

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY – ENABLED FOR DIFFERENTLY ABLED

Dear Friends My name is Selvakumar. Good afternoon.

It is a great pleasure for me to participate in EURO-INDIA 2004 and I would like to begin by thanking the organisers for being so kind as to invite me to speak today.

The main message of my presentation is, I think, very straightforward. It is that: **the advent of technologies should ultimately lead to a socio-economical uplift of all members of society.** Information technology is doing that. IT revolution is a boon for physically challenged people. At last they have got a platform to prove their mettle. IT can make them “DIFFERENTLY ABLED”.

There are about 70 million disabled in the country. But less than one percent are employed. Compare this to China where 70% are wage earners. Worse, most of the paltry one percent is in low skilled jobs, as clerks and peons.

The disability sector itself is stuck in the past. NGO's [Non Govt. Organizations] are busy imparting skills like basket weaving and candle making that are not marketable. If the number of employees is to rise, there has to be some halfway point where the corporate and “differently-abled” can meet.

The fundamental concept - of “live and let live” - can be put into action by creation of rewarding and meaningful jobs. The advent of technology as an important life tool can be used as an advantage for lucrative placements. Software giants are the best organisations to understand these societal needs by providing the required placements.

The software industry is a “Mind Industry”. The main resource in these software industries is the intelligence and the logistic attitudes. These can be provided in abundance by differently-abled staff.

Companies should understand diversity and having disabled employees in the work force encourages the management and workers to develop a positive work culture of innovations and flexibility.

This is what LASER SOFT INFOSYSTEMS – CHENNAI is doing. It recruits disabled people, irrespective of their qualification. It provides them all the needed assistance.

Like LASER SOFT most of the IT companies are ready to recruit disabled people. Companies realize that they can expect long term commitment from disabled personnel. But they look for qualifications. Unfortunately there are not many qualified people among physically challenged.

The problem with most of the differently abled people in India is their low morale. We need to get out of that syndrome. We need to expand our minds and the thrust to learn and achieve should always be inherent.

Mere secondary education will not give this confidence. By acquiring higher education particularly in technical areas their confidence will be boosted. If they are daring enough and confident they can achieve anything. They should not be satisfied with what they have got. Learning with the latest Technologies will give them enough room to prove their capability.

Unfortunately, after higher secondary they prefer to go for Arts and Science rather than technical education. In India every year there are so many backlog vacancies in reserved engineering seats for disabled people. There are many institutes for disabled which gives the basic computer skills. From my point of view training should be more exhaustive. Training in MS-OFFICE again leads them into clerical work.

Differently abled should not be treated as separate society. They should feel that they are inside the system. When they are given training or education under a “SPECIAL” umbrella they may feel that they are differentiated.

When I was doing my studies I thought about this. Now that I am in work, I am even more convinced that it would be nice to have an institute which allots the equal seats to disabled and non-disabled students. So that disabled can mingle with the society and they can compete with normal people.

I shared this idea with my friend IVOR AMBROSE, manager of the EU project Web site on Disability and Employment: www.socialdialogue.net. He encouraged me to proceed. I proposed a project to start up a technical Institute with my chairman Mr. Suresh Kamath. He promised me that Laser Soft Infosystems will support the start of the Institution.

Here I would like to share with you some of the main ideas for the Institute which I imagine:

I call it “LITE”

- which stands for :

LASER INSTITUE FOR TECHNICAL EDUCATION

It is good to have a slogan! LITE - “Lights the Minds!”

This Institute will give a 4-year course in Information Technology. The first three years would be in-house training. In the last year trainees will be sent to other companies and they have to undergo corporate training. In the final semester every body will be placed in employment through the existing ‘campus placement’ scheme.

SELECTION PROCEDURE:

I could envisage a large intake with 40 + 40 seats. Seats are equally allotted for non-disabled and differently abled. There will not be any other reservations. Everybody has to write the entrance exam. If a disabled person fails in the entrance test he or she will be given two chances until the next academic years comes. This is not applied for the non-disabled people. This is the full extent of “positive discrimination” – after this the disabled trainee must meet the same requirements as others.

SYLLABUS:

- BASIC ENGINEERING
- LATEST TECHNOLOGIES IN IT – FIELD.
- QUALITY MANAGEMENT
- BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
- PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
- MEDICAL ENGINEERING

HOW THIS INSTITUTE DIFFERS FROM OTHERS:

- Disabled can compete in real society by being with non-disabled people
- Non-disabled and disabled people can understand each other. It will have the impact once they go out and are moving within society.
- Assistive technologies, disabled-friendly buildings and environment would have to be in place to provide the same freedom of movement and access to learning for all.
- Teaching technology with moral values.

Conclusion

I believe that this vision and the plans I have tried to sketch for you need to be brought forward to implementation. Our Information Society cannot afford to turn its back on any of its citizens. It must be ‘smart’ enough to make use of all its human capital and to allow all citizens to achieve their working ambitions.

To realise this vision I am looking for your ideas and support, both moral, practical and pedagogical. I have no doubt that collaboration with other organisations and partnerships between European and Indian networks can lead to great results.

Dear Friends, thank you very much for your attention.