

Mariwala Turns to Mentoring Entrepreneurs



Sweta Mangal of Ziqitza Health Care

KALA VIJAYRAGHAVAN

MUMBAI

Sweta Mangal is looking forward to be mentored by Harsh Mariwala, chairman & managing director of the Mumbai-headquartered Marico. The 35-year-old isn't joining the ₹4,000-crore consumer products & services marketer. Rather, she is one of 85 entrepreneurs handpicked by the 68-year-old founder of Marico to be a part of Ascent (Accelerating the Scaling up of Enterprises), a not-for-profit foundation he's set up — and invested in — to mentor entrepreneurs.

Mangal is CEO of Ziqitza Health Care, a seven-year-old venture that operates 860 ambulances in six states. "Being an entrepreneur can be a very lonely job, and I always sought a sounding board. It is difficult to relate to industry-led forums where top leaders speak about leadership and success. Trust groups help us meet people who are in a similar situation and whom we can relate with," says Mangal.

Ascent offers a self-help platform through three trust groups of 10 entrepreneurs each. Each group will comprise a non-competitive, diverse bunch of entrepreneurs facing different challenges. The groups have been formed on the basis of size of business — one group is for products businesses with revenues of between ₹2.5 crore and ₹25 crore; another for those between ₹25 crore and ₹50 crore; and a third for enterprises with a top line of ₹50 crore and over. For services businesses, the cut-offs are ₹50 lakh to ₹5 crore; ₹5 crore to ₹10 crore; and above ₹10 crore, respectively. The launch of the first set of trust is scheduled for August 15, 2012, by which time Ascent would have 100 entrepreneurs.

Mariwala is using his personal story as the USP of Ascent. "Now that I am not involved in the day-to-day running of Marico, I have the time for this initiative. Through my own experience, I feel an entrepreneur's journey, while exciting one, can often be along a testing and lonely path; it is very difficult even for

their families to understand the various challenges they face," explains Mariwala. Besides chief mentor Mariwala, the leadership team at Ascent includes Milind Sarwate, finance and HR head of Marico, as chief enabler; and Manak Singh, a well-known figure in Indian entrepreneurship circles, as chief evangelist. Sarwate helped Mariwala flesh out the concept of Ascent.

One of the main drivers when selecting businesses to mentor is whether they have the ability to scale up. "A lot of entrepreneurs have good ideas, but do not have the skills to scale up the business from a small to a medium to a large company. A lot of businesses fail because entrepreneurs fail to make this leap," points out Mariwala.

One such entrepreneur looking to make that leap via Ascent is 48-year-old Manisha Sangani, head of the 12-year-old Priority Marketing, a lifestyle retailer.

"Today my business has reached a threshold and, at my age, I do not have the patience of a 24 year old. I want to scale it up faster and need to learn how to do that from people like Mariwala," says Sangani, who, along with husband Shailesh, has brought fashion and watch brands like Fossil, DKNY, Armani, Kenneth Cole and SKAGEN to India.

Another business that has made it to the Ascent final list is bulk drug manufacturer Trichem Life Sciences. The company's head Sushil Jain says he hopes to tackle daily challenges through insights gained from the mentoring.

"I am hoping to be more organised and networked and also benefit from entrepreneurs in similar setups," says Jain. Other than the criteria of turnover and potential for scale, Mariwala and the team at Ascent also evaluated the levels of ambition of the entrepreneurs and innovation at their enterprises. And those who displayed an eagerness to learn, share and collaborate made the cut.

**kala.vijayraghavan
@timesgroup.com**