

Spot Talent Not Qualifications

I go for long walk in the housing complex where I stay. I noticed recently that day a certain tree was in full bloom. And the next day somebody had fixed on the tree what looked like a notice - but it wasn't. The 'notice' gave details of the botanical name of the plant, and further informed that it was perhaps the only one of its kind in the city of Thane. That made it a rare plant.

Every time I pass by the tree, I look up and smile. So rare and yet I never knew it was so near!

This is how I felt when I met people at Arihant Industrial Corporation. This is a small industry which is all set to cross the Rs 100 Cr mark. Set up in 1984, it now has a factory at Vasai and one more is set up recently at Manor.

This is one place which students of Human Resource Development would do well to visit and study. I did, so I know. They are in the business of making water-slides, and water-park. They supply to several countries across the world. There is nothing new about this, right? But now look at some of the things that make this organisation special.

Arihant went through very difficult times financially in the nineties. Managers offered to take a salary cut. Workers [say with a sense of pride that they] worked on 'single overtime' basis. When they came out of the difficult times, the people were compensated. To set record right I must also tell you that this is not told to me by the MD who holds a large chunk of shares, but by the workers themselves. Learning computers was made compulsory to workers. Even this should not surprise you, right? You would have seen this happen in many industries! So what's special?

Workers told me that they were allowed 'space' [the actual words were that 'they were allowed to make mistakes and take decisions on their own']. I met Shrikant Parab who is qualified as a welder, a highly skilled welder. He worked as a welder in Arihant. But the MD trained and eventually promoted him as 'Logistics Executive.' He handles logistics and distribution. When he joined the company his qualification was '7th Standard pass.' Somewhere along the line he has cleared matriculation! [Champions of IIMs, and Managers of Talent, are you reading this?]

Dattaram Pawar told me that he is '3rd Standard fail!' Like Parab, he too joined as an unskilled worker. His talent was spotted early. He is now Production Executive, and a reliable one! Both Parab and Pawar told me that they were authorized to decide on a lot of issues, and sign many important documents which would certify quality and clear dispatches. Do you really believe that a '3rd Standard fail' can make it as an executive? Do you really believe that a welder can be an efficient Logistics Executive? In case you do not believe, please revisit your assumptions and beliefs. Or better still, visit Arihant!

Sandeep Sagvekar worked in the buffing department where the powder deposited on your clothes and body keeps only your eyes and teeth white! He was moved as a delivery boy, then finally in sales. The company's regular sales team was not able to do a good job, so Sandeep was pressed in service. The MD realised that he was a go-getter and the customers of his products could be addressed in Marathi. Sandeep beat all expectations. He brought in sales more than three times that of his predecessors. Similar is the story of Ravi

Rajput who is considered an AutoCAD 'cat!' If the drawings are complicated, if a problem is to be solved, it is Rajput who is relied upon.

You may argue that this is all possible in a small company. I would invite you to revisit that assumption too. In the company where I used to work two peons moved in staff cadre and almost made it to the managerial cadre. I know that such was the case in the seventies in many companies. But today we [me included!] need reminders for the fact that in the field of Human Resource Development there are limitless possibilities. And the limits really exist in our minds.

The real message is that we must learn to identify individual talent. To believe that only one type of people can succeed in an organization is not just wrong but such nonsense. I have had the benefit of a long discussion with late Mr. KR Mondkar. He was the CEO of the erstwhile TELCO, now Tata Motors. Mondkar began his career as a dispatch clerk in Bombay House. As he was about to retire, he wrote a letter to JRD Tata requesting for a meeting. And JRD obliged, inviting him over for a cup of tea. JRD enquired, referring to Mondkar's letter, 'You write so well, Mr. Mondkar, where did you learn to write such excellent English?' Mondkar replied, 'Sir, I often mailed your letters as a dispatch clerk, do you think I mailed them without reading?' Mondkar had insatiable quest for excellence, but in the case of others a mentor like MD of Arihant [who incidentally holds no formal qualification in HRD or coaching,] can do the job.

It is time for us to open our mind and spot talent, not qualifications! The unique people are in our sight every day, like the tree near my home!!

Vivek

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