

ACHIEVERS

IIM LUCKNOW ALUMNI ASSOCIATION



BIRENDRA BISHT

2000 – 2002: PGDM, IIM Lucknow

2002 – 2004: ThyssenKrupp AG

2004 – 2005: Product Manager, ICICI Lombard

2006 – Present: Founder and CEO, QMR Labs Pvt Ltd.

*This newsletter features highlights of our interaction with alumni who are continuously raising the bar in their chosen profession or doing something completely out of the ordinary. This month, we spoke with **Birendra Bisht**, an alumnus from the class of 2002. Birendra is the Founder and CEO of QMR Labs Private Limited, a niche Business Analytics, Consulting, & Modeling firm .*

Alumni Committee: Birendra, could you describe your career path since you graduated from IIM Lucknow?

Birendra: I was picked up by a German-based global engineering major ThyssenKrupp AG, and was immediately placed in their Italian Steel Plant at Terni. My job was of a Technical Controller, a role encompassing Technical Budgeting, Improvements, & Production Planning/Control. I handled several key assignments, including Revamping the Production Planning Process, and identifying Best Operating Practices for implementation from within ThyssenKrupp group. A year later, I was deputed to India to work with the Managing Director, the role being of Organization Development. Some of my best Operational learning came from managing assignments on Order Management Process Re-design, Performance Management System Design, and Logistics Cost Optimization initiatives.

I quit after 2 years for ICICI Lombard, which was playing into the sunrise Insurance sector and was quite a “start-up” then. The roles that came my way were truly diverse, including Risk Underwriting & Analytics, Corporate Sales, Product Management, and even the niche Space Insurance domain.

In July 2006, I eventually did what I always dreamt of doing, starting my own company called QMR Labs Private Ltd.

Alumni Committee: Could you elaborate on your current job profile:

Birendra: Currently, I am the Founder-CEO of QMR Labs Pvt. Ltd., an Analytics & Optimization firm that offers Optimization based Decision-Support Products and Solutions for enhancing Corporate Performance. Based in Mumbai, we are focussed on Supply Chain Optimization, Operational Excellence, and Projects’ Predictability solutions. With an exceptional team of young professionals, we are engineering novel products to meet our clients’ business challenges.



Alumni Committee: What according to you are the skills required to be a successful entrepreneur?

Birendra: I believe that every person is capable of becoming a successful entrepreneur, i.e. no one is born an entrepreneur. In fact, India is a nation with the maximum number of entrepreneurs, if we include all Farming & Trading communities.

More than skills, I believe it is the attitude that determines a successful entrepreneur. I am listing what I think are the most important ones:

- *Dream* – Without a big-dream in one’s mind, it is next-to-impossible to succeed. A Dream builds-in the necessary Risk-taking and Shock-absorbing capacities one needs as an entrepreneur. Plus it is a great attractor for high-quality talent.
- *Courage is Destiny* – That was the motto of the school I studied in. One’s destiny is written by one’s own hands.
- *Perseverance & Hard-work* – No compromises on hard-work and an ability to survive the toughest of environments. While every start-up wishes to become big in the shortest possible time, only those survive who have a long-term staying power. Markets, including customers & competitors, keep testing us continuously. Perseverance can best be described by The S-Curve Phenomena, a very slow growth in the initial phase, and then an inflexion point towards high growth zone.
- *Ability to Motivate the Team* – Attracting the Best Talent, and retaining them is the biggest challenge that every entrepreneur faces. For me, I keep challenging the individual beliefs of people as regards their performance capacities; by giving them goals perceived to be much beyond their capacities, and an environment to experiment and achieve these.

Alumni Committee: What do you think were your greatest takeaways from IIM Lucknow? How have these learnings contributed to your success?

Birendra: I made some great friends at IIM-L, which was the biggest take-away for me. Also, it was at IIM-L that I started seriously thinking about becoming an entrepreneur.

The confidence I generated while participating & competing with my batch-mates was a different experience altogether; it built the foundations for my in-nings as an entrepreneur.

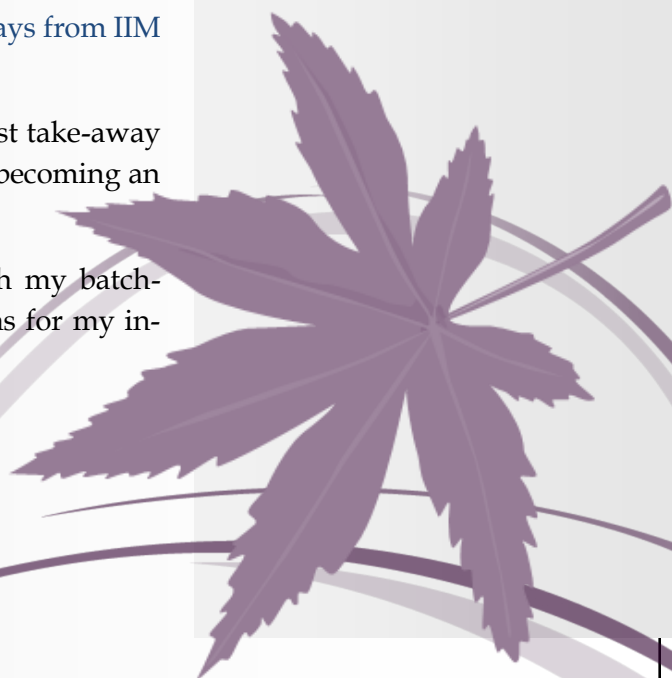
Hobbies:

“I used to be a sportsman in my school and college days; I still like playing Badminton, Cricket and Football, and continue practicing Yoga.

