

CUT
the
CRAP

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

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**A father's rant to a daughter
of an impressionable age**

Vidusha Nathavitharana

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*Dedicated to Shaakya as she starts her young adult life
and to Jaith, when he comes of age...*

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PART 1: A RANT AGAINST CONVENTIONAL WISDOM!

I have always 'listened' to advice. However, both my parents encouraged me to critique everything - and never take anything on the face of it. Advice, as with all things, is about perspective and context. Even this book - is MY perspective, based on the contexts of MY life. As such, taking advice must be seasoned with introspection and careful thought – as, what works for one person may never quite work the same for another. The critically important thing is to ensure that you are able to learn the principles and the applications of the principle: and more than anything else, WHEN to use WHICH principle.

There is nothing called bad advice: all advice given to you is probably good, but they may NOT actually work FOR YOU! Herein lies the issue. What is the earthly point in getting advice if it doesn't solve your problem!

Here is the most critical lesson I have ever learnt. NEVER take ADVICE. Yep - even this book. NEVER take it. YOU need to be the ONLY person to advice you. NO ONE ELSE can make decisions for you. NO ONE ELSE can suffer through the consequences of the decisions you take. NO ONE ELSE can understand your unique situation and yourself better than you. Don't misunderstand this: SEEK advice - in fact, seek advice from anyone - just don't TAKE THEM without MAKING IT YOUR OWN. OWN the solutions and the actions you are about to take. NEVER take decisions purely based on someone else's opinion/advice - if you do, you will NEVER grow - and worse - you will ALWAYS find a scapegoat to blame when things go wrong. So, to become the master of your own destiny, you need to first OWN it - ALL of it - and this certainly includes all the advice you get.

This chapter is dedicated to all the typical words of wisdom I have had over the years, and learnt to have a knee jerk reaction against it!

Try, Try and Try again - then, you will succeed...

Oh god! How many times have I heard this!!

I have said it to myself as a mantra over and over again whenever I have failed to achieve my ambitions.

What a load of crap!

One of the most gut wrenching realizations I had was thanks to a Coach I hated for many, many moons.

All through my growing years I wanted to shine in sports. In College, at least during my time, sport was a religion: studies were for nerds: and no one really liked the 'nerds'. Getting straight A's was 'great' but being part of a winning team in almost any team was 'cool' - and if you were part of the rugby team or the cricket team, you were 'IT! I knew I could never be 'IT' but oh boy, didn't I want to be 'cool!'

So I took up Basketball, and from the first day I stepped into the court, I LOVED IT. I remember watching matches on old VHS tapes huddled together with friends and dreaming of being like Kareem Abdul Jabar and Shaqueel O'Neil! I went for practices every day, without fail. I practiced hard. I put my all into it. My grades started slipping - and slipping badly. Ammi chided me incessantly but I wouldn't let it go. For two straight years I didn't even go on the family holidays if practices were there.

I ran, I did my suicides, I did my free throws and three pointers, I did layup after layup, but it was quite plain to see that I would never be 'good' at it. I was passable, and I probably played all of ten to fifteen minutes during the tournaments throughout the two years. The first year we didn't go too far, but the second year, we went all the way to the finals and lost to St. Peter's! I cried for the first time in my young adult life!

Then came the harshest words I ever encountered. The man I revered almost like a god - my coach, called me to a corner one day and said, "Nath, I admire your commitment, but I think I ought to tell you this for your own good. You are not really cut out to play basketball. You are a little too slow. You can't really shoot straight. Your layups are ok - but a good defender can easily tap the ball off you. You will never be good enough to play first five".

The words stung. I had to bring every ounce of self-control to hold back the tears. I came back home and cried for a solid hour or so in the privacy of my toilet. I hated him. I hated him with a vengeance. 'I will show him' I thought to myself and practiced even harder. I never quit. I went for practices every day for six more months!

Then there was a friendly match - three months before the season started.

My coach played me in the starting lineup. I was THRILLED. My team members were brilliant sports. They truly supported me - though they knew fully well I was nowhere close to the best of them. They passed the ball to me at every possible opportunity only to find me fumbling - and losing the ball to the opponents. They gave me every opportunity to take my favourite layup shots - only to find the ball being easily tapped off my grasp by the talented defenders that opposed me.

Within ten minutes I knew I was outmatched in every way - and I was only too aware that I was costing my team the match. I spoke to my Coach and got myself out - and from that point onwards the team just clicked and went on to win the match.

I quit that day. I saw the wisdom in my Coach's words. I still hated him. It took me a long time to really forgive him. But I DID understand what he meant.

I took on debating a few years later, and the rest as they say, was history. The discipline and hard work I learnt during basketball I brought to the debate team - and we became something of a dream team. I shone in my own right - but never in basketball. I realized then what my Coach had done and I went to him for the first time after quitting and thanked him. He was right in telling me I was no good. Had he simply fanned my passion, I would have just been absolutely mediocre at best. He was right to tell me to find something I was good at. I am glad he did, because all my time was taken up doing something I would never have been really good at and what a damn waste it would have been!

This entire episode is still etched in my mind. At a tender age, I learnt a very important lesson in life!

Passion alone is NEVER ENOUGH. You need to be good at something too. Working hard is never enough if you want to be great at something. You need skill too. This was a bitter pill to swallow, but I am glad the 'medicine' came my way early.

Many years afterwards, I watched a documentary on Micheal Jordon. I watched how he practiced and practiced and practiced until he made his 'weaknesses' his strengths.

I asked myself - 'did I give up too easily' - and then I watched his early games - and realized he DID have skill - certainly a hell of a lot of skill than I ever had. He also had the natural grace to play the sport. His practices made him great: but he was good to begin with. Sure, may not be as good as his peers when he started out - but he WAS skilled.

I see a lot of young people chasing the 'follow your passion' advice. Sadly, I guess, whoever the author was of this quotation never quite completed the sentence which I think would make all the difference in the world - 'follow your passion if you have the skill for it.'

NEVER get caught up with chasing dreams that do not belong to you. I know it is harsh when I say it like that. But, stop for a moment and ask yourself, 'do I have the skill to really make it great in what I am doing?' The evidence will be there for you to see: and you will know.

Now look, having a hobby and making it your life's mission are two different things. I still 'throw hoops' whenever I go to College. I still watch the NBA playoffs. I still do some of the practices to keep myself fit: but that doesn't mean I am harboring dreams of playing at the NBA. Learn to differentiate the two.

Choose things you are good at. Choose things you have a natural gift for. We ALL have talents. Identify them for yourself. Then, put all your energy to make it an absolute strength.

For me, my natural gifts were two fold. I could make complex things simple to understand and tell others about it. This made me break lessons down with ease and teach my friends in College without any difficulty.

I was also good at 'talking' - in fact, my mother could never quite get me to 'shut up'! What I do now is a combination of these two strengths. I facilitate learning for young men and women and help them become better at what they do by honing their skills and sharpening their way of thinking.

Even WITH skill, there needs to be a HUGE commitment to 'perfect' your craft. Just because you have talent, that doesn't mean that you will 'make it' (that's a different conversation for later). However, if you have no skill to begin with, then, chances are, you are honestly fighting a losing battle. Sure, you will be better than what you were, with a lot of hard work, but you will be mediocre at best. If that is enough for you, then it's all fine, but if you want to be great at something - which I always wanted for myself - then, quit when you know you really aren't making any headway because you lack the fundamental skills for it.

So, don't bullshit yourself into thinking you can 'do anything as long as you keep trying'. You really can't do it that way. Hard work, dedication and commitment need to meet skill for you to really make the mark.

You can't judge a book by its cover...

True!? But wait...

How DO you actually buy a book? What makes you compelled to pick it up and flip it over and read the synopsis? Imagine if all the covers were EXACTLY the same! HOW will you decide which book to read honestly?

We are all unique. We also have our own little peculiarities and quirks that make us who we are. This is all well and fine. However, remember that we are also part of a larger society: and though we are exceedingly challenging the paradigm of 'fitting in' and opting rather to stamp out our own individuality, EVERY society and 'clique' will have their common identities and norms: and it is important to respect this and establish credibility BEFORE we demand to be accepted as 'ourselves.'

Lots of times, we ARE judged. Its 'cool' to say never judge people: but we DO. We ALL do. Most of the 'judging' happens at first impressions: possibly the second: but after the impressions are made, we either add to it or change our perceptions based on what we encounter, just like we change our 'judgement' of a book after reading it, or of a movie after watching it fully. We either confirm or negate the initial judgement.

It IS important to make the right first impressions. SURE, but it is equally important, if not more important to ensure you can LIVE BY the first impressions you create. However, MAKING that FIRST IMPRESSION is crucial because often you never quite get a second chance. Is it FAIR? Hell no. But that's just the way it is. You are wise to accept it - and learn to work around it.

Let me share two experiences...

One of the biggest opportunities we had at High5 (the consulting company I founded in 2005) was introduced to us by Melanie Kanaka the then GM Finance and Administration for the World Bank in Sri Lanka. It was a simple enough one day facilitation in Negombo, but this was the first time we were ever called in by an organisation like The World Bank where the participants were regional.

