

Raman Ohri (third from left, with the SEP leadership team) says, “We are process nerds. We have a process for everything. We are constantly fussing over the processes ... how can we do this better? So, of course, we had a plan for succession. I know (CEO) Jeff (Gilbert) started thinking about this at least 10 years ago.”



New Leader Takes Reins at SEP

By **Rebecca Patrick**

EDITOR'S NOTE: We introduce a new feature of occasional one-on-one discussions with Indiana business leaders.

Carmel-based Software Engineering Professionals (SEP) was founded by four Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology graduates in 1988. Now, another Rose-Hulman alum is guiding the company after CEO and co-founder Jeff Gilbert stepped down this spring in a planned transition.

Engineer Raman Ohri has spent his entire professional career with SEP – 26 years to be exact. He rose through the ranks and previously was named president in 2015. Then in April, he officially succeeded Gilbert as CEO.

BizVoice® magazine chatted with Ohri to learn his vision for the company and catch up with what’s been going on with one of central Indiana’s oldest and largest software firms.

***BizVoice:* As recently as a decade ago, much of what SEP did was in the medical field. What types of software work does SEP do today?**

Raman Ohri: “We focus on a type of work and that work is usually something where there’s a lot of complexity or regulatory – maybe there’s a safety aspect. You don’t need us for simple problems. We are tending to work on things that are complex.

“One example would be in ag tech, where we’ve done a lot with guidance systems for tractors – helping them drive themselves. We still do quite a bit of medical device work and sometimes that work is

on the medical device and sometimes it’s on the cloud.

“How could you build an infrastructure for a lot of connected medical devices that are going to be out in the field such that you can safely and securely get that data from the patient back into the system so it can feed into the caregiver and the medical record and so on. It’s the things we expect technology to enable for us now. Also, lots of work in aerospace, financial services, building technology.”

What is it about the company that made you want to stay at SEP and now lead the company through this next phase?

RO: “We work on this really broad array of projects, whether its different technology platforms or different verticals. We’re always solving new and interesting problems. It’s a constant variety and challenge that’s really satisfying. Culturally, we do everything we can to not have anything that disincentivizes people from doing good work and helping their teammates. ...

“You step in, you’re solving problems and doing good stuff – that’s a very rewarding cycle. And then once you cross over into taking on some leadership roles (as I did), then if there is something I don’t like, it’s my responsibility as one of the many leaders at SEP. ... We’re constantly turning things over and figuring out how to do those really simple things better.”

Are you going to be putting your own spin on things at SEP, or do you view it as more a continuation approach?

RO: “We don’t veer away from our core principals and there are things we’ve talked about and how can we set people up, create an environment where they can do the best work of their career. That hasn’t changed. But the way that we go about it is constantly changing. This isn’t a brand-new thing, but the last few years we’ve really made

an effort to find those “capital P” policies you have in companies and get rid of them when they’re not helping us or not providing value.

“We hire very smart people who want to do a great job; they don’t need a dress code. One thing Jeff was very good at and we are carrying on is every now and then, stepping back and saying, ‘Why do we do it that way? We don’t need to do it that way.’ We’re constantly looking those over. We hire people that do a good job; it’s not that complicated. People want to be proud of their work at SEP and everywhere else. They want to do work they can feel good about, go home and say I accomplished something. If you keep that in mind, you probably don’t need all the silly policies.”

When *BizVoice* did a feature on SEP nine years ago (for the Best Places to work issue), the company had just started touting its story. How is that translating today?

RO: “It’s not about bragging and more just about sharing the cool things that are happening here. ... We’ve made a real concerted effort to be part of a couple different communities; one is our technical community. We learn so

much from everybody else about methods and how to build great teams and how to build projects well. So, we will speak at local conferences, national conferences. There’s things we’re learning about.

“Also, from a giving back perspective, anybody who’s been spending a lot of time in tech, it’s been a healthy time to be in this business. We all feel very lucky and we want to give back. Every year we have been amping up our community involvement. We love it when it involves us actually getting out and helping with our hands or our brains. We met a high school that has a computer science class. We invited them to come over so they can have a much more tangible vision of what it would be like (to have a career in computer science).

Anything new that’s already been rolled out by SEP or on the horizon?

RO: “There are so many. We’re always looking at the next technology platform – not because everything is new and shiny, but because we have to be ready to help our customers build great products, so we need to know whether that’s a method or a technology or just a combination. ...

“We’ve been steadily building up our UX (user experience) practice the last 10 years. It’s not a separate line of business; it’s what we believe is necessary to do this job well. To build great software, we need designers and developers, and increasingly – this is the new part for us – product and product-management thinking.

“How do we validate these ideas? The whole world of product management is all about trying to figure out what are those right ideas and how can you prove them before you spend a lot of money building them. We’re increasingly rolling that into our teams. We think this is what you have to offer to do this (business) very well for customers.”

When you are not leading SEP, what are your favorite things to do?

RO: “Outside of work, my wife and I try to keep up with our sons and their activities – school, band, Tae Kwon Do and general pestiness. I’m the worst athlete you’ll ever meet, but I stay active – running, cycling or whatever crazy fitness challenge my friends pull me into. What little time remains goes to reading just about anything and serious board games.”

RESOURCE: Raman Ohri, SEP, at www.sep.com

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—Erland Porter, CPA, INCPAS Chair-Elect

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