

Interview with Mr. Sanath Pilapitiya- Chief Technical Officer of Etisalat Lanka.

Amiable, down to earth and friendly, Etisalat Lanka's Chief Technical Officer Mr. Sanath Pilapitiya has been in the company for over 16 years having joined in 1993. Describing himself as a person with strong determination to achieve his goals, he always follows certain principles as a guideline. Educated at Trinity college, he has a BSc (Hons) from the University of Peradeniya with a 1st class, after which he topped the hiring test at the then CellTell, joining as a planning engineer. Now the CTO, he talks to us about his experience at the company, what drives his technical team and Etisalat's entry into the Sri Lankan market?

Q: What is your role within the company?

A: I am totally responsible for the whole network, including Information Technology. We have to ensure maintenance of a certain grade and quality of service to the customer, network expansion in line with the growth plan and tangible contribution to the growth of the business.

Q: How has the company encouraged you and how do you in turn drive your technical team?

A: From the day I joined I was encouraged to contribute ideas and opinions, which empowered me to make suggestions. It was a very interactive and progressive approach, which I continue to adopt with my team. Employees are very happy when they are empowered and engaged. Therefore we have driven the company in way where we try to implement any good suggestions. As a result the churn rate of people leaving the company is very low. We give them necessary education, facilities and most importantly recognition to keep them satisfied. Keeping the employees happy has been in the culture for a long time and I also try to adopt it when leading my team. After all, as a service company, if the employees are not happy- then you cannot make the customers happy.

Q: From a technological perspective, what developments have taken place in the company since you joined?

A: When I joined there were only four cell towers for CellTell and its steadily growing ever since. Also, at that time the only available technology was analogue cellular, from which in 2000 we moved to GSM. There was no sophisticated equipment back then. We learnt a lot as things progressed and new technologies came in. Regrettably, we were a little late to get into GSM but in the long run we were able to enter the market with the latest and most compatible GSM technology, which was manufactured with future proof technology. We were also the 1st to introduce pre-paid which became very famous.

Q: What is the next step?

A: Going forward, Etisalat want to be the technological leaders and with their financial support, we will definitely achieve it. We will introduce the latest and best technology into Sri Lanka. We will mostly focus on speed, as speed is what will have a competitive and marketing advantage as

we go ahead, especially with regard to Broadband and Internet. Etisalat are keen on becoming the number 1 in every aspect, and so we can achieve it. From a commercial point of view, Etisalat is an extremely strong brand which gives us a good backing and confidence to engage in business.

Q: Where do you stand with regard to industry competition?

A: Actually the challenges ahead are things we are all geared to face. We have a good relationship with our competitors. So when it comes to tower sharing or jointly sharing resources, we are always very corporative and have a good mutual understanding. From a technical point of view there is no real competition. The competition comes in with the packages offers and branding and such. However, with Etisalat onboard we will be clear leaders in every aspect because with the new parent we have all the backing we need.