

# The Social Manager

*Kavita Nigam, Chief Human Resource Officer, KARAM Industries, is a qualified doctor who realised that her social outlook and an innate ability to connect with people made her a natural choice for a leadership role that always required to connected with people. Therefore, taking on the HR role at Karam Industries was but a natural choice for her. As she managed the Human Resource function, the company, which was only established when she had joined, experienced tremendous growth in India and overseas.*

BY S. AJAY KUMAR

## IN BRIEF

<b>Name</b>	: Mrs. Kavita Nigam
<b>Age</b>	: 49 Years
<b>Title</b>	: CHRO
<b>Organisation</b>	: KARAM Industries
<b>Experience</b>	: 19 Years
<b>Years in HR</b>	: 19 Years
<b>Education</b>	: MBBS

**H**ow do you look back at the professional journey that you have traversed thus far? Please share few of the enriching experiences that you came across.

My journey over the last 19 years has been extremely enriching. I managed to establish the HR department, and then took human resources through various stages of development in the company. Learning was involved at every stage of my career, and over the years, I was taught by scores of people I met. I also derived that there is no single head-fast rule for any particular situation, and the different aspects of human psychology that govern how we react to a particular situation.

I believe an early understanding that everyone is different contributed to my professional growth. This helped me to become a better listener, and as a result, made me excel at my job. It allowed me to interact with various groups of people easily, and to learn from almost everyone with whom I interacted. Lessons such as these can only be learned in real life, not as part of a structured curriculum. I have enjoyed my journey so far, and since I am a social person, the journey has been very rewarding.

**How has working across industries made your professional journey more interesting?**

I started my career with the company that I am still working in. And, it has given me an in-depth insight into various aspects of the organisation's working - the how's and why's behind strategic decisions, and their impact on the working, over the years. While I strongly feel that working across

diverse industries has certain advantages, often, it does not allow for a deeper understanding, acquired when working in a single industry. Mastery in a single industry is invaluable, since it allows a nuanced and a broader understanding of the industry and business.

Today, it is common for people to have multiple careers, and while some have found success in multiple domains, having expertise in a single domain is equally valuable. Industries are large and complex, and very few can understand a single industry as it is required of them. People who have expertise in a single industry can correlate disparate information better than many people. Such a correlation can lead to breakthroughs that benefit not just one industry, but multiple industries. Considering how complex and interconnected the global economy is, the need for people with expertise in a single industry is simply huge. For these reasons, I believe that my journey so far has been all the more enriching because I have clarity about my work that many others who have been working longer than me in a similar role do not possess.

**How different have the two experiences been for you- setting up HR from the scratch in an organisation to managing well-established HR frameworks?**

Years ago, I set up the HR department from scratch. Building on policies that were decided collectively in meetings, and drafting them to suit what was best for the organisation, although a challenge, was easy since the organisation was small. Over the years, I have made it a habit to relook at policies, and tweak them to ensure that they fit in the present scenario. Progressing towards more automation, and working around a more robust performance management system has been a perennial challenge, once the basic HR systems were in place. Promoting better employee engagement is a constant challenge that we face since the organisation is always growing. Managing a small organisation is easier than managing one which is large, but just because an organisation is large does not mean it cannot be managed nearly as well as a small and nimble one. With the right

