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Training with patience: Elements Akademia

The founder of Elements Akademia Pvt. Ltd, a vocational school, spends most of his time overseeing operations in various branches in tier-II towns in India

Namitha Jagadeesh

Mumbai: Nishant Saxena's life as an entrepreneur couldn't be much more different from his days as a consultant for a consumer-goods multinational in Singapore.



The founder of **Elements Akademia Pvt. Ltd**, a vocational school, spends most of his time overseeing operations in various branches in tier-II towns in India.

His start-up has set up six training centres in small towns such as Lucknow, Jaipur and Bhopal to meet a critical gap between aspirations of India's millions of graduates and reality: make them employable in industries such as business process outsourcing (BPO), banking and retail by training them for sales, marketing and customer care jobs.

A graduate of the Indian Institute of Management, Lucknow (IIM-L), Saxena spent eight years with Procter and Gamble in roles that included strategy and planning.

Filling a gap: Nishant Saxena, CEO, Elements Akademia.

Two years ago, by the age of 30, he was going through what he calls a mid-life crisis. "After 5-10 years, most corporate managers keep asking themselves if this is all," he says, "But it is hard to give it up because the (alternative) path to choose is very difficult and very risky."

Just how hard the entrepreneurial path would be, he learnt only on the field.

While trying to get students to join the institute, Saxena discovered to his consternation that neither the attraction of the private sector nor his IIM background lent him much credibility in those towns. The mother of one student in Kanpur asked him, "*Paisa leke bhag toh nahi jaaoge?* (You won't run away with the money?)"

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Along with training students, he had to convince and counsel parents to allow their children to move cities or work the night shift in BPO firms. "In Singapore, my output was to give recommendation from an air-conditioned office," he recalls,

"That's an easy one, compared to working in towns with no electricity for 12 hours in a day and people don't trust anyone from the corporate world."

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Saxena's start-up makes its revenues by charging students for the training, and claims a 70% placement rate. "The opportunity is very large, as there is a gap between employment and employability today," says Kanwaljit Singh, managing director, Helion Venture Partners.

The downturn has impacted jobs that Elements Akademia previously matched its students with, particularly in the banking industry. However, corporate partners in the BPO industry continue to hire its graduates, says the company.

Elements Akademia plans to open more centres and is targeting \$10 million (Rs50 crore) revenues in the next 5-10 years.

"The most important learning is that things won't respond the way you want the first, second or third time," observes Saxena, "Entrepreneurship is all about executing with patience."

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