Playing a Long Innings

With a rich experience of almost 4 decades, and even after a ‘formal’ retirement, Anjan Bose is still going strong at the crease
Interviewed by: Jayata Sharma-Sand

Anjan Bose is a name that everybody who has ever worked in the healthcare sector, knows and respects. With an experience of almost four decades, Mr. Bose has been instrumental in bringing about a lot of changes in this sector. He changed the game for almost every organisation he worked for, by giving it his Midas touch, thus making him our Game Changer for the month!

Background check
Mr. Bose spent his childhood in Kolkata, until his entire schooling years. He looks back fondly to those memories and says, “My entire roots were formed at Kolkata, where I was based for the starting 17 years of my life.” He schooled at St. Lawrence High School there and is still attached to the place, so much so that every time he visits the place, he makes it a point to once take a round of the school. When asked what makes him so devoted to the institution, he tells us, “They experimented a lot, and gave us a free hand with our interests. They taught us in social studies about ego and super ego; even at the age of 15, we were being groomed to be good human beings.”

It is interesting to note that right from his childhood days, Mr. Bose was being groomed to be a doctor, and in fact, had no love for engineering! However, as fate might have it, there were different things planned for him. “I was a biology student and it was grilled in my mind that I will be a doctor someday. However, the admissions for engineering started prior to medical and that was my turning point.”

Entering healthcare
His friends influenced him to appear for IIT engineering entrance exams. Surprisingly, he scored a very good rank and before he knew, he was already studying Electronics and Electrical Communications engineering at one of the best colleges in India, IIT Kharagpur! This was in the year 1971. He says that all this was just fun for him, as it was more about being with friends and having a good time.

In the meantime, he got a scholarship and admission into the Calcutta Medical College, again a premier institute during those days.
The lighter side of Anjan Bose

Favourite song
Last Christmas by George Michael and Zindagi ek safar hai suhana by Kishore Kumar.

Favourite movie
Sound of Music

Favourite famous personality & why
I admire Steve Jobs for his innovations, Bill Gates for entrepreneurship, Martin Luther King for his bold leadership and Mahatma Gandhi for all he did for our nation. I wish there was someone who could be a combination of all of them! That would be a hit with me!

Favourite food/cuisine:
Chinese and South Indian

A holiday destination that you enjoyed the most
The char dham yatra that I did with my family in early 1990s. Although it’s almost 20 years since then, that trip has stayed in my mind. We had fascinating experiences, we travelled by buses, rode on mules, saw landslides, and cloud bursts. It was an unforgettable, overwhelming yet amazing experience.

However, only one semester at IIT Kharagpur was enough for Mr. Bose to fall in love with the place. Because his mind was fashioned to be a doctor, it was not an easy choice to make, but soon engineering fascinated him enough to leave behind medicine and thus began an outstanding journey of five years for Mr. Bose at IIT Kharagpur. Mr. Anjan Bose also had a “double” – winning both NSTS (National Science Talent Search) and the prestigious JBNSTS (Jagdish Bose National Science Talent Search) scholarships. He still remembers his faculty there for their exceptional qualities and contributions.

In the final year, he had a choice to make in regards to their projects. And then resurfaced his unfulfilled desire to become a doctor. He took up a project in “Biofeedback Technique Using Electroencephalography”. It was a combination of electronics and body science. His project turned out to be impressive and before he knew he got job at Philips Healthcare, known as Philips Medical Systems in those days. Later on, Philips opened positions for service engineers, and that’s how a long association began with a company that changed the course of his life.

Journey @ Philips
Mr. Bose’s first stint at Philips lasted for 14 years! During this term, he worked in various capacities in India and Europe. He started as a service engineer in Kolkata, then went on to become the Eastern Zone Manager, then rose to be a Project Manager, after which he became the Regional Manager, South Asia, and Manager, Strategic Planning and Country Sales Manager, India. He also operated as an expatriate from Eindhoven, Holland. In fact, he was one of the youngest expatriates at the age of 30. Not just this, he was also the youngest manager at Philips (he was made manager at the age of 25). This was quite a feat, as we are talking about the days when average age of managers used to be quite high.

He then left Philips for a while before returning to the organisation, from where he finally retired last year. Mr. Bose is not the one to sit at home and relax, even after his ‘formal’ retirement, he is actively working in the industry and is currently the Secretary General of the Healthcare Federation of India. Not just this, he finds time for regularly writing diaries and even poetry! This multi-faceted personality, amidst his super-hectic schedule, manages to spend a couple of hours with us for an exclusive interview, thanks to his time-management skills.

Excerpts...

What made you leave Philips Healthcare and then ultimately come back?
I was agonised to leave Philips, the company has a reputation that people join it and then retire from there. However,
sometimes there is an itch from inside to do something more, and then there are times when there is a pull from the outside. In this case, it was more about the pull that came from Hewlett Packard. They were planning to enter India directly, and waited seven months for me to join them.

I spent almost a decade at HP as their Country Manager & Vice President, India (Medical Products Group), setting up their business in India. I moved on to be the South Asia Director and then Director, Emerging Markets, Asia Pacific. Then, after a few years, Philips acquired HP Medical. However, by then I had already moved on to become the Managing Director at Datex-Ohmeda India, where I could help the team to turn around the business in a span of three years.

