

“We are looking at training about 1 lakh people in the next five years.”

- Santosh Parulekar, Co-Founder & COO, Pipal Tree Ventures Pvt Ltd

He had a dream: to create a livelihood for rural youth. And once Santosh Parulekar, Co-Founder and COO, Pipal Tree Ventures Pvt Ltd (PTVPL), realised the construction sector was the way to do it, there has been no turning back. He tells SHRIYAL SETHUMADHAVAN about his company, its plans and prospects.

When was Pipal Tree Ventures established? And why did you zero in on the construction sector?



Santosh Parulekar

The company was established in November 2007. We narrowed down our choice to construction because it best suited the rural population in terms of education and is the third largest employing industry in the country.

Tell us more about your customers and services.

Our prime customers include large construction companies like Lanco, Hindustan Unilever, AMC Construction, Ashoka Construction, etc. We even offer tolling services where we manage the complete operations at a toll plaza for companies like Semhapuri Expressway and GICL. For construction companies, we offer skilled, steel fixing and wire bending or formwork types of labour. We guarantee productivity on the basis of which these companies pay us and we, in turn, pay our men. We also offer training to labourers, especially subcontractors, at specific companies, along with operating and managing training centres on site. Our services also include staff administration, where we not only handle compliance-related issues but work on a job card, and mechanical maintenance, where we provide mechanics and the workshop. We also offer surveyor services, which help construction companies in pre-bidding. Further, we provide drivers and manpower for smaller services.

What does the training curriculum cover?

The first month is focused on the basic

skill that needs to be performed 90 per cent of the time. We then offer practical, on-the-job training for three months to improve productivity. Then, we introduce trainees to allied skills. So, for instance, if the service is steel fixing and bar bending, we first focus on cutting, bending, placing and then tying. Once the trainee delivers high productivity, he is trained in how to read the drawing, calculate the quantity and then determine whether a bridge has to be made.

How have the youth responded?

Initially, the youth were rather wary. But, today, many people join us because we ensure that they are given increments along with a salary. Suppose we place a wire bender with an initial salary of Rs 5,200, within two years, he will get around Rs 10,000. And if his work meets the standards, his salary will be Rs 6,600 at the end of the first year. Today, the only challenge is that when they are required to migrate elsewhere, they drop out. But we are working on it. Last year, we trained around 4,000 people; our target this year is around 8,000-10,000. So far, we have trained close to 3,500 people. We have a total staff of 150 and at least half of them are trainers. And at any point in time, we have almost 200 people undergoing training.

What is the company's reach?

We currently have 13 training centres across Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Our boys are working across the country in places like Assam, Rajasthan, Mysore, Bantwal, Nepal and Goa.

Tell us about your alliances and partners.

We have tied up with TAFE Australia and ACS Germany for skill training experts come here and train our trainers. They also help in certification when we introduce new skills. In India, we have alliances with equipment manufacturers like Volvo, Word Chain and Dusan that help us obtain old equipment and set up the course curriculum. In addition, we have alliance partnerships for setting up training centres; for example, Ashoka Builders has set up a centre in Nasik.

Why are you planning separate training programmes for women?

Women are more loyal, stable and willing to learn faster. However, they are normally unwilling to migrate because of family responsibilities. Hence, we had to find local jobs for them - toll operations are ideal. Today, we have many female toll operators in Andhra Pradesh and Kerala working in day shifts. We are also trying to encourage women to work as heavy machine operators and ask the men to bring their wives along in the hope of providing jobs to both. In fact, we have even provided family accommodation on site. We have already conducted a programme for women toll operators and are currently working on training women in Rajasthan for steel fixing and bar bending.

What has the industry's response been to your initiative?

It has been overwhelming. The industry needs a huge number of skilled labourers for steel fixing and bar bending. We take further orders only after fulfilling pending ones. Many customers approach us for other services but the demand is higher than what we can supply. In fact, wages are going up because of this. Our own trainees used to get a salary of around Rs 4,500 a year ago; now it is Rs 5,200.

How have you brought about a change in the construction industry in terms of manpower?

Our labourers are given fixed wages, while ensuring that output is higher than the construction company would expect. These companies have always wanted to get steel fixing and bar bending services on an itemised rate on the basis of weight and size. Second, fixed wages encourage productivity. We have also introduced the concept of a job card for specific workers. For example, in the case of a driver, the company would either give him a fixed salary or pay up on the basis of the number of trips made. Then, there's the measurement of productivity. Now, we regularly measure our trainees' performance, fill out the job card and find out how much work they have done, after which we decide on promotions and increments.

Your stated aim is to set up two training hubs and 12 spokes across India in the next five years and train 50,000 students. How do you plan to achieve this?

We are actually looking at training about 1 lakh people within the next five years. The more consistent our performance, the more trainee hopefuls we attract. For example, a year ago in Bihar, we found it hard to get any employees to train. However, with time, those who have trained with us are bringing in more people.

To give your feedback, write in at feedback@ASAPPmedia.com



The company has 13 training centres across India.