

Raise your Hand

“Get into challenging situations. Do not worry whether you know anything or not. You will learn on the job,” say **Raghavan V Srinivasa** as he shares his story

Raghavan Srinivasa, Chief Financial Officer of Computer Sciences Corporation India (CSC), grew up in Madurai. His father is an agriculturalist and his mother a proud homemaker. At 23, he moved away on work, and for over two decades now, he has lived in Bangalore. Srinivasa credits his parents, and particularly his mother, with encouraging him to do well in life, and motivating him to stay balanced.

Of mentors and confidantes

A mentor is someone who should be able to understand and appreciate you as an individual. This ‘understanding’ is what allows the person to give the right perspective and direction. I have been lucky to have not one, but two mentors – both professionally and personally – and I was able to open my heart out to both of them. On the personal front, I confide a lot in my wife. I value her candid opinions, which are realistic and logical.

Not every organisation that I have worked for has connected me with a mentor. Most, however, have introduced me to people who have influenced and impacted me. For instance, I still speak regularly with one of my ex-employees from GE. These are select individuals who offer me unbiased and objective views, and give me a clearer perspective about my professional life. In that sense, these are people who have been a constant in my career spanning 27 years.

Two mantras that have stayed constant in my 27-year career is, ‘be true to yourself’ and ‘expect the same from your peers and employees while communicating the message very clearly’.



Mentors and guides are critical for one’s growth because they support you during challenging times. You need somebody to depend on and help you correct the course of your life. That’s where the role of a mentor becomes very powerful – someone who can guide you, correct you and appreciate you; someone who can listen to you objectively without being judgemental.

Diverse and cross-sectoral experience counts...

I have been lucky to choose a career that has taken me on different paths. When I first started out, one of my seniors gave me some very sound advice: to have a ‘good rotation’ in the first six-seven years of your career in all areas of finance, and then to reflect on which part you have loved most. Those words of wisdom have been my guide. I started with internal audit and then moved to taxation, followed by accounting and later business analysis. I drew on these experiences



and realised that I wanted to step outside the boundary of finance and engross myself in the pure business side in manufacturing, operations, trading, buying and selling. Since I had worked closely with these stakeholders in the course of my career, I had already strong exposure to these areas. I also told myself that, by the age 35, I must become a CFO – and indeed, when I became GE’s CFO, I was 34 years old. I took over the reins from my senior, V Raja, who is now the Vice Chairman and MD of Philips India.

My initial experience of managing various departments in finance exposed me to challenging situations. However, I never run away. I have been posted to places where no one has wanted to go, and managed to turn around what

would otherwise be professionally bleak situations. I have been happy to take charge, and have learnt not to say 'No' to situations that offer professional challenges that will eventually hone my skills. In some of these places, the nearest town was about 30 kilometres away. In the initial years of my career, I had to forego my weekends, working day-in and day-out without complaint. Living in these small towns has given me phenomenal insights, allowing me to create ethical and global working standards, and shaping me into a stronger person, professionally as well as personally.

Dive into the unknown

Raise your hand and get into the most challenging situations if you want to succeed. Do not worry whether you know anything or not – you will learn on the job. If there is anything that comes your way, accept it and figure out how to do it to the best of your ability. Be willing to learn and stretch yourself in areas beyond your functional knowledge.

Leading and motivating the team

A good finance person should have excellent business skills. Take the IT industry, for instance, where I have worked for almost 17 years. Most IT companies have walk-in interviews, a segment where finance doesn't have much role. I told the HR department of one particular IT company that my team would arrange the interviews, monitor the selection process with the other relevant departments, and thus help the company acquire the best talent. This exercise allowed my team to stretch its potential and understand the various stages of the interview process, and what goes into hiring employees. I also send my team members to look at operations and to closely understand the particular

Career Highlights

Mr Srinivasa has over 27 years of diverse business experience, including 15 years in senior management positions in the manufacturing, IT and ITeS industries. His core strengths lie in start-ups, business turnaround, driving the growth agenda, and M&A. As a finance leader, he is a bankable strategic business partner with demonstrated leadership and change-management skills, and strong business ethics.

Mr Srinivasa joined CSC in 2014 and has since been an instrumental part of its growth story. He worked his way up the rungs of middle management before moving to Motorola as Finance Manager. It was at GE Lighting India that he got his first big break, becoming its CFO before shifting to GE Capital-IT Services. His next move was to Logica, where he took over as Finance Director-Global Operations, and then to AGC Networks.

department's processes. If I am looking for future leaders, they must monitor everything closely, which means understanding how the company functions in all its departments, not just one.

While such exercises help motivate the team, it is also important to reward and recognise people and offer them greater visibility. I also encourage all the departments within the company to work towards customer satisfaction – and I love employees who make customers happy. I also push my employees to participate in relevant conferences and forums, which allows them to interact with a larger section of our fraternity and to gain expertise.

Finance will never be the same again...

The CFO's job is changing rapidly, in that finance heads are now considered equal partners in the business. What is challenging is that we are expected to embrace change swiftly, keep up with the trends, and figure out ways to grow the company. Also, with the advent of business analytics and big data, CFOs need to process a lot of information in real time, taking swift, logical decisions for the sake of the company.

Moving forward, I predict that the finance function will undergo a major shift, particularly with robotics starting to supplement

people. The role of the CFO will extend beyond the finance domain into areas like technology, HR, and operations. Indeed, the day is not far when the CFO will be referred to as 'Chief Value Creator'.

A management mantra for keeps

Two mantras that have stayed constant in my 27-year career is, 'be true to yourself' and 'expect the same from your peers and employees while communicating the message very clearly'. Transparency, commitment and a clear conscience all have a strong place in my scheme of management. I also like rewarding strong performers and recognising talent. Performance, and not experience, is what matters.

Bliss outside of work

I make it a point to give time to social causes and activities. I travel on work for about two weeks each month, so in the remaining two weeks that I am in Bangalore, I spend quality time with my 12-year-old daughter. I genuinely feel that children have a rare gift – the ability to come up with brilliant ideas that one can use in one's professional career. I read widely about world economics, and try to correlate things, such as what drives the actions of the Indian government – politically and economically. I am also a music lover and listen to Carnatic music. ■