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In Sri Lanka there is still vast scope for development in the field of HR

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He has over two decades of both private and public sector working experience in diverse environments including Unilever and Nestle. He has engaged in consultancies in more than ten countries in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. He is a Commonwealth AMDISA Doctoral Fellow and a Fulbright Postdoctoral Fellow. He holds a Ph.D. and an MBA from the Postgraduate Institute of Management, University of Sri Jayewardenepura and a B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Moratuwa. He is also a member of the Chartered Institute of Management (UK).

As an academic scholar, he has presented research papers at international conferences in more than ten cities in Asia, America, Australia and Europe. He has published articles in local and foreign journals, and is also an author of two books. He has won many accolades including gold medals for best papers in two international management conferences, and recently, the platinum award by the Alumni of the Postgraduate Institute of Management (PIMA) for outstanding academic contribution.

Q) What is your view on Human Resources

Management in today's context and what do you think of the existing quality of Human Resources in Sri Lanka today?

Human Resources (HR) is one of the most rapidly changing fields today. The reasons for this being that there are rapid changes taking place in the world today. With these changes competition in the field of business is skyrocketing. With that, there is a need to utilize people and to get the best out of them. I for one see this in three angles. That is, the need to get the right people, to get the right things done by the people and to reward the people for it.

In Sri Lanka there is still vast scope for development in the field of HR. I do see significant improvements however such as the national HR Awards which is a classic example of giving recognition to brilliant performers in the field of HR. The size of our country does not matter we are still capable of attaining great things. The Indian partners who were involved in Sri Lanka's National HR awards last time took note of the positive attributes of HR in Sri Lanka.

Q) What do you feel are the positive and negative attributes of HR in Sri Lanka?

I feel that some institutions in the country are sadly lagging behind. This is especially the case with the HR system in the public sector. Many of them use primitive methods which involved paying a salary and getting



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the work done. This technique should change. However with the introduction of the National Administrative Reform Commission (NARC) which has been formed to encourage the advancement in HR in the public sector, I hope to see significant changes in this area. The private sector on the other hand is driven by dynamic professionals. I see far more scope in the private sector. However, some private sector firms are only focused on short-term profits and other gains. This obviously has an adverse effect on HR relations.

My research has proved that if there are CEOs that appreciate the work of their employees, then that coupled with competent HR professionals who are able to gain support from other HR personnel is what will lead to achieving good results.

Q) What can be done to improve the negative aspects?

There is a growing demand for talent with the increase in demand for employment opportunities that are clearly visible today. For instance, it has been identified that there is now a dire need for skilled workers in the tourism sector. HR professionals have a big part to play here in showing young people how to tap the job market. Young people should be given awareness on job opportunities at school level. They should be advised to not narrowly focus on a few career paths

which is often the case.

We tend to think that we must all aspire to be a doctor, proctor or director. These professions are vital to us. However we should also focus on other career choices without limiting our options to a few. HR professionals can be an important role here in identifying the talent of young people and providing them with suitable opportunities.

Q) How can we identify the skills of young people and provide them with suitable job opportunities?

The way I see it there are two types of talent which are, raw talent and required talent. There is plenty of raw talent but very little required talent. For instance if you speak to university lectures they will tell you that university students are very smart. Yet if you speak to CEOs they would tell you that there isn't enough required talent. The reason for this is that there is a huge gap between raw talent and required talent. We can bridge this gap if we make amendments to the curriculums and syllabi at school and university level and ensure that what young people are taught can be made applicable to the real world.

Academic institutions should provide quality and relevance in what they teach students. In Sri Lanka we do not have an accreditation system but if such a system is introduced they we can be assured that young people will receive better quality education. Furthermore, if the private sector collaborates meaningfully with the public sector

then we could make positive changes and provide better opportunities for Sri Lankan youth.

-Olindhi Jayasundere

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