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THE HUMAN FACTOR

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THE HUMAN FACTOR 2016 LISTINGS

INDIA'S BEST HR HEADS AND 200 BEST EMPLOYERS OF INDIA



"THE BIGGEST HIGH!"

India's leading HR Heads Talk About The Best Moments Of Their Career

Q. How, where and when did you start your career, specifically in HR?

A. My tryst with HR was more by default than by design. I was keen on Civil Services – chose subjects during graduation with this aim. However, not wanting to get married early and needing to become financially independent right after graduation, I tried to figure out what to do and ways to reach my goal. With time, civil services was no longer the preferred option. Mandal Commission had made it even more unfavourable.

In the early 1990's, students had limited access to information as there was no Internet and the telecom revolution was yet to begin. I would go to the post office every week and get a copy of the Employment News paper while I was pursuing my graduation in Bhopal. Every page was scrutinized like there was no tomorrow.

That's how I got to know about TISS, applied and got selected to the prestigious institute.

My 20 years journey in HR began here and since then, there's been no looking back and I am enjoying every moment of it!

During campus placements, I was offered a job at then a sought after employer, National Organic Chemical Industries Limited (NOCIL). During the interview, I told them that I would consider joining NOCIL only if they allowed me to begin on the shop floor.

The men were shell shocked. Is this girl nuts? She wants to work in one of the most unionized environments of those times! But I was firm. They came back the next day and made an offer.

Q. Why did you choose HR as your professional field?

A. As I said before, my journey in HR was unplanned. However, once at TISS- I thoroughly enjoyed all the learning – in class and practical fieldwork in each semester. With each passing day at the institute, the realization dawned upon me that I was born to be an HR professional – an absolute fit in the groove! I displayed most characteristics in varying degrees akin to an HR person early on.

Q. Could you briefly describe the initial years of your career – what were the challenges you faced, the areas you enjoyed the most, the lessons learnt?

A. At my first full time job, the experience was very enlightening. It covered a wide gamut of



APARNA SHARMA (INDEPENDENT DIRECTOR ON THE BOARD OF T. S. ALLOYS LTD) BELIEVES FIRMLY IN THE 3C'S OF HR – COMPETENCE, CONNECT AND CARE – AT THE SAME CAUTIONING THAT ALL THREE ARE EQUALLY IMPORTANT, AND ONE WITHOUT THE OTHERS WILL BE AN UNSUCCESSFUL TREATISE

THE ROAD TO SUCCESS IS ALMOST ALWAYS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

issues — be it union issues due to the size of Batata Vadas (called as Aloo Bondas in some places), routing of bus transportation and integration and change management focus when NOCIL & PIL (Polyolefins Limited) were to merge.

After spending two years in NOCIL, I joined Monsanto, a leading global Biotechnology organization. I was exposed to a manufacturing environment (Lonavala, Silvassa, Bellary, General Santos), R & D set up (Bangalore, St. Louis, Boston, General Santos) and commercial operations (all India & in the Philippines). I

did pioneering work in setting up the R&D centre at Bangalore for Monsanto India. My efforts continue to be remembered by those who are still a part of the organization.

At Monsanto, I worked diligently and seamlessly with all parts of the organization, be it in India or the Philippines. I worked hard to make a positive impact and contribute to each employee's career and life overall.

Some of those efforts are reflected in the recommendations by my ex-colleagues on www.linkedin.com. My biggest satisfaction is that I

am best remembered for my exemplary work, simplicity and humility.

I moved as an expat to the Philippines based out of Manila in 2003. In a completely alien environment, I tried to endear myself to all through my simple, focused and straightforward nature, setting up of robust systems and processes and coaching people internally for bigger roles.

Clearly, I once again made a mark in Monsanto locally and globally.

My career at Monsanto was extremely enriching and rewarding from where I truly transcended geographical and cultural boundaries!

Q. What would you describe as the highest point of your HR career?

A. As shared above, I deeply cherish my career at Monsanto for all the experiences, challenges, rewards, and friendships. It truly helped me become well-rounded, global professional. I have of course, in each of my jobs, been able to bring about key changes and also make a long term impact for the organization.

