

LET'S TALK TALENT

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Edition



Exclusive - Aquil Busrai

Spotlight - Indrajeet Sengupta

A Connections Initiative

Food For Thought

Arsh Rachit
Deepak B. V

Fire Side Chat

Deepak Singh

Point of View

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LET'S TALK TALENT - A CONNECTIONS INITIATIVE

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EXCLUSIVE**Dr. Aquil Busrai**
CEO - Aquil Busrai Consulting**"From Disruption to Renewal
HR's COVID Journey"**

Every 400 years, the legendary Phoenix Bird rises high in the sky and then circles the heaven a few times. It is said that during this circling the sky, the bird is torn between it's yearning to hurtle into the flame and the fear of facing its own end. It finally decides on what it is destined for - Renewal. It plunges itself into the eternal fire, only to rise again in a new, renewed Avtar and to live for another four hundred years.



I was reminded about this story in the context of the challenges HR is facing during the COVID-19 crisis. Plunging into the unknown crisis, not being certain about how to cope with uncertainty and without any precedents to fall back upon. Many HR and Business Leaders, suddenly seemed to have frozen in their track - unable to move, unable to think of options and letting fate take its course.... similar to a stray deer in front of a car headlight on a highway.

For these leaders, relying on past experience is futile as no current situation is ever exactly like a past situation. Secondly, relying on past experiences prevents one from receiving anything new. It is said that the native Indians in the Americas could not even see Columbus's ships because there was nothing in their experience that matched the idea of there being such big boats on the ocean. COVID was one such big ship on our horizon.

Anytime we rely on our past experiences, we limit what can show up to only that which has already shown up in our past. Dealing with COVID crisis, therefore, called for fresh approach, devoid of precedents. Many established, even experienced leaders failed to satisfactorily meet this challenge, much to their own surprise, not to mention dismay. Senior, experienced and oft-acclaimed leaders were faced with what Kavi Arasu calls "Solomon Paradox" - King Solomon was very wise and wealthy, he was sought after for advise. But when it came to his own life, he was a miserable failure. This raised an enigma - can such leaders take their own advice? During COVID crisis this paradox became all the more glaring.

I do not wish to indulge in arm-chair criticism or judgment of those dealing with crisis. I would therefore like to share my perspective about the challenges and opportunities that the COVID Crisis presents to HR fraternity.

Faced with any crisis, our first and instantaneous response is to 'steady the boat' and 'immediate damage Control'. I however, have a contrarian view.... I am of the opinion that during such a major disruption, HR should create MORE disruptions. And I say this with all seriousness. The rationale is that during disruption there is often no option but to change. Change is no more



seen as one-off situation but something that will stay for long. Additional disruption become part of the evolving situation and resistance to change is therefore, minimalized. Attention is diverted from routine business activities, which actually frees up time to think Future, to think of Strategy. It is also observed that at such times, creativity flows spontaneously. Desperate problems calls for desperate solutions and that give rise to higher level of adaptableness. All this bodes well for innovativeness and ingenuity. Both most needed to deal with crisis of COVID magnitude.

My submission is to adopt a fresh M-B-A formula for HR fraternity. Let me explain:

- M = Maintain what is Core
- B = Break Ruthlessly, Recreate
- A = Align afresh with Business

M = Maintain what is Core.

In such critical times, while one is struggling to simply keep 'head above the water', HR must focus on ensuring that Organization's Core Values and Beliefs are not compromised for mere short-term gains. And that Ethical standard, Reputation and Engagement - not only with internal employees but also with external stakeholders like Campus, Vendors, HR Service providers - are given highest priority.

Deloitte's February 2020 Survey indicates that whopping 86% of respondents - particularly young professionals - favour career with Value-Driven organization. Profit and Monetary gains are much lower in preferred qualities. Adequately highlighting which type of organizations will be beacon for high quality talent in the future.

B = Break Ruthlessly, Recreate

COVID crisis has literally pressed the 'Pause Button' for most HR activities. This is the juncture to critically review all HR Policies, Practices, Layers, Structures, and Hierarchy and challenge status quo. Ruthlessly and boldly discard and discontinue some of these practices that have outlived its utility and relevance.

