

The Persistent Mentor

C.Rangachary, General Manager (Human Performance) and Senior Consultant, HTC Global Services firmly believes and adheres to the adage that learning does not conclude at the class room. He has therefore been forthcoming with training programmes that concentrate on individual employee development with a purview on corporate objectives. - BY AJAY KUMAR



Q How do you look back at your professional journey so far? Please share some of the most enriching experience that you came across.

A Going down the memory lane of my five decades of professional journey in the corporate world, I had the privilege of interacting with

several people, irrespective of their age, hierarchy, across the board in the sales, banking and IT sectors. Having had the opportunity to work both in Government undertakings and private sectors, I could gain a balanced perspective on the working environment and play my roles

proactively and effectively.

I started my professional career as a salesman in the year 1964. I vividly remember when I was given an introductory talk by the then District Manager. He said, "Ranga, you can commit as many new mistakes as possible, but don't repeat the old ones." This first talk removed the fear of committing mistakes and the fear of failure. This has given a lot of confidence to venture, experiment and take a calculated risk to achieve the set goals. I have learnt as a salesman, to be an achiever, one has to "reject rejections" and learn to see failure as temporary and isolated. I was also convinced, to achieve my goals, the first condition is to refuse to let failure steal the better of me.

Then onwards I could succeed in all my endeavors in my career and could add value to the roles I played with a positive mental attitude with a curiosity "what can I do to make this place better?" I was in sales till 1967.

The second phase of my professional journey started in the year 1968 in the banking industry till my retirement in the year 2000. Starting from the frontline staff to the level of AGM (TRG) I had the privilege of playing various roles and in various geographical locations with a rich variety of people. This has laid the foundation for me to be a "practitioner" in people management at the field level and also as a trainer from 1983 to 2000. During this period the learning was deep rooted, broad based and well

ramified in people management.

I was also convinced that every role is unique and powerful. The way one perceives the role empowers or erodes the roles' efficacy. A positive perception of any given role, builds the good self-image and a healthy self-esteem. I also learnt that every role is interdependent. It developed the art of being not a mere role taker, but a role maker and a good team builder and player.

My passion is training and HR. In the middle of my banking career, I was gravitated to the training and for full fifteen years I played this role. I was instrumental in building a robust training system by designing a number of technical and soft skills programmemes/workshop across the board. Soon after my retirement in 2000, I have taken up the role of General Manager (Human Performance) with HTC Global Services India Private Ltd., till date.

It is a very fascinating experience with HTC, I was impressed by the way the HTC Management waited for 3 years till my retirement in Banking and kept up their commitment to take me as the Head of the Human performance. I was also impressed with the core values of the company like simplicity, honesty and humility- the three facets of truth. When I first visited the Head office in Michigan and met the top management team, I experienced that these core values of the company are not merely written in the employee handbook

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

Won the All India Prize in "1971 for essay competition" on the topic 'Banking & the small man'

Written a number of articles on management topics, published in-house journals & Financial Express.

Selected to steer the revamping team of bank branches (around 50) with a new marketing thrust.

or displayed in the corridors of the company but they are demonstrated in their daily work life from top to bottom. The top management team, I observed, has a paradoxical mix of intense professional will and extreme personal humility. They also demonstrated that they believe in permeating this culture to the grass root level. This conviction and trust are driving this company from good to great.

Having got the freedom and support from the company, I took training as a powerful tool to transform this organization from better to the best.

I took training and development of people as an integral part of the empowerment process to strengthen the muscle of the management cadre. In the process we built a robust internal talent pipeline fortified by comprehensive training and mentorship programme/workshops.

We have built a dedicated HR team to adopt and enrich the HR practices in the real sense of it, which I elaborated in various replies I have given on the best HR practices.

Knowing fully well that the leadership development and self-mastery does not happen in a moment, but it happens over a time span, we have

- Institutionalized self-introspection and self-correction throughout the organization as the main theme of selective training programmes. We made these programmes mandatory and more so to our Human Performance team members
- They need to unlearn, discover to look at things afresh, gain a new perspective and skills to find a niche and enlarge people network and become strategic business partners.
- There is a continuous exploration by the Human Performance department by asking themselves "Are we adding value to the people with whom we work and the organization?"

