

The Head Master

Armed with a bachelors degree in economics from Delhi University and an MBA from XLRI, Jamshedpur, Ashish Rajpal, 42, founder and CEO of iDiscoveriXSEED thought he knew exactly what lay ahead of him when he graduated in 1992. He was wrong. Just two years into his job at Procter & Gamble in Mumbai, he was given the opportunity to market a brewery in Russia. Only 25 at the time, he quit his job, married his girlfriend Rachna and moved to Moscow to work with the French food giant, Danone.

Restless since the birth of his children, Avni, 14, and Kartik, 12, he started thinking about the best way to educate them. As a child, Rajpal found school quite disengaging because of the teaching methodology. He did not want his children to suffer the same tedium. "It became clear to me that my destiny was to return to India and work in the education sector. I quit and applied to the Harvard graduate school to study education," he says.

After returning from Harvard, he took a year to figure out the way ahead. It was this vision that led Rajpal to start iDiscoveri, a teacher training programme, upon his return to India in 2002. The idea was to make learning an experimental phenomenon rather than just a textual one. The initial

thoughts ranged from working directly with children, to providing consultations and setting up schools. "Finally we realised that a teacher training programme would bring about a wide-spread change," says Rajpal.

Rajpal admits that it was not

ASHISH RAJPAL

42, Entrepreneur

Years abroad 11

Moment of clarity "The birth of my children led to a surge in interest in children: what makes them different and the best ways to educate," says Rajpal.

Knee-jerk reaction "Everyone was surprised. Reactions ranged from shock to silent disapproval," he says.

The impact XSEED has grown rapidly to reach over 700 schools across the country

always easy. "It was hard, after the kind of life I led, to wait outside principals' rooms for two hours for an appointment and have totally crummy people talk down to me," he says. Initially, the programme worked but he soon realised that the teachers went back to their old teaching methods once the training was over. That led to idea of XSEED, a curriculum-cum-teacher training plus assessment programme for schools, where practical lesson plans were drafted by various academics.

The company is now called iDiscoveriXSEED. After its pilot with three schools in 2007, XSEED has scaled rapidly to reach over 700 schools across the country, ranging from some of the best known institutions such as Bombay Scottish and Padma Sheshadri to many schools in tier II and III towns. With XSEED, children have shown visible improvement in grasping concepts, communication and academic performance. iDiscoveri, on the other hand, reaches out to about 300,000 people a year now. Most of them are in small towns across 22 states and in several countries, including Bhutan, Singapore, the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

With expansion plans on the anvil, Rajpal now wants to cover pre-schools under XSEED. The road ahead might be rocky, but this is just another milestone he wishes to cross.

by Gunjeet Sra

RAJPAL AT AN XSEED CENTRE IN DELHI

