

I like to see my children the first thing in the morning. They are 12 and five years old. That's the most refreshing dose of the day. Before they leave for school, I spend some time with them. Then, I proceed to my Blackberry. After the mails, I read my newspaper and start getting ready. By 9am, I am prepared to get out of my personal space.

My day is structured to the needs of the company. I let logic drive it. I reach office by 10:30am. I keep the pre-lunch hours for internal discussions, where we recapitulate what has been happening and what needs to be done. It's a basic review process that helps me remain on top of things. It also allows a certain amount of flexibility to my team because they can plan the rest of their day. I think that doing this at the end of the day won't have the same impact. I reserve my post-lunch hours for external meetings, if any.

I am very flexible during meetings. I don't like to define them by time. Sometimes, a 15-minute meeting will flow into four hours. Other times, a meeting scheduled for four hours will finish in 15 minutes, because it has lost its value by then. Meetings are dynamic and they should stay that way.

My work day has remained much the same since 2005 when I took over managing the company. Before that, when I was heading our manufacturing units, my routine was different. But, life's like that. It should be dynamic. I enjoy both roles. I wouldn't be able to pick a favourite. Running a business is a continuous process, like riding a bicycle. It can get monotonous, so setting new goals is very important. It allows you to look forward to each day. I don't do anything I don't enjoy; as simple as that.

I am completely self-motivated. I run my business in a structured manner. We have a vision, to which we attach milestones, and then we implement it. For instance, right now, the biggest milestone in front of me is to strengthen our own brands of rice. We have traditionally supplied rice to other brands. However, in the recent past, we have worked on creating our own brand, which contributes 10 per cent of our revenue right now. We want that share to go up to 50 per cent within five years. And, we want a global footprint for our brand in the next 36-48 months.

For this, we need the right processes and the best human talent. I don't like to micro manage, unless required to—which happens once in a blue moon. My aim is to hire people smarter than me because I am not in the education business.

To grow, you have to surround yourself by good people, and I am always on the lookout. I hold interviews two times a week. Growth, I think, gets limited by the absence of good people, and not by that of business opportunities. In India, especially, there is no lack of opportunities for a business to grow. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of talent and intellectual strength, which are inversely

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proportional to our population. Employability is an issue. Ethics and morals are a very, very big issue. I see a misplaced sense of wealth creation among the young people nowadays. There are glaring gaps between expectations and capabilities. I have seen so many inflated resumes and mismatched expectations; and that worries me.

You can't run a business if you don't trust your people. Of course, a certain de-sensitisation happens over years of hiring the wrong people. But, that doesn't mean I am less trusting. Yes, I definitely trust systems more than people, though. I have inculcated systems into Amira in the past few years. We have revamped the organisation and put processes in place. That's what I enjoy doing most—establishing systems and seeing them hit milestones. I have a single-minded focus on that.

I have consciously moved to a younger team. There is no substitute for experience. But, there are functions where experience is at a discount, like in sales. There are so many new methods, ideas, and strategies out there. I have found the younger people to be more

“with it” on that.

I expect our team leaders to mentor their members. Recently, I was at a popular restaurant, where the service was terrible. I went and met the head of the hotel and told him that the problem lay in his training process. You cannot expect efficiency and good service from your people, if you don't invest enough in training them. Training fulfils the gap between performance and expectation.

I have reached 70 per cent of my HR milestones. Now, I spend four hours in a week doing people-related work. Twice a year, we have an off-site for everyone. We have close to 300 full-timers and

all of them are part of this. This is a great way to interact with them. Other than my senior management, I also keep in touch with the top and middle-level management, roughly 20 people, on a fairly regular basis.

All said and done, I am a demanding boss. And my employees know that. I detest the “*chalta hai*” attitude in India. It's seeped into the new generation, too. The problem is that it doesn't get you anywhere. Like, if people are late for meetings, I don't see it as a punctuality issue. For me, they are just not committed enough. The subject matter of the meeting should be important enough for people to be on time. Everybody's time needs to be respected.

Time is the most precious commodity. You need to value it, otherwise it won't value you. I do allow myself to indulge in spontaneity during the workweek, but it happens rarely. I never bunk work. You bunk something that you don't enjoy.

I don't like eating big lunches; they make me sleepy. I grab a bite, generally a sandwich, while I am talking to somebody. I am usually in the middle of an internal meeting during that time. At the manufacturing unit, we had an elaborate lunch ritual. All of us would get together and eat. Today, if I am not in a meeting, I use the time to think rather than eat. I don't smoke or drink either—another reason why I don't have to sleep too much to detoxify my body. I just have two or three foamy espressos a day.

I generally travel once in a month. We take part in a lot of exhibitions since that's a great way to meet customers. I try and go for some important ones. In July, I went to New York for the Fancy Food show. Dealing with customers is at the core of our business. Although I meet fewer customers now, I do oversee the function. Even when I am out, my senior team knows they can get me for any meeting they want.

Though the Internet is a great way of keeping in touch with everybody, I still believe a lot more in personal contacts. I have an account on both Twitter and Facebook, but I don't post update very often. It's not a priority for me. The Internet has put personal meetings and verbal communication at a premium. Very few people pick up the phone and call you. That effort has to be more appreciated.



The Self-motivated Worker
Chanana wants his own brands to bring in 50 per cent of his firm's revenue within five years.

I am not a slave to my gadgets. I use them; I don't let them use me. The iPhone, for example, has great applications and I use it for entertainment when I travel. It's not part of my daily work kit, though.

I like to exercise after work. It's part of my evening routine. I walk for an hour and then do yoga. It helps me de-stress and get into that balance of the evening. My exercise routine has pretty much stayed the same for the past 20 years. Once a week, I try and take out time for golf.

I enjoy reading. *The Economist* is my weekly fix. I have been reading it for years. I also try and go through the Harvard Business Review. I read a lot of business magazines. I don't read books—I subscribe to audio book summaries, which I listen to in my car, or on my iPod. These are mostly business books.

Four times a year, I take a holiday with my family. It's usually for a week or 10 days. As a family, we like to go for beach holidays. These holidays help me unwind and clear a lot of things in the mind. There is nothing better in life than spending quality time with the people you love. ☉