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Clock speed of India is changing, we must move fast: HUL CEO

Jawa Says Co Must Experiment More, Accelerate Scaling New Ideas To Take On Various Types Of Competitors In Mkt

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Mumbai: Hindustan Unilever CEO & MD Rohit Jawa, who took over at the helm of the Rs 58,000-crore FMCG behemoth in June, says the next evolution for HUL is not just being big, but being quick. Jawa says he wants to sustain and build on the success of the company while ensuring that new ideas get scaled up speedily. He has taken charge at a time when the company's volume growth has slowed down, and it is facing heat from low-priced local players. In an exclusive interview to TOI, Jawa says HUL is open to partnerships with entrepreneurs to leverage their ecosystem and help them scale. Excerpts:

You are known to be the transformation man at Unilever. What can one expect in re-imagine HUL 2.0?

I have two jobs here. One is to sustain and build on the success of the company, which has a 90-year proud history of many firsts... to take that success forward. At the same time, the country and consumers are changing, their aspirations are changing. Our portfolio must, therefore, shift as well. The clock speed of this country is changing. It's become very fast. You have competitors of all kinds in the market today. We must learn to move fast, experiment more, and scale new ideas quickly across the length and breadth of our massive infrastructure.

The next evolution will be a company that is not just big, but also fast. With not just has the scale but also the agility, with not just great repeatability but also experimentation. Some of our work on incubating brands is showing promise. Some of the new businesses that we acquired in well-being, or for that matter, the new formats we're launching in the market, show we have the right ingredients... which we have to now magnify.

We must have a culture

of empowerment where we can disaggregate decision-making units. While we create a platform where HUL offers people stability, safety, security, the regulatory, compliance and talent backbone, we still need to have speedboats of progress where people can take our business to the next level.

On co-creation with startups facing a funding winter...

We will be encouraging more work around new brand creation. Our premium beauty business unit has shown us the way to build digital and social-first brands. We've learned how to play that model. We are also open to partnerships. The-

ve intensity is the nature of the beast. This is not a zero-sum game. It's about focusing on how we can best serve our consumers. This is a huge market and there are a lot more years of growth. The biggest focus is to get used to driving competitive volume growth because the price is flat to negative now and to keep driving the up-gradation engine because that's the long-term story.

Do you see the premium pie of the portfolio becoming bigger?

Premium is already growing 1.5 times faster than other parts of our portfolio. Most of the innovation, new benefits and formats are co-

cial one. I like teams who like to work with each other, and have fun working with each other. I'm keen on having a strong set of leaders so I can empower them, and I have more time to think about the future. But also, I love to roll up my sleeves if there's a need. In the first year of training, I was taught how to clean shelves to put up the merchandise. So, it's about the consumer first. I believe in sticking to an agenda that has not more than five priorities, as any agenda that goes beyond that can be diffusive. I love the power of focus.

In one of your blogs, you called out Harish Manwani as one of your mentors. What learnings have you picked up from him?

I learned from him to simplify the complex, and how to eventually turn that into a rallying cry that became actionable. I learned from him the ability to use this to get to the core. At times, lots of data is thrown at you along with information, biases, and opinions, but the ability to cut through all of that to get to the heart of the issue is what I learnt from him.

In one of your pieces, you said you're a reserved person...

I like my moments of quiet to re-energise myself. I think each of us are born with different personalities. All leaders are not extroverts. I like spending time with people I enjoy being with. Music, a book and my family are my best bonding moments.

Do you see the new generation spending lifelong careers with the organisation?

Lifelong careers in a single company may be a thing of the past in the general industry, but it just so happens that people like to work for companies where they feel they are growing personally, have the closest friends, and where their value systems are not challenged.

“We Are Open To Partnerships

Re-Imagining HUL 2.0 | We will have to become more **experimental**, open to different ways of doing business and forming partnerships as there's a big world outside HUL that we can leverage

Co-Creating With Startups | We will be encouraging more work around **new brand creation**. We are also **open to partnerships**



Premium Pie | Premium is already growing **1.5 times** faster than other parts of our portfolio. Most of the innovation, new benefits and new formats are coming in that space

On Competition | Heightened regional & local competition is a **temporary reality** of one part of our business, but that's not the whole reality

Rohit Jawa | CEO & MD, HUL

re's so much enterprising, entrepreneurial energy and creative people in this country. We should leverage that force and might as an ecosystem where we have the strengths of a strategic play in safety, R&D and supply chain. We can help many entrepreneurs scale.

That's the reason why we picked up a 20% stake in Well-being Nutrition, and why we took a stake in OZiva — we'll have more ways of creating a brand and serving the community. We are divided across three big business units, and they have their own 16 categories. We operate as 16 small business entrepreneurship units. Partnerships will be one of the things that we will be looking to do more of.

On competition...

Heightened regional and local competition is a temporary reality of one part of our business, but that's not the whole reality. Competiti-

ving in that space. Upgradation will remain the engine of growth, and directionally, it is moving to become 40% of the portfolio.

When will the rural market growth come back?

With the numbers we see now, rural sales have come back by volume to where they were two years back. It's on the path to recovery.

How do you see the next decade?

On a more transformative basis, we are well-positioned to win and grow in the next decade. 19 of our brands are more than Rs 1,000 crore.

What is your leadership style like?

I always start by having a collective and shared vision of what the lighthouse is. With the team I work with, it's not just a shared strategic alignment but also a so-