FORCENET E-ZINE

Magazine of the military veterans in the corporate

FORCES NETWORK
THE NETWORK THAT WORKS

CURIOSITY

INSIDE

https://www.forces-network.com/
@FORCESNETWORK1
forces-network@googlegroups.com

FOCUS | PASSION | IMPACT

FORCES NETWORK
THE NETWORK THAT WORKS

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A sense of curiosity is nature's original school of education.
-Smiley Blanton
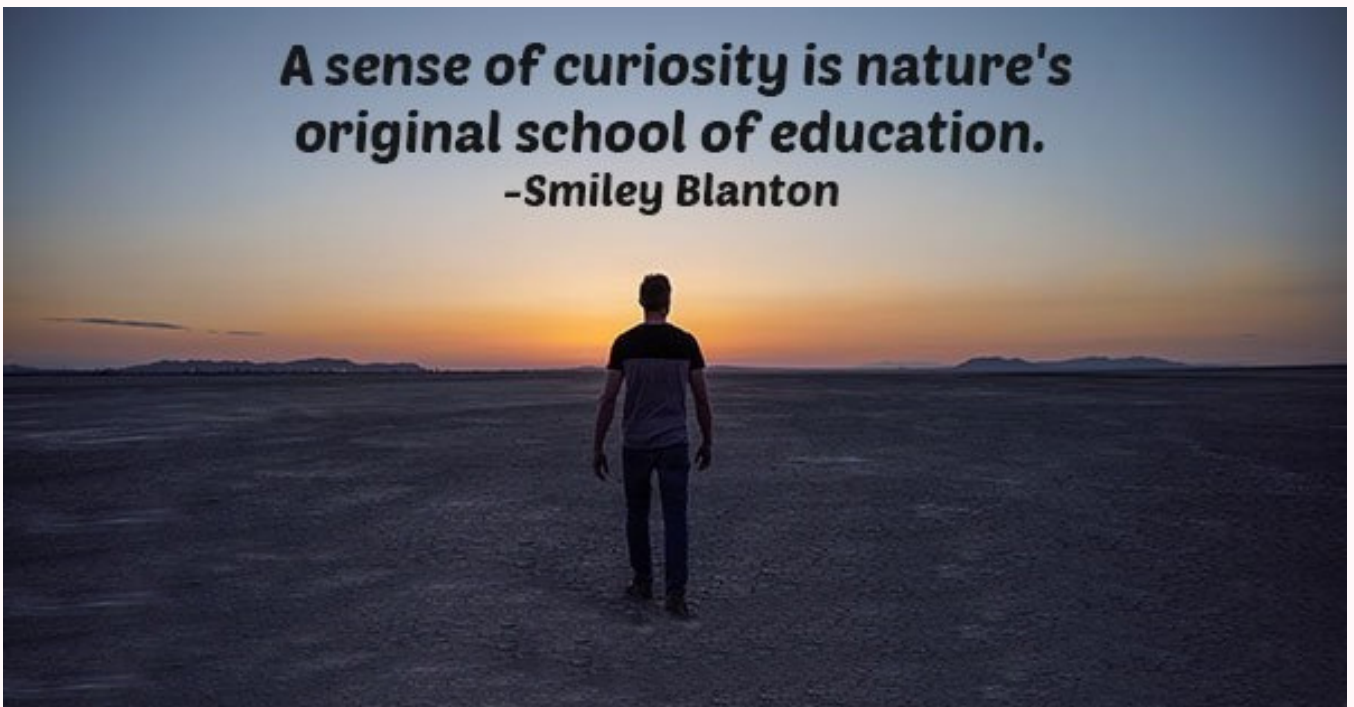
From the Editor

Dear Reader,

The Apollo 11 moon landing all started with curiosity, no doubt with questions such as: 'What would it actually be like to walk on the Moon? In fact, it was curiosity that led to some of the world's most crucial triumphs. Curiosity is a complex thing. Curiosity is a natural human instinct that is sparked from the day we are born. Curiosity is a fundamental element of our cognitive functioning, leading to a natural release of dopamine, the brain chemical related to all things pleasurable. Curiosity should, therefore, become a second nature for us. There are many different factors that keep us inquisitive, and that makes us natural informavores.

Curiosity is a mental state or an attitude that allows you to be extraordinarily interested in something. Why is curiosity so important, especially regarding personal development? I think that one of the most important benefits of being a curious person is that you will become very open-minded towards new ideas, interests, and adventures. Being curious helps you to approach challenging tasks or problematic situations in a positive, curious way rather than steadily visualizing the associated fears towards a task.

I believe that curiosity is the vehicle used by the open minded. It takes them to different places, allowing them to explore and discover different possibilities. The benefits of curiosity are not limited to the intellectual. For children and adults alike, curiosity has been linked with psychological, emotional, social, and even health benefits. Curiosity helps us become better problem solvers, and resourceful with desire to change and improve the status quo. Curiosity can also help us overcome our fears, and become action takers. When we are curious, we are more open to exposing ourselves to different ideas and cultures. As a result, our appreciation for life increases. Curiosity makes us more self-aware, and leads us to humility. The urge to explore and seek novelty helps us remain vigilant and gain knowledge about our constantly changing environment, which may be why our brains evolved to release dopamine and other feel-good chemicals when we encounter new things.

Though born with this natural instinct, we can also make it pronounced, for a more fruitful and satisfying existence. For that, first of all we need to eliminate "I'm bored" from our vocabulary, since it mercilessly kills curiosity. Secondly, search for something positive and interesting in all things and situations. Thirdly, question everything – not merely for the purpose of questioning, but to gain something out of that process. Fourthly, break the monotony and strive to do something different and be different…as often as possible. And finally, overcome your fear – the fear of the unknown. You actually lose nothing, by being curious.So, just go for it. May you have a wonderful time ahead.

Until next time, take care and stay curious!!! And, cheers to Forces Network - the Network that Works!!!

Regards,
Lt Col Ranvir Singh

Stars of Forces Network

A Forces Network Star is a member of the Forces Network who has gone on to achieve glory in the his/her corporate/civilian avatar. The aim of this series in not just to celebrate our successes from the veteran community, which unfortunately we do not do enough, but also to inspire others. The ultimate goal is to set up a virtuous self-sustaining cycle of inspiration leading to more successes in turn inspiring many more.

BY UDAY K SHRIWAS

Capt Gandharv Singh Chauhan joined the Indian Army in March 2005, as a Short Service Commissioned Infantry Officer. After completion of his initial engagement of five years, he opted for release and started his corporate journey. An IIM Indore alumnus, he comes with 16 plus years of expertise in fields of Security & Crisis Management, Facility Management, Real Estate and Administration, who has worked in different industries at Mid-Senior/Senior levels, with very successful accomplishments and recognitions. At present he is working as Head of Real Estate, Commercial Area Administration and Facility Management, for Bayer Group of Companies in India

Joining the Indian Army

Coming from a para-military family background, Capt Gandharv resided and studied at multiple places during his childhood, from Madhya Pradesh to Punjab, Assam, then Rajasthan. He did his graduation in Bachelor of Arts in 2002 from MDS University Ajmer. Since he was an avid Sports Shooter, and had participated and won National Shooting Championships, he wanted to pursue Sports Shooting at a larger scale. And then clearing the CDS examination and SSB in first attempt brought him closer to his dreams. He finally joined OTA Chennai in 2004 and got commissioned as an Infantry Officer in March 2005. During his service, he was also part of elite Army Marksmanship Unit and represented the Services team in three National Shooting Championships Competitions.

While in service, he also got his International Sports Shooting Federation Judges "B" license in Rifle & Pistol and Range Control Officer in 2009. It required a lot of efforts, midnight oil burning as the curriculum was vast and only few could crack it. He was one among the lucky ones.

After successfully completing one of the goals in his life, he decided to pursue life in corporate world, and opted for release, and started his corporate journey in July 2010.

At Army Marksmanship Unit in 2006

Military to Corporate Journey

Capt Gandharv's journey began with opting for a resettlement course at IIM Indore in Jan 2010. He was married for three years when he decided to opt for release. Life ahead was uncertain, challenging and complex, but he took the call, though after doing some diligent risk assessment. His reason to opt for a resettlement course was very simple - that he wanted to be a part of the larger team. Being together, helping each other finding jobs, placements committees etc don't let you feel left out during this resettlement course. Also, it's a good knowledge sharing platform. He thus strongly advocates and advices fellow officers to opt for resettlement course for their planned transition.

During the end of his course, as part of the placement committee, he reached out to many corporates, arranged and appeared for interviews, but nothing was getting finalized. Though he personally appeared for three interviews, but did not got placed immediately. The course ended on 18 June 2010 and he was out of job, with anxiety having stepped into his life.

He went back to his home in Delhi, kept following up with the organizations and also appeared for some more interviews. Finally it paid off. To his surprise, he got offer letters from all the three organizations where he had appeared for the interview at IIM. Suddenly, anxiety in life was converted into happiness and also into confusion, as he was now not able to decide which organization/industry to join.

He finally chose to join RIL considering the brand value, profile and location. Remuneration was never his criteria for the first job, as he believed the basic principle

of having "one foot on ground" was important for the moment. That's how he started his first job in Corporate as "Manager – Security & Loss Prevention" at Reliance Retail, based out of Jaipur on 18th July 2010. He conveys with confidence and pride that his wife was his biggest supporter during this transition.

Corporate Life

Capt Gandharv firmly believes that luck and destiny plays a vital role in one's life. Our dharma is to keep trying, being prepared, put in efforts, but finally we land up where we are destined to be. Our submission of efforts, preparation, thought process etc is also part of the larger plan of our destiny. So, while we try our level best to achieve what we want to achieve in life and be persistent in it, we should also give time for events to happen. Wait for the right time to come, and things will fall in place.

His first job was good, and his supervisor, his peers were all great people. A lot of learnings, cultural adaptations were taking place. One has to understand the system first before bringing in improvements/innovations. That's what he did in his initial six months. He observed, followed, and worked at every level to understand the nuances of Loss Prevention in retail business. He firmly believes that all Faujis are very good at observing and understanding things, because we all join the forces through kind of same system of selection/SSB etc. Organizations do expect a change/improvements/ innovations, so always try to bring in improvements/innovations in whatever you do.

Together as a good team of SLP Rajasthan, they brought in lot of changes in the system, from making databases, to short training films, introduction of new auditing techniques, to new formats for enhancing efficiency of the system, and it was well recognized and appreciated by the organization.

Enhancing Learning and Experiences

Capt Gandharv believed that, the need to rise in professional life could only be achieved by having varied experience in corporate life. Getting experience of a hard-core manufacturing setup was one thing he desired to have. he also joined the Forces Network in 2011, as he knew that it was a great platform for knowledge sharing, hand holding, and able guidance from our own fraternity. Ten years down the line, he still feels immensely proud to be part of this professionally social network.

Approximately after two years with RIL, he got an opportunity to work with Hindustan Zinc Ltd (Vedanta Plc) as Chief Security Officer for a site. He joined as part of a green field setup (precious metal plant), with designing of entire security management system of the site. Setting up of a Command & Control Centre with video analytics based system, integrated DFMDs, Access Control Systems, working with world class consultants, it was again a big learning and new experience. As it was a project stage, sometimes he even ended up working till 4 AM, but he used to enjoy this work. He

learnt a lot of things from Google/YouTube videos also. He established the entire state of the art security setup before time, and it was one among the best integrated security management systems ever done for a manufacturing site. He served with Hindustan Zinc at two locations, the latter being one of the world's largest mining and smelter complex, near Udaipur.

After 3 years stint at HZL in manufacturing setup, Capt Gandharv joined Cadila Healthcare Ltd (Zydus Group), a pharma major, as "Group Head - General Administration and Corporate Security", based out of Corporate office at Ahmedabad. It was a good change and he was finally back in a metro city which was well needed as his son was getting three years old and was to start his formal schooling.

Corporate security is somewhat different from manufacturing security setup, and also for the first time, he was into Administration and Facilities Management, which included cafeteria, travel management, real estate, event management and lot of other things. He landed up in his third job with Zydus thorough LinkedIn. The experience gained at Zydus helped him in joining his current organization, also a pharma and life sciences organization.

Capt Gandharv joined Bayer AG (his present organization), a German multinational pharmaceutical and life sciences company and one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in the world, in Dec 2016 as "Head Security & Crisis Management, South Asia, handling country cluster of six countries. He was reporting into Germany and was

Addressing an Information Security Event

a part of Regional Coordination. From what he has experienced so far, he feels that working in an MNC is all together different, encouraging and fulfilling experience.

Effective Jan 2020, his role has been enhanced. He is now the Head of Real Estate, Facilities and Commercial Area Administration, taking care of investments/divestments, Facility Management of all office locations, and Administration of Commercial Units. He is now planning to do some specialized certifications/courses in Real Estate Management, to gain further knowledge on the subject.

He is now based at the South Asia Corporate Office and plans to continue with his learning curve in the current organization.

Advice to Fellow Officers Planning for a Transition

Capt Gandharv emphasises that everything is possible, and we just need to plan and keep moving. Keep the basic principle in mind - 'one foot on the ground". In corporate world, getting your first job after Fauj is the most crucial aspect, so plan your moves and take your decisions accordingly. For the first job, brand and profile could be two most important factors in joining an organization. Don't fall for a CTC race. It will fall in line once you are in a position to bargain. Get your CV right, do some research of the profile and modify your CV accordingly. Apply for right jobs matching your skill sets. Reach out to people who are already working in corporates. People are willing to help. Have a willingness to adapt and learn.

Individual's attitude and behavior is the key factor on how successful one could be in life. And last but not the least – Be realistic and practical. Platform like Forces Network are helping the fraternity in successful transitions from Military to Corporate and Capt Gandharv feels indebted and grateful to this set up for doing this much required selfless service for more than a decade now.

Capt Uday K Shriwas was commissioned into the Corps of Signals, and served in various theaters during his service for five years, including in a newly raised RR Battalion. Thereafter he has worked with many renowned Companies, and is now the Relationship Leader with Yes Bank Ltd.

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How To Manage Lifestyle Creep Post Retirement

The armed forces teach men (and increasingly women) to be gentlemen (and ladies). This also often means not just the softer aspects like conduct and bearing but also the habits and things one inculcates.

It may sound strange but using the proper cutlery for meals is a habit many officers inculcate only in the Armed forces. A liking for the finer things in life thanks to the affordability that CSD brings, becomes the norm. In the absence of rent to pay or regular money outflows that a civilian in the same position might be exposed to, the idea of lifestyle creep may seem foreign.

However, once you retire, lifestyle creep can be quite real as you, at least partly, come to terms with the civilian world. Lifestyle creep is just the year on year increase in your expenses, above and beyond normal inflation, thanks to rising income.

You might most certainly have your own home at that point, perhaps a new job, and the pension of course. You are also likely to face the rampant consumerism that is the standard in any major city. Suddenly, you begin to see things that were rare in the Armed forces.

Between the field postings and peace stations that few know even exist, permanent commission officers can quite easily fail to notice the myriad trends that catch the fancy of those residing in the likes of Gurgaon or Bengaluru.

This means you are quite likely to add to your regular purchases what you learnt about only post-retirement when you actually lived in a major city. After all, just because you are in your 50s or 60s at this point doesn't mean you have suddenly decided to stop having fun. You do want to live a little and enjoy. Unfortunately, this often means spending a lot more than our earnings allow.

Having a pension, savings, proper financial planning, etc. allows a person to maintain their lifestyle in retirement. Please notice the word, "maintain". It rarely means "enhance". While your pension and income from investments and a job might allow you to maintain a very good lifestyle, it will rarely allow for expenses that go beyond what is reasonable. Expenses mount up far quicker in the civilian world than in the relative isolation of a cantonment. So how do you, first of all, detect you are spending more than you should? Here's how.

1. When you can't find enough cash for a sudden expense that is at least 50% of your monthly income.
2. When your "cash flow" is reducing month on month, or you find yourself unable to save anything.

3. When your monthly credit card bill goes up more months than not.

4. When your debt obligations (EMIs) are over 50% of your pension and other earnings.

Often post-retirement you still have obligations such as your children's higher education, for which we hope you have saved and invested, or your children's marriage. However, we have observed that considering the known nature of these expenses, most individuals plan for it in some way or the other. It's the unplanned lifestyle expenses that slowly become regular that derail many a financial plan. So what should you do?

1.   While you might have taken on a new job just after retirement, don't count on its income for over 10-15 years unless you retired quite young. Working post 70 should be a choice and not an obligation.

2.   While your pension will keep going up with inflation, your expenses can go up much more. Ensure that you always maintain a 20% buffer i.e., you live on only 80% of your income.

3.   Just because you have assured income coming in, do not enter into risky ventures that you don't understand well, for example, commercial properties or even cryptocurrency!

4.   Always maintain an emergency fund equivalent to at least 4 months of pension. Even though you have access to ECHS and military hospitals for health care, you should be prepared for any sudden serious family emergency. This often requires big outflows that you could not have predicted. It's better to have an emergency fund than to not have one, even with a pension.

Keeping in mind just these four points you can avoid a lot of heartaches and ensure that your retired life is both fun and hassle-free.

Follow us on

Curiosity IS THE WICK IN THE CANDLE OF LEARNING

William Arthur Ward

CURIOSITY

Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why.

~Bernard Baruch
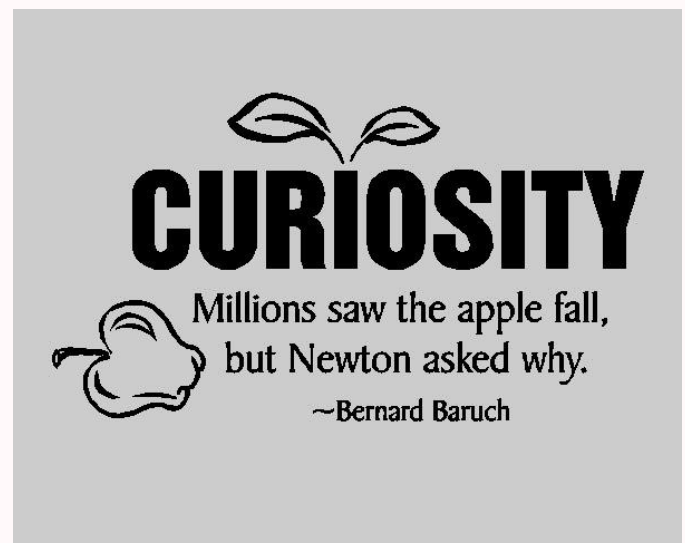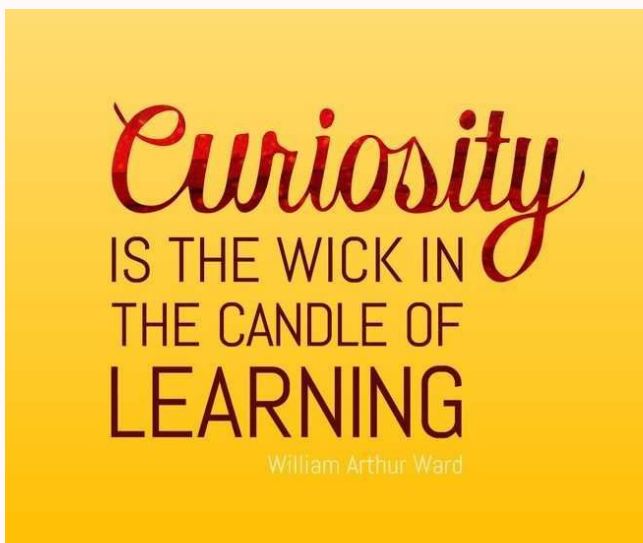
ForceNetPreneurs

In this series we plan to showcase a few entrepreneur members of Forces Network who have achieved a reasonable degree of success in their business ventures. The aim being to celebrate their success as also to learn from them with a view to motivating more amongst our community to take up entrepreneurship as a full time vocation. Finally – we do need job creators in greater numbers than job seekers.

