

iNEK makes foreign-born employees feel at home

BY CHARLIE ANDERSON | STAFF WRITER

Siri Vara, clad in jeans and tennis shoes, is instant-messaging a friend when her boss, Venkata Vadlamani, walks in on her.

Vadlamani, who is about the only employee at iNEK Technologies LLC with his shirt tucked in, pays no attention. The well-groomed manager of operations has an almost religious belief in giving employees their space. "I'm not going to be doing any surprise inspections," he said.

The work environment at iNEK is an East meets West concoction.

Employees stream in between 9 a.m. and 9:30 a.m., a compromise between the 8 a.m. American standard and the impromptu and later work hours in India, where iNEK's employees almost exclusively hail from.

Although there is a standard lobby in iNEK's Corporate Woods headquarters, it's painted in vibrant reds and yellows. There are cubicles, but they cut off low, and there are no conference rooms.

About half the employees stare ahead at PCs. The other half huddle together around couches and cubicles.

The vast majority of iNEK's Kansas City-based software programmers work at the site of clients or from home. When iNEK's India-based employees travel here, they stay with Kansas City employees in guest houses.

"It's more like Friendster here than a

corporate environment," Vara said, referring to the social-networking Web site similar to MySpace.com.

Vadlamani said: "Don't come in at 7 a.m. You're losing sleep."

Founded in 2004 by Aruna Mandadi, iNEK has been riding the recent spike in demand for IT services. The company's specialty is customized Web software developed by its educated work force of foreign nationals domestically and Indian workers abroad.

So devoted to smarts is iNEK that Vadlamani said he's more interested in hiring grad students and Ph.Ds than computer geeks. He'll hire sociology and journalism majors, too, and teach them computer programming.

"I go for the brains," Vadlamani said.

As such, salaries in the United States start at \$70,000. The company also pays the fees to get its employees certified in various technical specifications.

The company's salaries in India are considerably less, but Vadlamani said they are comparable based on a cost-of-living adjustment.

"I'm not going after cheap labor," he said.

Praveena Bellamkonda, iNEK's human resources and employee relations manager, said the company gets quick returns on its investment in people.

"Because you get paid well, you know you have to work hard," she said. "And you're happy."



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What sticks out about the work environment at iNEK is how English is a second language.

Vadlamani said he's trying to make the office "more colorful," but he keeps hiring people from India.

"I want to make it more diverse," he said. "But if you're going to jump in the water, you want to jump into familiar water."

Being so far from home, iNEK employees appreciate the trend.

"They're like family," Bellamkonda said. "We understand each other."

On weekends, iNEK employees often will come back to the office and watch Indian movies on the Internet. After work, many shoot pool together.

Although much of the work is done in India, the Overland Park-based employees are putting their stamp on the outsourcing trend. Recently, they built proprietary software that will be sold in India.

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INEK TECHNOLOGIES LLC

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Location: 9200 Indian Creek Parkway, Suite 187, Overland Park, KS 66210

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Principal: CEO Aruna Mandadi



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