Taking every opportunity to learn

Most people switch off after a hard day’s work but not Mr Vighnesh Balan

KHUSHWANT SINGH

WORKING and studying is definitely not easy and comes with a fair amount of sacrifice, says Mr Vighnesh Balan.

“I had to use up most of my annual leave entitlement for classes and had to juggle work and school assignments. I’m also planning to wed later this year so that’s another responsibility,” he says.

All this means that there is little time to spend with the family and friends, but his parents and fiancée understand his position and support him wholeheartedly.

“My company also helps me with certain flexible work arrangements to accommodate my requests when they arise. The bottom line, however, is that this is doable. The key is to plan your time and organise your work properly. Most importantly, you have to stick to it,” he says.

Enhancing career prospects

The 36-year-old Singaporean is presently the manufacturing manager at Shire, a global biotechnology company focused on serving people affected by rare diseases and highly specialised conditions. He has a degree in chemical engineering from the University of New South Wales in Australia.

However, after about 10 years working in the biotech sector, he decided that an Executive MBA (EMBA) programme would help him take his career further as it would give him new insights into the realm of strategic thinking, critical analysis, and most importantly, a “bigger picture” understanding of business operations.

ESSEC Business School was his choice for three reasons.

“First, the school had an impeccable reputation as a business school in France and I felt assured of a first-class teaching faculty. Second, the MBA curriculum had exactly what I was looking for, namely overseas residencies with top universities abroad such as the UCLA Anderson School of Business, and a strong focus on entrepreneurship and business digitisation.

“Third, the diversity of the 2015 EMBA intake was something that intrigued me. Meeting people from different countries and the thought of exchanging views and sharing knowledge with them was something that excited me very much,” he explains.

The 15-month EMBA course costs about $90,000, part of which was co-funded by his company. Mr Balan says he was fortunate to receive this sponsorship as it is based on stringent merit-driven selection criteria and in line with an employee’s development plan for a leadership career path within the organisation. He also had some additional help from ESSEC in the form of a scholarship.

Mr Balan feels that it is crucial to keep his skills and competencies current and relevant, especially with the accelerating pace of change at an unprecedented rate.

But he admits that the thought of learning, especially for the rest of your life, can make most people feel overwhelmed, including himself, given the long work hours and multiple commitments of modern life.

Staying motivated

He keeps himself motivated by learning things that he is inquisitive and passionate about, and which he believes can help him at or outside work. “When opportunities arise, I try to apply what I learnt,” he says. Many times it may not work, and he tries to figure out why. “But when it does work, and I achieve the desired outcome or result, it fuels my motivation to keep learning,” he adds.

Professor Cedomir Nestorovic, director of the ESSEC and Mannheim EMBA Asia-Pacific at ESSEC Business School, says: “The ESSEC and Mannheim EMBA Asia-Pacific programme is built on three pillars—a unique academic curriculum incorporating the latest business trends, a pan-Asian core with global reach, and an inclusive approach.

“Participants gain significant international exposure over the course of their study through residencies with partner universities. This allows them to gain a global perspective of current business issues, develop soft skills, and bring practical skills back to the workplace.”

Mr Balan’s MBA course ends in December but he is already considering further avenues for improving himself.

He explains: “Adult education for me is truly a lifelong journey and I plan to keep going at it in a number of ways—executive education being one of the many options available. Short courses provided by accredited organisations, such as the WDA, is one avenue I would consider.

Fuent in English and Tamil, Mr Balan is planning to learn French.

“I’ve also always wanted to learn to be fluent in a third language, and to know what it takes to effectively conduct training courses, so those are definitely some things I would like to pursue at some point,” he says.

“The great thing is that here in Singapore, the opportunities to equip yourself with the skills you want are endless. You just need to know what it is you want to pursue,” he adds.


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