

Smoke free zone

The anti-tobacco drive, initiated at Bajaj Electricals Limited two years ago, has inspired as many as 157 employees to quit smoking



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TWO years ago when Bajaj Electricals Ltd (BEL) took a count of their smoking staff members, the number was 157 out of 1400. Today, the number has come down to zero. Thanks to the anti-tobacco drive that was adopted by the company two years ago by the chairman of BEL, Shekhar Bajaj. It was initiated on the insistence of Kiran Bajaj, director of Paryavaran Mitra, an NGO.

The campaign, that worked in phases, did not show results overnight. Infact, during the initial stage, Bajaj used to personally write mails to each employee who smoked. "I just wanted to reach out to them and urge them to at least think of quit-

ting. A lot of them gave a positive response. Fortunately, fifty of them immediately decided to quit," remembers Bajaj.

Gradually, Bajaj urged the others to decide which side would they rather be on – the 100 smokers or the 50 converts.

"For a lot of them it was getting rid of an addiction that we were talking about. So even if they wanted to quit, it had a lot of effect on their physical

being. Which is when we tried to create an environment where non-smokers were encouraged and rewarded," adds Bajaj. This was followed by an award function, wherein the ones who had quit smoking were felicitated. These staffers and officers were asked to share their experiences.

The real party

Anil Kumar Singh, chief Manager, advertising and brand development at BEL says that the entire experience of having quit and helped others to quit has been a very satisfying one for him. He himself quit the habit of chewing tobacco in May 2010. Sharing his story, he says, "The habit had begun in a harmless manner where you just want an instant high or a kick but before you realise it is right or wrong, you become an addict," he says. It was on the insistence of Bajaj, who would gently speak to all the employees and advice them to quit, that Kumar too decided to say no to tobacco. "Last year during the World Anti-Tobacco Day function at our premises on May 31, I was a speaker and told everyone about how I managed to quit the bad habit," he says, beaming with happiness.

After the first year of the drive, the number of people quitting the habit, kept multiplying day by day. Singh adds that there were no harsh embargoes imposed on the smokers but just a gentle perseverance that saw them all give up the habit. "In fact the smokers would themselves tell us about the problems they were facing and how they were trying to quit. We just helped them quit by having group discussion therapies and positive talks," he says.

Now that the employees have been smoke free, the management at BEL plans to replicate the success throughout their entire network. They will now be turning to their dealers, distributors, vendors and suppliers who are all in the bad habit of consuming tobacco in any form.