

From Customer Service to Strategic Management

Gunalan Ganesan joined Halton's Malaysian subsidiary as Customer Service Officer in 2004, at a time when structural changes were underway in the unit to reshape its business and focus on the Commercial Kitchen Ventilation sector that had proved to yield good margin. With his background in engineering, Gunalan had previously worked in one HVAC company but not with the food service industry.

"I had never been exposed to this special area of ventilation systems, and in the beginning, I wasn't even too fond of it but rather thought about giving up," Gunalan tells about his early days in the business. But before acting on his doubts, the game changed for him.

"I was lucky to have General Manager at the time, **Georges Gaspar**, and the local Controller **Chacko Philipose**, as my mentors. They provided me with learning opportunities, and even encouraged me to make mistakes and utilise them to develop in my work. This was a totally new experience to me," he says.

For the first nearly two years, Gunalan worked as a project site engineer. He travelled frequently and often on short notice in South East Asia, Japan, South Korea and the Middle East.

"It was hectic but a great time, as I had the chance to meet our customers and solve their problems together with the project teams. My knowledge of both the systems and customers grew quite a bit. Also, being there and winning the customers' trust and loyalty felt really rewarding and energising, and motivated me to do my best for the company," Gunalan describes his spirit.

His learning at work brought such good results for Halton that in 2008, he was given the opportunity to start up the company's operation in India. By the time, Halton had only had a few projects in the country but this was to change. Gunalan thanks the Malaysian team for their great support and enjoyable teamwork for the Indian unit's kick-off project that proved successful, creating loyal customer relationships.

In 2011, after establishing the operation of the Indian team, Gunalan returned to Malaysia and took up a new position as Sales Manager of South East Asia, responsible for the region's sales.

In 2012, he was promoted General Manager of the Malaysian factory and sales unit, which gave him a further opportunity to apply and develop his leadership skills that included attentive listening in decision-making. Later, he was also chosen to participate in Halton's Future Leadership Development Program, which he finished in 2016.

"The program was a fantastic experience to me and prepared me well for my future growth in the company. We got to meet other Halton staff from all over the world, learn from each other and even develop long-lasting friendships. I feel grateful that the company invests money and time to train future leaders," he says.

During those years, Gunalan reported to one of Halton's long-standing veterans and great personalities, **Olli Sipilä** who eventually retired in 2018. Educated further by Olli's leadership, long experience and strong values base, Gunalan followed Olli as the new Regional Director for Halton Foodservice's Asia Pacific unit the same year.

"In this position, being part of Halton's Strategy Steering Group has been yet another new experience and made me feel that my views are valued in the company. I have also realised that line managers are our asset whose development is essential to continue strengthening the company," he says.

Other important learnings by Gunalan?

"It is essential to be honest, trustworthy and brave to accept new challenges, even tough ones, if they are offered to you. Halton provides a lot of opportunities for both professional and personal growth, and you should be ready to seize them."

"And, last but not least, we are there for our customers. As our Chairman **Mika Halttunen** always points out, it is the customers who pay our salary. We shall provide them with the best genuine value and serve them better than any of our competitors. Simple as that."

