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## A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

**For any employee-turned-entrepreneur, the challenge of giving up a steady job to venture into an unknown business territory is huge. Yasmin Taj introduces you to a few Indians who returned to India after leaving their secure, high-paying and high-end jobs in foreign countries to set up ventures, in a quest to realise their vision**

### BACK FOR GOOD

Thomas Mookken, VP, NeoGen Labs left for the US in 1984 and spent a considerable part of his career exploring opportunities in the telecom equipment industry there. "I started off as a software developer and after my MBA, moved on to marketing and business management roles in the industry," informs Mookken. But then, he gave it all up and came back to India. Talking about his decision of moving back, Mookken expresses, "I enjoyed working in the US but after the dotcom bust in 2001, the industry never recovered. Meanwhile, we had a baby and my wife wanted to move back to start a consulting company of her own. Therefore, the risk was not much and besides, I feel I am fairly risk tolerant."

Then, Mookken and his partner Dr. Cariappa started NeoGen Labs, a newborn screening (NBS) provider to detect inborn errors of metabolisms in babies. He says, "This concept was relatively new in India and also unheard of, though in the US, it is popular. We decided to explore this theory further in order to increase awareness. My partner's technical expertise and my experience in the field of marketing and business management helped our venture grow." But his journey wasn't devoid of any hurdles. "Since it was an unknown concept, challenges were inevitable. We had to spend significant resources educating and raising awareness among patients, doctors and hospital authorities. We also had to address the other bureaucratic challenges and deal with hordes of paperwork that consumed a lot of our time and resources," he adds. He says that despite the tough times, the venture did gradually prosper and today, he has no regrets.

### A SMOOTH TRANSITION

Chander K Madan, CEO and Co-founder, eAge Software Services discusses his entrepreneurial journey, "I started working very early in life. Though it wasn't an easy ride, it also had a few advantages. Starting early provided me an edge and a wealth of experience that helped me in all my future endeavours. I had the opportunity to work in Hong Kong and Singapore for a considerable period." After having worked with some leading organisations like NIIT and HP for two decades, Madan decided to leave the comfort of the corporate world and turn into an entrepreneur. "The corporate life was very rewarding; however, it was hectic too. For a few years, I was toying with the idea of becoming an entrepreneur and I felt that the time was just right. Though a corporate job offers you a lot of benefits, a cushy lifestyle and a high-flying existence, I still couldn't call it 'my own'. I decided to spend my time and energy towards creating and building value through my venture instead of going through the routines of the corporate life," he avers.

Madan along with his friend Rajesh, co-founded eAge Software Services in 2008 with a

shared vision to be the best-in-class portal to provide knowledge, infotainment and cater to the professional needs of the next generation. Talking about the challenges he faced, Madan says, "I think setting up a business in India is never easy. Apart from the challenges that budding entrepreneurs face in the infrastructure space, one has to unlearn a few things that you learn from your corporate life for it might not necessarily be applicable." Madan shares a piece of advice, "First of all, if you have a great idea that you strongly believe in, pursue it! And always think big but start frugal."

## TOWARDS GREENER PASTURES

Kiran Datar, along with three other co-entrepreneurs, when smitten by the entrepreneurial bug decided to come together to start CyberBazaar, a company that provides end-to-end audio conferencing services. This decision of theirs not only compelled them to give up their American dreams but also put their high-paying careers at stake when they decided to return to India to set up an untested venture. "I worked as a strategist (International Economics and Foreign Exchange) in the US. Though this may seem like a purely career oriented decision at that time, the underlying driver for the choice being made by us was a strong desire to establish an innovative, global, technology driven service, based in India," expresses Datar.

After coming back to India, ten years ago, these four friends started Cyber-Bazaar. Talking about the challenges that they had to overcome, Datar explains, "When we decided to start CyberBazaar in India, the old regulations that existed back then, prevented us from entering the government monopolised ISP space. Faced with this setback, my team and I were forced to turn towards other communication related business plans." After continued efforts to establish and expand the business for two years, CyberBazaar was acquired by WebEx Inc. in 2005 and in 2007, Cisco acquired WebEx. "We had very early on recognised that collaboration was the only way through which the IT industry could reach newer heights," Datar adds.

Experts say that there aren't too many people who have it in them to take huge risks in life. But those who do and become successful in their attempts pave the way for the rest to follow.

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