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MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

**A SUCCESS STORY OF
MR.IAKOKA SUBRAMANIAM**

Profile

THE PROFILE

Born in 1948 in a small village in suburban Coimbatore, Mr. N. Subramaniam completed high school and went on to pursue Mechanical Engineering at PSG Tech in the city. He recollects that 70-80 percent of the people in and around his village worked in textile mills, including his father. Textiles has been a part of Mr. Subramaniam's life right from his childhood days.

After completing graduation, Mr. Subramaniam spent a few years working for a chemical unit and then moved back to Coimbatore to join Shanthi Gears in 1981-82. Subsequently, he worked with the Elgi Group for a few years. In 1987 he, along with some of his friends, started IAKOKA Syntrans, for manufacturing synthetic spindle tapes at a time when the market was predominantly using cotton tapes.

During this period, Mr. Subramaniam travelled extensively across the length and breadth of the country and established close personal relationship with various textile units, right from the shop floor people to the top management. He and his associates also started IAKOKA Beltrans for belting solutions. It was in 1995 that Mr. Subramaniam approached Habasit-Switzerland for partnering it in the Indian market. Subsequently, in 1996, a new JV company was set up, Habasit Iakoka Private Ltd., with a 51:49 shareholding.

Mr. Iakoka Subramaniam is the managing Director of M/s. Habasit Iakoka Pvt Ltd (An Indo-Swiss joint venture)

Habasit Iakoka

- is the largest manufacturer of Synthetic Sandwich Spindle Tapes for textile machinery applications in the World
- is the leading Power Transmission, Conveyor and Modular Belt Specialist in India and offers a comprehensive Sales and Service Network
- manufactures Synthetic Sandwich Spindle Tapes and Leather Transmission Belts in India.
- markets and represents the entire product range of Habasit AG, manufactured in Switzerland, Italy and USA.
- employs around 260 persons in production, sales and services.

This undoubtedly is one of the most successful joint ventures in the textile industry in India. From a turnover of Rs. 4 crores in 1996, the company recently crossed the Rs. 100-crore turnover. With three manufacturing facilities, 300 employees and over 23 dealers across India, Habasit Iakoka is the unmatched market leader in the product segments in which it operates. The company enjoys a domestic market share of 60 per cent for spindle tapes with 10-15 per cent of the turnover coming from exports.

During his career spanning over four decades he has been an active member and office bearer of many prestigious Industry Associations. He has travelled all over the world for sales promotion and participated in many trade exhibitions.

He is a happy man throughout, and there is a sense of achievement, a sense of satisfaction from where he started to what he has accomplished till today. He will continue to be closely associated with the textile industry. "India will be the No.1 country in textiles in the next 10 to 15 years. Given an equal platform and opportunity, Indians can outdo anyone in the world", says Mr. Subramaniam. He is a forerunner for the make India movement.

A firm believer and follower of our rich culture and traditions, Mr. Subramaniam is straightforward and outspoken. He has written five books so far and has to his credit a collection of poems, short stories, travelogues and motivational books, all written in Tamil. He has also won a few awards for his

writings. His journey as a writer will continue more vigorously after his retirement. (Source: The Textile Magazine)

THE PHILOSOPHY

Iakoka Subramanian has evolved a management philosophy by synthesizing the oriental values and western practices prevailing in the organizational and social plane.

He is an advocate of a 'hybrid' practice by bridging the dichotomous value system of east and west, particularly in the context of globalization. According to him Indians are capable of multitasking, but specialization will make them more competent. Westerners tend to be more precise and accurate but the flexible approach in dealing with clients and customers and the mutual trust in business dealings found in India has a definite advantage. Performing amidst uncertainties and constraints is the Indian way, while elaborate and detailed planning is essential for perfect execution.

Based on his personal experience and extensive industrial tours interaction with overseas industry leaders he has developed a set of perceptions and values, which he prescribes as success ingredients for those who aspire to be a player in the global market.

Innovation proneness:

Technology and innovation are intertwined. The case of Iakoka Habasit is a brilliant example. The 'Spindle tapes' used in spinning mills were usually made out of cotton fibers. To ensure durability and efficiency Nylon tapes were invented by Habasit in Switzerland and the same was introduced in India by Iakoka –Habasit, and the product proved to be a great success. Innovative marketing practices like direct selling and demonstration in the plants made the product quite popular.

No compromise in quality:

Mr.Subramaiaam advocates zero tolerance to defects. Besides Timely delivery, honesty and integrity in business dealings are inseparable human aspect of quality. Quality of the product or service has many coordinates.

- Technical training is an input for quality which depends on the human quality of commitment and work culture of individuals coupled with socio-political environment.

- Materials and machines used are equally important in determining the quality of the product.
- Transparency, industrial democracy in work environment, and team work are the essential elements of productivity and quality

Appreciate the cultural differences:

In the global business environment one has to know that culture and values vary between one country and another. A global businessman has to understand and respect the alien values; and value judgment of ones behavior and customs may not be desirable. Therefore management practices have to be devised taking into account the specific social and cultural environment of the business system. There can not be a single business practice or a set of practices applicable globally. They are culture specific.

Respect the Native Values:

Mr.Subramaniam emphasizes that the Indian businessmen should steadfastly stick to the time tested Indian familial and personal values, which is very different from western system of values. Materialism and individualism dominate the western society, where as family bonds and community consciousness are sheet anchor of the lasting success and superior performance of Indians. Therefore the H.R. practices should be designed with proper understanding of the native culture.

Anchor the Responsibility system:

The success in industry and business depends on the network of duties and responsibilities. Mr.Subramaniam draws inspiration from the responsibility system prevalent in every profession, in Japan. The responsibility system prevailing in Japanese society is unique and amazing. Respecting the rules and regulations, confining to ones own functional boundaries, professionalism, absence of corruption and bureaucratic red tape and commitment to duty are the hallmarks of Japanese society, while such values are found missing among the workforce in India by and large. Installing responsibility systems, discipline and orderly behavior in every profession and in all walks of life are necessary to transform India.

Nurture the Niche Market:

Mr.Subramaniam is a strong votary of the 'niche market' .He advises all the entrepreneurs, whether the market is local or global to design the product features services and practices according to the market

needs. His own joint venture initiated in 1996 is a spectacular success because it eminently serves a specific need of a specific market. Mr.Subramaniam was given a prestigious awarded in 2008 by Habasit (Switzerland).The citation states that;

The tireless effort, the vision and fore sight, the dedicated leadership, trustworthiness, teamwork and the customer centric approach made the Habasit Iakoka a “Jewel in the crown”.

Mr. Iakoka Subramaniam is a thinker and writer as well, with a perfect grasp of contemporary business and society and yet very unassuming and modest. He believes in ethical business practices and respects human values he attributes all the success to the inherited familial traits and parentage, native culture, hospitality equal treatment to everyone, not being greedy, respecting the community and society, adoring the ethnic culture and national pride. The above values dominate the management philosophy of Mr. Subramaniam. These values are the ingredients of his success both in the family and business.

In the context of Globalization and liberalization Mr. Subramaniam gives a bit of advice to the youth, particularly to the student youth. While getting exposed to the global business practices, we have to relook our native values in the context of business. Everyone needs to understand freedom in the right perspective and exercise self- control or get attuned to a controlled environment and an appraisal system based on accountability. These are pre- requisites for our personal success and career achievements.

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