There is a regular coaching on the undercurrent philosophy of the

RAPID FIRE

Favorite quote: "Arise, Awake and stop not until you reach the goal (Swami Vivekanda)"

Leadership style: Servant leadership or 'Baby Style'

Current professional goal: "What can I do to make this better" (People's lives can be transformed by this questioning)

Favorite book: "Seven habits of highly effective people" by Stephen Covey

Favorite music artist: Dr. Mangalampati Bala Murali Krishna

Life is: a series of thoughts

Family is: a training ground to play various roles effectively through love

I strongly believe in - Myself

Family for me - Training ground

The most important thing I do on Sunday - Meditation

I deal with setback by - Self-introspection and self-corrections

3 things I never leave home without - positive attitude, patience and enthusiasm

company that:

- We believe in 'sustainable growth' but not 'swelling'
- We believe in contributing to the culture of 'need' but not 'greed'
- We draw attention of the people to realize that "we should make money, but money should not make us "

Thus the company over the years and during recession demonstrated its inherent strength by remaining stronger for having gone through the downturn and succeeded in the long run.

Q Best HR strategies are built on futuristic vision. What are your views on the same and how have you practiced this during your stint with various organizations? What is your plan for your own future with HTC?

A The task before the Human Performance Department is profound. The problems and responsibilities are vaster and challenging than ever before. They

are no more confined to mere activities of recruitment, retention and retirement. They have many more challenging objectives to fulfill. The HR strategy, no doubt, should look into the future and aim towards a strategic business partnership. It has to create a legacy and a return on investment and add value to their people. After many years of lecturing and training and gaining feedback, I came to the conclusion that the HR needs to create a sustainable development alliance with people. But how to go about with it is a big question.

I believe what Stephen Covey said that the problem by relying on just personality ethics is that unless the underlying paradigms are corrected, simply changing outward behavior is not effective. We all have the paradigms and perspectives and they can have a dramatic impact on the way we handle the people and situations.

So I firmly believe that the focus of the HR futuristic strategy should be how to make the people shift their paradigms and make them unlearn their pre-existing biases, habits and core behavior.

I subscribe to Jim Harris' view in his book 'Blind Sided' that "In our busy lives the key to individual and organizational security is self-introspection and self-correction". It needs to be institutionalized. The HR with a real futuristic vision needs to create a discipline of reflecting and discussing based on insights gained and make course corrections. They need to be applied in a disciplined and rigorous way.

I am proud to say that since I took charge of HR in HTC, apart from the usual training activities, a separate wing with a dedicated team, which will not only focus on grooming and developing managers and leaders, but all the employees of the company with the underlying themes of unlearning paradigm shifting and grooming emotional intelligence. These programmes are mandatory and will facilitate an

In brief

NAME : C.Rangachary
TITLE : General Manager
AGE : 75 years
ORGANIZATION : HTC Global Services
EXPERIENCE : 50 years
YEARS IN HR : 30 years
EDUCATION : MA (Economics) CAIIB

action plan with a follow up on their progress.

No doubt these programmes on 'Employee transformation' are time consuming activities, but, are not a vain speculation. I am thankful to the management of HTC who strongly supported me in this experiment with trust, patience and perseverance to see the results over a period of time and they can vouchsafe the results.

Q What were some of the challenging times in your career that gave you the important lessons of life?

A Bridging the 'execution gap' is always a challenge in the organizations. 'Execution Gap' is nothing but an organization's commitment and achievements-which is always wanting. The paradox is despite the most advanced HR practices and employee engagement strategies backed with technological interventions, the gap prevails despite the best efforts like:

- Re engaging people to stay on track every time
- Engaging the hearts and minds of the people

This paradox compelled me to think that that management of people is twofold:

- Management of events/situations which may involve people
- Self- management

Situations arise every day that requires engaging people and getting things done through them. If I have difficulty in managing myself, I have difficulty in managing my affairs at

home or in the organization. If I can manage myself well I can manage any situation. So I was driven to the reality that 'self-management' is the real crux of the problem. While I agree what managements are adapting in building a culture of trust and collaboration to bridge this execution gap to some extent, they need to demonstrate a genuine intent and motive, in which people value their learning and development above most other aspects of the job.

