

The All Weather Skipper

Sushil Baveja, President & Head - Corporate HR, DCM Shriram Ltd., comes across as one among those few leaders, who, after a stint of more than three decades in the HR domain, attribute their success to the lessons imbibed during the initial years of their career, and also impress on the fact that these very lessons enabled them to make key decisions, that proved to be value adders to the organisation as well as the stakeholders.

BY S. AJAY KUMAR

Rapid Fire

Favourite Quote: "Tough times do not last, tough people do!"

Leadership Style: Be inclusive, open and strive to create value all the time

Current Professional Goal: Implement technology with a human touch

Favourite Book: "What got you here, won't get you there" by Marshall Goldsmith

Favourite Movie: "Unstoppable" starring Denzel Washington

Favourite Music Artist: The melodious Mukesh

Life is...? what we make of it!

Family is... where you can be your own natural self, completely vulnerable...

I strongly believe in.... One's destiny is in one's own hands

Family for me... Wife, my two daughters, son-in-law, grand-son, our pet dog and a few childhood friends

The most important thing I do on Sunday.... Eat Rajma Rice

I deal with Setbacks by.... Introspecting and reflecting on next steps

3 Things I never leave home without....? Mobile phone, wallet and glasses / spectacles

How do you look back at your professional journey so far? Please share some of those enriching experiences that you came across. My professional journey of about 33 years is one that has been extremely enriching. I think I have been fortunate to get the right breaks and opportunities, and each of my stints has been unique in terms of learning and exposure. Looking back, I feel that I have had a blended experience in multiple ways. I was provided with opportunities to work for both Indian and Multinational Companies in manufacturing and corporate HR roles, and managing industrial relations, and designing HR systems and processes. I have been fortunate that all the organisations in which I have worked were genuinely people focussed, professional and progressive, and, strong in ethics and values. Therefore, every organisation that I worked for enriched me in some unique way. Samtel, the organisation where I began my

career, provided me with an opportunity of establishing and institutionalising the HR function in a fast paced, demanding business environment, and, I was only three years in the organisation. My next stint at Cadbury at Malanpur (Gwalior, MP) gave me the first-hand exposure at managing and stabilising industrial relations on the basis of a relationship that was characterised by fairness, trust, and transparency. My role at Gillette, Bhiwadi involved building a culture of inclusiveness, vibrancy, and high energy through some very pro-active, employee involvement programmes and initiatives in partnership with the line team. My stay at Alcatel brought me in touch with global perspectives and programmes in an environment that was technology led. However, my current role at DCM Shriram is one that has been most enriching. It has taught me how modernity blends with tradition, how important it is to build a rational and emotional /

Buzzer Round

- **A mysterious benefactor wrote you a check for Rs. 100,0000 and said, "Help me solve a problem! What would you say?"**

Let the cheque first get credited to my account!

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

It is too deep to be shared here either!

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

Learning to play guitar

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

Why people behave erratically!

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

When I won a game of tambola!

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

Respect more than anything else.

