

Giving, Creating Impact Top Leadership Charts

Business leaders would like to see youngsters moving beyond the call of work and making a difference to society

LABONITA GHOSH
MUMBAI

It's never too early for young executives to think about their larger purpose in life. Words like 'impact' and 'giving back' are no longer just platitudes in India Inc; CEOs believe young leaders need to live them.

More and more business heads say they want to see the youngsters in their companies looking beyond their immediate role and responsibilities, and thinking about how they can make a difference to society and the larger environment around them. And they need to do this right from the start of their careers.

For, sometimes that desire to give back, the passion to help others or have an unshakeable work ethic to do no harm, even at considerable personal loss, might just be the X-factor that sets a young leader apart from his or her peers.

Companies are now facilitating this as well, with their extensive CSR and sustainability initiatives, or their employee volunteering programmes. Some are even mandating time for staff to spend on social activities outside of work, and have reported a fair amount of enthusiasm and participation among their younger employees.

It's certainly a start, but not enough. As Kalpana Morparia, CEO of JP Morgan India puts in, young managers spend too much time chasing their next job, and perhaps not enough thinking about the role they are supposed to play in society. "Youngsters are always thinking about their current or next job, and how they can be appropriately remunerated for the work they are doing," she says. "But if a young leader aspires to be a Nitin Paranjpe or a Nandan Nilekani of the future, s/he needs to realise that they didn't get to where they are by asking 'what is my next job?'"

You don't have to wait to become a CEO to do this, however, says HUL CEO Nitin Paranjpe. "At all points of time, I have been at the stage where I have wanted to do things that will help make a difference," he says. "The assumption that you have to become a CEO and earn a certain salary before you can get to that stage, is fundamentally flawed. You could be at that stage at the beginning of your career, or you may not even be there at the end, when all your material and

Two-Way Street

GIVING MORE: WHAT CEOs TELL YOUNG MANAGERS

START EARLY

Young managers need to spend more time thinking about the role they play in society

Give more importance to building character through what they do for others

CULTIVATE CORE VALUES

- **Success is about having an impact and doing it with value and ethics**
- **Young leaders must do something for the community or environment**



physiological needs have been met. It's not about how much you earn; it's about the state of mind you bring to a task."

Indeed, there's more to doing good that young managers may be able to see. McKinsey chairman Adil Zainulbhai says he'd like to see more youngsters give more importance to the idea of building character through what they do for others. There is a strong leadership connect in this. "Leadership isn't just about achievement. It's also about how you have made the world and your environment a better place, and how you have helped others," he says. "Doing this gives young leaders

CEOs often check whether young leaders are not simply padding up their resumes

a broader vision of society, and gives them a balance and perspective that grounds them firmly. Over time, character matters a lot in how people will become leaders."

Or what kind of leaders they will be. It's no surprise then, that when CEOs interact with young leaders — as they did during the recent ET Young Leaders programme — many of them ask questions designed to subtly gauge if the young executive is genuinely interested in giving back, or simply padding his or her resume.

When Morparia asks them who their roles models are, or where they see themselves 10 years from now, it's largely to understand their world view. "We forget that business exists in a country because society has allowed us to conduct that business," she says.

"If we don't have a world view about how or what impact our particular job has or will have on society, then it becomes just another job. But all of us exist because we have a larger purpose. If a youngster has a world-view on

this, it appeals to me."

When Infosys co-chairman Kris Gopalakrishnan asks candidates to define success, he's looking to pin down leadership traits vis-à-vis the idea of impact. "Some define success as the ability to give back," says Gopalakrishnan. "To me, it has always been about having an impact and doing it with value and ethics." He admitted he was particularly impressed by one candidate who aspired to influence policy-making in the country.

Zainulbhai's questions to the young managers, about what they do in their spare time, not only gets them chatting freely, but also helps him sift the things they are deeply committed to, from the things that look good on their college application form.

"I would like to see a little more from them in terms of doing something for the community or environment around them," says Zainulbhai. "People who are real differentiators, have been doing something even from their school days, like giving tuitions to kids or teaching them English and such." You don't need to probe much with them; if they're passionate about their projects, they talk about it without much prompting, he says.

Marico CMD Harsh Mariwala, however, has a slightly different take on this. Mariwala, who mentors budding entrepreneurs through various for a like TiE and ASCENT, a non-profit venture he has founded, prefers — among other things — for youngsters to have an innovative bent of mind. "Some entry-level executives are too young to be thinking about impact," says Mariwala. "I feel they need to concentrate on their careers now and don't need to worry about giving back till they are much older." How much? "Perhaps when they are 50," he says, with a laugh.