This is not going to be an easy task - we in HR get enamoured by many of our creations because it has earned us accolades and seems like indispensable part of our ethos. Breaking and discarding ruthlessly however, provides incredible opportunity to create something much better and more relevant.

Have we paused to ask - Why Annual Appraisal? Why not Quarterly? Why Annual Increment? Why not quarterly Incentive? Why Increment at all? Why not Profit Sharing? If organization does well this Quarter all gain, if not better luck next quarter. We need to wean away from attitude of Entitlement to attitude of Earning. Organizational survival should be the prime focus.



I am of the opinion that during such a major disruption, HR should create MORE disruptions. And I say this with all seriousness

A = Align afresh with Business

With normal business, in many organizations, having come to almost grinding halt and with HR getting into focus through employee-related activities like Engagement and Safety, I feel this is the time for HR fraternity to go back to basics and revisit and also critically review its own alignment with Business leaders and the purpose of business. Many in HR have swayed away from this vital connect and have got immersed in various HR processes, often detached from the angst that business leader are agonizing over. Now is the time to repair those bridges and authentically get traction with BU leaders. Understand what they really need and align HR offerings with the business requirement.

It is also time to revise HR policies and processes, and as mentioned earlier, break free from ones that are not meaningfully aligned with business and its purpose. For example, HR can sit with BU Leaders and relook at the High Potential list and segregate the very best from a list that has often been inherited year after year. It is same with Succession Plan. Are the named successors still relevant, with changing needs? Has organization structure become obsolete? Many of the traditional, well established practices would be discarded or amended if HR and BU leaders were to sit together to assess their effectiveness.

HR should get to do things they had no time for earlier. Adversity is the time to test one's own leadership. It is also time to amend behaviours that yields better partnership between HR and BU leaders.

The M-B-A Concept will enable the HR function to sharpen its focus and align with business. This in itself will facilitate handling the COVID Crisis more effectively.

Role of HR during and after COVID Crisis:

All that has been stated so far would be mere, theoretical and conjectural if HR Community cannot play a responsible role in guiding and facilitating the organization in dealing with the crisis and also in planning recovery. My submission is to divide the crisis into two segments:

No one will venture to state any time period but in the First Phase - HR should drive to increase efficiency within the organization. Cost pressure will be inevitable. With shrinking business, organizations will strive to do more with less.

This phase will be ideal period to provide training - both hard as well as soft skill. This will be a game changer investment when Re-bounce curve begins for the organization. A trained workforce readily available, when most needed, will be a major contribution by HR. Acceptability of on-line training courses is high and costs are also manageable. A counter-intuitive thought that I strongly believe in is to identify internal or even few external good leaders and recruit them. Normally organizations shy away from spending money at such juncture, but in my view these are arsenals that organizations should build to prepare for the rebound. HR should delve deep into the High Potential list and critically examine the same, along with Line Managers.





Time for HR to take a leap of faith and take calculated risk on putting younger and diverse talent on the pipeline. Identify those with high learning agility who can adapt easily to the virtual working style and have resilience. Focus should be on helping organization Rebound faster than the competitor.

In the Second Phase, lot will depend upon whether the economy recovery is U-shaped, V-shaped or L-Shaped - in any case organization will need good, committed people. If employees have remained well motivated and engaged during the first phase, then the organization will have a better chance for re-bouncing rapidly.

Second Phase could also be an opportunity to make changes that may not have been possible earlier. As long as the company has the cash flow to keep operating, this is a unique window of opportunity to upgrade the talent pool. It sends a strong positive signal to the market. In times of uncertainty, confidence in organization's brand and its financial strength and strategy could be more attractive than the salary package for new hires. It is human nature, a flight to safety.

HR will need to recognize the need for change of Leadership style within the organization. In this phase it will be critical that leaders be agile and not cling to one way of doing things. Indeed, it is likely that different leadership styles will need to be adopted as the phase progresses. In Phase One, for instance, an affiliative, participative style of leadership - where decisions were made through consensus and based on relationships, may have been appropriate. In the Second Phase, however a pacesetter, "run fast and keep up" style, or a more directive "here is what we need to do to make up for lost time" approach may be more in order.



