

MASTER STRATEGIST

With a skill-set in strategy, business development and implementation, Mario Habig, Managing Director, Le Passage to India Journeys, has created a brand that is committed to excellence

TT BUREAU

Ask any successful leader about their area of focus and you are most likely to hear that strategy and implementation is high on their list of priorities. The next step is to ensure that successful execution of the strategy becomes the focus of every person in that organisation. It's called teamwork, what the French describe as 'esprit de corps.' It means a sense of unity, of enthusiasm for common interests and responsibilities, as developed among a group of persons closely associated in an enterprise.

Mario Habig, Managing Director, Le Passage to India Journeys, brings with him a wealth of industry understanding, global experience and a proven skill set in strategy, business development and implementation. A man of vision, he has been able to articulate that vision to his team so vividly that it has become their vision. Habig began his professional career with TUI, in Group Controlling, in 2004. Prior to his role as Business Development Director of Destination Services, he headed the Executive Chairman's office and the Group Strategy & Business Development function at TUI AG.

In a one-on-one with Today's Traveller, Habig speaks about his rites of passage as he moved to Le Passage to India and his experiences as head of a Destination Management Company (DMC).

Habig's story begins in January 2015, when the Chairman of Le Passage to India invited him to take over as Managing Director of the company. A cultural shift had occurred with the takeover of the company by TUI, but Habig was ready for the challenge. "I think I was well prepared for the job since I had

a very good understanding of what I wanted to achieve in the company, and as such, within the industry," shares Habig.

The dynamic young executive set about managing the workforce, because he believed that was crucial. "I think it was very important to tackle the job from the HR angle because, I believe that if you keep your team happy, then they will keep your clients happy," states Habig. He points out how Le Passage to India was diverse, comprising many companies and brands, including Le Passage to India, India Routes, Go India Journeys, amongst others, and the first step was to bring them under one umbrella.

Habig succeeded in doing just that, proving that teamwork is the glue which keeps a team together, a bond which promotes strength, unity, reliability and support. "You can see now that we are well-synergised, we are sitting in one place, we have different teams interacting very strongly with one another, our ties are stronger and together we impact the market better," informs Habig. Though coming from a European background, Habig was cognizant of the importance of family ties in India and that a family approach to business that emphasised trust and values was the way to go.

Next on Habig's agenda was strategic positioning of the company and to create a mission statement that would provide the company with a framework and purpose. Armed with a repertoire of strategy skills from his years with the TUI Group, Habig knew that an effective mission statement must be a clear, concise declaration about one's business strategy. This is how he came up with the positioning statement that nailed



it for Le Passage to India: 'The journey of a lifetime, every time.' Shares Habig, "That has been our guiding principle. It was defined following the key issues in the market and from the fact that I have a very clear strategic framework because I've worked for many years in the strategic areas of business."

Habig stresses upon his experience as a business strategist, having started his career in TUI and making it to the top rung as head of the Executive Chairman's Office, where he was responsible for heading the group's strategy and group development function. He then developed a strategic framework for destination service for the entire DMC business globally. The astute professional points out that technology poses a major challenge in the marketplace, where suppliers now go directly to the end user.

Habig is an advocate of customer-experience management, which relates to customer interactions and to exceed customer expectations and garner customer loyalty. The master strategist puts his vision statement succinctly: "If I wish to create the journey of a lifetime, I would want to create experiences that last for a lifetime, something that is extraordinary and exclusive for my clients. If I aspire for that, I first need to understand the client, and be closest to that person. And that doesn't mean...the tour operator, or the travel agent abroad, I need to understand the end customer... the one who is travelling."

Hand in hand with customer engagement comes 'differentiated product propositions,' that is, offering exclusive products that nobody else can. Habig cites the example of Mexico's famous pyramid at Chichen Itza, where TUI offered its clients an exclusive entry before opening time. Habig has endeavoured to make this exclusivity consistent and calls it 'operational delivery,' and this is linked with the brand as represented by the company. The latest ISO 9001 2015 standard for product development ensures operational delivery and includes all standard operating procedures. This is how the company translates its vision to reality.

Multiple initiatives towards product enhancement, constant brainstorming, everyone working jointly as a team...these are some of the things that Habig lists as the hallmark of his company's resounding success. "Along with one key element to see it through, which is patience," concludes Habig with a smile.