The entire South East Asian regional representatives were coming in for a series of workshops in Sri Lanka, and we were called in to do the team work facilitation. This was an opportunity not to be missed and we prepped like crazy to make sure it was just 'perfect.' We met Melanie several times over to understand the group. We were crazily nervous as we knew this was a make or break program. I remember with great fondness how we sat up all night going through the motions over and over again so that when we 'hit the stage' we were all well rehearsed and absolutely ready. The program was attended by Honore Ndoko, the Chief Administration Officer: and he sat there watching the proceedings ever so often throughout the day: ever so often making a few notes. I had no idea who he was until he introduced himself at the end of the session over a cup of coffee. He told me something I came home and celebrated with my team because those words meant the world to me. He said "I was impressed with your level of professionalism and preparation". All of the work we put in to that 'one day' made all the difference in the world in creating the right impression. Melanie called back a few days later and thanked all of us and we celebrated a second time around when she said "you put Sri Lanka on the map. Honore was impressed with the quality of resources we have in Sri Lanka." This was the start of a series of assignments that followed - taking us to different countries in the region - broadening our horizons and enabling us to make a mark in the regional stage. That one BIG opportunity came because of a first impression. We could have been the BEST consulting company in the island - but had we not made the effort to make the right first impression, all of it would have been for nothing.

Hmm... so that went right. Here is one that almost went south...

One of the assignments that I almost 'blew' was down to my little 'idiosyncrasy' in my dress code. I have always been rather 'informal' preferring to be 'comfortable' rather than 'suited up.' The DFCC Leadership Program was something that we 'pitched' for. Pujitha got us the introductions, and we went in with a lot of confidence and a well curated program. We made the presentation to a rather austere and distinguished panel which was made up of Senior Vice Presidents of the Bank, all of whom were very much older than us. After the presentation, there was a barrage of questions, all of which we felt we answered well. Once it was all done, we shook hands confidently, and left.

One of the panelists came in after us, stopped me and took to a side. He leaned forward and told me 'son, your presentation was really good - but next time you come to the Bank, please put on a long sleeves shirt and a tie - otherwise you may be mistaken for Cooray's assistant.' This took me completely by surprise - and I had no clue as to who Cooray was. The only saving grace for me was the twinkle in the VP's voice and the wink afterwards which told me he wasn't 'angry' - just 'concerned.' Fate had it as we were about to leave the premises a young man ushered me to his desk and told me 'tell Cooray to bring us some tea to the meeting room - and machang - tell him to bring it quick.' Later I met Cooray - and he was the ONLY person in the bank to don a black trouser and short sleeves shirt - the exact same attire I had worn for my presentation. I made a mental note that day to honor the dress codes of an organisation.

Again - don't lose the context of this. It is NOT about the tie or the jacket - or in fact the jeans. It is about UNDERSTANDING the organizational context: or the social context - and playing accordingly.

The same gentleman who gave me that little 'advice' spoke to me once the program was concluded and told me 'now you can wear anything you want son - everyone knows you - and they all speak rather fondly of you too!' I gleefully donned my favourite clothes afterwards - but it taught me a truly valuable lesson - EARN THE RIGHT FIRST - and for that, you just get one chance to make that all important impression. ONCE you have earned trust, confidence and 'your place' in the fold, you don't need to worry about 'first impressions' - you only worry about never letting them down.

Too many times we don't want to understand the importance of earning the right to be idiosyncratic. IF you are really good - really, really good - then, your work and your fame precedes you. You can turn up in a sarong and still command attention and respect. Take A.T Ariyaratna for example. Almost everyone knows the gentle giant of Sarvodaya. He walks in wearing a sarong every time - but he IS A.T. Ariyaratna. What he has done with the grass root communities in Sri Lanka is legendary. I can't afford to look at him and say - 'Ah! If he can, why can't I turn up in sarong too?' If I turned up in a sarong as a trainer for corporates, I honestly don't know what the reception would be, and rightly so. I am NOT THAT GOOD! If I was as good as Anthony Robbins - or if I was as famous as Richard Branson, then I guess, it wouldn't matter: but until then, it is wise to pay heed. Remember - even Richard Branson, as iconic and idiosyncratic as he was, never turned up in jeans to be knighted!

Individuality is important - in fact, it is a birthright. Guard it. Nourish it. But don't be naive. Make sure you are absolutely aware of your surroundings, cultural settings and contexts. Play within it until you are able to hold your own. Humble yourself to sacrifice a little bit of your individuality until you 'prove yourself' and be ok to do it.

It is NOT 'lessening yourself' - it is merely a way of proving to yourself, and to others that you are able to honor others as much as you honor yourself.

Don't flatter yourself - you are NEVER that important where others HAVE to take you seriously. So, take the time and the EFFORT to make the right first impressions, and once you have won their confidence, be yourself.

'But hey' - once someone asked me after a presentation on making the right impressions, 'aren't you lying about yourself if you portray something you are not - isn't that completely the opposite of being authentic.' That was a fantastic question - I lauded him for thinking on those lines. Again, I reiterate - there is a difference between trying to portray something you are not merely to get something done - this charade can never be maintained and you are bound to be caught out for sure. However, what I am talking about is actually learning how to be both who you are, and what is expected of you. I know it sounds a paradox - but then again, much of life is actually a paradox. Let me give you an example. Under normal circumstances you may like your hair long - but would you not put a 'net' around it if you were a chef? Is this losing your individuality? Under normal circumstances you may enjoy staying bare chested at home (especially during the hot and humid April season) - does that mean you stay as you were when your daughter's friends and their parents come over? No. Why not? Well, because it is disrespectful. You don't lose your individuality - nor does it not make you any less authentic. It just shows you are respectful of others and circumstances. Individuality should NEVER be at the cost of others!

Money can't buy happiness

When I was in the UK reading for my undergraduate studies, my mother sent me this poem as she was concerned (actually she was concerned from the time I was 16!) that I was putting far too much attention to 'making money':

What Money Won't Buy

- ▶ Amusements but not happiness,
- ▶ A bed but not sleep,
- ▶ Books but not wisdom,
- ▶ A clock but not more time,
- ▶ Companions but not friends,
- ▶ Finery but not beauty,
- ▶ Food but not appetite,
- ▶ A house but not a home,
- ▶ Medicine but not health,
- ▶ A ring, but not marriage.

And I wrote back to her:

Money Will Buy

- ▶ **That oh so comfortable bed** - without which can you sleep fine?
- ▶ **The clock that rings without fail** – without which going to work on time you will never earn a dime!
- ▶ **Books** - which one can devour - and with voracious reading, wisdom has a better chance
- ▶ **Finery** - and with constant travel, beauty certainly will emerge like a flamboyant flamingo dance!
- ▶ **Food** - with or without an appetite to ensure you are never hungry,

- ▶ **A house** - without which, how can you make a home? Am I getting through? Are you angry?
- ▶ **Medicine** - because all of us at some point WILL fall ill
- ▶ **A ring** - without which marriage never begins
- ▶ **Companions** - some of whom may well turn out to be friends!

See mother - money may buy amusements - not happiness - as you say But it sure does help to have some - and a bit more stacked up for a rainy day!

We have two kinds of people fundamentally: those who think money is everything - and those who think money means, nothing.

Both, I think are foolish!

Those who think money is everything run behind it and hoard it - but never really have the time or the ability or sometimes the inclination to use the money they have made to 'have fun' and 'enjoy life.' The hamster in the wheel is eternally running - not realizing that he can stop if he wanted to: now that the money IS made.

The others think of money as the biggest corruptor - and never quite make the effort to make enough - so, they end up working for the rest of their lives. They have certain comforts and they tell themselves that 'this is enough for after all, there are more important things in life than making money.' Most of these end up being hand to mouth - and never quite becoming financially independent.

What a shame!

See - I personally think anyone who says 'money isn't everything' is right - but they are also probably very rich to begin with. WHEN you have all the money in the world, then one can philosophize: but until you do, if you really believe this paradigm then you make the horrible mistake of ending up without much wealth to call your own in your old age. That is DISASTROUS unless you have a child who will take care of you. Similarly, if you actually think that money is everything, then you keep making money even when you have no idea how you will spend it. You become old without too many fond memories to call your own, and possibly no children who truly think well of you, rather, as a parent who cared more for the money than you cared for them. 'I did all of this for you' never really registers as the truth. They all know you were far more concerned about the next million than spending an additional hour with them.

I read 'Rich Dad Poor Dad' when I was about 30 years old - I wish I had read it when I was 16! I would have made some fundamental changes as to how I 'managed' money had I done this. I recommend this book to anyone who is serious enough to understand HOW to actually make money work for you - rather than working for the money.

However, this is the CRUX of it - there is a difference between being 'rich' and being 'financially independent.' Most people don't understand the difference. Being 'rich' is about having a ton of money or assets: being 'financially independent' means you have passive means of income to enable you to have the lifestyle you want WITHOUT having to work for it. If you have a brilliantly successful business or a practice - then you can become rich - but you will have to keep working in order to maintain that lifestyle you have made for yourself for the entirety of your life for if not, the moment you stop, the income diminishes.

So, the challenge is to convert your hard earned money to investments that keep pumping you passive income.

