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Director – South,
JD Institute of Fashion Technology

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10

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Sandra Agnes D'Souza

Director – South, JD Institute of Fashion Technology

Empowering Students to Become Successful Leaders

Sandra Agnes D'Souza, Director – South at JD Institute of Fashion Technology, works on a vision to keep the students at the centre of all initiatives. An energetic leader who has introduced varied courses in the field of Art and Design industry, Sandra's specialisation lies in developing interpersonal relationships, team and leadership management, strategic and risk management, business development plans, and establishing industry connections. She has a total of two decades plus experience in various fields. Of which, five years she worked with humanitarian organisations as Regional Training Coordinator with ASP (Ankuram Sangamam Poram), a microfinance organisation for Dalit Federations, a National Fundraiser for NCDHR (National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights). Rest of the experience is in design education of which 10 years she has been exclusively associated with JD Institute of Fashion Technology.



Innovation is possible when we can refer to what is present to make better-educated decisions. This helps students to study and become promising leaders



Sandra Agnes D'Souza,
Director – South,
JD Institute of Fashion
Technology





JD Institute of Fashion Technology has strived to create an environment conducive to growth. In the institute, women are at the forefront of leadership and decision-making roles



Sandra's role includes creation of strategies that align with the university structure, end-to-end solutions, overall development, and expansion in terms of the academy, industry, and academic excellence. As a Director, she also works closely with the marketing and accounts team, staff, and faculties. Her firm grasp of psychology has helped her understand the nuances of building relationships with students and their parents. She also introduced skill-building for faculties and staff alike, which has helped achieve high academic success standards for the institution.



Her primary focus is ensuring quality education and finding ways to aid students in accomplishing their dreams. For this, she has introduced new-age courses and amenities at the JD Institute of Fashion Technology. Besides, students are guided by faculties who are armed with industry experience for them to learn and thrive. Sandra shares, "It is imperative to seek domestic and international collaborations and participate in events that are grounds to build a dynamic industry network that provides us with opportunities to learn and understand what is new in the industry." These efforts have paid

fruition by being recognised and bestowed with awards for contribution towards education. She does not believe in lying on laurels but going all-out and taking up challenges to ensure growth.

Encouraging Innovation and Creativity Among Learners

The multiple award-winning design institute, JD Institute of Fashion Technology, was established in 1988. From a singular entity, the institute has expanded to 40+ learning centres across India, 40,000+ alumni, and 96% successful placement. JD Institute offers many courses in Design,



Media, Entrepreneurship, Management, Photography, and Hair and Make-up Artistry to cater to the ever-growing market. With a vigorous combination of Research, Mentoring, Practical exposure, and Classroom training, the institute plays a crucial role in shaping the students to become the industry experts of tomorrow.

Sandra shares, “JD Institute’s mission is to change how people perceive design and make India one of the Design hubs in the world.” The institute thrives on one goal; to constantly inspire and encourage students to follow the three pillars for which JD stands: Innovation, Sustainability, and Eco-friendly. JD Institute of Fashion Technology was founded to identify students’ potential and to give freedom to explore their creativity, realise their potential and achieve their dreams.

The institute has experienced faculties from various industries who support students in their endeavours and make them industry ready with a well-crafted curriculum. There is a provision of research and development facilities on the campus to aid students in their educational initiatives. To further demonstrate the steps taken toward students’ success, the institute has teamed up with government and non-



government bodies. They have collaborated with Adobe India, IIID, ADI, KOEFIA, London College of Fashion, Chelsea College of Arts, Georgian College, India Fashion Week London, Condé Nast College of Fashion and Design, Furniture and Fittings Skill Council, Jawaharlal Nehru Technical Education, etc. They also provide international study tours to the world’s fashion capitals – Paris and London, to help students and faculties seek a global perspective to stay ahead. Platforms like JD Design Awards, thesis writing, dissertation presentations on course subjects, and international associations open horizons to understanding design from



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Rather than wallowing in “what could have been,” Sandra believes that one must accept the shortcomings and be able to rise from them

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different aspects. “Innovation is possible when we can refer to what is present to make better-educated decisions. This helps students to study and become promising leaders,” she adds.

Advice for the Women Leaders

In the past, most women struggled to gain recognition in the workplace because of societal expectations and stereotypes. However, women have made great strides and are thriving in leadership roles in several previously male-dominated industries. Sandra says, “women are multi-taskers by nature. To succeed, they must be willing to step out of their comfort zone and build both mental and emotional strength.” As you rise higher, you must be thick-skinned and not give in to pressure. If you cannot do so, it will lead to frustration, and you will want to give up. For women to carve a space in the top management, organisations need to create comfort in the workspace, have performance-based remuneration, and acknowledge their contribution to creating long-term benefits.

Sandra emphasises, “women are still a minority in leadership roles in India. Though we have seen a growth in women leaders, they are just far and in between. We still have a long way to go. The harbinger of change is witnessed when a workplace is more inclusive.”



To improve the chances of Indian women taking on the mantle of leadership roles, an organisation needs to recognise their contribution to ultimately enable them to succeed. Sandra believes as a leader, she is responsible for everyone who works with her; hence their well-being is of utmost importance to her. Hence empathy plays a massive role in interactions. This led to building trust among organisational resources, enhanced steadfastness among the staff, and helped them find a purpose to work together for a shared vision. She further adds, “I consider myself a leader as I own the organisation’s vision and work towards sustainable mission strategies. I have a resilient attitude and commitment towards my job.”