BY UDAY K SHRIWAS

Lt Col Raghuram Vemuganty was commissioned into 103 Engr Regt in 2002. He has served in Assam Rifles and Army HQ in MS Branch and HQ DGBR apart from serving in a new raising Engr Regt as the Second-in-Command. Post Retirement, he worked for about two years in a Renewable Energy company as the GM (Projects) and subsequently co-founded his own EdTech venture "AspectO", based in Hyderabad. He is also an alum of the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad.

Uday: Tell us something about your background prior to joining the Army, and your subsequent Army career.

Raghuram: At the outset, I thank the editorial team for considering it worthwhile to include my very short experience as an entrepreneur in this forum. While I do not yet feel that I have done enough to deserve this honour, I take this as an opportunity to share my experience so far in the hope that I may help other officers in their transition.

I did my entire schooling and graduation from Hyderabad and I come from a non-fauji background. During my 12th standard, I once got the opportunity to attend a passing-out parade at the Air Force Academy at Dindigul, Hyderabad. I was over-awed by that experience and decided that I want to join the Air Force. I graduated in Computer Science and was selected in campus recruitment by Satyam Computers and worked there for about six months. In the meantime, I had also cleared CAT and CDS exams. Coincidentally, my interview dates for both IIM Kozhikode and SSB clashed, and I chose to go ahead with SSB and subsequently joined the IMA.

In the Army, I had a pretty regular career. I got commissioned into the Corps of Engineers (Bombay Sappers) and did tenures in Assam Rifles and Army Head Quarters. I was in the raising team of officers in an Assam Rifles Battalion, as well as in the raising team of an Engineer Regiment during my last tenure before leaving the Army, I was fortunate that my professionalism was recognised, and for which I have been awarded four commendation cards during my service.

Uday: Please give us more details about what you are presently engaged in.

Raghuram: Currently, I am involved in an EdTech start-up, which I co-founded with Sujeeth, a classmate of mine from ISB. Our firm is called AspectO and we are developing cutting edge solutions using AI and ML to improve efficiency and accountability in the education sector. Apart from this, I am also on the Board of another firm which is a JV with a leading film production house in Hyderabad.

Uday: What was the impetus for you to leave the uniformed service and then get into entrepreneurship?

Raghuram: I had suffered a back injury during my tenure in Assam Rifles. Having served in the MS branch, I knew that the options for my employability as per the Army policies were limited to roles which did not excite me. My last posting before I decided to leave was in a new raising Engineer Regimrnt as the Second-in-Command. This was one of the most memorable tenures that I had during my service. Though it was very professionally satisfying and exciting, I was sceptical about the kind of postings that lay ahead and decided to take the plunge.

As an officer with a permanent commission and only few years away from pensionable service, almost everyone I knew in the Army advised me against leaving. However, I saw the situation from a different perspective. I wanted to start my second innings as early as possible before age become an issue with my employability in the corporate. This was a calculated risk that I was willing to take since I had been preparing for this transition and was clear about what I had to do and equipped myself accordingly.

Post-retirement, after the resettlement course at IIM Lucknow, I had the choice between working with a leading American Bank and working with a little known MSME company in the renewables sector based in Indore. I chose working with the MSME, since I was getting a role which gave me a bird's eye view on all facets of running a business and also the opportunity to interact with clients at a high level. I could also leverage the man-management and project management skills that I gained from the Army in this role. Another reason however was that I wanted to be as close as possible to Bhopal, where my wife Pooja Iyengar runs an NGO.

I worked in this company for little under two years and would give credit to this company for giving me the confidence to become an entrepreneur. As part of the senior management of the company, I saw first-hand how business decisions are taken, the various issues that impact the daily operations as well as the top/bottom lines. This was an invaluable experience for me and has not only helped me in my current venture but also during my MBA in correlating theory with real life cases.

Uday: What was the vision behind starting your venture, and thereafter expanding it?

Raghuram: It all started with a simple conversation with my co-founder, in which he mentioned that his son's teachers were complaining that the boy was not attentive in

the class and was always busy doing something else, though he was scoring good marks in exams. This brought back memories of my school days when as a back-bencher I was not usually called out by the teachers to answer questions. There were also a few of my classmates then who used to hide behind the student in front of them to avoid being picked out by teachers.

Reminiscing those memories, we wondered if our lives had been different had the teachers been more involved with us. We started brainstorming on how we could use technology to aid the teachers in achieving this, and this is how our product came into being. We are happy that we were able to solve a simple yet a serious problem.

Uday: What were the challenges you faced in this entrepreneurial journey? And how did you overcome those challenges?
Raghuram: Everyone encounters initial hiccups, and it was no different for me. However, it did not deter me in any manner. The challenges as per me were:
   - Technology Know-How. Though the idea formulated pretty strongly, the technology know-how and its capability to validate the implementation was a critical challenge during the initial phase. Quite a bit of effort went into research and reaching out to Subject Matter Experts for advice and bouncing off ideas. This helped set a framework on the technology approach to the problem.
   - Idea Validation. It was also a challenge in understanding the usability and adaptability by end users of the solution and identifying the right features and UX to grab attention of the stakeholders.
   - Developing the Prototype. With current Investor dynamics in India, raising funding on ideation is a challenging task. Lot of institutional investing is available for scalability, but not much for innovation. Sourcing technical resources and convincing them to contribute to build the MVP is a quite a bit of effort and requires self-funding.
   - COVID-19. Our initial product was focussed towards solving the problem in a classroom setup. With the outbreak of the pandemic and all schools closing down, we had to pivot our strategy and re-anchor ourselves with the new norm of online teaching and change our product features and capabilities accordingly.

Uday: Would you like to share the details of your products and services, and your marketing strategy?
Raghuram: The COVID 19 pandemic has forced a re-think across sectors towards improving productivity and reducing costs. One of the worst affected being the education sectors, with schools and colleges being closed for a long time now. In such a scenario, revenue continuity and strategic cost reduction, whilst ensuring the highest teaching standards assume great significance. School administrators often wonder if it is possible to increase the productivity of teachers without compromising on regular functioning and how to ensure effectiveness of the pedagogy in both classroom and online learning mode.

My start-up AspectO aims to achieve this. It is an artificial intelligence/machine learning product that enhances both classroom and online learning. Through continuous evaluation of student participation, it triggers events to drive student engagement while in class. It also personalizes educational content and assignments based on the attentiveness of students during teacher-led class sessions, remote sessions, and even online self-learning sessions on platforms such as Coursera. AspectO is provided as a Cloud based SaaS platform, focusing on multiple target segments with education as primary. The product effectively assesses student attentiveness (both in classroom and online), effectiveness and productivity of the teachers, suggests improvement in pedagogy, provides appropriate data driven levers to the school administration to control costs, allows administrators to mitigate risks from loss of revenue and also reputation using the inbuilt AI based campus security tool.

We have been deliberately keeping a low-profile as far as marketing the product is concerned due to IP issues. Now that the patents and the funding issues have been sorted out, we would be executing our marketing strategy over the next couple of months.
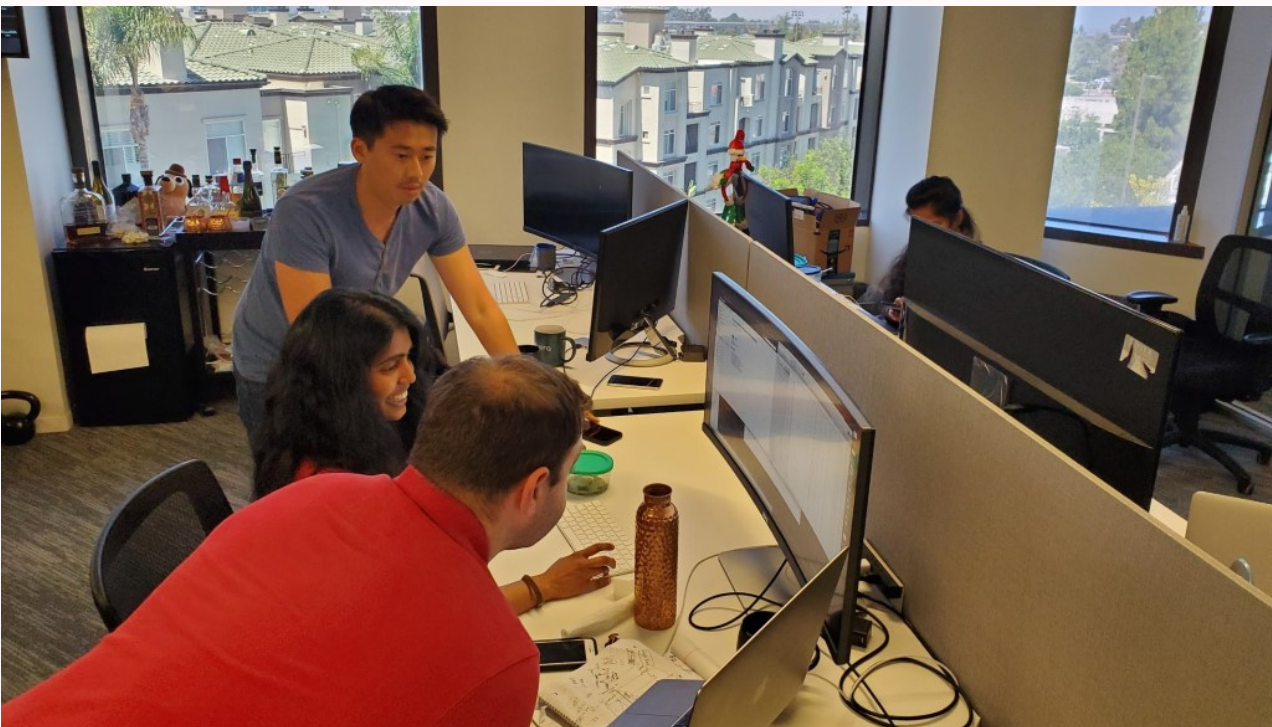
A busy day with the team at the office

Uday: What is your team like, and how did you build it?
Raghuram: Initially, our immediate need from product point of view was technology validation for which we reached out to Industry experts to understand AI and ML, Application development, and Scalability. Currently we have, Technology, Product Management, Business Development and Marketing teams.

Our Core technology team currently comprises of AI ML experts, Front end and API Developers. we have a small team of fourteen out of which seven are based in India

and the rest are working from the Bay area in US. Apart from this, we have some more free-lancers working on specific projects. I look after Product Management, Research and Strategy while my business partner Sujeeth looks after the technology.

Building a team with the requisite skill sets was a major challenge for us. No one was interested in working with an initial stage start-up, though we were paying more than the industry standards. We found that people were are more inclined towards working with MNCs irrespective of the fact that they would be working on cutting edge technologies in a start-up. However, thanks to our network, we were able to rope in some really good people eventually.

Though our team is small, our team members bring in lot of complementary skills which we able to leverage to achieve good results.

Uday: Where do you operate from, what is your reach, and how do you tackle the challenges usually associated with this business, as there are a lot of players in this domain?

Raghuram: We operate from Hyderabad where we have taken up office space in WeWork, a shared workspace. Once we identified the problem we wanted to solve, we did extensive market research to ascertain the competition and the features that would be required. Our potential clientele are educational institutions providing learning in both classroom and online formats. We realised that AspectO is a unique solution and doesn't have any competition at the moment. This fact has been echoed by all our potential investors who have a bird's eye view of the entire EdTech space. In fact, recently Forbes listed our product as one of the top ten most innovative products globally ! This has greatly increased interest in our product.

For the networking and business development activities, we leverage our existing contacts apart from the extended network of both ISB. LinkedIn is a social professional network tool which we use heavily.

Uday: How do you plan to tackle the challenges thrown at you in this COVID-19 situation?

Raghuram: Like most businesses, we faced a temporary setback because of the pandemic. Our plans to start beta trials had to be postponed. However, we used the situation to pivot our strategy and developed another product focussing on the online classrooms. This turned the pandemic to our advantage. There is no comparable product which provides the full range of features and that has successfully integrated with video conferencing platforms used by educational institutions to run their online classes. We now have two products – classroom and online to support the educational institutions.

Uday: How do you find your entrepreneurial journey so far? Any regrets?

Raghuram: Unlike many of the esteemed members of the Forces Network, I am

relatively new to entrepreneurship. However, the last two years or so have probably been extremely stressful, at the same time exhilarating for me. Though I have been habitually taking risks in my career, this was the biggest gamble for me since I was investing time and money at a very critical time in my life. The pressure to make it work has been immense. But we believed in our idea, and once a lot of technology leaders and prospective customers validated our idea, it gave us renewed motivation to persist. Seeing our idea developing into a successful solution coupled with the fact that we are creating our own destiny makes this journey absolutely wonderful!

Uday: What are your future plans going forward?
Raghuram: The underlying technology of our product has applications in various other sectors as well. We have a firm product strategy planned for the next 36 months and plan to enter other sectors in a planned and phased manner. We have had initial discussions with few thought leaders from Logistics, Security – facilities, school and public transport, HR and BPO domains, and the interest that has been generated is quite encouraging and we are confident of success.

Uday: There must have been great lessons during this tremendous entrepreneurial journey. Can you share a few from your experience?
Raghuram: Yes, definitely it has been an experience with wonderful lessons. However, I would like to emphasise on these:
- <u>Think Big</u>. Do not hesitate to put your idea forward and take opinion of others. It's okay to think big and fail rather than have regrets later.
- <u>Seek Help</u>. One cannot know everything. Seek help in time before making costly mistakes. You may probably get only one shot and making your product successful. Complement your skill sets with that of your team members.
- <u>Do Not Stop</u>. Success is built on failures. products failing to perform as desired or first investor rejection are to be seen only as learning for a better future outcome.

Not only have I learnt lessons from my own short journey so far, I have also learnt from observing others. I would thus like to pass on these learnings to the budding entrepreneurs, as well as the job seekers:
- <u>Start the Transition Process Early</u>. Ideally, we should start the transition to civil at least two years before the D Day. These two years should be spent on researching on corporate life by extensive interaction with veterans and internet sources. Certain key issues being:
    - How corporates are structured
    - What are the different verticals and their roles
    - What kind of jobs can I expect with my current skill sets – you could also examine the career graph of veterans with profiles similar to yours. A good place to do this is on LinkedIn.
    - What qualifications/certifications can one acquire to get a role that is of interest. and work to obtain those certifications as well to remain relavant! One could also use this time to prepare for competitive exams like GMAT/GRE.

- Preparation of a good CV- interact with veterans on how to use 'civilian' language to describe our expertise and experience.
- Build a nest egg to cater for at least six to eight months of your expenses. It would take at least that much time to get a good job. This is especially important for short service commission officers.

- <u>Have a Mentor</u>. This helps greatly in understanding industry requirements and how to navigate phases of insecurity and lack of clarity. I have been fortunate to have the guidance of stellar veterans like Col Pravir Mishra, who has an amazing industry knowledge and experience.

- <u>Networking</u>. Importance of networking cannot be understated. Most jobs in the senior levels are through reference and having a good network helps.

- <u>MNC vs Others</u>. While working in a MNC certainly is more glamourous than working in a relative unknown/MSME, in my opinion the role and responsibilities are important in the long term. In my case, I learnt about every facet of running a company just by virtue of being part of the senior leadership. This helped me greatly in my current venture.

- <u>Role vs Remuneration</u>. Preferable to choose a role which provides greater learning value and long-term growth over high paying yet mundane jobs which can be easily automated in future.

Lastly, and perhaps the most important lesson I have learnt is to have confidence in yourself. Faujis definitely have what it takes to excel in the corporate!

Uday: So, what advice would you like to give to the fellow ForceNet members who want to take up similar entrepreneurship?
Raghuram: Believe in yourself and collaborate with someone who has complementary skills required to execute ideas.

Next is to have clear idea on how the idea is going to generate revenue for the investors.

We had once approached an acquaintance during our initial days for advice on our product and he thought our idea was too radical and couldn't not be executed! We never got disheartened and persisted with our idea and it has paid off !

Uday: Any important projects undertaken by you over these years?
Raghuram: The last year or so has been spent on product development, collation, and analysis of the immense volume of data and refining our product. Though we are still in our infancy, we do have firm LOI from several reputed schools for our product.

In addition, we are also in advanced stages of discussions with two State governments for employing this product in Government run schools.

We expect to be fully engaged with these projects over the next 12 months.

Uday: Do you have any other hobbies or interests, which you pursue passionately? And how?

Raghuram: I am an avid aeromodeller. I have a huge collection of scaled aircraft models that I love to build during weekends. Apart from reading books, I find this hobby to be extremely rejuvenating mentally.

Uday: Sir, it has been really wonderful to interact with you, and learn about the sacrifices you have made, and the courage you have shown to take all the challenges head on. Your journey should definitely be motivating many amongst us, to kindle our self-belief, and strive to achieve what we are passionate about.

Raghuram: Thanks a ton, Uday. It was also motivating for me to recollect my journey. I definitely hope that it comes up as a guiding lamp for someone.

Capt Uday K Shriwas was commissioned into the Corps of Signals, and served in various theaters during his service for five years, including in a newly raised RR Battalion. Thereafter he has worked with many renowned Companies, and is now the Relationship Leader with Yes Bank Ltd.

