

**INTERVIEW**

## **Quality is our name and paper is our game**

**Quality Incorporations VII Ltd. was founded in July 2004 in the small but very famous island of Jamaica. It was the beginning of the year 2000 when Krishna Vaswani began to think about people who consumed, consumed, consumed... but “what about the people who had to produce?”.**

**Krishna Vaswani was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1982 and there he spent the first years of his life. His family owned a wide range of businesses, including the largest local chain of retail stores (first in the cosmetics sector, then clothing).**

**Since the Vaswani family also represented the Tata Indian family of entrepreneurs outside the borders of India, through a commercial bank, the Vaswanis were also responsible for controlling the group’s business activities in Jamaica.**

**Krishna had a happy childhood there; he loved the island and its people and tried hard to become an athlete by practicing every sport under the sun.**

**The island was devastated by a hurricane in 1989 and this event brought new neighbors into the community that later turned out to be very influential in his life. One family in particular took him into their home and taught him the values of being simple, humble and serene.**

### Sonia Bernicchi

Right from the beginning of the 90s, since he was not very inclined to study, he decides to focus on the world of business. He sells fruit to passers-by directly from his yard at home, sweets to his schoolmates and secondary school students and he works during school vacation time. Business is surely in his blood.

#### **THE RIGHT TIME.**

The right time for him came when he realized his friends were going off to study in foreign countries. He had heard many positive things about studying in Europe. In 1998, his parents (Prakash and Anita) gave him the opportunity to do so: he attended college from 1998 to 2001 in Kent (in the south-east of London) and from there, he goes on to study geography and economics at Kingston University in London (from 2001 to 2004), where he obtained his first cum laude degree, majoring in Science. And contrary to what he thought when he was an adolescent – that studying was not for him – he begins to realize how hard his parents had worked to be able to send him and his brother Sudhama to study abroad. He understands that, thanks to them, London had opened many doors for him; he had finally become “independent”.

He comes home for Easter holidays in 2003 and tells his father that he is not interested in taking over the family business, but that he instead wants to do something on his own. Later that same year comes an opportunity to purchase some tissue converting machinery.

He returned to Jamaica on the 4th of July 2004, and the very next day he purchased the West Indies Pulp and Paper (WIPP) company. A new horizon opens up for him: he realizes that he has ‘a newborn baby to feed’, to care for. Krishna Vaswani discovered that in the paper industry, unlike other markets, it was the price determination and supply distribution chain that made the difference. He began to get familiar with the market and its suppliers, and since he knew that paper was very delicate for transportation, he focussed his attention on the local markets. He soon learned that producing was very different from selling. Retailing can also get boring: all you had to do was find a product, increase its price and sell it. But Krishna Vaswani has always loved a challenge; he believes that a life without difficulties or challenges can be very boring. The West Indies Pulp and Paper company changed its name to Quality Incorporation VII Ltd. On September 4th, 2004, Krishna met a person at the Tissue World Americas show who

turned out to be very influential for the development of his knowledge and understanding of this market: Edmar Freire from Facepa, Brazil. Edmar helped him in numerous ways to develop new ideas and projects within Quality Inc. Today, Edmar is still a dear friend, advisor and partner for life.

Quality Inc. has grown seven-fold since the start of its operations. This stems from concentration on its customers, products, logistics and a solid foundation of good relations with all the supply chains. The company owes its success especially to its scrupulous staff, the machine operators Terrance Williams and his team, E. Clarke, O. McFarlane and their assistants. It is through their hard work and high standards that everybody continues to excel with new products and new ideas. General Director Gregory Harrison, who is a well-experienced accountant, has been a great example to follow and is a very patient and scrupulous person. Sudhama, Krishna's younger brother, joined the company at the end of 2005: with his contribution, the Vaswani family began to consider the idea of producing paper napkins, best sellers on the island today. Their father, Prakash who has always been a great businessman and advisor, is close to retirement, but nevertheless, with his great experience, continues to give his sons a hand and his blessing.

Jamaica is a very demanding country because of extremely high taxation and low incentives for production, but Krishna Vaswani does not look only to Jamaica and to this business. He is negotiating to build a paper mill in Jamaica and considering extending his influence to the surrounding region. According to Krishna, in every country there are different product standards, different customer needs and increasing competition. Krishna Vaswani's adventure has just begun.

### **THE GROWTH OF 'YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS'**

I met Krishna Vaswani in 2004, during the Tissue World Americas event. He approached me and reverently asked for information about our products. At the time, he had recently acquired a company, West Indies Pulp and Paper which manufactured tissue products, so his adventure as a businessman had only just begun. What immediately struck me about him was his modesty, his clear intentions and the enthusiasm of someone who has the courage to take on a new challenge...his determination.

