

It's a beautiful tech world

Srinivasa Addepalli's fascination for the wonders of technology fits in perfectly with his job as senior vice president, global strategy, at Tata Communications, and adds an interesting tech touch to his personal life

That's [phonetics] my profession: also my hobby. Happy is the man who can make a living by his hobby!" So said Professor Henry Higgins to Colonel Pickering in George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*. Ask 34-year-old Srinivasa Addepalli, senior vice president, global strategy, Tata Communications, how he feels about his work and you will receive the same answer, with one difference — Mr Addepalli's interest is in telecom and technology, not phonetics.

Mr Addepalli's life has been scripted and directed by technology. "I was always interested in technology

and knew about the latest in that space," he recalls. He graduated in electronics engineering, but then, contrary to what one would expect from a technology buff, rejected software as a career. In explanation, Mr Addepalli says, "I wanted to use the capabilities of technology to change society, the way we behave, the way we communicate, the way we live. That's why I chose to study strategy and marketing at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad."

The acumen he acquired in technology and management in the course of his studies is now helping him in formulating long-term strategy and managing the global corporate brand identity for Tata Communications. Also invaluable is the experience he gained at his first job with the Tata Strategic Management Group, where, by a lucky chance, he was initiated into the intricacies of the telecom sector: "I joined TSMG in 1999; in 2000, my colleague, who was deputed to steer the new Tata Teleservices project, had to go on leave and I became the project leader."

Mr Addepalli worked on several projects on the Tata group's strategy and investment in the telecom and media space; he also helped VSNL [now Tata Communications] to devise strategies for managing its businesses. He spent about 18 months in Mr Ratan Tata's office, coordinating the group's activities in the telecom space. With this background, it was but natural that he should focus on telecom, and, in late 2005, he joined VSNL.

An Apple everyday

Ten years of telecom has whetted his interest in technology to such an extent, his whole life, work and leisure are driven by gadgets and gizmos. A huge fan of



Steve Jobs and his company, he passionately declares, “I love Apple! I have a professional admiration for its business strategy and understanding of consumer behaviour; on the personal level, I love their products which are so consumer-friendly and intuitive.”

He owns two Mac laptops, one for work and one for home, an iPhone and three iPods. In addition, he has Apple wireless routers at home, and spends hours experimenting to find out the things he can do using the wireless network. The other day he streamed music from his Macbook Air into his music system using the Apple wireless network, with the iPhone as a remote, “for the sheer fun of trying and coming up with something different using technology”.

Reading had taken a backseat with his busy schedule, but not anymore — Mr Addepalli has downloaded several books on his iPhone. These days he has a tryst with PG Wodehouse on his daily commute to and from work. If he is not reading, he is playing scrabble or darts on his iPhone. And when he is in a mood to do neither, he is trying to play the flute — on his iPhone, of course! He also uses his iPhone to remotely control his Macbook and his PowerPoint slideshows. Interestingly, he has also coaxed his wife, Suman, into using the Mac and iPod Touch, and turned her into an avid fan too. “She is now hooked on to them.”

Tech play

Exercising has never been Mr Addepalli’s forte and he confesses it nonchalantly: “I have tried all forms of exercise and enjoy none of them.” But, recently, he discovered Wii [pronounced V], an advanced gaming console with a sports package, and is enjoying the rigours of tennis and boxing like never before. Wii is connected to the television and has a motion-sensing remote that captures the movements of hands and sends the information to the sensor bar of the console, enabling a virtual game.

So, on most days, visitors to Mr Addepalli’s home will find him playing tennis with Wii. He swings the Wii-remote like a tennis racquet, playing different strokes with excitement and tension written on his face. And as he scores, the game gets tougher. “It requires me to move and hit much faster. I get a lot of physical activity.” Often he spends around an hour playing tennis at home, having the same fun that sports people have at a tennis court. Getting into the spirit of playing a competitive game, he says, creates energy and is a huge de-stressor. He usually plays against the opponents on the screen, but at times, if his two little daughters are asleep, Suman joins him for a game too. Mr Addepalli says, “Earlier, watching me hit the air wildly, she would find it very weird; now she

is a convert. We’ve realised it’s a form of exercise that’s lots of fun.”

A vocal advocate of maintaining a work-life balance, Mr Addepalli tries to keep his weekends free for the family, even though the nature of his job requires him to be connected 24x7. “I try to be very conscious about when and how I work. As an individual, work is important but family is equally important too,” he avers. Technology definitely helps him in managing the ‘when’ and ‘how’ of it. “That’s the good part about technology — it gives you the option to work efficiently and the opportunities to enjoy personal life too.”

Tech toy

Mr Addepalli keeps a tab on the latest in technology. He browses the net, has friends with common interests and does a lot of research on the subject. Some of it is led by work. A couple of years back, the discussion in the office revolved around devices other than PC that could deliver content to customers. Someone from the broadband team sent Mr Addepalli a link to Nabaztag [meaning rabbit in Armenian], a wi-fi enabled internet pet.

Immediately, he bought a Nabaztag in Singapore and is thrilled with his toy rabbit’s abilities. It shows emotions: rolls its ears and changes colours, and reads out real time news, weather updates, messages, and just about anything from the internet. It plays music and gives out reminders as well. It can also work as a communication device if there is a Nabaztag at the other end. But there isn’t a community yet and he isn’t able to use it much — Mr Addepalli is probably one of the handful of people in India who own it. “I saw this as one more consumer device that could deliver the capabilities of the internet without requiring a computer. Being a country with low PC penetration, we need to experiment with such devices.”

Technology amuses him no end. It has changed his life so much, all his interests now have a technological twist. Writing to express his views, for instance, used to be a favourite hobby, and, in his college days, he wrote extensively for *JAM*, the youth magazine. Later, he wrote occasional articles on management. But as work occupied more and more of his time, he lost touch with writing. Till technology opened a new vista for him, this time in the garb of blogs.

Off and on, he blogs on behalf of the company, writing about emerging technologies, new trends and new developments in the telecom space. He wants to do more of serious writing and aspires to write a book some day. But perhaps we will have to wait till Mr Addepalli discovers a technology that transfers thoughts to a Mac! ●

Shubha Madhukar