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‘Find a way to teach students to think broadly’

Dr Sudhakar Balachandran, faculty member, Dean’s Forum, at Great Lakes Institute of Management, Chennai, spoke to *BL on Campus* about what it means to be a business-ready manager and what makes Great Lakes unique. Balachandran believes that the institute excels because of its approach towards the curriculum, that emphasises a mix of technical and soft skills. This core principle was articulated by Dr Bala V Balachandran, Founder, Great Lakes Institute of Management, who said that the goal of Great Lakes should be to create managers who possess not only a good understanding of business fundamentals but also strong leadership skills.

Excerpts from the interview:

What does business-ready manager mean?

Business-ready managers need to have technical skills, such as the knowledge of finance, accounting, operations, marketing strategies and management fundamentals. Another critical quality of a business-ready manager is human skills. Business professionals don’t just succeed because of their technical strengths, but they also need a deep understanding of human skills which helps them lead organisations, negotiate, sell products, present ideas, and deal with crisis situations.

Students at Great Lakes are taught to co-operate with their peers while simultaneously engaging in healthy competition. In the business world, you often notice corporations forming alliances in certain areas whilst competing in other areas. By nurturing these skills, and giving them hands-on opportunities, students are equipped to become business-ready managers. Conceptual skills are of great significance as well, as the business world today looks radically different from what it did two decades ago. The challenge for today’s management schools is to find a way to teach students to think broadly about the world.

What makes Great Lakes unique?

There are several aspects that make Great Lakes’ unique. But they also present unique challenges. It is based on the principle of global mindset with Indian roots and seeks to create business-ready managers with these attributes.

When Great Lakes started, it was located at Saidapet in Chennai. To run an institution, it takes money and resources, and we did not have any endowment or funding then. I did my MBA at Kellogg School of Management, and doctorate at Harvard Business School, and I was a professor at Columbia Business School for 12 years. One day, when I was talking to students about a global mindset and world-class standards, a student politely asked me, “Sir, can you look around? Does this look like the facility of a world-class institution?” I acknowledged the question and went on to clarify that my notion of space in education was quite different from his. That space is not so much what’s around you, but it’s simply between your two ears — mind-space.

Read online at - <https://bloncampus.thehindubusinessline.com/videos/challenge-is-to-find-a-way-to-teach-students-to-think-broadly/article27375768.ece>

Watch the video interview - <https://youtu.be/I3COpPRPCDw>