

# Employment

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## An effective mix of the quirky and the daring at Sarva Integrated (Pvt) Ltd

Entering through the door in to a spacious room which bore unmistakable evidence of severe book addiction stocked upon shelves and coffee tables which have been fattening on extensive reading for quite a considerable amount of time, the propitious feeling of trampling experience rich grounds was mutual for our team who entered the flair of Mr. Chrisantha Jayasinghe, Managing Director of Sarva Integrated (Pvt) Ltd. Thus began the journey of Sunday Times in to the very depths of this silent giant who boasts of seven years of fruitful existence cradled in its bountiful lap of creative efficiency in the constantly fluctuating field of advertising.

The name 'Sarva' may not ring a bell in the minds of some and yet, advertisements such as Stella, Kurukurules, the Hutch Tick Tick ads and the Union Assurance Kandy dancer may toll a whole orchestra of familiar bells in the heads of almost every citizen of the Sri Lankan soil. "Sarva doesn't come to mind when you speak of advertising. We are so intent on providing effective solutions for our cherished customers that we often do not have the time to go about blowing our own trumpets" says Mr. Jayasinghe, better known as CJ among his many acquaintances in the industry. It is a classic case of a carpenter not having a chair at his own house, he says.

Sarva is a creative solutions provider who makes recruitments in the account management and creative cadres. "Advertising is not something that you can survive if you do not love it!" says CJ, also stating that one either gets addicted or end up hating the industry. Sarva recruits people who have had no prior experience in advertising and experienced individuals alike as this unique agency is constantly on the lookout for that streak of inbuilt talent and dedication that is quite rare to find. Sarva is indeed packed with diverse talents acquired from different walks of life who share a common passion for advertising in their midst, says CJ, the mastermind behind this whole operation.

Sarva also recruits management trainees and they try to hire school leavers and freshers to the industry in whom they can inculcate the behaviour, attitudes and the values of the agency as well as the industry. CJ said. Once recruited, the juniors are put to work under the seniors in the company who will take them under their richly furnished wings to guide them through the many challenges that may spring up in this long and difficult walk towards customer satisfaction. In addition to the mentoring, every two years, the new recruits will also be subjected to the "uplift" programme which is a training programme that is enriched with the valuable insights and advice of many professionals and experts of the industry for the benefit of those who are still green in this luscious tree of colourful talent.

At present, Sarva is comprised of eight senior creative directors who are in charge of leading four teams. Most of the creative directors who work at Sarva now have known Mr. Jayasinghe for quite a long time and it is them who have called and asked to work at Sarva. CJ who is glad that he has a team of loyal and dedicated individuals who he did not have to go in to the trouble of buying. "Most people who work here has been with me for more than five years" CJ states, also mentioning that because of the friendly and light culture that is unique to Sarva, people tend to stay loyal to Sarva.

regardless of the constantly fluctuating nature of the advertising industry which has seen the flight of many an individual to the bosom of other agencies which offer them higher compensations or better rewards.

Creativity cannot be taught. Therefore, aiding the new recruits in channeling their thoughts in the right direction is what is done at Sarva. In addition to the right kind of attitude, it is a blend of right brain activity and business analytical thinking that is required from those who are interested in being recruited by this rather vibrant institute. Being able to see things in an unusual manner as well as the ability to understand and view matters from a business perspective is very much appreciated here. "It is a mix of brilliance and craziness that we are looking for" CJ said, confessing that a little craziness always helps to bring out the dormant creativity that lies inside.

Sarva also recognizes the need to localize their work according to the tastes and the familiarity of the market. Therefore, Sarva employees need to be able to tap in to the pulse of the people, thereby playing the role of a psychologist in order to get their message across to the public. The ability to understand as well as the willingness to understand the psyche of the people is an important quality that is sought in a Sarva employee. In addition to this, the ability to steer the thoughts and needs of the client who usually does not have any clue of their advertising requirement is an essential talent that is expected of those who hold management positions in the company. "We have creative directors who have cars but they still go by bus from time to time just to be in touch with the people" states the good Managing Director, obviously pleased with the kind of dedication and the commitment that his team puts in towards the success of the organization.

