

Marching to the Beat of a Different Drum



MWBE's sense of community and responsibility leads to business success.

Culturally Speaking

By Patricia Andrews-Keenan

It is clear when speaking with **Sonu Ratra**, co-founder and president of **Akraya Staffing and Consulting Services** that she gets most excited when talking about the culture of her 12-year-old company. With a focus on IT, engineering, and creative and marketing talent, the Silicon Valley-based firm has over 350 consultants and a local staff of 35.

Ratra firmly believes that hiring the right people and inculcating them into the right culture is a sure-fire rec-

Akraya employees, who refer to themselves as Akrayans, just completed work on a **Habitat for Humanity** home in San Francisco because they wanted to be more "hands on" with the work they do in the community. This is in addition to raising funds for natural disasters and ongoing support

for the **India Literacy Project (ILP)** through their participation in Race for Literacy.

The company is keenly aware of the impact it makes on the environment as well its status as a Santa Clara green-certified business. Akraya also focuses on creating a



Akraya employees with participants in the **Institute for Economic Empowerment for Women's Peace Through Business Program**. Pictured on either side of Ratra (in black and white) are businesswomen **Joan Mazimhaka** and **Fakhria Ibrahim** (with head wrap).

ipe for success. And the numbers don't lie. Today, the certified woman- and minority-owned firm is a preferred staffing and consulting partner to many Fortune 500 enterprises. Akraya is on track to earn \$50 million this year, with long-range goals to double that to more than \$100 million.

But, back to that culture, Ratra describes her company as "very socially responsible" with a core belief that with success comes responsibility. "Coming from India I learned the value of community," she says. "When you attain success you want to make sure you give back."

healthy environment and the office has been designated a "junk-free zone" with fresh organic fruit delivered each week. Apart from a full roster of employee benefits, Akraya offers its employees some other unique perks including:

- A pet-friendly office
- Health Club memberships
- Increased paid time off after three years of service
- Sabbatical after five years of service

The company culture is best described as collaborative and Ratra speaks proudly of a workplace where

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everyone rolls up their sleeves to get things done, they team up to solve problems and the executives have an open-door policy. "We're all in this together and never want to let being good be the enemy of being great," she asserts.

It appears the firm is doing something right as they've amassed some impressive local and national accolades to support their philosophy.

Among them:

- *Achievers* 50 Most Engaged Workplaces, 2014
- #1 Best Staffing Firm to Work For and #1 Best Staffing Firm to Contract For, *Staffing Industry Analysts*, 2013
- #1 Best Place to Work in Bay Area, *San Francisco Business Times*, 2012 and 2013
- #3 Largest Minority-owned Busi-

ness in Silicon Valley, *Silicon Valley Business Journal*, 2013 (Ranked #5 in 2012)

• #6 Largest Women-owned Business in Silicon Valley, *Silicon Valley Business Journal*, 2013

In July, Akraya hosted two businesswomen as part of their work with the **Institute for Economic Empowerment for Women's Peace Through Business Program**. The organization focuses on education, mentorship and coaching for businesswomen in Rwanda and Afghanistan. Akraya welcomed businesswomen **Joan Mazimhaka**, a partner at a strategic communications agency in Rwanda, and **Fakhria Ibrahim**, the founder of an Internet service company in Afghanistan, to their offices and Ratra's home. The delegates spent time with the company's department heads and also visited local corporations including **Brocade**, **Visa**, **Google** and **Facebook**, ending the week with a networking event.

Ratra founded Akraya in 2001 along with company Co-Founder and Chairman **Amar Panchal** after having worked in the Silicon Valley technology industry for years. The two saw a gap between client demand and the service offerings of their competitors and saw an opportunity to fill that gap obviously to great success. "Everything we do for our employees has a direct impact," Ratra says. "This is a very competitive business, but that is what binds our team, them working and problem-solving together."

Last February, the firm appointed **Pankaj Jindal** as CEO. According to Ratra one of the most important things a company can do is to hire bright, smart people who are better than you and let them take your company forward. "We wanted an expert in the field and Pankaj comes from a strong staffing background," she said. "We have to continually adapt to a changing market that is both dynamic and volatile and much different than it was when we started 12 years ago."

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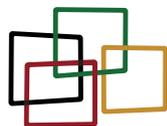


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The private firm, in addition to its Sunnyvale location, has employees in Canada, Charlotte, North Carolina, Boston, Massachusetts, Singapore and India with plans to further expand their reach both nationally and internationally. Ratra says each month the management shares the company's financials and other updates with employees.

Again, Ratra references culture.

"Our culture is about openness and about celebrating achievement. We believe people are looking for more from their work experience and when a company supports them it helps drive growth. Every month, three or four members from each department get together and cook breakfast for the entire office. It is an opportunity to know each other informally while also learning what motivates people

to achieve."

Akraya is also sharing its expertise outside of the firm by investing in vendor-supplier programs designed to provide innovative approaches to recruiting, developing and increasing their diverse supplier base. Their programs target women, minorities, veterans, disadvantaged and small business owners who share the company's mission of providing quality services to their customers.

Lastly and most importantly, Akrya has a laser focus on customer service. "Our customers come first and our goal is to exceed their expectations," says Ratra. "Our goal is to be one of the best staffing companies globally, add to our portfolio of Fortune 500 companies and be a recruiting center of excellence in our industry."

And one more point on the culture at Akrya. Ratra says a few years back the management heard grumbling among the women employees about working all week and then spending their time off cleaning. Not one to shirk a problem, Akrya now provides a weekly cleaning service to her employees. This perk and the company pool table, what more could anyone want? ♦

Patricia Andrews-Keenan is a communications executive with extensive corporate communications, public relations and community affairs experience. She formed the boutique communications firm **The Tallulah Group** in 2008 with a focus on media and public relations, communications and community outreach.



The Tallulah Group serves a roster of corporate, education, D&I and health care clients. Andrews-Keenan's background encompasses stints as a journalist, PR manager, government affairs director, communications and corporate affairs executive with top-drawer companies.

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