



Ruhie Pande

CHRO, Godrej Housing Finance

Ruhie Pande is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Godrej Housing Finance & Godrej Fund Management. She is a seasoned HR professional who is passionate about coaching, leading HR transformation strategy, and diversity & inclusion.

The Entrepreneurial Mindset: Hiring for Potential over Experience

In a conversation with All Things Talent, Ruhie Pande CHRO, Godrej Housing Finance, talks about the challenges of identifying and hiring 'cultural fit' candidates, the importance of investing in the potential of an employee, and how hiring and upskilling needs changed due to the pandemic.

Q. Godrej Housing Finance began operations last year during the pandemic. What kind of a hiring strategy did you employ to find the right people for a startup?

Godrej Housing Finance is a ground-up startup and I was pretty much the first employee. I moved from Godrej properties as CHRO. The first team that we set up together was the management committee or the Founder team. There we looked at two-three key things apart from the functional expertise. For these players, it isn't an individual win but a team win. So we looked at the co-founder team mindset. Second, we were clear about how we will build diversity as a way of being. Not just representation but also as an organisational strategy. We want to be a gold standard in the BFSI industry. The first year already saw 34% hiring diversity in terms of gender. We did a lot of targeted hiring for business, technology,

leadership, to get women on board. We also hired from different industries and companies. Our first 100 people came from 50 different companies. Also, we were open to hiring from different sectors like real estate, consumer products, etc. In order to be an agile startup, we decided to have a flat structure and create roles that are empowered. For many that we hired, it was a step-up role, something they haven't done before.

Since we had no background in BFSI, we leveraged the Godrej brand to showcase what we were as an organisation. We showcased to the hiring managers what they are capable of. We also expanded our footprints on social media. We got senior management to talk about culture. Even before we started talking about our products, we chose to talk about our culture. One of the first videos that we put out on social media was by our MD and CEO Manish Shah which was about his vision of the company and the culture he wants.

Q. What kind of hiring challenges did you face due to

the pandemic and an altered mode of working?

We were the early adopters of the digital way of working, be it for consumers or our employees. Starting from onboarding to engaging our employees, we went ahead with the digital approach. We amped up communication in the first few days. We were hiring from four locations, Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore, and Pune. We got leaders to talk to people, our HR team connected with people one on one. The biggest challenge was since it's a startup, connect is important. It is natural to have coffee conversations, impromptu town halls, and others. We missed that. Second, as we were scaling up and expanding, how to manage employee safety and business pressure was on our mind. Another aspect is the fatigue from work from home that was building up.

In terms of hiring challenges, we are very lucky that we have a brand like Godrej behind us. That opened a lot of doors even when we didn't have a presence in the BFSI space before that. People were willing to talk to us. But the challenge basically was

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Q. How much talent was available in the existing talent pool in the BFSI sector?

In that entire pool, we looked for people who are a very good cultural fit for us. We also looked at a few roles differently while hiring if we couldn't find a ready talent in the existing talent market. For channel partnering, we looked at the real estate business and for certain roles in my team, I looked for them in the FMCG sector. We were looking for people from the industry in the case of risk operations and sales. Since we didn't have too much talent, we recruited externally, including the top team. But in the case of HR or Finance, we did float IJPs.

Q. A digital-first approach also means a lot of reskilling and upskilling needs. How did Godrej Housing Finance address it?

We hired people with a digital mindset. But yes, it doesn't mean that we aren't upskilling our employees. Digital formats keep changing. We have internal L&D teams. We used tools like gamification, shorter e-learning modules, and more. We didn't do much reskilling but upskilling and constant training are the ways we will run.

Q. Do you have plans to hire in rural areas or top 4 cities only?

As you expand your operations to tier-II cities, one has to understand the talent realities of that market. The environment is perfect to hire folks from Tier-II cities and get them into the workforce. One of the ways to reach out to them is social media platforms where the penetration is equal in Tier-I or Tier-II.

Q. You mentioned that the first 100 people were hired from different 50 companies. How do you define those roles?

For instance, we have got a person in our HR team. He handles the HR Business partnering and the entire rewards folio. He came to us from an FMCG company where he worked for 8-9 years. We were looking for someone who

could anchor the entire business partnering portfolio, understand sales and distribution, and best HR practices. So we felt FMCG could be a good place to look at.

Q. Can you elaborate on the culturally fit talent hiring in case? How does a potential employee view the culture of Godrej HFC being a differentiating factor?

We truly believe that talent that culturally fits is able to adapt to the core beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour that are intrinsic to any organisation.

In line with this belief, at Godrej Housing Finance, our values, Be Bold and Be Entrepreneurial, define the very core of every role and that the role holder has the freedom to set processes from ground zero. Unlike other players in the space, we have ensured that we enable our employees, across verticals, the opportunity to ignite an idea and implement it.

This is only possible when our talent resonates with our value system. Thus, we hire for potential over experience and give bright talent the chance to get into leadership roles earlier in their career.

Q. The financial services industry is known for its attrition rates. What HR policies need to address this issue? Is there anything unique for the HFCs from the policies of other Godrej Group companies?

An important element of talent acquisition is to look for potential over experience. When organisations invest in the potential of a candidate, it enables them to nurture young and bright talent to grow into their leadership roles. This talent path not only supports retention but drives talent to excel and succeed by doing work that has purpose and meaning.

As a young organisation, at Godrej Housing Finance, we too invest in our talent and groom them into new leadership roles across all levels. Since inception, we have been continually working to create processes such as MDCs and other coaching and nurturing programmes for our employees. Furthermore, we have devised a performance model where employee efforts are recognised with attractive bonuses and incentives.

We truly believe that employees stay with an organisation when they truly and deeply believe in their work and company,

irrespective of the industry. And this is what we strive to be each day.

Q. In an interview with VCCircle, CEO Manish Shah said the company wants to build a balance sheet of around Rs 10,000 crore over the next three years. Keeping that target number, what kind of hiring pipeline are you trying to devise for the coming years?

As a new entrant in the retail financial space, we, at Godrej Housing Finance, are guided by the ambitious growth plans of the organisation and ensure there is a comprehensive 'build vs buy talent strategy' in line with it.

To this end, we are continually looking to hire talent with high potential and not limit the talent assessment of prospective hires against current role requirements. We also ensure that we evaluate each candidate to assess their potential to grow and step up to take larger roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, there is a clear classification of 'sought-after' skills, for example, tech and analytics to suit the current demands and a strategy of how we engage with and hire these resources as we evolve our business and product offerings.

Going forward, in addition to lateral hirings, campus as a source of talent acquisition will play a pivotal role in the organisation's talent expansion plans. This will not only enable us to engage with minds that will bring fresh innovative ideas and skillsets but will also tie up well with Godrej Housing Finance's plan to build a young and dynamic organisation.



Snapshot

- **Date of incorporation of the company:** October 5, 2018
- **Employee size:** 300
- **First 10 Employees:** CEO, CHRO, CTO, Talent Acquisition team, CBO, CRO, CC & Ops Head, CFO
- **Gender parity metric:** 33% diversity
- **Number of employees onboarded during the pandemic:** Close to 100 employees
- **The differentiating factor:** Our values: Be Bold & Be Entrepreneurial