

It is 1600hrs on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2008 and I'm sitting at my desk in office. I am preoccupied with work and among a dozen things running in my mind, at the moment "*Digital Unify*" tops the charts. Yes, today is the D Day. I am taking my first *Digital Unify* class.

The *Digital Unify* is ST Foundation's flagship program. It aims at spreading the benefits of digital technology to help bridge the digital divide. It provides free of cost the technology as well as the basic training to those who have no knowledge of how to use a personal computer and access the internet.

I'm told that my students are amongst the house keeping and the facilities staff of our campus. I'm excited, for I have been looking forward to this day, since I took the training myself in February 2008. At the same time I'm jittery as today is the first day of training and lies on us is the onus of making the session enriching and fun filled.

I vividly remember the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, my first day of the *Digital Unify* training. It was 0915hrs already and I was having breakfast in the cafeteria. With every passing minute, the bites became bigger and I almost gulped the last sandwich. I entered the room, with an apologetic smile with words "Sorry, I'm late" in my mouth. I remember Chhavi, our facilitator, standing in the centre of the room, trying to break the ice by discussing cricket and movies with the audience, conspicuously in hindi. As I sat, she asked me to introduce myself. I started with "Hi all, I'm Deepika" and she interjected. "Hindi" she said sternly, "hum yeh tino din hindi mein hii baat karenge" (For the next three days, we will communicate in hindi only). The first minute of the class I learn my first lesson and an important one. The three days were a complete learning experience and we all understood the significance of being *unified digitally*. At the same time, we were the most mischievous bunch of students and indulged in a lot of friendly banter. We ended the training programme envisaging that someday we will confidently stand in front of a class and teach our students about computers.

As the clock strikes 1615hrs, I hastily lock my desktop, delve into my bag to get some money, fetch the white colored Digital Unify book which I had carefully placed in my cabinet in the morning, and I embrace myself for the job. My first stop is the Wellness centre to buy some chocolates, a lesson well learnt from my previous trainings and I head towards the training room.

Outside the room, I'm cheerfully greeted by Kamaldeep, who maintains the logistics of the programme. Also I'm pleasantly surprised to see the number of students, twenty of them, all hurdled together, in a group. Their punctuality amazed me.

As we all settled, I saw inquisitive faces brimming with shy eagerness. Some of them giving me askance looks and whispering to each other. I heard one of them say, "Yeh madam hame padhayangi" (This Madam will teach us) and I smiled to myself. The session started with the distribution of certificates to the previous batch of the house keeping staff, for the successful completion of the course.

Finally the moment came when I found myself standing in the centre of the room, introducing myself to the class, once again, only this time as the facilitator. After a brief introduction round, we kick started the training by setting some rules for the days ahead.

The first task was conducting a pre-test. As we distributed the question papers and the answer sheets I could sense a malaise descending on the class. I could see the tension levels rising, strained eyes quarrying into the sheet to make some sense out of the questions. I guess my reasoning, that at the end of the ten day training they will know all this and much more about computers, did little to ease the discomfort, though they all gave me a sly smile in response.

From what a computer is, to what it can do, from what a bit is to what a terabyte is, from how to login to the machine to how to shut it down, we touched upon the many mammoth and intriguing topics.

Doing practical, be it opening a CPU and getting bewitched by the complexity of the mother board to creating a file in the text editor, was the most enjoyed and awaited moment of the day.

The candid ambience, the frivolous jokes and the chocolates gradually broke shackles of reluctance and hesitation. I could sense my students basking in the glory of a new found confidence. A confluence of thought, (most of it digital☺) dissolved all barriers of caste and creed and we all were indeed *Unified Digitally*.

Today, I sit and ponder at the first day, when understanding when to click the left button of the mouse and when to click the right button was the most mystical thing in the world, and reflect over the last day, when all I could hear were the mouse clicks. The journey I embarked upon has been extremely satisfying and a great learning experience. As I say and believe, “It is a privilege to be born privileged in this world and some part of this privilege needs to be returned to the society” and as someone said “You will find, as you look back on your life, that the moments that stand out are the moments when you have done things for others” --- The Journey Continues.

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