

## Building a service industry mindset in India

'Being the society we serve' has spent little more than a year with full of learning's and fine tuning. This has grown on us and has led credence to the philosophy of driving inclusive growth in India through our vision of 'Enable India Live Better'.

We are beginning to see the challenges that present themselves in our growth journey - in building key capabilities. And, our people management capability. We attempt to describe our approach and learning so far on our people strategy.



The **b**eginning is our take-away

Through the course of 2008, we have prided in opening more stores and formats than globally normal. This has come with its accelerated share of learning's: some of them very basic and universal, but learning nevertheless:

- Value lies in the last mile
- Having specialist capabilities across customer understanding and interaction points is secondary to integrating these points to deliver one single message to our customer
- And that this business will be an mass employer. Hence our ability to staff is lesser of a problem than ability to staff with consistent knowledge, skills and attitude

We built a people management framework that will stand the test of geographic complexity and scale in the short term and manage costs on a steady state in the long term.

To achieve this, there were primarily **f**ive pillars.

## 1. **A**vailability of manpower

India while on a population of 1 Billion, we were constrained by the fact that only 87 million were available post their secondary education. So how do we staff our business an estimated 50,000 trained people, predominantly customer facing? The answer though came through a simpler route – to be the store of the community we needed the community to work with us. Our customer facing talent strategy hence is based on '*everyone can work at easyday*'. We today have a diverse workforce working with us. We have

provided opportunities to many people who hitherto never imagined that they could be employed and earn a fair wage. Housewives and local meat cutters are two examples.

## 2. **S**kills are teachable, attitude may not be...

So while we believe that 'everyone can work at easyday' opened up the talent funnel to almost 500 odd million Indians who could potentially work in organized employment, the challenge was to impart skills to people who never worked in Retail or other organized employment. There came in the realization that basic training was an investment necessary to increase our supply demand gap. Flexible work options enhanced the opportunity. Bharti Academy of Retail with 12000 walk-ins in a year has demonstrated the supply for us to train and employ. India is still very conventional to job options and has strong mind sets that also need to be overcome for people to utilize the opportunities that retail sector will generate. 2009 will see another path breaking employment model on seasonal workforce.

## 3. **T**raining, our way of life

'Training' as a word in our industry should be replaced by character. Our ability to provide consistent customer service experience across formats and locations will singularly depend on two capabilities. First, ability to simplify learning to enhance assimilation & retention. Second, supervisor realization and ownership that even the most basic of tasks need constant top of the mind reinforcement and hence play a trainer role is critical.

## 4. Service to our associates

As we have already experienced, an Indian's adaptability to the mobile phone technology has other spin offs. We have experienced a higher assimilation and comfort in use of other technology and devices. For example, the cash till key board, texlon operation etc. Understandably significant training inputs are given to help them use this technology for superior customer experience.

Initially, choice of the service delivery platform to associates went the conventional route. Of that of web based service through in-store desktops. However, it did hit a point of no utility as the talent strategy was to bring in people from anywhere - no literacy, no education, no experience. With India having a greater penetration of mobile phones than fixed line and with a lineage of being a global big in mobility, it was an obvious choice to have a associate service center providing multi lingual, toll free service.

With a brand 'myHR', this service provides seamless one point service to our associates. This we believe will be the cultural anchor of our large workforce spread across locations. This will be a tangible experience to our associates and drive consistency of service and culture. Today 40% of our associates use this service month on month.

Strategically, in the HR Model, it helps focus and leverage Business HR partners on to helping supervisors and Business Leaders fine tune their people management skills.

## 5. Leadership at all levels

This by far has been the biggest learning through the year. This is at three broad levels:

- a. How do we teach and impart ownership of people and assets?
- b. How do we teach 'store profitability'?
- c. How do we integrate key drivers at the organization level to deliver seamless value to our customers? – eg : Integration of Merchandizing and Marketing thinking with Operations execution? Or how do our middle managers manage multiple functional specialists to leverage expertise for their business?

A vital success factor would be build specialized talent in areas of Merchandizing, Real Estate Development and Supply Chain. These have long gestation period of acquiring and grooming talent and learning to make India come up to capability levels of high retail penetration markets.

We believe that the venture between Bharti and Wal-Mart will generate India's first generation retail leaders. The global experience and understanding of Wal-Mart and the Indian Market understanding through market leadership and innovation will be the best business school for retail professionals.

2009 will be focus on this pillar. Combination of our leadership grooming strategy and development framework of University of Bharti Retail will help start the foundation laying of a strong business leadership DNA of 'making everyone successful'



### About the author and quick information:

Hari Abburi heads the People Function for Bharti Retail. As a member of the management team at Bharti Retail has been part of the team in shaping up the people strategy for the retail venture.

The strategy of 'being the society we served' is an outcome of several inputs from Indian Retail experience, global practices within the Wal-Mart world, global and Indian retail competitor benchmarks and practices. Importantly, this reflects the Bharti Group leadership thinking and approach to people management framework that has been at the heart of its success in India.

We acknowledge all contributors and thinkers who have helped shape up this strategy and success so far.

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