A few months later he phoned me to set up an appointment, visit the company and seriously start to speak about becoming his supplier. From that moment on, we established an excellent professional relationship that has, in time become a solid friendship based on mutual trust and respect. In the course of the years, I have witnessed him grow professionally, attentive to the many facets and hidden dangers in the paper sector, driven by a competitive and ambitious spirit and guided by a precise vision of what he wants to achieve for his company in the future.

Krishna is of Indian origin, but grew up in Jamaica and studied in Europe: he has picked up the best from all three cultures and his knowledge of them has helped him to relate with different cultures in an intelligent and flexible manner. He is used to travelling around the world and interacting with others; these are his great strengths. He comes from a family of entrepreneurs so he has grown up in the midst of challenges and difficulties. Despite having had the possibility to work in the family business, he has chose to pursue his own career, his dreams and ambitions, in a sector he had no experience in. Today, his achievements are unquestionably excellent.

Entering into a market like the Jamaican one where 85% of the products were imported from neighboring Trinidad and Tobago and also China, turned out to be a winning move. These countries are very competitive, but since Quality Incorporations VII Ltd. has been present on the market, they have experienced a considerable decrease in their sales volume. By focussing its attention on the needs of the market and on other important aspects such as price, quality, product presentation and logistics, Quality Inc. has become the country's major supplier. Brands like Delicate, Thrifty, Cuddle, Right Choice and Naps have become much more than just names for tissue products among Jamaican consumers, and today, Quality Inc. is the most important paper napkin producer in Jamaica. Krishna is one of the youngest entrepreneurs on the Caribbean area and his success is due not only to his professionalism, but also to the fact that he has set up a business that is based on true principles and honest values, and because he is able to motivate his team and involve them in innovative and interesting company projects. When we meet each other at the various tissue trade fairs around the world, it is a great pleasure for me to talk to him about many topics, listen to new ideas, participate in his great creativity and observe how this young businessman has grown professionally and humanely, never once forgetting who helped him become the man he is today.

Krishna Vaswani kindly agreed to be interviewed by Perini Journal where he talks to us about himself – the man and the entrepreneur.

Perini Journal (PJJ): Mr. Vaswani, you are a young businessman who manages a company that is not run by your own family: could you briefly give us a summary of your career?

Krishna Vaswani (KV): I admit that starting in a sector that was entirely new to me was a bit ambitious on my

## INTERVIEW

part. Determination and my willingness to travel have opened my eyes to knowledge of the industry, supply chains and those who operate in this market. Spending long, hard working hours both in the plant and in the market have probably been the most determining factors... sowing the seeds for a tree laden with fruit.

PJL: Although you have Indian origins, you and your company, Quality Inc., are based in Jamaica. Why? Was it you who chose Jamaica or did Jamaica choose you?

KV: My father's parents moved here in the mid 50s and chose Jamaica and Barbados as their home base. I was born and raised here, so...I would say that it was Jamaica that chose me.

PJL: What countries did you study in?

KV: I studied in Jamaica until 1998, then I went to Bellerbys College in East Sussex. After that, I went on to Kingston University in London where I got my cum laude degree.

PJL: Do you feel Indian or Jamaican?

KV: To be quite honest, I feel more Jamaican than Indian. The fact that I was brought up in Jamaica and attended international schools all my life has given me the chance to make friends with people from all corners of the world. But living and studying away from Jamaica have made me appreciate the place I call my home even more: the music, the beaches, the parties, fishing, the food, friends.

PJL: A company's success is usually merit of more than one person. Who are the people you would like to mention, if any, that have supported and helped you to become the youngest entrepreneur in the tissue business on the Caribbean islands?

KV: Yes, of course our success is due to several influential people, like my father, our first president; the family guru,

Gregory Harrison; my aunt Rosa; but above all, our customers and consumers.

PJL: Why not also add a machine to this list of thanks? Which machine do you feel has been fundamental for your career?

KV: I would of course like to mention Fabio Perini S.p.A., which I firmly believe is "the Rolls Royce" among tissue converting machines.

PJL: Since you have lived in several continents, which is what makes you what you are today, from which point of view do you see the world and the market: of a Jamaican, an Indian, a Brazilian or a European?