Amit Dalvi
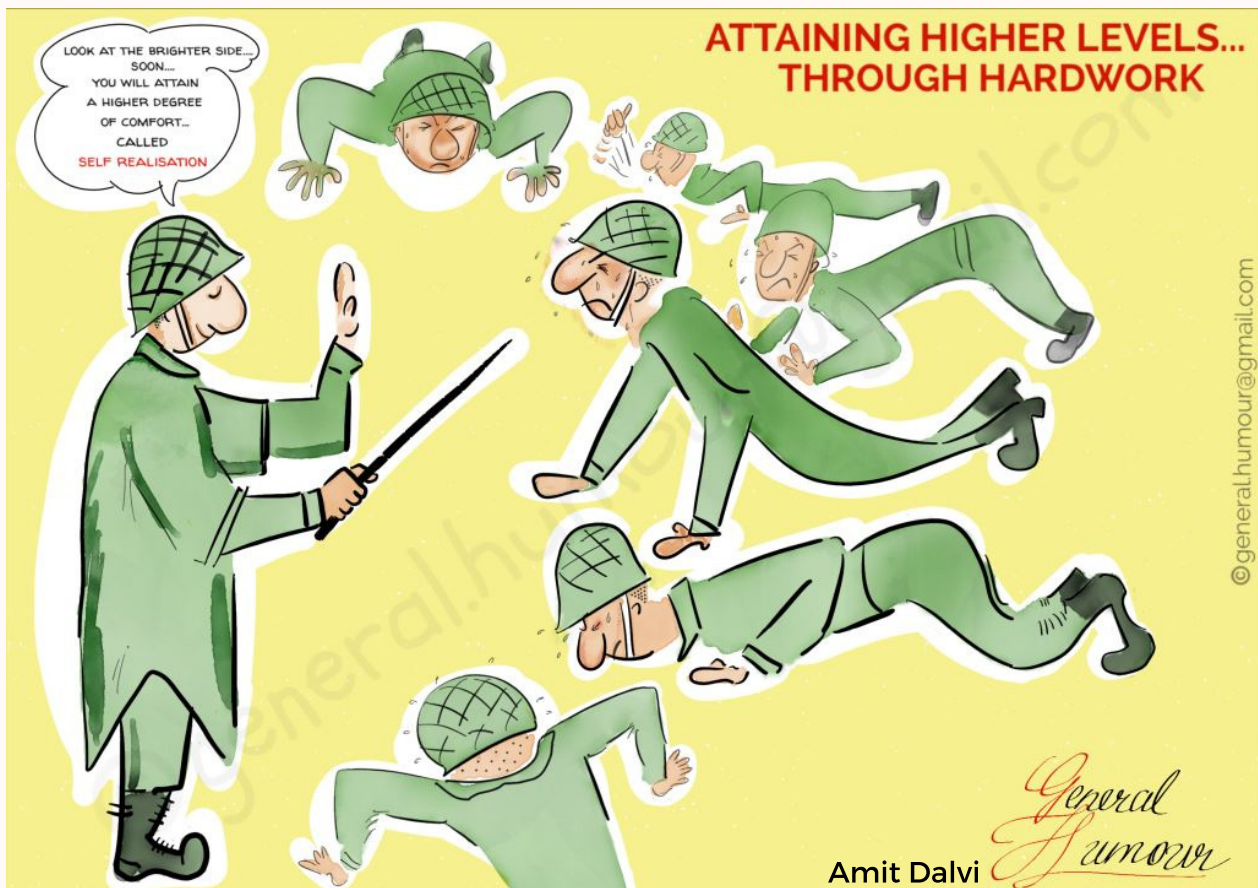
Expatriate Insights

In this series we plan to showcase the achievements of the members of Forces Network who have settled abroad and carved a niche for themselves through hard work, grit and determination. The aim is to bring to fore the mechanics of such transitions, and thereby quell the apprehensions of the larger community in the Network. Learning from each other would help us exploit our true potential in any part of the World. And, it could be beneficial for our families too.

BY BIDISHA PANDEY

Col Akash Ghosh is an alumnus of the prestigious Indian Military Academy and got commissioned into the Corps of Signals in 1985. On completion of his tenure in the Army, he worked for Tulip IT Services, followed by Ericsson, and is presently the Chief Technology Officer (Passive Infrastructure) at Globacom at Lagos, Nigeria since 2011.

Bidisha: What were the highlights of your tenure in the Indian Army ?

Akash: I was fortunate to be part of the Indian Armed Forces and to serve with some of the finest soldiers. My experiences in the Army were varied and unique but the common thread was the sense of fulfilment and accomplishment that each of those stints provided me. My most memorable tenures include the one at Siachen where surviving each day in those harsh conditions was an achievement, the one at Binnaguri when we helped in recovery of families with limited resources during the Bhutan floods, undergoing the full commando course at NSG Delhi and training with the first batch of MARCOS, my deputation to Victor Force Rashtriya Rifles during the Kargil war and finally getting the opportunity to work at DRDO under the exemplary guidance of late president Dr A P J Abdul Kalam.

Bidisha: Did you have any concrete plans as to what exactly you wished to do post retirement? How did you prepare yourself for the second innings?

Akash: Yes, while I retired in 2007, I got the first offer by Motorola in 1995! Telecommunication sector was booming and therefore I had no doubts about moving out and making it big in the Telecom industry. Interestingly, I did the Project Management Professional certification in the year 2000, when very few people were aware of it, and it was none other than the great Dr A P J Abdul Kalam who motivated me to do it during my attachment at DRDO. Later, I did the pre-release course from Management Development Institute, Gurgaon in 2007 and joined Tulip IT services.

Bidisha: Please share the major highlights of your corporate journey so far.

Akash: My first stint was with Tulip IT services. I looked after sales, operations, manufacturing and business development and we had set up ATM Machines for Barclays in the entire North region. Tulip, I would say, was ahead of even Reliance during that time. My next corporate experience was with Ericsson and we were given the responsibility of Idea 2G roll out in six circles of North India, which we accomplished in record time, and were awarded for the same. 3G acceptance trials were going on at that time. In 2011, I moved to Lagos, Nigeria to work for Globacom. In the initial few years, I worked closely with the sales team to identify problem areas and worked out solutions to fix issues and liaise with vendors for better and timely supply. I gradually made my place in the organization and today I am proud to be the Chief Technology Officer at Globacom. The biggest highlight of my journey in the corporate sector has been the way I have been able to successfully marry and align what I learnt in the Armed Forces with the demands of the corporate world.

I feel proud that I have been able to carry on with the traditions of Defense in my corporate environment as well. So, 'dining in' and 'dining out' are part of our team in Globacom as well. Celebrations of birthday and anniversaries are also part of the tradition being followed, where ladies and children too are part of this family. Fortunately, we have an 14 defense officer in my team.

Celebration of a social event with extended family, at Lagos (Nigeria)

Bidisha: What were the major challenges you faced after moving to Nigeria?

Akash: It is important to understand the pulse of a country to live comfortably in it. I picked up books about Nigeria to understand the culture and the people there. I made an effort to gel with everyone and it worked. Today, Nigeria feels like home.

Bidisha: A lot of officers aspire to move abroad post retirement. Do you think moving abroad is always a good decision?

Akash: Like everything else, moving abroad is a decision one makes, based on personal circumstances. However, it is always a good idea to earn in dollars and spend in rupees. At present, everyone is aware of Africa's potential and the huge business opportunity available in this region. Growth is inevitable. While moving to a more developed region like US or UK may help you earn in higher currency, but you may often get paid less as compared to their own people for the same job. In Africa, it is different, Indians are paid more than locals and treated with utmost respect making it a very lucrative option. That said, every single decision will come with its own set of pros and cons as per one's view of life, and moving abroad is another such decision point.

While at NSG

Last day in uniform with driver in most informal way

Bidisha: What would be your advice to officers who are preparing to switch to the corporate sector?

Akash: First of all, shed your rank. Understand that your work is your identity in the corporate sector and first names are the best names. There is a need to unlearn and relearn new methodologies and ways of working, please be open to absorb it. Keep your communication channels open, talk to people, network and understand the environment and its needs. Lastly, skill enhancement is extremely important. Invest in yourself and try to gain as much knowledge as you can before you take the plunge.
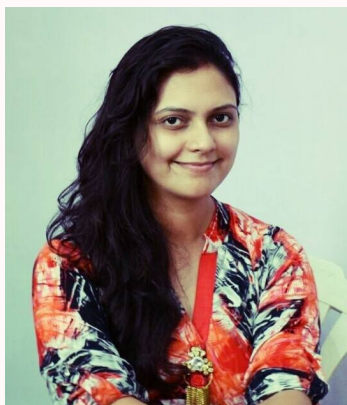
__Bidisha Pandey__ is a blogger who believes every individual has a story and a lot can be learned from every story. More stories and interviews by her can be read on her blog site www.sassyweekender.com

Women Power

Spouses of Defence Officers have immense potential as individuals. While many of them have already established themselves as successful independent entities, a very large number still has to recognise and exploit their inherent hidden capabilities and worth. In this series we plan to showcase the achievements of such spouses of the members of Forces Network who have carved a niche for themselves through hard work, grit and determination, so as to provide adequate motivation to the others.

BY RANVIR SINGH

Kanishkaa Rahul Pandey is a well known name in fitness industry since 22 years. She is certified and trained in the field industry, and is a women's health and wellness specialist. She has obtained more than 20 National and International degrees and certifications in different verticals in this field. As CEO of Ikan Activewear, she has her own line of sportswear for women, scientifically designed to ease workout. She is also a consistent writer for national and local dailies, and also features on various TV and digital channels. Her programs are also available on Fitvit channel on YouTube.

Ranvir: Please tell us about yourself and what you do, and how you started ?

Kanishkaa: I am a fitness specialist with 21 certifications and degrees to my credit with more than 22 years of experience in the field of fitness. My Fitness Company, 'iKan-Ignite the Power Within', helps women to get fit - mind, body and spirit through LIVE online fitness classes. I am trained in various forms of fitness like cardio health, strength training, body conditioning, sports as medicine, hormonal health, weight management, advanced dietetics and nutrition, pre and post natal health, meditation techniques, Qi Gong and several more.

Fitness is not just about working your body. It's as much about working on your mind and spirituality. As we connect to who we are, we evolve. We, at iKan Fitness use a comprehensive approach to work on all the verticals of health of each individual who connects with us, so that our students can get sustained fitness at any age and stage of life. We have students from all over the world connecting with us. Low impact, intermediate and advanced levels are taught in live classes daily.

I also have a Fitness Sportwear line wherein we manufacture sportswear for women. The idea is the provide world class yet cost effective training and sportswear to women. I also give programs on TV and write for newspapers about health and wellness, and I have the fauji connection too, being married to and Air Force officer.

Ranvir: What is it that inspired you to embark on this journey of Fitness and Healthy Lifestyle?

Kanishkaa: When I was 17, I had hormonal imbalances and my weight shot up to 87 kgs. I had no clue why it was happening but I was eating unhealthy food and craved for sugar all the time. I was in the comfort zone of not knowing what I was doing to myself till one day in an intercollegiate competition while trying to sit on a chair, the chair broke. Everyone laughed at me and that day I decided, I am never going to feel this way about myself ever again in my life. That was my turning point in my life, and the start of this journey.

Ranvir: Did you have this passion even before marriage, or was it something that got ignited after marriage?

Kanishkaa: Marriage instilled in me stronger concepts of courage, dedication and discipline. Rahul, my husband would be away on temporary duties and rescue operations and it made me more independent. Sometimes in life, when being strong is the only option, you break the glass ceiling. My husband often says, "Sometimes to change your life, you need to take a leap out of the comfort zone. So when in doubt or in a non productive situation, that is exactly what I do...TAKE A LEAP OF FAITH...by following my instincts as if there is nothing to lose.

Ranvir: Has the life in the defence environment had any influence in your decision to pursue this profession, and have you had any related professional training?

Kanishkaa: Yes, initially I would train people at my studio. After marriage and one posting after the other I got to train several different people across the country including lady officers, doctors and home makers from the defence family. I also give diet consultations to defence officers with specific requirements like weight loss, marathon running, cycling etc. Now since we are online, our reach is all over India and abroad too, for people both in Civil and Defence life.

Ranvir: Would you like to share the details of your services, and your marketing strategy?

Kanishkaa: We at iKan, have two sections which are very close to my heart and the only reason for them was because I am extremely passionate about them.

One is our live online fitness classes which has workouts and meditation as part of the one hour and fifteen minutes daily class. The students are given customised diet plans as per their health conditions, fitness levels and goals for their health, and monitoring of food intake is done diligently.

The online class includes various forms of workout and meditations like cardio, kick boxing, tabata training, stability balls, stepper training, circuit training, weight training, Qi-gong, kundalini activation, chakra meditation and so on.

FORCES
NETWORK
THE NETWORK THAT WORKS

We are strict about techniques and hell bent on making sure that students don't get any injuries. We send the routine that is planned for the day, one night prior, along with information on required equipment like weights, stability balls, steppers etc. I personally explain techniques of workouts every single day for five minutes before starting the workouts and personally monitor all online students while I workout with them. In each batch, we also give workout videos to students who are unable to attend live classes. The idea is to make workout a lifestyle not a task.

Second is our sportswear line. We created this line with a lot of love to ensure that the determined people who workout, should have high quality sportswear at affordable prices. Sometimes exercising can be tough. We provide world class sweat wicking fabrics that are suitable for all skin types and are designed to support their body during workouts and even during leisure activities. For example our high waist tights support back and abdominal region to enhance workouts and facilitate jumping etc. This is highly beneficial, if you have a back condition or if you are exercising post partum. It looks great too. We have kept our rates under Rs 999/- as we want people to enjoy our wide range of sportswear with a smile. Wearing different and interesting outfits can be a motivation to many women. We are small as a company right now but we are slowly moving forward. We will be getting into online retailing very soon.

A class in progress at the studio

Ranvir: How has the journey been so far, and any stories of transformation you wish to share?
Kanishkaa: The journey has been amazing. when I see the transformations in people as they reduce 10, 20, 30 even 40 kgs, looking fresh and feeling peaceful in their minds, that's when I feel all the hard work has paid off. we are very goal oriented and there is no right or wrong goal. My AIM and PURPOSE in life is to help people reach their fitness goals with joy.

The reason for that is, as we work towards a destination, we give precious irreversible time to it. While we are busy working, time is passing by and so is life. the journey has

to be as joyful as the destination. I wish to see people being comfortable and happy in their bodies. I hope to make them connect with themselves as they live through this wonderful life. There are so many transformations that it's difficult to pick one but some before and after pictures may help to get an idea of our work.

Transformation of body and mind.......of self and students

Ranvir: Where do you operate from, what is your reach, and how do you tackle the challenges usually associated with this business since there are a lot of players in this field?

Kanishkaa: We are located in Ghaziabad right now, as the location is helpful to us for the manufacturing set up. We can operate from anywhere in the world as we are completely digital now. We are a business with heart. For us the transformations and happiness that we bring about in people associated with us is the greatest reward.

We provide a training which is so unique and comprehensive that there are very few people who will have such in-depth knowledge, patience and dedication to carry it through. We do not think of competition or what anyone else is doing. We incorporate the best of everything in our trainings. The goal is to get the best results for each client.

Ranvir: Any other challenges have you faced so far, on the way to establishing yourself?

Kanishkaa: Challenges are part of living. we encounter man power issues and sometimes financial issues too, to sustain the business and quality of services. But we are not the ones to compromise on quality come what may, and that gives iKan character. We just work harder and find ways around our limitations.

Ranvir: What are your plans for the future?

Kanishkaa: I believe in "Fit Women, Fit India" which is our pivotal initiative. I intend to make one woman fit from every household. This way their families will be fit too and the result will be a fit nation.

I have been on the wrong side of fitness for long so I know what it is to have a body you don't understand and relate to. I know what it is to experience pains and aches and to be on medication and to bear the side effects. I want to help people feel light in their bodies, connected to themselves, igniting the power within, to stay strong and peaceful with an improved quality of life.

Ranvir: How did COVID-19 situation affect your own fitness, your business and also your students?

Kanishkaa: We were more used to connecting with people on a personal basis. When Covid happened, that was not an option but we kept our promise of personalized training with constant on-screen and personal monitoring though calls and conversations. We want to bring health to people's homes and that is our major criteria and Covid helped us to learn new ways of doing so. After the initial struggle, we realized, it was a blessing in disguise as we got the opportunity to connect with people all over the world. It has definitely been an amazing learning experience.
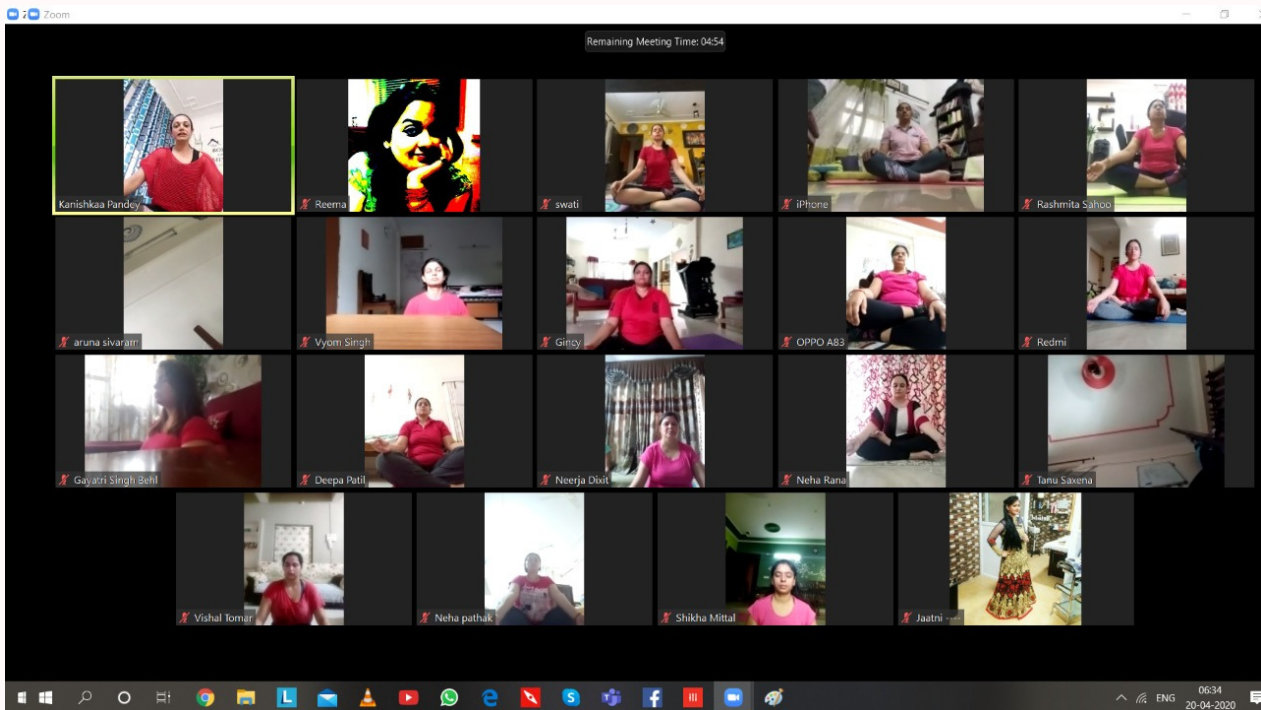
Conduct of online training classes

Ranvir: What advice do you have, especially for spouses of defence officers, who desire or aspire to be similarly independent?

Kanishkaa: We are very lucky and honoured to be married to such brave men and to be part of the defence family. Just like any achievement comes with a price, we too have a price to pay. Women may not get opportunities or conducive environments very often to pursue their passions.

It becomes more difficult with our moving from one place to another so often, but every posting has something unique to offer and I suggest making the best use of the resources available at the time. We do not know what tomorrow may bring but pursuing your passions to the best of your capacity every single day helps. Each baby step is important.

Now-a-days technology has broken insurmountable barriers, so we can optimize our work further if and when applicable to your field of interest. Balance is the key. It's not like we have forever, but every moment is an opportunity to make a change for good, however small it may be, but a change is what matters ultimately.

Ranvir: Do you have any presence on the social media, or on the web, where people can reach you and also learn about the wonderful work you are doing?
Kanishkaa: Yes, we do have our social media presence, where details related to our work can be seen, and become a part of our dream.

Our Instagram handle is https://bit.ly/3dNjOV1, the Facebook page can be reached at https://bit.ly/3krxqXm, and my fitness videos also feature on the FitVit channel on YouTube.

Ranvir: Thank you, Kanishkaa. It was wonderful to learn about your efforts to raise the fitness quotient in the society, and to contribute to the mental and physical health of the individuals. We wish you all the best for your future endeavours.
Kanishkaa: Thank you so much for your good wishes, as we definitely welcome them to fulfill our mission goals. I hope that the reader will be motivated to focus on their fitness goals, and be a part of the healthy society.

