

Building up Others

“Believe in yourself. Believe that ‘you can’, and ‘you will,’” Aksh Rohatgi talks about what makes his journey worthwhile.

Hands-on, transparent, fair, and a versatile leader – these characterise Aksh Rohatgi, the CFO of ISS Facility Services. He believes leadership is all about building and empowering others. Upbeat and full of beans at 41 years of age, he has a lot going for him. Leading a team at one of the largest facilities management service provider in the world is no small task, but he does this with passion.

Born in Delhi, Mr Rohatgi shifted to Mumbai two years ago when he joined his current organisation. To this day, however, he fondly recalls the winding by-lanes of the walled city he spent his childhood in. ‘Those quaint eateries and the hustle bustle of that place’ still evoke nostalgia. Work takes him all over the globe, but it is family time when he is home: with his wife Mukta, who is a Professor at Delhi University, their 11-year-old son Namr, and their pet Maggie. Life is truly blissful.

On learning from past successes...

In my view, I have not yet done anything too

“I attribute a large part of my success to my team members. Without a good team, which is driven, motivated, honest, and capable, the task becomes much more difficult.”



great yet. It is true that turning around business operations, changing customer portfolios, closing the books, undertaking acquisitions and divestments, unlocking shareholder value, changing the DNA/culture of organisations, and building high performing teams, can be called as ‘success’ by many, but life is so much more. Take the example of Mark Inglis, the first double amputee to scale Mt Everest. And there are many other inspirational personalities, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Kapil Dev, Bill Gates, Martin Luther, Lionel Messi, and Helen Keller, all of whom turned significant odds around in their favour. Still, from whatever I have achieved thus far, I have deduced the following lessons:

Understand the ‘purpose’, the big picture, and the higher intent: In today’s VUCA environment, it is important to think two levels up (the bigger picture) and to connect the dots. Think about the ‘why’ of a transaction: why is it important for

your seniors, or for your company’s board and other shareholders.

Think about the ‘how’: How can we convert adversity into opportunity? With Mark Inglis, the ‘adversity’ was that he did not have legs, but the ‘opportunity’ was that he had legs made of carbon that would not get a frost bite, which is among the worst fears of mountaineers at high altitudes. It was not easy, but he used his disability to his advantage. Clearly, it is vital to understand the context – and identify the strengths that can be leveraged and the shortcomings that must be overcome.

Value your team: I attribute a large part of my success to my team members. Without a good team, which is driven, motivated, honest, and capable, the task becomes much more difficult. Trust your team and instil trust within your team. Understandably, finance professionals often prefer to closely monitor their teams. However, they will be better served by creating an environment of trust and confidence, and ceding greater decision-making authority.

Go all in: It is important to believe in yourself. Believe that ‘you can’, and ‘you will’. Take chances, and do not be afraid of failure – you are not defeated unless you give up trying. And when you try, give it your best. Aim for the moon, because then you will at least land amongst the stars.

...and from my experience in diverse sectors and geographies

I held multiple roles prior to my current role as CFO, including, advisory and consulting (with the Big Four), leading businesses with P&L responsibility, setting up functions, cross-border transactions, implementation of ERPs, and even auditing books. I enjoyed these thoroughly, and was always fortunate to have great bosses and teams.

Each of these roles shaped me in different ways. Audit-related work made me ask tough questions and dive deep into details – I understood that there is no such thing as a ‘silly’ question. Consulting provided a



Aksh Rohatgi,
Chief Financial Officer,
ISS Facility Services

global exposure to work environments in various countries, and of diverse cultures. Finance roles strengthened my business insight and improved my understanding of the functioning of boards, investors, private equity players, sell-side and buy-side analysts, as well as tax and legal advisors, aiding me in becoming a well-rounded professional.

I evaluate each role by the amount of learning that it offers. In my earlier days, I used to seek technical knowledge (including financial know-how). Soon enough, I realised that softer aspects such as people management, communication, and relationships, are equally important. Moreover, learning is a continuous process – I learn from, and become a better professional with, every situation that I encounter.

