THE BEST COMPANIES TO WORK FOR IN INDIA
The Only P That Matters

An (imaginary) HR manager from the 1980s comes out of retirement to read BT's Best Companies to Work for in India 2006 survey and visit the top 10 companies. His impressions, as told to R. Sridharan.

You know, till sometime back-actually, until a few weeks ago when BT pulled me out of retirement and asked me to look at the findings of its Best Companies to Work for in India 2006 survey-I was ruing my retirement. Not anymore. I don't think I could be an HR manager today; not if the stories coming out of the top 10 companies are anything to go by. It's a mad world out there: HR managers are scrambling for workers and spending sleepless nights, worrying over compensation, recruitment and retention. Worse, almost no employee at the top 10 companies says that she is happy with the money she's making or the career counselling she's getting at her company. It includes Infosys employees, who have been promised Rs 126 crore in bonuses this year.

That's not how things were when I was in the HR...errr...personnel administration business. Back then, we didn't do HR, we did IR-industrial relations. Drunken and rowdy workers were our problems, and not some overambitious MBA or techie in a hurry to become the CEO. From IR, we moved to personnel administration, ensuring that the company policies on pay, leave, and benefits were followed strictly. Then, we stumbled onwards to personnel management. For the first time, we started looking at things like employee grades, careers and people policies. It wasn't until the early 90s, when I had been retired for a few years, that human resource management became the buzzword.

Some HR honchos I met at the top 10 companies told me what's happened thereafter. In a word, the HR world has been turned on its head. As the economy started surging towards knowledge industries (IT and financial services being just two of them), the resource that HR managers came to deal with changed. Unlike blue-collar workers,

software coders and investment analysts didn't come by the dozens (in a manner of speaking); to woo them, they needed to be offered stock options, not to mention high salaries. Since the wealth they were creating was phenomenal, other employers were always willing to better the deal to lure them away. One thing led to another-or, rather, to in-house valet services, free massages, gyms and crèches-and pretty soon, these were standard fare.

2001 RANKS		2002 RANKS	
1	INFOSYS	1	INFOSYS
2	P&G	2	P&G
3	HP	3	HP
4	ICICI	4	SKBCH
5	HUGHES SOFTWARE	5	SATYAM
6	LG	6	AGILENT
7	HLL	7	BHEL
8	COMPAQ	8	AMERICAN EXPRESS
9	ASIAN PAINTS	9	COLGATE-PALMOLIVE
10	BHARAT PETROLEUM	10	GILLETTE

Talking of fare, did you know that you can order at least six different cuisines on Infosys' (#1) campus in Bangalore? Or that you needn't even come to office every day but work from home if you are at Sapient (#5)? Or that at MindTree, you can question your superiors without fear of getting sacked, and that at Satyam Computer (#3), not just your birthdays, but those of your family members are remembered and celebrated? Without doubt, my trips to these companies show, organisations and their CEOs are speaking a different language. At Johnson & Johnson (#6), for instance, Managing Director Narendra Ambwani told me that he had a simple approach to people management: "I have to only think what I would like as an employee."

2003 RANKS		2004 RANKS	
1	P&G	1	SASKEN
2	AMERICAN EXPRESS	2	INFOSYS
3	NTPC	3	THERMAX
4	J&J	4	HCL COMNET
5	GSKBCH	5	HDFC

6	TATA STEEL	6	NTPC
7	COLGATE PALMOLIVE	7	DR REDDY'S
8	WIPRO	8	SATYAM
9	IOC	9	PATNI COMPUTERS
10	ITC	10	HUGHES SOFTWARE

Finally, the HR manager of today has become tech savvy. There's a phenomenal amount of information technology that is being used to manage human resources. Infosys, for example, will have 70,000 employees by the end of this fiscal; Dr Reddy's (#4) is learning to manage employees spread over different parts of the world. At HCL Comnet, like at most other best employers, HR runs on a self-service model. Employees raise a 'ticket' every time they have an issue that needs addressing. Of course, they can also check their provident fund status online, and post ideas that they think can transform their company.

Like I said, this is a different world for HR managers. And, oh, did I mention? Not one of them sits near stores-like I used to.

2005 RANKS		2006 RANKS	
1	INFOSYS	1	INFOSYS
2	SASKEN	2	MINDTREE
3	GENPACT	3	SATYAM
4	HCL COMNET	4	DR REDDY'S LABS
5	NTPC	5	SAPIENT
6	HSBC	6	AGILENT TECHNOLOGIES
7	SAPIENT	6	JOHNSON&JOHNSON
8	COVANSYS	8	COVANSYS
9	HDFC BANK	9	HCL COMNET
10	MINDTREE	10	HSBC