meet in downtown Manhattan on a frosty winter morning in a colossal conference room that overlooks the Hudson River, the accomplished editor-in-chief is recovering from a bout of laryngitis. She's attributing the strained vocal chords to an action-packed schedule at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, a newsmaking four-day event complete with a keynote speech by German chancellor Angela Merkel and a mental health panel led by Prince William. Mehta, whose prolific magazine career has featured tenures at *Vanity Fair*, *Bloomberg*, *Fortune*, and the *Wall Street Journal*, was there to talk human-centred digital transformations with heavy-hitters from companies like Walmart, Adobe and Microsoft. "The fact that we're even having this conversation is a sea change," she says. "Even 10 years ago, it was all about deploying technology and figuring out the human consequences later."

IN GOOD COMPANY

It's this people-first approach that shapes Mehta's professional vision, largely defined by an unwavering belief that businesses should be peered at through a wide-angle lens. "They are part of an ecosystem that includes more than just their shareholders—they are part of communities, they have employees and customers," Mehta says. At *Fast Company*, her strategy surfaces through a commitment to ultra-progressive storytelling, like a trailblazing photo essay on the first male cheerleaders of the Los Angeles Rams football team—"For us, it was a story about workplace inclusion," Mehta shares—and nonconformist cover choices, such as African American venture capitalist Arlan Hamilton and

Japanese telecom magnate Masayoshi Son. "Not exactly central casting for a business magazine," Mehta admits. "We want to show you what the future of business looks like and we feel these are people who are exemplary."

RISKY BUSINESS

The 49-year-old journalist, who was born to a Gujarati father and Filipino mother in suburban Chicago, credits her parents' left-of-centre love story for equipping her with a

frequency for all things unconventional. "It was this very unexpected romance for the mid-1960s. My mother was raised Catholic and my father was raised Jain," she describes. "I think they followed their hearts and that's what they've passed on to me," she adds. "Trusting my gut, trusting my instincts and following my true north has always held me in good stead." That robust inner compass is precisely what steered Mehta towards her college newspaper office at Northwestern University as a freshman English major. "All the beats had been handed out, and it became clear that nobody really wanted to cover business; they [were more interested in] campus protests, or

sports, or the cool acts coming to town," she recalls. "So I thought, 'I'm going to zig when everybody else is zagging.'"

That maxim still guides Mehta, who openly bemoans journalism's current breakneck, tweet-before-you-think pace. "Our profession is just so much more breathless now," she laments. She's thankful to have inherited a publication that's not galloping after breaking news, delivering carefully calibrated business, tech and design analyses instead. "We're not racing against the clock to get a story out, so we have the opportunity to pause and present our take," she explains. "But we're all being called to be insta-pundits and I think that's difficult," she says. "Because when you move fast without being thoughtful, you can make mistakes." ■

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