

AlumSpeaks

In conversation with Mr. Vikas Arora

SIMSR Alum Batch 1993-95

Senior Vice President and Head Bancassurance, Consumer Digital Banking -
Deutsche Bank



Q. What are your most memorable moments at SIMSR?

A. The first that comes to my mind is the campus. I believe you cannot find a better campus anywhere in Mumbai. The fact that I got into games like golf is because I got tuned to a life where I was used to open space. What you see now is a far more concrete version of the campus than when we were a part of it in 1993-95. We had fantastic faculty. I remember Prof. Pyarelal Arya who was our Dean. He was an extremely simple person. I can still visualize him with that long multipurpose umbrella which was used as an umbrella, for walking as a stick and for students when we were not following his instructions (laughs). He left a very strong impression on us. He came from the industry. People in the industry respected him a lot and we were lucky to have someone like him to teach us. We made lifelong friendships in college. We have stayed in touch and we know what each of us is doing. We may not meet very often but we are well connected. The friendships that you make while growing up are the best because you do not have expectations from each other!

Q. What are the significant learnings you had in these two years on the campus?

A. I had completed my engineering and worked for one year before joining the MMS program. I did not want to be singled out as a specialist in a particular field. SIMSR provided me the opportunity to look at various industries. We did projects in Consumer Durables industry, Banks, FMCG etc. Those two years allowed me to explore and decide what I wanted to do. I knew what was happening in the industry to some extent and it was a good experience to do projects pertaining to various industries and then decide which one you finally wanted to work with.

Q. What have been the turning points in your life?

A. The first was my education. An engineering and MMS degree were both strong turning points. A PG program makes you a focused and analytical individual. It allowed me to move into different job roles. We were some of the first people to be placed from our batch. I spent 4-5 years in hardcore sales job with IT hardware companies. I learned a lot there. Second turning point was when I had an opportunity to move into Financial Services in 1999. I have been in Financial Services for 17 years now. Third was when I pursued a 1 month Senior Management Development program at IIM A after a gap of 15 years in the industry. It was a different and amazing experience. We had a challenging curriculum which focused on case discussion. I learnt a lot during that phase.

Q. You have been associated with Deutsche bank for almost 15 years. How has your experience been?

A. I joined Deutsche bank from Bajaj Allianz and was part of the founding team when they set up the Retail Business. My job was to build third party distribution business apart from core businesses like tie up with mutual fund companies, insurance companies, scan the market and find good avenues for clients. Then in 2014, I got the opportunity to move to the central office in Frankfurt. I was part of the International Business for all investment and insurance products outside of Germany specifically Spain, Italy, Portugal, India and China. I was the custodian of the INI business and my job was to keep risk in check with these third party products, whether we are tying up with right partners, providing the right products, whether a product is meant for a segment we cater to, whether regulatory guidelines are followed by each country etc. It was a fantastic experience. We worked on a project called Project Victor which was largely to add more people into existing branches to see how we can muster up deposits and other products to comply with regulatory requirements in India. It largely focused on building our SME business. Later on, I moved from Frankfurt to India as Head of Acquisitions for Private and Business Clients.

Q. You have had diverse profiles in your career starting from Sales, Insurance and Business Development to Acquisitions. What have your learnings been in this journey?

A. My journey has been tough but thoroughly enjoyable. . It was very important for me to have a successful career. I have been taught that it is extremely important to have certain value system and you cannot be flexible with your values and principles. This lesson has helped me a lot. I have always given weightage to sincerity and smartness. You need to find out what motivates you, learn the art of working in a team, learn to take defeat, have a competitive spirit and at the same time ensure that whatever you are doing is ethical. I am a sports enthusiast and believe we get to learn all of the above in the playground. You can judge a person far better on the field than in the boardroom. It allows you to observe how the person reacts while winning or losing and whether he plays with ethics in place. It is also important to get along with people. People should like and respect you. You have to **learn, de-learn and relearn**. Lastly, think smarter and quicker. Always be step ahead than your competitor.

Q. You were awarded the BFSI - Leader of the year 2012 award by Asian Confederation. What made you stand out in the crowd?

A. Your thought process behind doing things defines you. I have been part of many discussion forums and conferences. I have been contributing to forums regularly. It's an amazing learning ground. I got to meet various influential industry people.

Q. You are also an alumni of IIM-A. What motivated you to go back to education after almost 15 years of working in the industry?

A. It is important to challenge yourself and also spend quality time with people from various industries and like-minded people working towards a common objective. The program provided me a great platform to meet people from various industries specially seniors from Production Industry, Banking, FMCG etc. Professionals who pursue these programs are seen as people who have capability of growing with the organization. I wanted to develop myself into Senior Management role in the Global Deutsche Bank environment so I initiated it. It helped me get out of my comfort zone.

Q. You have worked extensively with Germans. What are some of the lessons we could learn from them in terms of work culture?

A. I would not like to generalize, however there are things we could pick up from them. Some things they practice which stand out are that they are extremely process driven. Things don't happen in a jiffy. You need to be competitive and hardworking but they don't do things that are short sighted. They will complete a task in a specific time period but in a manner which is prescribed so that there is a process behind it. They value your time as well as their time. They are extremely disciplined. They maintain a better work life balance as compared to us. They will not take work beyond 6pm on Friday. They will not attend office calls beyond a certain time. It is not easy for us but we need to follow it. Also they do not engage in personal work during office time. They never put anybody on pedestal and provide an equal platform for everyone. When they talk to people whether it's their boss, customer or subordinate you will find the discussion ending on a meaningful note.

Q. What is your advice to SIMSR students?

A. Students should know that MBA program is not a ticket to get into a comfortable job. You have to strive, struggle and make your mark in the industry. You must have dignity of labour. You might have to do things you may not like but no job is small. You must have the courage to do things which may not necessarily put you in the comfortable situation. Be in the field, understand what's happening in the industry, and spend time with people in the industry. When you are starting your career, be open to doing things that add value to you. People respect you for your principles. Never budge away from them. For anyone to be professionally successful you have to be personally happy. Invest good time with family, develop a hobby, play a sport. Chase happiness not success. Lastly, read a lot. Be Aware of what is happening around you. Contribute on various topics and always be open to learning.

Q. Any suggestions you would like to give to the Alumni committee to increase the association that our Alumni have with their Alma Mater?

A. More platforms should be created outside the institute like which are initiated by the students and where you are inviting industry experts, something similar to 'Investex'. A simulation exercise can be conducted during these sessions where industry experts can guide students.

Interviewed and drafted by ALCOM Members -

**Parul Pathak
Priyanka Mirajkar**