Lt Col Ranvir Singh, a product of Rashtriya Military School and and an alumnus of National Defence Academy, was commissioned into 2nd Battalion The Bihar Regiment in June 1988. After hanging his boots in Jan 2009, he has contributed immensely as a Corporate Warrior for last 10 years to recognised organisations like IL&FS Technologies Ltd, National Institute of Bank Management of RBI, and MMTC-PAMP India Pvt Ltd. Apart from being a Security & Safety specialist and an Administration expert, he has a keen interest in the field of ever evolving Information Technology, and a flair for writing. He can be reached at ranvirsm@gmail.com

Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.
Zora Neale Hurston

Stars On The Horizon

Children of Defence Officers have the capability to excel in various fields, owing to their extensive exposure resulting from frequent transfers and change of stations. They possess very high adaptability skills, and immense potential as individuals. In this series we plan to showcase the achievements of such children of the members of Forces Network who are on the path to carve a niche for themselves through hard work, grit and determination, so as to provide adequate motivation to the others.

BY UDAY K SHRIWAS

Surbhi Rathore is the CEO and Co-founder of Symbl.ai. Symbl is bringing to life her vision for a programmable platform that empowers developers and businesses to build unique conversational experiences without the hassle of upfront training or building their in-house data science expertise. She co-founded Symbl almost 2 years ago and backed by Amazon and a Techstars alum. Symbl raised an early-stage venture round of $6.5M and deployed capital to grow a team of tech enthusiasts to 30 people primarily distributed between India and Seattle. She comes with experience from technical and customer-obsessed roles in both startups and enterprises such as Nevis Networks and Amdocs. Before co-founding Symbl, she worked in the Conversational AI space with a focus on delivering value to Telecommunication users. She is an advocate for Women in AI with a personal mission to inspire more women to work in Data Science. In her free time, she loves to travel and spend time with her remote and distributed family.

Uday: Please tell us something about yourself, what you do, and how you started your professional career? What is the inspiration behind your Venture you are presently engaged in?

Surbhi: I graduated from University of Pune, India as an electronics engineer and joined a startup to work in software development right after my graduation. I moved from Network Security to the Telecommunications industry when I switched to work for Amdocs, and got an opportunity to work on products that helped optimize conversations at scale, specifically contact centres. I gradually transitioned to work on opportunities that involved a higher understanding of customer pain points and implementation to optimize customer experience - and that triggered my first move to working on a Conversational AI product. Being an integral part of the journey to launch the product to finding first few customers, I was inspired by how human-machine interactions could help automate many redundant tasks and make a big impact for larger operations. However, I was a strong believer that no matter how many chatbots or virtual assistants exist in our future years, the element of human to human interaction will always be special, and we need the AI ecosystem to provide for technologies and products that makes humans smarter in their interactions.

During 2018, when my co-founder and I, who was then also working on the same product in Amdocs, see a unique pattern emerging in the communication products - using ML/NLP to provide recommendations and coaching to humans as a native experience in products without the use of wake words like "Alexa, Siri". The market understanding together with our hypothesis and the vision of how we saw the world differently - all lead to Symbl, which was then called Rammer.

Symbl is bringing the same vision to life, and I am honored to lead the company in such a time like never before where digital communications have become critical to our daily lives and ML can be used to convert this goldmine of data for generating shared knowledge, and save time, thus giving superpowers to knowledge workers.

From working in Amdocs, picture in Vodafone, Italy.......To joining Techstars Seattle 2019 to start Symbl, with co-founder CTO Toshish Jawale

Uday: Has the Army life had any influence in your professional life?

Surbhi: Being the daughter of an Army officer has been a big part of me and my journey. It has shaped me to be the leader and entrepreneur that I am today. Perseverance and adaptability are some of the core values because of which giving up was never an option. It is the same values that shape our company with a high quotient of looking at our team as family. We are proud of the Symbl family that has come to existence over a short span of 2 years and cherish both - ups and downs in the journey building memories for life. This is what I experienced in my upbringing as an Army kid and I am proud that it is a part of me in whatever I do.

Uday: What role will your solutions play in the life of the end user?

Surbhi: Symbl is an API platform for developers and businesses that are looking to add intelligence to their products and supercharge productivity for their end users. As a company we strive to provide value first to our developers and builders - to provide them a scalable conversational tech infrastructure so that they can focus on building experiences and get to market fast, without spending time in data analysis and model building. The other aspect of our value proposition depends on the use case our

builders are creating in the ecosystem, and that could range from reducing average call handling time in call centres, increasing more sales, reducing on-boarding time for new agents and most important amplifying customer experience.

Uday: Would you like to share the details of your products, and your marketing strategy?

Surbhi: Symbl is a conversational intelligence platform that enables businesses to analyze voice, text and video communication data contextually, without the need of building any upfront ML models or using wake words like Alexa, Siri. It is a passive embedded intelligence that can be integrated in any product to provide real time actionable insights and generate shared knowledge.
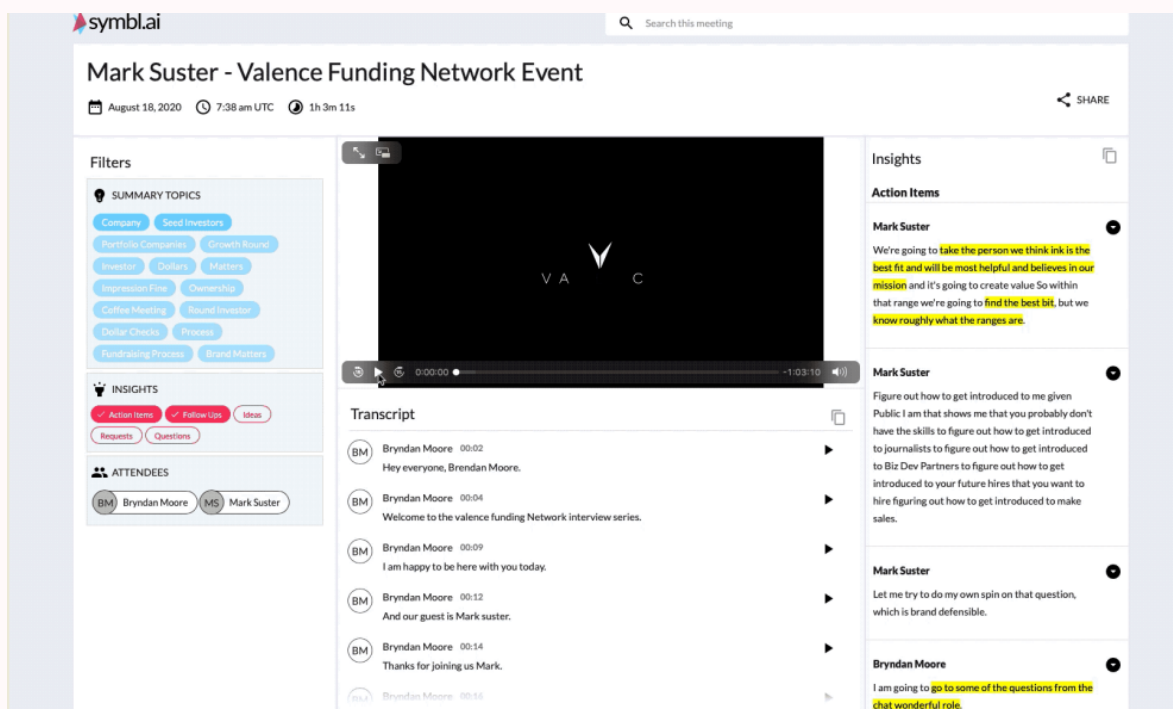
Quick screenshot of how a pre-built video summary looks like of a webinar

Uday: What is your team like, and how did you build it?

Surbhi: Symbl has a hybrid remote team split nearly half between US and India. We started with an early team in India in Pune and then expanded to other regions as we raised the previous rounds of venture capital in the US. We looked for early hires that shared similar vision and wanted to solve one of the most fundamental and challenging problems to solve to build a sophisticated ML engine that could understand human to human conversations at scale - and I am really proud that Arjun, Sekhar, along with my co-founder Toshish still continue to remain as excited to scale the business as they were in laying the foundation. We hired primarily from Linkedin, referrals and angel.co, and have only recently got headhunter with us to help us scale. Even now I try to take the first call myself, finding culturally aligned tech enthusiasts have always been a big part of my role at Symbl and the one I love doing.

Uday: Any special learnings while you started building your business?

Surbhi: Getting into an accelerator program like Techstars in the first six months of

starting the company was by far the best decision as it helped us understand the foundations of building a business, and get connected to the right network of entrepreneurs, investors and advisors that really helped and supported us in our journey thus far. Techstars also helped us connect with the right people for figuring out visas and immigrations which is primarily one of the biggest roadblocks of Indian tech entrepreneurs when thinking about starting a company in the US.

The founding members at Pune, in 2018

Uday: Any other challenges have you faced so far, on the way to establishing yourself?

Surbhi: Like many other startups, we had challenges in bootstrapping the business, moving to the US to start the company, getting early hires and customers and raising venture capital, twice till now. I think these are some of the known challenges in the life of a startup founder and there is no right or wrong answer - but it's about what works for you.

Uday: And, how did you overcome these challenges?

Surbhi: Joining an accelerator program worked in our favour to get affiliated with the biggest brand name in the industry as a tech founder. We built our initial team in India and took being indian as a big advantage and that saved us not just early dollars but also made us active and running round the clock with a higher velocity. Raising venture capital early and not worrying about dilution, helped us with the validation, credibility and the capital needed to find product market fit. All of this would not have happened if we did not have early customers - we never hired a sales lead in the company until we raised our first round of venture capital - and it was all founder led sales. I think that gave us not just a thorough understanding of the pain points but

also developed a partnership and trust with early customers that goes beyond just revenues.

Cooking at the founders retreat at Techstars 2019 - Seattle, WA with co-founder of another startup in the batch of TS 2019

Uday: What are your plans for the future?

Surbhi: We recently closed additional $4.7M in venture capital that was backed with some key investors like Amazon, Crosscut, Jump Capital, Technexus and Flying Fish (again) - we are very excited about scaling our GTM, invest in building a developer first brand and in building the most accurate, comprehensive and scalable platform for businesses looking to analyze any conversation data.

Uday: How do you plan to tackle the challenges thrown at you in this COVID-19 situation?

Surbhi: COVID was particularly interesting! We launched our platform just 10 days before the pandemic kicked off globally and had no idea that the market we address would mature and grow overnight. It was exciting to see the growing need and demand of understanding conversation data in products and workflows. With all businesses working from home, or call centres moved to digital platforms - we had to scale the platform very quickly and had some challenges in ramping engineering hires in parallel to support growing customers. As a result, we had to quickly raise a round to support customers in the US and build engineering, support and success functions in Seattle and around. Fundraising was interesting as well, since 99% of conversations happened over Google Meet/Zoom/Phone - as result of which there were more meetings and things could move fast but we still haven't met our lead investors, so it's kind of different. I am so looking forward to going to LA and getting coffee with them. It feels a whole different world now.

Uday: What advice do you have, especially for Wards of defence officers, who desire or aspire to be entrepreneurs?

Surbhi: Just do it! Like how our dads, well most dads, teach us how to swim or ride a

horse or whatever. Jump at it and you will figure it out. You are so much more than you think of yourself, so don't let fear of the unknown hold you back.

With younger sister, another entrepreneur in the family, besides their mother

Uday: Which is the most important trait you think, to be a successful entrepreneur?
Surbhi: Combine data and intuition both to make decisions and build a strong EQ, you will need it before you know it.

Uday: As per you, what are the important do's and don'ts in the world of entrepreneurship?
Surbhi: Do's - try starting with a co-founder, its fun to share ups and downs with someone; find customers before you build the product; build content and community early. And, don't - underestimate the power of network. Don't - hire too many people in sales/marketing after your first round of financing, and until the first two years - only delegate functions to other people after you have done it yourself.

Choosing the path of either getting to early profitability and sustainability or investing capital for R&D and growth - depends on the type of business you are building, nothing is right or wrong, so choose what works best for you!

Uday: Would you like to talk about your other passions/ volunteer works/social engagements?
Surbhi: Love promoting women in tech and AI and so involved in a lot of such communities, I am also a strong believer in hiring people and not skills - and so collective mentorship and empowering others to find their true passion is what I am very determined to. I also love to travel and with my family distributed over different countries, I take remote collaboration very seriously.

Uday: Thanks, Surbhi. It was great to touch base with you. surely, more youngsters will gain strength after reading about your enterprising spirit and exploits.
Surbhi: My pleasure, Uday. As I stated earlier, my upbringing in the Army has a big role to play in all this.

Capt Uday K Shriwas *was commissioned into the Corps of Signals, and served in various theaters during his service for five years, including in a newly raised RR Battalion. Thereafter he has worked with many renowned Companies, and is now the Relationship Leader with Yes Bank Ltd.*

Knowledge Bank

Facial Recognition And Its Risks

BY SURESH CHANDRA

Within just a few decades, facial recognition has gone from being some staple of highly advanced security systems in movies to existing all around us and even in the palms of our hands. The technology has been implemented in several ways in our society. Some phones use facial recognition to grant access and some governments like China and the US are using facial recognition on databases like driver's licenses for a variety of reasons.

Then we have got fun things like Snapchat filters that utilize facial detection. Now there is a big difference between *facial detection* and *facial recognition*. With facial detection the computer is saying yep that's a face and with facial recognition the computer is saying yep that's your face.

Is facial recognition something to fear? In some ways COVID-19 gave us a reprieve on facial recognition – pretty hard to do facial recognition with masks and to be honest, one would probably be happy to use a mask on a regular basis as long as one can socially get away with it.
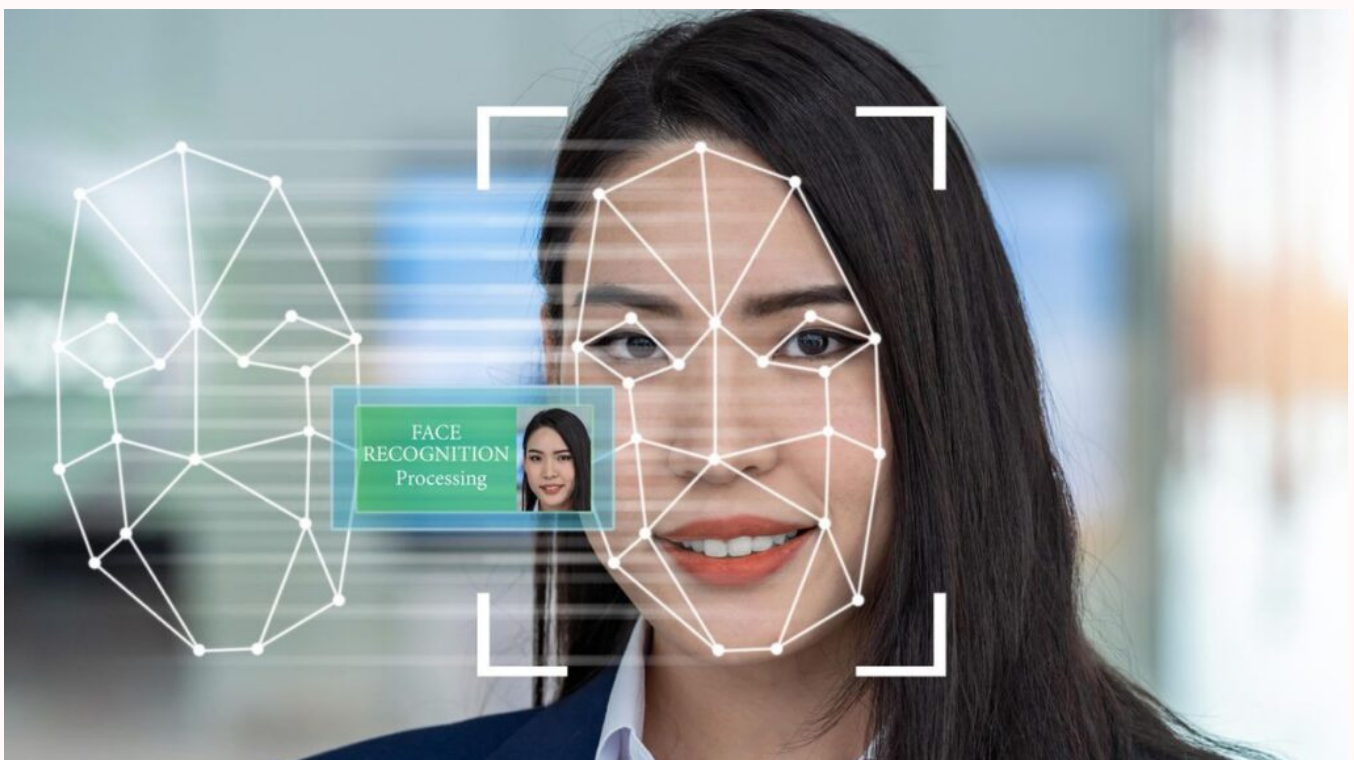
Unfortunately, majority of us may not know the implications of facial recognition technology and how this is being used/misused. One may not like the Orwellian references but knowledge about how it can be used against us will spring up many surprises.

What is Facial Recognition

Facial recognition is a technology that is capable of extracting a human face from a digital image or a video frame grab and matching it against a database of faces to verify or recognise the individual.

The two main tasks performed by the system are:
- Verification - Comparing a new input face to a known identity (one-to-one analysis) – for example, unlocking of smartphones with facial identification
- Recognition - Comparing an input face to a database of multiple face identities (one-to-many analysis) – generally done by law enforcement / surveillance systems. (An interesting read is the INTERPOL Face Recognition System).

How Does it Work

The ability to confirm identity is something our brains pick up on pretty quickly when we are young, but it is actually a pretty complex problem for computers. When we think of a human face, we probably think of a pretty basic set of features - a face has eyes, a nose, and a mouth. But obviously there is more to a face than just these features. In fact, to get a good idea of how complex this problem can get one can draw a bunch of different simple faces and you will quickly notice that they differ in a lot of factors like the width of the nose the distance between the eyes the shape in the size of the mouth and so on.
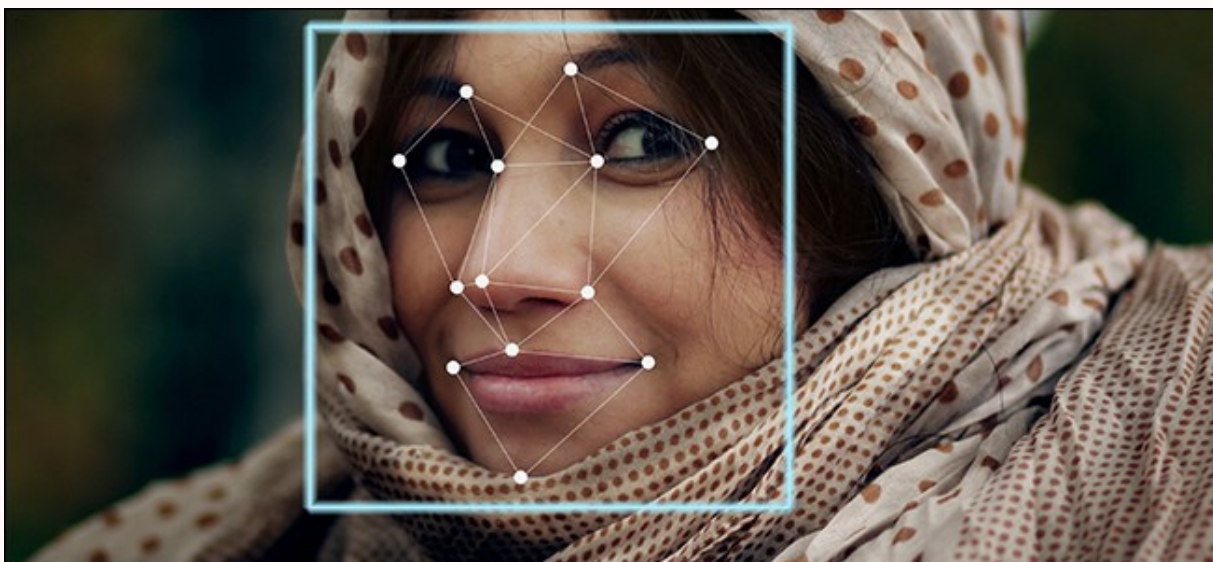
So far most facial recognition is done by looking at the proportions of your face relative to the position of your eye's ears nose mouth and sometimes eyebrows and chin. There are various algorithms for doing this. We can refer to this technology as *2D facial recognition* since the analysis is performed on a flat image acquired from either is picture or a video frame grab. Some facial recognition technologies evaluate up to 80 factors on the face to help identify unique features and ultimately identities. These features get to be pretty detailed observing things like the depth of eye sockets, the height of cheekbones, and the shape of the jawline. Most of it is done by AI machine

learning. If we do not want to write code for facial recognition, we can send the images to [Amazon AWS](#) and they will process them. So today it is easy for any app to do facial recognition through the use of Amazon AWS.