Organizations that come out of a crisis stronger, typically have leaders who drive change around how they Operate, how they Engage Employees, and how Nimble and Flexible they are in Focusing, Engaging, Rewarding, and Retaining their People.

Conclusion

Whether we are confronted with technology invasion in form of AI or ML, Climate Change, or virulent pandemic like COVID-19, our world is likely to remain capricious and unpredictable. For organizations to maintain any level of sustainable success, they must learn to operate in ambiguity and constant

disruption. HR's contribution to building a culture that not only tolerates this climate but also thrives in it will separate the winners from the losers. And if HR succeeds in this journey, it would have risen out of the flame like the proverbial Phoenix - completely renewed and ready to face future challenges. Though, hopefully not as calamitous and catastrophic like COVID -19.



INDRAJEET SENGUPTA

***Executive Director and Chief Human Resources Officer Hindustan
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Indrajeet Sengupta is a Human Resources professional with multi industry and multi geography experience. He is a trusted business adviser, talent developer, innovation and change leader, adept in leading teams, collaborating across stakeholders and problem solving complex business challenges.

SPOTLIGHT**INDRAJEET SENGUPTA**

Chief Human Resources Officer at Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages.

Can we balance life?

Let's take a moment to acknowledge and reflect on our fears and anxieties. No doubt, COVID-19 is teaching us some hard lessons and providing us with some amazing choices to make.

'Can we balance life?' Is this an illogical question or is it untimely? After all, the idea of balancing life when everything around is in a state of flux is absurd. For many, their life is completely disrupted. Uncertainty continues and it appears that things will remain this way for a while.

But as an eternal realist, I believe, we should all take charge of the situation. All we need is to revisit our priorities.

Let me drive home the point with a personal experience... Flashback to two and a half years

ago, I was caught in a rather difficult dilemma. An exciting overseas job opportunity beckoned me just around the time when a very close relative was diagnosed with a life-threatening ailment. My wife and I decided to move on and attend to the crisis. Staying in the hospital for some time as a caregiver changed my outlook to life. The only focus was on ensuring my loved ones in the family got the attention and support they needed. Work continued remotely too, technology being the enabler. In this chaos, our close friends, extended family and some exceptional colleagues at work provided support and balance. There were new friends to make at the hospital - doctors, nurses, housekeeping staff, interns and cafeteria/administrative staff.



There were times when I felt drained out physically, emotionally and sometimes mentally, but we persisted and never lost hope. All the pain and agony slowly faded as our relative eventually recovered. But believe me, what we learnt in that short period of time was immensely invaluable. Up until then, my world revolved around family and work like two parallel railway tracks that went along nicely but never met. The unfortunate turn of events on the family front showed me that both life and work were a single track and led by our priorities.

It is because of this experience that even today I do not regret letting that overseas opportunity go by.

And now, we are in the throes of COVID-19 crisis. Once again, it's life threatening as well as a career threatening- this time for many of us. As I reflect, we don't realize that every day we all go through tough situations, often without realizing the implications.





Companies go through mergers and restructuring all the time. As employees, we sometimes face unreasonable bosses, toxic work environment and tough market situations, not forgetting the many other forms of natural disaster. Amidst all that, we still crave for recognition (that we exist). Just imagine the anguish and misery of those whose near and dear ones have tested positive for COVID-19, those who also need to take care of their aging parents often remotely. The list of agony is endless.

So, what do we do? Let's take a moment to acknowledge and reflect on our fears and anxieties. COVID-19 is teaching us some hard lessons and providing us with some amazing choices to make.

Everyone has become Generation A, which is Generation - Agility. Everything else is irrelevant now, no matter how hard we argue. This is a new chapter in our own evolution. This is a generation not defined by numerical age; it's only defined by agility, purpose, adaptability, new skills, learning habits from peers, using mixed media to interact, health and safety..



But as an eternal realist, I believe, we should all take charge of the situation. All we need is to revisit our priorities.

Fear and anxiety are a given, but so are opportunities. The longer we take to accept it, the worse it is for us. How about if we only focus on finding incremental progress? As Nassim Nicholas Taleb has described in his book *Antifragile: Things that gain from Disorder* - "Some things benefit from shocks; they thrive and grow when exposed to volatility, randomness, disorder, and stressors and love adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile."

