



Mobilizing Life!



HALL OF FAME - LUMINARY

DISTINGUISHED BUSINESS LEADER

OMNI- POTENT

G.S. SAREEN
Omni United

It is said first impressions are inked in seven seconds. How about sitting in Mr G. S. Sareen's glass-encased office – perched loftily on the 30th floor of the swanky One Raffles Place overlooking Singapore's CBD – as the suave founder of tyre powerhouse Omni United talks about his much-publicized goal of gunning for that magical \$1 billion in revenue? Now, that's one heck of an initial impression.



“Speed is important, mistakes are acceptable”

Up Close & Personal

How was running a business always the most obvious choice?

Because when you work for the army, you work for the president of the country. So I thought if I worked for the president of India, I cannot work for anyone else and I would not like anyone else to be my employer. So I said, let's chart my own destiny and this is where I've ended up.

What businesses did you run before starting up Omni United?

After the army, I tried lots of things, then somebody asked me if I sold tires; and just like that, I went into the industry. When I came to Singapore, I set up two tire companies in 1994 and 1999.

Has Omni United surpassed even your wildest expectations?

Every day, every month and every year has been better than the last. Because if you are a growing company and it is not the best, it means you are in decline. Our growth has been very aggressive.

What is a key lesson you have garnered since becoming an entrepreneur?

Don't bite off more than you can chew. You'll get indigestion. It is good to be highly ambitious, but ambition and execution are two different things. Aspire for huge goals, but execute them

in sync with your capabilities. Taking time to better your skills and finding the right talent is important, and don't be afraid to make mistakes – mistakes are acceptable but speed cannot be compromised.

You initially projected that Omni would hit the \$1 billion dollar mark in 2015. Is that still possible?

No, for a variety of reasons, although we will definitely cross half a billion by then. If I were a listed company, I would have gotten vilified for missing that number by half, but we are a private company and \$500 million is not a bad thing! We are on our way to a billion; it is just a matter of time before we get there.

You were named in Fortune magazine's list of Asia's 25 Hottest People last year. How does that impact you?

Nothing. These are the things that make you feel good about yourself for a little while and then the next day, you resume your normal routine. We are all human beings who appreciate it when others appreciate us, but you cannot have a swollen head. So what if you are on Fortune? Fortune is not God; I love them for nominating me but ultimately it does nothing. You can't be affected by these things and lose your focus. If you take it as a pat on the back,

wonderful – if it becomes a diversion, that's dangerous.

What advice would you offer to young entrepreneurs?

Think global. Think really big because there is no limitation to the human mind. Do you want to fantasize about the girl next door or about Beyonce or Madonna? [laughs]. How would you know what is your potential without trying? If you start settling for mediocrity, then you're doing yourself a disservice. Does that mean everyone should be an entrepreneur? No! You have to know who you are in life – know what you want and what you can do. At the same time, have high ambitions and big goals.

What is your motivation in life?

Motivation cannot be commercially-driven. It is not about money, cars, watches or the finer things in life. It is more important to be responsible, and how you handle yourself, your family and your employees' well-being. The word responsibility means “responsibility”. Your ability to respond. To me, achieving success means being more confident of myself. I want to wake up every morning and look forward to what the day brings and not go “oh my god, is it really another day of work?”

Much-vaunted by the press for his ability to dream big but yet walk the talk, the Madhya Pradesh native, a former career officer in the Indian army, is adamant that business was always in his blood. “Somebody told me this recently – you should never hesitate when it comes to taking risks. If you win, you reap. And if you lose, you guide,” intones Mr Sareen, who last year was named one of Asia's 25 hottest people in business, according to Forbes Magazine. He is evidently used to winning – because the numbers are compelling.

He established Omni United in 2003, and almost a decade later, supplies the company's six brands – including its flagship brand Radar – to 80 countries worldwide. From quality tyres for cars, trucks and buses to SUVs and agricultural machinery, close to 10 million tyres are sold annually, with revenue hovering around the \$200 million region in 2012 – a quantum leap from its relatively modest figure of \$7 million in its debut year. And so popular has its value-for-money proposition been that people have dubbed Omni the “Ikea” of tyres.

It is a moniker that is worn with pride. “It's

absolutely right because whether it is Ikea or Walmart...you get a good product at a good price with full service support,” he explains, clearly pleased with the flattering comparison. “It really depends on what you want to do – there is nothing wrong with being a Lamborghini, but there's also nothing wrong being a Kia. Both are great.” While recent years have been ones to savour with Mr Sareen making inroads into the professional racing circuit and distinguishing himself as a socially-conscious entrepreneur, he is very much focused on growing the business long-term. Ambition is tempered by prudence and sound common sense.


“I constantly try to hold back company growth, because you can't become a billion dollar company overnight if you don't have the management bandwidth or proper infrastructure,” says the father of two. And he provides us with the perfect food for thought- esque anecdote on why his goal is within tantalizing reach: “Look around you along the endless expanse of the city's highways. What do you see? Not humans, not cars but tires rolling all over the place.”

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