



PEOPLE BUILDING TRUST

The power of inner connection

The entire 12,000 workforce of Bangalore's electricity supply company, including supervisors and senior executives, has gone through Initiatives of Change training programmes recently, building trust and transforming lives.

Suresh Mathew and Dilip Patel report on this far-reaching initiative.

Management trainer Dilip Patel was startled when, waiting at a traffic light, a stranger tapped on his car window and enthusiastically started telling how his family and work life had improved dramatically because of a three-day course Patel and a team from Initiatives of Change (IofC) had conducted in Bangalore's power supply industry. The same response came from a crew in green uniforms, working to clear tree branches from overhead electricity lines. When they recognized Patel, they rushed towards him, talking about their gains from the *Parivarthana Dhaare* (a process of transformation) training programme they had gone through months before.

'It transformed him into a calmer, more reflective person, bringing a change in his family life as well'

They were among the 12,000 workers, supervisors and senior managers of the Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) who have received IofC training in the past year.

BESCOM, a public sector undertaking, is the main electricity distribution company for the state of Karnataka in south India. This 'process of transformation' was initiated by its Managing Director,

Tushar Girinath. A senior bureaucrat from the elite IAS corps (Indian Administrative Services), in 2006 he had attended one of the 'Ethics in Public Governance' programmes held at Asia Plateau, the IofC centre in western India. (See box)

It had a profound impact on him. Known as a tough, efficient director, it transformed him into a calmer, more reflective person, bringing a change in his family life as well. Girinath was so convinced by the experience that he set out to offer this experience of change to all his colleagues and staff in BESCOM.

The challenge was immense. Organizations in the public sector domain have no real competition. With assured job security for employees and minimal accountability, the result is often half-hearted customer service, poor ethical behaviour and ineffectiveness in the discharge of professional responsibilities.

Sarosh Ghandy, director of IofC's Centre for Training in Ethical Leadership, and local IofC workers, Dilip Patel, Saju Kurian and Suresh Mathew, were called for a preliminary discussion where Girinath outlined his vision for a two-tier thrust to bring a positive difference to his organization.

He was keen to have three-day workshops examining issues of personal responsibility, behavioural dynamics and ethical lifestyles, in order to initiate a cultural shift in the mindsets of his employees. BESCOM's human resources manager, Sathya Prem Kumar, was brought on board, and took on this task with great conviction.



The first phase of training was for the senior leadership. Top management and trade union leaders were sent for training at Asia Plateau, while middle-level officers were offered a similar course in Bangalore. Over a two-year period from 2007, 90 senior executives and 300 assistant managers were trained by IofC. The change in the working atmosphere was palpable.

The next, and more ambitious, phase of the programme was to find a way to offer the same experience of change to the 11,700 junior staff who make up 92% of BESCO's workforce. These were the employees at the bottom of the pyramid, including line men, meter readers and junior assistants. They had virtually no formal education, spoke only the local dialect and had never been to any training programme of this kind. Adding to the challenge, IofC had no previous experience of conducting workshops on this scale.

'Thousands chose to take charge of their health and begin exercising'

Responding to these needs, the *Parivarthana Dhaare* programme was designed around the basic desires of every human being to be healthier, happier and more successful in their life – not just in the workplace. Facilitators were recruited and trained, all with a passion to make a difference.

Then, over a nine-month period, the entire workforce went through the three-day *Parivarthana Dhaare*, using schools, colleges, community facilities and clubs across seven of Bangalore's urban and rural

districts as training venues. At any given period, three to six classrooms were occupied, each with about 60 participants.

IofC inputs of listening to the inner-voice and looking at core values of purity, honesty, unselfishness and love were presented in practical and interactive ways alongside sessions on anger management and the use of acupuncture for minor ailments. There was enthusiastic participation in games which drove home the message that each person can take responsibility for improving their lives. Thousands chose to take charge of their health and begin exercising, walking or playing sports. Hundreds gave up smoking and drink.

The last half day was designed to reconnect the workers with management through an honest dialogue where managers listened to employees about the problems they saw – issues like electricity theft, lack of respect, mismanagement, equipment breakdowns and poor safety procedures. Of the 23 major issues that surfaced, 19 have so far been directly addressed by management, increasing the level of trust and confidence within the company.

But the larger, often unmeasured, outcome has been in the personal lives of employees like Raju, a line man who entered the classroom on the first day under the influence of alcohol. Three days later he was completely off the drink. Four months later he has become a better worker and has saved enough from not spending on alcohol to buy a colour TV and a new bed needed in his home.

Ethics in Public Governance

In the last few years, hundreds of India's elite public servants – the senior officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) have taken part in 'Ethics in Public Governance' programmes at Asia Plateau. The eighth of these courses began on 29 November with each of the 19 participants outlining the positions of high responsibilities they hold at national or state levels. There were exercises such as a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis, and spirited discussions on the ethical and technical challenges of administration.

But on the third evening, something more happened. Perhaps inspired by the 'soul nurture walks' each morning, or the introduction to the practice of inner listening, the IAS officers began to open up about their struggles and motivations. One officer described how he was appointed District Collector in one of the poorest states in India. Drunkenness and absenteeism were rife among his staff. Though development programmes were in place, little productive work was being done. At first he tried threats of dismissal, but then felt his 'inner voice' prompting him make Mahatma Gandhi real in the lives of his workers. He began each day by assembling everyone, appointing

one of the lowest workers to garland a large painting of the Mahatma, and then getting everyone to sing Gandhi's favourite prayer song:

The true human being, the true follower, is he who understands the pain of others, and tries his best to resolve it as if it is his pain.

The results were dramatic. Government workers began to serve; programmes began to move and absenteeism from drunkenness dropped. Soon, the same ceremony was being used in meetings all around the district. Because of effective programmes to eliminate child marriages, improve village sanitation and promote green cover, the district administration was awarded ISO 9001:2008 certification.

The dialogue from that evening moved to another level. 'One thing I have learned here,' said another administrator who has battled with systemic corruption, 'We are not alone: both in the challenges we face and what we can achieve. We are part of a community seeking to make a difference drawing on that which can't be seen but which can be felt from within. To me it is being true to self – listening to that inner voice.'