

INTERVIEW

with the Leaders of the Corporate World

The Journal is running a series of Interviews with the senior management of the organizations who were awarded the Best Corporate Award-2013 by ICMAB in 2014. The interviews focus on the leadership style and the organization's way of working that has helped it achieve corporate recognition.

British American Tobacco was awarded the Best Corporate Award 2013 under the Manufacturing category.

Here **Shehzad Munim, Managing Director, British American Tobacco Bangladesh**, shares, in his very candid manner, his way of working and his views on Bangladesh talent, specially finance talent.

How would you describe someone successful?

Someone successful in my definition is someone who has a purpose and is pursuing a dream to fulfill the purpose. Success can probably never be defined with money, will power and such factors. However these are sometimes enablers to achieve one's vision/purpose. Until one anchors one's drive to a purpose, he/she will tend to go into flippant tangents and find it difficult to keep focus. Someone successful is always someone with a focus. When you interview me you will find lot of analogy with cricket! I will tell you the West Indies Cricket team, in the 1970s and 80s, was the most successful team that the world is yet to see.



SHEHZAD MUNIM

Shehzad Munim joined BAT Bangladesh as Territory Officer in 1997, after graduating from the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) of Dhaka University. He worked in different marketing roles within BAT Bangladesh before taking up assignments in BAT New Zealand as Group Brand Manager in 2003. After successive international roles in BAT Australasia, Shehzad Munim returned to Bangladesh in 2007 as Head of Brand Marketing. In 2008 he assumed the role of Head of Marketing. After completing a very successful tenure, he took over as Area Head of Marketing, South Asia Area. Shehzad Munim was appointed as one of the Non-Executive Directors of BAT Bangladesh in 2010 and in 2013 became the first Bangladeshi to be appointed as the Managing Director of BAT Bangladesh.

They were successful not only because they were great players but also because they almost had a purpose to prove to the world that black men were equal to the white men. This is mentioned in Viv Richard's biography and other literature that the WI team were set out to prove that they were as good as anyone else in the world.

While managing a large & complex organization as yours, how do you translate business decisions into actions through people while ensuring they are focused and motivated?

Any organisation would need to have a corporate vision - which states where you want to take the corporate as a whole. The organisation needs to articulate the vision, mission and strategy statements. At British American Tobacco Bangladesh, we have always had a 3 -5 year vision supported by strategic pillars. These were well articulated and clearly communicated across the organisation. Each employee's performance is linked to these strategic pillars/goals. Employees need to understand how they are contributing to the strategies

If you look at BAT Bangladesh over the last 10-15 years, you will see a complete transformation in our financial results, corporate governance and in the ways we run the organisation. I believe success is not only measured in the bottom line numbers. It is also measured by how the organisation is seen in the society and whether you are seen as a leader or not by the society you operate in. From that aspect I think our approach of defining, articulating communicating our strategy across our employees has helped us to remain focused and ensured appropriate resource allocation. This is more important, being part of a MNC Group, as we need to convince our Group to invest in our Bangladesh operations, despite all the challenges. Unless you have a well defined vision, these resource allocations are hard to get. Today, in Asia Pacific Region, we are allocated one of the highest capital expenditure to enable us to expand our capacities and uplift both management and shopfloor skillset to equip us better for the opportunities that Bangladesh upholds. This explains why we have been able to perform well.

You have had extensive experience in working overseas with different nationalities across the world. When you look at Bangladesh talent, what are the key skills /capabilities to develop in order to compete in the global arena?

I believe we are as good as anyone else. Generally people complain about the education system in Bangladesh. I have studied all my life in this country. I do not think it has held me back from working anywhere in the world. The biggest challenge is in the mind: accepting that we are as good as anyone else. Whenever a foreigner walks into our domain, we tend to think s/he will work better/ know better than us. This is due to lack of self confidence, I believe. If we are disciplined and focused and we try our level best we can be as good anyone else. In my mind the best example is our cricket team! There are no foreign players and no one playing in international leagues (except a few). However the entire team is able to compete at international level and is competing quite well. You have to put in hard work- there is no shortcut. Your results will come through.

If you look at our organisation, we have been putting in lot of people in international assignments and they have been performing quite well at international level-upto a functional leadership level. However the conversion from function leadership to commercial leadership has been few. This is where our bottleneck lies: while our people are very competent at functional level, when it comes to leading an organization or function - setting a clear path or vision- a limitation comes in. We need to become better in the ability to think better than today and having the belief that we can be as good as anyone else.

However I think this is changing, with the generation changing. My personal belief is that the generation who were born free has immense agility of learning and they have a very big ambition. We are probably the first generation and have gone to a certain level. When I look at our management trainees and when I see them going abroad (as part of the trainee program), I see true signs of them becoming global citizens. Their ability to dream and the confidence level they carry is very

different- something I have not seen in my generation. That is why I think Bangladesh has immense potential: when these new generation will assume leadership roles, they will take bold decisions for the country.

As a Managing Director, how do you see the value that finance professionals can/should add to the business?