The mandate at ISS, and what makes me tick

Headquartered in Copenhagen, Denmark, and listed on NASDAQ OMX, ISS Facility Services is a leading global provider of Facilities Management services. With ~500,000 employees globally, it is easily among the top ten largest employers worldwide. In India, too, it employs over 50,000 individuals.

Facilities management is a labour-intensive activity, and over 90 per cent of the organisation's workforce in India comes from the lower economic strata, and is paid the legal minimum wage. Regrettably, exploitation of labour is not unknown in this industry – people are under paid, disrespected, mistreated, and even, at times, pushed to the wall. It is our collective responsibility to arrest such income inequalities in our society.

Two years back, when I was evaluating job offers from various companies and consulting firms, I chose ISS because I thought it is a good way to 'give back' to society. Given that the average household size is four, a workforce size of 50,000 means that ISS is touching the lives of approx. 200,000 people in

With over 20 years of diverse business experience, Mr Rohatgi's core strengths lie in Corporate Strategy, Planning, Corporate Finance, Tax, Deal structuring, Transaction Due Diligence, Pre-and post-Merger Integration, Financial Reporting and Budgeting, to name a few.

Chartered Accountant and Alumnus of Harvard Business School (EE) and IIM-A (EE), Mr Rohatgi started his career with A.F Ferguson & Co. in 1996 as an

Article Clerk. In 1999, he joined KPMG as Manager. This was followed by a stint with Exl Services as Vice President – Business Process Risk Consulting, followed by a brief innings with Deloitte Touche and Tohmatsu as Senior Manager - Enterprise Risk Services, only to return to EXL Services as Vice President – Finance and Head of Corporate Planning, Business Finance and Pricing, prior to joining ISS Facility Services in September 2014.

India. The organisation's high standards of conduct and practices make a difference in their lives. Many have migrated from villages and small cities in search of a job and have seen tough times. Listening to their stories increases one's appreciation for life, and that is what keeps me going. I try, as much as possible, to ensure that my decisions are focused on improving the lives of, and empowering, our front-line colleagues.

To realise the vision of ISS of "... being the world's greatest services organisation", we want to create a culture that ensures not just the 'expected' or 'desired' service standards, but aims to continuously delight customers, with 'surprising' or even 'unbelievable' service moments. We believe our competitors (for service standards) are not just other facilities management companies, but companies in other industries that demonstrate world-class service standards. Ideally, we would like to benchmark our practices and service excellence against the likes of Disney, Singapore Airlines, Four Seasons Hotel, or even Starbucks. We want to distinguish ourselves based on the difference we make to our employees, customers, and society.

Story-telling: That management strategy that matters

Last year, on a visit to the Disney Institute at Orlando, I was inspired by their 'art of story-telling'. The Walt Disney Company thrives on its ability to tell stories that con-

nect with people's emotions. The understanding and appreciation of the power of story-telling, manifests their culture and leadership. Story-telling should be an essential strategy of communication, new ideas, concepts and challenges. People are more engaged and inspired by information that is narrated properly. It leaves a lasting impact, and I believe this skill distinguishes the 'great' leader from the 'good' leader.

Running: A passion

In the little time that I get after work, I enjoy running, and have retained this passion over the years. I have run marathons in the past, and I still do some running, at least 3-4 days in a week. This keeps me healthy and de-stressed. In addition, these morning runs give me time to think and structure my day, helping me to organise my thoughts and remain focused on my target for the day. Someday, I wish to trek to the Everest base camp, but this would require about 20 days, and I am confident I shall make that happen – "Someday".

Seeking inspiration from books

I love to read biographies, and I do that during my travel. It is very interesting to read life stories and how they evolve. One of my favourite books is *The Class* by Erich Segal. The book follows the diverse fates of five classmates from Harvard's class of 1958, recording the way their lives intertwine, and culminating in a dramatic conclusion at their class reunion 25 years later. ■