JD Institute of Fashion Technology has strived to create an environment conducive to growth. In the institute, women are at the forefront of leadership and decision-making roles. The idea is to encourage women to be more dynamic and bolder to take up demanding roles. Sandra also shares, “Becoming a leader is more than a role. You need to keep attaining new skills and become accustomed to the needs of the leadership role.” She wants to create a culture of gender parity where a deserving person is promoted.

Overcoming day-to-day challenges

As a leader, every day is different and comes with its own set of challenges. Sandra feels proud to have a fantastic team in which she has complete faith in. She does not believe in micro-managing, so her



yearly and monthly goals are set at the beginning of the year, with occasional meetings to determine the progress. Sandra shares, “A leader should be confident enough in their employees to independently achieve the set goals.” This builds an optimistic work surrounding and boosts confidence among everyone.

The academic line has high pressure, especially during the peak admission season. To deal with these challenges, mechanisms are put in place which have been developed over a course of time. Rather than wallowing in “what could have been,” Sandra believes that one must accept the shortcomings and be able to rise from them. Also, there is no harm in approaching for help. “I advocate teamwork as it helps with ownership in organisational advancement. When the team needs me, I am always at their disposal and vice versa. It is also imperative to make the time to reflect and learn,” she adds. A leader with a growth mindset sees opportunities for their team, even during times of crisis.

As a leader, the people you work with are your strength. Sandra says, “to make them valuable to your organisation, you need to support them to take on bigger roles irrespective



of gender.” This will allow them to gain insight into themselves and their work, empowering them to plan a successful path toward leadership.

Professionally, bosses with whom Sandra has worked with so far have been a significant influence in her life. She says, “I have been able to move up the ladder because of progressive environment at my work places. My superiors were able to understand my potential and gave enough freedom to challenge myself and take risks.” Sandra has learned that to it is importance have a supportive work environment and a management that believes in your abilities and ready to give you those chances to make your dream come true. Without support one cannot achieve anything. She explains, “apart from my bosses, my colleagues too have been my champions. I believe knowledge can be sought from anybody. We usually tend to be restricted in learning from our subordinates, however we should keep an open mind and be flexible and ready to take on the information from everyone, be it from someone who is higher in the hierarchy or even someone who is just starting



out. Hence, I am influenced and inspired by everyone around me.”

Ongoing Education System

The current education system attempts to provide the best for the students and warrants overall requirements for improvement. Every academic segment has a standardised process of imparting knowledge. However, the institute realised they must build a robust education ecosystem that opens windows for creative education. As there is considerable growth and opportunities in the design realm, students with an artistic bent of mind want to pursue the field without going through the grind of conventional direction. To encourage themselves, they needed to create a strong educational ecosystem that encompasses innovation and is receptive to change. This will lead to an exciting knowledge culture and cultivate the creation of innovative work and projects that will contribute to building leadership-driven professionals.

Students in today’s times are lucky to have information readily available at their fingertips. While talking about education, Sandra says, “During my time, the scenario was different. We did not have access to online resources and social media. For information and knowledge, we relied heavily on learning directly through hardbound publications, library materials, and information imparted by the professors.





JD Institute of Fashion Technology is an entity of JD Educational Trust. Under its aegis, it has introduced the JD School of Design, which was started to provide new-age courses for new design disciplines to meet the current market demands



Listening to the radio and watching the news were other resources for staying tuned to national and international updates.” These events, influences, values, and services meted by the professors have been significant markers in her life. This made her realise that nothing is going to come easy and instilled a never give up attitude and accept challenges head-on. “I want to attribute the lessons I have learned in organisational and management skills, work ethic, business management, etc., to my professors. Most of all, I also want to attribute my success to my sturdy faith in God,” she adds.

Stepping Towards the Future Goal

In today’s competitive world, staying abreast of market trends is vital for an organisation’s success. Despite the competition, one should be bold in learning from their competitors. Sandra says, “we also attend various forums and interactive platforms like seminars, panel discussions, well-connected industry networks, international collaborations, student community, and social media platforms.”

There is also regular upkeep with industry trade publications and websites; national, regional, and city newspapers; influential bloggers and business thought leaders. Staying informed on trends is essential to build authority and value,

to demonstrate future direction. This also enables to improve strategy, augments the organisation’s vision, and creates a persuasive philosophy. “In this way, we can explore all areas of leadership to guarantee the effective development of our employees, retain talent and lead our organisation to greater heights,” she adds.

JD Institute of Fashion Technology is an entity of JD Educational Trust. Under its aegis, it has introduced JD School of Design by Mr. Nealesh Dalal, which was started to provide new-age courses for new design disciplines to meet the current market demands. The courses offered are Graphic Design, Product Design, UI/UX, Event Management, Textile Design, etc., in collaboration/affiliation with various universities in India and abroad. Sandra shares, “We are also looking to build more research-driven infrastructure for better facilities and a larger student intake to bring larger financial growth to the institute.”

They aim to become a university by building vast university structures and centres. Based on the needs of the industry, they are also exploring the side of design education, which has yet to be touched on. “We are giving more importance to Bachelors’ and Masters’ programs. We are also looking forward to starting with a PhD. Courses soon,” Sandra concludes. ●