

# LTH's Sustainability Initiative

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO REALISE THEIR ABILITY, AND LIVE WITH DIGNITY

*Despite the fact that we are progressing and achieving new heights almost every day, still People with Disabilities (PWD's) have very limited scope to make their career path or get a dream job. There are not enough facilities for further education and job mapping for them. In such circumstances the Sustainability Initiative of Lemon Tree Hotels (LTH) which is committed to train and work with PWD's, is a remarkable initiative to offer them a job in hospitality segment that is a multi-billion dollar industry. Whereabouts brings more on this, here are the excerpts...*

Rajesh Tiwari

Instead of reading about the expansion plans, profit strategies and market behaviour today you are going to read about the Sustainability Initiative of Lemon Tree Hotels that gives PWD's a reason to smile and live their lives with dignity. Though employment of PWDs seems to be a common initiative across many hotel chains in India, be it ITC and Taj etc., the Lemon Tree Hotels is the largest employer of people with disabilities.

While coming across disabled people (with Speech and Hearing Impaired, Autism and Down Syndrome), usually we look at them with the soft corner of our heart, wish them good luck and move away, but this thought rarely comes to our mind that they could become

the part of a leading industry such as hospitality that is full of growth opportunities. We may not have given our proper attention to their working behaviour but when you will see Employees with Disabilities (EWD's) serving in a five star hotel at a restaurant, front desk or at housekeeping department, definitely you will follow their each and every action with a curiosity; how they do it so well?

Started eight years ago, the Sustainability Initiative was initiated by Chairman and Managing Director, Lemon Tree Hotels, **Pats Keswani**. It was his passion and idea to train people with disabilities and provide them an opportunity to serve the hospitality industry. He believes that the brand should stand for more than



**Pats Keswani**  
Chairman and MD  
Lemon Tree Hotels



**Aradhana Lal**  
VP-Sustainability Initiatives  
Lemon Tree Hotels

'Just Profit' and therefore he has been driving the brand to become truly Indian and trusted. In order to make these values a part of LTH's DNA, the focus has been on creating a socially inclusive working environment which seeks to bring in people of different backgrounds, abilities and ethnicities and offer them work as a unified team with a common goal.

Lemon Tree believes that persons with disabilities (which can be physical, social or economic disabilities leading to an opportunity deprived) must be provided the same opportunities as others to realise their full potential and live with dignity. By creating a supportive environment in the organisation that allows them to deliver their best, Lemon Tree

is able to play a part, however small, in social inclusiveness, opportunity/livelihood creation and therefore nation building. Just like other initiatives this too was started at a very small scale with a hotel in Gurgaon, and since 2007 Lemon Tree Hotels has been hiring PWDs across the group's hotels. Currently, 13 percent of group employees (400 EWDs of which 350 SHHs, 40-45 OH, 5 are Down Syndrome and 1 at the Corporate Office (a Visually Impaired)) are Employees with Disabilities (EWDs). LTH aims to raise this number up to 15 percent by end of the next financial year. The company has successfully developed a structured process to induct people with disabilities into all its hotels pan India, including remote places like Muhammas in Kerala.

LTH started this initiative with Speech and Hearing Impaired (SHI's) people almost eight years ago. Orthopedic Disabled (partially- hand, leg or any part of the body, or complete - on wheel chair) joined the team almost five years ago. Encouraged with the response people with Intellectual Disability were included just a year ago. LTH has already started working with people with Down Syndrome while Autism and Visual Impaired people are under training at Bengaluru and expected to join the group soon.

### SHORTLIST & JOB MAPPING

In order to make it happening, the first and foremost important task is reaching out to the PWD's and selecting for the jobs as per their ability. For this, one needs to develop relationship with the NGO's running across the country. And, the partnership model of working with NGO's plays a critical role in success of such initiatives.

Elaborating more on the procedure **Aradhana Lal**, Vice President-Sustainability Initiatives, Lemon Tree Hotels explains, "The criteria we use

for selecting Employees with Disability (EWDs) is primarily that the candidate should have the right attitude i.e. desire to learn, passion, drive, courage, etc. and we will train them for skills i.e. functional skills to perform the tasks of Housekeeping or Food & Beverage (Service) i.e. F&B (S) or Front Office, etc. We also ask the NGOs to support us in the screening process of PWD candidates and have a dialogue with the parents as well so that we can understand the environment the candidate is from."

LTH partners with NGOs and training/skilling organisations, who are mobilising People with Disability (PWDs) across India and providing some vocational training or skilling to them. "They understand better how to provide training to a speech and hearing impaired person, to a person who is orthopedically handicapped," she explains. There are several such partnerships; Sai Swagam, Noida Deaf Society, Effior, Leonard Cheshire Disability, American India Foundation, SNS Foundation, Muskaan, Tasmara, Action for Autism, Dialogue in the Dark, V-Shesh, Youth@Jobs, etc. are to name a few.

Another challenge that comes in front of human resource and management team is job mapping. This process helps decide what kind of role/responsibilities can be given to them in order to utilise their talent and help them grow. Further elaborating on this she says, "A structured job-mapping is done for each disability type versus the different functions/ departments and roles within the department. This is done together with the concerned NGO, who has expertise in a particular disability. The important issue is to ensure that an employee with a specific disability is able to perform his/her job with the disability coming in the way of their doing the job."



Employees with Disabilities at Lemon Tree

**R Hari**, General Manager-HR also participates in the job mapping and he observes them closely to understand their requirements better. Elaborating on EWD's behaviour he says, "The EWD's take at least 15-20 days to get settled and understanding their job profile. In an attempt to create a pleasant environment for them such employees are being positioned in a group of at least

3-4 people of the same disability in one department. These employees are very focused towards the job assigned to them and productivity level is very high."

### KEY PROCESS & ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAMME

The service process flow required innovative ideas like EWD cards, a card introducing

