



Hari Abburi, Head-People, Bharti Retail Ltd.

## Dignity Of Work Works For All

*Despite the drivers for each generation being different, the basic tenets of the workplace that are universal are respect, dignity at work and skills for life*

**BHARTI** Retail has a clear belief that over the next decade the industry will witness a significant shift in the mindsets of people with regard to employment (*as is understood today*), says Mr. Hari Abburi. Deployment of hourly workforce, flexible work hours and weekend options are some of the expected developments. These will lead to employment options for many people who could not pursue a livelihood in the present structured system.

In line with the company's vision of 'Enable India Live Better', Mr. Abburi shares some details about the current employee base, "At Bharti Retail, we believe that a diverse workforce is vital to driving inclusive growth in the country. We currently have a diverse set of people working with us: housewives (13 per cent), F&V vendors (14 per cent), local meat shop cutters (13 per cent), mature urbanites (11 per cent), differently-abled people (8 per cent), retired personnel (2 per cent), and rural population (5 per cent), in addition to school (18 per cent) and college (16 per cent) students/drop-outs. As a result of this diversity, there are two to three generations of Indians working with us including fathers and daughters, mothers and daughters/sons, brothers and sisters, and retired people aged 45 to 50 years and above. This has helped us become a workplace for the community and identify ourselves with the society we serve."

The binding factor for the diverse population at Bharti Retail is that of gaining 'skills for life'. This meaningful engagement strategy helps the company hire people for great attitudes, without any qualifications or command over English, as well as impart knowledge and

skills for enhancing their livelihood in an environment of respect. The positive work culture impacts the quality of life of their associates' families as well.

We then asked Mr. Abburi exactly how effective learning is imparted, and he explains, "Our associates interact with thousands of customers everyday. Our culture of listening to our associates to pick up feedback and ideas quickly, and responding back is at the heart of it. We also have best-in-class practices across stores that support learning and development. We believe our training practices drive the edge in customer service in the industry by incorporating real-time feedback and experiences."

Bharti Retail has instituted practices that ensure formal and informal two-way communication. Daily huddles, poster campaigns, store visits, training forums, and internal websites all merge together to successfully create and spearhead a highly informed workforce.

This focus on learning and communication has ensured quantifiable gains. Mr. Abburi affirms, "Bharti Retail is the first company in the industry to offer permanent 4-hour jobs and flexible work options. This has enabled contribution from unconventional segments (*housewives who work in the morning, college students who work in the evening, etc.*). We believe our opportunities fit into the lives of people who work with us rather than people having to fit into the opportunities we provide. A mixed generational workforce teaches itself basic values, patience, counsel, new generation skills, and dignity of work

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Despite the drivers for each generation being different, the basic tenets of the workplace that are universal are: respect at the workplace, dignity of work, and skills for life. Hence, the cultural outcomes are focussed on being successful, to develop skills and wanting to do better in life.

Mr. Abburi comments on the role of culture, "Working with very elderly, retired, middle-aged and very young associates has taught us that as long as we respect people for their abilities and contributions, age does not come in the way. While India continues to grapple with changing age groups in the managerial population, we believe that the changing outlook to employment will not be centred around this belief. We have young people in managerial roles successfully leading associates who are of their parents' age."

He rounds up by sharing his two-fold learnings as a retail HR professional. Firstly, investing in the training of people ensures that the employability of the population is collectively enhanced. Secondly, dignity of work is important to all. Regardless of the role, if people can be made to feel proud of their

contributions, the larger population will come into organised employment. For instance, this concept has enabled Bharti Retail to have about 40 per cent women working in its stores, primarily because they feel respected and valued. This has made their families believe that working holds importance for them.

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