I used to, and even today, retain a very strong interest in Environmental Sustainability; in fact, when starting on my own, I was very strongly debating whether to start-off in the Environment Improvement domain. I am quite sure that someday I will have a venture in this space.”

Favorite Books:

“I will be disappointing the audience on this; but I am not really an avid book reader. The only book that had a great impact on me was actually a text book recommended by Prof. R.K. Srivastava, titled “Factory Physics”. The Eliyahu Goldratt series was also good.”



Advice For PGP Students:

“Innovation, Hard Work and Perseverance will take you to great heights; ‘Copy & Paste’ attitude will limit one’s growth potential”

Leaders Who Have Inspired You :

“I have adopted, and am continuously adopting, the philosophies of several leaders:

Infosys Founding Team: Take-up-the-challenge

Thomas Edison: Never-say-Never (249 failures before he successfully invented the Electric Bulb)

Rahul Dravid: Perseverance”

Alumni committee: Why Supply Chain Solutions? What would be your advice to students looking at a specialization in Operations?

Birendra: Personally, I view Supply Chain from a much broader perspective than the normal view. Supply Chains are omnipresent. The base view is for Physical Supply Chains (Goods & Material); just extend it to People, and we get Human Resource Supply Chains; now move to the services sector, and we get the Service Supply Chains (eg, Service Operations); and thinking of Capital, we have Financial Supply Chains. Everything is basically a Supply Chain, and optimizing Supply Chains is the biggest challenge to businesses today.

We are in the business of optimizing Business Performance; today’s complex challenges cannot be solved by the subjective judgement of professionals alone; they need hand-in-hand approaches that are based on Analytic Rigour & System Modeling. Our business solutions and decision-support products help businesses to make robust-decisions

My advice to students: Operations is at the core of all businesses, and the world needs more Operational Experts than Planning Experts. There is an infinitely great opportunity for Operational Excellence professionals. Don’t miss on specializing in Operations.

Alumni Committee: What do you think can be done to support and further the spirit of entrepreneurship at IIM Lucknow?

Birendra: Entrepreneurship is like a Chain Reaction; more successful case studies will generate an exponential growth of new entrepreneurs. The key is to ensure that the first set of ventures result in success.

I think the process must begin at the Candidate Selection Process; there must be a conscious attempt to select at least a few students with the spirit for entrepreneurship.

Facilitating an environment for sustaining future young turks is equally critical; the IIM-L community has already taken several steps towards this.



Alumni Committee: What do you think is the perception of IIM Lucknow students in the industry? As a long term plan, what are the necessary steps that the institute and the students need to take to get on par with the best B-schools in the world?

Birendra: IIM-L students are, by and large, perceived to be excellent professionals with great managerial capabilities. However, unlike the IITs, IIMs in general, and IIM-L in particular, are yet to be identified with great entrepreneurs.

In the longer run, IIM-L will be much helped by producing fewer Generalists and more of Functional experts. This will go a long way towards catering to the skills-based resourcing requirements of the industry.

Also, the curriculum must be made more contemporary and if possible, futuristic; and must have greater depth in it. Students would then benefit by developing an orientation for details and meticulousness.

The campus must “smell” of Innovation as soon as one enters in. And encouraging experimentation at each step and activity is the best step towards Innovation. The IIM-L community, including students and the alumni, must come together and generate ways to achieve this.

And finally, Case-based learning approaches must pave the way for more innovative learning methods. This is certainly one of the ways to create global learning benchmarks.

Alumni Committee: The current batches have a high average work experience (3-4 years) – an aberration compared to historical batch profiles of IIM Lucknow. Do you think this change is a step in the right direction?

Birendra: I don't know the trend; as compared to our batch profile, it appears to be on the higher side. But I am sure it is part of a conscious decision of the IIM-L selection committee. It certainly is in tune with the higher work-ex benchmarks of global B-Schools.

I guess the move is in the right direction; students with significant prior work-experience are better able to link together the 30+ academic courses, and appreciate the insights. Also, they should now be better prepared for entering the business world, and shape-up rationalized expectations for their professional careers.

Special Memories from IIM Lucknow:

“One memory relates to our project team, a group of 4 people who did several projects together. During one of the HR courses in 1st year, I failed to go beyond zero in a quiz, and followed it subsequently with a poor (albeit positive) score in the mid-semester exam. Almost on the verge of getting an “F” grade, the only possibility to survive was to get good marks in the Project. Since the project topic was flexible, and knowing that time and effort was hard to devote, we decided to experiment by doing a Stage Play for an HBR case study. The ‘script’ was already there, so it took us only a couple of hours to rehearse. The presentation went off fine; I think the idea to do a stage play was so fresh that the professor gave us enough marks to survive the course. That was the sweetest Return on Time Investment I had ever managed.”

Please send in your feedback/suggestions to alumni@iiml.org

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