

Case Study: Will-power, tolerance and perseverance

When R.K. Behera set up his business in Jamshedpur nearly 40 years ago, it wasn't easy going. "I struggled for the first six years, and couldn't pay a single paisa to my family," says the Chairman of the nearly ₹2,000-crore RSB group which manufactures a variety of components and systems for the automotive industry. "My brother, who was working for LIC, supported me."

Behera's background was the stuff entrepreneurs are normally made of. He was from a 'very ordinary middle-class family'. His father, who was working for Tata Steel – not in a very high position – borrowed ₹15,000 from his friends to give him his starting capital. Those friends gave the money grudgingly – why couldn't the boy join Bokaro Steel Plant where he was getting a job?

But the young man had, in his own words, 'very strong will-power, tolerance and perseverance'. And he has shown what these qualities can help you achieve in the face of adversity. With no experience of business, his International Auto Products became a sick company in four years, and he couldn't pay back the loans of Bihar State Finance Corporation (BSFC), the bank and the Small Industries Service Institute. Friends continued to advise him to give up. But he wouldn't. The bank gave him a good package, and he found a mentor in A.K. Chowdhury, MD of an Asset Management Company, who fought for Behera and got him an additional loan of ₹ 1 lakh with no security. Following this, BSFC also gave a good package, and Behera was back in business. Eventually, his company became the first in the industrial area to repay BSFC fully.

Sticking to his knitting, Behera – who had now been joined by his brother – managed to get a breakthrough with Tata Motors in 1980 thanks to his quality and customer-centric approach. From then on, there was no looking back: growth hit 80-100 per cent a year till 1995. "We started from a small base, so the percentage is not as great as it sounds," he admits. "But I was earning enough to support my family."

Behera says he could not have achieved what he has without the support of his customers and banks – but the man's personal commitment in the face of all odds obviously counted for much. When he decided to start manufacturing propeller shaft components, for instance, he couldn't afford a consultant's fees; so he prepared the project report on his own. "That helped me to learn finance!" he smiles. And when IDBI once turned down his loan application on the ground that he was not eligible because he already had one unit, he again didn't go to a lawyer or consultant, but studied the eligibility criteria in detail – and found that he was. Burning with fever and 'very disturbed', he faced a major grilling session by 21 interviewers, but emerged triumphant – though with a loan of ₹12 lakhs against the ₹15 lakhs he had asked for.

Even after the Tata Motors relationship began, there were various obstacles. "The challenge was to take their equipment, dismantle and re-install it in our plant, and start production of the prop shafts within 45 days. We took it up, and did it in 25 days!" Behera says. And every time he made a major new investment, a recession hit him immediately. "We kept investing in adverse situations, but came out of the situation every time," he says.

Having faced challenges all through his career, he says only an entrepreneur can face such risks. "You have to believe in yourself. After that, you have to surrender yourself totally to God's will," he adds. "That will let you satisfy all your stake-holders, not just the share-holders."