TIME is the ultimate luxury. However, you can never quite have the time unless you become financially independent. Having the CHOICE to do what you LIKE and what you ENJOY as well as truly devote time for your kids, your parents, and yourself is in fact, only possible if you are able to be financially independent. Sure, you can do it without any money too - but is it sustainable? Imagine being a CEO of an extremely successful organization and trying to take a week off, truly take a week off. Alternatively, think of being a relatively chilled out 'free-lancer'. Will you DARE let go of a really big gig? Realistically, neither person can take that call UNLESS, there was a passive income coming in to make sure there was bread and butter on the table! The whole bohemian utopia crumbles when you see your kids in hunger!

So, don't think of money as the devil incarnate. It is neither the 'be all' nor the 'end of life'. However, make the distinction and promise yourself to be financially independent as fast as you possibly can. Life is too short to spend all your money, but it is also too long to be without creature comforts.

The reality is, with our inflation and financial instabilities, finding financial independence is more important than ever. Don't kid yourself into thinking that you can 'survive with the bare bone minimums' because even with a very humble lifestyle - how much you need will increase over the years and unless your 'earnings' are hedged against inflation, chances are the quality of your lifestyle will decrease every year. So, make sure your financial acumen is strong and that you have a financial plan for yourself - not to be rich, but to ensure you can generate enough of a passive income to ensure you maintain the lifestyle you want into your old age.

Patience is a virtue

I have always been an impatient being. I hate when people tell me 'all in good time' or 'there is a time and a place for everything' or the golden one of them all 'patience is a virtue.'

I do understand the wisdom of each sentence: I really do. What I hate is the connotation. WHY wait? Patience - waiting for something - rather than DOING something for it - somehow doesn't make sense to me.

Often, it is the 'older and wiser' people who make this remark - more often than not, with an all knowing look at us 'poor souls' who are not old enough to understand! Even though I am older now, I am none the wiser.

Waiting sucks. In fact, I think waiting is counter-productive. Again though - let me set context.

See, IF patience is a virtue, then we can actually sit there and wait for everything. A better job, the promotion we wanted, that ideal partner, that dream vacation, etc. Will any of this come about because you were patient? No. These will come about ONLY if you work damn hard for it. Patience has nothing to do with it.

Don't wait patiently. Aggressively pursue your ambitions and dreams. Don't wait for things to happen. Make things happen. This MINDSET makes all the difference in the world in you either making it or settling. Don't settle.

You must have a sense of urgency, a burning desire to get things done. If it isn't urgent, most often it gets put on the 'back burner' and never gets done. Think of the tap that drips. You never fix it. WHY? Because, it isn't urgent.

It is important, yes - but not urgent. You don't visit your aging parents for a while. WHY? Because it isn't urgent! So, get a sense of urgency for all that is important to you - and get it done. Don't wait.

NOTHING happens EXACTLY to plan - we all know this, unless of course you truly are charmed (and some, honestly are!) Most things don't work out because you will it either. Patience is not what is required, it is dogged perseverance, an almost anger at the lack of results and an even more ambitious plan to make it a reality. You need to often fight to get what you want: not wait patiently for it.

One of my long cherished dreams was to get a Masters. I wanted to do this soon after my degree: but one thing after the other became a priority and it got pushed back. First, was a rather demanding career which I was keen to get ahead in, then came kids, then came more demands from the career, then I started out on my own, then a second kid. My Masters was the last thing on my mind. There never seemed the perfect moment to start - and going for lectures seemed impossible as most of my training programs at the time were over weekends. After 15 years of 'waiting patiently' and telling myself 'it's ok', I really got frustrated with myself - no, I got ANGRY with myself. I went online, and registered for my first MA. I never thought too much about it or how exactly I was going to find the time. All I knew was that I wanted a Masters - and I'll be damned if I made any more excuses for myself. Doing an online course of study for the first time was really tough, and funding an international program with all the other commitments was even tougher: but I am glad I did it, because it turned out to be one of the most rewarding learning experiences I have had thus far in my life.

Nothing great ever come from waiting. Every major win for humanity from abolishing slavery to freedom as nations came because people got frustrated after waiting - and taking on a fight. Had we waited, I think we would still be waiting.

So, get impatient. Get going... I think Nike said it best... JUST DO IT!

There IS a caveat. One DOES need to be patient: but not with doing things - but about feelings. The importance of patience is with one's own feelings and with dealing with others' feelings. Patience certainly is a virtue then. Be impatient with getting things done - but be patient with your feelings when things don't go right and be patient with others who find fault with you and critique you along the way. Again - it sounds paradoxical - and it is - but once again, much of life is just that - paradoxical. See, the ability to manage your emotions becomes critical in life if you want to be successful. Bigger the dreams are, bigger the setbacks and possibilities of failure. Bigger the gulf between what you have and what you want - bigger the workload and pain. So, being able to tell yourself its ok to fail is important. It is equally important to have a ton of patience with those who say 'no' and the doubters. We will talk about this at greater length in a different chapter - but for now, let it suffice to say that patience is a virtue when dealing with emotions but never with getting things done.

Honesty is the best policy (with apologies to my mother)

Honestly?

I don't know.

Many have been the times I was plain glad I didn't just blurt out the 'truth.'

I genuinely feel honesty is overrated (not to be confused with integrity - which is a whole different ball game). Lying is a necessary part of everyday life. We lie for a plethora of reasons - and this is where I think the difference comes. If you are lying to 'save your hide' then, that's when honesty comes in: but if you are lying to honestly avert pain and heartache - then, in my humble opinion, it is not only ok - it is much more desirable than being truthful.

My father's eldest brother was his best friend. His 'buddy' in all things crazy and possibly borderline insane ! Even he was elder, my dad possibly played the role of the 'mature' adult !! So, you can imagine his sorrow and absolute horror when he found out that his brother was diagnosed with cancer. My uncle was not the kind of person to ask too many questions, and for the longest time actually never went to a doctor in the first place... However, once his 'home remedies' didn't yield any result, and once his breathing became extremely difficult : he went to the doctors, who referred him to the cancer hospital. Once my uncle went in and came out, had my father walked in, and asked the dreaded questions...

'How bad is it?'

'It's bad - probably two or three months' was the answer he got.

My father came out of the room - and told my uncle 'good news Aiya (brother), its at its early stages, 'and the doctor said you can beat it if you take your medication!' (which is actually what my uncle told my dad having gone to the JP !!!)

The medication was mostly to ease the pain. He wasn't even prescribed too much radiation given the stages he was in.

He took the 'medication' and somehow, managed to almost a year. He never knew the truth - or at least we think he never quite accepted he had cancer - nor did his wife. My father carried that burden with aplomb, and cried only for the second time in his life when my uncle died.

I honestly don't know whether what my father did was right: all I know is that my Uncle seemed happy, blissfully so - and was up and about his normal routine and seemed none the wiser to his condition. We went to see him every opportunity we got : and every meeting was the same. Laughter, stories of youthful folly, reminiscing their parents and siblings who were no longer with them, and a quiet drink shared in silence before they left.

The moral high ground 'I never lie' and 'I am blunt' I think is deeply inhuman: deeply hurtful : deeply one sided. Don't EVER LIE to save your skin : or to willfully deceive in order for personal gain : this is integrity : and you should never allow you to be without integrity : but honesty, honestly, is best left alone and tempered with love, regard and empathy.

Enjoy the journey - not the destination

See, it is true that one must enjoy the journey, but genuinely think about it - most journeys that are worth taking honestly isn't enjoyable at all.

The 'journey' towards anything that is a 'stretch' is tough, both physically and emotionally - and at times, spiritually. The piece of advice (as almost all genuinely heartfelt pieces of advice goes) is well intended: but often has the wrong connotations. Enjoy the journey somehow gets you to think it is going to be easy or somehow you can find pleasure whilst on the journey.

Mohammed Ali famously said 'I hated every minute of training, but I said, don't quit: suffer now to live the rest of your life as a Champion.' Do you honestly think any world famous sports personality 'enjoys' practice? Do you think any musician starting out practicing hour after hour of scales enjoys it? Do you think the gym buffs starting out as a skinny little fellow or a rather rotund, obese fellow not quite seeing their own feet enjoys the diets they endure or the huffing and puffing on the treadmill enjoyable? Do you think the mountaineers who brave the highest peaks 'enjoy' the ascending barely breathing in the oxygen starved air?

Hell no! See, the 'enjoying' comes when we narrate the story of our success - because it's nostalgic at that point. Having done it, we look back at all the hardships we endured with a certain fondness, respect and regard. We look at each of those grueling moments as a rite of passage that enabled us to achieve that ultimate pinnacle. GETTING there - when it was ACTUALLY HAPPENING is honestly never as pretty as we make it out into being.

Having gotten there, most of us chime 'remember to enjoy the journey' - because in all seriousness most of us (let me not say all, as there are ALWAYS exceptions to the rule) forgot the 'take the time to smell the roses' along the way.

One of the most grueling and possibly gut-wrenching 'journeys that I personally had the misfortune of being part of was my daughter's O/L's. I say misfortune, because I genuinely was gutted many times over (though I never showed it to her ever) simply watching her go through the motions. It wasn't pretty and it is one of those things I do not wish on any parent. Having been born with 'lower than average IQ' she was challenged with learning disabilities from an early stage. When one cannot put two and two together and actually make four and understand the logic behind it - one knows one has problems.