I took training as a powerful media to convert every manager as an expert coaching communicator. The major role of HR is to create a culture of coaching communication throughout the organization. HR has to play a very serious role in the future and bring that paradigm shift to bridge this 'execution gap'.

Q How has working across industries and geographic made your professional journey more interesting?

A One common factor whether in sales, banking or any other sector, we deal with people and 'people are people'. They are unique and so is every team. They are all products of situations and circumstances driven by emotions and feelings, irrespective of the fact to which part of the world, race, gender, language and culture they belong to. Perhaps the differences might be expressed in their unique and yet different styles.

I believe that I need to understand others first than expecting others to understand me. This has helped me to establish effective, empathetic interpersonal relations and communication. By seeking first to understand than being understood, greased many conflicting situations. I have practiced this principle that I need to listen first than providing solutions off hand.

This practice made my career journey much more exciting and fruitful. I have also experienced that it is one of the greatest relationship builders. It nurtures empathy,

patience to listen and the courage to accept the reality of the situation.

Q How different have the two experiences been- of setting up the HR from the scratch in organizations and managing well established HR frameworks? Please elaborate with interesting anecdotes.

A First of all, we should accept the reality that no framework can be perfect or permanent. The HR should have an open mind and need flexibility to adjust, alter and evolve a new framework if needed or wanting. As the generation either X or Y has a new set of needs and

ready-made furniture. It is much more fruitful if it is from the scratch. The planner can study, plan design and in consultation with the management and stakeholders can come with a framework that serves the new organization with a built in flexibility for any future changes.

Managing well established frameworks, apparently, looks easier but in reality is deprived of the much needed flexibility to accept the strategic changes due to their existing paradigms. Organizations that are blindsided by the market driven realities find it difficult to embrace those new changes and their challenges. Their myopic vision is

strategic interventions to their framework. It would be tough for the HR department to sell the new ideas to convince them to breathe a new life into the burdensome framework, however sophisticated they might be and how they worked wonderfully well once.

Any organization, new or old, needs to be agile, result oriented and flexible enough to embrace the new challenges.

The HR practitioner of today needs to be proactive to prepare the robust HR framework to face challenges of change without much friction. A matured and a well informed HR department can build such models that meet the aspirations of the people and also develop a flexible framework with the foundation to meet future changes.

BUZZER ROUND

1. A mysterious benefactor wrote a cheque for Rs. 10, 00,000 and said 'Help me solve a problem'. What would you say?

"While understanding the intensity of your problem and thanking you for the trust you reposed in me in solving the problem, you appreciate that I cannot stab a solution until the full story is told and the diagnosis of the problem is made".

2. What is the one thing you are proud of but would never put on your resume?

Being honest and humble

3. What is the one dream that you have tucked away for the moment?

I start accomplishing small things at hand, putting my heart and soul and work up my way to bigger things. Hence there were no occasions to tuck a dream of feeling frustrated.

4. Is there something that people constantly ask for your advice? What is it?

They often ask me what is that makes people successful in their job. Is it smartness, hard work or what type of behavior and attitude put them on the career ladder and move fast to reach the top.

5. When was the last time you astonished yourself?

When I retired in 2000 officially, but not in reality.

6. What do you value most? Free time, recognition or money?

I accept things as they come and be happy. I believe that one needs to deserve before he desires.

7. Are you living your life purpose or still searching?

Yes, I am living my life purpose by meditating on the beyond and experiencing of being and becoming.

wants. The HR should be in a position to propitiously design the framework to meet their existing or emerging needs and wants and also help change their paradigms if any.

If you ask a carpenter to make a beautiful art piece he prefers to have raw wood as his raw material to

owing to their-

1. Past success
2. Value rigidity
3. Legitimization of whatever they did in the past is effective and needs no change

This prevents them from venturing into new thinking and new

Q Who have been your figures of inspiration during this professional journey? What are the values and ideologies when you think leaders should definitely walk the talk to win the confidence of the stakeholders?