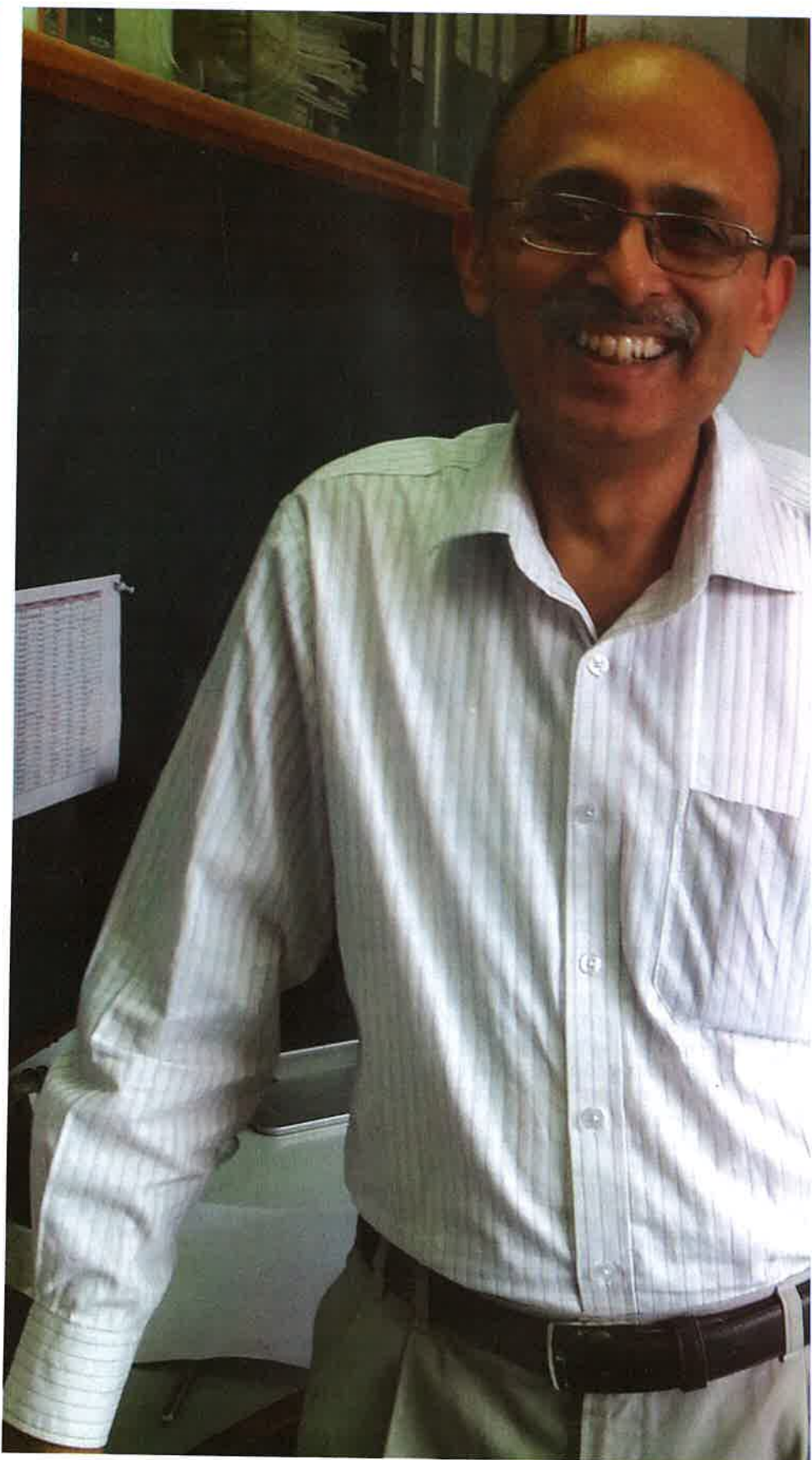
- **Are you living your life purpose- or still searching?**

Still reflecting...one should not feel content at any stage

family connect to drive discretionary energy, and how contemporary, global perspectives need to be blended through humility and by being grounded.

What were some of the challenging times in your career through which you were able to receive the most important lessons in life?

The first challenge was when I had to confront a rather aggressive strike in the very first year of my career. I was in the forefront of everything- conciliation proceedings, negotiations, disciplinary actions, interfacing with authorities and so on- that is associated with a situation of unrest. And, the situation was successfully resolved in a few weeks. The key learnings from the situation were- there is no substitute for relationships, presence of mind is important in tough situations, be calm, and do not give in to provocations, and that hard work, honesty and sincerity is paying. Like



any other HR professional, a common challenge that I have had to face all through my career has been managing involuntary separations arising out of non-performance, breach of ethics, violation of work place conduct etc. in an amicable manner. I have had to do this with people across all hierarchical levels. The lessons after facing innumerable situations of this kind have been- be firm, but do not make the situation that of win-lose, treat the individual with respect and dignity, support wherever possible to help the individual get gainfully employed, be fair and transparent in the process. There is a place and a job for every person in this world, it is a matter of getting that right fit which leverages one's potential and capability.

In brief

NAME : Sushil Baveja

TITLE : President & Head - Corporate HR

AGE : 53

ORGANIZATION : DCM Shriram Ltd

EXPERIENCE : 33

YEARS IN HR : 33

EDUCATION : Master of Business Administration

diverse, cutting across industries and sectors - TV components, confectionary / food, consumer non-durables, telecom, and then working in a diversified conglomerate. Every new role meant starting from the scratch, acquiring new business knowledge and skills, building relationships afresh, dealing with a new set of workforce, handling unique challenges, and providing distinctive solutions. It was interesting because of several learnings, since each industry had a different insight on offer. The application of HR knowledge has to be nuanced and customised to specific needs and requirements.

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

My experience has indeed been

How different have been the two experiences for you- of setting up HR from the scratch in an

Up, Close and Personal

What inspired you to steer your career towards HR?

My desire to do something meaningful that impacts the lives of people, and raise their capability to become a significant part of the organisation. I have always believed that HR is not merely a business function, but also a noble profession.

How do you like to spend your free time?

Reading newspapers, karaoke, watching television - mainly news, sports and movies - and playing with Cruz, my pet golden retriever - who is my stress-buster and source of energy!

