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“Machines are inanimate; it’s the people who drive the success.”

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The ability to truly understand the wants and needs of its customers has been the driving force behind Garware-Wall Ropes’ evolution.

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His parents didn't have enough money to send him to school," says Vayu Garware, as he recounts the tale of how his grandfather, Abasaheb Garware, came to found the Garware group of companies that exist today. "He actually worked at the school in return for free education. He then moved to Mumbai to look for work, was living on the street, and he taught himself to read and write English, which you can imagine must have been a difficult thing."

Vayu continues the story with a telling description of his grandfather: a man "with an entrepreneurial mindset" who, despite his poverty-stricken upbringing, started a second-hand car sales business from the ground up and quickly earned a favourable reputation. "He began importing expensive English cars to sell in India, but when Independence came around the Indian government put in controls to stop the import of these types of vehicles," Vayu recalls. "So he came up with a new business: selling plastic buttons."

What followed was a string of manufacturing ventures until he eventually founded Garware-Wall Ropes, of which Vayu Garware is the current chairman and managing director. "Actually, this was one of the last companies my grandfather set up," Vayu shares. "He was already 70 or so years old when he started this business; an entrepreneurial person never stops."

In the early days, Garware-Wall Ropes was a joint venture with US-based Wall Industries, founded to complement the family's nylon business, which was already an important supplier to the Indian fishing industry. "It grew quickly, and within the first few years my grandfather bought out the American partner; however, the original name remained," Vayu explains.

Fast-forward to 1991 and it was his father Ramesh Garware who next stepped up to head Garware-Wall Ropes, after

**"If our people come here excited, then they will deliver outstanding things."**

returning from a nine-year stint living in Australia with his family. He quickly garnered a robust reputation as an influential businessman in India and made great inroads for the technical textiles sector. Then, in 2011, it was his son Vayu's turn. But he had to prove himself first. As he had just finished his studies at a reputable business school in the US, when he came home in 1997 he expected to immediately join the finance division of Garware-Wall Ropes; however, this wasn't what his father had in mind. "I had to start on the production shop floor, running the machines, understanding the applications, and really diving deep into it." In retrospect, this experience served him well and gave him a solid understanding of all facets of the business, guiding his move to take the company through a period of great evolution when he did take over the reins. Previously it had been operating in monopolistic conditions, with little-to-no competition. But things had changed. "We had to become an application- and innovation-oriented player, providing value-added solutions to our customers. We needed to consider them as part of us because our product goes into their business application, and that's their livelihood, their income. Our job is to increase their profits, and by partnering with them it builds brand value and develops deep, long-term relationships."

To successfully deliver on this approach, Vayu set about building on the values his predecessors had instilled: being innovative, understanding customer needs, and adding value through function, environmental impact and cost. Further to this, he needed to emphasise that people were the biggest drivers of the organisation. "Machines are inanimate; it's the people who drive the success," Vayu says. "We've had a great mix over the past few years – fresh thinking, new talent, working with the people

who've been with us for 20-plus years. That's one of our strengths: we're able to bring together the in-depth knowledge that comes from the veterans and combine that with the fresh views of the newcomers. We invest a lot into developing our people. We're recognised in the Great Places to Work® list, and it's something we're very proud of because it shows that our people are happy to come to work every day. If our people come here excited, then they will deliver outstanding things."

Ten years ago, Garware-Wall Ropes led a three-day brainstorming session with 25 of its top staff members to determine what vision it needed for the future. "We thought about why we come to work and what the core company DNA is," Vayu says. "Through an interactive and collaborative process, this mission statement came about: 'Provide innovative, application-focused solutions to enhance the value of our customers globally'. It took almost four years to align everyone on that, but people

started to see the value being delivered. This propelled us to leadership status in most of the segments we operate in today."

Vayu believes there's only one way for the company to go now, and that's up! Its focus for the future will predominantly be on four areas: innovation, operational excellence, geographic expansion, and new business lines.

"We see tremendous potential in each of these areas to aid our growth ambition," Vayu says confidently. "And to deliver this, we have imbued an agile and responsive mindset through various measures like lean manufacturing practices, resulting in a robust back end while ensuring things work harmoniously. At the end of the day, what sets us apart from our competition is having better ideas. But even with all the ideas in the world, if we don't put them into action, there's no point. And herein, people are our key strength to consistently innovate and deliver value-added solutions to our customers." ■



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