A I have come across many inspiring people, each with a facet of leadership style that can be termed as unique. But my learning happened "how to be and how much to be", to be an effective leader.

I have observed and learnt from some to be an effective leader that one needs to be strong but not rude or impolite.

Some impressed me with their big vision and bigger goals they kept and accomplished. Some were rank optimists and in spite of hindering obstacles reached their goals. Some applied the Pareto principle of spending eighty percent of their time with twenty percent of quality people who did eighty percent of the work.

Some were benevolent autocrats, some democratic and yet accomplished their set goals. Whatever be the style they chose everyone is leading someone and everyone is following someone. I was inspired and also learnt that to be an effective leader one needs to be a Humble Servant.

To sum it up, I quote what John Maxwell said "Leadership isn't how far we advance ourselves, but how far we advance others " I have learnt that leadership should have a goal of helping others to advance. All other qualities of leadership fall in line.

Q How do you like to spend your life beyond work? What are your hobbies? How do you find time to still enjoy them?

A I define time as a gap between our thought and action. When I work, I work, and usually there is no spill over. I am in the habit of reading and writing and socializing, which I enjoy. When I look at the different perspective of others from mine on the same problem or issue I really wonder how the nature has provided opportunities to look at things from a new perspective and approach.

Q Having been a leader in global companies you might have surely travelled a lot. Please share some of your experiences of traveling to different places. What have you

gained from these experiences?

A As I have already mentioned in my reply earlier that irrespective of the differences and variations in color, age, sex and culture, I seek first to understand others than being understood by them. This shatters the irrational biases, beliefs and value rigidities and opens the new vision to embrace change with a fresh learning. I learned to adapt to any environment. Naturally, I many times felt this world is one big family.

Q Please share your experience at the B-school. What are you learning?

A My learning in this content is 'Theory without practice is futile, practice without theory is fragile'.

Q Please acquaint your family and how do you like to spend time with them despite hectic schedules. Has someone from your family inspired your values and growth as a human being?

A I, my wife and two sons married with one daughter each is the

composition of my family. We live together. I enjoy spending time with the kids. I have also learnt that a joint family goes with a series of reconciliations and adjustments greased by love. My wife has a strong belief that people can be together despite variations and differences and make provisions for other members putting our ego down; I am one with her on this.

Q Please share interesting incidents and anecdotes from your professional experience that can add interesting facets of your professional journey. What inspires you towards HR?

A There were many incidents in my career, which became live case studies for my/ others learning purpose. Due to space and time constraint I confine to one incident. I recall one incident at the start of my sales career in the year 1965 and yet fresh in my memory. It was my first visit to one shop in the morning hours in Shimoga to book an order. No sooner I stepped into the shop,

HR PERSPECTIVES

Some gaps that HR organizations need to bridge in India are:

- Not finding the right skills is the biggest challenge. Getting relevant domain skill with a mix of leadership/ management skills is a task by itself.
- Improving middle management performance, grooming and mentoring them needs a lot be done
- Much more rigorous steps are needed to be taken to bridge the gender gaps at work place like sexual harassment, gender discrimination; lack of equal opportunities and inferiority treatment by colleagues is still a long way to go.
- Even though breakthrough thinking and well framed policies exist, but people feel that the intent is falling short of employees' expectations. Many a times they are disillusioned as there is no 'walk the talk' and thus it erodes the trust.
- Need to create a culture of accountability of middle level managers and train them as 'coaching conversationalists' with employees.

Common Errors that companies commit while coming up with various engagement practices

People value the intent/ motive behind the engagements more than their words when their actions lack the genuineness, there seems to be a gap in the engagement practices though apparently looking good.

