

The Peoples' Manager

In his professional life spanning thirty nine long years, and all of which being centred around People Management- be it managing disparities with the Unions or making use of technology focused towards HR- Dr. Sripada Chandrasekhar, President and Global Head-HR, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories has seen it all. From the industry of steel to strategic HR, Dr. Sripada has gone through vivid career phases managing people on the work floor to handling a multi-cultural, multi-nation workforce to mature as a strategic partner to the business.

- BY S. AJAY KUMAR

How do you look back at your professional journey so far? Please share some of those very enriching experiences that you came across.

It feels amazing and looking back, I cannot believe I have covered so much! I have had the opportunity to experience all three sectors of the economy viz. Public Sector, Private sector and MNC - and some very iconic companies in each of these sectors at that. To top it all, I had the opportunity to learn from several key industries such as, Steel and manufacturing, IT Education and Training, Telecom, Consulting and IT Services and now Pharma. The journey has been dotted with many enriching experiences - the first part of my career was marked with working with unions, large contract workforce, alternative work schedules, complex and large integrated manufacturing technologies. The second part of my career was marked with speed, growth and competitive strategies demanding deep commercial acumen. In the third, I received significant global exposure and understood the ways of handling multi-cultural, cross-country

RAPID FIRE

Favourite Quote: In life it is not so difficult to 'get' what you want, but it is very hard to 'know' what you want.

Leadership style: Consultative, inclusive and facilitative

Current Professional Goal: To teach, coach and build the next generation of HR leaders.

Favourite Book: The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

Favourite Movie: None in particular but several movies starring Amitabh Bachchan, Naseeruddin Shah and Mahesh Babu

Favourite Music Artist: K. J. Yesudas

Life is...? an opportunity to find and do what you are good at.

Family is... the biggest source of support and strength.

I strongly believe in.... constantly learning, changing, adapting and doing good

Family for me... is very important - almost my lifeline

The most important thing I do on Sunday.... Complete a lot of domestic chores, eat a good Andhra meal, listen to Telugu film songs and read or write something. All while the mind is constantly buzzing for the next exciting idea!

I deal with Setbacks by.... Moving on

3 Things I never leave home without.....? wallet, handkerchief and mobile phone



workforce, significantly mature and evolved HR processes, and many globally strategic HR programmes. Overall my career has prepared me at once to handle operations on the ground, and, boardroom strategies and governance at the top to see the details and the big picture at the same time.

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

I have often found that the emotional wounds have directed me towards some very unforgettable lessons in my life. In the early days of my career, I used to be very impatient with the others and carried

In brief

NAME : Sripada Chandrasekhar

TITLE : President & Global Head of HR

AGE : 59

ORGANIZATION : Dr. Reddy's Laboratories

EXPERIENCE : 38

YEARS IN HR : 38

EDUCATION : MBA, Ph. D

a holier than thou attitude. This led to me being snubbed by my peers and superiors on several occasions. Though I was hurt with this, it taught me invaluable lessons in humility and

teamwork. Later, I was put in job situations where I had no prior knowledge of the industry and the skill sets involved. Initially, I was often lost and found lacking depth. As a person who takes immense pride in his professional abilities, this spurred me to invest in developing a deeper understanding of the industry, and thus made me a much more effective professional. I would also like to share another interesting experience that taught me the value of respecting other cultures. During a post-

acquisition integration dinner of an Indian company by a European multinational, I found they were serving cuisine that was not to my liking. So I quietly got up and went and helped myself with my favourite curd rice from a different part of the restaurant. I came back and joined the banquet. However, my boss noticed this, and rebuked me for it the next day. I realized my faux pas and resolved to be more adaptable. In retrospect, this perhaps sowed the early seeds of my now firm belief in the value of diversity and inclusion.

How has your working across industries helped to make your professional journey more interesting?

People and their talents make the biggest difference in all industries. We think it is only IT or other service industries which are people dependent, while a steel or a cement plant is not. That is not true. Even in the traditional manufacturing industries, it is people who make all the difference. And with industry 4.0 type of IT and automation integrated manufacturing, all industries are morphing into a similar look and feel. The difference between industries lies in their business models and critical operating priorities. In large scale manufacturing, it is often capacity utilization and productivity, in telecom, it is market share and ARPU, in Consulting and IT services, it is billing per person, in Pharma it is 'time to file' new products. Likewise, every industry comes with its key business levers. It is important for a HR person to quickly grasp the key

UP, CLOSE AND PERSONAL

What inspired you to steer your career towards HR?