Shaakya's grim determination and resilience was something I drew a lot of inspiration from: and I watched her making sum after sum, do past paper after past paper just to ensure she does not fail. EVERYTHING was a struggle. What would be absolutely 'easy peasy' (like my son often says) was like doing PhD physics for her! Having gone through the motions and passed her O/L's with 3As, 3Bs and 3Cs (not having a single simple pass was honestly a HUGE win for her!). I put out a post about it on social media which brought in an outpouring of love, well wishes and tributes. Trust me: we didn't enjoy the journey: none of us did. It was absolutely heart breaking for Rowena to see Shaakya having to struggle like that - and for me personally, it was about 'toughening her up' which meant I had to be tougher than normal with her emotions as well as her focus - not allowing me to have the 'typical' father daughter relationship I longed to have with her. It also meant she could really pursue things that she really had a passion for as O/L's was the entry point for any form of higher studies. More than anything else, Shaakya, also being only human, will have many moments of absolute breakdown - seeing a report riddled with 30's and 40's when she had poured hours on end prepping. It genuinely was a miracle she didn't simply give up! Kudos to her school, Methodist College - and also to all her teachers who stood by her and truly spurred her on - but the bottom line was this - the journey wasn't enjoyable one bit - and whichever way one looked at it, it wasn't 'inspirational' when we were going through it. It was just sheer agony and heartbreaking above all else.

Was it worth it though? Hell yes. Shaakya found a certain inner confidence going through all of it and coming out on top that is very difficult to give otherwise. She has a steely confidence: an iron will and a resilience which I think is far more important than the grades she got. The destination was worth all the effort put in: as, what she learnt from it can never be learnt otherwise.

Now that she is over the hurdle, even she looks back at it and laughs at herself for the myriad of times she simply broke down.

Be willing to put yourself through shit to get to where you want to get to. If you can get there without pain - sure - that's GREAT. However, chances are you really are never going to achieve anything significant without significant pain associated with it. Don't worry about enjoying the journey: suffer through it in silence. Once you arrive at the destination, like you getting to the summit of Everest, you can come back down, and relive those moments for a lifetime!

If you want to 'enjoy the journey' take a train trip on the Orient Express: don't take up Everest!

PART 2: BULLSHIT YOU SHOULD NEVER TELL YOURSELF

We all tell ourselves a ton of bullshit: mostly to pacify ourselves. I am no exception.

I wish (I know hindsight is a wonderful thing!) that I learnt NOT to bullshit myself earlier - as I genuinely think I would have been far more at ease with myself and more importantly, done things differently if I had done so years ago.

See, we have a natural 'comfort zone' and whenever we step out of it and things don't quite go according to plan, we find all the BS in the world to cocoon ourselves from the hurt. Getting hurt, and thriving in it, and using that hurt to propel ourselves forward is an important character trait that I think distinguishes the true heroes from the wannabes.

I have often resorted to console myself with total BS. This chapter is dedicated to the nonsense I told myself I will never resort to going forward!

You are perfect - JUST the way you are...

Sure. We have all said this at some point. We have all been in love. We have all crooned sweet nothings to our better half's ears. There is nothing wrong with that.

However, this is one of the biggest pieces of bollocks that we chant these days. 'We are perfect - just the way we are' - and we have the audacity to add 'if you can't deal with it - that's YOUR problem.' Really?

Telling this to yourself is NOT positive reinforcement - it is a deep conceited load of crap that you need to completely wean yourself out of.

NONE of us are PERFECT - and there are TONS OF THINGS we need to improve on if we are to truly become the best versions of ourselves. UNLESS we are humble enough to accept this, truly, truly accept it - then, we never improve - and the only loser is you: not the ones who point it out.

The world has gone bonkers with a false sense of positivity. Being this conceited is NOT positivity: it is a total misrepresentation of the word. Those who point out your faults are actually those who love you the most. Sure, none of us want to be criticized - especially by those who are nearest and dearest to us - but unless they do - who will?

See, the issue is, that we are too damn proud to accept our faults. Rather than listening, we jump to defend ourselves. What is wrong in pointing out a fault in the first place? Are you too big to listen? Then, that in itself is something we need to correct in ourselves.

In a day and age where we criticize almost anything and anyone, isn't it important to really take a cold hard look at ourselves - with or without others' pointing it out. Self-reflection and introspection is the ONLY way we truly come to grips with our own little faults - and making the commitment to make these 'right' is the ONLY way we truly improve ourselves. This learning NEVER stops - we need to commit to improve ourselves every day - till the day we die.

One of the harshest criticisms of my training 'style' came from my wife who hasn't seen much of my training. On one of those odd days - very early on in my career, she saw me running a program and told me quite bluntly 'you crack too many dirty jokes. I defended myself vehemently, and told her that she has no sense of humor.

However, I did mull over it afterwards and realized this was true. I DID crack too many 'dirty jokes' - this was my way of breaking ice - and generally everyone laughs and no one said anything. However, a woman will look at these quite differently to a 'typical man' - and it was right for her to point it out. I changed - and I am glad I did - there are many, many ways of bringing out humor rather than crude jokes. Much later on, one of my participants who came back for one of the programs many years after her first program with me, came up to me after the program and said 'it is nice to see you don't crack dirty jokes anymore Vidusha - I used to cringe being in the audience.' I asked her why she never told me so in the first place and she merely smiled and said 'I felt too awkward to tell you - but I am glad someone did.' I told her it was my wife who told me and then she started laughing 'you would have got a right royal earful then ha!' I confided that my wife is generally my biggest critique - after my mom!

We almost never quite take our mothers 'seriously' - much to our own detriment. My mother was - as I guess it is for most of us who have South Asian mothers - and still is - someone who will criticize me without hesitation. One of the biggest 'grouses' with her was that I never worried about my spelling. Ammi would put circle after circle in red and get rather cross that I would never be able to write even one sentence without a spelling mistake in it. I used to get quite upset with her: 'but Ammi - isn't my essay just spot on' I would try and fish her for a compliment - but no such luck - she would quip back 'how can you be spot on with so many spelling mistakes.' I never quite listened: I never quite corrected myself until I went to work. My former boss, Shirendra Lawrence was a stickler for 'perfection.'

I was charged with developing the 'induction manual' for the company - and I did this with absolute joy! Imagine my horror when the draft (which I thought was perfect - as it was beautifully crafted, extremely well written and had innovative binding and recycled paper) came back with over a 100 spelling mistakes neatly marked. I was devastated. I hastily corrected it and sent it back within a day. It came back with spellings marked again. This happened 5 times over - until all the mistakes were duly corrected. Shirendra called me to his room at the end of the week and told me 'at least use spell checker Vidusha!' I was waiting for the compliment 'super job' which never came - and rightly so - as all the 'good work' was negated in a document riddled with spelling mistakes - which would have destroyed the company image had it been distributed without being checked. I still suck at spellings - but I make a conscious effort to proof it - and more often than not, seek professional help to ensure that my important documents are error free. I went home and apologized to my mother and told what happened - and Ammi being Ammi, merely smiled and said 'hope you learnt your lesson!' I read the draft once again and found a few more mistakes that even Shirendra had missed (which I immediately corrected before the document went into print.)

Throughout my career, I have been blessed to have bosses, peers and even subordinates who have unflinchingly pointed out my faults. I won't lie: I have defended my corner - argued - gotten upset over things - but I always go home and think about it - and more often than not, I find that they are right. Sometimes, it is only one perspective - which they made into being a 'truth' about me - but even that one instance where it came to light made it something they thought was 'wrong' or 'could be better' and they were caring enough to tell me. Today, my daughter and my son are quick to critique my work - my actions and my every move - and once again - they are often right.

It is easy to be conceited enough to think we are brilliant - and maybe we are - but even the most brilliant of us have much to learn. In fact ALL of us have more to learn than not. Knowing this truly, truly knowing this, and acknowledging it is the first step I took to honestly improving my craft, my relationships and my whole approach to life in general.

It's complicated!

I hate this statement with all my heart.

It's a bloody excuse not to face realities and DO something about the predicament you are in. It is a shameful exoneration of oneself. It is a shammer's attempt to get out of a situation and still feel good about oneself.

It's complicated? Then bloody hell, simplify it!!!

There is absolutely NOTHING complicated about anything in life. Actually life is pretty simple if you learn to look at it that way. I used to hide behind the 'It's complicated' statement for a long time until a former boss of mine confronted me with a version of the 5 why analysis which I dubbed the 5 'so's' afterwards.

I was finding it really tough to do my work - and keep the focus. We had just had Shaakya and there came the sleepless nights afterwards as she was a really light sleeper (makes up for it now though!!!). I had also taken up a few lecturing assignments for the newly initiated Apparel CIM program, and it was all becoming a bit too much.

My work didn't have the same 'dead centered focus' that I was somewhat known for and my boss picked it up. After listening to my usual long winded harangue he simply asked:

'So?'

I explained it again and the same question came back:

'So?' I was annoyed. This time, I broke it down to him - and said 'it's complicated boss, you won't really understand' and all it prompted was another -

'So?'

'So I really cannot do all of it - but I really want to, also' I quipped - anger slightly raising its head and absolute frustration with a boss that didn't seem to give a shit...

'So... now you know' he said, with a glint in his eyes.

