

# At Marico, will is more prized than skill



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BY SOUMYA GUPTA  
soumya.g@livemint.com

MUMBAI

**H**oning employees' skills, instituting 360-degree feedbacks and grooming leaders internally, Marico Ltd, the packaged consumer goods maker that had sales of nearly Rs5,000 crore in 2016-17, has made it to the eighth among Great Places to Work Institute's top 10 list of the best manufacturing companies to work for.

The maker of Parachute and Saffola oils obsesses over "empowerment" and "early responsibility" to make sure employees across corporate offices and shop floor, and all seniority levels, remain engaged with their jobs.

"We prioritize 'will' over 'skill' because our belief is that people with the right 'will' (i.e., learning agility and achievement orientation, will be able to make a difference," Amit Prakash, executive vice-president and head of human resources, said in an interview. "Skill is something that can be developed. We have experimented with different approaches like reverse mentoring, growth hacking teams and think tanks to build capabilities at Marico," Employees at Marico are called "members" and "Mariconians".

"Our 360 degree feedback process is one of the signature practices that new leaders experience in Marico," Shruti Ambegaoker, head of organization development and governance, said in an interview. "New leaders receive detailed in-person feedback from various members, in addition to going through a few self-reflection tools as part of their first development dialogue. These rich insights and discussions set them up for long-term career development at Marico."

This is crucial when the company develops a steady class of young managers who will go on to fill the ranks of middle, upper and top management. Marico relies on a

mix of new B-school graduates, internally identified star employees and lateral hires from the industry. All of them are guided by the company's board directly.

"The top management gets involved in leadership development by mentoring Marico's Young Board," said Ambegaoker. "The Young Board is formed every year by selecting young leaders from different functions and geographies to work on one or two key organization initiatives, which could include big-bet ideas or culture-building initiatives. The top leadership team is also actively involved in sponsoring and mentoring Think Tanks and Growth Hacking teams to harness new business ideas."

Not just with grooming management, the company is closely involved in ensuring gender parity across seniority levels. A big diversity challenge for manufacturing companies is ensuring women are able to work on the shop floor and in field sales teams—both spaces traditionally dominated by men.

"We have worked towards this by creating basic necessities like clean dedicated washrooms and specially created changing rooms to cater to their emotional and physical safety," said Ambegaoker. "We have dedicated POSH (prevention of sexual harassment) committees in place at each location that we operate in. We have generated high trust in our Code of Conduct and POSH committees, through quick and rigorous enquiry and action with complete confidentiality. This is evident through various surveys which indicate almost 100% confidence in these systems."

What matters at the end of the day, say Prakash and Ambegaoker, is that the company and its employees should feel committed to helping each other to grow. After all, the promise they make to everyone in their ranks is "to continuously challenge, enrich, and fulfil the aspirations of Mariconians so as to maximize their potential to make a difference."

## 'Empowerment and early responsibility our core principles'

BY SOUMYA GUPTA  
soumya.g@livemint.com

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**P**eople management policies at large manufacturing firms must focus on helping employees realize where they can improve and deliver better results, say Shruti Ambegaoker, head (organization development and governance), and Amit Prakash, head of human resources (HR), at packaged consumer goods maker Marico Ltd. This is why Marico Ltd emphasizes systems to address career development and gender parity at every organizational level, from the corporate office in Mumbai to the factories, sales teams, and carrying and forwarding depots around the country. Now, the company is busy addressing challenges that automation and social media will bring to HR policies. In an interview, the two discuss how the firm turns its employees into "Mariconians". Edited excerpts:

**What are the core principles that guide how Marico hires, trains and promotes employees?**

**Prakash:** Empowerment and early responsibility are core principles that form the foundation on which Marico's hiring and grooming strategy is built.

These principles are embodied in our Talent Value Proposition which is "to continuously challenge, enrich, and fulfil the aspirations of Mariconians so as to maximize their potential to make a difference."

We look for three fundamental traits that are critical to being successful in a highly empowered culture. The first, is high initiative and self-motivation. Such people take ownership and make things happen. The second is the ability to challenge existing paradigms or status quo. And the third is a growth mindset, which is important for long-term success.

**How do you ensure you are able to reach out to all employees and help them develop their skills and careers in the company?**



Marico HR head Amit Prakash with organization development head Shruti Ambegaoker.

**Prakash:** Our development interventions focus heavily on experience-based development. We believe in developing 70% of the skill through on-the-job assignments, 20% through mentorship or coaching by the leaders, and 10% through classroom and other formal learning interventions. An example of this is Ignite, our management trainee programme. Our management trainee graduates, once selected, undergo a structured one-year-long programme which includes, experiential learning through projects, rural immersion and on-the-job training, shadowing and mentoring, and specific behavioural interventions which hone them to take on their roles as managers at Marico.

**What's Marico's programme to**

**ensure diversity in the corporate office and on the shop floor?**

**Prakash:** We understand that diversity works both ways and this is reflected in our policies and our code of conduct. For example, when revising our parental policy last year, we not only extended the maternity leave but also paternity leave, which will truly empower women. We also included a special provision dedicated for men and women's physical and mental wellness across grades during this special life-stage. Marico takes pride in successfully bringing most of its female employees back to work after their maternity break and taking care of various factors like flexible working.

**How does Marico secure a friendly work-**

ANRUDDHA CHOWDHURY/MINT

**ing environment for female factory staff and factory managers?**

**Ambegaoker:** We have worked towards this by creating basic necessities like clean dedicated washrooms...and specially created changing rooms to cater to their emotional and physical safety. We have dedicated POSH (prevention of sexual harassment) committees in place at each location that we operate in. We educate members on our code of conduct through communication and campaigns, education sessions, e-learning modules and by sharing contact details of representatives in case members have any complaints or concerns. We have also set up complaint boxes at all locations to provide access to our grievance

**redressal mechanisms. What are some current**

**challenges in people management that Marico is working on?**

**Prakash:** We believe the biggest challenge of the future lies in paradox management. How we are able to offer standardization with customization, automation with high personal touch are some examples of the paradoxes we need to manage. In order to create a future-ready Marico, we must build a future-ready and robust HR function. Hence, we are investing in building our capability through not just automation but making HR smart and intelligent with the use of chat bots, AI (artificial intelligence) and state-of-the-art HR automation systems. We are complementing this with human intervention to create signature experiences for our members.