Another way of doing facial recognition is by doing contour mapping off the face, for example that is done by iOS and Pixel 4 phone facial recognition. This is done by a combination of laser and infrared. We can refer to this kind of facial recognition as *3D facial recognition.*

Accuracy

There have been many complaints in the press about the accuracy of facial recognition. For example, it was tested against the African American members of Congress and some of them were identified as criminals by this facial recognition. The facial recognition system employed was claimed to have flaws with dark skinned faces. For obvious reasons it means that the AI cannot demarcate the position of the eyes versus nose and mouth in dark skinned people. This will be true in the dark and unlit areas well.

Facebook also uses this kind of recognition logic meaning eyes nose and mouth alignment. But because of large volumes of data, the AI is able to capture all the different angles of a face in a much better way than its competitors. Most estimates peg the accuracy of Facebook facial recognition to be around 98%. There is no doubt that Google and Amazon will strive to reach that same level of accuracy for those of us feeding its AI via Google Photos and other apps. *2D facial recognition* is pretty accurate these days.

As far as 3D facial recognition is concerned, it does not have a large enough database yet. The technology is slated to overcome the short comings of 2D facial recognition due to is ability to used depth details of the face. In fact, the iOS phones are able to validate faces even with sunglasses and even if the face is partially obscured by inanimate objects.

Exposure to Everyday Facial Recognition

Facial recognition is being done automatically in more places and apps than we actually realize, and this database is growing like crazy. Does this have any major effect on our privacy?

Most people are not aware that even common day-to-day activities are tied to facial recognition and we are not talking about facial recognition for secure entry to your phone. Simple events like going to the supermarket will subject us to multiple instances of facial recognition. That is how bad it is.

Jogging around our neighbourhood, taking selfies on the phone – seemingly

innocuous events include facial recognition. This is very bothersome because we expect facial recognition when we are going to the airport or visiting a government facility, but do we expect the same while taking a walk in our own neighbourhood. *The problem is that most of us are unwilling participants in the facial recognition infrastructure and many of us who are aware of the technology cannot do anything about it.*
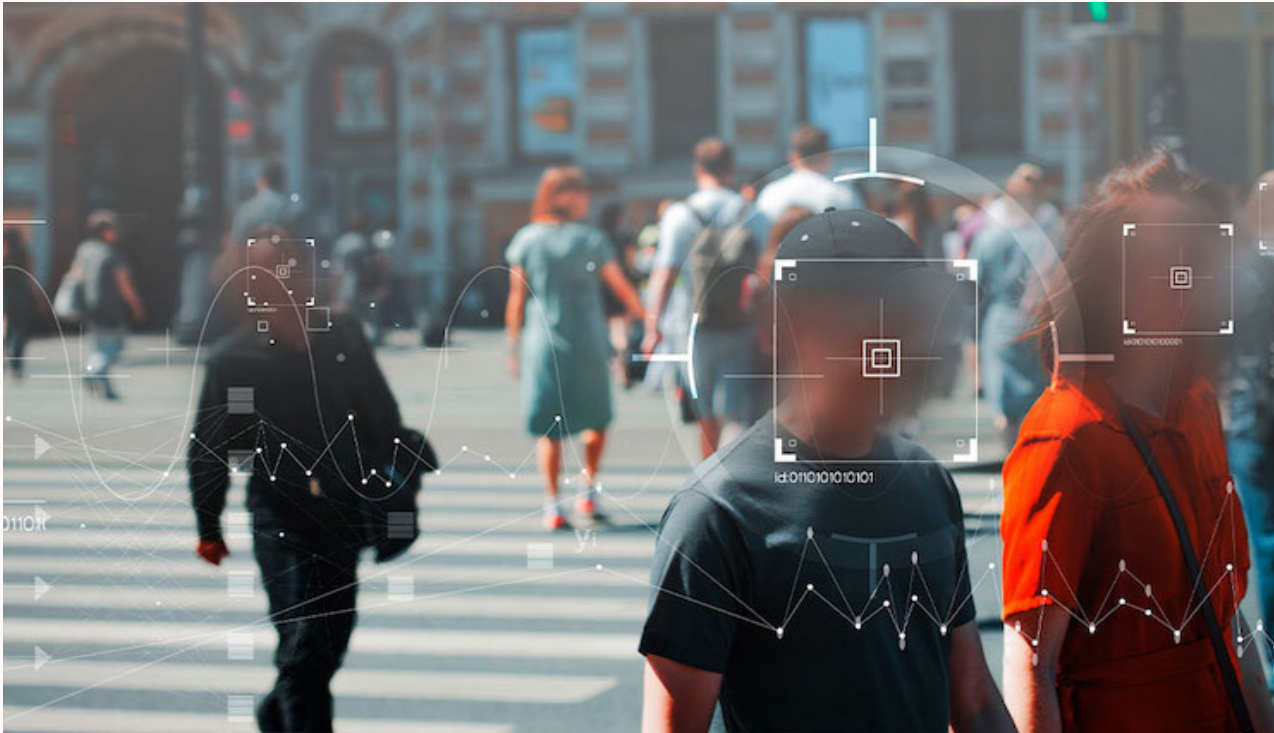
In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to inform you where facial recognition occurs including unexpected places, then I will try and explain about how it is evaded and finally I will explain why this is such a big deal. Why facial recognition will affect our privacy and ultimately our freedom.

So, what are these *unexpected instances of facial recognition*?

In any modern city there are street cameras actively taking facial recognition shots. You will get traffic challans with your face prominently recognized based on your driver's license. I have witnessed these traffic challans in action and in some geographies, they actually state that they use facial recognition. They also use cameras to actually track both your face and your license plate.

A well-publicized event was when the LAPD used facial recognition for *pre-crime tracking* of people associating with gang members. It was done through a contract with [Palantir](#), which did the pre-crime analysis of the profiles of people living in gang areas.

Google explicitly states that they do facial recognition on your photos in Google Photos, so, if you upload your photos there, it will behove you to be aware of this. Apple also does facial recognition of photos sent to iCloud. They want to suggest

photos to your friends, that is their excuse.

Facebook is the world leader in facial recognition. Just being on Facebook exposes you to constant facial recognition tied to your Facebook account. If you have not been hiding in a cave, then perhaps your face has been tagged in Facebook. Tagging, as you know is suggested by Facebook, when they recognize someone as being a friend. Obviously, they can recognize everyone, even if they are not a friend. If you walked around Disneyland and a family next to you takes a photo, if you are in the shot and they post it to Facebook, then Facebook will know you were in Disneyland at that exact time in with your accurate location. This is pretty insidious.

Here is another new way we do not even think about. Ring cameras (Home Security Cameras). Buying them is a dumb idea if you are a privacy focused person. Do you understand what you signed up for when you got Ring? *It means it is okay with you to upload your videos to Amazon for facial recognition and have those videos be available for use by law enforcement or anybody else with a government contract like Palantir.* What is worse is when one jogs around the block ring cameras of the neighbours are basically spying and sending information about the location of joggers and passers-by to third parties and you cannot do anything about it

Do you know that Ring is promoted by law enforcement because of this particular availability of videos that they get access to? The promotion, by the way, is an actual contract Amazon tells them that they can get access to the videos as long as they promote Ring. This keeps getting worse, our lack of ability to deny permission to facial recognition is very frustrating anytime there is a camera. We now have to worry where are the newest cameras being added.

About the *autonomous vehicles* – new 2021 model cars will be partially self-driving

now, not just Tesla, but many models will have this kind of capability to do any kind of autonomous driving. It means, lots of cameras on the car, in fact, a car like a Tesla will be driving around and basically enable the possibility of tracking any person on the street that was spotted by the car camera for safety reason. Tesla will definitely have a record of every person it encounters on the streets. Where does that video go?

Here is another one, that you may not think about. If I can take a picture of you, I can use a *Reverse Image Search* to find out who you are on the Internet. Can you imagine the access of Google and Facebook employees – they have access to facial recognition from Google Photos and Facebook, which they can reverse image search. Facebook, by the way, refined its facial recognition because many of us have uploaded thousands of pictures on Facebook so its AI keeps learning.

For the moment, we can get away from some aspects of 2D facial recognition because of COVID-19. If one blocks his/her nose and mouth, the facial recognition will not work or if one wears sunglasses. You can try it yourself; it is difficult even for a human to recognize people entirely from a face alone if they are wearing a mask. Usually if one cannot see the person's entire body, to add to the input, it is exceedingly difficult to recognise who it is with a masked face.

So, *what is the big deal with actually getting facially recognized through these automated means*?

Would you like to walk around with your name address and birth date and a permanent id attached to you at all times and big enough to read. Well, that is exactly what happens in facial recognition.

Back in 2013 or so a company in Russia decided to make an app with facial

recognition and simply by pointing your phone on anyone you can then look at their VK profile. The VK (short for its original name VKontakte meaning InContact) app is the Russian equivalent of Facebook. At the time with their limited tech, they were already 80 percent accurate finding somebody's face on VK. So, if you want to stalk some woman just take her picture then you will be able to find out all her info on VK using this app. At some point anyone with a large enough collection of photos either stolen from social media sites or the Internet can accomplish this.

Companies that already have a huge collection of social media data include Spokeo, Intelius and Acxiom to name a few. These companies collect all the identifiable information including your house, your car, your employment records, your legal records, arrests, divorces, lawsuits etc and this can be matched to a face. *This is with you not even being on the Internet.* You could be hiding on the Internet recently and your past will show up through these third-party databases and if these companies release an app with facial recognition matched to their databases – we will all be in the dock.

Doxing (real life stalking) will blow up big time and there will be no pseudo anonymity on the Internet any longer or creating a different persona on the Internet will be a thing of the past.

The other threat of course is with *government mass surveillance* and *Google/Facebook surveillance* – you will not need to be on the Internet – through the sources I mentioned earlier which includes self-driving cars and traffic cameras your every move will be known in profiled. Your participation in protests will be inhibited because your face will pop up in a database and get your profile. This is already an issue in dictatorship and countries with authoritarian governments.

Many places in the world have extremely dense camera systems. Cities like London and New York are already known for having lots of security cameras, but with the use of Ring cameras the governments are getting an expanded infrastructure for free. So, there is the capability now for so many players to know every place you have been to. Every time you visit the market your face is captured at a traffic intersection that you cannot avoid. Privacy focused people may have to map out locations of cameras on their route and will take the longer route to avoid them.

The possibility of misuse of facial recognition technology for mass surveillance by various entities including nation states and big tech is very real. Populations living in countries with a dictator/authoritarian leader can vouch of it, where one could be jailed for having a different idea. So, this is not theory. Imagine, if that dictator had

access to this information, he would make sure that his opponents disappear after he learns who they are. If you are a journalist trying to keep your source private like Edward Snowden, this is going to be extremely difficult. Your source could end up whacked or suicided.

These are the real impacts of the loss of privacy. When it comes to freedom fighting, a powerful and corrupt government could render it impossible when facial recognition is rampant. Active participation and mobilisation of opinion on the Internet is no longer important. It is a scary thought that there is no place to hide from facial recognition and what would become of some one who simply does not agree with someone powerful.

The newest attack which uses facial recognition is [Deepfake](#) someone could take your face and your voice and use the Deepfake app for the video and the [Adobe Audio Manipulator (VoCo)](#) app for voice and basically, they can duplicate you saying something else. Someone could come up with a video of people singing praises about Stalin or Hitler. It is scary.

In a future world, this will become worse – privacy will become non-existent in a world with extreme facial recognition. Combine that with your love of Alexa Echo and we are truly in a world without privacy. *Facial recognition is the final nail on the coffin.* The only way to stop this is for us to realise its impact and force our lawmakers to come up with laws that prevent the misuse of the technology.

It is really sad that back in the days before mobile phones people were extremely sensitive about being clicked without their permission – but the millennial generation has minimized this. Now with phones tracking your location, facial recognition and voice listening by Alexa/Siri happening 24/7, the future is truly scary. It is only a matter of time when some powerful person will misuse the technology like big brother in George Orwell's 1984.

We have to legislate new laws to prevent the misuse of the facial recognition infrastructure by our law enforcement and business enterprises. We have to come up with detailed policies and procedures to prevent this collection and abuse of facial recognition data because there is no technological way to stop it.

__Col Suresh Chandra__ was commissioned on 11 Jun 1988 in the 94 Field Regiment. He commanded 121 Light Regiment and superannuated from service on 30 Nov 2017. An MTech (CSE - IITD), he has been instrumental in the design and development of the ACCCS/Project Shakti. He was an instructor in School of Artillery and DS, JC Wing, Army War College. He has also served with the Wargaming Centre, SWC and was Col GS (Systems) Western Command. Post retirement he divides his time between mentoring underprivileged kids in Mathematics, Physics and Computer Science of Class XII level, and freelancing as a cyber security and data analytics expert. He is available at sureshchandra@protonmail.com

Artificial Intelligence Altering Facilities Ecosphere

BY RAJESH NAIR

In the year 2000 when I was working as a system administrator, managing Windows NT and UNIX servers the buzz words were Virtual reality, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotics. A subject of interest for all those who were working in the software lines in those days. The days were also covered in the fear of Robots and AI taking over all the jobs which would make a barren situation out there in market. Two decades later we are still in a novice state when we look at these industries. India, being the fastest growing economy with the second largest population in the world, has a significant stake in the AI revolution. Recognising AI's potential to transform economies and the need for India to strategise its approach was felt. The US published its AI report in December 2016; France published the AI strategy in January 2017 followed by a detailed policy document in March 2018; Japan released a document in March 2017; China published the AI strategy in July 2017; and U.K. released its industrial strategy in November 2017; NITI Aayog has also released National strategy for AI discussion paper and a National policy was defined in Jun 2018. A truly transformative nature of the technology, yet its in the nascent stage of its adoption worldwide.

Like most of the industrial and technological advancement that were born with the wars, AI was also born some time during the world war II. AI refers to the ability of machines to perform cognitive tasks like thinking, perceiving, learning, problem solving and decision making. Initially conceived as a technology that could mimic human intelligence, AI has evolved in ways that far exceed its original conception. With incredible advances made in data collection, processing and computation power, intelligent systems can now be deployed to take over a variety of tasks, enable connectivity and enhance productivity. As AI's capabilities have dramatically expanded, so have its utility in a growing number of fields.

What is Artificial intelligence (AI). The Oxford English Dictionary defines AI as, "the theory and development of computer systems able to perform tasks normally requiring human intelligence, such as visual perception, speech recognition, decision-making, and translation between languages. Integration of AI in newly developed smart cities and infrastructure could help to meet the demands of a rapidly urbanising population and providing them with enhanced quality of life. AI in Office Administration gets used in a variety of third-party integrations. Artificial intelligence (AI) is a beneficial tool for facilities management (FM) teams, that can save money, reduce energy usage, improve productivity, and help in many more aspects. Though it may take time for buildings to fully adopt this technology, the long-term benefits will far outweigh the negatives. But the road to this point is uncertain. Facility managers should educate themselves on the capabilities that AI can deliver while also considering how the technology could help with specific issues in their buildings. AI does have the tendency to be marketed as a panacea, but beyond this hype, there are real opportunities for improving building operations.

Let us look at how AI is looking at a disruptive change in the Facility Management eco-system.

Decrease Energy Usage: AI is completely changing the way some organizations cut costs on vital areas of operations like energy, HVAC, security, and other systems. This is possible through reinforcement learning, otherwise known as trial and error.

The AI algorithm analyses historical data and uses that information to attempt to build a neural network—or a collection of software or hardware designed to mimic that of a human mind—and teach it how to do something. In this case, it would be to improve the efficiency of a building. Take Google, for example. The tech giant has been using AI to monitor one of its data centres for the last few years, and the results are significant. Since letting the AI algorithm take over, they've seen savings of about 40% on powering the data center's cooling system.

Percentage-wise, businesses typically spend more money on energy resources – heating, cooling, ventilation, electricity, and water – than just about any other category of building management. While there are hundreds of ways to reduce energy consumption across facilities, AI provides a hands-off solution to major energy drains such as HVAC, refrigeration, and electricity. Using predictive analytics, AI-enabled tech can monitor and more efficiently manage energy usage in real time– for example, turning down the heat during periods of inactivity based on historical usage patterns (deduced from advanced models of a particular building's thermal characteristics or Internet of things (IoT) sensors that detect foot traffic).

Energy Monitoring, Measurement and Verification (M&V): M&V is a great example of AI, because it takes what can be a very complex set of calculations (creating a building's performance model) and automates them. Then, new variables, like weather and occupancy, can be used to provide energy consumption estimates using the same model. With enough data to observe the correlation between energy, weather, and

occupancy, an accurate model can be used to calculate one of these variables if the others are available. In the case of M&V, actual weather and occupancy can be used to estimate energy use under a pre-retrofit scenario, which can be compared to the actual energy consumption after the retrofit. The difference between actual and predicted energy is a more accurate way to track energy savings (compared to looking at energy bills before and after the retrofit).

Demand Management — in Front of or Behind the Meter: Understanding current energy demand is very important for grid reliability. Utilities have to know how much power they'll need to supply and want to avoid generating too much. Facility managers want to avoid high demand charges for using too much energy at the wrong times. More data on energy consumption and the characteristics that drive that use (such as weather and occupancy) can translate into better predictions about how the grid will behave. With this knowledge, it's possible to reduce energy demand, save money, and increase grid reliability.

HVAC Optimization: In terms of demand management, understanding the performance of subsystems, like HVAC, is important. In the summer, cooling demands in an office can be the difference between setting a new, costly demand peak and avoiding a hefty charge. AI can provide cost savings by pre-cooling a building in the early mornings based on calendar/meeting and historic occupancy data. The building's HVAC system would start early in the morning, when energy is less expensive, and begin cooling space for the day ahead, all without human intervention. Moreover, if a building has used a pre-cooling strategy in the past, AI may help improve future pre-cooling efforts.

