

Never Say No to a Good Offer



Hi

I am Ranbir Singh Mangat. I am PG diploma from Institute of Paper Technology – 1969 batch. I was born and brought up at Bengal paper mills by virtue of my father working at this mill. Paper making was in my blood and this possibly motivated my father to send me to paper tech course.

It was end of winter in 1983 and I was into 4th year of my marketing job in a Delhi based trading company dealing in imported machine clothing and paper machineries. Earlier I had been working at floor level for 10 years in few paper mills which included Bengal Paper Mills, NEPA Mills and Orient Paper Mills-Amlai after completing my professional studies. One of my neighbors Mr. Lekhi called me over to discuss a proposal. Mr. Lekhi got to know my father when he had a contract to supply and erect Evaporators in Bengal Paper Mills where my father also worked. He said that he has an offer to dismantle a 100 TPD paper unit from Norway and that I should do the job. Back then a 100 TPD paper unit was considered big enough. I told him frankly that I have no such experience, but he insisted that he is confident I can do the job. On his repeated prodding I accepted the offer. He also informed me that I will have to organize the dismantling crew too and was given a timeline of 15 days to assemble the team.

After fixing the remunerations of prospective crew members for the project, which was to be completed in a 3 months window of Visa validity, I started scouting for mechanical fitters, helpers, carpenters and draftsman. Fitters were very demanding looking at the nature of “foreign assignments” and so were other categories of crew. This was going to greatly upset my budget and proving to be unremunerative to me. I was desperate to execute this project as I had included tickets for myself to UK, USA and Canada in the contract as bonus for executing the project. I was stuck and the clock was ticking by.

Desperate situations call for desperate solution, as the saying go!! I said to myself it’s a simple dismantling job anyway, not a machine erection work, then why I need experienced fitters? Why I need draftsman when I can do it myself, I thought? One fitter from a paper mill in Punjab was referred to me by a friend and he agreed to work on terms set by me. I needed total 14 crew members out of which 2 were to be carpenters. I decided to bet on Truck Cleaners from my small Punjab town Doraha for dismantling work as they had “experience” in fixing heavy truck tyres. They are hardworking and “foreign crazy” too, like most of us are and passport ready. It was an easy job selecting the Truck Cleaners and carpenters. My brother in law too was roped in as he had experience in handling Truck workshop.

The selected team members assembled in Delhi with their passports for the flight. The Visa was on arrival those days in Scandinavian countries. We all, including Mr. Lekhi, landed at Oslo airport after changing flights at Paris and Copenhagen all tired and exhausted. The wait at immigration counter took

a long time as Visa for each has to be processed. Then we boarded a minibus to take us to project site Halden, a 2 hours' drive, beautiful port town in Norway. We all were so tired that we dozed off as soon as we boarded the bus. Sometimes the sleepy eyes struggled to catch a glimpse of the scenic beauty of the countryside as we drove through.

Next day, after checking into a bungalow which was to be our home for next 3 months, we were taken to the project site at a walking distance. Most of my team had never seen a paper mill and, therefore, had no idea of the task at hand. A walk-through tour of the machine and equipment to be dismantled was over in an hour. We were shown a battery of Centri cleaners at the adjoining building which earlier an Indian engineering company could not dismantle in time and hence abandoned by them! This was enough to demotivate me before the work started.

I showed my crew the equipment to be dismantled and kept assuring them that it is not difficult job. The Punjab boys were too eager to start the work. The safety aspect of the job was explained in detail especially about the rotating equipment's like presses and dryers. I was making sure my limited team members are not hurt due to any mishap. Mr. Lekhi showed me the Superstore from where I could get ration for the team and left for India. Team members took turn to cook meals. There was no restriction on their food choice. The breakfast was always bread and omelet.

As expected, the boys were quick to grasp the work at hand and started dismantling the equipment as per schedule planned. After few weeks more equipment was added to the shipping list including 2 huge SS Tanks for Fibre Recovery and Super Calendar Stack. But my worry was how to take down the Overhead Travelling Crane after the execution of the job. The Chief Engineer of the Halden Paper mill provided us all the equipment we needed including Hydraulic Telescopic Boom Crane. On Sundays to give a break most of us used to walk down to Svinesund, a small town 11 kms across the border in Sweden, for shopping in the weekly flea market.

We were on our way to completing the job in 11 weeks, all equipment marked, photographed, packed and stored for dispatch. We were asked to overall Fourdrinier Suction Roll and Suction Press Roll at site before packing, which we did. In between I had to visit Gein Maskiner AB, Jonkoping, Sweden, to look for a single-nip calendar in used machinery yard.

The local TV channel crew visited our site to shoot a story on us. They were too keen to show how Indian Carpenters are driving nails into the packing boxes with hammer instead of pneumatic "Nail Guns". The print media also covered our visit. We were happy to see our faces in the newspapers but could not make any head or tail of it as the language was Norwegian!

As I said earlier my worry was the Overhead crane. I kept thinking of many options, but they seemed to be time consuming and unworkable. Then I saw an Exhaust duct right in the center of the ceiling. I discussed with Chief Engineer of the mill the possibility of lowering a Boom Crane hook through the exhaust space to lower the crane. The CE agreed to this idea and deployed the Boom crane outside of the building, lowered a hook, then slightly lifted the overhead crane to take it off from its rails, rotated it slightly then started lowering it slowly and then the overhead crane lost its balance and hit the floor with a bang!! Thankfully no one was hurt. We cut the crane in 2 pieces for transportation.

With 1 week to go before our deadline expired, we had completed our job. The management utilized our team's free time and offered them the job of clearing the building of pipelines, electric cable trays and other leftovers (not needed by us and not in our contract) and earn money by selling that scrap. Boys were quick to grab this bonus and finished the job in 3 days. We celebrated the successful

completion of the project with Champagne. The next day all left for their different destinations. One stayed back to “explore” Norway, some left for London to meet their relative (London Visa on Arrival).

On return to India and after the equipment arrived at the destination in Dhule, Maharashtra, I was offered contract for machine erection as they thought I would be the best person to do that. I politely refused the offer as it was destined that I returned to the marketing job. After a month I joined Porritts & Spencers (Asia) Ltd in marketing department. I retired from P&S as Exports Manager in 2001. Since then the company was taken over by Voith, Germany and is known as Voith Paper Fabrics India Ltd.

I have spent more than 45 years with paper industry and have enjoyed my association immensely.



Ranbir Singh Mangat

tagnam@hotmail.com