Interview Assignment

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1. Recently, I had the opportunity to interview Mr. Rajiv Mathrani, Executive Vice President and Head of Star Sports Marketing, which is a part of Star India (currently a wholly owned subsidiary of The Walt Disney Company India). Star India is the largest TV network in India, broadcasting sports, movies and tv shows. Star Sports is one of the many channels run by Star India, responsible for the broadcast of Sports. Star India is based in India and headquartered in the city of Mumbai, the financial capital of India.

Mr. Rajiv Mathrani has held the position for over 3 years now prior to which he was the Chief Brand and Online Officer for Airtel, one of the leading multinational telecommunication service companies in India. Currently, he is responsible for pushing forward the brand of Star Sports. Digitally, the goal is to get people to pay the subscription for Hotstar, their own subscription-based OTT platform (which showcases live sports, movies and TV shows from HBO, Disney, and Star), even if it is just for the live sports. All of this is guided by the analysis reports generated from the data gathered by the company regarding viewership of the channel and customer data from the Hotstar app. He and his team are responsible for coming up with ideas for television advertisements, branding placements (placement of products/services in TV shows and movies, for example, the lead actor relaxes at home by turning his TV on and watching Star Sports/watches sports on his mobile device using Hotstar, and the wife scolds him for watching sports all day, etc.) and getting in touch with celebrities and athletes for endorsements.

The organization follows a typical corporate hierarchical structure. Being the Executive Vice President, he reports to the President of Marketing directly, and indirectly to the upper management and the Board of Directors.

2. I met Mr. Rajiv Mathrani for the first time at a company meet and greet during my internship in 2019. He was friendly, very approachable and saw everyone as an equal. I was interested in potentially pursuing an MBA with a specialization in Marketing and I had a discussion with him regarding what a career in the same would be like once I started working. He was extremely helpful, did not dismiss me like a kid but instead gave me all the insight I hoped to get. He helped me shape my decision regarding the course I chose for my master’s. I decided to contact him again. We conducted a video call over Zoom to discuss my assignment and he was very friendly about it. I took down handwritten notes during our video call and it was effective enough owing to my sharp memory. I don’t think the mode of interview affected my ability to report on it. I had the information I needed, and a video call is as close to a live interview as it can get. My notes were concise yet elaborate enough to trigger my memory enough to recall everything that occurred in the interview.

3. Mr. Rajiv Mathrani manages a team of 10 people directly, which is the marketing team, and a team of 4 analysts indirectly who analyze the data they mine from customers. They decide things like whom or which events to sponsor, which sports to sponsor, coming up with offers for Hotstar, changes in subscription plan pricing and making decisions based on the data provided by the analytics team. He is personally responsible for reviewing the analysis reports of customer consumption and making decisions with regards to Hotstar and stuff like which athlete would work best as an ambassador, which celebrity to choose to endorse the events, and so on based on the collective suggestions of the team. A typical day in his life starts with a meeting with the team regarding whatever the upcoming agenda is, may it be sponsored endorsements or the topic of what content to add to Hotstar or even what advertisement to shoot next. The meeting is a brief of the plan of action for the day, after which everyone finishes whatever work they were assigned, and Rajiv works on reports which need to be turned in to the President of Marketing. He also meets with the President and the Board of Directors from time to time to understand what the company’s goal is and how to move forward. He interacts with the analytics team once a week to keep track of the progress made by the latest decision, by checking up on daily customer interaction with the TV channel and the app. At the end of the day, the team meets again to discuss the ideas they might have come up with during the day. That is a day in the life of Rajiv Mathrani.

Nobody’s life is free of problems. Mr. Rajiv faces his fair share of these too. Lack of creativity, meaningless reports thanks to data inconsistency, not meeting deadlines are common. He feels that overcoming these problems one at a time, every day is what being a manager is all about. “There wouldn’t be managers if there were no problems” says Mr. Rajiv. Currently he is dealing with the problem of marketing live tv over Hotstar to the audience, because Hotstar has their most audience in the age range of 18-27. He needs to sell the idea of watching Television over smart devices to audience over 27 without making it sound like a complete shift from television. The nature of the problem is audience related. He needs to segregate and target the audience with different kinds of advertisements and offers. His plan is currently to have 5 different advertisements catered to the different age groups of 18-23, 24-27, 28-32, 33-40, and 40+.

