



Nirmala Sankaran

Co-Founder, Chief Evangelist, HeyMath!

Nirmala leads product design, innovation and talent at HeyMath! HeyMath! is among the first to have created a globally recognized world-class ed-tech product in India, in collaboration with University of Cambridge. It has been exported to the rest of the world.

Nirmala was nervous that morning. She had a breakfast meeting with New York Times columnist and author Thomas Friedman in Singapore. At the end of the conversation, Friedman promised to write about HeyMath! It was featured in his Op-Ed column, and in his bestseller “The World is Flat” as an example of globalisation in education. What followed was a flood of enquiries.

The first prototype of HeyMath! was approved in 2002 by Raffles Institution in Singapore. They agreed to pilot it and were ready to sign the cheque. Raghuram Rajan has been an advisor from day one. He helped shape the teaching methodology, asking a lot of tough questions. Hey Math! has been adopted by over 1000 schools, and has impacted more than 1 million students and 5000 teachers.

The product has been designed to match the demographics of the users and incorporates the local culture and dialects. When schools adopt HeyMath!, the program is implemented through teachers both live and

asynchronously. Digital content and a technology platform are provided, along with professional development support. Students can use HeyMath! independently as well. Customized learning paths can be created for each student depending on their individual needs.

HeyMath! was featured in the top 50 companies in NASSCOM’s Emerge Innovation Category. Nirmala has been featured amongst the top 100 IT innovators in India. In 2007, her company was awarded the Most innovative company by Microsoft. Accolades continue to flow in the form of ICT award from Eduweek South Africa and the Partner of the Academy of Singapore Teachers from the Ministry of Education, Singapore. She was also featured as a Young Turk in CNBC-TV 18s programme.

Nirmala thrives on ambiguity and complexity. Her desire to solve a problem led her to stumble upon the acute shortage of good Math teachers. On the flip side, students were struggling and fearful of the subject. The internet and India had a role to play. The pieces fell together. That’s how HeyMath! was born. www.heymath.com

Nirmala is convinced that women make fantastic leaders in any field, especially STEM.



Meeting with New York Times columnist and author Thomas Friedman

Leadership is about collaboration and being relationship centric. Hundreds of women have been involved in HeyMath! There is a very low rate of attrition because of the creative space and autonomy offered to employees. Nirmala is associated as a mentor with incubation centers at IIM B and IIM, Udaipur.

As an entrepreneur, unlike in any other job, your natural talents and passion come together and you can be in your element. There is no ceiling to the value you can create or the learning that you have. Women are well suited for entrepreneurship because of their problem solv-

ing and collaboration capabilities. Unicorns are mythical creatures. But zebras are real, operate in groups and preserve each other. Zebra companies make money and also do good to the society.

Nirmala was passionate about becoming a cricketer. In her high school days, she used to go to the ground without fail every day at 4pm. She had even dreamt of dropping out of school to take up cricket. She graduated from Shri Ram College of Commerce, New Delhi and an MBA from IIM Bangalore. Her message for young professionals:

“Go create a zebra company and dazzle as a group.” – Nirmala