



## HOW I DID IT COBRA'S CHAIRMAN ON TURNING AN INDIAN BEER INTO A GLOBAL BRAND

by Karan Bilimoria

**W**hen I was a young boy in Hyderabad, India, teachers told me I wasn't creative. I couldn't draw or play piano, so they advised me to focus on academics, which I did. I graduated from a university in India with a commerce degree and moved to London to take a job at Ernst & Young, where I qualified as a chartered accountant (CPA). I then went to Cambridge University to read law, assuming that I'd become a barrister or an M&A adviser.

But a latent creativity was inside me waiting to break out. Sitting in a traditional British pub one evening after classes, wondering whether I had a too-fizzy lager or a too-bitter ale, I had an idea: I wanted to create a more balanced beer, one that would pair well with food, especially the curries from home. It would appeal to both men and women. And I eventually sell it around the world.

That was the dream. Today it's reality. The beer brand I eventually launched, Cobra, now generates \$250 million annually in global sales. The journey required a great deal of creativity. It also demanded flexibility, and integrity—not just from me but from everyone who helped build the business. I never reconciled with those grade school teachers. I hope they would be proud.

### ENTREPRENEURSHIP WAS ALWAYS CALLING

Although I declined to continue my career in accounting or to pursue in the legal profession, the specter