Focus on Predictive Maintenance: We know that in 2020 and beyond, organizations are thinking about maintenance not just as preventative, but as predictive. Predictive maintenance differs from preventative maintenance in that it takes on a more proactive approach. Instead of receiving alerts when your system will be due for

maintenance following a timeline, predictive maintenance will alert you when something should be done, even if it's not the time for scheduled maintenance! After all, things don't break on a schedule. But with predictive maintenance, you can have a better idea of the health of your systems which makes intervening when necessary easier and more cost-effective. Even planned preventative maintenance can be costly. With AI, facilities management teams can better determine when to leverage as-needed maintenance, instead of performing regular (and sometimes unnecessary) maintenance. The results? By implementing AI to monitor their maintenance efforts, organizations have saved, on an average, 50% less on preventative maintenance, reduced the number of hours they spend on preventative maintenance by 50-70%, and have lowered the number of breakdowns by 70%.

Further AI-enabled FM software can predict and even prevent breakdowns by analyzing and interpreting historical data on past asset failures, services, and labour requirements, and using this information to automatically create work orders and direct them to the appropriate vendors. Data pulled from complex machines found in buildings, like chillers and boilers, can be overwhelming to facility managers. But, when these data streams are analysed by a software solution, trends may appear. This analysis may indicate a high likelihood of failure in the near term, based on the condition of the equipment and reasonable estimates about how it is used (such as expected operating times). The additional insight, which may help a facility team plan upcoming maintenance, can reduce unexpected equipment outages, add predictability to the budget, and keep occupants comfortable.

Space Planning: As more offices move to open plan designs and more flexible arrangements, there is some risk of a shortage of space, especially at peak times. Today, according to CBRE, about 40 percent of space is unoccupied. Offering too much space is not a problem for occupants, but it is very costly for the owners and operators. Reducing the amount of space too much, or increasing occupancy, may increase these costs, but also may lead to a poor working environment. With a rise in indoor space sensors, it is possible to predict demand at different times — both when planning a new open office and just for day-to-day management. AI helps by pulling in the data from these space sensors and providing estimates of occupancy, plus information that can help to resolve potential issues. It also provides a Virtual tour of the still to build office thus ensuring the FM team can provide inputs in the construction phase.

Predict Facility Cleaning Needs: Custodial staff typically clean all occupied spaces regularly. This schedule-based approach is appropriate for busy spaces that are consistently used. But, with more flexibility in how occupants interact with spaces, it's likely that some spaces will be used more than others. There is an opportunity for spaces to be cleaned only when they need it, based on actual use. Today, this cleaning schedule may be based on sensors that track occupancy, but AI can help to predict cleaning demands and even generate a schedule for service providers. AI provides data to custodial staff on use in specific spaces, so staff are able to plan their activities based on condition. This data-driven approach to a traditional service is especially

compelling in real estate, where the physical space remains the core of the offering. Automatic sensor based cleaner is also moving in which does this work on orders from the mainframe. Moreover, AI can optimize supply by automatically ordering various materials and products for the office space, based on actual and predicted occupancy trends.

Improve Building Security and Safety: AI isn't just helping FM teams make smarter decisions, cut costs, and optimize building operations. It's keeping organizations safer — both online and in person. For cyber security purposes, AI helps detect and prevent online threats and requires less human involvement. Typically, AI security systems are designed to flag potential risks by learning what is "good" and "bad" behaviour online. Also, AI can present possible solutions to problems or threats, which takes a lot of the guesswork out for humans. AI can be used to protect sensitive data like employee and customer information, organizational data, and more.

AI is bringing revolutionary capabilities to physical security at commercial facilities. Security is a significant priority for most FM teams, yet it's not typically put on the front burner in terms of prioritization. That is, it can be easy to take for granted (until a breach occurs). As surveillance systems become more complex and the volume of security-related data increases, AI can help fill in the gaps where manual review and management fall short. Access control, CCTV surveillance, intrusion detection, package screening, and weapon detection are just a few examples of commonplace data-driven security technology in FM. While useful on their own, these applications can be enhanced and made even smarter with the integration of artificial intelligence and machine learning. AI is used to analyse CCTV footage and make it instantly searchable under tags such as "red car," "black hoodie," and so forth.

Many commercial buildings spend a significant amount of money on the indoor safety of their offices. There are a range of AI applications related to safety and security. For example, instead of using a key card for access control, one can use facial recognition.

compelling in real estate, where the physical space remains the core of the offering. Automatic sensor based cleaner is also moving in which does this work on orders from the mainframe. Moreover, AI can optimize supply by automatically ordering various materials and products for the office space, based on actual and predicted occupancy trends.

Disaster Response: It's heart-breaking to hear stories that often emerge after natural disasters of people untraceable, trapped, unable to get out of whatever nightmare they are stuck in. Imagine being that person, who survives a disaster, only to then slowly fade away waiting for someone to reach them. Aided further with technologies like drones, sensors and geospatial mapping, that can collect valuable real time data, machine learning algorithms can help with optimal deployment of limited rescue resources. Post disaster reconnaissance, identification and prioritization of affected areas, real time tracking of individuals, etc. can all be possible. These technology can also help in averting many human error made disasters and thus reducing the fatality. Imaging a train derailment predicted and averted due to AI.

Humans make mistakes—that's just part of being human. However, when it comes to optimizing facilities and building operations, human error can be quite costly. Organizations can reduce the risk of human error thanks to AI algorithms. But, humans still have the final say of different tasks or actions. This isn't to say that AI is infallible, though. Instead, it's more transparent and predictable than humans.

The use of AI to scan visitor IDs and photo capturing of visitors, further automatically informing the host of the visitor, adjust the light and temperature in the adjacent meeting room where your visitor will soon join your host, ensuring all the pre – requisite for the meetings (pen, marker, pad, water etc.) are informed to concerned team in advance. Ensuring the visitor is not able to move to any restricted area, giving appropriate access to the visitor and logging of the visitor post the meeting, are means of using AI for VMS.

Traffic Control: This one is almost a no-brainer. There are massive amounts of data available on traffic flows and the same can be utilized for more efficient traffic management systems and creating infrastructure that is future-ready. As an example, UK has announced the development and adoption of 'smart traffic lights' — signals that are not rule based but dynamically adjust based on actual traffic going through them, monitored through sensors and cameras. The same can be used for better traffic management and parking management in big campuses.


Transport Management: Transport management has been a pain area for almost all the FM professionals. Transport automation system has considerably improved AI in their working. The new Transport management systems (TMS) in market does the rostering, routing, route distribution, cab tracking, employee sign in and sign out, billing and reports with help of AI. They keep evolving as per situation and individual company policy, the AI system learns skipping of particular area, changing particular route due to any reasons, changing type of cabs to cater employee requirement. A strong point being the increased safety features for employees, including SOS button and tracking availability. Features like automatic deviations alerts have been built to ensure no deviation is done by any team member's including the drivers. The features are more shown in pictorial as above.

Café Management: Cafeteria has been an employee experience area. Companies ensure employee gets a wow experience in cafeteria. Some of AI Café Technology are:
- Robotics.
- Smart Kiosks.
- Chatbots.
- Food Service Apps
The AI in café can order and customise as per employee's needs, it also helps in improving the employee experience every time they come to café. The wait time of employee are reduced. AI helps customers choose their meals based on different preferences. Robots helps in speeding the food making process and delivery and

ensure consistency in food taste. A smart café ensure a clean and smoothing café by ensuring cleanliness, lighting and music as per time and mood.
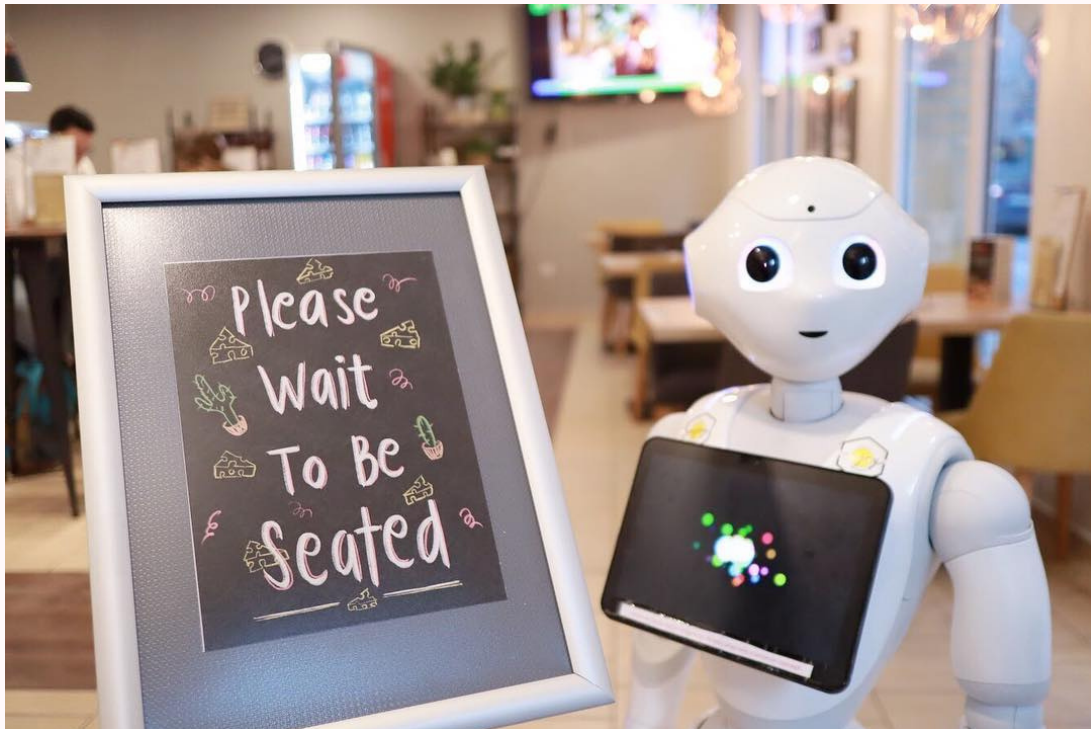
Travel and Hospitality: For hotels and other businesses in the Hospitality industry, one of the most exciting uses for artificial intelligence is for providing assistance to customers online. AI is able to respond to questions and provide valuable information to customers, even when a customer service rep is not available. Applying machine learning in travel industry provides powerful messaging and product bundling capabilities based on context and traveller propensity. This is important for travel agency since travellers are expecting travel providers to know them better and offer those deals and services based on their past preferences. The robot is able to provide tourist information to customers who interact with it.
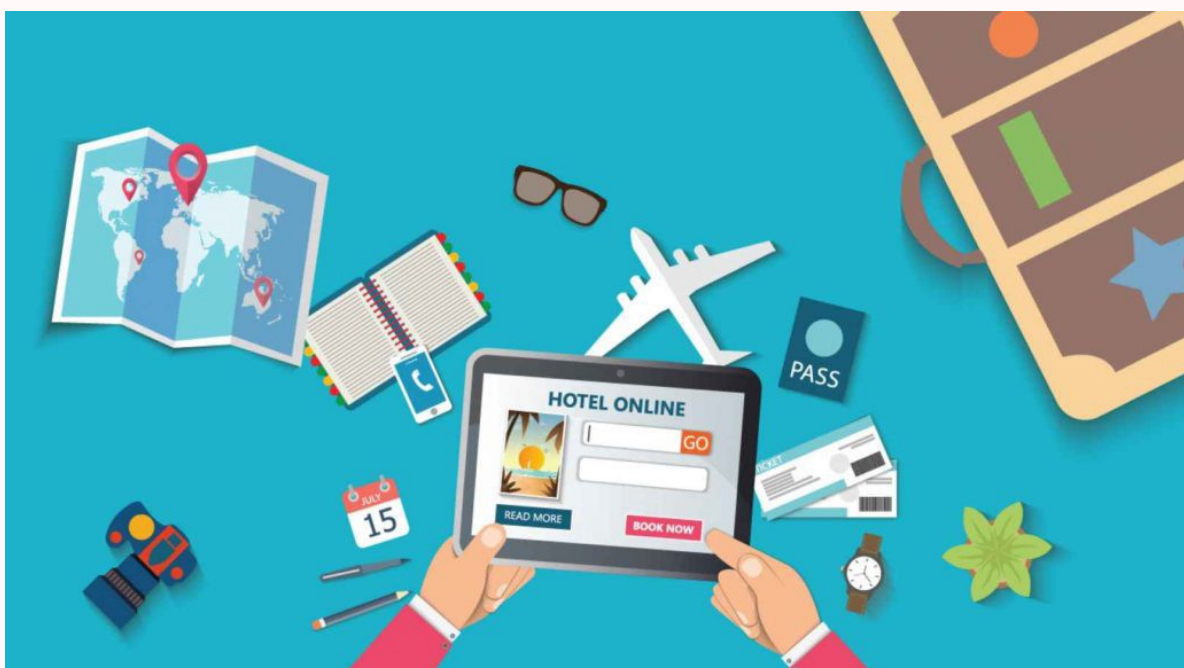
Most impressively, it is able to learn from human speech and adapt to individuals. By automating "best next actions" based on guest data, AI gives hotels the opportunity to enable personalization in ways not previously possible. AI can identify and resolve issues that could potentially erode guest satisfaction without the need for human intervention. From a customer's personal choices to their smallest of needs, AI-enabled hotel concierge bots can offer minute service and careful assistance. Surprised how the travel portals gets you the right choice every time you plan a holiday?

While I have mentioned most of the benefits, there definitely would be many more and so are few of the challenges. AI works on the algorithms feed in it, and cannot be 100% reliable. The system requirements for AI is considerably higher, obtaining and funding that level of computing power can be challenging for business, particularly start-ups. This is still a challenge in India and most of the companies shy away from AI due to the costing factors. As per a survey conducted by Schneider Electric for 400 US FM companies, there would be an increase of 39% additional investment. Integrating AI is a challenging task, very few companies are able to do the same in current market. Since AI is collecting a lot of sensitive data, which are generally stored in cloud system, there are legal approvals required for ensuring there is no violation of data privacy along with a strong Internet security system to ensure no hacking happens.

The Fear factor as I mentioned in my starting that AI would take away market jobs is a common concern with many. However with the talent shortage in facility management, this seems unlikely. Moreover, running a building will always require some level of human interaction, too. More likely is that AI solutions simply change certain aspects of certain jobs. The jobs aren't lost, but they are different. An example of same is... An automobile industry got state of art robotics equipment at their plant. What happened to the workers? They simply graduated to become supervisors, and started supervising the work done by the robots, some helping them as a token of support. The hands which were tightening with help of spanner now checks the bolts are properly bolted. As per Schneider Electric in above survey there is a lack of 31% trained resources in market for handling AI. However the most important negative side, is changing the psychology of existing manpower. Traditionally administration was taken as any layman's work, and the work style had little or no innovation. Making them accept the astounding changes and enlightening them in the use of the same, is a major challenge for the FM leaders now.

One of the great things about AI is that it's always learning and improving, however humans still manage the system and can step in when necessary. This makes a case for how humans and AI can work smarter together. However, manpower skill enhancement to use the new AI software is a requirement, currently while the system is available the manpower available are not scaled to use such system. What's changed is the availability of cheap computing, advances in algorithm coding, and an abundance of newly available data.
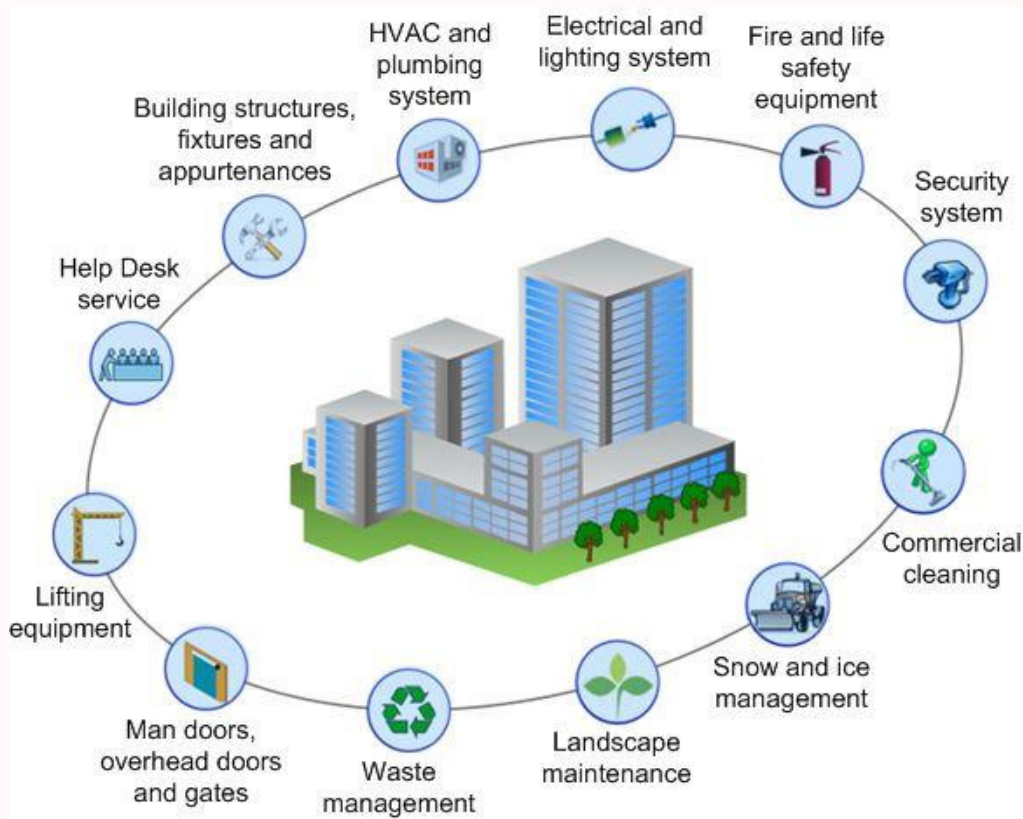
The applications of IoT and AI in facilities management are only just beginning to emerge, but their future looks incredibly bright. It's been said that FM may be the industry that benefits most from AI in the coming years, especially given its large quantity of repetitive, time-consuming tasks. With AI-enabled technology in place, FM professionals will benefit from increased efficiency, reduced costs, improved contractor relationships, and a boost in asset reliability. There has to be a clear implementation strategy to be made, which means the management has to have a detailed knowledge on the AI. And given the abundance of available data now in market AI should create wonders in customer wow experience, cost leverage and safety.

Remember, "*Data is to AI, what food is to humans.*"

Capt Rajesh Nair *is a commerce graduate from Nagpur University. Prior to joining the Army he has worked as a computer server administrator and as a computer faculty for nearly four years. He joined the prestigious Officer Training Academy in 75th Course, and was commissioned into 14 Maratha Light Infantry in March 2003. Post Army service, he has worked in the field of administration for more than a decade, having worked with companies like Wipro, Mahindra Automobile, Tata Communications and Credence Global Solutions. He has done many a course including certification course in Facility Management, POSH, ISO etc. He is a certified POSH Trainer.*

Gratitude Corner

Age No Barrier For Learning

BY RAVI SHANKAR

I had retired from Navy on 30 Jun 20, after completion of my service. And, I was quit fortunate that I had joined a defence electronics company at Chennai on 03 Aug 20 as DGM. However, I resigned from this company on 13 Jan 21. Thereafter, I have joined MEIL as Associate Vice President at Hyderabad in Jan 21. Megha Engineering & Infrastructures Limited (MEIL) is a major infrastructure company headquartered in Hyderabad, India. The company was established in 1989 as a small fabrication unit. In due course of time, the unit made a name for itself in the manufacturing and engineering sector. I am presently a business Head of a company newly acquired by MEIL.