Sarva has an easy going culture which lets its employees loosen up and practice their creativity at full throttle without any constraints. They have no hierarchies and they call themselves the "machan agency" because of this factor. Employees are very well looked after with regards to their safety as when working after hours, Sarva makes sure that transport is provided right to the doorsteps of both male and female employees after a specific time during the night. Sarva also takes the responsibility of keeping their employees well fed very seriously as they believe that their employees should be comfortable at all times while they work and takes extra pains to provide them with copious meals when they happen to be working extra hours in to the night. However, Sarva does believe in practicing certain constraints when it comes to managing the organization structurally. "Many people think that advertising is a wild and crazy industry. But no alcohol where you earn has always been our policy which is quite unheard of in the industry" CJ says, emphasizing upon the importance of respect to one's profession and practicing etiquette in



Mr. Chrisantha Jayasinghe, Managing Director of Sarva Integrated (Pvt) Ltd.

one's respective place of work.

Sarva offers a quite a generous remuneration package which is on par with the industry as well as an interest free loan scheme for employees who have stayed loyal to the organization for many years, with the aim of lending them a hand to achieve their objectives in life. And unlike many other organizations, Sarva also does not sign any bonds when an employee happens to go abroad. "We believe personally that you can't force an employee to stay. If he does not want to work for you, he's not going to do his best" states the Managing Director of Sarva, emphasizing the fact that it is a happy employee which makes an efficient employee in a workplace.

According to CJ, advertising is not all about creativity. It is about providing the client the results that he or she anticipates. "Effectiveness and creativity are two different things. You can have beautiful, creative ads but if they cannot be understood, there is no use" CJ said, also stating that people watch advertisements as entertainment and not with the aim of analyzing them as one would analyze a painting or a piece of art. "We try to keep our work as less superficial as possible" he reveals, also stating that understanding the market and localizing the promotions are what they, as an ad agency concentrate on doing.

Commenting upon the award that Sarva brought home from the recent People's Awards for "Thembili", an advertisement that was created for their client Lanka Bell, CJ believes that this award offered for the most popular advertisement of the year is proof of the effectiveness that they strive to achieve in their creations. "You cannot force feed campaigns and concepts that have been created abroad to the local people. You have to create something which appeals to the local people with things that they are familiar with" he says, stressing upon the importance of going local and the incredible power of that brand building possesses in today's world.

CJ describes the relationship between a client and the ad agency as a husband-wife

relationship. For him, it is not merely a supplier-client relationship, it is based on a deeper, more profound foundation. Each person should be happy and thriving in order for the other person and the relationship itself to prosper. "Our clients are just overjoyed to see us prospering because they in turn have prospered along with us" he reveals, commenting upon the incredible bonds that they maintain with some of their loyal customers who have remained with them since the very beginning itself.

A casual glance around the room and one is sure to get a wisp of the insatiable reader that lurks within this advertising persona. CJ confirms our theories by stating that he avoids bookstores for the fear of "going crazy". Reading is a habit that he has inherited from his father and then carried along from childhood itself. He carries a book with him every where he goes and it is not such a big deal as he already has a rather interesting collection of books stored up in his mobile phone which he likes to read while travelling, attending to functions and events which does not interest him and etc. However, he describes himself as being the black sheep of the family and an "utter disaster" who has broken every rule in his parents' books. He has always been fond of English literature, drama and such subjects over other more serious subjects and he claims that advertising is just a natural extension of his love for the arts.

Venturing on to advertising has happened as a complete accident to CJ. "You might dream of becoming a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer but nobody really dreams of becoming an advertising executive!" he says, stating that he too had never even dreamt of becoming an advertising person. However, now that he has become one, he claims that he will never be happy doing anything else as well.

Starting his career at JWT as an account management executive purely by chance, CJ has gained experience in working with different brands and individuals before he initiated Sarva with just five people. He believes himself to be a very lucky individual as the agency has seen profits and growth within its very first quarter itself. Today, Sarva integrated has an impressive portfolio of clients as a result of its quality, localized services and the excellent relationship that it maintains with its rather vast customer base. "It's a win-win situation for all" CJ says, beaming.

