

Slide 01 – The Game Begins

- No external funding. Started with self-funding of just Rs.1,60,000/-
- Very limited resources. 200sqft office near Prernatirth Derasar road, 1 mac laptop, 7 chairs and tables. No developers. No designers.
- Created screen design in MS Paint for our first project worth \$3200!
- Hired a freelancer who did not have a mac so gave our laptop + my home Wi-Fi Router to her so that she can work on the project from her home at Rakhial, a nearby village!

Slide 02 – First 9 Months

Despite coming from a six-figure salary job, we were committed to make our hands dirty. We had to lead by example.

- To hire our first employee, we interviewed him at Havmor, Nehrunagar. He was coming from Reliance Retail and wanted to join an IT company (of just two people :D)
- Hired first graphic designer by asking just one interview question – can you open and close Photoshop?
- Hired first 3 iOS developers who were fresher. They took 2.5 weeks to learn to save a record in database!
- With limited infrastructure and resources, we could not attract senior profiles from our industry... we, the two founders were senior people who led the show for first 9 months...

Slide 03 – Enter 10th Month, We're a Team of 15 People How We Made It

- Timely Salary. Not a single date missed.
- Trust based personal relationship with every employee
- Transparent and straight talk which was often uncomfortable (even to us)
- Laser focus on finishing what we started
- No investment in unnecessary things such as company signboard or even a website
- Focus on one marketplace to generate business – Elance.
- Ensured that everyone wins: Our employees, our clients, and our company.
- Encouraged leadership and self-learning as preferred traits
- Work effectively not efficiently, no need to work late nights

Slide 03 – Enter 10th Month, Learning Thus Far Face of Reality

- Exceptions apart, only excellent infrastructure, huge headcounts and air-conditioned offices attract people from software industry, not the vision, talent, capability or intent of the leaders who have dreamed of something different...

- Had to hire experienced people from non-IT industry because we wanted only quality people. Experienced, good-quality people from our industry thought that we were “too small” for them.
- For fresher profiles who needed a break, plastic chairs or non-a.c. office were okay, they did not even care to ask for our website but for senior people, these things mattered. Why can't colleges teach people to look beyond the infrastructure?
- We had to accept the fact and decided to move to a bigger office at Sachet-4. Rent increased from Rs.11,000/- to Rs.1,00,000/- per month. This was our profit that we had to shade off. Of course, to get good talent and for the greater good of the company.
- To keep people motivated, no complex HR systems and processes were needed. We celebrated small things such as birthdays or individual achievements, said “thank you” with a smile when people ran an extra mile to deliver.
- Key learning: Never bring motivation through \$\$\$ in work culture.

Slide 04 – Enter 11th Month, Hiring Senior People Our Interview Process

- Communicate clearly what is expected. Be transparent.
- Our straight talk made some people uncomfortable during the interview itself. Some of them never turned up. This was okay as we were clear what kind of culture we want to build. Transparent.
- We asked senior people to take challenging assignments to learn a new subject and give presentation on the subject that will last for 2.5 hours without any interruption. Over 60% people opted for such challenging assignments. This conveyed that they were committed; ready to learn and do whatever it takes. It also made them clear that the game is not going to be very easy!

Slide 05 – Things Changed for Us (July 2012)

- Experienced people got attracted as now we had good infrastructure – office building, latest hardware, air conditions running all the time, a receptionist to welcome you and dedicated HR team...
- We also allowed potential candidates to talk with our existing employees about how we work. Not all companies do that. Potential candidates generally do not go beyond HR cabins.
- We kept investing in infrastructure, training, securing latest computers and other hardware. We also communicated purpose of this to each and every employee – that was to reward him or her with work system that facilitates them to produce good results. Cash rewards were not even comparable.
- By the end of 2nd year, we reached the team size of 40.

Slide 06 – New Challenges

- Short of talent pool, which can deliver complex projects that required state of the art engineering

- Harsh reality is: if you are a software company based in Gujarat, you get 3rd or 4th grade talent. Exceptions apart, first grades are working in USA with Google, Facebook or Apple and second grades are picked by Infosys, TCS and Cognizant.
- This is extremely challenging when you want to deliver value to the clients.
- We looked at other parts of India in bigger cities such as Hyderabad and Pune but crowds were black everywhere...
- So we had no option but to look outside India.
- We could not afford employees from developed economies such as USA, so we opted for Ukraine and Russia. This was also not easy but we paid them in advance to get their buy-in and book them to work on our projects as freelancers to start with.
- Now, this was a huge business risk for a startup like ours but if you don't take risks, you don't grow, do you?

Slide 07 – Completion of 3rd Year

- Stay 100% focused at least for first 999 days.
- Get clear on what you DO NOT want.
- Establish the ground rules (e.g. transparent communication, straight talk, zero politics)
- Finish what you start.
- Always ask yourself, "What problem are we solving here?"
- Inspect what you expect.
- No "Yes Sir, I will do it " or "I have a problem" - "No Spoon Feeding"
- Don't allow politics or personal preferences to creep in.
- No place for people who cannot take decisions.
- Do not tolerate nonsense.
- Do today's work today. Ask people to do the work right now.
- Flat organization structure.
- Create a culture where people's dreams come true.

Recommended Book Resources

- 4E of Leadership
- Execution - Ram Charan (My Personal Favorite)
- Delivering Happiness - Zappos