Then, in 2004, I rejoined Philips Healthcare as the Managing Director. I also had a brief stint of two years with Philips Consumer Lifestyle, where again I had the satisfaction of helping the team to regain its confidence and do some good work. Thus, retiring from the company after a fulfilling and long-lasting association.

**Four decades of extensive experience! What has kept you driven?**

I read somewhere 20 years back – if winning is not everything, then why keep a score card! It has stuck with me ever since. Winning drives me, though I am not of the belief that one should win at all costs. I am a very strong believer of fair and square play – and integrity. However, I have always worked in an environment where winning was the target. I feel honoured that healthcare sector leaders whom I have worked with for long, gave me their confidence. At the Healthcare Federation of India, we are looking at designing a NASSCOM-like industry body for healthcare, it is called NATHEALTH, and this is what is keeping me driven and busy! Why not use my four decades of knowledge and experience to help in building something for the industry that is unique and helpful in ways more than one.

**Talking about NATHEALTH, tell us more about it.**

Indian healthcare is in a truly unique place at this point of time. The positive and negative are at a constant interplay. At one end we have taken giant strides to establish ourselves as a highly skilled medical ecosystem with excellent clinical outcomes, as well as a very powerful value proposition. But this is counterbalanced by a massive disease burden, tangible dichotomies in delivery and a huge infrastructure crunch. To solve this is our most immediate challenge. It will take commitment and a lot more.

Healthcare providers in India have to come together and influence decision makers to create an environment that will power the next wave. NATHEALTH is the genesis of this movement. It is the forum that will facilitate the shift in mindset, delivery and decision making. It is our vision to build a better and healthier future. Our vision is to “be the credible and unified voice in improving access and quality of healthcare”, and our mission is to enable environment to fund long term growth, help develop and optimise healthcare infrastructure, help shape policy and regulations, help bridge the skill and capacity gap, encourage innovation’

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**A family person to the core**

Mr. Anjan Bose has done well in balancing his personal and professional life. He knows his wife, Kamalika, from his high school days and they have now been married for 36 years! He adores her singing. The couple has two children, a daughter Anjalika, who’s a certified Yoga instructor and a designer, and a son Aniruddha, who’s an MBA from Oxford University; both of whom are entrepreneurs. Mr. Bose and his wife are also pretty attached to their golden retriever, Tyson.

His home has a painting of Dutch houses, because he says that Holland holds a very special place in the hearts of the Bose family; and many lovely memories and friends were made during the years with Philips.

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**On Retirement**

When work is life, there is no need for retirement! However, I do not want to be ‘retired hurt’; I will keep working and sharing my knowledge as long as I can give my 100 per cent to the work I take in hand. Let me also clarify that I am not a workaholic, the term seems like addiction. Passion is different from addiction.
and support best practices and promote accreditation.
We have already started doing roundtable meets, where we are bringing together the multiple stakeholders of healthcare sector.

You have successfully turned-around a lot of organisations. What were the main challenges faced?
As a young manager, I had people ranging from ages 25-60 working with me. My first challenge was to make sure they all work as a team; and hence I always showed respect to the seniors and affection for the juniors. It helped me a great deal.

Secondly, in a turn-around process, you need to find out why the brand image went down in the first place. It happens when you do not deliver your promise. Irrespective of how big your name or brand is, you have to constantly keep delivering. In all companies needing a turn-around, I started by cleaning up the delivery and service. In fact, there were days when I travelled to three cities in a day, meeting clients and ensuring good service. Repeat orders from loyal customers are a confirmation of your commitment and trust-worthiness. I inherited dissatisfied and irate customers. So, I had to work on maintaining and improving relations. Brand is all about faith and trust, and as you move ahead in brand building, you eventually have a customer as your advocate. I always believed that happy people create happy customers. Customer delight through sincere and efficient service were my key strategies. In fact, this is how my relations with the game changers of the industry, like Dr. Prathap Reddy, Dr. Devi Shetty, Dr. Naresh Trehan, Mr. Analjit Singh, Mr. Shivinder Singh and others grew over the years.

Customer support before sales was always my mantra. Never overcommit and under deliver. A leader should be like Zubin Mehta who should be able to take everybody together and have them aligned as a team.

Talking about leadership, what makes an ideal leader?
Tremendous focus on keeping your commitment. As mentioned earlier too, also always keep service before sales. The two pillars of an organisation are its customers and people – a leader should be inspiring trust and confidence.

How do you strike a work-life balance? Do you get time for your hobbies?
Over the years, work and life have merged for me. Thus, I try and be as well-organised and well-planned as possible. The less urgencies you are in, the better managed you are, and can find time for everything in your life. Also, I think technology has played a major part in keeping my life balanced. Technology helps you remain uncluttered and organised; it also increases ability to multitask. Every evening, I think about my day for 10 minutes, which helps me plan for the day ahead.

And hobbies keep evolving with age. I love sports, mainly cricket, tennis, soccer and badminton – if I can’t play, I watch! I am also a music person, and can enjoy all kinds of music. I also like reading. Right now, my unfulfilled desire is of writing a book, which will have insightful stories and management mantras.