

## A lot can happen over coffee!

Team Ascent, Online

July 30, 2008

The Orchid Hotel in Mumbai witnessed a congregation of sorts with some of the biggest names which came together for the HR Café on 23-24th July 2008. Organised by Par Excellence, a primary training and consulting firm, HR Café was a one-of-its-kind conclave for People-Practice Champions to come together collaboratively. This conclave ensured interactivity among delegates as opposed to conventional lecture formats which most HR summits follow.

The purpose of this conclave was to enable the creation of pure knowledge for intelligent application. It facilitated collaboration among competing companies on people-related emerging challenges, thus evolving a solutions paradigm collectively. The attempt here was to look at sunrise industries that are engaging with multiple talent as well as alignment related challenges.

The conclave saw participation from some of the biggest names in the world of media, entertainment and retail. The audience actively participated in deciphering concerns and evolving practical, ready-to-use solutions.

Rajeshwar Upadhyay, director, Par Excellence said, “Our attempt is to understand industry specific current and future trends and challenges and to explore People-Practice Champions’ astute responses to the challenges. The overarching need of HR Café is to create indigenous frameworks to resolve existing and emergent issues, given their industry specificity.”

The first day of the congregation revolved around the major talent management issues in the media and entertainment sectors. HR heads from Sony Entertainment, Tata Sky, UTV, Radio Mirchi, Sa Re Ga Ma were a few among those present.

Speaking about talent management, Sujaya Banerjee, chief learning officer, Essar Group said, “The new source of competitive advantage is not Capital, not Strategy, not Technology...but People.” The current scenario of the war for talent is that it is an extremely competitive job market with a severe attrition of young talent.

The questions here were – Does the organisation know what it is good at? What is it that an organisation needs to build for more and more people to succeed? Do we really understand the business the way it works?

“IT is going through a turmoil. We don’t know what to do with the 5,000 young and bright engineers we have. As we foresee, it is the HR and not finance or marketing that will take the cake,” noted K Srinivas Rao, head strategy-HR, Satyam Computer Services Ltd.

Post lunch, the HR Café explored the following themes:

- Talent Acquisition
- Talent Alignment
- Talent Engagement
- Talent Development

The forum used open spaces as a mechanism for driving discussions in the four above mentioned areas, in an industry specific way. The first part comprised a CEO from the industry setting the context. Participants thereafter began generating problems experienced in their industry with the help of anchor facilitators.

The second part of the session comprised generation of applicable solutions in the light of research material available. This, thereafter, became the final presentation with an indicative dashboard. The concluding session comprised ‘bringing it together, taking it forward’ with a celebrative ‘can do, will do attitude.

The second day revolved around the major talent management issues in the Retail sector. Not only were the sessions insightful but the audience participation too was high. Trent (Westside), Café Coffee Day, Wills, K. Raheja, Gini & Jony from the industry and TISS, ITM from the academia were few of those present there. Interestingly, some experts from outside the industry too talked about their best industry practices which the Retail segment could benefit from. “The Retail industry needs to resort to cross-fertilisation method and incorporate best practices of other industries like IT/ITES,” K. Srinivas Rao, head strategy, human resources, Satyam pointed out. He further added, “Any industry that is nascent and still evolving needs to go out and borrow measures of other industries instead of re-inventing the wheel.”

Talking of the major manpower issues facing the industry, Sangeeta Singh, executive director, HR, KPMG stressed on the need of looking beyond traditional talent pools. “Retailers are dipping into the same talent pool that’s exposed to other industries. They need to create their own talent pool by moving into tier2, 3 & 4 cities/towns.” She also stressed on the fact that young school pass-outs in rural India can be looked at as potential employees.

Another interesting point made was the transition of the retail industry. “It is shifting to the hospitality model where customers are looking at the salesman as a ‘host’, providing an overall shopping experience,” Rao noted. He further added, “The frontline executive is not just a salesman but a host. S/he has the power to influence the consumers’ buying decision.”

However, the industry is grappling with the age-old issues of talent acquisition, retention, employee engagement and training-development. “We need to brand this industry and create glamour value just like the BPO industry did five years back,” Rao asserted.