Resilience, curiosity and focus are also a given. We have it. Choosing a positive outcome in an interaction, seeking daily progress in everything, making daily plans and sticking to the basics (such as eating on time, spending time with family watching TV, stopping work at a set time) and enjoying a hobby (music, reading, photography, art) are all different ways of expressing resilience, focus and curiosity. As Victor Frankl famously said, "Between stimulus and response there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

Like all such other things in life, career is also led by choices we make every day. Many of us are probably looking for the next job out of fear. Finding our own purpose and aligning with the companies we work for, is crucial.



A purpose can overcome fear and be liberating if we want it to be that way. It's all about adding new skills, honing existing skills, impacting communities around us and being passionate about serving employees and customers. Talent has become global. So why fuss about whether we are global or regional or local talent? Anyone can do a job from almost anywhere, except where a physical infrastructure is needed like a factory or marketplace.

Yes, **digital connect** is the way forward. In fact, I sometimes wonder how soon or far will it be till we see our colleagues at our workplace again "Digital Trust and Belief" is fast becoming the new currency of culture to enable employees to be productive. The current experience has also taught us that 'Work from Home', must be based on **mutual trust** and not on trackers and apps. Remember, policies provide guardrails.

Ultimately work and life are all about our passions, choices and finding our purpose. As I conclude this article, I am tempted to title it "**Can we focus on enjoying life?**"

Creating a **support network**, seeking professional help and counselling is the need of the hour. Emotional and mental health issues are on the rise and so is burnout. Acknowledgement and gratitude for our families, friends, colleagues and many unnamed individuals who step in and help us is a **MUST** behaviour change. Health becomes the biggest casualty in times like this. We don't realize the emotional, physical and mental load we carry every day. There are many of us who also have existing co-morbidities. Currently, it's our personal energy that has been challenged the most. We must prevent burnouts of our talents.

Humility to accept that not everything will go as planned, is the key. The vulnerability helps unlock new ideas, new friendships, new opportunities and an entirely new path of evolving ourselves. It's our self-awareness and perspectives, which allow us to make progress incrementally while helping others progress with us. COVID-19, in that sense, has opened new possibilities. Empathy is another trait that will help us remain united in turbulent times. The least we can do is to show our genuine concern and appreciation for our families, friends and colleagues. And it must reflect in the way we treat them and take care of their wellbeing.





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ARSH RACHIT

Head - HR, Business Functions
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Tricks to Survive WFH

It has been over six months that we have been working from home. And these have been difficult months, haven't they? Beginning with denial to frustration to adapting to the 'new normal'. It has been easier for some and difficult for others but mostly it has been a rollercoaster ride for all.

The lockdown has led to paucity of time for everyone. The working hours have started to stretch with everyone trying to juggle between office work and household chores. We have all become better multi-tasker. But how can we master integrating the "new normal" into our lives? Here are some tricks.

Set consistent work hours.

The human brain prefers a structured day. Not having a consistent routine adds to stress and burnout. Decide the office hours of the day. Ensure that you do not check emails outside these office hours. Set this expectation right with your colleagues too.

Take time off

A break from work allows you to reenergize and helps you to do better. Take time off and utilise it doing fun activities with family or pursuing a hobby. Enjoy a road trip maintaining the safety standards.

Avoiding 'death by webinar'

There has been surge of online trainings and webinars during the lockdown period. Limit the no of webinars you are attending and choose the ones which add value to you as a professional.

Develop a stress buster

Find a stress buster that would allow you to take a break and keep you recharged. Join an art club, try cooking, board games, the list is endless.

Ask for Help

If you're feeling stuck, ask for help. It is good to discuss the situation with your mentors, managers or even your team members.

Sleep more

Sleep is critical for health and wellness. Setting a cut off time for work at-least couple of hours before bed helps.

Get out of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out)

We all live in a world where is so much happening around us. That we constantly keep checking our mobile phones for notifications alerts. Get out of the FOMO. A simple trick could be to switch off notifications for most of the apps on your mobile.