'What do I know?' I snapped back - hating the Yoda Skywalker type conversation that was taking place and hating the fact that he was playing Yoda!

'So now you know you can't do all of it...' he said, once again sounding like Yoda.

'Choose' he said, and then just like that he walked out leaving me in his room, bat shit crazy and confused!

I went home and had a chat with Roons and yes, Boss was right - it WAS that simple. Choose! And choose I did. Not that MY choice has to be YOUR choice - but we ALL need to CHOOSE.

I chose to focus on work. The reason was simple. There was jack shit for me to do anyway with a toddler - and I was the sole breadwinner for both my family and two sets of aging parents who had saved little for their old age (they had happily showered all of their wealth on our education and happiness.) I slept alone for most days, ensuring I got my share of proper sleep, let go of most of my commitments of a personal nature - and just focused on work and ensuring I did what I needed to do to ensure I got ahead in my career which was the ONLY way for me to ensure we had a better quality of life. Popular - hell no - but thankfully Roons understood (actually, SHE was the one who said 'you can't breast-feed her anyway!') but very few others did.

The point is not whether I made the right choice or not - the point is it is NOT complicated. Nothing is. The issue is that we somehow feel the compulsion to complicate it - so that we may feel good about ourselves in a weird sordid type of way - and make it more bearable. Somehow, if it is 'complicated' we have the 'excuse' to allow the status quo to be as is...

The choices we make shape our lives. Irrespective of WHAT we choose there is a downside. However, NOT making the choices makes things much, much worse. Simplify the choices before you and ask yourself - what is most important - both for the future and also for RIGHT NOW. There is ALWAYS a trade off - and very often, long term success comes with a sacrifice in the short term.

Now, whenever someone tells me 'it's complicated V', I tell them to 'choose' what to do. If you don't make a call - it's on you: NOT the 'complication' you are in.

NOT being able to make that sacrifice - or not wanting to put yourself through the physical and often emotional turmoil in the short term, is what leads to that so called 'complicated' situations.

Now, whenever someone tells me 'it's complicated V', I tell them to 'choose' what to do. If you don't make a call - it's on you: NOT the 'complication' you are in.

I did what I could...

Oh how I absolutely HATE this phrase.

Doing what you 'can' is irrelevant. What you need to do is what needs to be done (to achieve what you want to achieve).

See, the moment you say 'I did what I could' you are telling yourself you did 'all you could': but this is NEVER true. What you need to do is to think anew and find new ways of doing things and ensure what NEEDS TO BE DONE is DONE.

What you CAN do, and WILL do are two different things. We are ALL capable of a hell of a lot more than we think we can if ONLY we are willing to put ourselves through it. So, if you want to take the easy way out - and console yourself, then I guess 'I did all I could' is good enough - but hey - who are we trying to kid...

This is another one of those beautiful BS phrases we use to not accept we FAILED and not being honest about it - and asking that all important question WHAT CAN I DO TO GET IT DONE!

One of my 'subordinates' who worked with me at CCL (who wished to remain anonymous when I spoke to her about writing her story - given that she has grown sons who still doesn't know the full extent of their mother's sacrifices and she doesn't want them to know either - which hugely increases my respect for her!) was married with two kids when she was just 20. She eloped with the 'love of her life' who was just a year older than her and both sets of parents disowned them. She started working when she was just 17 years as she wanted to fend for herself and 'not be a burden' on her family. Then when she was about 33 (which is when I got to know her) she found out that her husband had an incurable illness which incapacitated him from working. So, she became the sole breadwinner. Her salary was not more than 15,000 SLR at the time - and she wasn't even an executive! Her ambition was to ensure she had a house each for her kids apart from their own house - and to ensure her kids were educated. She wanted to have a business of her own, and ensure they were rich enough to have holidays abroad each year. Many laughed at her and called her 'overly ambitious.' Unlike me, she never said 'I did what I could!' and settle for anything less than what she really wanted. Whilst working, she started stitching uniforms over weekends and holidays. She also prepared lunch parcels to be sold through her eldest son in their school. She saved up her bonuses and increments to pay a down payment for a van that she put in as a school transport van and used it during weekends to hire for weekend trips - especially for those at our office. She ensured her husband was taken care of - and miraculously, medicine became available to 'live with the condition' rather than dying of it. She told her husband to stay at home and manage the kids as well as managing the little ventures she was starting. She never told a soul about it - apart from a few of us who were honestly rooting for her - and swore us to secrecy. Fast forward 15 years: she is still working. BUT now she is a manager, both her kids were educated well.

They go abroad every year. She took care of both sets of parents in their last years as none of those who got 'married with their blessings' wanted to look after them in their old age! She built three houses - one for themselves, and one each for each of their sons. Not bad for a woman who was making only 15K a month and living on rent! I asked why she never quit her job - and take on the business ventures she started and take it 'to the next level.' 'I always wanted to be a manager and the exposure I get here I can't really get anywhere else. So, I allow my husband to run the business ventures and I do my best to take MY career to the next level' she said. All I could do was to nod with absolutely agreement!

I asked myself 'what's your excuse?'

When I left CCL she cried. She still keeps in touch - and often tells me that I helped her in many ways and I keep telling her that she is the kind of person who would make it with or without anyone's help because she NEVER used 'I did what I could' as an excuse. She found ways around things, got down to it and got on with it. How can a person like that ever fail?

'Shit happens!'

'Shit Happens!'

Sure: but why does shit happen to YOU?

There really IS a pattern here. If you analyze things carefully enough there is a pattern to your behavior and decisions.

See, shit happens because you were too blind to see the red flags a waving, - a waving - a waving... You just didn't see it actually - you didn't WANT to see it.

Let me offer one very humiliatingly stupid example.

We were planning a family vacation for the April season. After much deliberation we decided to go to Bali. Me, being me, generally NEVER take chances with family vacations: but this time around, money was a little tight and I scouted for some cheap options. Along came a Linked In message about some cheap flight options. It was cheaper by about 10K per ticket and this made all the difference in being able to book a nicer hotel for the kids. I spoke to the dude - and he seemed pleasant enough and I went with it. Never bothered to do my homework or to do a few verifications given that this was the first time I was using them. There was a company and the guy was absolutely 'customer centric' and I went with it. To cut a long story short: we never got the tickets - and we never got the money back either! All we could do was to lodge a complaint at the police station and pursue legal action. What a bloody disaster -especially for the kids who were eagerly awaiting the trip overseas who had to be told they can't go because their father 'went with his gut!' If I had bothered to do my due diligence, it would have been quite clear that this was a scam.

Thankfully, this was relatively small amount of money: and we can afford to let go none the less : but imagine if this was that all important trip to a dream destination - one can never quite 'recuperate' from it - and irrespective of it - it always leaves a bad taste in the mouth for years to come!

Shit happens? Yes, because I was STUPID!

Don't allow yourself this excuse either. When 'shit happens', there are two very important questions to ask yourself:

1. WHY did it happen to me? What did I do to leave room for it?
2. WHAT can I do to ensure it never happens again?

Simply telling yourself 'shit happens' is a sure way of leaving room for the same 'shit' to happen to you again, and again - and yet again.

I don't give a flying f*c*!

Someone told me this when I was an impressionable teen - and I gleefully adopted not only the words, but also its true essence. It took me many, many, many years to 'unlearn it' because genuinely it is very liberating not to actually give a 'flying f*c*!' In fact, many years afterwards I also read a book that boldly showed you how to do exactly that - 'not to give a flying f*c*'!!

Trust me, I know too many people who actually care far too much for what 'others' think and never really live life because of it. However, there IS a flip side to this. There are as many - if not many, many more who actually are absolutely toxic human beings because they 'don't give a flying f*c*'.

My 'aha moment' came about thankfully early on in my youth. Watching the entire episode unfold was almost like watching a sordid sitcom... Both were very, very close friends - almost family - and will remain anonymous (names used are fictional to make writing this easier - though the incident is not).

Asanga and Dulanjalie were childhood sweethearts. It was one of those love stories we all looked up to - as they were 'going out' when most of us had not even considered having a 'girlfriend.' Both were sensible people and both were good in their studies. Both were heavily into extracurricular activities and both were star students, the perfect power couple. What we really loved about them was though they were clearly 'far above' us mere mortals, they were rooted, grounded and absolutely fun to be around. We weren't surprised when they got married having both graduated with First Class honors. Two kids and a few years later imagine our horror when they split up. I met Asanga soon after we heard the 'news' and sat with him for a few hours over a few beers. It was evident that though he was really upset over the breakup he wasn't willing to actually 'give a flying f*c*!' This surprised me a lot - because both of them were extremely individualistic - but we all thought this was what was awesome - that they could be themselves - and still have all the fun in the world and be together.

Marriage is 'complicated' - maybe? But there are simple underlying things that make any relationship work. If you really want a relationship to work, the foundation is actually to care. When marriages fail - it doesn't really matter whose fault it is. The sad reality is that who gets affected the most are the kids. 'Bad' marriages are not only the ones that end in divorce: there are far more toxic ones where the kids see incessant bickering, abuse and complete lack of love and regard and kids get sanitized to this behavior as much as most employees who have toxic bosses often get sanitized by it (though they hate it) and more often

than not, demonstrate the same behavior when they become managers in their own right.

