

From Guns to Greens: Short Story of a Successful Entrepreneur

Puja Jain*

Abstract

Lt.Col. (retd.) R.N. Kapoor, a retired army man turned entrepreneur: Despite having squat amount to invest and no background or support for an enterprise, this daring man entered into an unconventional field of business i.e. nursery and garden centre at Ludhiana (Punjab) at that time when setting up a business in Punjab was considered to be an irrational decision because of terrorism at its peak. He converted his passion for plants into a business venture. Like any army man, he stuck to the disciplines of business and till today runs nursery in a professional manner, applying various concepts of management. His varied range of products, services and activities certainly distinguishes him from many conventional nurserymen not only in Ludhiana city but in the country as well.

Keyword: Nursery, Management, Professional, Business Venture, Entrepreneur

After twenty two years of service if a retired army man, having no background of business, can venture it to new altitudes, then certainly to become an entrepreneur what is required is dream and determination.

Lt.Col.(retd.) R.N. Kapoor

When Col. Kapoor left army, due to personal reasons, he was standing on a brink of a new but capacious life with no idea of how to walk it through. All that he had were just Rs.15,000, wit, humour and an apparently impossible dream to create and establish his identity all over again in an unchartered field. Working as an employee would have been the safest option during 1989-90 when terrorism was at its peak in Punjab, but this would never satisfy his

enduring dare. He was crystal clear in his thought that whatever arena he enters into, it should be of his liking, fetching reasonable profit, and could be started with a squat investment. Col. Kapoor belonged to a service class hence there was no body to guide him for an enterprise.

His love for nature acted as a bounty that helped him give an idea of converting his passion into profit. Ludhiana, *a merc city* (Ludhiana is also called as 'merc city' because of high number of Mercedes cars running in the city), opened up vistas for his ambitions. Eventually emerged a robust decision of opening a nursery in Ludhiana. On 16th February, 1989 "Technocare Nursery & Garden Centre" was born – a name that imbibed in itself technology with care. He wanted that spirit of venture should be there in its name. Col. Kapoor and his wife, Nilam Kapoor, can never forget those initial days when they borrowed furniture and used to sit under a tree to sell their plants. "Resources follow will" was the mantra that gave them strength. On 8th March, 1989 first truck of plants got unloaded. That was a sign of growing demand for their plants. Today Technocare Nursery is the single largest purchaser of plants in the region, claims Lt. Col. Kapoor. Amongst their many other successful business policies, one that worked was buying on credit and selling for cash initially. By making timely payments they could win trust of their vendors. Another major policy decision taken by Col. Kapoor was to make payment to suppliers even if part of their product was of low quality, however that vendor was blacklisted and no further orders were given to him. This policy paid rich dividends. This policy created tremendous amount of good will, because this generated a feeling in the market that Technocare was fair, honest, principled, and no-nonsense company. Not only vendors but their unmatched service and guidance

* Assistant Professor, Sri Aurobindo College of Commerce and Management, Ludhiana, Punjab, India. Email: apaj52@gmail.com

to their customers also paid them. In addition, the twin policy of *Fixed Prices* and *No Bargaining* put Technocare far ahead of its competitors in an era when bargaining was the accepted norm especially in the nursery business.

Way back in 1989, the concept of Garden Centre was almost unknown in India. This concept involved availability of all the gardening inputs and services under one roof. Technocare also pioneered the concept of Garden Centre and worked to provide maximum gardening related products under one roof. Today Technocare is a place where green lovers can get all items ranging from seeds to mower, all services from landscaping to rental of plants. Through Technocare one can be provided with all that is needed for basic plant care like gardening implements, manures, sprinkler systems as well as secondary products like designer pots, garden statues etc.

Not just that Kapoors always intended to create an aura of peace and tranquility in their nursery but they also wanted their nursery to be a place where their customer could not only shop but also enjoy a moment of peace and joy amidst nature

However journey so far hasn't been quite so easy. One major hurdle has been total lack of technical information or professional reading material related to gardening in Indian conditions. Frequent visits to P.A.U. (Punjab Agriculture University in Ludhiana) to interact with professors as well as interactions with local nursery owners helped Col. Kapoor a lot in gathering information pre-requisite to his venture. He realized the importance of information; hence he catalogued all the pieces of information meticulously. Today Col. Kapoor can proudly say that there are few in the industry with as much working knowledge as him, so much so that this soldier turned nurseryman has also been elected president of the Indian Nurserymen Association (regd.), the first one to hold this prestigious post from Punjab.

As of now Col. Kapoor is ably supported by a team of trained personnel to maintain all aspects of gardening e.g. weeding, watering, pruning, fertilization, pest management etc. in a professional manner. Unlike other nurseries in city, this professionally run nursery, has all modern business management concepts like inventory management and quality control, maintenance of proper books of accounts etc. Employee welfare gets top priority in all plans. Technocare provides employment facilities for not only urban but also rural men as well

as women. They are given in-house training. Once the probation period is over they are entitled to uniform and provident fund. Best worker award is given every month to duly appreciate all those who work hard and contribute in all sincerity towards making Technocare a unique, vibrant and forever growing organization. Holding exhibitions, conducting workshops, attending and delivering lectures and seminars, participating in flower shows and *Kisan melas* is another professional feature of Technocare which differentiates it from usual nurseries of the country.

Today Technocare is spread over an expansive area of 11 acres having more than 1200 varieties of different flora. His battalion of more than seventy employees including MBAs is hardworking and focused. Each plant is identified with its distinct scientific name – a yet another characteristic that distinguishes Technocare from the other conventional nurseries of Ludhiana.

Technocare specializes in providing fully grown mature plants to give a long-been-there look to the newly emerged gardens. “Instant gardens are the rage in the city. People today don't have patience to wait for their garden to grow. Here is where Technocare has stepped in as they try to source the plants from all over the country and now even from China and Sri Lanka! A crane lifting 15 to 20 feet high trees is a sight all too common in Technocare.”

“To remain at the top one must remain informed about one's competitors. One must keep the customers informed about one's own self as well and forever endeavour to re-invent oneself all the time”, opines Col. Kapoor. “As a constant endeavour to re-invent and renovate oneself Technocare is currently focusing on building a new plant product line ‘Technocare Originals...’. ‘Gift a Plant’ is another product line to cater to the taste and sentiments of our very environment conscious customers who prefer to gift a living plant as symbol of perennial love and goodwill rather than any other materialistic short lived gift.”, says Nilam Kapoor. Also on their anvil is the creation of a website for online buying of plants and other accessories. Moving in tune with the world, they already have created a Facebook page for keeping in touch with customers and others. Today, with absolutely modern infrastructure, an elegant office building, fully computerized office operations, state of art greenhouses and net houses and their own plant production, the Kapoors feel that they have finally arrived.

Figure of Technocare's annual turnover may not be very huge, but without a doubt his story can be used as an example by teachers teaching entrepreneurship to youth. All one can grasp is that even with a meager amount, wonders can be made to happen if we have dream and determination. Technocare as a starter is a definitely yet another success story in the history of small and medium enterprises.

Col. Kapoor is a role model for many ex-service-men who retire at a young age. His paradigm shift from love for guns to greens is both awesome and unbelievable.

It won't be an exaggeration if Technocare is called as an 'oasis in the concrete jungle of Ludhiana'.

References

<http://www.thetechnocare.com/> (accessed on March 5, 2013).

<http://www.tribuneindia.com/2009/20090808/real.htm> (accessed on March 6, 2013).