Eat healthy and stay hydrated.

Do ensure you are consuming right amount and type of food and water to remain healthy.

While these trick could be difficult to implement they are not impossible and they can definitely help you imbibe the 'new normal' successfully.





ASHA SUBRAMANIAN

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Asha Subramanian is an HR professional with experience in the entire gamut of HR. She has played a pivotal role in building and scaling Ibibo groups people and processes. She creates HR strategies for execution and makes HR a true activist in corporate environment by enabling change agents, and bringing in corporeal, sustainable and scalable HR models in place.



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“Role of HR in making a gender
neutral work place”

> Diversity, the art of thinking independently together!

A gender neutral work place fosters innovation, improves company culture and attracts right talent with better outcomes. One common feature among successful organizations is the manner in which they treat diversity. Diversity gives rise to multiple perspectives, which in turn sparks novel thinking and innovative ideas, ensuring a happier and more productive workplace for all. HR is the gateway to ensure that good practices are adopted and practiced not only as written policies but also in action throughout an organization. HR can help in enhancing gender neutral behaviour by highlighting the disparities and identifying gaps through solid evidence with data on gender, pay, rewards, recognition, etc.

> Coach leaders to become change agent

To be a successful gender neutral organization, the process must commence at the very top. Being gender neutral is a top-down commitment and a good gender mix in the leadership roles, with inclusivity in board meetings, and decision making would enhance it. HR should facilitate coaching leaders to create a culture of shared accountability, have a gender neutral language when they address their team and develop both men and women equally in all roles.

Leaders should be change agents as well as brand ambassadors for driving the cause successfully.

> Develop an inclusive and bias-free hiring process

Gender inclusiveness should start right at the beginning of a hiring process, like the job description creation stage. HR can rely on technological tools to create gender-neutral job descriptions. Another crucial step would be to keep stereotypes away from the hiring decision making process. One way to stop gender bias can be by incorporating a blind candidate view by the human resource management system or applicant tracking system. This way the recruiters and hiring managers can do a first cut candidate screening without accessing the applicant's identity.

> Favourable Culture & Policies for all

An organization can be coined as a healthy & gender neutral work place when it out grows out of the gender stereotypes and gives equal privileges to women & men. This should be the case for all the organisational policies like flexible working hours, working from home, part time working, office day care, overall facilities, professional growth, equal pay etc. An example of this would be that if women are getting maternal leave, paternal leave should be encouraged too considering that men also play a vital role in taking care of a child. This culture creation will automatically help in making policies that nurture a gender neutral work place.





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Future of work; post COVID-19 Pandemic

★ **Pre COVID-19 pandemic:**

The world was already witnessing a digital revolution that changing our lives in many ways. Knowledge was no longer hidden or the property of few. Knowledge was becoming ubiquitous. Acquiring new skills and learning new technology was possible wherever you were and information was at your fingertips. Social media revolution was changing our psyche of craving for visibility and digital identity was etched as part of our personality. The newer generations were bolder, more knowledgeable, more demanding and way more confident. On the other hand, in companies, automation was improving the efficiency of every function that had predictable & repetitive tasks. With evolution of Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning, even complex tasks were getting done by machines smoothly & efficiently.

★ **COVID-19 - The catalyst**

The digital revolution had made the technology available and ready. What COVID-19 did was to catalyze all the disruptive forces together as people mobility came to a grinding halt. Lives had to be saved and the world had to move on. The companies had to continue running. The sheer instincts to survive, drove away the technology adoption. The workplaces got redefined overnight and a new way of working was born out of the blue. Suddenly, the world was flat for talent again. Anyone with access to the internet and a secured connection could contribute by working from anywhere and for anybody. Recruiting, assessments, onboarding, workforce engagement, learning and development and almost every function of HR moved online. Overnight, HR got a new face - a digital one.

★ **The future of work - Post pandemic**

With the new ways of working from anywhere, the rules of the game are going to change dramatically. The fundamental definition of a work place will be relooked, redefined and recalibrated to bring in more efficiency. The gig workforce revolution which was underway before the pandemic, will have all the potential to go mainstream in a new avatar. This could redefine the organizational structures. The thrust will be more on information security and safeguarding IP rights as most work will now happen remotely, thousands of miles away. The role of HR will be very different too from the current one.

