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The Daily Star

DHAKA, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2019

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NEXT STEP

FAST AND CONSISTENT WINS THE RACE

In conversation with G M Kamrul Hassan, Group CEO, Igloo Ice Cream, Food & Dairy Ltd.

In your diverse career, what are your biggest achievements and setbacks?

I started my career in Nestlé in 1995. I used to look after the medical product market which was all about infant nutrition. However, I studied Biochemistry in Dhaka University, which was entirely different from my work at Nestlé. I pursued my Masters in Nutrition and later completed my MBA from East West University.

Initially, the Nestlé team was small but it gradually grew. I became the senior officer and subsequently the team leader, the executive and finally the field operation manager. Since I used to look after various markets, I had to constantly be on the move, developing the market nationally. After training for a year and a half, I had the chance to join Brand Marketing under the condition that I have to finish my MBA.

I left Nestlé after serving it for 12 years. I was jobless for a while, before a senior colleague connected me to Rahimafrooz. From there I shifted to Igloo as Head of Marketing and Sales. I worked there for a year, before joining New Zealand Dairy as a group brand manager. Within three months, I became the marketing manager and after a year, I got appointed as the head of marketing. After working there for five years, I was transferred to join the mother company, Fonterra Co-operative Group Limited, in New Zealand. There, I looked after the markets of Singapore, Bangladesh and Nepal. Later, I returned to Bangladesh and joined Pran-RFL as the Chief Market. After 10 months, I re-joined Igloo as a CEO at the request of Mr. Abdul Monem. 3 years later, I became the group CEO.

Changing roles, departments and companies, in each part of my career, is an achievement to me. Every broken wall seemed like an achievement to me. The awards and promotions, and even the appreciation I received from colleagues are all achievements I take pride in. I do not want to belittle my efforts by tagging this word to a single step of my life. As for my biggest setback, it was leaving Nestlé, because then it seemed like my career had come to an end.

What is the status quotient in Bangladesh in the business context and where do we stand as a nation in the global arena? What management and leadership practices are required to carry forward the flag?

The economic progression of Bangladesh is one of the finest in South Asia; Per capita income, degree of urbanisation, energy penetration and women empowerment are all on the rise, and the overall lifestyle of the people in this country is positively evolving. A work-oriented population with more disposable income loves to spend. I think the country is moving in the right direction. With that said, we are still a lot behind in terms of meeting international standards. A country does not mature unless its businesses have sustained and thrived two to three generations, in which context Bangladesh is still very young. Bangladeshi products are now being exported to other countries and therefore we must strive to reach and maintain international standards. For example, Igloo is using the same ingredients as Nestlé and Häagen-Dazs, maintaining the best standards for ice-cream.



As a leader, I believe in participative management. I try to ensure that I become a partner instead of a boss at work, by emphasising on open communication. However, I don't compromise on integrity.

What skills are necessary to thrive in the 21st century workplace and what do you look for in prospective employees?

I believe, all professions should have at least a six-month internship peri-

od to properly understand the real life scenario of workplaces.

The people behind products and services talk louder than the products and services themselves. Hence, the challenge is converting this 160 million people to productive people. Adapting to technologies will be impossible if we do not have enough skilled people to run them.

In the garments industry, most of the managers are Indian, Japanese or Sri Lankan. We are losing almost 10

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billion US dollars here. To stop this outflow of money, we need to build management-level employees. If we cannot accumulate the human capital with proper skills, Bangladesh will suffer.

For recruitment, I do a quick scan on how positive a candidate is and evaluate their basics. I also look for communication and negotiation skills, adaptability, flexibility and most importantly their body language. Lastly, I check if they have the mentality to be dedicated towards work.

What are some adversities in the country when it comes to skills gap and how to overcome them?

Our curriculum should be more practical-oriented than theory-based. Bangladeshi students need to understand what Bangladeshi brands are doing. Our teachers need to stress more on local examples over foreign ones that don't match the local context.

Our people lack the ability to

convert knowledge into skills. For example, the youth have a concept that sales job is for the poor. Hence, they do not even want to talk about it. Whereas, there are Sales Directors hired for a salary as high as 15 lakhs to 20 lakhs taka a year.

Most of the local companies think that training and development is a waste of resources because the employees will quit after receiving training. The contribution a skilled person can make in a company in months is worth more than the contribution of an unskilled person for three years.

What advice would you give to fresh graduates who are new to the market?

We should have a vision of where we want to see ourselves. The bigger goal needs to be broken down to smaller goals. The goals should have time-frames; it is alright to reach desired goals late, but we should not lose dedication and patience along the path, while always having an alternative plan. We should also analyse the jobs we are doing and the reasons behind them.

There was a saying that slow and steady wins the race. However, I believe that fast and consistent wins the race. In this era where text messages take only fraction of a second to reach its destination, we cannot fall behind.

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The interview is taken by Maisha Zaman and Maureen Nauer of The Daily Star.

How to manage your desire for power

Each human being, as adventurous as they are, is tweaked in different ways and responds differently. The reason we are not all the same is because all of us have diverse needs based on our individuality. When we do not pay enough attention to the details, it upsets our capacity to act astutely or purposefully. One dominant human need is seeking a certain degree of power and control in other people's lives. Often, we fail to manage our need for power and develop a super-inflated image of ourselves when the said power gets to our heads. Wanting power is not intrinsically wrong and it certainly does not make you evil. The problem occurs when we get carried away with a fake sense of entitlement and lose control. Here are 3 steps to stay vigilant and tame our desire for power.

KNOW THYSELF

Self-knowledge & self-discipline is the key. The researchers I spoke with suggested to create self-awareness as to where one stands on the power hierarchy. It helps when the person truly understands that the world doesn't necessarily revolve around them. They must also realise that having desires is normal but they shouldn't let this get the better of themselves. Knowing the way our mind and bodies are tuned will help us get a better vision as to how we can take better charge of situations.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE

"When people feel powerful or feel powerless, it influences their perception of others," said Yap, a postdoctoral researcher at MIT. People who possess a certain amount of power tend



not to see the other side of the picture. They fail to recognise the opinions and understandings of other people which creates distrust and devaluation among them. Thus, changing the way you see it might help you become more empathetic & perceptive.

MANAGE EXPECTATIONS

Any sort of power or authority you gain does not come from you. People place you in an elevated position so that you can provide them with a service. In fact, the bigger picture suggests that the authority you expand is an artefact of other people's social expectations. Don't let it get to your

head that you're bigger than the role you're playing. People will be done with you once you're removed from the position of authority. The affirmation and reputation that people give you is an illusion which will last only till you play that particular role. Don't ever try to assume that you have the right to abuse the power that has been handed over to you.

SAJID BIN HASNAT

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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.

BUILDING A CULTURE OF OPEN COMMUNICATION AT THE WORKPLACE

1 INSTITUTE A TRANSPARENT WORKPLACE

Hiding information leads to distrust. To prevent that, practice transparent communication. Smart employees will be willing to get access to this information, so don't worry about burdening them.

2 ELIMINATE THE US VS. THEM MIND-SET

The conceited "us vs. them" mentality leads to interdepartmental conflict. Cross communication is critical for strengthening relationship and fostering genuine human connections.

3 MAKE OBJECTIVES AND KEY RESULTS PUBLIC

OKRs are objectives and key results that are established quarterly or semi-annually. In order to elucidate roles, responsibilities and deadlines, all OKRs should be available throughout the organisation.

4 ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO STAKEHOLDERS

Establishing a transparent communication system that values employee feedback, not only makes them more hardworking, but also fosters loyalty. Ask relevant questions to employees to be on the loop.