

Getting at the bottomline

This book is not for the light hearted or for those who want to merely perform jobs in HR." The opening sentence is hardly conventional for a book on HR management, a field known for its sedateness; yet Jyothi Menon pulls it off in this passion-filled, passion-creating work, keeping up the tension in an almost un-putdownable manner till the very last page. All that passion brings across the central message that managing human resources has become the most important element of management as success in this area translates directly to an improved bottomline. A rather bland summary – definitely a great deal lost in 'translation'.

Perhaps, getting Kiran Karnik, the then president, Nasscom to write the foreword may not be something to rave about; but getting her own boss, Pradeep Nevatia, MD, Lason India to insert a second foreword shows a glimpse of what the author refers to as *true class* in HR practice values in Lason India, based on "respect, dignity for all, and a deep organisational reverence for the customer". Menon comes across as a loving passionate human being whether at work or at home. Her deep involvement in all her activities can be seen in her mention of her family – her world revolves around [them] and life has forever been transformed by their presence.

The Power of Human Relations is not just another of those HR books – interspersed with aphorisms, theories, truisms and clichés. Presented by way of a dialogue between mentor and protégé, at once intimate and semi-formal, it excites myriad concepts that seem to have been buried deep within one's own consciousness to rise and acknowledge the wisdom and insight of the grandfather at 'Neem Tree Place'. In our continuous search for the ideal organisation that can attract the best talent and retain them, where systems are not driven by 'dreary desert of dead habit' there is yet a tendency towards *chalta hai* – the anything-goes attitude. We could blame it on the circumstances in which HR as a management discipline has grown – in subservience to the central objective of the organisation, i.e. production.

As Mohan Thite in his book *Managing People in the New Economy* says, "From the beginning, top management has driven HR, and HR professionals had little exposure and opportunity to contribute to strategy formulation and implementation." Rather the attitude towards HR as a discipline itself has been one of *chalta hai* with the supercilious notion that anyone can 'manage people'. This is perhaps because HR management is highly organisation-specific, situation-specific – and does not have any pre-defined formulae or techniques. Further the contribution of HR managers to the bottomline is not directly assessable.

Menon takes all this head-on. To the claim of the

subservient nature of HR management, she strikes out with vehemence: there is a desperate need for world-class organisations in our country, she says, and it is imperative we begin now. "We cannot have world-class technology and poor people management skills that do not either complement the technology or conversely the people involved in the management of that technology. We cannot get ourselves in to the comfort zones (*chalta hai?*) that we are slipping into. We are getting so comfortable, the employees in several companies that I have seen are settling for the *status quo*."

To the claim that the contribution of HR to the bottomline is not assessable she throws an interesting challenge – *the cost of one employee is the gross revenue of the company divided by the head count*. Admittedly unorthodox, it covers the cost of hiring, training ... and "the indirect cost of trust that is bestowed upon a new employee". A new employee, she explains, takes time to settle down and earn the trust of both his peers and seniors. Till that time he is not in full productive steam and that costs the company money; he is productive after trust has been gained on either side.

Perhaps the most powerful point made in the context of the bottomline by the mysterious, Surendran, psychologist, turn-around artist of many a tea estate, mentor and grandfather of the protagonist, is that of building *Brand Ambassadors*. No employee can be a 'mere employee.' Mere, ordinary employees don't impact anyone, least of all customers. These are your brand ambassadors. They are keepers of your brand.

Summarising the main thrust of the book would be a near-impossible task. A daring attempt is, however, made with the hesitancy of one capturing the spirit of a billowing cloud of passion!

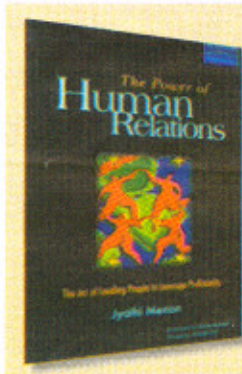
New customers are gained and the loyalty of existing customers is ensured when those within the organisation provide the energy for each other and create an environment that influences external customers positively.

Organisation-employee-customer relationship is crucial. *The company fosters the employee fosters the customer fosters the company.*

Empower your employees to become brand ambassadors, train them with the proper tools, and see how they influence the customers. Nothing promotes business like proud brand ambassadors.

It is just three components that can make or break a business. People, people and people.

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