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

I have travelled to quite a few places in India and abroad on work and leisure. Each travel has left me with some unique takeaways. I have travelled on work to Hanoi on several occasions. The city has impressed me most for its simplicity and culture. People are simple and straightforward and unostentatious, eager to help, always smiling, and have a great regard for India and Indians. They are quite disciplined about their work life balance, and do not get stressed. These traits have always impressed me, and this is how we should be leading our lives. Similarly, my memories of General Santos City in Philippines for work are no different. People remain focused during the day on their work, but as soon as the day ends, they enjoy life. They live in the present, enjoy their life to the fullest, and, do not worry about tomorrow. Their energy and enthusiasm for life is infectious. You feel completely relaxed in their company. They are also very God fearing and kind. I think these qualities bring completeness to one's life.

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

The years of my growing up have been quite exciting. I was born in Dehu Road and spent some part of my growing up years in Talegaon.

My father was then in the Army. When I was in class 8, we shifted to Gurgaon. I finished my schooling and college in Gurgaon. Later, I moved to Ghaziabad for my MBA at IMT. In fact, I lost my father when I was 16 years. I was very close to him and his demise shattered me completely. Though, I became emotionally stronger with time, the vacuum has always remained in my life. I used to be a very carefree child, but this personal setback made me responsible and mature a little too early in life. I also had a keen interest in journalism and radio broadcasting. I have written for some newspapers, done crime stories, and even interviewed personalities like Khushwant Singh and Darbara Singh, who was the then CM of Punjab, for one of the Hindustan Times' publications.

What was your learning from the B- School?

My learning from the B-School has been that academics and concepts lay the foundation of your knowledge, and the real learning happens when you apply the concepts and theories at the work place. The case studies, projects, assignments, workshops, seminars etc. make you a lot more practical and connected with the real world. B-School essentially provides the necessary inputs and prepares you in a structured and practical manner to succeed in the corporate world.

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

Yes. My father has and continues to remain as my source of inspiration and strength. He inculcated the army values of hard work, sincerity, commitment, integrity and passion in me.

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

I would give that credit again to my father. He has been a great influence on my life, character and value system.

HR Perspectives

Some gaps that HR Organisations need to bridge

The most important gap that needs to be bridged is around aligning the HR agenda with the Business agenda. HR needs to relate to the larger business, economic, social, customer and technological context. It is extremely important to understand the key sources of competitive advantage for the business, identify the cultural capabilities and competencies that are needed to influence the sources of competitive advantage and then design interventions that influence the relevant behaviours or competencies / capabilities, which in turn impact the sources of competitive advantage and consequently business outcome. The other important gap is around self-development. HR needs to be extremely focussed in building its own capabilities, being contemporary in its perspective, and acquiring new skills and competencies to stay relevant. Being tech and digital savvy in today's world is getting indispensable. As per Dave Ulrich, an important competency that HR professionals need to have today is navigating paradox. And again, as per him, HR needs to wake up to the reality that HR is not about HR, but about the value that it creates for the end customer.



Common errors companies commit while designing engagement practices

The most common error that companies make while designing engagement practices is trying to bring in industry best practices, without looking at the immediate organisational context or the company's requirements. The focus needs to be on doing what is right for the organisation, and not what best is happening in the world outside. The other important gap or improvement that needs to be brought in is around measuring the effectiveness of these practice or initiatives, trying to see the impact on business performance. There needs to be an ROI around every initiative that gets undertaken. Another error that usually gets committed is that many times HR brings in programmes and practices without getting the buy-in or ownership of the line management. We should not forget that there is an element of change management to most of the strategic initiatives that we introduce at our workplaces. The value proposition for every stakeholder segment needs to be clearly established to drive adoption of any practice or initiative at the workplace.

organisation to managing well-established HR frameworks?

I have had the experience of setting up HR right from the scratch at Samtel Color. It was a Greenfield project which involved the setting up a colour picture tube plant in technical collaboration with Mitsubishi. I was just three years in the company, and was picked to be a part of the project team. I had to get all the statutory clearances and compliances, hire around 1500 employees - including workers, engineers, managers - and get them trained as per the job requirements, establish HR processes and systems, and, build a culture which blended with the Japanese and Indian ethos. I take a lot of pride in the fact that the company reposed trust in me and my capabilities to establish and institutionalize the HR function of such a large project. Subsequently, I have worked with three large multinationals - Cadbury, Gillette and Alcatel - where the frameworks were already in place. Here, the success was based on the successful

execution of global best practices and systems. Everything had to be done within a well-established framework that were of a global standard and benchmark. There was a challenge to ensure that the standards are not compromised, and are leveraged fully to attract, retain and develop talent. The challenge was to manage the global practices in sync with the local ethos and culture to achieve a blended solution to every situation.

