

Publication	Hindustan Times (Shine)
Date	March 08, 2011
Edition	Delhi



Corporate top-line: Clockwise from top left — Rekha Sethi, DG, All India Management Association; Sangeeta Talwar, former president, South Asia, Tata Tea group; Gayatri Balaji, COO, Sparsh BPO Services Ltd; Supercop Kiran Bedi, and Jyoti Rai, VP - HR, American Express

Ladies' special

Your leadership style counts. If you lead by example then your being a man or woman is irrelevant. You will command respect anyway, says VANDANA RAMNANI

You are a woman. Do you think it is lonely at the top? Do you deliberate for long before saying yes to a great offer for the top job? Do you prefer making safe professional choices? Would you rather be the division head of your company instead of getting embroiled in the hurly burly of running an international/national empire? More importantly, do men question your high position? If they do, how do you handle them?

It is true that women today no longer, unlike in the yesteryears, have to stretch them-

selves to establish their credibility. The all-male corporate landscape now has a handful of women heads and their numbers are growing. Men too are used to seeing more women at the top and no longer question their being there. Sectors where one is likely to see more women at the top are banking, FMCG as compared to IT and manufacturing.

Though many women corporate heads do not see much difference when it comes to dealing with their male colleagues, they do acknowledge the inherent differences in leadership styles and the route

taken to climb that all-important corporate ladder.

Rekha Sethi, director general, All India Management Association, does not see any difference between her male and female colleagues. "I believe that your work speaks for you - your colleagues will respect you irrespective of your being a man / woman if you can earn that respect - through your work / leadership skills and empathy. I do hear of a lot of women struggling to make their place in a 'man's world' and I am sure that is true but I guess I have been one of the lucky ones who has had equal chances," she says.

Sangeeta Talwar, formerly president, South Asia for Tata Tea Group and executive director for Tata Tea Ltd, was perhaps the first woman executive when she joined the corporate sector 30 years ago. More than handling men, the main issue, Talwar says, is how a woman handles herself in a male landscape. "Be good to them (men)" is her advice.

Successful female leaders have to have three important qualities: Courage, which is presenting their point of view and defending what they think is right. The second is confidence, which is all about respecting other individuals and being able to believe in

themselves and respecting the individual. Compassion - seeing things from the others' perspective, too, is important.

Supercop Kiran Bedi is of the firm belief that the greatest challenge for women leaders is to continue being led by the leadership vision. For Bedi, the challenge is to continue to grow and not let enthusiasm dwindle, not let monotony set in. The challenge is how women will steer their male colleagues to collective development and continue to make it a win-win for the company and the individual. And if a woman is able to rise above her gender that becomes her greatest strength, she adds.

Bedi says she has never believed in asking others what she would not do and never asked them to be something that she could not be. "When you ask juniors to make sacrifices, you should be willing to do that yourself."

Five men and two women report to Gayatri Balaji-COO, Sparsh BPO Services. She says women are as competent as men and there is no real difference in handling both. Having said that, women do bring in a certain sensibility to the workplace, a certain level of understanding. However, there is a common perception that women can be taken for

granted as they are perceived as not being very strong.

What is most important is that male colleagues should respect their female boss and that boils down to her leadership style, the kind of leadership she is. Then being a woman or a man would be irrelevant.

Jyoti Rai, VP-HR, American Express, has two men reporting to her besides 19 others in her team. Men, she says, will view a complex situation by responding to the key concerns precluding the surrounding details and proceed to seek solutions for those. On the other hand, women are more likely to comprehensively try to grasp the information and put it in context before recommending solutions. The need for details, discussion and debate is, therefore, higher for women.

Another fundamental difference is that when women communicate they are more focused on conveying information and building connections/ consensus. However, they are also more likely to view feedback personally as opposed to objective appreciation of the same. These are perhaps marked differences when it comes to male employees/team members.

Male gender culture, says Rai, has traditionally been hierarchical. This means their

sense of accomplishment or progression typically stems from climbing higher on the corporate ladder. Therefore, managing expectations or showing genuine appreciation is a challenge especially if there is no significant elevation in position.

Male colleagues typically have a more facts-based approach as opposed to feelings. Empathy and emotional quotient, however, are essential ingredients to forge successful professional relationships. The challenge is to transform a transaction-based approach to a more interactive outlook.

