

CHENNAI

ALWAYS AHEAD OF THE CURVE

HE'S WORN MANY HATS AND IS NOW THE CEO OF OCTOZE TECHNOLOGIES — **MONIKA HARIRAO AND BLESSEY PM, CATCH UP WITH AR SWAMINATHAN FOR A QUICK CHAT ABOUT HIS PASSION FOR HIS WORK**

PHOTOGRAPHY: Kamaldeen AR @ kamalphotostudio

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WHEN AR Swaminathan, (affectionately called Swami), embarked on a journey to the US to complete his masters, he came across a Chinese proverb that said: *a journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step*. Taking this first step, after completing his schooling at *Montfort School, Yercaud* and then his bachelor's in electronics and instrumentation from *Annaalai University*, he then pursued a master's in computer engineering at *Wayne State University, Detroit, USA*.

He then began his career at *EDS, Lansing USA* and worked with the company for four years before returning to India in 1997 to kick-start his own business. He then joined *SRS Systems* in Chennai, handling large scale projects for their US based clients. In 2002, Swami joined *iSOFT* as a development manager and held various positions in product management, ultimately heading their product development department.

In 2014, Swami along with his then colleagues, Mouli and Venkat, having an experience in product building in the domain of health and healthcare decided to start their own business focusing on the education sector. Thus, was born *Octoze Technologies*. Their first product was for the global education market, by making it a cloud-based product which turned out to be an instant hit.

EXCERPTS FROM THE CONVERSATION:

WHAT MADE YOU START 'OCTOZE TECHNOLOGIES'? HOW DID THIS IDEA COME ABOUT?

Octoze was created by Mouli, Venkat and I. We three were working for *iSOFT* and in the end of 2013, we asked ourselves: why not start something of our own? As I hail from a business background, running a business comes naturally. With our combined experience of developing a product from scratch, building it and then making it a market leader — we were convinced we could repeat such a success for our own company. Thus, was born *Octoze*.

YOUR PRIOR EXPERIENCE WAS IN HEALTHCARE. HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO MAKE THE SWITCH?

This is something that I am asked frequently. We are product developers by design. So, for us creating any product is something that comes to us with ease. It was healthcare earlier, today it is education and it can be something else tomorrow. No one knows... as long as we are capable of adaptation and accept the market changes, we will always be a winner and on the top.

HOW DID YOU BUILD A SUCCESSFUL CUSTOMER BASE GLOBALLY?

We owe our success largely to our references. Sharing references in this business is the key. It is very difficult to find good software solutions in the education sector, backed by a company that can offer both implementation and support services in a very demanding environment. Customer service, on time delivery and customer satisfaction plays pivotal roles in our success.

TODAY, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT PLAY A KEY ROLE IN THE INDUSTRY?

Our employees are treated as our very own family members. I recollect how our family members would treat employees, young or old in our town with utmost respect, love and affection. It is in our culture. It is a part of our heritage. At *Octoze*, we love to do our best and we learn how to do better. Every company has an underlying keystone around which it revolves. For us, it's our untiring devotion to user experience. We go to lengths that others would consider extreme. We believe in engineering for the user, not for the company.

SO, HOW DOES ONE BECOME A SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEUR?

There is no time tested formula to become a successful entrepreneur. You have to love what you do. The success rates of startups are very less. Success of the business is linked to how best we carry forward our idea to the consumer.

HOW SHOULD AN ENTREPRENEUR INVEST THEIR TIME?

Innovation and strategy are something that entrepreneurs have to dedicate their time to. It is very easy to be trapped in operations, which is very critical but to be successful one has to keep looking ahead. Always.

WHO HAVE YOU BEEN MOST INSPIRED BY?

It has been and always will be my mother. She has always inspired me with her ability to do any work at any time for anyone and always with a smile. The second person, who inspired me professionally, is Ravi Kumar, the CTO of a company I worked for in the past.

LASTLY, HAVE YOU EVER TURNED DOWN A CLIENT?

Oh Yes. Several times. Initially, at the time of starting off, like every new business, we signed up with everyone who we came across. As months passed, we realized if a customer does not understand who we are and what we represent, the relationship will not last. Thankfully, our clients are also on the same wavelength and therefore we have a good pipeline of clients. Today, we focus on customers with whom we can be technology partners rather than vendors. **✎**

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