See... you NEED to care, especially about those nearest and dearest to you think - and feel - and expect... Unless you can make adjustments for their sake you are just an absolutely selfish asshole. Parents need to care about their children's feelings. Wives need to care about their husbands' opinions - and of course vice-versa. Children need to care about their parent's wishes. Similarly, I think it IS important for subordinates to acknowledge and be sensitive to their 'boss's expectations and 'quirks' as much as bosses are expected to be sensitive to their subordinates' needs. If everyone didn't 'care', imagine what work will be like! In fact, this is EXACTLY what is wrong with the world today. NO ONE gives a 'flying f*c*' as long as they get what they want. Restraint is out of the window. One's individuality is stamped irrespective of the consequences to others.

Learning to actually care is important and that DOES mean surrendering some of your individuality. To me, if you REALLY care, then you WILL make that sacrifice. IF you really don't give a shit - then, you must be ok about others not giving a shit about what you say too. Imagine how that would be. Imagine if your mother never gave a shit about what you liked to eat, your father never giving a shit about what you like to do, your teachers never giving a shit about your difficulties, your friends never giving a shit about your fears and insecurities and your spouse not giving a shit about your needs! Not a pleasant feeling, isn't it?

The key is to know that your opinion, your feelings, your expectations and your version of life is just that: YOUR version. EVERYONE has one - and at times, very often these worlds collide. Tolerating someone else's world view and trying to find common ground is an important skill to learn.

Ah... I was just unlucky

'Luck' is something I must admit I have mixed feelings about. I look around me, and some people seemed to be just that 'lucky'! It somehow seems to come easy for them. Whatever they 'get in to' seems to 'work' and they don't seem to even try hard! Success seems to come easy to them.

I genuinely feel that 'luck' has something to do with the ease with which success comes to you. Being at the right place at the right time is something you cannot engineer. However, to claim 'I was unlucky' when things DON'T happen the way you want, and success eludes you is a mistake: because then you give the power you have over your destiny to something or someone else - which I have never been comfortable with.

I read somewhere a small equation which stuck with me.

Luck = opportunity * being ready to make use of that opportunity.

This equation is nowhere close to deciphering how to be lucky - but, flawed as it was, it gave me a fantastic starting point to ensure that I was 'luckier' than what I was!

See, it isn't really hard to spot opportunities. If you are able to actually look at it, almost everything gives you an opportunity. Every meeting you have is an opportunity to make an impression, every meal you have is an opportunity to become healthier, every place you visit is an opportunity to meet someone interesting, every film you watch is an opportunity to 'learn a lesson', every time a lift is full is an opportunity to climb a few steps which will help you have that 10 minutes of exercise during a busy day, every time you make a presentation is an opportunity for you to hone your presentation and speaking skills... You catch my drift?

Then, of course, there are those once in a lifetime opportunities that gives you that 'big break' that will help you take yourself (or your business, or your career) to the place where you envisioned it. You meet a possible partner who is as excited as you are about your business proposition. You meet a CEO who is as excited as you about a shared future. You meet that professor who is as passionate as you are about your intended area of research... When THIS happens, all of your 'preparation' will come to bear: in either being able to convert that opportunity - or losing it forever.

Getting the opportunity and 'being ready to take on the opportunity' has many moving parts but here are three areas to focus on:

ASK FOR IT. Sometimes, you need to blatantly ask for it. Subtle overtures might not work. Is asking for it sounding 'desperate' - certainly! But hey! Isn't that the truth? Asking for an assignment that you are really passionate about, asking for a raise that you think you richly deserve, a job that you have been dreaming of: there is nothing wrong with it. Remember though, as with all things – it is never what you say - but it is all about how you say it!

Ensure you have the right skills, competencies and capability to do it. It's all fine and dandy to be confident but be realistic too. **NEVER** overshoot your capability or capacity and over promise. Be absolutely certain that you can deliver what you promise you can. Often, you get that **ONE** chance to make that all important break, so don't F it up because you got cocky!

Have a support network. You almost always need help and support of many others to 'crack that big one' so, ensure you have your network ready to help if required.

Things don't go your way for a multitude of reasons. Some are within your control. Some are not. Try never to focus on what you can't control and put all your efforts to ensure you DO control what you CAN. This ALWAYS stacks things in your favor.

Having said all that, it doesn't harm you to go down on your knees and say a prayer either!

Don't doubt yourself - go with your gut

'Luck' is something I must admit I have mixed feelings about. I look around me, and some people seemed to be just that 'lucky'! It somehow seems to come easy for them. Whatever they 'get in to' seems to 'work' and they don't seem to even try hard! Success seems to come easy to them.

This is one of those age old little things that I took to heart far, far too seriously.

Trust your gut...

But you know what? There IS a reason you have a gut AND a brain! You are wise to use BOTH: especially when it matters the most.

If you are going on a trip - just go - don't plan too much, and go with the flow.

If you are changing your career, getting married, starting out on your own, making a sizable investment, then please don't just go with your gut.

I often muse that there is nothing we do with logic alone. All of us are only human - and as such, governed by emotions and instinct and there is nothing wrong with that. All the logic and reason in the world sometimes is never enough too and sometimes it all just goes wrong, but the CHANCES of going wrong can be diminished quite significantly if you prep up, plan and think through things carefully and plan a few steps ahead AND factor in the risks.

We do all this at work, but sadly, we rarely do this with our own lives.

Life isn't or at least shouldn't be a series of instinctive reactions to circumstances. After all, what is the earthly point in possessing such cognitive capacities if we cannot think about our own lives?. Amazingly it is about our lives we think the least. We talk for hours on end about the way the world is, the garbage issue and why our cricket team failed. But, how often do you talk about why you never got that promotion and analyze it carefully or why you are not really making progress with your business?

I have often told myself 'you got this, just go for it!' Sure, it has worked plenty of times but it has also gone disastrously wrong. 'That's just the way it is,' I have often consoled myself.

Doubting yourself is very good. Do it. Confidence is not just blind action. Confidence is not the absence of fear. Confidence is not irrational.

Throughout your life you WILL doubt yourself. Good. Ask yourself WHY at this point. WHY are you doubting whether you can or can't do something? Second guess yourself EVEN when you truly believe that 'you got this' - even when you are cock sure of yourself. There is no harm always asking what can go wrong,

this better prepares you for things to come. If nothing goes wrong then brilliant: but if it DOES, then it makes all the difference in the world to be prepared: because what courses of actions to take has been forethought - and this will ensure you are still on track - rather than being derailed by the 'unforeseen' which at times throws you completely off course permanently.

NEVER doubt yourself is bad advice. DOUBT yourself - but go ahead none the less - especially if you want something that bad. But, always, always, always, plan eventualities and prepare yourself. This is NOT being negative - it is just being REALISTIC - as things, more often than not, never go according to how YOU plan it.

We are all quite ingenious - in that - we can always weigh things out in multiple possible angles. It is an amazing gift that possibly only humans possess. Our instincts are ONE of those angles. So, it is right to consider it. However, that ALONE is a recipe for disaster. As always, if you have all the money in the world, then 'going with your gut' wouldn't really make much of a difference either way to you, then hey - it doesn't matter. However, for most of us, we who can't really afford to foolishly 'go with our gut' when there is a hell of a lot more than our little happy go lucky positive attitude at risk! This extremely 'cool' way of thinking, honestly is a death trap!

It's easy for you to say...

I used to dismiss a lot of advice with this contemptuous phrase.

'It's easy for you to SAY.'

See, most people WON'T say anything to you. It takes a hell of a lot love, consideration and courage to actually tell you something negative to your face...

NEVER ever dismiss it with, 'It's easy for you to say.'

Sure, no one really understands your context, your heartache and your helplessness. Here's the kicker, THEY DON'T NEED TO. All they need to know or feel is that whatever they saw you did or heard you did was not 'ok', so they called it out.

Acknowledge the advice, taking it or not is up to you but acknowledge it and be thankful they gave it to you straight.

There is nothing called 'positive criticisms' or 'constructive criticisms'. It is constructive or destructive based on how you take it and what you do with it.

See, NEVER take all the advice you get but LISTEN to all of them. Truly listen. Truly digest it. Truly acknowledge it. Others will have perspectives to you that you never ever see for yourself. Having the 'patience' to listen, to listen is important – and it will honestly make you a lot wiser!

Forgive - but don't forget

One of the things I found really hard to do is to forgive. Oh yes - it is easy to just say it - but to really, really get it out of your system was really hard for me. However, until I learnt how to truly forgive I realized that the only person I really tormented was me.

However, there was more to this than just forgiving. See, if someone did something to you that really needs 'forgiving' rather than a mere chat and clarifying the misunderstanding over a beer or a coffee, that means it must be something rather bad isn't it? So, why 'forget' the lessons it ought to teach you?

NEVER forget. Specially those gut wrenching of betrayals, the worst of let downs, the biggest of promises broken, people who were party to it: forgive them for sure, but never forget - not because you want to get your revenge at some point but to safe guard yourself. Let go of the emotion but never let go of the cognitive.

I have come to realize that it is only a precious few who will fundamentally change - and that too, for the better. Most of us are who we are and rarely change fundamentally. So, if you were subjected to a betrayal, then you are wise to remember it. NEVER be naive into thinking that they will miraculously 'change' and it will turn out to be different the next time around. You need to be able to discern people for who they are and though you forgive and completely let go of the negative emotions surrounding the person, never forget the incident and never forget the lessons you learn because of it.

