

AMIT JINDAL: He is pursuing graduation at Delhi University. Works with Roadrunner and earns up to ₹23,000 a month. He uses the money for his education and treatment of his father, who has tongue cancer

The door is banged. In our face.

Being Sticky

The Indian Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry faced a similar problem in its budding years, around 2001. Indian call centre agents were often shouted at, sometimes abused, by American callers who saw their jobs being taken away. It frustrated employees but, according to Sandeep Aggarwal, a former chief marketing officer of BPO firm Serco Global Services, the industry did not really have a solution beyond counselling an employee for a few minutes. The abuses, coupled with "grave hour" shifts, kicked off a huge attrition wave—40-50 per cent attrition in BPO was not uncommon in the 2000s. The industry learnt to live with it.

Retention is already low in the delivery business. Few stick to a company beyond six months and can jump for a paltry ₹500-1,000 hike. Does the industry have an action plan to stem attrition?

Himanshu Meena is co-founder and CEO of Mumbai-based delivery company Parsel. He agrees to meet this writer at a Starbucks in Greater Kailash one Saturday morning in February. He is 26, has longish slat-pepper hair, and wears a three-piece suit. A question on attrition and his retention strategy is popped. The answer is equally eye-popping.

"You don't want to have them stay longer as well," he says, in a matter-of-fact way. "Union would be a big issue always, especially coming from Mumbai. When people gather at one spot, unions are bound to form. Say 30 people who gather in a warehouse."



Meena says he is speaking from experience. He faced resistance when the company's salary structure changed from fixed pay to wages depending on the number of hours one works.

For an industry as young as three-four years, unions could ring a death bell. Meena may have a point but there are companies who want to build great employer brands showing employees a career path. They don't agree with Meena. Indeed, almost all delivery companies now have role models who have been promoted. Ecom Express' founder-director Sanjeev Saxena started as a delivery boy himself in 1987, in courier company BlueDart. "Competent" delivery boys in his organisation have now been promoted to supervisors as well as delivery centre heads.

Roadrunner had launched a delivery boy grad programme through which it offers courses in English and Computer Science to delivery boys. It plans to absorb top performers as trainers, quality inspectors, and trackers.

Centum Learning is tasked by AskMe Grocery to run its training programmes. About 16 delivery boys crowd in a conference room one December morning. Trainer Pankaj Manak explains the company's development plan. Every city AskMe Grocery is in has city heads. Below him are zonal managers or those who manage four hubs. Then there are hub managers, hub coordinators, procurement guys and at the bottom of the chart, the delivery boy. Manak turns around to ask: "Who in this room wants to be a city head?"

All of them. A few nod, some raise their hand, all of them chuckle, and then burst out laughing. The prospect of a formal career, higher wages, and a better life is good fuel to fire up aspirations. ♦

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