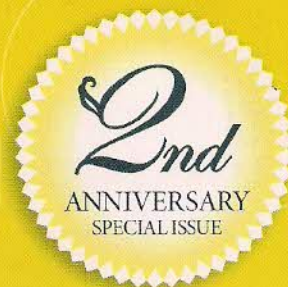


Inc.

GUIDE BOOK: How to resolve office conflicts

Following Page 24

The Magazine for Growing Companies



Presenting the...

Biz Kid Club

They have the inheritance. But the 2nd Gen also has perceptions to battle and points to prove. That's no cakewalk, as this crop of heirs tells us

Page 25

THE GOODS

Swipe away at these touch desktops

Page 21

Apps for smart business travel

Page 22

PLUS

HIRING TROUBLES?
THE PROBLEM COULD BE YOU

Page 52



SAMANTHA KOCHHAR
MD, The Blossom
Kochhar Group

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Suchir Censets

NIRUPA SHANKAR
VP (Strategy),
Brigade Hospitality
Services

ISHAAN SURI
Director, Interarch

Carrying the Torch

Are the heir apparents ready to claim their space?



ON THE COVER

From left: Rahul Seth, Samantha Kochhar, Bharat Joshi, Nirupa Shankar and Ishaan Suri. Photograph by Subhojit Paul in Delhi. Cover design by Anil T.

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25 The Inheritors

Get to know the 2nd Gen of India Inc.—their challenges, aspirations and fascinating journeys make for great stories.

BY SHREYASI SINGH AND IRA SWASTI

26 Ishaan Suri

Interarch Building Products

29 Nirupa Shankar

Brigade Hospitality Services

32 Chetan and Rishi Kajaria

Kajaria Ceramics

34 Rahul Seth

Sudhir Gensets

37 Vikas Kapur

Hidesign

39 Dipak Sanghavi

Nilon's

41 Bharat and Hitendra Joshi

Associated Container Terminals

42 Ankit Gupta

Holostik Group

45 Samantha Kochhar

The Blossom Kochhar Group

EXPERT VIEWS

Kumar R. Parakala KPMG

Samish Dalal SP Jain

Institute of Management & Research

Mitali Bose Hay Group

52 Why Is It So Hard to Find Good People?

The problem might be you. Are you making any of these all-too-common mistakes when hiring?

BY APRIL JOYNER



48 How I Did It Patu Keswani

The founder of Lemon Tree Hotels has created a low-cost airline equivalent of the hospitality business. AS TOLD TO SHREYASI SINGH



NIRUPA SHANKAR

BRIGADE HOSPITALITY SERVICES

“You always have to be on your toes”



Joining her family's ₹600-crore real estate business was never a given. Happily for everybody, Nirupa Shankar's ambitions and those of the Brigade Group slowly began to align perfectly.



AS TOLD TO SHREYASI SINGH

PHOTOGRAPH BY SUBHOJIT PAUL

Growing up, working in the family business was not always on my mind. There was never any pressure to do so. I was honestly just exploring things for myself. I studied Economics at the University of Virginia. Every summer, I'd come back to India and do different internships, be it in advertising, research or a hotel internship at The Leela Palace Hotel, Bangalore. I ended up taking a consulting job with Ernst & Young in the US after my graduation though—those are the kind of companies that come for jobs on campus. But I knew it wasn't something I wanted to do for the rest of my life. So I started taking evening classes in hotel opera-

**MY TIP**

Set the right example by working hard and displaying a positive work ethic. Also, treat people with respect. It's a privilege to have a great platform to start with. Second-generation entrepreneurs must use that wisely.

tions at New York University. I absolutely loved it—it just clicked with me. So I applied to Cornell University's Hotel Management School, where I did my Master's and had the incredible opportunity to intern at Four Seasons, Singapore.

Brigade Group had already started the first Mercure hotel in India (eventually rebranded as the Grand Mercure). In 2009, when I finished my hotel management degree, I got a couple of job offers. But was taking up a job the best use of my time? That's when my parents told me to think straight. They said the opportunity to be in the hotel business was right here, at home with our company. So I decided to go where I could learn the most in the least amount of time. At

that point, Brigade Group had eight to 10 hotels planned for the future. I also knew that deep inside my parents wanted me to come back and help support the business. While I am the younger of the two sisters, my elder sister is married and currently living in the US. I also started seeing the benefits of being in India. Also, I wanted to be part of the ramp-up phase in our hospitality business. There's no point in coming in after all the hard work has been done. Monitoring is not where the fun is. It is only when you build a project from scratch and add tremendous value to bare land, that you can feel a sense of achievement. I'm glad I joined when I did. Initially, I was a little apprehensive about moving back home. I had been living abroad

on my own for eight years since I was 18. But surprisingly, the transition was pretty easy.

I was inducted into Brigade Hospitality Services in 2009. This company primarily managed the hospitality related assets of the parent company. Our hospitality portfolio consisted of lifestyle clubs, convention centres and serviced apartments—essentially, they complemented many of the residential and commercial projects of the group company. For instance, for all our large residential enclaves (over 700-800 apartments), residents expect a really nice gym, spa, dining area, badminton court, squash, a swimming pool other sporting facilities. The hospitality team would ensure that these facilities and services were properly and professionally managed and delivered to the customer.

But nothing was handed to me on a silver platter in the last two years. When I came in, there was no major announcement. It was like any other new joinee coming in—a template mail was sent out with my qualifications, what I'd be working on and who I

COMPANY PROFILE | BRIGADE GROUP

Brigade Group was established in 1986 by M.R. Jaishankar with property development as its main focus. Today, Brigade, headquartered in Bengaluru, is one of South India's leading property developers. The ₹600-crore company has a uniquely diverse multi-domain portfolio that covers property development, property management services, hospitality and education.



would report to. I had to consciously make myself known within the organisation—in the beginning, people hesitated in calling me for meetings. I'd go up to any team member myself if there was something I wanted to participate in, and ask that I be involved. That's sort of how you make your way.

I spent the first three months as a management trainee. I worked with our ground and front line staff to understand what they were doing and what challenges they were facing. I also wanted all our staff to be comfortable with me. Making the effort with people really helped. People spoke to me very freely because they knew I had the best interests of the company. I didn't have a hidden agenda. I didn't need to move ahead at anybody's cost.

Honestly, I think the hospitality team is happy that they have somebody from the promoter family working with them. In the first 10 years of the company, my father knew every employee and every customer. Today, after the tremendous growth in the past 15 years, the hospitality team only meets him once a month for a review session. Now, because I'm here, I think they do feel more connected with the bigger picture.

Of course, the expectations are there. You have to be very sharp. People will not hesitate to appreciate or dismiss you. My father's shoes are extremely large ones to fill. But with the support of my family and my sister who will eventually join the business, the new leader-

ship transition will happen over time, maybe even five to 10 years. We have an organisational goal of ₹10,000 crore by 2020 and I am here to ensure that this happens.

I'm confident I can take the business to the next level. I have a lot to offer. I still need to learn so much from my father—his grit, determination, his eye for business. But, I'm not him. I bring different things to the table. In any case, the company isn't what it used to be. What you require in the first 25 years isn't what you need in the next 25. I am learning a lot today and gaining tremendous experience and exposure. Of course I want to see this company grow, and to support my father's vision, but at the same time, this is also a great platform for me. That's important too. **1**