



# ≡ DHL EXPRESS PAKISTAN ≡

## EXPRESS IMPROVEMENT



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*Managing director Sarfaraz Siddiqui explains how, in just four and a half years, DHL Express Pakistan has become the best company to work for in Pakistan*

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When the global international express delivery specialist DHL Express first opened offices in Pakistan some 30 years ago, it did so in a joint venture partnership with local partners. In 2008, however, when the opportunity arose to acquire full ownership, DHL quickly took full control and drafted in Sarfaraz Siddiqui to transform the business into a world class operation. A Pakistani national, Sarfaraz has extensive international management experience spanning over 24 years with DHL, including responsibility for pricing and yield management and commercial planning for some 153 countries. He has also been head of business intelligence and productivity development for 89 countries in the EMEA region.

Today, DHL Express has earned a dominant market share of the international express delivery market in Pakistan, and leads the market in terms of operational best practices, customer service, value for money and staff engagement. The Pakistan network comprises three international gateways at Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad which link directly into the DHL global network. The Karachi airside facility is one of the most modern in the global network. Employing some 280 staff, it also provides the service centre facilities for the south of the country.

In the north of the country around 250 people are based at service centres in Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad and Sialkot. All five service centres are then supported by an extensive network of some 55 service



Direct sort and loading

280

Employees at Karachi airside facility

points spread across 22 cities countrywide, and supplied by a modern fleet of 150 pickup and delivery and sales vehicles, making DHL Express Pakistan the leading air express service provider in the country.

“When I arrived here in 2008 from Bahrain, DHL Express Pakistan had several untapped opportunities for development and growth,” Siddiqui explained. “There was scope for productivity enhancing structural changes which could lead to improved employee motivation and positive business results. The right areas for investment had to be identified to achieve the targeted outcome.” It was clear he had a big task ahead of him.

His first move was to bring in a new senior management team to help rebuild the business. Then he turned his attention to what is often the most difficult element of business improvement. “We worked on building employee engagement,” he explained, “and opened up as many channels as possible to create honest two way communication between management and staff.”

He began the process by launching a series of town hall meetings, personally visiting every location around the country to present an overview of the company and



Managing director, Sarfaraz Siddiqui

to answer the questions or concerns of the staff. “The first town hall meeting went on for seven hours as people had so many comments and questions,” he remembered. “We noted down everything and ended up with a list of over 130 action items from that one marathon meeting.”

Through extensive communication and employee engagement, he swiftly addressed issues in a timely basis and ensured he returned to each location after every three months to repeat the exercise. This contributed towards promoting trust and commitment amongst employees. “It

was very successful indeed. And I have continued the town hall meetings regularly every three months, addressed each and every highlighted point without exception,” he said. “As a result, the staff began to trust management and it’s been a journey towards excellence. Now, people know that I live by whatever I say.”

One of the first big staff issues he addressed was that people were working extremely long hours and yet performance was not optimal. Siddiqui took a firm and fair stance. He announced that all staff were to arrive at 9.00am and leave at 5:30pm, and

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he surely led by example to deter anyone from trying to impress him by working longer hours. “I then told them that if they were still working late in the evenings consistently, and yet not achieving the goals then it would be necessary to review the scope and the processes to identify areas of improvement.” It was a promise he kept.

With the help of a thorough skills audit, roles were reviewed and employees were placed in the right numbers in positions that were appropriate for their skills. Alongside this, a training programme was rolled out to support staff in their work and to introduce the most efficient working practices and processes.

“With an optimal staff strength,” Siddiqui said, “we benchmarked our salary scales within the industry and implemented a range of performance-based bonuses and incentives. This was a great motivator and employees welcomed an achievement based structure where rewards were based on good performance.”

The turnaround in staff motivation has been reflected in the annual DHL employee opinion survey. In 2008, employee engagement rating was 68 percent. In 2009 it rose to 70 percent and by last year it had shot up to 98 percent, a position Siddiqui expects to maintain when this year’s figures are announced.

“WE NOTED DOWN EVERYTHING AND ENDED UP WITH A LIST OF OVER 130 ACTION ITEMS FROM THAT ONE MARATHON MEETING”



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While staff engagement was one of Siddiqui’s highest priorities, he has addressed performance in every area of the business, raising it to world class standards. In 2008 he inherited an organisation with potential for growth, and he set about to build an enviable, market-leading business in

Pakistan. The largest single investment has been the construction of a new US\$5 million state-of-the-art airside facility at Karachi. Covering some 7750 square yards, the site also houses the national headquarters, call centre and service centre.

Substantial amounts are invested in

the new telephony system and hand held scanners to support the use of the latest communications and IT systems across the business, while the vehicle fleet has been replaced. Buildings and offices have all been given a facelift, and equipment updated to DHL’s standards. This includes a further investment in security, installing the latest state of the art x-ray machines and explosive trace detectors to scan all the shipments. These are the machines approved by EU and US regulators for the scan of

imports originating from Pakistan. Many organisational processes have also been introduced to improve the level of service. For example, the company runs a centralised call centre at the new facility in Karachi. “But Karachi can be a volatile city in terms of security, so as a contingency

we have trained a number of staff in our northern offices to work as customer service agents and advisers in time of need,” Siddiqui said. “Now, if Karachi is shut for any reason then backup call centres automatically



**\$5 MILLION**

Invested in Karachi airside facility

start to operate in the north. As a result we haven't had a single service failure since the end of 2009."

Siddiqui has also applied his extensive experience in pricing to provide value for money to customers, coupled with highest levels of service. "This has strengthened DHL's brand image in the local market leading to strong customer satisfaction, brand loyalty, and ultimately a dominant market share."

During 2012, the achievements of the past four and a half years have received wide recognition. Perhaps the most prestigious award has been receiving the Express Tribune's Best Place to Work in Pakistan, run by Engage Consulting and based on a survey of the staff of 200 of the country's best companies. "But the best for us," Siddiqui said, "was when we won the DHL Award as the Best Country of the Year in Asia Pacific, and the most improved country of the year in Asia Pacific." It is fitting recognition of the significant changes that have taken place, and the hard work and support of a dedicated staff. **BE**

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