As I take a trip down memory lane, I find the Pune-based Vishwakarma Publications approaching me to me to write a book as the best moment in my HR career so far.

The fact is that they wanted me to pen down a simple, handy book which ignited my desire to reach out to GEN Y, especially the student community, who are confused, not sure what HR is since there are so many preconceived notions.

It has given me the opportunity to share the "Whats" and "Whys" in contemporary HR, real life challenges and knowledge acquired through 20 years of rich global experience across industry sectors. For these reasons, I titled the book "Reality Bytes – The Role of HR in Today's World".

The book is a best seller (first two prints sold out already), widely acclaimed by business and HR leaders.

It has something for everyone – be it an HR student, a budding early career HR manager (one to three years), a line manager who needs to be an HR manager in his own right to manage people or even a teacher or an entrepreneur trying to understand what HR is all about.

The English version of the book has been launched in 25 cities across the country so far. The third print is underway. The book has been launched in my birthplace – Ujjain, in my school – St.Mary's Convent and my HR

Much of one's growth as a person and professional comes through hardships and challenges. Embrace those and know that you will be better, stronger and wiser. No job or role is below your dignity... take everything as a learning experience, you will only gain!

Alma mater – Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

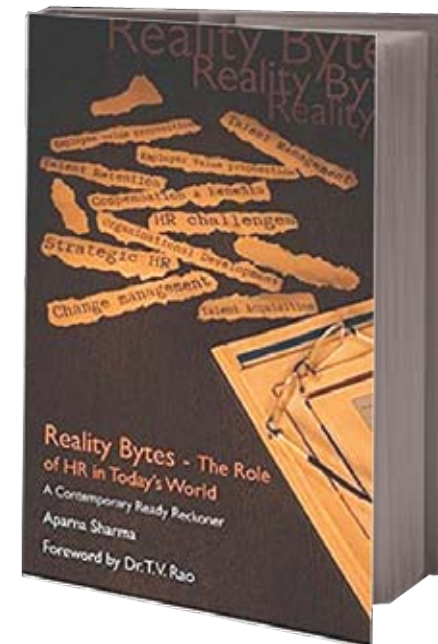
Now, the book has been translated into Hindi too in June this year, and three launches of the Hindi version have taken place so far.

There were two very powerful lessons for me in the writing and promotion of the book so far – The first one is, "If you can dream it, you can do it." I had dreamt of writing a book someday to share my experiences and help as many aspiring seekers – that day came early on.

Secondly, it's not always about the number of years of experience in any profession or job; it's also about the depth and richness of experience you acquire which becomes distilled wisdom.

Q. How did this achievement transform you personally and professionally?

A. I still remain the fun loving, simple person; some still call me "naïve", who continues to have the eagerness to constantly learn and have the innocence of a child in my eyes. My energy, radiance, passion, commitment towards life, and goodness have only grown manifold. I am



happy that I found my true calling in HR early on in my career and have been able to make a difference for the better in the lives of budding professionals (see "Leave a Comment on <http://www.aparnasharma.in/reality-bytes-role-of-hr/index.html>)

My life's simple philosophy, which holds true at work too is "I never lose. Either I win, or I learn."

My quest for life, growth and professional excellence continues.

Q. What advice would you like to give HR practitioners of the next generation?

A. Every HR person must strive to be authentic in their thoughts, actions and deeds. Employees need to experience the genuine concern and support from every HR colleague.

Here's my take – The 3 "C" mantra: Competence, Connect & Care helps establish the credibility of HR with employees. All three are equally important – only Competence without Connect and Care does not help the culture (soul) of the organization.

At the same time, only Connect and Care without a Competent HR leader or team is sheer populism which harms the credibility of Human Resources.

So, it's a delicate balance that every HR person in an organisation needs to bring in and maintain.

Credibility and respect come once all the three C's are in place and employees experience the impact through organizational culture of learning, growth and development, which HR has a key role to build, along with the CEO and Line Managers. HR has to be a friend, philosopher and guide of employees.

In summary, much of one's growth as a person and professional comes through hardships and challenges. Embrace those and know that you will be better, stronger and wiser. No job or role is below your dignity... take everything as a learning experience, you will only gain!

Finally the road to success is almost always under construction.