Firstly, one would expect the very basic-accuracy of reporting and compliance to all necessary statutory requirements. This includes what is mandated by various laws and group policies (for MNCs). The first assurance that a MD would require is the blind faith that all numbers reported - externally and internally- are fully correct. This is important to release the Managing Director from having to worry (check) these numbers. Secondly, Finance should be able to assure the effectiveness and efficiency of spend. Finance should be the neutral testing body in an organization- a lot like a testing machine of a car: Finance should be able to assure top management whether the organisation is optimally running. I expect Finance to advise me where we should add some more oil (increase resource allocation) in case of a growth phase. This may put pressure in the short run but I would expect efficiency to come in with longer term growth. At the same time, in times of a cost cutting phase, an organization should be protected from so much cost cutting that the machine grease oil is cut down. Therefore I expect Finance to balance out the organization.

Another important element I value in Finance is having the commercial sense to aid in decision making. If Finance comes and tells me to invest more in sales force or challenge the spend on advertising- I would most welcome such moves. Finance should be able to assess the quality of capital expenditure. Let me give you an example-suppose we are buying a (packing) machinery. In our industry, such machinery lasts for over 30 years. During decision making, we would tend to focus on the lowest operating cost. However consumers in the Bangladesh Market were moving to a different packaging. So consumer demand in 5 years would move away but today cost wise this is the cheapest. If we

invest money and time behind this machine, we would make a wrong decision. So any investment has to think into future and Finance should be able to challenge decision of even top management.

From your experience in working with Finance teams, what are the key areas Finance professionals should focus on to assume leadership/general management roles in organisations?

Finance professionals are in the best capacity to become general managers/managing directors. The key is to understand in depth how the business is being run. As an example, if you are responsible to look at Commercial Finance and if you do not spend time in understanding what Commercial is doing, and developing your own view, you have not spend the time well. If you are supporting Supply Chain, after sometime a finance person should be able to run the function. It's not only about numbers, it's also the rationale, the efficiency one needs to understand. And yes, there are certain technicalities that you are not expected to know; you are not expected to be the engineer. As long as you look at from leadership angle and believe technical problems can be solved then the thinking is there. Another area to focus on is stakeholder engagement. One should go out and meet external stakeholders and represent the organisation. The biggest job of the MD is to manage the external world. So it all lies in the appetite & hunger in the aspiring finance person. I believe Finance is in the best position to assume general management roles given their exposure to the deep knowledge of the business. The one area that the strong finance professionals should further focus on is the overall leadership thinking.

Running large companies is demanding and you have been quite successful in leading BATB. How do you maintain your stamina and your composure?

First, is to accept you cannot do everything yourself. Once you are disciplined and focus on the right things at right level, then you need to delegate and empower. One of our guiding principles is "freedom through responsibility",

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which basically states that you delegate and hold people accountable. We have to be master at art of delegation and motivate people to step up at appropriate leadership levels. Otherwise, you may start to micro manage. When I joined as the Managing Director, I was advised not to become a second Marketing Director (my previous role). Since then I have been very conscious of not acting like a marketing director. I focused myself on strategic delivery and motivated the top team on what to deliver. I am also very disciplined and use religion as a guidance: Wake up at Fajr and start the day early; from Fajr to Zohr I try to make most of my time & deliver the key things for the day. If you start late, you are always in catching up mode. Also one should keep a balance- not work after Maghrib (prayers). If this can be achieved at least 20 days a month (few days can be exception) - that should be OK. That's how I try to balance.

Sometimes we end a busy workday thinking whether we have really achieved something. What does a purposeful workday look like for you?

Every day should have an objective. "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People" (by Stephen Covey) is a good guide. Every day should have certain milestones to achieve. It is important not to load it too much. You should load it just enough. With practice you would know when the day is optimally loaded. Next day's objective should also be written down beforehand to remain in focus. Personally I do weekly planning and then I do daily planning. I keep aside half an hour everyday for next day. I keep 3 to 5

objectives everyday. Bangladesh environment is full of uncertainty (including traffic jam), so even achieving 3 objectives is good enough. One should also plan for socializing to build strong working relations within the organization and with external stakeholders. If you have slack time during the day, you should sit back and reflect on few things bigger.

We know you have been with British American Tobacco for 18 years. What message do you have for the young talents who are changing jobs (employers) frequently in pursuit of something more fulfilling?

The message is very clear. One of my seniors - the then MD of New Zealand - told me if in 1 year you do not work and not do anything, other than coming to work and leaving end of day, the biggest loser is yourself and not the company. The company will run but you have lost time. Earn to learn - is my message to the young talent. Wherever you work you must have learning opportunity and focus on this and not the money. Money will follow - I say this from my own experience. I went to New Zealand as a Group Brand Manager (Premium brands). By middle of the year I was asked to also look at the Value for Money portfolio. So the company gave me responsibility of 2 people. The thought of asking for a raise never came to my mind. I just looked forward to the learning. By year end I was promoted to Group Brand Manager. Similarly, when I was Marketing Director I wanted to learn how the external stakeholder engagement works. I worked with the then Deputy Managing Director to meet our Government stakeholders. In the process I stretched my direct team to take more responsibility. This gets replicated across the organization. However I would take full accountability of my role while stretching myself on other projects/areas. Remember, if you are not learning and the company cannot give you enough learning opportunities, then it is time to switch. It is the opportunity to learn and not the additional money (only) which should be the reasons for a job switch.

[Interviewed by Zinnia T Huq, Associate Editor, The Cost & Management].