Having been long associated with the agro chemical 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? Being a large, diversified group we have to look at a HR proposition that is unique to that business segment. Each business segment has its own set of unique strengths, challenges, business requirements, and cultural ecosystem. One cannot, therefore, have a standard approach or plan. The HR agenda or plan

needs to align with the specific business need of each of the SBU. While it may be challenging at times to continuously keep shuffling the lens or perspective, it also provides opportunities of thinking beyond the normal, standard way of doing things. To be able to offer several unique solutions, one needs to have a greater idea about the wider business spectrum, HR trends and solutions. The other significant dimension is also about the need to relate to the growth stage of each of the business unit. Some businesses may be in an accelerated growth mode, a few may be growing incrementally, and a few others in a status quo mode. The growth context influences the level of HR engagement and the consequent impact.

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

Learning Points

Be a learner: We need to have a learning mind-set. Have an open mind. Look out for new knowledge, skills, competencies to be abreast with the changes around and ensuring that one's relevant all the time. Learning influences one's thought process, perspective and consequently behaviour and outcomes.

Strive for improvement and creativity: Never get complacent and keep challenging the status quo. Improvements and newness bring about distinctiveness and a sense of fulfilment, achievement. Every challenge and problem has a solution if we work with a creative mindset. Conventional thoughts result in ordinary outcomes and unconventional / lateral thinking results in radical and quantum outcomes

Create Value: One needs to work with a sense of purpose, with a focus on creating value for all stakeholders that one interfaces with to ensure that one's work is valued and impactful. Creating value involves working with a contemporary thought process and an outside-in approach, relating to the needs and context.

Work with passion: One must give one's 100% in whatever that one does to make a difference and impact. One must unleash one's discretionary energy and effort to a grow at a personal and professional level. There is no substitute for hardwork, passion and commitment.

Be humane, credible, and humble: This has been my biggest learning from my present organisation and its promoters, the Shriram family. Treat people with respect, dignity and care to win their heart and soul. It brings in a sense of belongingness and family spirit. Business and humanity need to go hand in hand. Never get arrogant or carried away by glory, fame or status. Demonstrate highest level of integrity and ethics.



stakeholders' confidence?

The choice is a little difficult, but two professionals did impart significant impressions on me during my journey. The first person was V.J. Prakash, my boss in my first job at Samtel, who was heading the B & W Picture Tube plant at Ghaziabad. He turned around the performance at the plant, and made it a model plant on every performance dimension. He was extremely diligent, knowledgeable, sharply focused on results, and a great motivator. The other person is Aroon Joshi, the then Vice President - HR at Cadbury, when I was the Plant Personnel Manager at Malanpur. He was a well-rounded HR professional, very thorough about processes and systems, contemporary in outlook, a great mentor, and a fabulous trainer. Some of the values and ideologies to be demonstrated in leaders in day to day work life would include high level

of integrity, humility, respect & dignity towards everyone, forward looking and contemporary perspective, passion for people and results and a learning mindset.

"Best HR practices are built with a futuristic vision." What are your

Awards and Accolades

- 'Most Influential HR Leaders in India' at the World HRD Congress held in Mumbai in February, 2017.
- '100 Most Talented Global HR Leaders' by CHRO Asia at the World HRD Congress held at Mumbai in February, 2015.
- 'DMA - Thomas Assessments National Award for Talent Management in the Individual Category in 2013'

views on the same, and how have you practiced this during your stint with various organisations?

I strongly feel that HR practices and systems need to be designed and delivered, keeping in mind, the long-term business perspective so that the organisation is capable to deal with the VUCA world, and is adequately future-proofed. Many of us live in a here and now world which weakens the organisation's ability to grow and thrive in a competitive world. I have been fortunate to work in organisations which have been forward-looking, progressive and outside-in oriented. It helped me to focus adequately on strategic initiatives and build long-term organisational capabilities. I have continuously strived to raise the performance standards in line with relevant best practices and benchmarks, engaged in building partnership, and networking with the external world, operated with a learning mindset, and encouraged adoption of contemporary tools and knowledge to impact business performance

As part of the DCM Shriram family, what will be your focus for 2017? What are the organisational goals that have been set by you?

One of the key focus areas that we plan to drive in 2017 is technology adoption across various HR processes and systems using Success Factors and related cloud based solutions. The objective is to enhance the experience of all the stakeholders- employees, Managers, HR, Leadership - to impact business performance and results, and support the organisation to reach the next level in size and scale. Some of the other goals include building a robust talent pipeline to meet the succession requirements across various leadership roles and positions, and build a culture of high performance and engagement by raising the skill, knowledge, and competencies of people; to build the overall capability bandwidth to meet the long-term vision and aspiration of accelerated growth of the various businesses in the organisation. 