

# The Hero Mentors

Social-impact startups are witnessing heightened interest from successful entrepreneurs and CXOs of large corporations, who are happy to participate as mentors trading their experience and wisdom for the joy of 'giving,' finds Shonali Advani

When Atul Satija, ex-chief revenue officer at mobile marketing firm InMobi, discussed his plans to start a social-impact venture with a former Google colleague, Hugo Barra, the response took him by surprise. "You are actually allowing me to live my giving life vicariously through you," Barra, who is now vice president-international at Chinese phone-maker Xiaomi, told Satija.

As Satija shared plans for his venture, The/Nudge Foundation, with others in his network he found the theme recurring. "I realised everyone has a side to them that wants to contribute and give back but they don't have the right avenue," said Satija. The/Nudge focuses on poverty alienation through skill development.

Satija employed Barra's experience in technology, scale and brand-building to see "how we can build The/Nudge as a consumer brand and create an ecosystem around it."

The/Nudge has attracted several illustrious folks from the business world—Paytm founder Vijay Shekhar Sharma; InMobi founder Naveen Tewari; InMobi chief financial officer Manish Dugar; Arun Seth, ex-chairman of British Telecom; Pramath Sinha, founding dean of Indian School of Business; and Neeraj Arora, vice president at WhatsApp—to its advisory board.

An increasing number of successful entrepreneurs and corporate CXOs are engaging with change-makers, either as individuals or through structured programmes such as those at popular such incubators and networks—Villgro, National Entrepreneurship Network, Ashoka, Ennovat, Intellect and Dasra—bringing a new participative aspect to 'giving.'

Pooja Warriar, director of UnLtd India, an incubator for social-impact entrepreneurs, says, "There are more senior entrepreneurs (now), even really high-profile individuals, who are willing to give their time as part of a more structured engagement, like through Villgro's mentorship programme. Earlier, it used to be a lot more ad hoc, for instance through organisations like TIE." Generic mentors, Warriar said, have given way to sectoral or functional experts.

**In many ways, it's the changing face of the social entrepreneur that's creating the need for expert mentors**

"There's everyone from marketing experts to honey production experts (as mentors)," she said.

Phanindra Sama, founder of redBus, is now active in the social-impact space after selling his bus aggregator startup to South Africa's Naspers Group three years ago. "I was always fascinated by how people dedicate their lives to non-profits, as at end of it there's no wealth-creation, unlike for us," Sama said. "How do they do it without thinking of families, education?"

So, along with Raju Reddy, founder of IT services firm Sierra Atlantic, Sama set up Kakatiya Sandbox in Telangana's Nizamabad, their hometown, to build an ecosystem for long-term social impact. It was inspired by the Hubli Sandbox, an innovation hub to find scalable solutions to real-world problems and part of the Deshpande Foundation, a non-profit founded by venture capitalist Gururaj Deshpande. Sama also actively mentors companies such as agri-tech startup CropEx Technology and NextGen PMS, which advises companies on managing their carbon footprint.

Richa Bajpai, cofounder of NextGen, said having someone like Sama involved, also as an investor, helped her firm focus better on scaling up. "Phanindra always talked about being a market leader. He said scale yourself so much so that if there is a second competition the gap is more than 80%," she said.

Bajpai said Sama helped the company streamline its pricing and hire senior executives by highlighting NextGen's big picture vision. The company was also able to hire people from premier institutions such as Stanford and INSEAD. "Even if you are doing

**TOP AREAS MENTORS ARE STEPPING IN TO DRIVE CHANGE**

- HEALTHCARE
- EMPLOYABILITY/ LIVELIHOODS
- SANITATION
- EDUCATION
- CLEAN ENERGY

**WHY CXOS ARE ENGAGING WITH SOCIAL VENTURES**

- Net worth and assets in excess of requirements
- Desire to help the underprivileged or those not as fortunate as them
- Keenness to address real problems plaguing

the country

- Genuine belief that social impact can happen
- Talent churn: Younger entrepreneurs launching social ventures requiring mentoring

**COMMON CHALLENGES FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS**

- Support system to research viability of idea is under developed
- Limited talent pool because of lower paying capacity
- Thinking scale and growth with impact
- Reaching a network outside of the social impact ecosystem

**WHAT MENTEES LOOK FOR IN A MENTOR**

- Skills and experience
- Active contribution and association with the enterprise - advice or opening new doors
- Personal support
- Subject matter expertise
- Empathy for the cause



Cofounder of bus-ticketing platform redBus dived into the social arena after he sold his company to Naspers Group in 2013. Inspired by the Sandbox model adopted by Hubli-based Deshpande Foundation, Sama set up Kakatiya Sandbox in Nizamabad about 2 years ago. The model brings principles of entrepreneurship to social causes, thereby fostering innovation. Nizamabad's Sandbox has implemented 850 projects in the past year, with about 1,050 leaders involved

**PHANINDRA SAMA**, Founder of Kakatiya Sandbox



Founder of ecommerce company Paytm and investor in early stage mobile startups through One97 Mobility Fund, now also serves on the advisory board of The/Nudge Foundation. Sharma brings with him the experience of building startups, talent, culture, thinking scale, as well as building aspirations around the organisations at the non-profit that seeks to alienate poverty through skill development.

