

*In conversation with Sudha Jayashankar
Executive Director - HR of a Reputable MNC
SIMSR Alum Batch 1987-89*



Q. What has been the most memorable event in your professional life so far?

A. It was when I was working at Unilever Arabia, in UAE. I learnt that HR was not only a representative of the teams interest, but more importantly we had responsibility to translate the vision of the management to action.

Q. You did your MMS in Finance and then shifted to HR while you were working at the Stock Holding Corporation of India. Was it a conscious decision? How easy or difficult was it to switch from Finance to HR?

A. It was a conscious decision. I was a topper in Finance, at SIMSR and had initially joined the Operations team at Stock Holding Corporation of India. After a time it felt what I was not able to use the concepts learnt and enjoyed so, a year later, I joined the HR department as I felt it was more dynamic. A finance background helped me a lot in having an analytical view of HR and it helped add value to any conversation.

Q. You have worked in the UAE for quite a few years across various organizations including Unilever. How are HR policies in UAE different from that in India? Also, how challenging is it to formulate hr policies for different countries with different cultures?

A. Yes, the culture is very different in UAE as compared to India. In UAE, active listening was a skill I need to perfect and listening to things not being said was also important. In India the teams are more vocal and one has to design the implementation of the policies keeping in mind the culture of the people.

Q. A lot of companies are now heading towards consumerization of HR i.e creating a social, mobile, and consumer-style experience for employees inside the company. They want to create the workplace 'as an experience' for the employees. What is your opinion on the same?

A. These are good developments in an organization and engagement activities attract talent definitely. I also feel that retention of the right talent is equally important and for that a strong Employee Value Proposition is needed .

Q. Companies usually focus on hiring individuals that are like-minded and passionate to create a positive workplace environment. However, big companies today are shifting their focus on diversity, which means reducing hires who are like-minded to create an inclusive culture. Do you think this shift is a challenge or an opportunity for HR as a profession?

A. There is major difference between like-minded and diversity. Individuals who have a similar value systems as an organization would create a culture for the company. Including individuals because they are diverse - in gender, look , ability - would create an organization which is also empathetic and this is definitely an opportunity for HR to have more impact in the community as well.

Q. If you have to use three words to describe the role of an HR Director in a company, what would those be?

A. That would be a Mentor, a good Listener and someone having good Analytical skills

Q. You have been associated with sponsoring the education of girls in schools along with sponsoring other amenities like solar panels, water purifiers etc. India has a long way to go to provide basic amenities in schools. How was your experience while taking up this cause?

A. Donating money is easier than thinking through which project you want to support. It is now so much easier to make a direct impact in someone's life - if you have the time and the interest. It also gives one immense satisfaction and simultaneously humbles one. There is always something you could do more.

Q. When you were seven or eight, what did you want to become?

A. I wasn't sure what I wanted to become. But I was sure of the person I wanted to become – one who is honest and always have a clear conscience.

Q. Indra Nooyi in an interview had said that 'women can't have it all' and that the biological clock and the career clock are in total conflict with each other. We'd like your opinion on the same. Is it possible for a woman to strike a balance between intense personal and professional demands?

A. First of all, I feel women can definitely have it all. It is easier now to strike a balance between intense personal and professional demands. More so with the technological advancements. If you are at office you can easily stay in touch with home and vice versa. Having said that, you should also know how to manage time well. However, it's not just women who miss home. It's the same case with men as well when they know they are at work for 9 hours, they know they are missing a lot that is happening at home. But times are changing and organizations are taking note as well.

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

A. The campus life was very memorable. I have made some of my closest friends there. As a course it gave me insights into the importance of genuine teachers who want to make a difference. It inspired me to teach for some time.

Q. What would your advice be for young alumni starting their career?

A. Be patient. Some things take time and never stop learning. Always enjoy what you are doing – there is less time than you imagine.

Q. Some Rapid Fire questions:

a. Favourite movie- How Green was my Valley

b. Favourite book- The Myth of Sisyphus – Albert Camus

c. Favourite holiday destination- Home

d. Favourite Quote- “ If they Don’t know you personally, then don’t take it personally “

e. Favourite food- Pizza

f. Role Model- My father

g. One word/line you say the most- "So...."

h. Words that describes you the best–Honest | Centered | Easy going

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