Nina Chattrath, principal, leadership and talent consulting, Kornferry, agrees. "Though there is greater level of competitiveness than at the middle level, it has been found that women are not very comfortable about manoeuvring at the top and step away. There are enough and more capable women who stop short of the top slot not because they are short of calibre or competency but because they are unable to manoeuvre organisational agility. They are unable to manage multiple stakeholders and diverse interests concurrently," she says.

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Publication	Timesascent.in
Date	March 30, 2011
Edition	Online

CRICKET FEVER CATCHES UP AT WORK

As the Indian cricket team is all set to beat the Pakistanis in the semi-finals, organizations are ensuring maximum productivity at the workplace, without killing the fun.

As the entire nation awaits the India-Pakistan semi-finals, the best part is that no one has to plead excuses at work anymore to watch the match. Organizations have made special arrangements to appease the cricket fever of their employees. Says Susir Kumar, CEO & MD of Intelenet Global Solutions, "Intelenet is all geared up for the mega event. We intend to recreate the magic and spruce up the enthusiasm quotient on the premises. I think it is fair to say that India is a country where cricket is religion; hence the emotional chord binds us all when it comes to a good game of cricket." Here is a list of goodies that Intelenet has arranged for its employees:

- Giant size screen for mass viewing
- 4-5 LED televisions on each floor during the working hours when the match is on.
- Flexible break hours for people to watch the match as breaks in the BPO industry are strictly timed.
- Special snacks and beverages (non-alcoholic) arranged for all employees.
- Special India jerseys stall being put up with players' names and an option for customisation.
- Wrist bands, head bands, arm bands given out with Team India colours
- Tripartite colour face painting on the process floors
- Candies / jelly crystals with national flag colours being distributed during break timings
- Dress down day with the national flag colour options
- Flower decoration with white green and saffron at the main entrance.
- Contests for best cheerleaders, team with most enthusiasm and team with the best Indian attires

"It is true that cricket unites India, and if it is an Indo-Pak world cup encounter, unity acquires a whole new meaning. From an organisational perspective, it is the perfect opportunity for people to bond together and make new friends. Taking note of this spirit, we have set up a massive screen at Directiplex and have invited all cricket lovers to enjoy the cricketing spectacle with unlimited popcorn and juices. In fact, we have also declared this day as an optional holiday for those who wish to watch the match with families and friends," says Bhavin Turakhia, CEO, Founder and Chairman of The Directi Group.

Ashish Arora, Senior Consultant & Co-Lead, Text 100 Mumbai communications consulting firm talks about the festivities at Text 100, "An India-Pakistan world cup bout is a rare phenomenon in cricket history and it will be unfair if people do not get an opportunity to witness the spectacle. At Text 100, we have plans to recreate the stadium experience across all our offices in Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai. Live viewing on a large screen, costume party in cricketing gear, body painting, placards, thematic decorations, food and booze are some of the ssexciting elements being planned at respective offices. After all, it is going be one hell of a BLUETiful experience."

It is obvious that no organization can be immune from the fever that has gripped the nation on the eve of one of the most awaited matches ever!

Link: <http://www.timesascent.in/article/1/20110330201103301303581924a592da3/Cricket-fever-catches-up-at-work.html>

Publication	The Financial Express
Date	February 11, 2011
Edition	National

FE New Economy

REBOOTING THE SYSTEM

BPOs dial SOS over English

THE FLIGHT of voice processes to countries like the Philippines is making BPO companies in India jittery. Certain segments of the industry are now demanding that the government introduce a mandatory spoken English and business communication course in regional language schools that would ensure a higher supply of employable talent while moderating soaring wage expenses.

Employability of candidates applying for international voice business has emerged as a key challenge over the last few years and is perhaps affecting the perception of the buyer as to how well India can do vis-a-vis other emerging destinations. Out of every 100 people interviewed in BPO firm 24/7 Customer, only three get hired. In Hinduja Global Solutions Limited, only 10 make the cut while Aditya Birla Minacs ends up hiring about 20 for every 100 candidates considered.

