

“Having people in an **organisation** who always agree with **you** on **everything** is highly dangerous”

Simarpreet Singh, founder-director of Hartek Solar, joined the family business with the hope of doing something remarkable for society. The hard and valuable work did not go unnoticed, and he was listed among the prestigious 'Forbes 30 Under 30 Asia' achievers this year! His journey in the solar energy sector of India has been challenging as well as rewarding. In a candid conversation with Baishakhi Dutta of the Electronicsforu.com Network, he unveils his journey so far and the aspirations he has for his business. Excerpts follow...

Simarpreet Singh, founder-director of Hartek Solar



Some less known facts about me

Year of birth: 1990

Favourite book: 'Good to Great' by Jim Collins

Favourite movie: 'Interstellar'

Favourite food: Indian cuisine

Hobbies: Public speaking and reading

Childhood and family

I was a very energetic child who was full of fun. I was born and brought up in Chandigarh. I did my schooling from Yadavindra Public School, Mohali and later went on to study electrical engineering from Chitkara University, Punjab. I also did an MBA from S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research, Mumbai. So these institutions have shaped my journey so far.

My father, Hartek Singh, is the chairman of the Hartek Group and my biggest idol. My mother, Keerti Singh, is also very actively involved in the company. She heads the HR and the CSR arms of the company. I recently got married—a month back. My younger sister, Harkirat Kaur, is a gold medalist from Shri Ram College of Commerce, University of Delhi. She completed her master's degree from the University of Chicago, USA, and is currently working with an NGO there.

Turning points in my life

Back in 2011, campus recruitments were taking place at my college. I was in the final year of engineering, and had decided to skip going to college one day. My father asked me why I hadn't gone to college that day. I replied that companies were coming to the college to recruit students, and since I was going to join the family business (Hartek Group) anyway, I didn't need to go for these. My father said he would speak to me about this later in the day. And what he said that evening changed my life.

That very evening my father put down three conditions for my joining the Hartek Group. I needed to get placed at a company following an on-campus interview; if selected,

I then had to go for training to any place in India that I was sent to for at least six months; and I had to make my presence felt in whatever work I did or position I held. After being rejected by Infosys, Wipro, TechMahindra and L&T at the on-campus interviews, I finally got placed at Patni Computers. This gave me some level of confidence.

I was then sent to Gujarat for training at a French company called Schneider Electric. I used to wake up at 4.30 a.m., take the bus to the office at 5 a.m., and work till 4.30 p.m. This went on for eight months and by the end of that period I had gained a sense of responsibility, value for money, and an understanding of my path ahead. Going forward, once I joined the Hartek Group, I founded two sister companies within a period of one year.



I never wanted to be a liability to the family business; rather, I preferred to create something different for it



Wanting to make an impact

There are approximately 1.3 to 1.4 billion people living in India, of whom approximately 300 million do not get 24x7 electricity. This problem really affected me. The businesses that have been built over the last 10 to 20 years are all based on our wants and not our needs. Water, electricity, food and shelter are our basic needs, but nobody is really working on these. The lack of such amenities motivated me to work really hard and do something for the country.

The vision I had for the company was clear, but another incident inspired me to work hard for this sector. Back in 2014-15, I got the opportunity to stay in a village for about seven to eight months while I was working on building a 50MW solar sub-station. That's when I saw that people didn't have access to basic needs like elec-

tricity and water, and that their daily lives were really tough. I realised that the poor in India had to struggle a lot to get something as basic as water, and that was a real eye-opener for me.

The journey so far

The biggest motivation for me to join the Hartek Group was to solve problems and impact people's lives. In fact, the mission statement of Hartek is 'Making Your Future Powerful'. So when I am installing a rooftop solar panel that saves electricity and helps create a sustainable ecosystem, I am solving a problem. The profit or reward that I earn is nothing but a by-product.

When I was at Schneider Electric, I got the opportunity to understand the challenges faced by the power industry in India. And from there, ideas began to form on how to take the Hartek Group forward and, eventually, I set up Hartek Solar. I never wanted to be a liability to the family business; rather, I preferred to create something different for it. I strongly follow one ideology which was taught to me by my father, i.e., "The family is for the business, but the business is not for the family."

Recently, I made it to the Forbes '30 Under 30 Asia' list. Forbes had come out with a form that asked for the kind of social impact our work had on people and on the environment from an economic point of view. They considered these and various other factors regarding our work. Fortunately, I was shortlisted as they saw some potential in me and the work I am doing. I am immensely humbled that my work got the recognition from such a prestigious international organisation.

Best management practices

I am a very disciplined person who is extremely particular about punctuality. Hence I implement that at the office too, among all colleagues. At our headquarters in Chandigarh, the work culture is pretty informal. We all usually work with no separate cabins and there is only one floor where the entire team sits together. The whole idea is to empower young people to work on our vision.

For me, trust, empowerment and integrity are very important in order

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Advertising is salesmanship mass produced. No one would bother to use advertising if he could talk to all his prospects face-to-face. But he can't.



-Morris Hite



to run an organisation efficiently. If you have to build a billion dollar enterprise or a Fortune 500 company, then you have to have trust in your people. Everyone makes mistakes. However, this trust is reciprocated when your team recognises your efforts. To empower a team mate, one has to simply stop micromanaging things. If I define my responsibilities, then I have to stick with them. The Indian Army defines integrity as “doing the right thing when no one is watching.” I strongly believe in this. I believe that dishonesty and a lack of trust have no place in my team. If in a team of ten people, there is no integrity even among five of them, then there is no purpose of that team.

Having said that, we are still learning new ways of providing people with the best culture and environment to express themselves.

Preferred behavioural traits

I think being honest is very important in a profession. In the earlier days, things were very simple. But nowadays things have become very complicated in every aspect.

I appreciate simple and straightforward people, who can stand up to you and say what they think is correct.

Having people in an organisation who always agree with you on everything (even though what you suggest is wrong) is highly dangerous. So unless there is a healthy diversity of opinions within a team or organisation, there can be no scope for learning something new. I am drawn to people who are very comfortable being themselves.

Major contributions to the industry

In the last 28-29 years of the Hartek Group, the whole idea has been to create power grids and sub-stations to provide electricity and help thousands of people. Every project we do is an achievement in its own way.

Second, the formation of Hartek Solar has impacted the lives of people in a very big way. We receive hundreds of messages from people thanking us for saving electricity costs and providing green energy solutions. All this makes us feel really good about the work we are doing, and motivates us to work even harder.

Third, we have launched the ‘Grid Doctor’ which is an ambulance for power grids. This enables us to resolve issues whenever any outages occur or any other sort of problems crop up. Another mobile service we have launched is called the ‘Solar Van’ for resolving solar power issues. All this helps us in making our consumers happy and putting a smile on their faces.



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Future dreams

On the personal front, I want to give back to this industry through talks on motivation, entrepreneurship and similar other topics, at the various colleges and seminars that I frequently attend as a public speaker. Currently, I’m a guest faculty member at the S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research. So if I get the opportunity to teach and impart knowledge on the subjects that I’m good at, I would love to do that as well. This way, society can benefit from what I have to offer.

On the professional front, I would like to turn the Hartek Group into a Fortune 500 company. No matter how long it takes, I am determined to do so.

The late Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam emphasised the importance of giving back to society before one departs. I too would like to contribute towards better education and healthcare systems, and thus make the youth of our country capable enough to solve complex issues. **EB**

Message to entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs are the torchbearers of any industry. For any startup to succeed, my only advice would be, “Work hard, stay humble and never forget your roots.”