

Differently abled youth on a new high at Lemon Tree

Meenakshi Sharma | TNN | Dec 23, 2015, 11:55 AM IST

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NDORE: Wearing a broad smile on his face, Tanuj Khare greets the guests and asks for the order. Guests pick up a printed menu from the table and points out the dishes of their choice to him. Tanuj makes a note of the order and bows his head like a gentleman before making a move towards the kitchen.

Tanuj Khare, a 25-year-old city lad, has a hearing and speaking disability but that has not restrained him from grabbing a respectable job as a guest service associate at the Lemon Tree hotel. Like Tanuj, there are 16 speech and hearing impaired employees at Lemon Tree hotel out of the total staff count of 113 at Indore. The Lemon Tree group of hotels with outlets across 16 Indian cities has been hiring persons with disabilities since 2007 and aims to increase the ratio of people with disabilities to around 25 per cent by 2025 from the current 13 per cent.

"Hiring employees with disability (EWD) is part of our business model. The initiative is about inclusion and diversity. The outcome is mainstreaming of people with disability, who would otherwise not find a job," Aradhana Lal, Vice President- Sustainability Initiatives, The Lemon Tree Hotel Company, told TOI over the phone. Explaining through sign language Tanuj says "I love my job and work very hard throughout the day. This place is very friendly and I have made lots of friends." Tanuj, who has been serving at this hotel since a year now, is perusing BCom from a city college and aims to become a government officer.

Lemon Tree group has a total of 3,500 employees all over India of which employees with disability are 400, which equals to 13 per cent. Of the 400 employees with disabilities over 330 are speech and hearing impaired, 30-40 are physically handicapped while 9 are suffering from down syndrome and one is an autistic.

Playing carom with colleagues in the recreation room for staff, differently abled Hemant Chowdhary said, "Everyone here helps me in understanding and performing my job." The walls along the passage to the recreation room were decorated with motivational phrases and sign languages. "I wash vessels and also pitch in for other work whenever required. I like this place and would continue my job," said speech and hearing impaired, 22-year-old Lokesh Rathod, who has been working here since past 9 months. Lokesh is popular among his colleagues and has earned the title of the 'most hard working colleague' in the restaurant.

Lemon Tree group has an extensive training program schedule in sign language for all its employees before coming on board while after joining mandatory training is organised at regular interval for all the group employees. "Besides the comprehensive internal training we do, we take the help of NGOs to provide basic life skills training and professional skills training. The EWD becomes a part of the team once he/she has been trained fully to perform his/her job," said Lal.

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