

Gender Recruitment Issues in the IT Sector

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INTRODUCTION

In India, low literacy rates, traditional gender roles, lack of marketable skills and lower educational levels make it difficult for women to find employment, especially skilled or technical jobs. Women often must settle for jobs that are low paid and require little skill. The problem is compounded for women from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are often forced to work in the informal sector of the economy, which affords little job security or growth potential. The information technology (IT) sector has become a driving force in India's economic development, accelerating job and revenue creation. As opportunities continue to grow, IT jobs have the potential to create financial stability for greater numbers of employees. Lack of adequate training, high illiteracy rates and low familiarity with computers and the Internet have kept women from entering

the IT job market in significant numbers so far, despite the fact that women employees bring other valuable qualities to the workplace, like loyalty, attention to detail and good interpersonal skills.

Recognizing the benefit of increasing the number of women in the workforce, Datamation Consultants Pvt. Ltd. is using IT training to extend job opportunities to women from socially or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. These women not only lack the technical training and skills that would otherwise allow them access to these jobs, but often lack even basic education. Through an innovative public-private partnership program, Datamation works with local non-profit partners to give these women the training they need, and then recruits successful trainees for full-time jobs within the company.

BACKGROUND

Established in 1987, Datamation is a multi-service data processing and consulting firm, offering a suite of services including data processing, software development, medical and business transcription, data conversion, direct marketing and CRM, CD/DVD reproduction, imaging and GIS processing, and project management. Datamation provides services to both Indian and international corporations, including Fortune 500 companies. The work extends the IT sector into underserved areas of the country while generating higher profit margins due to lower operating and labor costs.

A major company with ISO 9000 status now under review, Datamation has a strong commitment to social responsibility. The logo on its Web site (www.datamationindia.com/) flashes a rotating tag line with slogans like "At the convergence and intersection of information technology and human

Figure 1.



development” and “Committed to the creation of employment opportunities for deprived youth, women and physically handicapped.” Datamation views its activities not as charity, but as social investment that simultaneously benefits individuals, communities and its own business interests.

TRAIN-AND-HIRE PROGRAM

Datamation’s train-and-hire program is based on an extensive public-private partnership between the company and more than a dozen private non-profit non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Partner NGOs are selected according to a number of criteria, including the strength of their institutional capacity, seriousness of their mission to create sustainable job opportunities, efficacy and impact of their efforts in serving their target communities and their ability to implement low-cost IT training courses.

Partner NGOs offer free or low-cost 6- to 8-month IT training courses to marginalized groups of women. These courses cover basic computer operation; various software applications, including Microsoft Word, Excel, Access and Power Point; and the fundamentals of software development, though trainees are not expected to become programmers. Efforts are made to provide training in local languages, as English is not widely spoken among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Knowledge of English is not a prerequisite to hiring. Since the overall goal of the program is women’s empowerment and personal development, the aim is to provide life skills training in topics such as healthcare, communication skills, professionalism and work ethic, and knowledge of worker’s and women’s rights. Successful graduates of the training course can apply for entry-level jobs with Datamation. Recruitment tests examine technical skills, numerical and quantitative analytical aptitude, and written and spoken communication skills. They also assess professional attitude and work ethic, and the ability to cope with the stress of working long hours at a computer terminal. Women are not given preferential treatment in the hiring process and must pass the same rigorous recruitment testing process as all other hires. Datamation is committed to hiring women who have the skills and qualifications to

succeed on the job; compromising hiring standards would not be of benefit to the company.

An ongoing mentoring and training system has also been established to ensure the continued success of new employees. Mentoring focuses on professional etiquette, stress management, communication skills, life skills and new developments in technology as they relate to their jobs. The cultural transition that occurs once the initial hire is made often requires daily attention, and mentoring has been seen to play a critical role in employee retention and success.

MANAGEMENT

Datamation maintains a close working relationship with its partners, especially the Datamation Foundation. There are regularly scheduled staff meetings, and frequent opportunities for communication and feedback. The staff of Datamation Consultants regularly works with Foundation and other partner NGO staff, resulting in an efficient hiring process following the training program. The Datamation Foundation acts as an umbrella organization for the non-profits in partnership. Under its guidance, the NGOs have developed a platform for networking and creating common strategies and objectives. Established as a private non-profit entity, the Datamation Foundation was set up by Datamation Consultants as a way to focus on Datamation’s social goals in a structured and independent manner. The Datamation Foundation’s stated mission is to provide social services and outreach to marginalized groups in India through innovative uses of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the creation of employment opportunities. The main activity that supports its mission is working with Datamation Consultants on the train-and-hire program.

Datamation Consultants also provides technical support to partner NGOs in support of their wider organizational needs. This may include hardware and software development, Web site design and maintenance, and technical support. Datamation conducts a needs assessment of each new partner NGO to determine the extent and type of technical support needed. Dedicated staff hours and resources donated for all partner NGOs are estimated at a cost

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