

# THE HR BRAVEHEART

ARUN KUMAR (CVT - HR, GODFREY PHILLIPS (INDIA) LTD.) SPEAKS TO ADITI SHARMA KALRA ON HIS LOVE FOR HR OVER CONSULTING AND THE RESULTING CAREER JOURNEY

Winston Churchill once said, "The progress is to change to be perfect is to change often." Such is Arun's belief who heads HR for the second largest player in the Indian cigarette industry.

This 2013 year graduate started his career with Tata Tea Industries, which absorbed him after he conducted an ADRIAR research on Consumer Alliance. The results found the concept to be unique to India and its neighbours, which notably impressed the President of ADMA at the time, who happened to be the JMD of Tata Tea. Next step was Hindustan Industries, where he got his first taste of Industrial Relations, and he remembers, "HR and IR are different sides of the same coin. What we call IR is HR for the bargaining party; there are certain laws you have to understand, but you are still dealing with people at the end of the day."

It was when he joined the Mitsubishi-Eicher Ltd Graduate that he got into "Business HR", and says he is indebted to them for the modern concepts he learnt

there. After realising how positively teamwork could impact employee performance, he took the initiative to bring about changes, one of which included dismantling the idea of workers as the enemy. Not only did this prove the company's trust in them, it brought

down the instance of strikes within six months. In another instance, Eicher's assembly line had a white board where the position was to under the names of those workers who had not met job requirements. When Arun found how much this demoralised the workers, he came up with the idea of jettisoning down the names of those who had performed efficiently instead. This gave a huge impetus for greater motivation, and even brought down the defects to zero.

Admits Arun about these years, "It was a transformational experience for me." As the success story of his initiatives began to do the rounds, he was hired by Hindustan Teles to contribute to its ever-growing HR function.

Post that assignment, he began his ten-year stint with Godfrey Phillips India (GPI), where he says he has got the opportunity to add value to the business, be it through Leadership Development, Assessment Centre (AC) or Development Centre (DC). He shares, "Before one can implement tools, it is important to understand the problems of the weaker link, to find out what is going wrong and how it can be strengthened. For example, the DC approach was a result of a climate survey and an audit of the HR process. However, Arun adds, "You can always show the 1000-strong employee base the path, but ultimately they are

## Personal favourites

**MOVIE:** To Dr, With Love.

**GOSSIP:** Caste of LI as I do a lot of photography.

**MUSIC:** Country.

**QUOTE:** There is no one starting, but a strong leader is, the leader I had it!

**HOLIDAY:** The joy is in the job itself and its plus side, and not in the destination.

the ones who have to take ownership of it, and deliver."

Having been instrumental in bringing about numerous changes at GPI, Arun comments on the new generation of employees, stating that they are more competitive and socially responsible than their ancestors. Keeping this in mind, GPI's National Diversity Awards are a recognition in itself. Also, Arun points out that the youngsters' education mostly has contributed to their competitive edge. Besides these, GPI is flexible in allowing employees to take time out and contribute to CSR initiatives in every way possible, according to their preference.



PHOTO: GURU BHARGAVA

The other important transformation through the years was the use of technology. From loads of paperwork to digital, GPI has now introduced paperless HR processes. Arun also teaches upon social networking websites like Facebook, which help people stay connected and enable knowledge transfer between organisations. He adds, "Such user-friendly technology also gives opportunities to seek help from experts outside and enables employee engagement."

Through his long journey, Arun has looked up to two people as his mentors. The first is Anil Sachdev, Arun's boss at Eicher, who he professes is "a very genuine leader who walks the talk." The

second is Dr. Zahid Gungor, presently based in Kolkata, and the both mentors, Arun says, "All answers are within oneself but we all need the help of someone who can bring them out for you, and that is the role a mentor plays."

On his words, he has endeavoured to incorporate this over the years, as he played the role of a situational leader. He explains the belief, "A new person will require a little more guidance, while a mature person will need you to be out of his/her way to perfection." He also values participative leadership, where he involves his people to take joint decisions, which helps in better implementation.

Amidst all this, having a work-life

balance is of utmost importance, and Arun claims he is "not too bad." "There are times when your work requires complete focus and your family understands that. But one should never become an excuse for ignoring your family. Once you can manage both these aspects, then there will be no issues," he affirms.

On a lighter note, Arun says that he is a mechanic at heart, and spends his free time in his fully-equipped garage. Quips he, "I am a carpenter, mason, and electrician, the handy man at home. Husband in my family says that I am setting a wrong example, but I enjoy doing that!"

-With inputs by Shikha Phang