Industry leaders say it is time for the government to intervene since it is not possible to make candidates who have studied in vernacular schools fluent and confident in business communication with a few weeks of training. BPOs are unwilling to invest more time in education since employees have little loyalty – all investments in the employee go waste because he is soon head-hunted by a rival. The BPO industry therefore argues it requires government help just like the IT industry. In the early 80s, numerous courses were designed to help the nascent IT services industry – Masters and Bachelors in Computer Applications, in Computer Science and in Applied Maths among others.

"Irrespective of voice or non-voice work, fluency in language helps people gain confidence. If a mandatory spoken and written English course is introduced in the education system, they would become very fluent in English communication," says co-founder and chief people officer of 24/7 Customer S Nagarajan. Spoken English should be enforced as a second language in vernacular schools and students should be tested at Xth and XIIth levels, he suggests.

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population that is one-tenth of India. Philippines has compulsory English courses.

Milind Godbole, president of Asia Pacific at Aditya Birla Minacs, says that most government schools can make it compulsory for students to speak in English within the campus. Second, reading abilities need to be developed.

"We are good in product knowledge. But there is a desperate need to develop conversational abilities. When somebody starts speaking in a typical American or a British or an Australian way, we struggle; we give monosyllabic answers while the customer is habitual of expecting some other statement. We appear not very empathetic," he notes.

Besides spoken English, even written communication skills are now becoming critical for Indian BPOs as they are now transitioning from primarily being a call centre to a contact centre – contact can happen via SMS, email, chat, or call. "Mobile texting has introduced short form of words and sentences. It does not affect spoken skills but has started affecting grammatically correct sentences," Godbole says.

He suggests that courses have to start very early in schools – around the Vth or VIth standard since this is the time students start cultivating habits. Also, it would make them

employable by the time they finish school – most BPOs have started recruiting non-graduates.

Sandeep Aggarwal, EVP, Sales, Solutions and Transitions at Intelnet doesn't see any employability gap at the moment but says a person from a vernacular background would never be able to manage unless he or she is exceptional. "Will English courses help vernacular people increase their chances of getting employed in the BPO industry? The answer is yes. The way it will help the industry is by bringing in more supply of labour into the talent pool. This may reduce cost pressures," he notes.

Jessy Christin, vice-president of Human Resources at Hinduja Global Solutions Limited says that at the university level, having a course in business communication will help. But it should be supplemented by other courses relevant to the industry – telephone etiquettes, listening ability and keyboard skills among others. "Structured BPO oriented courses should be aimed at training final year students who would soon be venturing into the job market. Such training intervention is more needed in the tier-2 and tier-3 towns which are emerging as the new hubs for our BPO industry," he says.

■ Goutam Das

EXPERTSPEAK

S NAGARAJAN
co-founder & chief people officer, 24/7 Customer



The BPO industry's scope is wide – we can produce more jobs than the IT industry if the government can create an English course that increases the employability of candidates. In regional language schools, business communication with spoken English as a focus area needs to be compulsory.

MILIND GODBOLE
president (Asia Pacific)
Aditya Birla Minacs



It should be good if the environmental education curriculum in some schools can be modified and replaced with reading the newspaper aloud and with story-telling. We suffer a lot in grammatically articulating things. Reading stories and books aloud and storytelling increases the confidence of the employee.

JESSY CHRISTIN
vice-president, human resources, HGSL



If the industry by consensus decides to adopt any assessment test as authoritative, it will be helpful for the industry as well as the aspirants. We will benefit from substantial savings in our sourcing costs due to reduced cycle time. The candidates will benefit from having a common and transparent process across the companies.

STATFACTS

A MIXED BAG

- The BPO industry stands at a robust \$14.7 bn
- Industry to post 15-17% growth in FY11
- India's share of worldwide BPO spending is down from 35% in 2008 to 34% in 2009
- Non-voice revenues have grown from 53% of the overall mix in FY07 to 57% in FY10
- Industry directly employed 985,000 people in FY10 compared to 155,000 in FY02
- Direct employment in the industry has jumped at a CAGR of 26% since FY02
- Wages are expected to rise 20% in FY11

Publication	financialexpress.com
Date	February , 11, 2011
Edition	Online

BPOS DIAL SOS OVER ENGLISH

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Link: <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/bpos-dial-sos-over-english/748673/0>