As always, the future will belong to those who have the courage to imagine it.

The ideas and thoughts discussed in this article are purely personal expression of the author & do not reflect the thoughts or actions of his employer or his previous employers.

Unrestricted





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'Lever'aging Diversity & Inclusion (D&I)

Many organisations are taking steps to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion, with limited success. All three are interlinked and go a long way in creating the right environment at work. While it starts with diversity, without inclusion and equity, sustenance would be difficult. A strong culture, and continuous communication are the building blocks for effective D&I programs.



1. Reduce Bias

"Harvey: Unfortunately, we only hire from Harvard. And you not only did not go to Harvard law school, you haven't even gone to any law school.

Mike: What if I told you that I consume knowledge like no one you've ever met, and I've actually passed the bar? - Suits."

Bias, be it about gender, institution, or affiliation (GIA), exists. Hence merely having a D&I agenda is no good, there is a need to establish an inclusive mindset to leverage the differences in strengths. We need to look at aspects beyond GIA to build a highly open, engaged, and productive workplace. We need to continuously train leaders and employees to be open, transparent, and fair.



2. Involve Hiring Managers

"I am unable to find the right person" or "The candidate doesn't have a degree from..." are probably the most common responses when hiring managers are asked why they haven't been able to hire for so long. This is not just a problem for HR Leaders It is in fact a larger problem for business that stare at losses occurring due to vacant positions. Often, we end up losing good talent, because we are not looking beyond the hiring manager's view.



There is a need to revisit our beliefs and build a right hiring strategy that is inclusive and open. We must train hiring managers to be objective - select for talent and skills and not based on GIA. Unless we create a culture of accepting differences, we will not achieve our objectives.



3. Be Flexible

COVID-19 unintentionally became the "Transformer of the Year", making organisations realise that "work from home" can give better outcomes. The world truly has become boundary less. This has led to flexibility in hiring and providing opportunities for talent without thinking about GIA. This will definitely yield a long-term benefit in the form of higher productivity, long term retention and a feeling of oneness.

We all have a crucial role to play in building a bias free, open, and inclusive workplace. Remember "that a chain is as strong as the weakest link", let us aim to strengthen every link.

If we activate the three levers, we would be able to drive and sustain meaningful D&I programs.



DEEPAK SINGH

Ex CHRO - Sentiss pharma, Tata power, StarStone Insurance

Deepak is a seasoned Human Resource professional with over 18 years of rich experience of helping organisations to translate their Business Strategy into comprehensive people strategies and anchoring its execution. He has worked with organisations like Reliance, Virage Logic(now Synopsys) Wipro, Cadence, Torus, Tata Power and Sentiss Pharma. He is also advisor to 2 tech start-ups

FIRE SIDE CHAT

DEEPAK SINGH

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StarStone Insurance



1. **What makes you passionate about HR?**
The very fact that the Human Resource function acts as a catalyst in every business equation by enhancing the people centricity of the organisation.
2. **One tech/innovation that will transform HR?**
The use of AI, ML and AR in easing the efforts involved the process aspects of the Human Resources function. This will allow the HR professionals and leaders to devote their time and energy in more strategic initiatives.
3. **One perception you wish to change about the HR function?**
With more and more organisations recognising the importance of the HR function, the perception of HR is changing to that of a strategic partner.
4. **What's your learning mantra?**
'Curiosity' as that of a child
5. **Appraisals based on rating or rating-less performance management/**
Rating-less PMS. It is more development and growth oriented.
6. **Things HR professionals must keep in mind while implementing tech in any HR process?**
Ease of use, accuracy and customer centricity.
7. **One question you ask in every interview?**
"Do you have any question for me?". I allocate a huge amount of time during the interview for the candidate to ask questions - It allows me to see how the individual is able to take charge of the meeting and properly frame his or her thoughts
8. **Best career advice you have ever got?**
Every organisation as its employees have their own ups and downs. The best career advice I have got is to develop and nurture the resilience of the organisation and its members



Team Talent



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Contact Us

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