KV: Here are my points of view. As an Indian: India is very self-sufficient, very closed and independent. If we look at most products that are made there, they are exclusively for the Indian market. There are very few companies that supply goods to the rest of the world. As a Brazilian: What a delightful country! From north to south, it is rich in different cultures and religions. They are very ambitious people, oriented towards conquering the world and becoming self-sufficient. I'll never forget the person who once said in Brazil: "God has given us everything; therefore we don't need anything from America, China or India". Consumption is probably at its peak: it is a productive nation to do good business with. As a European: Europeans are manipulated by the main players on the market. But there is a positive side: although they have high production and distribution costs, they are still able to supply consumers with reasonably priced products. I can see that competition is high. Besides, all markets are different: in Europe you will probably find many more plastic-coating companies and a higher quantity of starch in tissue paper with respect to America, where we can find bigger rolls (5.5 inches diameter), which run out before the normal French rolls (4 inches in diameter). As a Jamaican: Jamaicans have low incomes, this is why consumption of Cotonelle, Scott, Charmin and Angel Soft is not as high as in the wealthier countries of the world. I think these brands probably control 2-3% of the Jamaican market. We do, however, have considerable competition from Trinidad, but above all, it is the low-cost Chinese paper found on the market and a corrupt seaport system that have a negative impact on sales. In addition, a weak political system that does not focus on supporting Jamaican factories and creating work for its people further complicates things.

PJL: Does Jamaica have a closed mentality like other islands or is it open-minded?

KV: In my opinion, Jamaica is more open-minded than other Caribbean islands. We have a truly mixed population and a vast network of connections with Europe, Canada, the United States and the Caribbean which attract people from every part of the world. Not to mention our icons like Bob Marley, Usain Bolt, Sean Paul. As a nation, given the size of its population, we have a great reputation out there!

PJL: Does Quality Inc. want to look beyond the domestic market?

KV: Quality Inc. is on the right track to repeat the success it has had in Jamaica also in the Caribbean and in North and South America. We have plans to double our output starting in June 2010 and from there we hope to grow another 50% starting in April 2011. The export market has taken off and business is increasing a lot.

PJL: How would you define your business: a mission, an inspiration or a vocation?

KV: I'm convinced that this business is a combination of all three. An inspiration for Jamaica, since we as a company can manufacture products competitively on a worldwide basis. A mission, because this business is extremely demanding and things happen when you least expect them. A vocation, because there are many markets, like for instance Mauritius or Hawaii which have enormous potential: all that's needed is a bit of determination.

PJL: How would you rank your company in the world's business classification?

KV: That is a difficult question to answer, but I don't like being modest. Our company is based on principles and values. I would like to think that among our suppliers and customers, with whom we have excellent work relations, we are classified in their Top 5. We are third or fourth in the tissue converting sector in the Caribbean. In the world, if we exclude the giants like K-C, P&G, GP, Kruger, SCA, Cascades and APP, we could be among the first 100.

PJL: Can you tell us how Quality Inc. operates in the tissue field?

KV: Our aim is to serve our customers. You can never fail if you provide customers with what they want. Some markets deviate from this rule, since it is the supplier that controls the choice of the customers. There are many new projects in the pipeline, some already under way this year. We hope that starting from 2011, we will be able to have a more "vertical" production by producing our own paper, shipping our own raw materials and our finished products to the various Caribbean ports and further diversifying into other disposable tissue products.

PJL: People don't immediately associate Jamaica to the world of business: is it a nice place to live?

KV: Yes, Jamaica is not considered by many as a business nation, but only as a country that offers sun, sea and sand. Jamaica is a great place to live. Nevertheless, like many places in the world, there are pros and cons. The island offers numerous things to do, like fishing or hunting, excursions, riding, socializing, relaxing, practicing water sports, athletics and much more.

PJL: What is your company vision? And your personal one?

KV: The company has quite a bright vision. As I mentioned, we are trying to integrate more vertically in the tissue sector. There are also possibilities for us to expand into disposable household cleaning products. My personal vision is that the recession in these past two years has humiliated many, far too many. Companies too, at this point should have realized that they cannot derive benefits from consumers. The market is no longer local: it is global! We are in a market that can only move one step at a time: this is the only way we can start growing again.

PJL: Are you totally absorbed in your job or do you still manage to find some time for your private life too?

KV: Indeed, I am totally taken in by my work. I went through a bad period around the middle of 2009, I feared for my health. But now, I continue to work 12-14 hours a day, and rarely take a holiday; I think that when God feels I should take a break, he'll let me know.

PJL: Are you familiar with Italy? Is there something you really like about Italy?

KV: The Italians! They are splendid people in all respects. I have some Italian friends even though, unfortunately, I have only been to Italy once. Everything is fantastic in Italy: the food, the fashion, the cars, the wine, the people...and of course the pizza! •