Pure chance.

How do you like to spend your free time?

With the family, listening to old songs, going to music concerts and reading.

Please share some of your experiences of travelling to different places and what have you gained from these experiences?

I love to travel and see places, especially with my family. I enjoy learning about local cultures, cuisines, the unique 'efficiencies' of different social systems. The street side dancing of the elderly in China in public spaces, the way bikers follow lane discipline in Bali, the sheer range of house wines in Vienna, the India-like chaos on the streets of Rome, the way a lone driver waits for the traffic light to turn green in the middle of the night in country side UK - all teach you wonderful things about societies, etiquette and humanity.

Please share with us some of your memories from your years of growing up.

My early childhood was spent in rural Odisha. I went to schools made of mud walls and thatched roofs. I saw a lot of poverty and lived a very circumscribed life. I did not go to a restaurant or a movie theatre for a long time in my life. My childhood therefore was very different from the rich city kids. I remember a lot of family warmth. On the whole however, I would rather forget my childhood.

What was your learning from the B- School?

I had students from over 18 countries in my class. The biggest learning was the cross cultural perspectives on social and people issues.

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

I would prefer not to name a single person in particular. I learnt love for knowledge from my father and patience and resilience from my mother. I was influenced by several people within and outside the family.

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

As I said earlier, I have not been influenced by any one person. I have allowed myself to be inspired by many people in different times and situations. In fact, I continue to learn from others as I watch them closely and observe their unique strengths.

HR PERSPECTIVES

Some gaps that HR Organizations need to bridge

- HR organizations have become somewhat anti-people. We need to dial up people championship and advocacy
- HR overlaps with and is confused with people management. HR does not manage people. Managers manage people and HR supports managers. This simple truth is not well understood. We need to get Managers to own the people agenda and not take it over for them.
- HR must shed the image of a power broker, rule monger and fun-event organizer. It must rise to be the true partner of business, coach of the manager and friend of the employee.

Common errors companies commit while designing engagement practices.

- Engagement is not entertainment. The common mistake is to consider fun events, parties and family get together as employee engagement.
- Engagement is not what HR does with people. It is what managers do with their teams. Serious, personalised interest and investment in people, in their learning, career, growth and well-being is true engagement.

business issues and align HR strategies to the unique needs of each business. So working in different industries, tells you a lot is similar and yet different. The much talked about one size exists -but it does not fit all!

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

The difference is obvious. When you are building from the scratch, there is a lot of excitement which creates room for experimentation. Established companies present a different challenge of growing from 'good to great'. In their own place, both are interesting challenges. At the same time, the deeper you look, the more you realize that the difference between start-ups and mature companies are not all that black and white. In fact, there is nothing like a clean slate. For instance, a Flipkart has to contend with Amazon not just in the marketplace, but also in organizational practices. Similarly, many established companies (e.g. Tata motors, L&T, IBM, etc.) are constantly seeking to renew and reinvent themselves. So within those large companies, there is room for experimentation and change. So as

you move from growing companies to mature companies, you need to combine the speed and agility of one with the caution and concerns of governance of the other and be good at both!

Having been long associated with the healthcare sector now, 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 am presently at one end of the large healthcare value chain: viz. Pharmaceuticals. From my vantage point, I see that the Pharma business is faced is two big challenges-

- (1) how to design, develop, get approvals and launch market-relevant drugs in time and ahead of competition
- (2) how to build and sustain a culture of quality within the company so that your products inspire confidence among all the stakeholders at all times.

Both these challenges are crucially dependent on carefully crafted people solutions. In order to address the first challenge, HR must help managers acquire cutting edge scientific talent and provide them with an innovation climate. To address the second, HR must work with people managers and leaders to build a culture of Quality.

BUZZER ROUND

- **A mysterious benefactor wrote you a cheque for Rs 100,000 and said, "Help me solve a problem! What would you say?"**

Before accepting the cheque, I would ask what is the problem?

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

How I learnt to speak English -without going through an English medium school.

- **What's the one dream that you've tucked away for the moment?**

Writing a book

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

Career advice. Which job to choose or change into, how to get a raise or promotion, how to impress the boss etc.

