

# *Genesis*

Upon my return to India, in early 2003, an idea that was consuming both my business partner and me was that our success in professional life has been due to the two fabulous schools we had both been to - the engineering undergraduate school and thereafter the graduate business school and we both felt we should do something to enable and catalyze others to get similar experience, as these are truly outstanding experiences.

After some exploration, we set up a franchise of an institute that was training students to take a competitive test to get invited for the final selection process for the Indian Institutes of Management (popularly called the IIMs). There were 6 of them, when we started – Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Calcutta, Lucknow, Indore and Kozhikode and they conducted a single test called Common Admissions Test (popularly called CAT) and the test was for eligible graduates of any discipline and had three sections of Quantitative Ability, English and Logic. One had to clear all the three sections separately and also the overall total. This enabled them to be invited for a Group Discussion and a Personal Interview. It was held once a year in third week of November and approximately quarter million Indian students take this test for about two thousand plus admissions in these six top tier management institutes.

There were many coaching institutes that conducted training for this test. We opened a franchise for the top one in the city of Pune, though we were living in Mumbai. The year was 2003 and life was about to change for me, forever and for the good.

This is a story of those wonderful students and young people I engaged with – in excess of a lac of them. They taught me so much about life and about the changing mindset of the young in India. I am certain I made some impact on some of them. I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of the teaching, the training, the mentoring, the hassling. It involved frequent travels from Mumbai to Pune and back, on the Expressway, in addition to the corporate role I had to perform

Monday through Friday and managing business development in India, USA, Europe and Far East. Never in my life had I felt twenty fours a day was not enough till now and still enjoyed every moment of it and given an opportunity, in the next life, will do it again.

I came from a low middle-class family, based in suburban Bombay (as Mumbai was then called) and was fortunate to go to an English medium convent school. Both my parents had finished high school in Kerala and in the regional language. The school I attended was neither famous or well-known. It was a good school with some truly motivated teachers. I was oriented to the pleasures of reading and this passion stayed with me through my life. I also learnt the importance of doing well academically in the school, in spite of all the difficulties this may have caused me.

After school, I enrolled for what was then called a First Year Science program in University of Bombay, at the end of which I took the Joint Entrance Examination (JEE) and got selected into IIT Bombay. It was in IIT Bombay that I met a set of people who changed my life for ever. When you get to interact with peers, who are all excellent, you upgrade yourself. It is certainly not an easy process, especially if you are a good student. You soon realize that being good is relative and it is only when you meet better students, you really become better than just stay good.

Going through five-years of the undergraduate engineering program in IIT Bombay gave me an opportunity to meet people whose command of expressing themselves was so much better than me, that it motivated me to constantly improve myself. Staying at par with these exceptional friends of mine meant that I had to re-learn the entire process of education. It opened my thoughts to a global environment, especially when students started planning their graduate study programs in USA.

During my fourth year in IIT Bombay, I encountered a book called Hidden Persuaders by Vance Packard and that book introduced me to Marketing and since then, I was pretty clear and committed on wanting to be a marketing person in my life. That changed my plan from pursuing a masters in engineering to an MBA in marketing and that is where I headed.

After taking my CAT, I got selected into IIM Calcutta and completed my two-year post graduate diploma in management with focus on Marketing and Finance. I proceeded to start long career in marketing and stayed loyal to my love and interest in marketing.

Most of my career was in a core engineering business and thus I was able to juxtapose my engineering knowledge and my marketing interest and evolved myself as a B2B Marketing professional.

I was extremely blessed to have known very early in life what I wanted to do in. I know this is not the case with many of you, who will be reading this book.

Though I had made up my mind to do an MBA and focus on Marketing as a career option, I did not give up on my responsibility of being a good engineering student and stuck to learning as much of engineering as I could, during the remaining two-years of my B Tech program and passed out of IIT Bombay in the top three in the class.

I have, since then, noticed, during my seventeen-years mentoring life, that students completely give up on their undergraduate discipline as soon as they lose interest in that, which is such a pity! I will be talking about these things in further detail, in this book.

I also observed that many students, if not most, lack clarity as to exactly what they want to do in life. I do understand that things change far more today than during my time and one must have some flexibility while planning a long professional career but to change course, one needs a course to start with. Those few students who have this clarity are truly blessed.

This book will cover many areas of frustrations, self-doubts, anger and angst that many of my students have faced while preparing for CAT and the problems I have had trying to sort it out for them and get them more confident and positive. Some of you may have similar thoughts and can benefit out of these anecdotes.

**At the end of the day, there is just one person who can seriously stop you succeeding in anything you want to achieve and that person is the person you see when you look at the mirror every morning when you brush your teeth.**

I am very sure that self belief is an extremely critical ingredient to be successful and this is often forgotten or not valued enough. I will be talking of many cases in my professional life where doubts do come in like dark clouds and blacken your mind but it is confidence in oneself that brings the new bright sunrise. I have seen this with many of my students who were extremely good in their knowledge but lacked complete confidence in themselves. A good friend of mine, Ambi Parameshwaran, wrote a book titled SPRING that narrates many such instances of how to bounce back from setbacks and may be worth your read.

Trying to make the most of what you have at this moment is extremely important to succeed. Giving up at the first sight of difficulty or failure is very easy and can come to everyone. The stronger person gets over these shaky situations and works to achieve the results using one's confidence in oneself. In your long personal life and professional career, many such occasions will come and you cannot just give up and still hope to succeed. You need to reflect on your own life while at school or in college, how often you have given up and then suffered as a consequence.

Take the case of a typical engineering student, who gives up on his interest to study engineering, within two to three years of getting into an engineering school. It is easy to blame the type of the school, the quality of the faculty members etc. without realizing that even in your engineering school, with the same faculty members, reading the same textbooks and talking the same examinations, a student got the Gold Medal. What was the difference – that one individual's desire to excel, with whichever resources were available, while you used every excuse to bail out.

It is easy to find fault with others but neglect to look inwards. By just changing your mindset, you can make any situation a winning one and winning for you.

This book is about many of the students I interacted with and it is their stories and narratives and how many of them could get over their weakness and achieve success. Some, of course, could not make this change and lost out on their near-term objective.

*Success leads to the greatest failure - pride; failure leads to the greatest success - humility & learning*