You will never have too many friends: true friends. Never mistake acquaintances for friends. True friendships are built on trust and if you cannot trust a person, there is precious little point in having any form of relationship with them. However, life demands you spend time with people, work with people, collaborate with people and often partner with people who may not share the same values as you. Often you will be betrayed. Forgive. But never forget.

Being professional means you are able to work with anyone - irrespective of your opinion of them. Learn to be professional at all times. However, when you 'forget' you generally tell yourself it will be different the next time around: never allow yourself to be fooled twice by the same person.

There are no mistakes in life - only lessons - lessons repeat until learnt

This is something of a mantra I chant all the time - to everyone. Anyone who has worked with me, been taught by me or had the misfortune of spending a few months with me will surely tell you that they have heard me saying this over and over again at every given opportunity. There is a reason for this. It is for me to reaffirm it to myself - more than anything else.

There are no mistakes in life - only lessons - lessons repeat until learnt.

One of those 'mistakes' I had a hard time to 'learn from' is about being able to say 'no.' My general disposition is in the affirmative. If anyone asks me for anything, my general attitude dictates that I find a way of doing it for them. Nothing wrong with it, BUT, there are enough and more times when I hadn't fully thought it through - and once a commitment is made, it is made and you need to

keep to it. Over and over again, when in my head I know fully well I may not be able to do what is required, I say 'yes' and over and over again, I have not been able to keep to my end of the bargain and thereby let people down. I had the right intentions - but I often got the wrong results.

One of the biggest 'requests' I have often said 'yes' to, is to try and find 'greener pastures' for friends and family. Finding the right job isn't easy and when they get frustrated with their current jobs, many reach out to me - because I am in 'HR.' I have NEVER done recruitment or placements (apart from when I headed HR and had to recruit members for our teams), but, because I genuinely want to help, I say 'ok, let me see' and thereby build expectations. A few who have been close enough to me told me 'machang, not good. You promised to get me a job - it has been three months and you still haven't found a place for me.' I could kick myself every time it happened. Painfully I learnt that in their circumstances my 'let me see' is affirmative action. Painfully, I learnt to say 'I don't do recruitment - let me put you on to a few of my friends who may be able to find a placement. Call them - here are their numbers' - because the reality of the situation is that writing to my contacts will not get them jobs - unless there is a vacancy and if there was a vacancy, they would generally advertise.

There are no mistakes in life, only lessons and lessons repeat until learnt.

As with most things you do with good intentions, when it goes south, you feel hurt, but, we should always sober up to ask what are the lessons we can learn from them and learning the RIGHT lesson is absolutely imperative. Otherwise, we stand to lose ourselves - or rather, we lose that beautiful part of ourselves that makes us human - makes us good. Too often, when we get hurt,

we get 'warped' in an effort to shield ourselves which, over time, destroys the best parts of our being. Guard yourself against it at all times, and when you 'learn lessons', learn the right ones.

Don't compare yourself to others - but get inspired by your envy of others

Ammi always told me to never compare myself with others - advice I took to heart. It's one of those things I tell my children often - never compare yourself to others - be your own person.

Over the years, I added a sentence to it - 'but get inspired by your envy of others.' Paradoxical? Yes, but, here's why.

Comparison is important too. There is a LOT to learn from others, and studying those you 'envy' enables you to understand some great principles that you too can borrow from. Why reinvent the wheel? The idea is NOT to reinvent - but to IMPROVE upon the wheel already invented.

If we don't compare ourselves to others we tend to become deeply conceited and think no end of ourselves. Comparison draws envy, yes, but it can also be extremely humbling. There are ALWAYS those better than us, richer than us, fitter than us, better looking than us: so, why not look at them, compare, and turn that 'envy' into inspiration - so that you can better yourself?

The idea is NOT to wish ill for them - the idea is to WORK towards enabling yourself to 'be that' one day.

I had a few people I was utterly in awe of when I was in College. I must beg forgiveness if the people I speak of seem over glorified. I am also human - and these are people I 'idolized' back then - and still do - and I think I am permitted for my 'version' of them.

The first, possibly one of the most celebrated Head Cops of our time: Changa Kurukularatne. Changa was a brilliant scholar who got straight A's for his O/L's and pretty awesome results for A/ L's too. Good grades WHILST captaining Hockey, being part of the starting lineup for Basketball, being a President's Scout, Captaining the Debate Team and also the President of numerous societies and clubs College had. Gosh how I used to envy him. He was also one of those people who drove a BMW to school - and damn weren't we waiting to take a ride! During debates, ever so often, I would be given a 'lift' in his 316i: and Ammi still recalls how I would rant about the car over and over and over again. To top all this, he also had a 'girlfriend' who was equally accomplished: and their relationship was the one to emulate for all of us 'lesser humans'! Changa was, in many ways, someone I truly wanted to 'be like': because, more than anything else, he was well mannered, rooted, extremely well spoken and extremely knowledgeable.

I learnt from him how to 'manage' time - and 'juggle' priorities: and be able to shift between the academics and extra- curricular activities without 'dropping the ball' on either of them.

Then there was my cousin Milinda. 'Mili' as I affectionately call him was the one who 'introduced' me to the 'big match' - and I still remember very fondly how he and his mates took me to the 'boys tent' - and ensuring I was not 'left alone.' I was new to College - and didn't really have 'friends' after two months in school - so, he took it upon himself to ensure he was there for me - and kept me company. He played the 'big brother' role throughout my tenure in College, right up until he left - and in fact, at the big match - he still does!

Mili was one of those 'cousins' I truly envied - and still do. He is utterly well read, and I remember picking up words from him -

and ever so often writing the words that came out of his mouth and checking them up in the dictionary and still not being able to find them (mostly because my spelling was so bad that I would invariably write them wrong!). Mili was also an extremely popular school boy - and I watched in absolute awe how he 'moved' with his peers: making friends with ease, and resorting to 'daring dos' I could only dream of! He was also an extremely graceful basketball player and I think it is watching him and his colleagues playing that truly inspired me to play basketball too. Try as I might I never had the knack for it - but watching them play taught me so many lessons about team work that would become invaluable later on in life.

I learnt from Mili how to 'win friends' and not to take life too seriously: and also, most importantly, how important it was to be widely read and the importance of 'having the exact word' to use.

Another College mate I was truly 'envious' of was Asanga Welikala. I 'got to know' Asanga after my O/L's: and we became debating colleagues afterwards. Asanga was one of those quintessential eccentrics in every way. The way he dressed was steeped in his love of 'Godfather' which he got me to watch on his parent's TV! He smoked and had a 'drink' from the time I met him - and had a 'liquor cabinet' in his wardrobe (he didn't have a 'cupboard' like most of us). His handwriting was in calligraphy style - and was avidly used by everyone in College to write the names in certificates. He could draw - and he was the one who did the caricatures for the big match souvenir during our time. He played the piano like a virtuoso. But, the reason for my 'envy' was three fold: his simply vast knowledge of all things: his absolute disregard to what others felt about him: and of course, his home. His home in Nawala was a place I just gawked at when I first walked in. It was classy, simple yet elegant and awesomely spacious. I adored the woodwork, and told myself I will 'copy' it one day (and the ceiling at my home today actually bears resemblance to Asanga's).

However, the biggest lesson I learnt from him was to be able to hold yourself with confidence no matter what others say about you. That steely self-belief: and that arrogant ego that never yielded to anyone was a far cry from the rather sensitive and 'goody two shoes' I was in my early years. My mother would not have allowed me to get too cocky or be arrogant: but even she appreciated that I developed a thicker hide: which held me in good stead many years later when some of the worst episodes of my life unfolded.

I was unashamedly 'envious' of a lot of people. I never understood why this was a bad thing. To me, being envious is normal - how couldn't you be - especially when some seem to have the very things you wanted always. However, the challenge is to ensure that envy does not become a negative thing. Envy never made me jealous. In fact, it had quite the opposite effect on me. I was always inspired by envy. If I envied someone, it gave me that little extra boost to work harder, work longer and work more diligently to achieve the thing they had and I didn't. I owe deep debts of gratitude to those I envied, as they have made me better than I ever was.

Eat first - then feed others: but ever so often, sacrifice too

I was brought up to consider others' feelings and needs first: and be ok with sacrificing yourself for others' service and well-being. I still believe this is important: and that it makes a better world for everyone. However, increasingly, I am aware that like all things with good intentions, there is a BUT in it.

See, this philosophy works only if everyone thought like this. The tendency to be 'abused' is very high when you are naive in your genuine desire to make someone else happy. No matter what, we need to accept that we too have needs, that we too require happiness and that we too want to be appreciated and loved. For sure - let's not resort to being happy at someone else's expense: but let's start with being happy ourselves first, and then start offering happiness to others because otherwise it never really becomes sustainable. 'Charity begins at home': actually, make a correction - charity begins with YOU. So, unless you can AFFORD to be charitable, then, charity can never be sustained.

Once again, I see a polarity in most of society. There are those who are generous even when they don't have it: and others who are absolutely stingy even when they have it. Very few are both generous and financially stable. May be this is one reason why the rich keeps being rich and the poor get poorer: but thankfully, there ARE those who are both also - which is where I draw my inspiration from.