Some gaps that can be looked into-

- Decisions taken without the stakeholders knowledge
- Looking at the issues from management's standpoint only.
- Allowing a vocal few to dominate
- Systemic barriers in communication, communication gaps galore
- Not taking early adopters
- Low key training to managers on coaching and marketing
- Not being visible and involved
- Engaged in micro management and the snap judgments
- Not being transparent
- The HR department has a vital role to play. They need to be totally involved and enthusiastic in people engagement with a missionary zeal and not taking the role as a mere part of the job.

the shopkeeper greeted me with a loud voice 'get out'. I was taken aback, but went into the shop with a smile. He did not give me a chance to say more than 'Hello'. He continued to launch his attack may be more than ten times, yelling out 'get out'. At that moment my mood was off and my internal dialogues were- "I never met him earlier and it was my first visit to his shop, why this reaction? Why was he rude to me? Should I also enter into an argument and start my verbal attack to make him aware of his rude behavior? I am not at fault, why this? Despite this thinking, I maintained my cool and behaved as a seasoned salesman, though I was not at that time. Thanks to the company's orientation and training which made me to face this situation calmly I used some assuaging words.

"I am sorry; I know there must be some problem. May be I can help you solve your problem" saying then these words, I went deep into his shop and sat. By then the intensity of his attack was reduced and he said "please go away". I realized that he is showing the withdrawal symptoms and once again I politely asked him "Can I help you? Shall I book your order?" Came the reply sharp "nobody visited my shop all these days. I lost lot of business." I could understand the problem even though I was not the cause for it.

I booked his order and assured him of visiting his shop and apologized on behalf of the earlier salesman who missed his shop and business. I also took care of not questioning his anger or behaviour. I deliberately took care of not entering into argument despite his provocative behavior. The customer in the night came to my room in

LEARNING POINTS:

- Don't put tags to customer as 'irate', 'non co-operative' 'rude' etc. By putting tags to customer or others, we miss the real issue and we will be biased in solving it. The anger shown by others is a secondary response and leaves a clue that they have not been given their want or need in their preferential manner.
 - Be quiet with assertiveness while listening; look at the person giving him a feeling that you understood his feelings in that disturbed state. So acknowledge feelings, not words.
 - Don't be anxious to find fault with his behavior and attribute motives to his statement.
 - Don't enter into arguments just like that.
 - Arguments are psychological wars. Wars cannot be waged without strategy.
- **Assess the opponents strength**
- Customer is business - He can be right in his own way. Don't win the argument and lose the business.
 - Exhaust the other man's ammunitions i.e.
 - Listen. Don't talk. Don't have the verbal exchanges and supply oxygen to fire. See that his anger curve comes down. Sometimes if we listen empathetically not only his anger curve slopes down, but goes below the OX axis. He surrenders.
 - Allow him an honourable retreat even if he is wrong. This establishes good relationship and continued business.
 - Don't overkill by demeaning his failure

the lodge and apologized for his rude behavior in the morning. He used to send greetings every New Year and became a close friend.

This incident at the start of my career brought out a lot of learning which paved the way for me to use emotional intelligence in handling situations that can trigger emotions like anger leading to conflict and arguments then ultimately drive towards loss of business and personal suffering.

Q Having been a part of diverse sectors how did you have to constantly up skill yourself to meet the professional demands?

A Willingness to unlearn and

change and work on myself at every opportune time in the career helped me to update my perspective and skills to meet my new professional demands.

The major shifts in my career from sales to banking and then to I.T Sector made me to shift my paradigms first without superimposing my past knowledge and skills on the new emerging working scenario. This has helped to change and deal with the generation gap and made me adapt naturally to the change. I took time to reflect on the experiences and lessons I have learnt. This made me to proceed with a passion to succeed. I had to quickly understand and adapt to the younger generation by not carrying forward the irrational beliefs and values and introspectively to deal with the existing and emerging situation and the people's needs. This kept me accomplishing the transformation of people to a larger extent. Above all I am a rank optimist and believe that I can help people to fulfil their individual and organizational goals. That's my goal.

Q Who would credit in your life as a great influence in shaping the man you are today?

Vivid comes to my memory, my mother, a young widow with four kids to take care of. Placed in untoward circumstances with no respite from any source took courage, patience, sacrifice and love and steered our destinations in our lives. I drew inspiration from her well-being and well doing.

I also should mention my eldest brother, though a minor at that time, took charge of the situation then and held the rudder firm in the most turbulent times of our childhood. His commitment, guidance, care and concern have helped me to move forward towards my desired destination in life. **HC**