Skill Development & Training - Key Ingredient for Success

Centum Learning is a leading organisation in the global skills development and vocational training landscape. The organisation led by Mr. Sanjeev Duggal, a sociologist by education and a visionary by profession, Centum Learning, under his leadership has become the first Indian Multinational Training & Skills company with operations in over 20 countries. In an exclusive interview with Ahmad Shariq Khan, (Associate Editor- People & Management) Mr Duggal highlights the importance of skills development and training segment and related affairs.

**In your view, what are the key strengths of Centum Learning that makes it stand away from the crowd?**

Centum Learning is the first skilling MNC to have presence in 21 countries across the globe. Recipient of 28 global & national awards, Centum Learning is a unique social transformation company with presence in over 21 industry sectors. We have an in-house content factory for the best customised content for individual clients. We have formed Centum Skills Instructors Guild in the year 2012 where trainers from all the business verticals with their specialisations are listed. This ensures that as per each and every project we have a location-wise trainer ready to conduct sessions within a city or across country at the same time.

Our unique approach to skilling has made us the trusted ‘Go-To’ partner for corporates looking to deploy skills development and vocational training initiatives. With domain expertise in 21 industry verticals and over 1,358 learning and development specialists, it is not surprising that we have partnered over 350 corporates to address the dreaded ‘skills-demand’ gap.

**What new skill set you feel are becoming must for today’s workforce to stay competitive and on top of the game in today’s ever changing global environment?**

There is a gradual shift from the general to the specific courses. Certain basic processes such as understanding business drivers for training, knowing delivery and content, assigning subject experts, pre-training assessments, preparing trainees, delivering business-specific customised courses, post-training assessments and follow-up assistance are integral parts of the new requirements of corporate training. There is also the need to increase the value and return on training investment by designing courses which are clearly aligned with corporate strategy. Precise and powerful training framework should be directed to achieve key business goals. Smart companies are also realising that one-time induction training or annual process training programmes are inadequate.

Offering different types of training modules at different stages in an employee’s career programmes can be best tracked if they are customised to suit the needs of individuals based on the specific problem at hand. Sometimes, the results are apparent if it is a one-time module designed to address a specific dilemma.

**It’s often said that Indian educational system lacks the focus that makes candidates really employable in the job market. Your take on this, any initiatives by Centum Learning in this regard?**

The Indian government recognises that India’s youth is its biggest asset, making it, by 2030, possibly the youngest nation in the world. It is building upon the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF) in schools, setting a target of five million students
with a vocational qualification every year. The Central Board of Secondary Education already offers over 40 vocational courses in different sectors at the senior secondary level under NSQF framework. It makes sense to make CBSE the fulcrum to catch them young and train them early, in the skill sets that are essential drivers for the nation’s economy. We being an end-to-end training & skills provider are all geared to tap this opportunity by offering Skill based programmes for schools & colleges. Centum Learning has been empanelment by CBSE as a Skills Knowledge Provider (SKP) to provide vocational education to students at CBSE schools at the secondary and senior secondary level. In partnership with CBSE we are undertaking Effective School Management and Leadership programme to heads of institutions, academic staff and teachers as well.

How do you see the govt’s recent initiative -- Make in India and Digital India? In your view, how to make Indian youth make most out of such endeavours?

There cannot be a more opportune time to consider how closely a nation’s growth agenda is aligned with the skill-level of its manpower. We are playing a key role in evangelising skilling like a religion in India and making youth job-ready so that in turn they can make India a manufacturing hub in order to fulfill PM’s vision of ‘Make in India’. Centum Learning is mustering all resources to become a prime catalyst in delivery & scale-up of Govt’s skilling mission. There are hundreds and thousands of opportunities to start manufacturing in India but there is not enough skilled manpower who can be engaged in such manufacturing! Manufacturing cannot become a growth driver if the lack of skilled workers continues to be the greatest constraint in this journey. A survey conducted in 2014 reveals that around 78 per cent of the surveyed employers said they are concerned with the growing skills gap in India while 57 per cent said they currently have open positions for which they cannot find qualified candidates. So, the Government needs to pursue the two pronged approach of creating jobs in the manufacturing sector and encouraging multi-stakeholder partnerships to impart relevant, “employment worthy” skills.

Govt should make vocational education mandatory for women not pursuing full time education. Jobs and hiring in India needs to shift from being ‘qualification based’ to ‘skill based’. With ‘BetiBachao, BetiPadhao’ and ‘Digital India’ schemes being rolled out by the Govt, youth and especially women must be compulsorily taught to use computers and be skilled (in any field) in order to get acquire an ID card (maybe something like a BPL card). Government also needs to take specific steps for differently-abled people and help create job opportunities for them by building relationships with employer and industry groups.

The logo “lion” of ‘Make in India’ can truly come alive in the form of India becoming a manufacturing hub only if India’s youth or 65 percent of its population were to be transformed from being cubs to lions through appropriate skilling. Make in India is our collective responsibility and the first step in that direction is “First Develop Youth”

As a leading corporate trainer, what future do you see of this segment in India and challenges you like to talk about?

With over thirty years of experience in Enterprise Training, we have realised that the only way to increase the efficiency of the employees in the corporate sector is through innovative training methodologies which need to be upgraded from time to time. At, Centum Learning, we have adopted off-beat training modules which can be as simple and varied as story telling or Team building using theatre workshops. Depending on the clients, Centum Learning, which believes in the mantra of “Business of positive transformation”, has devised training modules which can enhance business results and develop skills as per industry requirements.

All organisations want to develop a team spirit so that the employees are not hesitant in making conversations, adapt to and promote new age issues like social networking, forge collaborations and be updated on the competitive trends. Apart from such behavioral skills, what matters most are the skills that impact business, namely hands on knowledge of product/process, sales and customer service skills etc.

It is crucial to understand that the one-size-fits-all approach does not work; a leadership training programme for newly-promoted team leaders is different from a vision setting workshop for senior leaders. The experience and competence of training personnel becomes critical in such scenarios. Besides this, the partnership will be different from a typical outsourcing arrangement as it requires a deeper level of engagement. For a program to be successful, the training company needs to completely understand the nuances of the process that it intends to impact.