

# 'Work drives me further'

**A**n inveterate traveller, a man who calls it a crime to work without passion, a man obsessed with quality. That is Dr Madhav Mehra for you.

Names and titles don't matter to him. He has been and still is on the board of numerous committees (so many of them in fact that he has probably lost count by now). As consultant, teacher and manager, he has been in the business of quality management around the world for over 30 years now.

Chairman of the US-based World Quality Council — a body constituted by 52 national and international quality associations to promote, oversee and coordinate quality activities across countries — Dr Mehra says his job "is to lead people into the 21st century, to quality through harmony."

He believes people need to be charged all the time. "The internet has made our aspirations boundless. We have to develop our inter-personal skills and create an atmosphere that will bring out the best in a person," he says.

As a child, he read Gandhiji's works. "I was deeply influenced by the Mahatma's thoughts on universality of religion," he says. He got through the civil services exam in 1961 and joined the ministry of railways. Leadership, team-building, employee involvement, communication — such concepts fascinated him and led to a PhD in Management by Objectives from London and to start Quality Management International in 1974. All through his 27-year stint in the railways, he lectured (and still does) on management issues

at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. "I believe all of us have a duty towards improving society," he says, "At the IIMs, I see a lot of cynicism. There is no dearth of knowledge among my listeners and there is tremendous perception, but the translation of response into action is poor. People lack role models today. They need to be guided."

Dr Mehra took voluntary retirement from the railways in 1988. He says, "It is tough to join the government, but it is even more difficult to quit. The government is a very staid institution. It doesn't encourage avant garde action. I

attribute my success to my hands-on approach. Since I know what bureaucracy can be, my lectures are practical." Quality does not figure high in India's corporate consciousness since company managements provide little scope to employees to involve themselves on the shop floor and in the framing of policies for workers, he says. But the situation is gradually changing.

At the recent World Congress on Total Quality held in India 2,600 delegates from 38 countries participated. "There has been a shift in

the paradigm, an organisational transformation. Workers are held to be equally important now," says Dr Mehra.

Such changes in thinking encourage him to carry on. Besides, he says, "My work excites me. So I never feel tired. Of course, I feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities at times, but that merely gives me more drive. I have miles to go before I can sleep. And happiness, for me, is in travelling towards my goal."



**Quality control is the magic mantra which keeps Dr Madhav Mehra constantly on his feet. DIVYA SREEDHARAN meets the chairman of World Quality Council**