

# Surinder Sharma: A Gentleman and a 'Power' Player

By Binoy Thomas

Surinder Sharma belongs in that elite group toasted around the world as the best and the brightest of India. A graduate of IIT Delhi in Electrical Engineering, Sharma says he moved to Canada primarily "for the sake of my children's education". After a stint with Jumbo Electronics as its General Manager in Dubai, he moved to Canada in 1995 and was almost immediately absorbed into Ontario's power sector. In other words, Sharma did very well unlike many professionals who moved into the country in the following years.

Since then, his children have done well, blessed with one daughter (insurance professional), one son (engineer) and one son (doctor). Talk about a stereotypical Indian family!

Having realized that his children were well on their way to independence, Sharma looked around for things to do that fitted his temperament and ambition. In 2002, at the age of 53, he quit his job and started Power Saving Systems Inc, an energy conservation projects company. By becoming an affiliate of a US company by paying a hefty \$30,000, he started out in energy audit business, of helping small companies under 50kw consumption with energy audits. This exercise helps companies to conserve and save on energy costs.

Even though there was much talk about conservation at the time, the business was slow to pick up. "In the first year, things were so slow I thought I would go back to a regular job," Sharma remembers.

But he stayed put and as they say, luck favours the brave. Two things happened on the political front and both turned the stars around to light up Sharma, a spiritually inclined man himself.

In 2002, then prime minister, Jean Chretien, signed the Kyoto Protocol that committed Canada to energy conservation and alternate energy development. The Ministry of Natural Resources came out with funding programs for both Energy Audits and Retrofit Projects. Now Sharma was in business for sure. He put his focus to serve manufacturing, hospitality and



warehouse sectors with a top to bottom sales strategy. Ottawa announced a 50% grant for any company going in for energy audits. "I jumped into my car, drove all the way to Ottawa to be in on it," Sharma smiles. "I think my application was the third in the basket!"

Again, if one stroke of providence was not enough, the Dalton McGuinty liberals took power in Ontario in 2003 and suddenly, instead of producing more power, the focus turned to conservation and alternate energy. "The policy changes were a big help to my plans," Sharma admits.

His big break came in 2008 when the Ontario Government launched a wide range of programs for Energy Conservation that gave Power Saving Systems Inc. an opportunity to partner with Nedco to serve the vast market in the Small Business Lighting across the GTA.

"We were given a list of 30,000 small businesses to work with to help them reduce their energy consumption through audits and thus save on costs," he explains. It was really hard going, talking to each small player, getting them on board and close the deal. But Sharma and his very diverse team persisted, that led to some very impressive results. In the meanwhile, those players that didn't have the heart in the game retired from the arena, leaving Sharma with a wider field.

"This program was perhaps one of the most successful in terms of cutting the peak demand load on Ontario's generating stations and also shutting the coal fired stations that were emitting maximum carbon emissions," he points out.

From the start, Sharma was determined to get it right, that he didn't try to do things in the 'jugaad' (cutting corners)

fashion popular with some of our brothers. He built a thoroughly professional outfit that came off with flying colours in the many government and industry audits it was subjected to. No wonder then, leading companies like Enersource Hydro Mississauga and Toronto Hydro work closely with Power Savings Systems Inc.

According to Sharma, Ontario's decision to invest in conservation first, before new generation, has proved to be very cost-effective and it avoided the need for building the planned new nuclear plant costing over 35 Billion Dollars to produce 1400 MW of power. He says, "The demand KW savings have been higher than this capacity with much smaller cost on the conservation programs."

Ontario's Small Business Lighting Program is likely to be revised in 2016 to cater up to 100KW load and giving greater focus on LEDs that results in greater savings than CFLs. This offers a potential to increase business a manifold in the coming years.

And while business is good, Sharma has kept up his busy community involvement, especially in the areas of employment for new immigrants and mentoring. He is proud to talk of his diverse workforce which include Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese, Phillipinos, Nepalese, Nigerians and others. His advice to new immigrants: Network with the mainstream and connect with diverse communities.

He is the only South Asian to serve on the Mississauga Board of Trade for the past four years. Among a host of his voluntary activities are the Walk for Values hosted by Sathya Sai International Organization in over 35 cities around the world.

Now that he has his business running smoothly, this grandfather of four is planning to travel around the world, go deeper into spirituality and work for the planet's environmental health. "God has been kind to me," Sharma adds humbly.

O, yes, I forgot to tell you - he was a table tennis champion of Delhi state in his younger days. A power player, down to his finger tips!

## Mayor Crombie Prepares for Indian Trade Mission

Mississauga: Mayor Bonnie Crombie, who is accompanying Premier Wynne on her India mission, said, "Mississauga is home to a significant Indian diaspora and we have the potential to open our City to a great deal of Indian investment," citing that nearly 15% of Mississauga's new Canadian community were born in India. Over 15,000 speak Punjabi.

Mayor Crombie said "Mississauga is also home to a number of Indian-based businesses, including: Air India, Ranbaxy Pharmaceutical Canada, the State Bank of India Canada and Wipro Technologies. I single out these four companies as examples, because each is an important part of Mississauga's four key industry sectors, which include: information and communications technology, financial services, life sciences and automotive and aerospace."

Last year, Mayor Crombie launched the Mississauga International Partnership Program Committee (MIPP) - a new working group committed to leveraging Mississauga's diversity with the goal to attract and retain foreign-direct investment

Mayor Crombie concluded "Through our active participation during the Ontario Business Mission to India, we will further promote economic development opportunities, the exchange of knowledge and best practices, and celebrate a far greater appreciation and understanding of Canada and India's enriching cultural traditions and shared values." The January 2016 Ontario Business Mission to India will include seminars, networking opportunities and meetings with private and public-sector leaders in the major Indian cities of New Delhi, Chandigarh, Hyderabad and Mumbai.



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