

Lighting Up Lives: Ashish Khanna

While the view from the top is a wonderful sight to behold, it's the climb on the way up that brings its challenges. This is something with which [Tata Power](#) President (Renewables) Ashish Khanna is quite familiar. "It looks wonderful now but getting here really took me outside of my comfort zone," he admits.



"I've been here for 14 years, and it's been quite a journey. I've accumulated a lot of learning along the way, which has rooted me into the business, helping me understand the fundamentals."

When Ashish signed on with Tata Power – a company with a 105-year track record of technology leadership, customer services and green initiatives – in 2007, heading contracts and procurement, he was just coming out of working for a US multinational company, and it was a huge change.

"I wouldn't necessarily say it was a shock, but it was quite a difference culturally from where I was and where I landed," he recalls. "It took me some time to understand, quite frankly. When you go deep into the ethos and values of this organisation, it just binds you. I became very bound by everything happening around me and the way the company worked."

Tata Power threw Ashish into different aspects of the company, giving him a holistic viewpoint of the group as a whole. He started on a fossil fuel project right out of the gate. Then he was asked to take on a few projects outside the country in Holland and look over some geothermal investments in Indonesia.

My team did everything. I just happened to be at the right place, at the right time and with the right team.

"I think it was a great thing that I was asked to take over different responsibilities at different times and not be slotted to one particular place. It helped me understand the group better. And, ultimately, it helped me contribute to its growth," he explains.

That knowledge came in particularly handy in 2014 when Ashish was made CEO and Managing Director of Tata Power Solar Systems – a segment of the company that was struggling at the time.

"We were in the red, deep red," he remembers. "For two to three years, it was not doing well." Ashish had to make some tough decisions and ended up shutting down a couple of businesses, which today, he's confident was the right choice. Back then, it wasn't as crystal clear.

"In business, it's relatively easy to start new initiatives and new businesses, but it is very difficult to shut down businesses because you form an emotional connection to them," he admits.



"You have this feeling that maybe you can do something to revive it. But looking back, the initial decision on shutting down a couple of businesses and then restarting advertising altogether proved to be very right for Tata Power Solar."

After streamlining the business for increased efficiency and profitability by focusing on building state-of-the-art technology, engineering and strengthening employee engagement, Tata Power Solar has grown by leaps and bounds, placing it as a market leader in the solar segment. However, the humble leader doesn't take any credit for the successful turnaround. "My team did everything," Ashish says without hesitation.

"I just happened to be at the right place, at the right time and with the right team." Now that he is President of the renewables portion of the business, a position he's held since May 2018, he's taken time to reflect on the journey. And the one thing that keeps resurfacing is the idea of wellbeing.

"It's very important to take care of your partners and subcontractors. You also have to take care of the communities around you," he insists. "It doesn't cost much and this kind of compassion and empathy towards the people that are working to provide quality products and services to our clients and communities is necessary."

This compassion also helped Tata Power navigate the devastating effects of the pandemic, making its number one priority the welfare of its people. Many were young, away from home and separated from family. But the company stepped up and connected these families, reassuring their loved ones' safety.

"It took a lot of effort, but it made us a better team. COVID-19 made us closer," Ashish says. "All of these factors have made us more human. This last year showed us how quickly we can bounce back."

Today, Tata Power is thriving amid the challenging times. Construction sites are working, and the company is on track to achieve India's ambitious 175-gigawatt renewable target by 2022. It all goes to show how important the element of humanity is in powering a successful business.

"When you take care of your employees and your partnerships, the business basically runs itself. You just have to keep doing the right thing."