

# As Covid Hit, It was People First and Biz Next at Marico



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The discussion about the pandemic and the business ecosystem invariably revolves around the business. Questions such as the impact on revenues and growth projections, operational disruptions, etc. are routine. The human aspect of the impact of pandemic remains limited to its effect on the workforce and the measures being taken to mitigate it.

I would argue that these questions, as important as they are, are too narrowly focused to capture the true scope of a, hopefully once-in-a-lifetime crisis. As a result, any answer glosses over the fact that businesses operate within a broader socio-economic context and whatever affects society, especially at this scale, affects the business. This truth has been laid bare and dragged into the spotlight by the pandemic. While the magnitude of its impact depended on the level of one's privilege, the core themes – concerns and uncertainty about financial security, health and safety – were painfully similar. This came at a time when our healthcare infrastructure and socioeconomic resilience had been pushed beyond the breaking point.

All of this could have brought the nation and its people to their knees – and, to an extent, it did. But it brought out the best in us, too. People and businesses stepped in to provide relief and support, in any manner they could. Community kitchens were organised in many parts of the country for families and individuals affected by Covid-19, while SOS calls for essential supplies were amplified through social media. Private efforts were made to source and improve access to ventilators, oxygen cylinders and concentrators to those in need.

I was also overwhelmed to see the commitment that Marico and the extended Marico family showed during these testing times. Staying true to our ethos – 'people first, business next', we adapted to the disruptions caused by the pandemic – as people and as professionals.

We made a conscious decision to restructure all critical business processes around the well-being and safety of our workforce. Initiatives were rolled out to offer medical, insurance and vaccination support to employees and their family members. Mental and emotional health was seriously compromised during the pandemic. To address this, we took serious measures to tackle this. We believe that the strongest connect that a member has in the organisation is with the immediate supervisor. With this guiding line, we trained some Marico leaders as 'Wellness

Coaches' to recognise the signs of anxiety, depression and stress amongst their team members. The leaders have been given the tools necessary to communicate with members when required. We also addressed one of the most significant concerns of our employees by ensuring job security to all.

Along with this, we made provisions to ensure that in the unfortunate event of Marico employees losing their battle with Covid-19, their family members have access to financial, relocation and education-related assistance from the organisation.

Our people are our driving force, and their grit helps us stay ahead of the curve, no matter the challenge. It has been especially exhilarating to witness their collaborative spirit and ability to fa-

## SAFETY ON MIND



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ce all hurdles during the pandemic. The dedication and bias for action displayed ensured that we weather this storm together, but also proved once again that our members truly are the backbone of our organisation.

Covid was a great disruptor. However, it did share equally great lesson for all of us: a disruption of status quo can usher in changes for the better. It created an opportunity for companies to transform and disrupt their ways of thinking and working. For instance, while working remotely, our employees have helped Marico enter newer categories, launch a direct-to-consumer portal, and introduce several digital interventions to serve all stakeholders including customers, business associates and network

partners. As an organization we became more agile, and future-ready, set to face unknown situations, like this pandemic. We believed in the beauty of simplification, focused on doing fewer things and reducing complexities.

Another important lesson that the pandemic taught the corporate world was to indulge in a far more rigorous risk assessment process. Companies have now started expecting "black swan" events to happen with some regularity. Multiple scenario building and short-term agile planning has become the norm.

This agility, adaptability, resilience, and risk assessment is being demonstrated by several businesses, millions of us in the corporate world, and society at large. Across the corporates, we are witnessing the emergence of a new style of leadership – one based on compassion and empathy. I am sure this will lead to conscious capitalism and purpose being more strongly embedded in the way we do business.

## SILVER LININGS

COMING BACK FROM COVID