

There is no better instrument than communication during a crisis: Shalini Singh

Singh, Chief – Corporate Communications and Sustainability, speaks about her journey, initiatives by Tata Power, opportunities and challenges presented by Covid-19, women leadership and more



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With the nation proceeding towards lockdown 4.0, the effects of the constrained economic activities have slowly and steadily begun to cast over the power sector of the country. There has been a decline in the demand and henceforth revenue in India's power sector. Communicators across the spectrum have been adopting and implementing desperate measures to tackle the challenging situation.

Tata Power, the largest power generation company in India, is also committed to bringing a change in society through social and sustainable initiatives. Aiding in this cause, the corporate communications and sustainability team is working recklessly to tide over this emergency.

Shalini Singh, Chief – Corporate Communications and Sustainability at Tata Power, is a seasoned communication professional with almost two decades of experience in industries such as power, IT, telecom & textiles & garments. Claiming to have spearheaded some of the most groundbreaking brand campaigns for the firm, she has also championed CSR initiatives and women empowerment initiatives for the firm.

In today's edition of Women Achievers Series, we talk to Shalini Singh about her journey, initiatives by Tata Power, opportunities and challenges presented by Covid19, women leadership and more.

Edited Excerpts:

How has your journey been? If you look back, what would be the most defining moment of your career?

It has been an amazing journey so far. I started my career with Arvind Mills & moved to Mumbai with Kale Consultants, an IT firm specializing in Airlines & Banking Services. Prior to Tata Power, I was leading Marketing & Communications for the consulting business of Accenture, India. Before that, I worked with Airtel and was heading Corporate Communications for its Western Region circles. I was also a part of the launch team for conceptualizing, planning & implementing Bharti's entry strategy in the Western Region telecom circles. It has been a very insightful journey so far with the privilege of working with some of the most distinguished names in the communications industry.

It's difficult to highlight just one defining moment in my career as there have been so many. But, to highlight one, I would like to say that I truly cherish the Global recognition, which our "Club Enerji #SwitchOff2SwitchOn" campaign received recently by winning "The Edison Award" for Social Innovation under the Social Energy Solutions category.

Coronavirus has presented a plethora of challenges and opportunities to businesses. How has it impacted your business? What are the opportunities that it has created for you?

The global pandemic has disrupted every industry by significantly transforming many aspects of the global supply chain across all the sectors including the energy sector. Despite being an essential service, the power sector has witnessed a drop in the demand below the seasonal norms due to the nationwide lockdown. Our renewable projects at 70 sites continue to stay operational across the country. We continue to ensure that all our employees including contract workers are taken care off during their travel, stay, food and safety aspects so that they are healthy and are able to operate the plant and systems seamlessly.

Our dedicated team on the ground is working very hard to provide seamless power supply to all vital institutions and millions of Indians quarantined at home. It is a crucial phase for all of us however, it has created an opportunity for us to support nation-building by ensuring uninterrupted power supply to the nation, including maintaining the transmission and distribution network in various cities. It has also given us a chance to move away from high carbon businesses and reduce emissions by moving on to sustainable energy.

What are the initiatives being undertaken by Tata Power to tide over these turbulent times?

We have been actively supporting the nation in its fight against the global pandemic through our various initiatives keeping in mind the safety and well-being of all the employees, vulnerable communities, migrant labourers and other stakeholders.

The importance of creating awareness of the disease cannot be underestimated, particularly in resource-limited conditions. Thus, we have been conducting awareness and prevention campaigns on sanitisation and social distancing to prevent the spread of the virus, as well as counselling people through digital platforms.

In order, to support vulnerable communities and farmers through this difficult period, we are ensuring a steady supply of food grains, soaps and sanitization kits to them and transporting the farmers produce from farms to markets, helping them earn a livelihood. Our subsidiaries are working closely with communities across their locations on multiple development initiatives to combat the spread of the virus.

Why do we observe attrition in the women leadership as we go up the ladder?

There are many reasons which are responsible for attrition in women leadership such as pay disparity, expectations from workplace and family, gender inequality, societal norms and so on. Due to all these reasons, women leave their positions at a far higher rate than men and it only goes higher as you move up the corporate ladder. If we keep doing what we're doing it will take decades to achieve true gender equality. We need to ensure that women have equal opportunity to gain the skills, experience and mentorship needed to rise to leadership positions.

The contribution of women is extremely important in every sphere of life. The only lesson which I have learnt and would share is that we need to continuously challenge the limits and norms both at the professional and personal front and keep going ahead with positive intent and strong willpower, commitment and

high ownership. We need to be more stubborn and determined to work our way up the leadership pipeline and that's how we can set a new standard of modern leadership.

How important has communication become now in these unprecedented times?

There is simply no better instrument during a widespread crisis than communications. Brands that stop communicating with their customers and other stakeholders in this hour of crisis would be committing a mistake. It is crucial for companies to maintain their brand and to reassure their stakeholders that there are contingency plans in place. After all, communications drive customer engagement and engaged customers come with serious benefits.

This is a time when humanity is at stake, and our communication cannot simply exist for its own sake. Therefore, it is imperative that any communication that we send to customers, employees or stakeholders should be informative, educational, inspirational, relevant and hyper-personalized.

A lot has been talked about the pay gap but is there something called value gap to be talked about?

The difference between the pay gap and value gap persists in all sectors when it comes to the female workforce. Instead of looking only at the pay gap, we also need to talk about the value that women can bring to the table because they tend to be more concentrated in different jobs than men. The role of women should be based on their merit and capabilities, and not on their gender.

How do you see the post Covid world to be?

The Coronavirus pandemic has already impacted the deceleration of the economic activities and has forced the businesses to make some uncomfortable choices about their workforce. As the government is taking all possible measures in response to the coronavirus, businesses are rapidly adapting to the changing needs of their people, their customers and suppliers, while navigating the financial and operational challenges.

Besides this, there are some major issues which we need to highlight to ensure our economy takes up fast after the lockdown such as poverty, unemployment, liquidity crunch and social well-being to avoid the second wave of Covid-19. It is important to re-set our priorities at a personal and professional level and we should start preparing detailed guidelines and make it mandatory compliance for companies' post-lockdown.