While undergoing the resettlement course at IIM Indore, I observed and felt that the opportunities for officers above the age of 45 was very limited. However, I came in contact with Forces Network, and realised that it is a platform which suitably guides the transitioning officers, especially the more aged ones, by not only motivating, but also guiding them to to upskill and becoming competitive. It was an outcome of this that I pursued my goals with renewed vigour and have been fairly successful thereafter. I sincerely thank the Network for the inspiration and building up zeal and enthusiasm to get into corporate world. I feel that this system is doing three things:-
- Creation of an eco-system for retiring defence officers.
- Inspiring to think big.
- Providing necessary tools, methodology and support to aspire for more.

So, PMP was the first qualification that I added to my profile, after attending the related webinar. After PMP, I kept my learning curve on as I did PSM and Certified Project Director from UK. Now, I am trying to go for PMP ACP. All these are for self satisfaction as well as self belief. I now have very high regards for the work being done by Forces Network, as it has imposed faith in my self to achieve betterment. I don't say that I have achieved any thing substantial or great till date, but definitely I am on the right track. Just want to convey my gratitude to you to this wonderful Network, as it acts like a big brother for all the officers like me, who are retiring from service.

Cdr Ravi Shankar is an Electrical Officer from the Indian Navy. He had retired from Naval Dockyard Visakhatnam on 30 Jun 2020. He had finishrd six months residential Business Management Course from IIM Indore in Feb 2020. He holds multiple post graduations viz MIETE, M.Com, M.Phil and MBA prior to retirement and got six certifications including PMP and PSM post retirement. He is presently working as Business Hèad of 500 Crores private Electronics Company at Hyderabad.

Book Review
Outliers - The Story of Success: by Malcolm Gladwell

BY SURESH CHANDRA

About the Author: Born Malcolm Timothy Gladwell on 03 Sep 1963, an outlier himself, is an English-born Canadian journalist, author, and public speaker. Son of a Jamaican, psychotherapist mother and an English, mathematics professor father, he is an author of repute and has many New York Times best-sellers to his credit. Considered as one of the most influential writers on business thought, his own path to success is a testament to the theory underlying his book Outliers.

Gladwell did not set out to become a great writer. He studied history at the University of Toronto and wanted to work in advertising. After graduating, however, he found himself the victim (or beneficiary) of *"demographic luck"* - he could not find a job in advertising, so he accepted a job as a writer for the American Spectator. The job at the American Spectator ultimately led to a position at the Washington Post, where Gladwell honed his skills as a business and science reporter and as chief of the New York bureau. Gladwell credits his time at the Washington Post with preparing him for his next job, a writer for the New Yorker.

He has published six books: The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference; Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking; Outliers: The Story of Success; What the Dog Saw: And Other Adventures; David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants; and Talking to Strangers: What We Should Know about the People We Don't Know.

His writings often deal with the unexpected implications of research in the social sciences and make frequent and extended use of academic work, particularly in the areas of sociology, psychology, and economics. Because his books challenge organizations to think critically about social change in a way that sheds light on organizational success, they are on the "recommended reading list" at many companies and business schools. Gladwell has been included in the TIME 100 Most Influential People list and touted as one of Foreign Policy's Top Global Thinkers. Gladwell was appointed to the Order of Canada in 2011.
(Source: *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcolm_Gladwell and Author's Bio in Outliers: The Story of Success*.)

The Book Review

The book uses the word "outlier" to talk about people who have had remarkable success or people who stand out, which contrary to popular perception, is not because they are somehow better, smarter, more determined, or work harder than

most, but as per Gladwell these individuals are "invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot".

"To build a better world we need to replace the patchwork of lucky breaks and arbitrary advantages that today determine success . . . with a society that provides opportunities for all."

out·li·er \-,lī(-Ə)r\ noun
1: something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body.
2: a statistical observation that is markedly different in value from the others of the sample.
                          - Gladwell, Malcolm. Outliers (p. 3). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.

He analyses these hidden advantages, cultural legacies, parentage, and the time and place of a person's birth and illustrates how they contributed to the success achieved by individuals mentioned in the book. In fact, Outliers do not have a singular story. Luck, birthdays, opportunity, upbringing, and many other factors all play over sized roles in their success too.

Gladwell carefully constructs his thesis and rejects the concept of a "self-made man". In doing so, he avoids coming across as a person promoting the usual "effective habits" or similar "self-help" guides. Using his subjects Gladwell challenges the traditional definition of success, asserting:

People don't rise from nothing. We do owe something to our parentage and patronage.... The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forebears shape the patterns of our achievement in ways we cannot begin to imagine. It's not enough to ask what successful people are like, in other words. It is only by asking where they are from that we can unravel the logic behind who succeeds and who doesn't.

The book is an insightful compilation of stories about individuals who are the leaders in their respective fields. When stories about outliers are told, there is a tendency to emphasize "individual effort". Gladwell argues that "individual effort", which does count for a lot of things, is just one of the reasons for success.

The book is divided in two parts namely - "*Opportunity*" and "*Legacy*". Each part focusses on the premise that no one achieves success in a vacuum without the intervention of opportunity. Some highlights from various chapters of the book are given in succeeding paragraphs.

The Matthew Effect

Advantages tend to accumulate over time - If you are put at an advantage over your

peers and friends from an early age, the advantages will lead to meaningful differences in performance that persist for extended periods. When looking at the stories of successful individuals, most people downplay the role that the Matthew Effect has on their life outcomes.

The 10,000 Hour Rule

It takes about 10,000 hours of deliberate practice to become an expert at anything. While this is true, convergence of luck and opportunity is also needed.
- Bill Joy, co-founder of Sun Microsystems, had an unlimited exposure to computers at an early age. In 1971, at the age of sixteen, he enrolled as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan. Until then, Joy had never worked with computers. That same year, the University of Michigan Computer Center, one of the best in the nation, opened, providing Joy with an opportunity for thousands of hours of programming "practice" as computer programming was changing from computer cards to time-sharing. Had Joy entered the University of Michigan before 1971, his access to computers would have been, at best, extremely limited. Despite his genius, he likely would not have had the opportunity to "practice" programming, and his influence on modern-day computing, if any, would have been limited.
- Most of the Silicon Valley billionaires were just at the right age (born around 1955) and were in their early 20s when the computer revolution began
- Most elite hockey players are born in the month of January because the cut off for age-class hockey in Canada happens on January 1

Preparation, practice, and expertise does play an oversized role when it comes to achieving greatness but so does luck and opportunity.

The Trouble with Geniuses

Having high intelligence (IQ) does not automatically mean that you will be successful in life. Above a certain IQ range, there is not much difference in performance. There is a threshold for achieving in a particular area. Once that threshold is achieved, the influence of grades and IQ scores lessens with time.

> *"If intelligence matters only up to a point, then past that point, other things - things that have nothing to do with intelligence - must start to matter more. It's like basketball again: once someone is tall enough, then we start to care about speed and court sense and agility and ball-handling skills and shooting touch."*

Upbringing

A genius has to be nurtured and encouraged. When looking at the stories of outliers, it is easy to overlook the role that upbringing has on how successful one becomes. Studies show that background and upbringing have more of an impact on success than IQ scores.

Children from middle and upper-class families are taught to speak up, stand for themselves, and express thought independence. And this explains why they achieve more throughout their lives. Their parents are also more involved in their lives and interests and this has a great impact on how they approach opportunities and challenges. They grow up believing that their voice and opinions matter even in the face of authority.

> *"The heavily scheduled middle-class child is exposed to a constantly shifting set of experiences. She learns teamwork and how to cope in highly structured settings. She is taught how to interact comfortably with adults, and to speak up when she needs to. In Lareau's words, the middle-class children learn a sense of "entitlement."*

On the other hand, children from poor backgrounds don't receive as much attention from their parents. As a result, they grow to be timid around many situations and develop stifling deference to authority.

Opportunity and Luck

Coming from disadvantageous settings can be an opportunity in itself and it often serves as a blessing in disguise. Rags-to riches stories focus on the many odds that the hero had to overcome, but they fail to point out that the "*odds work to empower the hero*" over future adversities.

Outliers also benefit from "*demographic luck*" or being born at the right time. People who reached maturity in the 1930s during the height of the Great Depression had less chance to make it than those who matured later when the economy was booming.

Engaging in meaningful work no matter how humbling gives you the opportunity to learn and grow. Humble meaningful work can also serve as a pebble stone for the prosperity of future generations.
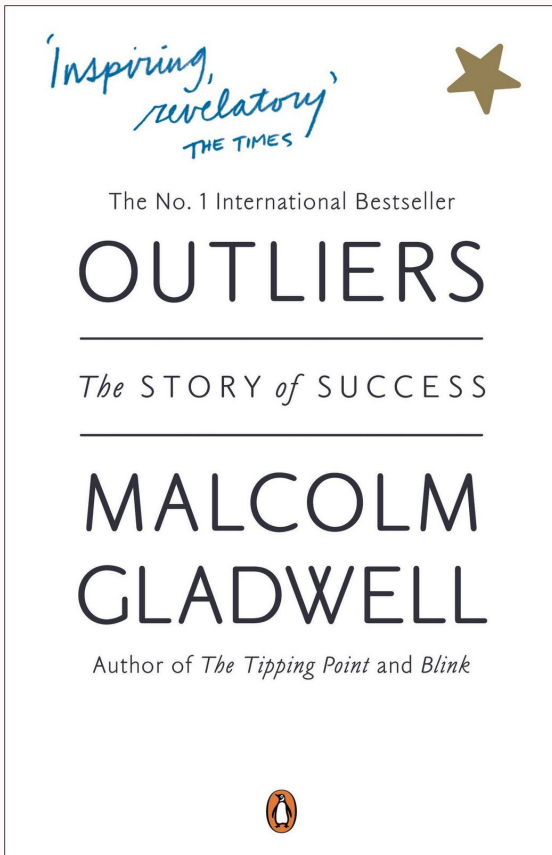
Name of the Book: Outliers - The Story of Success

Author: Malcolm Gladwell

Publisher: Little Brown and Company 18 Nov 2008

ISBN: ISBN-10: 9780316017923
ISBN-13: 978-0316017923

Goodreads Score: 4.17 / 5.00 from 592,361 ratings

Author's Profile:
https://www.britannica.com/biography/Malcolm-Gladwell

Cultural Legacies

Cultural legacies also play an important role in determining the success of outliers. These legacies shape how we react to our environments, how hard we work, how we approach opportunities, and our deference to power and authority.

Some cultures demonstrate a high reverence for power and authority to the extent that it can hinder job performance and personal growth. Others show greater levels of individuality and this can lead to greater personal independence and a willingness to take risks.

It is easier to count in Asian languages. And because of this math is more intuitive to South East Asians as opposed to Westerners. Most cultures in China, Korea, and Japan have rice as their staple food. Cultivating rice is more labour intensive compared to other forms of agriculture and this translates to different attitudes towards work and life in general.

Low-Income vs High-Income Students

The difference in performance between low-income students and high-income students is not down to differences in intelligence. Given the same opportunities,

students from the two groups perform at the same level. Low-income students' performance drops during the summer vacation. Their reading levels drop, and their maths grades go down suggesting that the home environment has an oversized effect on school performance during the period. The length of the summer vacation also has implications on how well students perform. Students from the Asian countries of Japan and China have longer school days and as a result have better reading and math skills. With proper instruction guidelines and interventions, it is possible to bridge the gap between low-income and high-income students. *What school kids from low-income community's need is a chance.*

Some Take Aways

Point wise these can be summarised as:
- Success comes from a lot of factors.
- 10,000 hours rule.
- Love what you do.
- Know and embrace your own culture.
- Success is partially based on luck.
- Early success leads to later success.
- Small things lead to larger repercussions.
- Talent matters.
- Role of opportunity is exponential.
- High IQ does not guarantee success.
- Outliers are rare.

He sums up his book with an interesting thought that - success is "grounded in a web of advantages and inheritances, some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky …. The outlier, in the end, is not an outlier at all."

The book succeeds in convincing the reader that once a basic threshold of genius is reached, extraordinary achievement is less about talent and more about *"opportunity"* and that understanding *cultural legacies* influence how we train and educate.

Outliers is a thought-provoking book and is a "**strongly recommended**" read for all.

Some Quotes from the Book

"Those three things - autonomy, complexity, and a connection between effort and reward - are, most people will agree, the three qualities that work has to have if it is to be satisfying."

"Practice isn't the thing you do once you're good. It's the thing you do that makes you good."

"Who we are cannot be separated from where we're from."

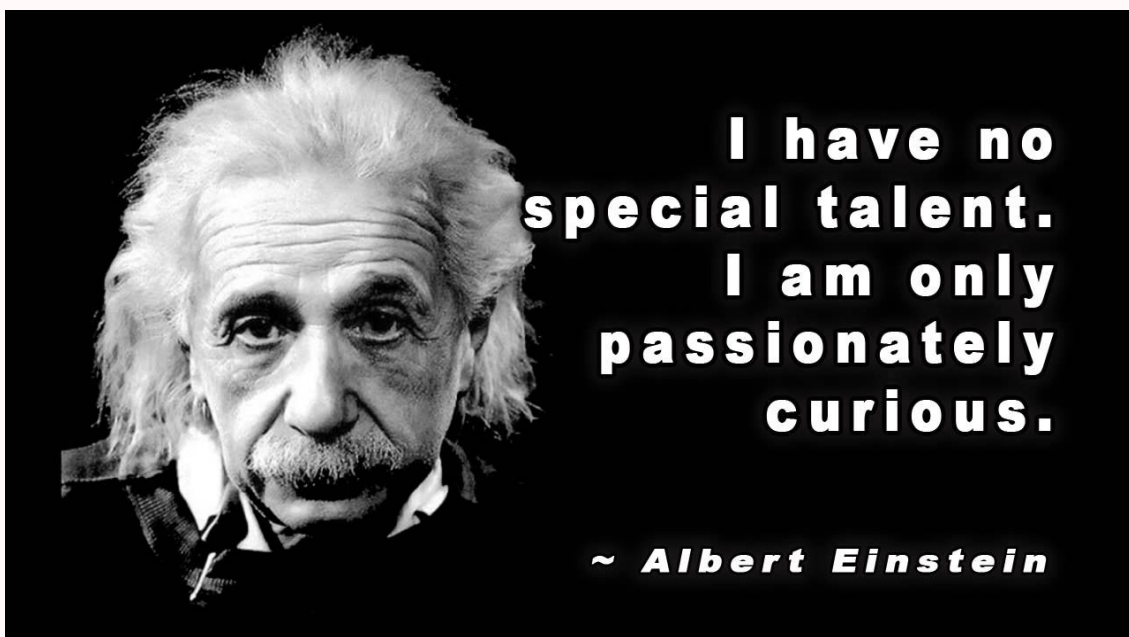*"No one who can rise before dawn three hundred sixty days a year fails to make his family rich."*

"Hard work is a prison sentence only if it does not have meaning. Once it does, it becomes the kind of thing that makes you grab your wife around the waist and dance a jig."

"Success is not a random act. It arises out of a predictable and powerful set of circumstances and opportunities."

"Superstar lawyers and math whizzes and software entrepreneurs appear at first blush to lie outside ordinary experience. But they don't. They are products of history and community, of opportunity and legacy. Their success is not exceptional or mysterious. It is grounded in a web of advantages and inheritances, some deserved, some not, some earned, some just plain lucky--but all critical to making them who they are. The outlier, in the end, is not an outlier at all."

***Col Suresh Chandra** was commissioned on 11 Jun 1988 in the 94 Field Regiment. He commanded 121 Light Regiment and superannuated from service on 30 Nov 2017. An MTech (CSE - IITD), he has been instrumental in the design and development of the ACCCS/Project Shakti. He was an instructor in School of Artillery and DS, JC Wing, Army War College. He has also served with the Wargaming Centre, SWC and was Col GS (Systems) Western Command. Post retirement he divides his time between mentoring underprivileged kids in Mathematics, Physics and Computer Science of Class XII level, and freelancing as a cyber security and data analytics expert. He is available at sureshchandra@protonmail.com*
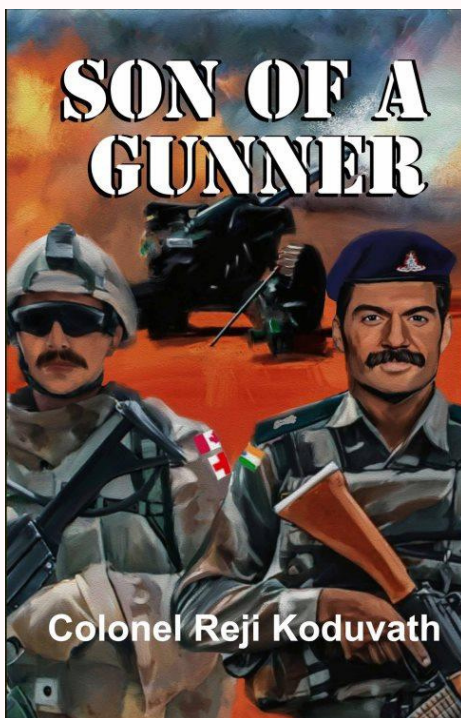

I have no special talent. I am only passionately curious.

~ Albert Einstein

Son of a Gunner : Col Reji Koduvath

BY SAJAN MOIDEEN

Those of you have served in the Armed Forces or have relatives and friends who are serving will find this racy and gripping book very emotional and help connect to those days you were in the Army. If you are a Gunner then, the memories of Deolali will rush to your mind. Every event in this book has been captured in minutest detail. This book has been meticulously researched and written by Col Reji who himself is a gunner. He is also well known for his blog www.rejinces.net and his first anthology of short stories Suit Boot and Tie. This book Son of a Gunner published in Jan 2021, reads like his own life experiences at many places.

The book starts with combat operations in Afghanistan and how Capt Joji Manakkal of Canadian Army Medical Corps, survives there. The book traces the life and death of his father Maj Shaji Manakkal from the back waters of Kerala to the icy heights of Kashmir. The emotional story of the Army officer, his wife and their son, spanning three countries, three generations is a marvelous piece of poetry in motion. Every aspect of training, commanding, posting out, field area life, the hardships, the loneliness is etched beautifully by the author. It displays the camaraderie of the men you command, their loyalty, while in service and even after retirement, till death does them apart. It gives the reader a vivid picture of how their own life would be. It also gracefully shows the way a widow picks up the threads of her life and emerges victorious and how the son returns to find the grave of his dad and bring the mortal remains to his hometown. In all it is a story worth reading again and again.

Every fauji, his wife and children must read this story. It will remind them of the beautiful experiences they had in the Army and what could possibly go wrong. It is

also a book that will transport you back to those good old days. It is a must read for all retired officers to rekindle your memory and bring back the experiences which you have lived and probably forgotten.

My course mates and I have a special interest in this book, because one entire chapter has been inspired by what we achieved in bringing back the mortal remains of our fallen brother Second Lieutenant ET Joseph after nearly 25 years. That operation has been captured in this book in all authenticity.

