

'We aim to build a synergy between business and environment'



Madhav Mehra

As Chairman of the World Quality Council and President, World Environment Foundation, Madhav Mehra knows what he is talking about when he says that the industry in the 21st century will be driven by the need to produce products that not only meet the quality standards set by the market but are also eco-friendly. He talks to Shuchi Sharma about how he plans to involve the industry in eco-friendly initiatives. Excerpts:

What are the main objectives of World Environment Foundation?

The main objective of the World Environment Foundation (WEF) is to develop and implement strategies for improving ecological balance through proper management of the environment. We aim to build a synergy between business and environment by helping industry discover that the environment need not be necessarily perceived as a threat but can be seen as an opportunity. WEF has been encouraging eco-friendly initiatives and environment management systems in all sectors of the industry.

Why do you think environmental issues have become so critical in today's world? Are the reasons more political, economic or is it simply a question of survival?

It is a mix of all these. Since the environment is able to rectify the damage done to it to a certain extent, the initial damage done by humans was not visible. But the rate of damage has increased so alarmingly that it is no longer possible to ignore it. The society at large has woken up to the fact that something has to be done not only to protect but also repair the damage done to the earth, in order to survive. This has resulted in the global community

How does the WEF collaborate with governments at various levels to achieve its goals? How far have these efforts been made in India?

Collaboration with the government agencies becomes even more important in third world countries like India where the degree of red tapism is higher. The Indian government also holds the environment issue close to its heart but its projects in this respect often get mired in bureaucracy. We being a non-profit, Non Governmental Organization are able to achieve more. The governments at various levels realise this and have been extremely co-operative.

How is the WEF planning to spread awareness in the industry about various environment related issues?

We at WEF want to change the definition of corporate governance from accountability to just the shareholders to accountability to the society at large. However, this cannot be achieved at the expense of the industry. So our aim is to create a synergy between the industry's targets and environmental issues.

In the new economy the industry needs to continuously innovate and provide the customers with quality products. We want to encourage the industry to produce products that are less toxic, use less energy and are renewable or recyclable. With growing concern for the environment the demand for such products is increasing and hence such an approach will also benefit the industry.

We have coined a new term called TEAM - Total Eco Effective Management. This approach will pave the way for TQM - Total Quality Management. It is a management approach centered on production of products that satisfy both the eco efficiency and the quality criteria. These objectives can be achieved only with the co-operation

industry has been impressive. We are presently accepting applications for the 2001 award.

What, as per you, has been WEF's notable success in the recent past?

To me, the most notable success has been the response generated in the industry for the Golden Peacock Award. I was very impressed when I was recently invited by the Mathura Refineries to view their efforts in controlling and repairing the damage done to the River Yamuna. All the birds and wild life that had left the banks due to water pollution have returned.

What else needs to be done to promote environmental issues especially in the Indian scenario? What are your plans in this regard?

There is a need to establish some amount of accountability. Only after we have calculated the cost of environmental damage, can we place responsibility. Apart from the Golden Peacock Award, WEF plans to hold conferences, workshops and seminars to spread awareness.

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