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# NEXT STEP

## SERVING THE FINEST IN F&B

### Interview with Managing Director of Watercress, Sheikh Aftab Ahmed

**What was your motivation to come to this (Food and Beverage) industry?**

To be honest, I do have a career. But this is something I am really passionate about. That passion is what drove me to enter this industry. It doesn't mean that I have to sacrifice my career. In addition to that, I myself am a potential client. During my trips abroad, I found that the quality of food and ambience of the restaurant with respect to the price were something that we couldn't find in Bangladesh. So I thought there must be thousands of Bangladeshis who are craving such a restaurant or food chain that would provide excellent food in a great space but at a reasonable price. In short, I, through Olive Tree Foods Ltd., want to lay the cornerstone of modern F & B in Bangladesh. Plus we want to show people that the F&B industry is a place where there is scope for talented people for a rewarding career. These were my sole motivations.

**How big is the F&B industry in Bangladesh?**

Since food is one of the very basic necessities, you can probably imagine how huge the industry is. Most employed people are now having their lunch and dinner outside. With more women joining the workforce, there is a steady decline on the dependency of homemade food. If you consider one crore middle income people spending Taka 200 per day for food outside their house then the F&B industry becomes a Taka 60,000 crore industry at least. So you can easily see how enormous this industry is.



**What was the toughest part when you started Olive Tree Foods Ltd.?**

Frankly speaking, it's really hard to pinpoint a single aspect as the toughest part in the industry. There were several challenges that we faced. We want to provide premium food for people at a sensible price range. And since we don't compromise with the quality of the food, we have to face stern competition with our competitors. Moreover, people in Bangladesh are very price sensitive.

Hence only a few understand the value of the product or food that we offer in this price range. But the good news is the situation is slowly changing. People are becoming health conscious, which is definitely great news for the modern F&B industry.

We also face an acute shortage of talented human resource with industry-specific skills in Bangladesh. The scenario is even worse for F&B. It sees one of the highest employee turnover rates. Scarcity of fresh ingredients is always a big issue.

**In the modern F&B industry, what is the compensation structure like? What is the scope of developing a career here?**

I would like to address the salary issue in two different parts: the present salary situation and the potential salary in the future. Since the industry is in a very primitive state, the salary in this industry isn't that promising yet. But it's not the case if you have experience in industry or if you are a really great chef. The good news is that industry veterans are coming here

*During my trips abroad, I found that the quality of food and ambience of the restaurant with respect to the price were something that we couldn't find in Bangladesh. So I thought there must be thousands of Bangladeshis who are craving such a restaurant or food chain.*

now. Hence the salary structure is getting a gentle lift. In the next couple of years, we are going to see a surge of foreign players. This will for sure take the compensation packages of people in this industry to another level. At Olive Tree Foods, we have a very good salary and benefits package for executives; it's at par with any local FMCG.

**Many entrepreneurs are interested to start restaurant businesses here. What would be your advice for them?**

It's great news indeed that more and more educated and passionate people are investing in the modern F&B industry of Bangladesh. My advice for them would be to do adequate research about the target industry before starting the business. You have to have a clear philosophy, or vision, and mission when you start. Also one needs to have proper infrastructure to run the business smoothly. By infrastructure I mean quality control, operations, sales-marketing, human resource, facilities management, customer service, supply chain, research and innovation, etc. It might be one person carrying out all the duties but it needs to be addressed.

**Where do you see Olive Tree Foods Ltd. and this industry five years down the line?**

This industry holds great potential. But so far we have done very little for it. We need new concepts. I am not going to divulge them now, since these are business secrets and Olive Tree Foods is already working on some of them.

As for Olive Tree Foods Ltd., we want to see ourselves as one of the top F&B operators in Bangladesh. We want people to be confident that Olive Tree Foods restaurant will deliver great ambience and great food without compromising on the quality.

INTERVIEWED BY: SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

Engineer-turned-writer, Shahriar Rahman is Sub-Editor of the tech publication of The Daily Star. He is also Head of Operations at HiFi Public



## WORKSHOP FOR Inter AD Maker 2015 held

The workshop for "ROBI presents Inter AD Maker 15" took place on 30th May at North South University. It was an initiative by NSU Young Entrepreneurs Society (YES!) to inaugurate one of the biggest marketing competitions in Bangladesh. The competition provides an opportunity to students from universities all over Bangladesh to compete against each other on a huge simulated platform in the field of marketing and advertising. Teams showcase their talent in front of the biggest names in the industry.

