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In India, Parents Become Part of the Hiring Picture

Companies Vie to Win Over Families of Potential Employees In Tight Outsourcing Market

By AMOL SHARMA, JACKIE RANGE and VIBHUTI AGARWAL
May 27, 2008; Page B8

When outsourcing company [Keane Inc.](#) hired Jyoti Taneja 10 months ago to work in its Gurgaon, India, offices, her parents were worried. The 22-year-old Ms. Taneja would be taking calls from American customers of U.S. health-insurance companies, finishing her shift at 2:30 a.m.



Workers at Genpact perform a cultural show for parents at the company's "Family Day."

Hoping to reassure their young hire's parents about her safety, her supervisors at Keane paid several visits to Ms. Taneja's family home in nearby New Delhi.

They outlined the security measures Keane takes to protect employees, such as providing a shuttle service to and from work, and having

security escorts accompany young women who are riding home alone. "All of that adds to my mom and dad's confidence," Ms. Taneja says.

Facing a shortage of workers, India's outsourcing specialists are pulling out the stops. In a culture where twenty-somethings often live with their parents and seek their blessing on major life decisions, family outreach has become a critical recruiting and retention tool, along with offering more-flexible work hours, higher salaries and continuing education.

Such efforts "create a bond, not just between the employees and the organization, but also with the families, and is key to our retention strategy," said Ritu Anand, a human-resources executive at Tata Consultancy Services Ltd., one of India's largest technology and outsourcing companies, in an email.

India's technology-services and outsourcing industry generated \$33 billion in revenue last year and is expected to continue growing at a fast clip, as U.S. and European companies increasingly farm out customer service and software development, as well as such functions as billing, payroll, benefits administration and insurance-claims review.

That growth has led to stiff competition for labor. Outsourcing firms are constantly trying to recruit new college graduates and lure young talent away from one another. Employee turnover rates have jumped, with half of the employees at Indian customer-service operations changing jobs annually.

Like many other young call-center workers, Ms. Taneja has fielded several calls from headhunters offering her a salary increase. But having settled in at Keane and won over her parents, she isn't moving. "I do get plenty of calls, but I'm not interested," she says. "I don't want to

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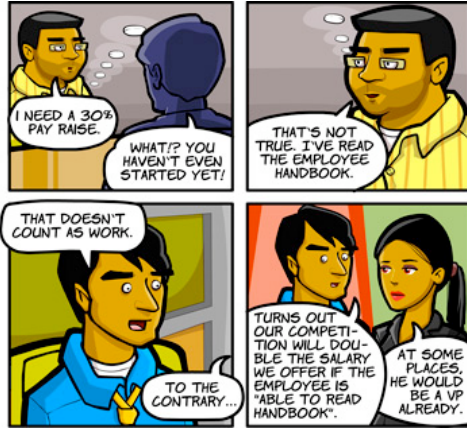
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start all over."

Keane, which is based in San Ramon, California, and operates in 10 countries, goes to great lengths to win parents' confidence. The company, which employs 14,000 people world-wide and has \$1 billion in annual revenue, invites parents to attend orientation sessions for the 200 to 300 new hires in India that start every few weeks.

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The online comic strip series "Doubtsourcing" highlights how much a problem attrition/labor is in India's outsourcing sector.

Because Keane isn't a household name, some parents worry that working there might not enhance their child's marriage prospects, a key consideration in India, or are concerned about money. "They'll ask, 'How much will my son get?'" says Sudip Mandal, Keane's head of recruitment in India.

Other parents want to make sure transportation to and from work is safe, especially for young women. Those anxieties were reinforced last fall by the rape and murder of a 22-year-old outsourcing employee of [Wipro Technologies Ltd.](#) on her way to the office for a night shift.

Keane's Mr. Mandal assures parents that Keane conducts rigorous background checks on local drivers before hiring them, and checks them daily to make sure they are alert and aren't under the influence of alcohol.

Like much of the industry, [Genpact Ltd.](#), a spinoff of General Electric Co. that has more than 34,000 employees in India, holds periodic "Family Days" for employees to allow parents and other

relatives to see what they do.

At a Genpact Family Day late last year, executives gave a presentation about the company's business to 75 or so workers and family members. Then family members watched a talent show featuring their young relatives singing and dancing. Next came a comic skit about what life might be like if Americans were the call-center workers and Indians were the customers on the line complaining about poor service.

Amarjit Vohra says she was initially opposed to her 24-year-old daughter Pawanpreet working at Genpact, mainly because of late-night safety concerns. But she says Family Day put her at ease. "I got to see the workplace from the inside," the elder Ms. Vohra says.

Tim Huiting, vice president of human resources at [Convergys Corp.](#), a Cincinnati-based outsourcing firm with 12,000 employees in India that handles customer service and billing for clients such as Dupont Co., Whirlpool Corp. and AT&T Inc., says, "People here now look at [outsourcing] opportunities as one of the most attractive career options for their children."

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