

# Second innings

Group HR hopes to tap a large pool of experience and talent by targeting women who wish to resurrect careers after taking a break from working

**A**rmed with an MBA in marketing, Sangeeta Navalkar had successfully carved out a niche for herself in the corporate world as assistant manager (brand and sales) in a well-known publication. Seven years into a career, the young manager decided to focus on spending time with her two children. She kept herself in touch with the business world by working in her husband's business but found herself with free time when both sons started full time school.

When Ms Navalkar considered getting back to a regular working life, she was apprehensive and uncertain, "The workplace had changed since I had left my job. Things are much more professional now; people seem to be working longer hours and travelling more," she explains.

There are many women professionals like Ms Navalkar who take the decision to put careers on hold in order to take care of children and families. As the years pass, these women find it increasingly difficult to get back to the workplace.

It was to draw upon this large pool of potential talent that the Group HR launched their Tata Second Career Internship Programme (SCIP) on March 8, 2008, in

Mumbai and Pune — an appropriate date as it is celebrated as the International Women's Day.

"Many women want to get back to work after a break but find it difficult to manage a 9-5 job," says Rajesh Dahiya, vice-president (TAS and sourcing). "SCIP aims at giving women professionals who have taken a career break an opportunity to get back into mainstream jobs, with the option of a flexible time schedule."

Ms Navalkar echoes the sentiments, "What attracted me to SCIP was the opportunity to work part time and the Tata name." She is now working with Group HR on the SCIP project itself.

## A wealth of experience

SCIP was aimed at women with minimum four years of experience in functions like HR, marketing, finance, legal, manufacturing, etc, and a career break of one to eight years. The programme calls for a six-month internship period.

When the programme was launched, Group HR received applications from nearly 2,000 women, not just from Mumbai and Pune, but also from other



Seated (From left): Shradha Vasudevan, Rupa Shankar, Sangeeta Navalkar, Rahul Krishana, Mukta Kamplikar, Chetan Tolia, Radhika Shah, Nalini Tripathi, Smita Dinesh  
 Standing 1<sup>st</sup> (From left): Vaishali Kapoor, Chanda Vyas, Preeti Jain, Nandita Gopalan Wadhwa, Nirmala Anaokar, Zia Sahu, Divya Chadha, Laila Menon, Himabindu Kanchan, Manish Singh and Sandhya Kabra  
 Standing 2<sup>nd</sup> (From left): Pearl Mascarenhas, Priya Soares, Sarmila Pande, Nidhi Jawahar, Bharvi Rajendra, Divya Gupta, Mansi Nangia, Vandana Y Nair, Vidya Dasgupta, Chandini Sehgal, Harini Iyer and Sujata Joshi  
 Standing 3<sup>rd</sup> (From left): Supriya Singh, Kanchan Nawani, Bakhtaver Bhot, Sunita Wazir, Priti Joag, Sapna Sensharma, Sangita JhunJhunwala, K Avanthi and Elton Lee

Indian states and even a few from overseas. Working with TMI, a recruitment agency based in Hyderabad, the SCIP team shortlisted 350 candidates who went through telephone interviews. Of these, 105 women were selected for a final panel interview with senior management from various Tata companies.

In the final round 34 women were selected as SCIP interns. The finalists went through an initial phase of training at the Tata Management Training Centre, Pune in June, that included a visit to the Tata Motors factory in Pune and interactions with senior Tata leaders such as R Gopalakrishnan, executive director, Tata Sons; Kishor Chaukar, managing director, Tata Industries; Ritu Anand, HR deputy global head, TCS and Satish Pradhan, executive vice-president (Group HR).

### Finding the niche

Shradha Kapur who took a break in March 2007 due to medical complications during pregnancy is now working with Rallis India to streamline their recruitment process. "It's a great feeling to be back to work," she says. Her wish is to continue working part time for two more years until her twins outgrow the toddler stage.

Chandralekha Maitra, head programme management, Group HR and head of SCIP, finds the project very close to her heart. "The biggest plus is that these women are remarkably qualified. Some have 10-12 years of experience and are top rankers, and university gold medallists. It is a remarkable talent pool," she says. "The biggest issue for them however is trying to find a life-work balance and SCIP provides the opportunity of a soft entry back into the corporate world for them," she adds.

Echoing her views Harini Iyer, an MBA from XLRI Jamshedpur, says, "A big chunk of the workforce talent is lost to the corporate world, when motherhood and other pressing personal matters take precedence in a working woman's life. SCIP provides just the right platform to resume one's career after a break by gently easing us back to the demands of balancing work with family."

Vidya Dasgupta, another SCIP intern, is a chartered accountant and cost accountant; she had her own consulting proprietary firm and also worked for Pantaloon Retail (India). Explaining her situation she says, "I took a career break in January 2005 due to lack of support in finding caretakers for my kids. I was travelling across India and my husband too was very busy. It was creating a lot of stress both mentally and physically. I chose SCIP to check if I could adapt well to working again, see where I could fit in, and whether my kids are able to cope."

Ms Dasgupta is currently working with Roots Corporation on SAP-SIM implementation in all Ginger hotel locations as well as on capitalisation of assets under construction for the new hotels. She has already travelled twice for the project and feels the experience has been tremendous. "It is always better to work for a professional set up and SCIP has given me an opportunity which I would not have been able to land on my own initiative," she adds.

### The right match

The big challenge for the SCIP team in Group HR has been to find suitable matches between the interns, who had been promised flexible working hours and minimum travel time, and the projects. Another challenge has been to introduce the concept to companies who needed to get used to people coming in part time. "Companies need to approach this in a human way," says Ms Maitra. "At the end of the internship if we can retain even half of these interns and have them join the group it will be good," she adds.

The programme is designed to concentrate on the needs of the interns. To help ease their entry into the workplace, the programme ensures that each intern has an assignment guide, a project guide, a reporting contact person and a buddy at the Tata company. Depending on the company, there could be one or two people fulfilling all the roles or four different people. The assignment guide is generally the head of the department, while the project guide works with the intern on a daily basis. The reporting contact may be the head of HR and a buddy is a colleague who introduces the intern to other people in the company, shows how things work, takes the intern for lunch, etc thus ensuring a seamless and comfortable transition into the new workplace.

In return, the interns have to pledge 500 hours over a six-month period for their project assignments and are given Rs4 lakh as compensation. At the end of the assignment, the interns may be offered a full time or part time job at the company, depending on their performance.

"We are trying to make SCIP a new channel of recruitment for the group," says Ms Maitra. SCIP will soon be launched in Bangalore and Ms Maitra plans to take it to Jamshedpur also. She hopes that SCIP will slowly build an identity comparable to TAS, and that five years from now it will help create a cadre of women employees in the higher management strata.

And that will surely be a win-win situation for all concerned. ●

*Jai Wadia*