

Interview with IBSAF World Magazine, July 2008

Director's Take

Something about Prof. P Bala Bhaskaran

I am one of those who switched from a corporate career to an academic career mid-way through my career, much before such change-over had become fashionable. I was attracted by the prospect of spreading management education and the prospect of creating systems, processes and structures where none existed. I have enjoyed this transition and excitement; I only hope it has not been too harsh on the students and the system.



**Prof. P Bala
Bhaskaran**
Director,
IBS Ahmedabad.

You and IBS...

I have grown with IBS through trials and tribulations, through trauma and excitement. I have enjoyed every bit of it. Looking back I am extremely happy about the professional opportunities that I have had so far.

The most important contribution of IBS to the business world...

IBS was started on the premise that India needed more management graduates than were being generated by the premium B-Schools. In one decade of its existence, IBS has proved that it is possible to create good management talent even out of those young persons who could not get into the premium B-Schools. IBS has also proven that it is possible to scale up operations rather fast through innovative methods. Besides these IBS can take pride that it has been able to offer major break-through in career to all those 16,000 odd alumni, who would otherwise have been on different tracks.

Your decision to join the academic profession...

It happened by chance. After nearly two decades of a conventional career, I was looking for a change. IBS offered me the break and looking back I have no regrets.

The toughest challenge that you have till date....

Each day and each assignment has been a challenge. I have also experienced that each assignment has been a bigger challenge than the previous ones. May be this is a sign of the process of ageing that one is going through!

The most interesting project that you have worked on...

I am not able to name one project as the most interesting one. Each project has had its own complexity and share of excitement. I may mention about a current project that we are working on. This is to map the students' capabilities - knowledge, skills and attitudes - on one side and to search for jobs that are in sync with them. The challenge is about involving a variety of professionals like faculty, soft skills experts, student counselors etc. and mapping a range of recruiters and jobs for the benefit of the large number of students. We are hoping to find the day when we are able to map the aptitude of the students and predict their suitability in terms of jobs and firms! We do not have ready template or solution to this situation, we are still exploring.

The most effective way to bridge the gap between industry and academics...

There is no single way of bridging the gap effectively. There is a whole variety of paths and we need to tread each of them. What works in one situation may not work in another. So we need to pursue multiple options simultaneously. It is a dynamic situation. But on the whole I would say that brand building is one of the surest ways to bring you closer to the industry. And mind you, brand building does not happen in one day.

Students now v/s Students at your time...

I was a student more than a quarter century ago. The world has changed a lot in this period. Personal computers and internet were not known in those days. IBM 1401 was the most advanced machine of those days. The students' universe today is one of more opportunities, more possibilities, higher affordability, more freedom, less limitations, less inhibitions and a higher level of confidence. The world has moved on an irreversible path; I am glad that Indian students have a

major stake in this brave new world.

Your most memorable moments at IBS and with IBSAF?

Most of my memorable moments are with IBS because that is where I spend most of my time. IBSAF has gained critical mass lately and is on its way to become a force to reckon with. Today IBSAF is living on a platform of nostalgia - of meeting old friends and reliving those glorious bygone days. While nostalgia and looking back has a definite significance in an alumni network, I feel, it needs to move forward to more creative and tangible platforms.

IBSAF: Your experiences and suggestions

I would like IBSAF to operate at three levels

Level-1: It must cater to the overall - personal, career and professional - development of its members.

Level-2: It must be able to leverage its networking power to the development of its alma mater, IBS as a great institution

Level-3: It must be able to contribute significantly to the development of the society and the country. All of these do not happen in a jiffy; things evolve over a period of time. All the same we must be aware of the possibilities and we must make definite initiatives in definite directions.

Please suggest some improved/interesting features and content that you would like in IBSAF World

Since the primary target group of the newsletter is the alumni, any feature that touches the alumni would be of prime relevance. IBSAF already has many features that interest the alumni. Anecdotes and sharing of experience by individual alumnus is a feature that I would recommend for possible inclusion. In each edition IBSAF could possibly feature the growth and development of one of the campuses. Each issue of IBSAF can focus on one of the Classes and bring out features on its current status.

If you could be something different, that would be...

When I was young I had dreamt of becoming a journalist or a writer of fiction. Somewhere the tracks changed and I landed where I am. I started career as an engineer, became a manager and later on got into managing an educational institution. What will I be tomorrow, I just do not know. May be I will try writing fiction.

Your idea of relaxation.

My idea of relaxation is pretty skewed. I end up watching movie and sports channels, if and when my family members allot me a slot on the TV; sometimes it ends up in traveling out of the city on short getaways.

Your message for us...

Haven't I bored you enough?

Ways in which alumni can contribute towards their alma mater...

Alumni can contribute significantly to the overall development of IBS ecosystem. Alumni can create scholarships to the needy students which would facilitate comfortable education to many. May be we could work on a sponsorship model where alumni creates a fund which would select students on specified criteria for sponsorship. Each such sponsored student should take up the responsibility of sponsoring a student later on when he is financially comfortable on a current cost basis. This can trigger an avalanche of financial support system so that no student would have to worry about financial problems in pursuing studies. IBS would be able to attract the best talent from all over. Alumni can also create Chairs/ Professorships in specific areas in specific campuses.

Suggestions to create a stronger bond between the students and the alumni...

The student is always looking up to the alumni as role models. When there is an involvement of the alumni with the student body in any manner, the bond becomes stronger. Mentoring, Networking, financial support, active involvement in the development of the B School in terms of soft and hard infrastructure etc would go a long way establishing a long-term relationship between the students and the alumni. ♦