

'You cannot say anymore that my **job** is only sales'

ALL ENCOMPASSING Nature of jobs has changed, says BP Biddappa, executive director, HR, HUL

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MUMBAI: Hindustan Unilever Ltd (HUL), India's largest consumer packaged goods firm by sales, has been listed as a Dream Employer for the eighth consecutive year and Employer of Choice for the sixth time in a row as per Nielsen Campus Track-B school survey. The company has attributed the ranking to some of its campus initiatives like Enterprise Inc and Unilever Leadership Internship Programme. During these programmes management trainees at HUL are exposed to various functions and roles within the company. They also get to spend time with the top leaders who are actively invested in these initiatives, says executive director (human Resources) BP Biddappa in an interview. Biddappa also spoke on how the company has evolved over time to become more relevant to the younger generation. Edited excerpts.

What does it take to make the cut every time?

It's a privilege to be rated high. We believe students have a lot of choice in front of them nowadays. We don't take this (rating) for granted. It's also the legacy of last 50-60 years. We have a very strong programme dealing with future leaders and management trainees. It's our investment into our people that is reflected into this ratings. People are our high-priority.

Given the younger generations' aspirations for entrepreneur-



■ BP Biddappa, executive director, HR, HUL

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ship what has changed for you in terms of dealing with the younger employees. Has the career path that you choose and outline for them changed over the years?

It really hasn't been a such struggle because we believe there is a small percentage of people who actually want to take a risk and say 'I want to step up and start something on my own.' I think

what people want by and large is the freedom and space to be empowered and take decisions early. Every year we look at our programmes to understand 'are there tweaks we need to make, are there any dimensions we need to make, are there any exposures we need to give?' That's part of our continuous learning process to make sure that every year the programme is relevant. All of

us have to live in an era where there are lots of choices where decisions are going to be much faster. So managers, leaders and management trainees alike have shifted to respond to an environment which is much more dynamic where there is a lot more of choices. There has been tectonic shift for talent across and senior leaders who aren't responsive and dynamic will struggle if they are not contemporary.

Are there any areas in terms of talent management that the company is working on to keep pace with the market demand?

For us, what we can do is we continue to contemporise in the context we see our journey. So the couple of exciting things that are happening is in terms of early empowerment. We want to make sure people are able to look at businesses in its entirety and not just as a function whether it is finance, supply chain or HR. So we make sure stints are across different functions, so on a year-by-year basis we try to make sure people are doing projects across different functions because we want to build strong general managers. We want people to have the opportunity to do these jobs earlier than that in the past. So from that perspective we are tweaking the programmes around the exposures that people get. So our first jobs could be pretty big and well rounded. We want to ensure that they are able to pull together the skills that come from different functions.

What are the skill sets that the

company is looking at in order to push it to the next level of growth?

Today the way the business operates is slightly different from what it used to be years ago. There is a lot of competition in the digital space. We want our business to be ahead of the curve. Therefore, we have already embarked on several digital initiatives and have a strong e-commerce business as well. We also need to look at what our competitors are doing going forward. Our initiatives like Winning in Many Indias approach was really about saying can we build nimble, agile young leaders who can respond to local competitors in any part of the market. This drive and focus on early general management is part of this effort.

Has that changed? If so what and how it has changed as compared to 15 years ago?

Today the expectation is you need to be a general manager in the first job itself. If you are a sales manager, you cannot say anymore that my job is only sales. That's the fundamental shift. You have competitors who are local and you have the opportunity to deploy different sets of skills into the first job. While the title of general manager is a misnomer, we would want people to be looking at the business in its entirety and in an integrated fashion from the time they start their first jobs. Earlier what happened was -- since we are a global company -- competition was a mix, information was not as swift. So it has evolved over a period of time.