

Making success of enriching minds, filling stomachs



Shouvik Dhar, Co-founder, Director at Career Aces, Level 9 Solutions, SCS Foods

We firmed up the career recruitment training module, and opened career development cells. — Shouvik Dhar.

He is an engineer by training. His hobby is music, and he has ventured into floating enterprises in education and food. Meet Shouvik Dhar, who quit a secure job in India's defence establishment to take on bigger challenges.

At the Electronics and Radar Development Establishment, Dehardun, Shouvik was instrumental in designing the first indigenous wartime scenario simulator to impart air warfare training to radar operators. This innovation resulted in an average cost reduction of Rs 3 lakh an aircraft for one training day for the Indian Air Force, says Shouvik.

As part of a six-member team, he developed a 3D radar display unit. There were some exciting projects — the digital display for the Rohini and Revathi radars – in which he was involved.

“However, personally, I felt there was only incremental growth for a career ahead. Hence, I looked out for Plan B, which was turning entrepreneur,” says Shouvik.

The plan did not go smoothly. He joined the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, to learn the ropes of business and entrepreneurship. The learning at the B-school and the five-year stint at DRDO lab gave him the confidence to try out some ideas.

In a span of three years, Shouvik has crystallised three ideas. Two of these in the education space have resulted in start ups – Career Aces Mentoring and Level 9 Solutions Ltd.

In the food space, he has established SCS Foods, which is into making dumplings under the brand ‘Zomos’. In both these segments, Shouvik has taken ‘baby steps’ as an entrepreneur and wants to scale up. There are 18 employees in the food business, with three outlets in Hyderabad.

Working out of a house, Shouvik and colleagues have standardised ingredients, test run it for five months. At present, it operates with a central kitchen feeding the three outlets. To scale up, there is a need to invest in a cold chain, packing and transportation.

Though entrepreneurship was his calling, coming from Assam things were different initially. The exposure levels of students were low and peer pressure was more on getting a good Government or corporate job. “I waded through the typical middle class dream of doing engineering and getting into a Government job,” recalls Shouvik, a BTech from NIT, Silchar.

The excellent exposure to technology and opportunities opening up to private sector with the defence lab and interaction with students from varied backgrounds at the business school, in a way changed his perspective.

“I got a pre-placement offer from a multinational, but declined,” he says.

In the meantime, the RPG Group had come to the campus. He made a proposal, which attracted them. However, with the downturn in the economy, they did not pursue it.

“I was caught in a dilemma, having refused a good offer and lost out on the new enterprise. The uncertainty in a way hastened my entry into turning entrepreneur,” says Shouvik.

He launched Career Aces Mentoring, a campus recruitment training initiative in 2009-10. He realised that Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu had a large number of engineering colleges, producing lakhs of engineers annually. But, the companies struggled to get suitable candidates for jobs.

In April 2010, another former DRDO scientist Subhash Chanda joined Shouvik.

They found an opportunity in bridging the gap. They tried free seminars and talks in engineering colleges. The first break came from the VNR VJIT college. Soon, they had 15 clients. “We firmed up the career recruitment training module, and opened career development cells.”

This pushed them into opening a development centre in Bangalore, which is involved in developing an active learning tool. There are nine software developers and Subhash heads it.

Another offshoot of all this action was the Level 9 Solutions with the product Edvento, which happens to be the first Indian adaptive learning product. With offices in New Delhi, it will also focus on school students.

His other love is music. A vocalist in Hindustani classical and East Indian folk, Shouvik has composed music and performed in over 100 concerts. He has a three-member team as well.

The RPG group had shown interest in the music related project, he recollects.

Education, food and music are the present mix for the 30-year-old bachelor Shouvik who has made Hyderabad his home base and is working to transform the start-ups into success stories.