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

Having grown in conservative ways, 'dancing' to a DJ playing music and in large groups would not come naturally to me. Recently during my daughter's wedding, I not only danced several times, but learnt a few numbers with the help of a professional choreographer and 'performed' during the Sangeet. This was a complete surprise to all who knew me and even I was surprised at my ability to shed some inhibitions.

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

At different life stages you need different things. In the early days, I needed money to raise my children, later I needed recognition, and, now I seek more free time.

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

Broadly, I know my purpose and I live my daily life in fulfilling my purpose. However, I continue to search for more effective ways of living my purpose.

This is a lot about zero tolerance to jugaad and a chalta hai attitude. No industry and more particularly Pharma can afford to 'somehow' manage. We cannot be expedient about business and compromise the highest global standards of good practices. This needs patience, persistence, role modelling and value-based governance. The Pharma industry must be committed to it and HR has a big role in enabling it.

Who have been your figures of inspiration during this 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?

I have learnt from a lot of people - many who are not celebrities, but are ordinary managers and leaders who do their jobs well. My big learning is that there is no perfect person; everyone is a mixed bag. So do not be enamoured by larger than life personalities. Look at every one carefully and pick up what they do best, not what they say, and if relevant, learn. So if I name the people, you will not recognize them for they do not have names like Jack Welch, Ratan Tata or Narayana Murthy, but are Pandey's, Subba Raos, Toms or Julias from different parts of the world- all quietly slogging away in their respective cubicles and shop floors, illuminating the environment with their diligence, humility and that

Awards and Accolades

- Best Young Trainer
- All India Young Manager
- HR Thought Leader
- Key Note Speaker -World HR Summit, Shanghai, China
- Top 25 CHROs recognition

unmistakable desire to do what it takes to succeed. I have been more inspired by qualities like: humility, pragmatism, resilience and continuous reinvention through learning.

LEARNING POINTS

- Know what you want and work hard -results will follow
- Knowledge is your real passport to survive and succeed
- HR does not manage people; managers do
- HR must step up its people and talent advocacy.
- Business comes first, HR only next
- Just provide a good level playing field - people will surprise you with their talents
- At the end what matters is: how good a human being you are -not your position or title or even legacies you seek to build.
- We must remember that HR professionals are 'professionals' and 'human' first - before being HR pros. Hence my advice would be in three parts: First, how to be a good professional. Second how to be an HR professional and finally how to be a true and wholesome human being. I strongly believe when all these three aspects come together that we attain significance.
- All professionalism takes deep knowledge and great expertise in a chosen field. True professionals don't resort to short-cuts and thrive on expediency. S/he seeks to constantly perform at the highest standards of the chosen profession. If you are a carpenter or a singer -you must make a furniture or a sing at world class levels and nothing less will do.
- Being a good HR professional requires deep understanding of business. HR does not manage 'people'- line Managers do. This distinction is important. Mere 'love for people' is not enough -you must be able to design and deploy strong people processes and programs -often relying on data and analytics - to ensure performance, productivity and development.
- Finally, what matters is how good a human being we are; not your title, position or professional accomplishments. Being human requires humility, empathy, inclusiveness and a deep desire to make a difference. Among all professionals, HR pros have the best opportunity to advance these 'human' imperatives in organizations- for themselves as well for others.

"Best HR practices are built on a futuristic vision." What are your views on the same and how have you practiced this during your stint in various organizations?

Best HR practices are built around specific company contexts. They derive their rationale from how they serve business and employee interests. If the flexibility to work from home is a best practice in an IT services company the same will be difficult to be practiced in a manufacturing company, especially in a continuous process plant, where employees have to physically show up, take charge, and operate equipment at a given location in various shifts. The biggest mistake in best practices is to believe that practices of one company will automatically work in another. While

you should have an eye on the future, as you design practices you should largely aim to handle here and now as well as near term issues. In the companies I worked for, the practices I introduced - whether in on boarding, hiring, compensation or leadership development - were designed to meet the business needs of the company.

What will be your focus for 2017? Any organizational goals that have been set by you?

We will continue to focus on organization design and people productivity through 2017. Building strong talent benches for pivotal roles, measuring the impact of our L&D programs, stepping up our HR-IT systems and improving people manager effectiveness will be some of our 2017 priorities. 