## Rapid Fire

**Favourite Quote:** Winners don't do different things...they do it differently

**Leadership style:** Supportive

**Current Professional Goal:** Make KARAM one of the best places to work in.

**Favourite Book:** Bhagavad Gita (3 volumes) - interpreted by Eknath Eshwaran

**Favourite Movie:** 3 Idiots, The Lion King

**Favourite Music Artist:** A.R. Rahman

**Life is...?** To be lived in every moment.

**Family is...** The reason behind happiness

**I strongly believe in....** Truth, fairness and compassion

**The most important thing I do on a Sunday....** Balance my time with the family members.

**I deal with setbacks by...** Taking them head-on and moving on.

**3 Things I never leave home without...** Blessings from elders, positive thoughts and a smile.

## Up, Close and Personal

### What inspired you to steer your career towards HR?

The biggest challenge is to comprehend the complexities of human behaviour. Nothing is more fulfilling than a motivated work force, willing to work together towards common organisational goals. I am also a very social person and enjoy social interactions and meeting new people. Good interpersonal skills and the ability to get along with people possibly played an important part in my success in HR. Human beings are complex, and only the most gifted among us can motivate people and create an environment that allows people to excel and be happy. I believe I was made for a social life and being a social person, I have a good grasp of social situations. So, while some people find interacting with people challenging, those who thrive in interacting with people can take advantage of situations other cannot. My inherently strong people skills have allowed me to find professional success, and thus motivated me to a role in HR.

### How do you like to spend your free time?

I like to read as much as I can in my free time. Books on HR, self-help and Indian culture are some of my best

reads. I think it is essential to read, because it opens one up to different views and ideas. It is no coincidence that some of the most successful people are voracious readers. Books on HR that offer viewpoints on the latest methodologies and tools are essential for success. I am also proud of my culture and believe that immersing myself in it will help me understand people better, and also improve my understanding of people. Interacting with people is enjoyable, however, reading what others think about them helps in expanding one's understanding and grants insights that are not possible during face-to-face interactions. The Indian mythology and culture have profound insights that can be useful for leaders today. So, reading and immersing myself in Indian culture often gives me penetrating insights into people that almost no book on HR will grant.

### Please share some of your experiences of travelling to different places. What have you gained from these experiences?

I have travelled extensively, and witnessed many cultures. But the basic human instinct of being motivated by small things, is something that I found

common everywhere. We do not have to make it complicated- just small acts of appreciation go a long way to motivate people.

### Do you believe that a B-School degree is essential for a leadership role?

I completed my MBBS from Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi in 1992. I think some of the best leaders today never earned an MBA. There are a large number of successful leaders who have gone on to build thriving organisations, without ever having earned a masters degree. While an MBA is invaluable, it is not essential for success.

### Has someone from your family deeply inspired your values and growth as a human being?

I remain inspired by my Father. His honesty towards work as also his dedication is truly inspirational.

### Who would you credit in your life as a great influence in shaping the person that you are today?

I credit my husband- the Co-Founder of our organisation, Rajesh Nigam, for shaping me into the person I am today. He has been my constant guide and mentor during different stages of my life. I would not have been what I am today without his support and guidance.

## HR Perspectives

### Some gaps that HR Organisations need to bridge

Be committed to better understand the needs of your employees. How you treat your employees is how they will treat your customers. We are well aware that success in business means keeping one's customers happy. When customers are happy with the service they get, they will continue to use your products and services. However, large companies have a large customer base, and the owners of such companies cannot always interact with them. This is why those who interact with customers should be happy since, one way or another, their cheerful attitude will be visible to customers and have a positive impact on sales, and help build relations.

### Common errors companies commit while designing engagement practices

More often than not, companies do not involve their employees while conceiving the organisational goals, mission, and vision, leading to employee disengagement. Employees need to be an active part of the company's goal-setting exercise, and recognise the importance of their work. A company's employees are its most important stakeholders, and they should be engaged in setting a company's goals. Often, employees have inputs that allow challenges to be viewed from a different and a better perspective. Such a shift in perception can lead to breakthroughs that benefit a company. The employees in a company often have a good understanding of the customers' demands, and are intimately aware of the grievances faced by the customers, and such inputs are essential for designing good engagement practices.

HR systems in place, and by using the right technology, a large company can be as agile as a smaller one. The journey from creating an HR department to managing a bigger company has been a transformative experience. However, as we have grown, the more complex tools used by us are also equally sophisticated. By using new software, we are able to recruit the right people most of the time, and allow better employee engagement. Needless to say, as we grow, we will adopt newer tools which makes it possible to manage a larger workforce with the same ease as today.

