

Putting people before numbers

HR has a huge role in strategy, elaborates RPG's Anil Aggarwal in an exclusive interview with *B&E*'s PREETI CHATURVEDI & SURBHI CHAWLA

An alumnus of IIM Ahmedabad, former President of the National HRD Network, a pioneer of the total quality movement in India and an orator par excellence, Arvind Agarwal essays all these roles with an unassuming grace. With an experience spanning more than three decades in marketing and HR across reputable organisations like IBP, Escorts, and Modi Xerox, he is now leading the Corporate Development and Group HR practice at RPG Enterprises. The group, which had a turnover of \$3 billion for

FY' 07, RPG is also one of the oldest Indian conglomerates, which has operations in seven diverse business sectors through 20 companies. Being at the helm of the HR for such a company is never an easy task. RPG, with its existing mix of both mature and mushrooming businesses, aspires to touch a market capitalisation of \$10 billion by the year 2012, thus ensuring that the HR of the company has to be on its toes all this while. *B&E* caught up with Arvind Agarwal on his recent visit to Delhi to discuss about the changing role of HR in today's world, and also to provide a sneak preview of HR processes and "Signature Practises" followed at RPG Enterprise. Excerpts from the interview:

B&E: How has HR's role changed over time & what has catapulted HR's staff to become partners in corporate strategy?

AA: A company's value proposition has to be primarily structured by its HR processes. That is why HR practitioners are essaying the roles of marketers as well as strategists beyond their routine activities. HR policies ensure that your

ARVIND AGARWAL
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claims to being a people oriented organisation are not mere motherhood statements but are truly reflective of your value system. For instance, if you refuse to sanction leaves of employees at occasions important to them on the work pressure reasoning, you are failing to live up to the brand promise of a people centered organisation.

B&E: How do you manage to differentiate yourself in terms of training & retention?

AA: It's very important to create a stimulating working culture, where personal aspirations are aligned with company goals; there is constant scope for learning and enough elbow room for discretion and ideating. At RPG, through our various initiatives, our focus has been to execute this in practice. We have

RPG firmly believes in creating a stimulating work environment



...en firm believers in the signifi-
-training. Our employees have
-rtunity to design their own
So we have training centres at
lkata and various other regions
liver structured programs. We
-heavily in leadership develop-
-grams. Moreover, we have insti-
y effective E-Learning practice
employees are given an option
from an array of online cours-
also incentivised for success-
-leting them. As most of the
is not having any kind of for-

...mal education like MBA, so we have to
-give them three months retail training.
We have about 8 training centers across
the country called 'Pragati' to enable us
in delivering training to our workforce.

B&E: *What are the challenges that RPG Enterprise faces in terms of managing its human resources?*

AA: The HR has to play a crucial role when you are growing as fast as we are. The greatest challenge in times like these is bringing in new talent. In today's time the talent market too has become very

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competitive. RPG over the years has been the largest single recruiter from some of the premium institutes and there are also an equally large number of summer interns that join the organisation. Many of these summer interns do return back.

B&E: *How do you brand yourself in these campuses to distinguish yourselves from the others?*

AA: Whenever we go to management institutes, we talk about the exciting portfolio that RPG group can offer as a whole. The group ethos followed at RPG is to provide exposure across business and functions. Even during campus interviews, we take an extra pain to customise job roles to meet the needs to the individual. Unlike all other prospective employers, we do not go with a standard package or set portfolio. At the end of the day, our objective is to provide opportunities that are exciting for each person that joins the organisation and for us as well. Hiring, is such an important function of our HR policies that at times even the chairman can be consulted before hiring a person.

B&E: *The current buzz word in the HR domain is about "Signature Practises". Can you share some of the interesting practices followed at RPG?*

AA: The Signature Practices for RPG are an embodiment of its core values. For instance, at RPG Enterprise, we believe in an anti-hierarchical approach, which has led to the instituting of our Advisory Management Councils. This practice was instituted with an objective of engaging the people that fall in the bracket of being the middle managers and comprises of 10-12 high performing cross functional young professionals from the middle and junior management. They have free access to all information and are given the freedom to deliberate on the same and make recommendations directly to the CEO. They are also privy to the actual board review meetings conducted by the Chairman. We are aware that it is a risky proposition but we also understand that breaking hierarchy is the way to innovate and ideate. **B&E**