

AlumSpeaks

In conversation with Mr. AslamKarmali

SIMSR Alum of Batch 1989-91

CEO and Sr. Vice President, Retail & Consumer Division - Eureka Forbes Ltd.



Q. As the CEO of Eureka Forbes (Retail & Consumer Division), what are the most important decisions you make as a leader of your organization? Also, what is the biggest challenge the industry leaders are facing currently?

A. The most important decision is while recruiting people in the organization and this is perceived as the biggest challenge in the current industrial scenario. I don't believe in recruiting people with specific experience in a particular geography, I believe in looking and recruiting people only for attitude and training them for skill. That has been my mantra and it will continue to be the same. To me, the most important decision is whom to recruit and then invest in building them as strong leaders for the company

Q. You switched to Eureka Forbes which is an Indian Company after a long association with Philips originally a Dutch company. How easy or difficult was it to adapt to the new organizational culture?

A. I used to work for Philips, a multinational company for 12 years. The company was extremely process driven, with limited flexibility. On the other hand, Eureka Forbes is more intrapreneurial. Another challenge was joining not just an Indian company but a company which was predominantly a direct B2B sales company, not too familiar with the retail business. So, it was a challenge to convince people around that retail is a little different and requires a different treatment. But I am happy to say we have done well. In the last 10 years, we have grown the business about 13 times.

Q. Eureka Forbes has many social initiatives 'Euroable', 'Nana-Nani parks' etc. How is this a reflection of the core values of the organization?

A. If you see my visiting card, it clearly says Eureka Forbes and it enunciates the core value of the company by the tagline 'Your friend for life'. So, our motto is not just about making best products or best technology, it is about making friends for life and we do not measure our success only with market share alone, we also measure it with the number of smiles and the relationships we build

Q. Eureka Forbes was inducted as an HBR case study 8 years ago. These days Harvard professors are mining India for management lessons. What do you think the world has to learn from India?

A. The first thing that India offers is - a country where infrastructure is still not at the global level, secondly, it offers a huge middle class - of about 77 million urban households, thirdly, it offers a very VUCA environment which is highly vulnerable, volatile & ambiguous. These kind of complexities and challenges make it difficult for management professional to succeed in such a dynamic environment. The professionals who succeeded make great case studies, are great learnings to mine and if you will look around you see some of the best global leaders today like IndraNooyi and a host of others like Satya Nadella, all of them from India. It shows the kind of wealth of management talent that India brings to the world today.

Q. What is your take on dealing with stress and how do you unwind after work?

A. I believe the best way is to live it separately. I never mix the person who is as a professional and the person who is a human being. They should always run parallelly to each other. So, when the two are living separately, there is no stress. Problems come when you merge the two, when your professional and personal life are constantly battling each other.

Adding to the question is it possible to keep personal and professional life separate, because work has become such that you are working 24*7?

A. There is a very famous phrase which says "work-life balance". In today's professional world it's a challenge. Thus, work-life integration is the answer. You integrate work and life together. So, you run them parallelly, enjoying both

Q. What are the significant learnings you had in your two years at SIMSR?

A. The first learning I had was that of multitasking - a very critical thing I learnt at SIMSR, as in the corporate world you need to multitask all the time. The second thing I learnt in SIMSR, is "winning in my mind". If you really want something badly, "Conceive the victory in your mind", the entire body's energy will work towards achieving that victory.

Q. Your batch comprises of industry stalwarts like Madhusudhan Kela, Ajay Kapur, Jacqueline Mundkar and many others. Are you still in touch with them and any fond memories that you remember?

A. I am very happy to share that we have a WhatsApp group of SIMSR batch 91. We party together, celebrate birthdays, go for holidays together and it's one of the most active WhatsApp groups I have on my phone. The memories back here are not about competing as class mates, but about deep bonding and that's what gives us the mileage today, 25 years later.

Q. Rapid-Fire questions:

- a. Favourite movie**-Hidden Figures
- b. Favourite book**-Whale Done! by Ken Blanchard
- c. Favourite holiday destination** - Phuket, Marriott vacation club, Thailand
- d. Favourite Quote**-Winning is in the mind
- e. Favourite sportsperson**- Roger Federer
- f. Role Model**- Mr. H.Chinoy (Aslam's uncle, who was also his informal coach)
- g. One word/line you say the most**- Fear God
- h. Favourite car**- Audi A3
- i. One word that describes you the best**- Friend
- j. When you were ten, what did you want to become**- Formula 1 Racer

Interviewed and drafted by-

Surabhi Singh

Arvind Rungta

Suryani Sinha Ray

and Ishita Gulati