**Having been long associated with the manufacturing sector, what is your understanding of the business, and how big a role does HR play in this sector? Were there any sector specific challenges and opportunities experienced by you?**

I have been associated with the

## Buzzer Round

**A mysterious benefactor wrote you a check for 1,00,00, 000 and said, "Help me solve a problem! What would you say?"**

Money is immaterial....I am happy you considered me competent enough to help you solve your problem!

**What's the one thing you're deeply proud of but would never put on your resume?**

I am very proud of being a good mother to both my children. It would not be on my resume, but will be there for the world to see!!

**What's the one dream that you've**

**tucked away for the moment?**

I work to fulfil my dreams as they come.

**Is there something that people consistently ask for your advice on? What is it?**

How to deal with human relationships.

**When was the last time you astonished yourself?**

Occasionally.

**What do you value most: free time, recognition, or money?**

Time with family.

**Are you living your life purpose or still searching?**

I am certainly living my life purpose.

defines the culture of the organisation. I have been inspired by the writings of great HR thinkers like Dave Ulrich. More closely, Rajesh Nigam and Hemant Sapra, the Founder Presidents of our company KARAM, are leaders who lead by example, and are people from whom I draw maximum inspiration. The passion, the hard-working spirit, transparency, and positivity prevalent in the company is owing to these values coming directly from the leaders.

**"Best HR practices are built on a futuristic vision." What are your views on this and how have you practiced this during your stint with various organisations?**

HR must be a strategic partner in all business decisions. This is because HR provides the biggest tool for success-good and efficient human resource. All HR practices must necessarily promote great culture, which is the backbone of success for any organisation for the

### Awards and Accolades

Woman Entrepreneur Award for UP, 2017.

future. Over the past few years, the role of HR has expanded and evolved from a soft role into a more structured and data-driven role. The employees of a company are among its biggest stakeholders and the HR department is responsible for recruiting such stakeholders. Having the best employees working for you is essential for the success of every company. To allow the best to work in a company, a company's HR department must comprise of people who are also among the best.

**As part of the KARAM family, what will be your focus for 2019? What organisational goals have been set by you?**

My focus in the year 2019 is to automate the process of recruitment and on-boarding to the maximum extent possible, so as to reduce the time deployed in this activity. Another focus is to ensure trainings and skill enhancement of the employees of KARAM, more targeted towards the finer objectives of our working. Work will also begin on Leadership skills training and succession planning, which will be an on-going process. 

manufacturing sector from the very beginning. The manufacturing sector is constantly evolving; the pressures of achieving production targets and timely deliveries are profound. Besides, the principles of lean manufacturing are constantly around for the employees to adopt. You can be in the race only if your manufacturing is lean, which can help you to remain suitably competitive for the market. The biggest challenge is to constantly upgrade the skills of the employees through a robust system of meaningful trainings. We also conduct regular post training feedback to learn whether the training was effective and result-oriented. Also, we are looking at inducting new hires who bring with them additional skills which can catapult us to the next level in business. However, the challenge is to fit the new hires into the existing environment, with minimum discontentment from the experienced workforce. However, we have been successful with this thus far.

**Who have been your figures of inspiration during the professional journey? What are some of the values and ideologies with regards to which you think, leaders should definitely walk the talk to win stakeholder confidence?**

"The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture." - Edgar Schein.

I strongly believe in the above statement, wherein leaders should take full responsibility of the culture that they develop for their organisation. And, the values that they live by

## Learning Points

- Life is a manifestation of your thoughts and actions. And, it is totally in our hands to be happy or not. And a heart filled with gratitude, is the true gateway for everlasting happiness.
- In the words of The Buddha, "Our life is the creation of our mind." We create our life and can choose to be happy or not.
- Someone filled with anger or jealousy will be unhappy, and someone filled with the gratitude of experiencing life will be joyful. The best can transmute even pain into joy.
- Our thoughts dictate our actions, and our actions shape the course of our lives.