

# Sense of purpose should be the beacon for MBAs

## HR heads get candid on what real success means to them

ANIL URS

The main mantra for success at the workplace is harbouring a sense of purpose. And the significance of this is being compromised at the cost of achieving bottom-line targets by the younger generation, felt the speakers at a session titled: *Candid talk with HR leaders: The real success mantras at work* at the BusinessLine-MBA Universe conclave held in Bengaluru.

“If you look at companies that have fallen from the heights of fame to the steps of shame, it makes one wonder what happened to our moral values,” said one of the speakers.

To this, some speakers felt that somewhere along the way fundamentals have been long forgotten and the understanding of success has morphed into something else.

Chairing the session, Raghu Raman, Chairman of the Coimbatore-based Amrita School of Business, said: “Hardly a day goes by

without one coming across a report arguing which is more important: softskills or hardskills. I feel there is no definite answer to this. Both are important. Now the question really is how do we instil both of these in our students.”

“Little effort is made to go beyond the routine soft-skills curriculum. There’s the usual communication platforms such as group discussions and mock interviews

but the curriculum should include aspects such as empathy, passion, spirituality and happiness too.”

### Experimental learning

He added: To address this skill gap, we launched the Amrita Live-in-Labs, an experiential learning programme, which has been designed to allow our students to develop and learn these skills.”



**Success formula** (from left) K Narayana Rao, Head-HR, NCC Ltd; C Mahalingam, Executive Coach; and Surya P Mohapatra, Head-Training and Knowledge Management, Hewlett Packard. SOMASHEKAR GRN

The programme aims to expose international youth to problems faced by rural communities in India. “Unless we give our students an opportunity to live and serve in villages they would never be able to imbibe lessons in compassion and the need to be humane,” he explained.

But, going forward, corporates and leaders have a responsibility to reward the right kind of behaviour, added C Mahalingam, executive coach and former CPO, Symphony.

“It is key to go beyond survival and success and ask: How do I become a corporate significant citizen?” he added.

### Success, happiness

Quoting strategy and innovation professor at Harvard, Clayton Christensen, Mahalingam said there are three main aspects to defining success and these can be sought by answering three questions: How do you define success in your career? How do you define happiness in your relationships? How do you stay out of jail?

Clayton was part of Harvard Business School’s 1979 batch and later went on to serve as a director



**Raghu Raman**, Chairman, Amrita School of Business, who chaired the session

on the Boards of several IT majors such as TCS. And a significant number of people from Clayton’s batch went on to become CEOs at Fortune 100 companies.

At one of Harvard’s alumni meets (held every five years), Clayton had noticed that no one had shown up from the 1984 and 1989 batches. He assumed everyone was busy and hence weren’t able to make it. It was only later that he had discovered that a significant chunk of batchmates from these years were serving jail time. Apart from this, many of them had

strained relations with their kids and wives and close family members.

Clearly all of his peers had made money making their goal and in the process forgotten the true meaning of success: cultivating solid relationships.

“Clayton talks about many such experiences in his book *How will you measure your life?* It is a must-read for professionals,” added Mahalingam.

Following this, K Narayan Rao, head HRNCC Ltd, spoke about the importance of passion, punctuality, self-motivation and a strong intellect. In addition to this, skills such as chemistry (team work), pushing the ball, follow-ups and accepting challenges are essential to become successful at work, he added.

### Sense of purpose

If you don’t have the sense of direction, the sense of purpose, which, of course, none of the B-schools can teach students, you are not going to reach your destination, said Surya P Mohapatra, Head-Training and Knowledge Management, Hewlett Packard. Mohapatra added: “So, I honestly

believe a sense of purpose is the most important competency, the most important factor that our young generation should pick up. However, today, I think the young generation has lost their sense of purpose.”

Speaking about case studies, he said: “When Bill Gates started Microsoft, he had no idea that he would become the richest man in the world. Did he start Microsoft to become the richest man in the world? He did not do that. He had no idea what would become of him. He had only one purpose: to make software which everybody can use.”

Likewise, when Capt Gopinath started Air Deccan, he did not want it to become the most profitable airlines. But it was still the most profitable airline at that point in time. He had one mission, to set up an airline even a common man could travel in.

All these business ventures, commercial ventures, business organisations, industries that have become successful have become so only because they had a larger mission, one which went beyond making just profits, he added.