Mr. Rajiv handles conflicts with confrontations. Having the involved individuals talk it out and state their problems is the fastest way to come up with a solution according to him. Understanding the problem will solve half the problem for him. I feel that this is a great approach as it helps the employees’ bond on a personal level by being forward about their feelings and being receptive towards the other, not to mention how quick it is to resolve disputes this way. I don’t think there is a more efficient way to do this because there can be no faster way to solve disputes. I would say Mr. Rajiv is both a leader and a manager. He knows when to involve himself enough to be a leader, to nurture the growth of his employees and when to be a manager and take care of disputes, problems and make decisions too. He plays both roles well, sometimes being more of a leader than a manager, but is effective, nonetheless.

Mr. Rajiv’s management style is best described as a “Middle Manager” [1]. He implements strategies in accordance with the Board’s goals and vision for the company. He files reports for the team’s performance on a regular basis, updating the upper management on the progress of strategy implementation, achieves targets set by the organization, and coordinates the working of the marketing and the analytics team. Since he is not involved with tasks related to company goals, he cannot be upper management, neither does he train new recruits or do any other activities that form the job description of first line managers or team leaders.

Mr. Rajiv Mathrani’s advice for new managers is to try to understand the core of each problem. Being a manager means solving unexpected problems to the best of your ability and you can only get better at it with practice. He advises not to fear failure as it will teach you the most. He wants people to learn to manage people along with time. Time is the single most important resource we have, and people need to sort out their priorities. Prioritizing work gets things done on time. Drucker’s advice [2] is very broad, covering more aspects than Mr. Rajiv did. According to Drucker, a manager should be effective, focus on contributions, play to strengths while improving on weaknesses, value time, make effective decisions, be an effective communicator, and work towards being a leader. Of course, no new manager can pull all of this off from the very beginning, but the goal is to try and do it as much as possible.

4. What is management? Nobody really knows, but we try to understand and teach the principles of management as we understand them. I’ve learnt that management and leadership are two sides of the same coin [3]. One cannot coexist without the other, but people tend to be more of one than the other. I learnt that it is a function of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling [4]. It is not a science, but neither is it an art. It is a practice.

A manager’s greatest strength is his perseverance. If he cannot persist in the face of odds every day, he cannot be a good manager. It takes persistence to make decisions that may or may not go right. Persevering through it all is what makes a manager. Being a manager is more than just a job. It is a lifestyle. If I was Mr. Rajiv’s boss, I would advise him to take a little time out of the day to work on reports, as he utilizes most of his time with his team. I would rate his performance as 9 out of 10.

I learnt that the world of television and sports isn’t as simple as it seems. A lot depends on customer data. A lot of sports aren’t telecasted anymore because they have lesser viewers than others. Marketing in this field isn’t easy either. I learnt the importance of creativity and being a good manager and leader. I learnt that this is a highly competitive sector to be in and every bit of success matters.

If I were to be in Mr. Rajiv’s place, I would probably not do anything different. He has been an inspiration, being an exemplar of how a good leader and manager must engage with his employees. He plays almost a parental role to his team, ensuring comfort and progress.

This interview has made me realize the importance of nurturing your team as a leader and helping them grow, and at the same time, being decisive and persistent enough to be a good manager. Being a manager is a big responsibility and I intend to fulfill it whole heartedly.

References:

[1] MGMT “The Principles of Management” by Williams – Topic: Kinds of managers, 1-3b.

[2] “The Essential Drucker” by Peter F. Drucker – Topic: The Individual

[3] “The Essential Drucker” by Peter F. Drucker – Topic: Management as a social function and liberal art

[4] MGMT “The Principles of Management” by Williams – Topic: Management functions