The workshop began with a brilliant speech by Farooq Shams, Executive Director of Planning at Bitopi Leo Burnett. He discussed the importance of advertising for marketing a product, and engaged all the participants through questions, constructive examples and mini-games. He talked about the three main components of an advertising agency: the creative department, servicing and planning.

In addition, he discussed who the target audience should be and the best way to communicate with them. He mentioned that it's not possible for someone to learn something properly only by listening or observing. One must get involved by sharing their viewpoints, asking questions and gathering experience. He ended his speech with a discussion on how to learn what the target audience is thinking, how to reach and how to bond with them.

The second speaker of the evening was Ashfaq Uzzaman Bipul, Director of Half Stop Down. A student of the Drama Department of Jahangirnagar University, he initiated his session with the remark, "Small mistakes are called mistakes. Big mistakes are called art." He went on to discuss how we go about advertising, pointing out the following steps: thorough observation, deciding what I want, thinking about why I want it, and finally how to go about advertising.

He showed some of his TVCs and shared the stories and experiences behind those. He ended with some advice: "Do something new. Because whatever it is, a new thing will attract people."

The last speaker of the evening was Muntasir Bhuiyan, Chief Operating Officer at Market Access. He talked about BTL (Below Target Line), its steps, and how we can teach and educate our customers through it. Then he discussed what a trial is: the means to teach customers how to generate campaigns. He also gave a brief on making a successful campaign: plan and then budget; think about where to execute the planning; and find your target audience.

He added that, for a campaign, we should have something for everyone and moved on to discuss how to calculate your Return on Investment (ROI). He pointed out that it is very important to ensure that people know about your best features.

## Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

The most important tool for any organisation isn't a tool, it's the people



Any company big or small is defined by its people. Make a wrong choice in selecting the candidate or nurturing the existing one and it reflects on the output of the work. Dale Partridge is an incredibly successful serial entrepreneur, founder of Sevenly and author of the book People Over Profit. He has been on both sides of the table working with and working as a cog in the machine. Except people are not like cogs he says, "When you get a company of people that feel like people instead of parts of your machine, they work harder." These are currently the practices in most big organisations. Google provides free food, nap hours and bicycle transport among other benefits so its employees feel cared for.

People are quite possibly the single most important asset of any company. Not the packaging plant, not the high end Macs: it's always people. I have had the privilege of working with great teams and leaders. The best ones focus on their colleagues. It's not about the sales charts, the deliverables or the countless other business jargon we casually throw about. Have we 'locked' the deal? Shall we 'sit' with the client? While these may temporarily make people sound productive, what they are really missing out on are the people that work for and with them.

People work better and with more dedication when you try to find out how they are working on a problem instead of if the problem itself is the priority item to be discussed. I once worked as a marketing executive for a German boss in Bangladesh who refused to acknowledge that Bangladeshi culture could play a little havoc with the classically strict,

straightforward policies of his hometown. Part of our job was to collect data from media personalities but these people never responded well to direct orders. They needed to be cajoled. Their time had to be accommodated for the incessant traffic irregularities. My German boss would only focus on a timeline and a daily quota. If the quota was off by even a single digit, heads would roll. That business model failed because eventually all the hard working people left.

People love themselves. One of the most trending search items on Google by most individuals is their own name. If you find a group photo online or in a publication, you look for yourself first. It's an inherent characteristic of human beings to single themselves out for recognition. I've argued with management about not just focusing on taka symbols, integers and decimal places alone. Those figures won't materialise if the right employees don't feel they are valued. And that comes after having chosen the right ones. Hire the right people, motivate them, care for their needs and watch the business grow. The most important tool for any organisation isn't a tool, it's the people.

WORDS AND ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

Coming weeks we will be delving further into real life practices and processes that help turn any business into a formidable contender.

Writer is Editor of the career, tech and automobile publications of The Daily Star. He is also an entrepreneur of a baby clothing business and previously worked in advertising as a Senior Copywriter.