

He comes from a family where almost everybody is a professional. He too was a salaryman when he started out. But, in 2000, he left behind a well-cushioned job as vice-president of business development at GE to launch a dotcom of his own.

He was making the journey all alone at that time and, in the initial days, there was not much money in the business. How times have changed. Today his company has 700 people on board. It grossed sales of Rs 1,000 crore in the year ending March 2008. Deep Kalra, founder and CEO of *MakeMyTrip.com*, one of India's leading online travel companies, has travelled a long way.

Born in Hyderabad, Kalra grew up in New Delhi. After graduating in economics from St Stephen's College, he went on to the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

His first stint was with ABN Amro, in 1992, as manager corporate banking. "ABN-Amro was at that time going through rapid growth," he says. "It was great working under its banner."

He later moved to AMF Bowling Inc, the world's largest bowling company, and set up its South Asia operations. He then joined GE Capital, because he felt that he was "missing out on the large company experience". This stint, he says, helped him immensely when he launched *MakeMyTrip*. The key learnings were in the areas of job delegation, hiring good managers, discipline and staying calm during moments of crisis. Staying calm is a quality he had to display quite often in his early days as an entrepreneur. The first few months after *MakeMyTrip* was launched were fairly smooth. But things started going wrong before a year was up.

There was the 9/11 terror attack in the US. Soon afterwards came the dotcom bust, and venture capitalists rushed for the exit. Money was hard to come by. Things were so tough that the staff strength came down by half and wages of the top management were put on hold.

Add to that the normal attrition within a company and the anks were severely depleted. But those

HOW I MADE IT

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Founder and CEO, *MakeMyTrip.com*



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who stayed on took up the extra load. And they've proved loyal; 65 per cent of those who stuck by him during his hour of crisis are still on board. Kalra's biggest challenge at that time was to ensure that his core team developed resilience. At no point did he want to give up. Would he have done things differently if he had set out now? Yes. "When you're younger, you're more willing to take risks. But when you get older, there's more responsibility, and the fear of taking on something completely new." His friends and family — particularly his wife — have been his support system all through, he says.

So why did he willingly take on such hardships? "There was always this latent desire to do something new, something of my own,"

he says. He wanted to strike out on his own since 1995. He made a close clinical assessment of which fields could be explored and zeroed in on the Internet and online stock broking. In fact, he was more open to the latter because it had synergies with what he had been doing till then. But a travel portal had a charm of its own.

It was hectic. It still is. Does he have any time for anything else? Somewhere he squeezes a bit out, and he likes to spend that time with his kids, one eight, the other six. The rest he divides between some "serious yoga" and swimming. He likes to read too, but has to restrict it to when he's travelling. He's currently on Rama Bijapurkar's book on the Indian consumer *We are like that only*.

Ask him where he wants to see

his company 10 years from now, and he lets out a gasp. Ten years is too long, he complains. So five? His aims are more immediate; two years from now he would like to see *MakeMyTrip* the leader in the Indian travel market.

As for his role models, Infosys chief N.R. Narayana Murthy has him bowled over. "It is amazing how he established Infosys from scratch and made it what it is today."

You remind him that he hasn't done too badly himself and ask if he has a formula for success.

"Work hard, have fun, create history, but two out of three is not an option," he says. For Kalra, it is always three out of three.

Based on a conversation with Smita Sengupta in Calcutta