This sagacious persona describes himself as being a happy-go-lucky person who does not have a lot of ambitions. "One does not have to be aggressive to achieve things in life" he says, stating that although he does have plans and things that he wants to achieve, it was never to be the biggest or the brightest as most people in the society strives to be. CJ claims himself as a person who has always floated about happily, going along with the flow. He has been lucky and blessed he claims, to have achieved so much within a short amount of time.

Speaking about the goals that he has for

the future, CJ aims to set up an agency which works in promoting the SME sector of the country free of charge. According to him, what the SME sector lacks is good quality communication which will aid in promoting their work. "Multinational companies are so strong in Sri Lanka because they have very good, planned communication strategies" says he, also stating that his next step will be setting up such a company which strives to urge the SMEs to strengthen their business via communication. "It's a very Asian thing" he says "We still look at nuts, bolts and factories and the manufacturing process of things. If you look at world class brands like Nike and Coke, they do not own a single factory. All they own are the brands and the design" states CJ, emphasizing upon the importance of brand promotion and the weight of the effort that should be put in to the building of a brand in the current society.

Mr. Chrisantha Jayasinghe who prefers to be referred to as CJ, is a person who likes to incorporate religion and spirituality in to his life, thereby making them an essential part of his journey in life. He believes in Jesus Christ and that he will always guide him in the right direction. CJ is also a firm believer of the law of attraction and the power of the subconscious mind as he constantly strives to gain control of his thoughts, avoiding negative thoughts to the best of his abilities and always trying to inculcate positive thoughts in his mind. He thoroughly believes that being a good man and always trying to do what is right is what has gotten him the help and the blessings of the divine powers up above in accomplishing the goals that he himself has never even thought as possible.

Aspiring youngsters of today can gain many a valuable lesson from the life of this formidable persona of the advertising arena who believes that problems are God's devices to help strengthen one's will and ability. "Whatever your circumstances are, you can make it happen" says CJ also stating that as long as one does not give up and think positive thoughts, one is very much able to create one's own path to success. "Do not let problems become obstacles" he says with a confident smile. He believes that everything happens for a reason as he is very much convinced that if he had worked for another agency instead of setting up Sarva seven years ago, he would not have achieved such success or the happiness that he is experiencing today. "Advertising is not the fun and crazy thing that people often imagine it to be. It is all about strategic thinking, business thinking as it is more like consultancy. We like to think of ourselves as a business partner instead of a creative partner" CJ said, concluding the interview with plentiful insights in to an industry of which the creations and not the creators have managed to become names that resound through thousands of households islandwide.

-Jayani C. Senanayake

## Motivation and solving office conflicts

THE CONSCIENTIOUS and well-meaning owner of a small business cannot seem to get his work force motivated, despite a good benefits package and pleasant working environment. "I am coming to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be nice to people," he says. "Maybe if I fired a few of them I'd get better results."

The supervisor of a 100-employee division of a large company says his employees are demoralized; he wants to know ways to increase their motivation.

An office manager is stumped to find out that two of her best employees told another supervisor she did not like them. "They are both top performers, and I can never remember being dissatisfied with them in any way," she says. "What's happening?"

These managers are discovering that managing means managing people. In the course of consulting and column writing I have found the two major problem areas for managers are how to motivate and how to reduce conflict.

Take the owner who is contemplating firing some of his employees. It is not that he is doing something wrong by giving them a handsome benefits package and good working conditions. He is just not doing enough. If you are in his situation you should ask yourself these questions: Do your employees participate in decision making? Do they have promotion opportunities? Do



they think you have made promises you have not fulfilled? Do you reward them for initiative and superior performance?

People will work for money, but except in extreme circumstances, they resist working for money alone. They also want recognition, security and opportunity. There is, accordingly, a simple solution for the supervisor of those 100 demoralized employees: Tell them "thank you."

It is human nature to like praise and to be motivated to work for it. I often tell my clients, "Do you want to make \$1,000 in five minutes? Go and give an employee a word of praise. His work rate will increase, his motivational level will rise, and he will pass along

his good mood to others."

