

Devina Mehra reacts to L&T Chairman's 90-hour work week remark, says 'this attitude means that most women would...'

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Market veteran Devina Mehra took to X (formerly Twitter) on January 10 to react to L&T Chairman SN Subrahmanyam's recent remark that employees should work 90 hours a week and even on Sundays to stay competitive.

'90-hour work week for nation building is bunkum'

"This type of recommendation of working for 'nation-building' or 'company building' is bunkum and makes absolutely no sense," she said, while referring to the company's statement defending its Chairman.

Devina further said, "Research shows that increasing the number of hours of work beyond a point (and certainly that point is far before 90 hours) reduces productivity substantially."

"As an employer my focus has always been on output, rather than face time at work," she added.

Devina recalls work culture at Citibank

She recalled her days at Citibank where she allegedly experienced a late working culture. "Many officers would while away time, say from 3-6 p.m., and then get back to work again to show their bosses that they were at the desks till 8:30 or 9. It was a dysfunctional work culture and one that I steered clear of when I became an entrepreneur," she wrote.

'Men with families advocating for longer work week'

Devina further added that most people who have been advocating for more working hours are men with families, including children. She was also referring to Infosys Founder NR Narayana Murthy whose '70-hour work week' comment had earlier gone viral.

"This type of working hours recommendation assumes that the man (it is almost always the man) who is working around the clock while his wife is taking care of the home and children. This was very starkly visible also from a book on Mr Narayan Murthy and Mrs Sudha Murty that I read recently. Mr Murthy completely outsourced parenting to not just his wife but also Sudhaji's sister and parents - So much so that the children thought of their grandfather as the real father and their father as only a 'backup' father. They also had no doubt that their father loved them less than he loved his company. Now of course it is all considered fine after the big payoff!" she wrote.

"Plus, this attitude means that most women would be precluded from this type of workplace and work culture; or at the very least, would have to give up dreams of having children (unless there's a social revolution and Indian men become somewhat equal partners in raising of a family)," she added.

All data shows that no country has moved from low income to middle income without very substantial participation of women in the work force, the market expert said.

'More women needed in workforce'

Devina further noted that data shows that no country has moved from low income to middle income without enough female participation in the work force.

She further took example of how such a working culture in Korea and Japan led to women not getting married at all, which led to birth rates crashing below the replacement levels.

'Put in hours on learning, not office'

"While I do not believe in long hours in office necessarily, the fact is that if you want to really be skilled in something like equity research or any other real knowledge area you needs to put in those 10,000 hours of work to really learn the skill. This means reading books, maybe doing courses from universities in your own time and so on. Without that you would not be at the cutting edge. So at the very least in the initial years you would need to put in the hours which may not be in office but on learning," Devina concluded.