

Build a suitable culture to treat customers as king

ACI Logistics Executive Director Sabbir Hasan Nasir shares his thoughts at The Daily Star's The Chief Executive Show powered by Marico

DWOHA CHOWDHURY

'Customer is king' is a mantra which is easy to say but very difficult to apply in real life.

To prioritise the motto in any organisation, the chief executive or the top brass have to lead from the front to build a suitable culture.

This was the main takeaway from a recent interview with Sabbir Hasan Nasir, executive director of ACI Logistics.

With a vision to set up retail outlets all across the country, ACI Logistics launched Shwapno in 2008.

It has since become Bangladesh's largest grocery chain with Nasir leading it towards the horizon since December 2011.

Pragmatism, vision, goal orientation and adaptability are the key traits needed to achieve personal and professional esteem, according to the executive director.

As said by Warren Buffet,

THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE SHOW

creating trust with customers by providing quality products.

"When a top leader practically shows that quality is his number one priority, others become bound to follow," he said, adding that customer complaints cause anxiety.

And when the top brass becomes anxious, it is felt in every sector of the organisation until things eventually get better.

This is why Nasir believes that achieving operational excellence is a daily endeavour, considering the scope for human error.

So to make its operations more effective and efficient, Shwapno arranges weekly meetings to dissect customer complaints and find solutions. "Other than apologising to an aggrieved customer, we offer



Sabbir Hasan Nasir

one of the top 10 overall brands last year, which was the fourth consecutive year it won the 'Best Brand Award' by Kantar Millward Brown and the Bangladesh Brand Forum.

The journey to the top was not an easy one though as by the time Nasir had taken the helm, Shwapno was struggling to stay afloat with 33 of its 70 outlets having closed down.

But under his stewardship, the grocery chain roared back to life.

There are currently 143 Shwapno outlets across 22 districts.

Ever since Agora became the country's first supershop in the late 90s, the industry has evolved and now accounts for

1.6 per cent of the country's \$16 billion retail market.

Meanwhile, Shwapno holds a 49 per cent share of the supermarkets' market share.

Having led the brand to all these achievements, Nasir believes that it was fate that shaped him.

During his formative years, Nasir had a passion for music and even formed a band when he was a 10th grade student at the Saint Joseph High School in Khulna.

After completing his HSC, Nasir was persuaded by his father to join the department of mechanical engineering at Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology (BUET).

He also believes he was very fortunate to have started his professional career as a research assistant to Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam, a veteran physicist and cosmologist.

A year later though, Nasir shifted to the corporate world in search of financial stability and became an intern at the Bata Shoe Company, where he was later promoted to senior efficiency officer.

During his time at Bata, Nasir completed an evening MBA degree from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) at the University of Dhaka.

He then worked in various capacities for Tetra Pak Asian Emerging Market, Dekko Accessories, Golfrate H&PC Limited in Angola and Shapla Initiative.

In June 2006, Nasir became CEO of the country's leading furniture company, Otobi.

But before joining ACI Logistics, Nasir had started his own consulting firm called, 'Road Map Limited', in 2011.

As Shwapno's executive director, Nasir kept developing himself to adapt with the fourth industrial revolution.

He strongly believes that geopolitical and macroeconomic data are important aspects for business.

"We live in a globally connected economy," he said.

Along with keeping himself updated, Nasir also ensures that Shwapno's employees are similarly skilled.

"Among more than 4,200 employees, around 2,800 are store based and are the key focus for skills training as it is here

where customers interact with us," Nasir said.

Around 72 per cent of all the vegetables and 52 per cent of the fish sold by Shwapno at its various outlets are directly sourced from farmers.

So, the sourcing team members must have the skills to properly interact with the growers.

This is how Shwapno became the country's first member of the Global GAP (Good Agricultural Products) in Southeast Asia.

Besides, the brand's office support employees are also trained to be agile and understand Kanban, which is a workflow management method.

"The skill upgradation process is happening all the time," Nasir added.

Shwapno stayed open amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and Nasir even encouraged his frontline employees to believe that they are serving the nation in this time of crisis.

While maintaining proper health safety protocols for all employees, Shwapno did not layoff a single worker due to

the Covid-19 fallout and there were no salary cuts either, the executive director said.

Shwapno found other opportunities amid the crisis as well by collaborating with delivery services like Foodpanda to expand its touchless grocery delivery service.

It also initiated the 'Phone e phone e bazaar', so that customers who avoid ecommerce platforms could place orders via a simple phone or video call.

For communicating, Nasir has one simple tip: be yourself, there's nothing to worry.

"Just give all of yourself and that's the secret," he said.

Even though Nasir has already achieved a lot in his professional career, he never gave up his passion for music.

In the past couple of years, his music career flourished as he released several tracks.

"I could never be anything orthodox because I am basically an artist. Primarily, I am a musician, but as the music industry has many obstacles, I found my living in business management," Nasir said.

"But still, I kept my artist soul with me," he added.

"When a top leader practically shows that quality is his number one priority, others are bound to follow it."

it takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it.

"And I strongly believe in this," Nasir said.