Published by Creative Crows, Son of a Gunner is available on Amazon for 399/-. You can order the book here....https://amzn.to/3pYKMv2

Col Sajan *is the Principal Consultant of Renergetics Consulting, an experienced International Trainer, Consultant, and a certified Career Counselor. He was commissioned into the Corps of Army Air Defence in 1991 and is an alumnus of NDA, DSSC, and Army AD College. After a remarkable career of 22 years he stepped out to the world outside. He has been regularly guiding officers transitioning out through Psychometric Based Career Counseling. He also regularly writes a popular blog* www.sajanspeaks.com, *and can be reached through his website* www.renergetics.com/careercounselling, *and on* https://in.linkedin.com/in/sajanmoideen

Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristics of a **vigorous intellect.**

— *Samuel Johnson*
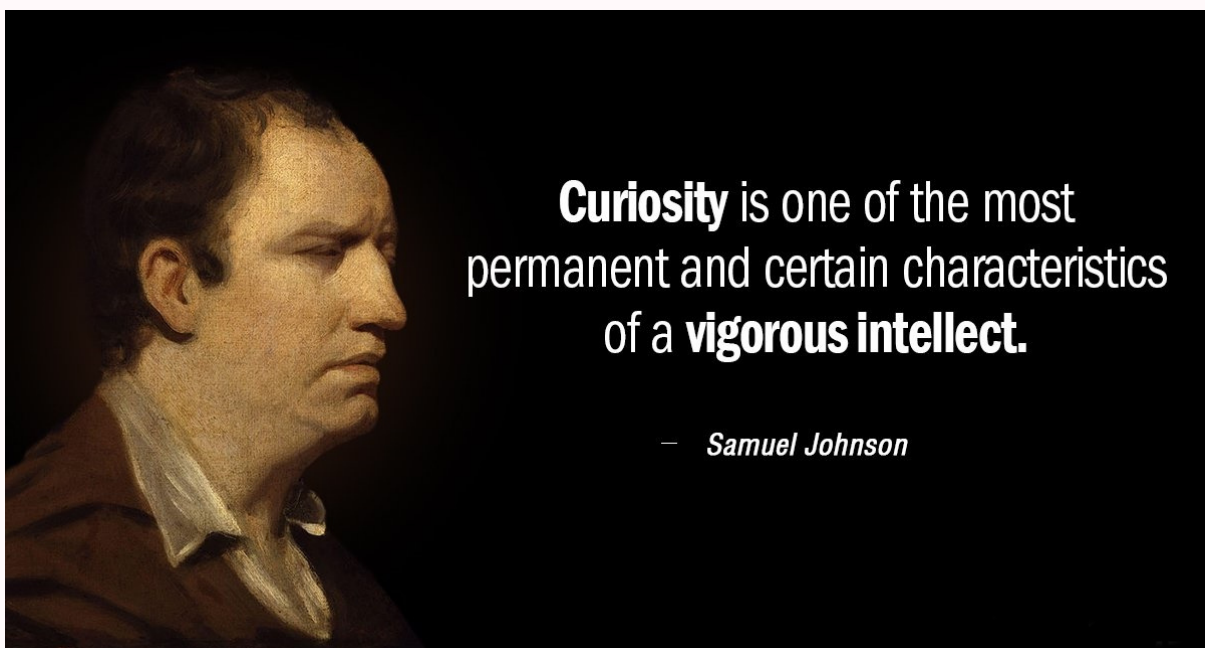
Tharoorosaurus : by Shashi Tharoor

BY MANAV AGNIHOTRI

Communication has always been vital and almost on top in today's connected world. It does so much than just saying one's say. It inspires, prods, drags, builds and destroys too. Military has always laid great and right emphasis on communication. It understands the pivotal role language and its contents plays in lives of the leaders and men. And so it teaches its leaders the art to tell their thoughts from laconic to elaborate style, engendering in them the practice of the fine art and exact science of appropriate communication. It is only right that the leaders of the forces leafing through the April 21 edition of the magazine, are given a review of another interesting book penned by Shashi Tharoor, the celebrated orator and writer.

Meru Gokhale, the publisher of Penguin India coined the title 'Tharoorosaurus' combing his name with the words Tharoor, Dinosaur and thesaurus. The author in the preface takes readers through his childhood days when his father made them play games on and around words during journeys they took together. This instilled in him his love for words and their apt usage to say the say in most concise and accurate manner.

Shashi Tharoor does not need an introduction and yet for the readers here, let this be told that besides being a very articulate politician, ex-Minister and an international diplomat, he is an author of best-selling twenty books including fiction and non-fiction. A three-time member of the Lok Sabha from Thiruvananthapuram, he has won numerous literary awards including a national Sahitya Akademi award, a Commonwealth Writers' Prize and the Crossword Lifetime Achievement Award.
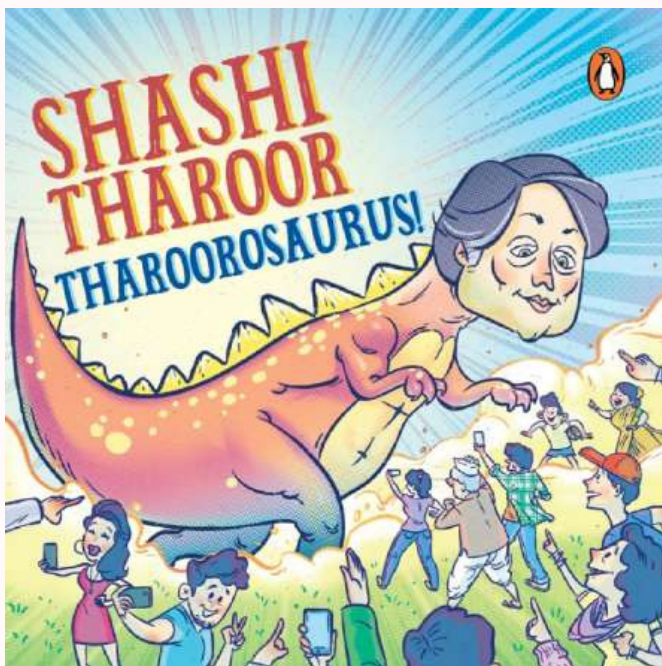
Comically named THAROOROSAURUS, it is the 21st book by Shashi Tharoor. The book is a compilation of 53 words, story-told in his inimitable style while educating the readers of their etymology and usage. Thanks to the leap year 2020 in which the book

was published, they added the 53rd word in honour of the 53 weeks a leap year has in it! While some of the 53 words such as troll, curfew and prepone are fairly familiar, he tells us the interesting stories behind them. One such example is the story of the word 'Prepone'. The author incorrectly considered himself to be the inventor of the word only to be corrected by a lady from the Oxford English Dictionary that they have an example of its usage in 1913.

The book on page 5 educates its readers of a British society named Apostrophe Protection Society. The Society has been closed by its founder and chairman, retired journalist John Richards as he lost the battle for proper use of the 'much-abused' apostrophe.

The book has a few pages on the word 'Quarantine'. It is topical to find the word in the year wherein the word Quarantine in the start frightened so many of us. The book tells us that Quarantine came from the Italian quarantinagiorni, literally 'space of forty days', keeping with the Venetian policy of keeping ships from plague-stricken countries waiting off its port for forty days to assure that no communicable cases were aboard.

Another uncommon word is Paraprosdokian. The book educates us that the word came from two Greek words. The earliest citation in English, is probably 1891. It also tells us that Paraprosdokians are particularly popular among stand-up comedians.

The book will delight and tickle and should be given its rightful place in one's personal collection.
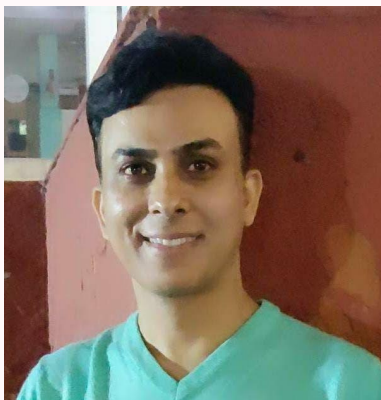
Capt Manav Agnihotri was commissioned in a Surface to Air Missile Group in 2003. After serving for initial five years, he took release and returned to corporate life. Back in corporate sector, he joined Governance, Risk and Compliance function and Information Security has been his area of expertise right from the start. Working currently with a global Telecom service provider, he is a specialist in Payment Card Industry: Data Security Standard (PCI DSS).

Stories

The Catharsis

BY MEENA ARORA

Preface: *Many inquisitors have asked me to share real case studies of my clients and how counselling and Neuro Linguistics Programming helped them. I will be sharing the learnings from few real cases, narrating them in a form of short stories. Considering the confidentiality aspects, few facts and actual names have been changed.*

- Sqn Ldr Meena Arora

- -

A heavy downpour of rain started quite suddenly, and the evening sky was turning darker due to the dense clouded overcast. The boys at the football ground started rushing towards the sheltered places. Oblivious of getting drenched, 14 year old boy Aron packed his sports bag and started running towards his street. As he ran desperately, his panting's covered his sobs, and the rains buried his tears. At least, for once he could cry freely. He took a longer than usual way to his house, which was no longer a home for him. He is still figuring out what might have happened within those 15 days when he last met his mother.

That day, as any other previous day, his mother packed his lunch box and school bag in the morning. Although unwell, his mother got him ready for the school and the class test with every detail possible. She wished him luck and bade him bye with a very soothing and loving smile. Aron hugged her and boarded the van, packed with other children, to school. He could see through the rear view mirror his mother watching the van for long till it took a final turn out of the colony gate. Aron did not know that it would be the last sight of his dear mom.

Aron was the only child of his parents. His father was a hardworking man and worked for a pharmaceutical company. Although very caring, he was quite serious and talked very less. They lived in a small joint family with Aron's old and affectionate grandmother staying with them. Aron's mother was a home maker and took care of every member very well. She was Aron's best friend too. He could talk about everyone and everything with her. She would also know about his moods, likes and dislikes.

That day, after the school, Aron was excited to tell his mother that he wrote his class test very well. There were other stories to be shared too, about teachers and friends and lot many things. But that day, his Mausi (maternal aunt), from other end of the city, came to pick him up directly from school. She told him that his parents and grandmother had to go suddenly to a distant relative's place for few days and till then Aron would be staying with her.

Aron was used to living with his Mausi, Mausa and two cousins oft and on. But often his mother accompanied him and if not, she used to prepare him with sufficient reasons. This time it was very unusual of his mother not to call or connect with him in any way for such a long separation. He asked his Mausi and Mausa but never got a clear answer. His father called him once and told that everything was fine. His Mausi daily dropped and picked him up from school and 15 days passed in such abnormal normalcy.

On the 16th day, Aron's father came to take him home. Aron was very excited to go back to his home and especially to his mother. Again, there were many many stories and incidents and definitely complaints to share. He had decided that he would not talk to his mother and express unhappiness over such a long separation.

As Aron reached home, he went straight to his room, hoping his mother to come coaxing and cajoling him. But more than 30 min passed, and no one called him. He started looking for his mother and found that none of her clothes or belongings were there. He asked his father if she had gone somewhere. Just then he noticed cold eyes of his father looking towards the photograph of his mother on the wall with garlands all around.

Aron was shocked and his mind went blank. His grandmother hugged him and told him that his mother has gone to heavenly abode. His father and grandmother assured him that everything would be fine and as normal as ever. He was told to be strong and mature to help and care for his father and ailing grandmother. They also insisted that he should continue going to school and visiting his friends as before.

With so many questions, emotions and tears blocked in his head, the child posed to live as ordinary as possible. But the closed box of emotions kept bombarding and turned into constant migraines. For three consecutive years, the child went through various kinds of medications and tests, but nothing eased his pain. It was then that he was referred to a psychologist.

After few sessions for getting the grip of the situation and understanding the boy, he was made to vent out all his grief. With the help of psychotherapies, he was taken to the past situation and was set free to cry and express his anguish. All his suppressed questions and concerns were answered in subsequent sessions with his father. Aron's mother was ill with a terminal disease. This fact was concealed from him. He could have been aware of the illness systematically. He was full of remorse, guilt and anger towards his father. He could have made his mother's days happier, at least he would not have troubled her for small things. He never got the opportunity to serve his mother well. He could then talk and cry freely with his father in the counsellor's office. Soon the migraines were cured, and the boy started handling all situations very bravely and maturely.

One more important aspect was overlooked in parenting above. It is about our religious processes, especially the ones related to the last rites. Almost all religions have their processes and rituals to deal with emotions steadily. The rituals take us through a systematic process that may even extend up to a complete year. During the initial 10 to 15 days, a collective expression of grief with all other relatives and friends creates the acceptance for the loss. This prepares the affected persons to carry on with their lives, duties and responsibilities. The process holds a very significant role, emotionally. From a grief that adults usually take more than a month to come to normalcy, how can we expect a child to forget and easily move on?

It is very natural for parents to save their children from every pain and grief, especially when it comes to a close person's demise. But how long can one avoid such exposure. After all, children will be facing the facts and world one day and most probably without the shelter of their parents. Is it not safe for them to confront the world with care and guidance? But the question is are the parents or guardians themselves strong enough to handle such losses and also deal with their children's distress?Well, if parent won't find out positive ways, no one else will.

I still remember the day, when in my childhood we lost a close relative. My father told me to 'darshan' of the departed soul as he had merged with the Divine. (Darshan may be defined as looking at someone or something with reverence). Obviously, that was followed by a series of questions from me, but my father answered all of them with patience, and to the best of his awareness and knowledge. The knowledge might not have been relevant or correct, but the discussion itself gave me a lot of hope and emotional space for catharsis.

Sqn Ldr Meena Arora *has served in the Indian Air Force for ten years. Thereafter, she has devoted herself completely to counseling and training. She conducts workshops, one on one sessions and training programmes. She is a Clinical Psychologist, Author, Certified Coach (International Coach Federation) and Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) Trainer. For upcoming training courses, on NLP, she can be reached at* *careersmeena@gmail.com* *and* *mina.arro@gmail.com*

Curiosity Is The Engine Of Achievement.

Ken Robinson

Matrimonials

Grooms Desired

A suitable match is sought by Col Sanjay Srivastava for his daughter. The daughter was born on 29 Jan 1994 and is 5' 4" tall. Her education qualification is Eco Hons and MBA. She is now employed with VPersist at Noida Father is retired and the family is presently settled at Noida. Her mother is a homemaker. She has a brother who is doing BBA. A boy is desired who is well settled with a pleasing personality. The boy's family should be Hindu, caste no bar.

Col Sanjay Srivastava can be reached at +91-8288094004 and sansri_13church@hotmail.com for additional details.

A suitable match is sought by Gp Capt CBN Yadav for his daughter. The daughter was born on 18 Jun 1994 and is 5' 2" tall. Her education qualification is MBBS (completed in 2019. She is now preparing for PG exams. Father is retired and permanent resident of Hyderabad (Mother tongue is Telugu). Presently father is working with Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Uran Academi, Rae Bareli, Uttar Pradesh. Her mother is a home maker. She has two brothers. Her twin brother employed with MNC after his B Tech & MBA. Her younger brother is in class 7th. A Hindu boy (MD/MS in medicine, civil services or in defence) is desired.

Gp Capt CBN Yadav (Retd) can be reached at +91- 9650605137 and cbnarenderyadav@gmail.com, for additional details..

A suitable match is sought by Gp Capt Vishnu Dutt Sharma for his daughter. The daughter was born on 18 Sep 1998 and is 5' 3" tall. Her education qualification is BDS. She is now undergoing her internship at Udaipur. Father is a serving officer and her late mother was a doctor. She has one sister who is studying in Class X. A suitable boy is desired who is well settled. The boy should be from a Brahmin and vegetarian family,

Gp Captain Vishnu Dutt Sharma can be reached at +91-9460845509 and vish140766@gmail.com for additional details.

A suitable match is sought by Lt Col Atulesh Mathur for his daughter. The daughter was born on 29 Nov 1992 and is 5' 4" tall. Her education qualification is B.Tech. (Biotechnology) and Master of Management from University of Windsor, Canada. She is a permanent resident of Canada and is now employed with a private firm at Toronto, Canada. Father is retired from Corps of Engineers and is presently practicing law at Delhi NCR. The family is presently settled at Noida. Her mother is an Asstt. Prof. at a college in Delhi University. She has one younger sister who is doing her graduation. A boy is desired who is preferably based in USA/Canada. The boy's family should preferably be Punjabi Khatri/ Kayastha.

Lt Col Atulesh Mathur can be reached at +91-9560500227 and atulesh@gmail.com for additional details.

A suitable match is sought by Lt Col Sunil Khanna for his daughter. The daughter was born on 05 Nov 1988 and is 5' 6" tall. He education qualification is Masters in Media & Mass Communication (AV). She was with Walt Disney India for fur years, Radio Mirchi for two years and is now working from Mumbai as a freelance consultant for script writing and digital branding solutions. Father is retired and the family is presently settled at Pune. Her mother is a homemaker now. She has one younger sister who is an investment banker and is married to a Consultant in Accenture, settled in Bengaluru. A well settled boy from a family with good values is desired. Caste and religion, no bar.

Lt Col Sunil Khanna can be reached on +91-9628222245, and sunil.khanna369@gmail.com, for additional details.

Brides Desired

A suitable match is sought by Col VK Haryal, for his son. The son was born on 4 April 1991 and is 5' 10" tall. His education qualification is Master in Information Systems from Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA. He is now employed with Microsoft at Boston, MA, USA. Father is retired and currently working and settled in Pune. His mother is working as a Principal at a Public School in Pune. He has one brother, who is working as a Brand Manager with Canara HSBC Life Insurance Company. A girl is desired who is working in USA/willing to relocate. The girl's family should be preferably a Punjabi/Saraswat Brahmin.

Col VK Haryal can be reached at +91-9403303861/8329996867, and colkaudinya@gmail.com, for additional details.

A suitable match is sought by Lt Col CP Prem Vas for his son. He was born on 6 June 1992. His educational qualification is B.Tech (Mech) from MIT, Manipal and MBA from SCMHRD, Pune. He is now employed with Sterlite Tech Pvt Ltd, based out of Pune as Deputy Manager, HR. Father is retired and the family is presently settled at Aluva, Ernakulam, Kerala. Father is a management consultant and Infopreneur. His mother is a now a home maker after retiring from the Army. Compatibility and comfort level of the son and the girl to accept each other are the only criteria being desired. Religion, caste, horoscope, dowry are irrelevant.

Lt Col CP Prem Vas can be reached at +91 99622 19777 and cppremvas@gmail.com for additional details.

A suitable match is sought by Col DD Sharma for his son. The son was born on 6 June 1994 and is 5' 9" tall. His education qualification is B.Tech,, and presently serving as Army officer. Father is serving and the family is presently settled at NOIDA. His mother is an Educationist. His elder sister, who is a dentist, is married to an Army officer. A girl is desired from a family with defence background, and willing for constant hectic Army life. The horoscopes of the children should match.

Col DD Sharma can be reached at +91-7587519163 and   dineshd59@hotmail.com, for additional details.

A suitable match is sought by Maj Gen Kulpreet Sing for his son. The son was born on 05 Oct 1988 and is 5'11" tall. His education qualification is BBA from Symbiosis, Pune and MBA from SP Jain, Mumbai. He is now employed with Udaan Express Ltd at Chandigarh. Father is retired and the family is presently settled at Chandigarh. His mother is a home maker. He has younger brother who is a Doctor working at Max Hospital, Delhi. A girl is desired who understands the values of holding a family together . The girl's family should be a Sikh/Hindu Khatri family.

Maj Gen Kulpreet Singh can be reached at +91 9622103330 and kulpreetchennai@gmail.com, for additional details.

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