And you must be aware that all the good work and good feeling you build up can be destroyed in ways you little expect. Take the supervisor who was amazed to find out that her two best employees thought she disliked them.

It can happen like this: The manager is worried about a procurement problem. Frank, the employee, passes the manager in the corridor and greets her with a smile. The manager, engrossed in her problem, looks up briefly and mutters a reply. Frank's mood drops. He wonders why she is angry with him, what he did, whether he is doing a good job.

The next day, the procurement problem takes a turn for the worse. Frank tries again. This time the manager does not even respond. Frank's worst fears are confirmed. And the manager does not even realize it.

Why does this happen? Employees are constantly gauging their job security and their employer's satisfaction with their performance by the expression they see on the manager's face.

OFFICE CONFLICT at its worst is caused by a deliberate troublemaker. Here is a typical case:

"I work with a manager who constantly criticizes me and the other managers. He likes to show my boss how knowledgeable he is and how he is the only guy who can 'get anything done around here.' The boss laps it up, and the two of them have lengthy con-

ferences discussing all the employees. This guy is bent on climbing to the top over our heads. What should we do?"

These professional conflict makes create morale problems, credibility problems and eventual productivity problems. They can be cunning and vicious, but they flourish only where the boss is a willing participant.

Professional conflict makes devote so much of their energies to criticizing others' performances that their own tasks are neglected. You can find subtle ways of pointing that out to their superiors.

What noting is that professional conflict makes rarely confine their volleys to employees. Their highly critical appraisals usually include disparaging remarks about the boss and his management style. At the appropriate time, you might wish to share with your boss your concerns about the damage being done to the boss' own image in the eyes of the employees. By the way, being along a witness or two. It will enhance your credibility. Keep your remarks dispassionate, and your boss will see the light.

A high level of employee motivation can make a company grow and flourish. Human conflict can reduce productivity and increase turnover. Business owners would be well advised to regularly monitor both. For a business they can spell life or death.

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## How to implement strategic planning

The strategic planning how-to question strikes at the heart of how to make change of any kind happen in your organization. Start by answering why your organization might want to embark on a strategic planning process. Want to be one of the organizations, in which employees understand the mission and goals? They enjoy a 29 percent greater return than other firms. This seems like a good reason to start strategic planning to me. How about you?

Keys to Strategic Planning Success  
These are the keys to effective strategic planning for your business.

Full and active executive support,  
Effective communication,  
Employee involvement,  
Thorough organizational planning and competitive analysis, and  
Widespread perceived need for the strategic planning.

If you are implementing your strategic planning in an organizational environment that is already employee-oriented, with a high level of trust, you start the strategic planning process with a huge plus. An additional plus is an organization that already thinks strategically.

Unfortunately, the implementation of strategic planning most frequently occurs as an organization moves from being traditionally reactionary to strategic. So, often, learning to think strategically is part of the strategic planning learning curve.

Full and Active Executive Support for Successful Strategic Planning

Successful strategic planning requires a large commitment from executives and senior managers, whether the strategic planning is occurring in a



department or in a complete organization. Executives must lead, support, follow-up, and live the results of the strategic planning process. Or, the strategic planning process will fail. It's as simple as that.

Without the full commitment of the organization's senior executives, don't even start strategic planning.

Participants will feel fooled and misled. A vision statement and a mission statement, along with this year's goals, filed, unimplemented in a cabinet or computer,

is a serious source of negativity and poor employee morale.

Senior leaders can do the following to create a successful strategic planning process.

Establish a clear vision for the strategic planning process. Paint a picture of where the organization will end up and the anticipated outcomes. Make certain the picture is one of reality and not what people "wish" would occur. Make sure key employees know "why" the organization is changing.

Appoint an executive champion or leader who "owns" the strategic planning process and makes certain other senior managers, as well as other appropriate people in the organization, are involved.

Executive support in strategic planning is critical to its success. Executives must lead, support, follow-up, and live the results of the strategic planning process. These are additional ways executive leaders can support the strategic planning process. See the first part of this article for more ways that leaders can support the strategic planning process.

Pay attention to the planning occurring. Ask how things are going. Focus on progress and barriers for change management. One of the worst possible scenarios is to have the leaders ignore the process.

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