To maintain the company's reputation, Nasir focuses on

gifts and make him or her a part of our fact-finding team as an adviser," Nasir said.

Shwapno was named a 'Superbrand' by Superbrands Bangladesh for two consecutive years in 2019 and 2020.

Shwapno was also declared

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GLOBAL BUSINESS

China's stunning export comeback has factories scrambling for workers

REUTERS, Beijing

China's manufacturing recovery, fuelled in part by demand from COVID-constrained consumers abroad, has soared past expectations this year, so much so that factories are now struggling to fill a shortage of blue-collar workers to clear mounting orders.

The country's output of industrial robots, computer equipment, and integrated circuits has roared back from its coronavirus paralysis - production for the year to November is up 22.2 per cent, 10.1 per cent and 15.9 per cent, respectively.

Much of the manufacturing boom has come from foreign demand, with export growth topping expectations for eight of the last nine months.

The remarkable turnaround comes as China has mostly eradicated the virus and contrasts with the sluggish comebacks seen in major industrialised peers, where factories are still struggling with pandemic disruptions and the hit to demand.

China's global export share increased to over 13 per cent in the second and third quarters from 11 per cent last year, according to Nomura, the highest for any quarter since at least 2006 when the investment bank started compiling the data.

While emergency stimulus in the United States and Europe pumped money into consumers' wallets, the fight to contain the virus in those markets fired up demand both for China-made PPE goods and gadgets for westerners stuck at home.

Government data shows that in November there were more people employed in the industrial sector in Jinhua city, which includes the eastern export hub of Yiwu, than there had been at any time since end-2017.

"We laid off about 50 workers in the first half, and now with orders soaring, we're short of staff and not able to further ramp up production," said Deng Jinling, who owns a thermal flask factory



REUTERS/FILE

Employees, wearing masks, work on a production line manufacturing display monitors at a TPV factory in Wuhan, China.

in Yiwu, selling to the Middle East, United States and Europe.

"We tried hiring dozens of temporary workers but they're not good enough," said Deng.

Some workers she laid off have found jobs back home and are not willing to travel back just a few months before the upcoming Lunar New Year holidays in February.

But with clients chasing her heels, Deng bought two automated production lines at the end of November to boost efficiency.

"We've never thought about doing this before, but this year has been so busy and we've exhausted

our options," she said. "One automated production line is the equivalent of 10 workers."

A private index by Renmin University tracking demand for blue-collar labour hit a record in the third quarter. Some factory managers have hiked wages by 25 per cent to 10,000 yuan (\$1,530) per month, well above the average starting wage for graduates, according to local media.

For China's bicycle industry, 2020 is the best year in a decade, with consumers abroad craving exercise and ways to avoid public transport, said Liang Xiaoling,

general manager at Guangzhou-headquartered Trinx Bikes.

"Our capacity maxed out in September and October, and we hired a lot of temporary workers to catch up with the demand," said Liang, adding that orders are now stretching into 2022.

His factories now employ about 100 extra temporary workers on top of 1,000 or so regular staff.

Although manufacturing investment was slow to recover, falling 3.5 per cent over the first 11 months, strong export demand helped it rebound in the last quarter.

Investment jumped 12.5 per

cent year-on-year in November, up from 3.7 per cent in October, according to research from analysts at CICC, an investment bank.

Zhang Qinming, who owns a company manufacturing speakers for European and American markets, says demand is 25 per cent higher than in previous years.

He's been paying his normal staff overtime to keep up and has also hired temporary workers for about 18-19 yuan an hour, 20 per cent more than his full-time workers. As a last resort, he's leased other factories to take the load.

NEWS In Brief

UK retail sales pick up ahead of Christmas

REUTERS, London

British retail sales recovered in December as restrictions on shops were eased and consumers bought food and other essentials ahead of Christmas, but the outlook for January was the worst since the summer, a survey showed on Monday.

The Confederation of British said its monthly retail sales balance rose to -3 in December from -25 in November, its highest level in three months.

But the outlook for January was much more negative with a reading of -33.

"It says something about the challenges the retail sector has faced during 2020 that stable sales volumes in the run-up to Christmas were seen as a good result for the time of year," CBI economist Ben Jones said.

"The new year looks set for an unpromising start, with retailers anticipating a sharp fall in sales in January."

The survey was conducted between Nov. 23 and Dec. 14, covering the end of a second English coronavirus lockdown, when non-essential shops were closed - and the return to tiered restrictions.

Gold jumps on US stimulus deal cheer

REUTERS

Gold climbed to a six-week high on Monday, driven by news that US congressional leaders reached agreement on a COVID-19 aid package, while lockdowns in the United Kingdom soured appetite for riskier assets and added to the metal's support.

Spot gold rose 0.9 per cent to \$1,896.56 per ounce by 0745 GMT, having earlier hit its highest since Nov. 9 at \$1,906.46. US gold futures gained 0.8 per cent to \$1,904.20.

The \$900 billion US stimulus deal reached on Sunday comes as the pandemic accelerates, infecting more than 214,000 people in the country each day.



REUTERS/FILE

Gold bar and coins are on display at a store of Hatton Garden Metals in London, Britain.