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How I Made It

Manoj Tirodkar
FOUNDER, GTL GROUP



In a sector where experience and qualifications are treated as absolute prerequisites for success, Manoj Tirodkar has defied all odds to script his own fairytale. Manoj, as he's popularly known, established the GTL Group in 1987 at just 23. Its mandate: to distribute and market telecom products. With the liberalisation of the telecom sector in India and increasing telecommunication needs all over the world, he has led the company to position itself as a provider of engineering and consultancy services. And all this without the usual crutches of fancy degrees or long exposure to the industry.

Tirodkar has a high school education; he did his SSC (Class X) from a Marathi medium school in Girgaum, Mumbai. "Most of my learning was by way of observation," he says. "The world around me, people and books have taught me a lot. I also spend time reading books that inspire me and give me insights into the best practices leaders adopt the world over." He has proved that if you have the vision and the will to fulfil it, nothing can stop you, not even a vernacular background.

Today, Tirodkar's flagship GTL provides network services; GTL Infrastructure owns shared passive telecom infrastructure; GTL Towers manufactures telecom towers; and Global Innovsource offers telecom engineering and HR services.

Tirodkar started his career in the family business. "I had a brief stint with Samarth Shipping, a family-owned shipping agency, as a management trainee. I also went to Germany to work in the ship management business," says he. But ships were history; the future belonged to a different form of communication. Thus, in 1987, GTL was born.

Opting for the telecom sector was a natural choice. Says Tirodkar: "Technology developments have always fascinated me and during my stint in Germany, I saw a lot of businesses using advancements in technology for improving productivity. This made me think. We were quite behind in the technology curve in India. Hence, I decided to bring in technology products to the country."

Tirodkar started off with fax machines, diversified into manufacturing wireless antennae and later ventured into e-commerce. Today, the GTL group has emerged as a leading network services provider.

Looking at the momentum of his business, it's tough to believe that the tide wasn't always in his favour. Recalls he, "In those days, doing business was quite difficult. However, I had the good fortune of having good employees who were able to make things work for me. Our first office was a small 300 sq ft apartment which belonged to a friend and I got some initial capital from my father. In those days, one needed a licence even to display or sell a phone or a fax machine."

But Tirodkar had a never-say-die spirit. "Success to my mind is what other people do to you. If you are prepared to respect your team and deliver your best to your customers and shareholders, you are bound to succeed," says he. This, coupled with the understanding that the quality one delivers —along with consistency and affordability — determines brand success, helped him in his quest to touch new heights.

Tirodkar realised that building the brand was about how much your customers could rely on your innovation and quality and he strove hard to instil faith in them. Satisfying customers became his and his company's second nature. This strategy paid rich dividends. The GTL Group today has a consolidated turnover of \$350 million plus, a market cap of more than \$750 million and over 7,000 dedicated and skilled professionals.

Not content to rest on his laurels, Tirodkar has decided to give something back to society through his GTL Foundation. The foundation was set up for social activities with a clear focus on health, disability, education, women's empowerment and children's welfare.

Juggling myriad roles, does Tirodkar find time to relax? Not very much, he agrees. But whenever he can take a break, he indulges in interior decoration, gardening, listening to music, reading and travelling. That's a diverse mix, in contrast to his sharply focussed group. But creating beauty both inside and outside the house makes for a beautiful business mind too.

Based on a conversation with Shibani Chattopadhyay in Calcutta