**VIJAY SHEKHAR SHARMA**, Founder of Paytm



The founder of mobile marketing company InMobi had a long association with philanthropy and social causes before he was hit by entrepreneurial acclaim. Tewari is also the founder of India School Fund, a US-based non-profit he started with Harvard Business School Alumni to set up schools in rural India in 2015. The organisation has set up two schools in Uttar Pradesh educating about 350 children so far. Tewari also mentored former colleague Atul Satija from InMobi with his NGO The/Nudge Foundation and serves on the advisory board.

**NAVEEN TEWARI**, Founder of InMobi



After a two-decade career in the investment management business and at the helm of affairs at private equity firm Chrysalis Capital, Dhawan setup CSF in 2012, a philanthropic funding and capacity-building organisation, making early and growth stage investments in education-focused social enterprises. Apart from this he serves on the board of several non-profits including Akanksha Foundation, 3.21 Education Foundation, Teach For India, Centre for Civil Society, Janaagraha, India School Leadership Institute and Bharti Foundation. As part of his role, he advises these organisations on strategic visions for growth and scaling the impact of their work.

**ASHISH DHAWAN**, Founder of Central Square Foundation (CSF)

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## A Smart Manufacturing Unit, Made in India

**Hot Startup**

**Think7**

The Bengaluru startup has designed a shop-floor management solution

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**Bengaluru:** Zubin Jagtiani has always been an integral part of the shop floor—area in a factory where the production happens—thanks to his family's business. Over a period of time, he felt the need to solve a simple problem: How to give the right instructions to the right people at the right time? He searched the existing market for a solution, but found none. He finally decided to take the plunge and build

one along with Raghu Shenoy, a friend of his brother-in-law. Thus began the journey of Think7, a shop-floor management solutions startup.

"I didn't find anything when I was looking for a solution. In that process, I figured that this problem was not just for SMEs (small and medium enterprises), but it was rather across sizes. ... The idea of German precision is well known. They build stuff that works. We wanted to highlight that we can build a product like this in India," said Jagtiani.

Think7 offers a management suite consisting of two components. The first is a software solution where one can have check sheets, interpret drawings of the product, do data analysis and get detailed reports, among a host of other features. The second offering is a Think7 piston, which is basically a rectangular box-like smart machine controller. The piston is attached to the machine so as to track it and keep giving real-time updates. The whole management suite can be accessed re-



Think7 solution on the shop-floor

motely, thereby eliminating the use of papers on the shop floor.

Each machine is also fitted with a tablet, which keeps a record of all activities, thus making the factory 'smart and connected'. "All these years we were doing documentation from drawing to shop floor, all in pa-

per, including instructions to (machine) operators and inspectors. The intention was to go paperless. When Think7 came up, it was something like connecting design office to shop floor to dispatches, we were able to make manufacturing environment automated," said M Vanamurthy, deputy general manager at Turbo Energy, a TVS group company.

The 18-member Bengaluru-based company, which was incorporated in December 2013 and has been working with own funds till date, has more than 30 customers, mostly in the automotive space and a few in the aerospace sector. The business model revolves around two aspects—the software solution is run on an annual subscription model and the hardware component is calculated on the number of machines and plants that a particular client has. "In the future, we are even planning to introduce hardware as a service. We are surely open to investment, but our business does not depend on it," said Jagtiani.

**In Brief**

**After India Entry, Duolingo Eyes Indonesia, Pakistan**

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Soon after language learning app Duolingo launched services in India with a Hindi app to teach Indians English, Luis von Ahn, founder of Duolingo, said the US-based startup is scouting for opportunities in Indonesia, Pakistan and other emerging markets. "These are countries we have never looked into but after entering India, these are interesting markets for us," said Ahn, who believes that some of the issues specific to India, would be applicable to other emerging markets. "When it comes to education, during a conversation with a professor at IIT, we found that students who were on academic probation were usually there because of a lack of English speaking skills," said Ahn.

**EduBridge Learning Raises \$2.5 million**

Our Bureau

**BENGALURU:** EduBridge, a Mumbai-based skill development platform that provides services to youth in semi-urban and rural areas, raised \$2.5 million (₹17.1 crore) in a series A round led by Insitor Impact Asia Fund and Acumen Fund. The firm plans to use the money to expand operations to Gujarat, Odisha, Jharkhand and Bihar, as well as strengthening their existing presence. "We also plan to spend on integrating various technological applications into our system, improving accessibility of our services in rural India," said Girish Singhanian, founder of EduBridge Learning. The startup currently has 60 training centres in the north east, south and western India and claims to have trained 50,000 unemployed youth from rural India over the last five years.