Ever so often a 'sacrifice' is also important. To me, the highest form of love is sacrifice. Sacrifice must not be misunderstood: giving gleefully what is not yours is NOT a sacrifice - nor is it charity. Much of the so called Corporate Social Responsibility is actually not charity at all. We collect money, rations and non-perishables during times of crisis like a drought or a flooding: and then happily 'advertise' it as our charitable contributions. Sadly, we do the same as individuals too. Sacrifice requires you FORE-GOING something IMPORTANT: knowing it is more important to someone else, than to you. This is possibly why we love our parents so much - and possibly why our children don't love us with the same intensity: our parents truly SACRIFICED for us: but we rarely sacrifice for our kids, truly sacrifice. We have never gone hungry to feed our kids, we have never worn 'repaired' shoes so as to

ensure we can afford the sports shoes for our sons and daughters, we have not gone by bus to afford the luxury of sending our kids in a van. So, is it any wonder that they don't quite understand what really matters?

Commit yourself to become the best you can be. Commit yourself to being rich enough to be generous. Commit yourself to being happy so that you can pass your happiness around. However, ever so often, commit to making a sacrifice or two too: as this is when we honestly become better human beings.

Actions speak louder than words - but words hurt more than actions most of the time

I have always defined myself through this:

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS.

Live by example. Don't say it - do it. Put your money where your mouth is. All these 'credos' are ones I truly, truly, truly believed in: until I got married and had kids.

See, the flip side in believing actions speak louder than words is that you start caring a little less about your words! We somehow justify the words in our own minds telling ourselves 'no matter what I said I did the right thing - so it's ok': therein lies the problem.

Don't get me wrong - it is absolutely important to ensure you don't resort to hollow promises or become a hypocrite by not doing what you claim you do. It is certainly a matter of integrity to live by what you say: but, equally important I think is to be sensitive to the fact that words can cut deeper than actions - most of the time - given that we use words all the time.

One of the most deeply imbedded and vividly pictured in my mind was the face of my son when I reprimand him. His generally smiling and rather mischievous face clouds over: and he then gives me a look that I cannot ever shake off afterwards. The hurt is evident: and I cannot ever take back what I said. The sheer agony he feels because of a simple set of words unfiltered through his facial reactions is worse than anything he can say to me. Yes, reprimands are necessary. The question is, HOW we reprimand.

Unless we are aware, truly aware, we really cut deep with our words. This is something Roons (my wife) always tell me - as did my mom all through my life. My quick temper flares up in words, and though it subsides as fast as it flared up, the words have since left my mouth and can never be retracted: and the fallout is far worse than I ever could comprehend. Over the years I have promised myself to say nothing when in anger: and it has served me well.

Words hurt: and no amount of 'action' can drown the intensity of the hurt felt. Lessons learnt the hard way...

One video encapsulated this brilliantly: watch till the end (especially the end!)

https://www.ted.com/talks/benjamin_zander_on_music_and_passion?language=en

Expect nothing in return: but give nothing to those who do not value it

Ammi and Appachchi always told me 'when you give, don't expect anything in return.' Easy to say: bloody tough to do. We instinctively ALWAYS want something in return, even if it is to see a smile and get a hug!

Ammi added the second part of the sentence - not in words - but by a deed that had a lasting impression on me.

It was Ammi who labored to get me to read. At every given opportunity she would buy me books - most from Peters Book Shop in Maradana where second hand books were sold. I hated second hand books back then (actually I hated books back then - period) - but I understood later on that both my parents could ill afford new books. She kept buying books of all sorts, hoping against hope that I will pick them up and read.

'It's the only way to improve your vocabulary and spelling Putha' she would tell me, over and over again, but, no amount of cajoling made me pick up a single book and read, and the piles of books simply collected dust!

Then I met Asanga...

The first time I went to his home I saw a handsome set of books - the Encyclopedia Britannica. Beautiful, imposing, the bright leather covers gleaming - but aging beautifully with constant reading. I fell in love with how it looked - more so than the wealth of knowledge it held inside for those who wanted to flip over it and read... I was caught up in the superficial - not the substance.

I came home, and asked Ammi to buy me a set of encyclopedias too.

Ammi ignored the request.

I requested again.

She ignored again.

I vented - and demanded the books.

She kept silent again.

Finally, in a fit of absolute anger and disappointment I lashed out - and called her 'stingy.'

'What's the point in buying books Putha, you never read' is all she said with that 'severe look' that my mother gives (even now!).

As young and hot tempered as I was back then, I remember sitting down on my bed and looking at the piles of books that were never read. I still remember the first book I picked up - 'Famous Five on a Treasure Island' by Enid Blyton. I was nearly 16 years old, and I was reading Enid Blyton - shame isn't it! I remember reading it almost all through the night - not because I wanted to impress my mother - but because the book gripped my imagination - and I was immersed. My mother thought this was me trying to 'convince' her to buy the encyclopedias: but I was genuinely hooked. In the following months I started devouring all the books that I never even looked at. I couldn't have enough of it. Book after book, I kept reading. Novels, biographies, historical accounts, newspapers and articles from my appachchi's archives, magazines, and periodicals: I would read anything that came my way. Before six months were up I had read almost everything we

had at home and was borrowing books from the library too!

Ammi proved to be right: my vocabulary increased tremendously, and my spelling improved drastically (though still a far cry from what it ought to be) all this without any effort or 'studying.'

Ammi started buying me books again: and at a sale that took place in Nugegoda bought not one, but two sets of Encyclopedias which I still have proudly on my bookshelves: read, earmarked and small short notes done...

See - there are always those who WANT it - but will not make use of it: and then of course, those who will make use of whatever that is given to them - and be grateful for it. Be it advice, be it a house, be it a job, be it a simple gift like a book or an extravagant one as a car, the question is, whether the recipient will make absolute use of it.

How many times would we sit and 'advise' others - and they will simply nod and do nothing with it: what an absolute waste of time (for both parties concerned)? How many times do we buy our children a computer and all they do is play games on it (nothing wrong with playing games - don't get me wrong - but is that ALL they can do with it?). What a waste of money? How many times do you give money as charity not knowing what happens to it?

We all have limited resources - money, time and effort: use it wisely.

Giving for the sake of giving is of no use to either party, nor is giving, simply because you can. You must choose to give to those who deserve it because otherwise there is no value in it, it just becomes a waste. Never give anything expecting something in return for yourself and never give to those who wouldn't make

absolute use of it either, because it simply becomes a waste of money and effort. However, if you give to those who truly will make a difference with it, then, the transformation in their lives is satisfaction and 'reward' enough. NEVER underestimate the extent to which a simple gesture of kindness or 'charity' can impact others. What may seemingly be 'trivial' to you may turn out to be life changing to someone else...

When I was in the UK as a student I would work two jobs to ensure I had enough to 'sort myself out' and one of it was in a small Indian Restaurant called 'Tava Hut.' I started out cleaning the toilets and the tables, and then, after a while, helped out the 'chef' (hence learning how to make Tandoori meats and Indian dishes like the masalas, the madrasa and the vindaloos.) I also served whenever the need arose. Many of them were 'regulars' and after a while most get 'chatty'. A typical meal used to be around 7-9 pounds. One particular old gentleman used to come like a prayer every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday for dinner. He had a staple set of dishes he ordered and he never offered a tip but was a wonderful conversationalist with a typical British sense of humor that would have most of the others in stitches of laughter, and us 'brownies' smiling and laughing awkwardly as most often we didn't 'catch his drift.'

He knew I was studying Business Management, and one day casually asked me what my grades were. I told him, and I was shocked when we asked me to bring my grades transcript the next day he came. I thought twice about it - but finally decided to take the letter from the campus and show him. He looked at them - and asked me why I had scored exceptionally well for some and not so much for the others. I told him the truth - some of those subjects I had read avidly on: but others not so - mostly because I could not afford the books - and also because I didn't have the time to go to the reference section of the library because I worked part time.

He asked me what subjects I was doing for the current semester and imagine my surprise when I got a ton of used books when he came next. Turned out he used to be a lecturer, and his son did Business Management too and he had bought second hand books for all his subjects. Throughout the two years I knew him afterwards, he kept giving me books. He NEVER tipped me but he gave me something FAR MORE VALUABLE! He kept asking me for my transcripts: and I suspected this was more to “keep me in check’ rather than actually see my marks and not give me books if I got low marks, but the message was important and clear. I expect you to do better now that you have the books (and therefore, no further excuses!)

He clearly expected nothing in return, but once my final semester was done, he did ask for the books back - and told me - ‘you are done with them - maybe someone else may need it’ with a twinkle in his eyes, telling me that he may well have done this more than once!

I dutifully returned the books, with deep gratitude and told myself that this is the type of ‘help’ I must resort to too: something meaningful, something thought through, something without anything in return, but something that is ‘deserved.’

Giving is the prerogative of the one who gives - yes, but there is an equal and as important prerogative of the receiver to make good use of it. One without the other is meaningless - either way.

Remember where you came from: but never be limited by it

When I was admitted to S. Thomas' my father was worried.

He is unashamedly a 'Sinhala Buddhist.' I have never seen or heard my father resort to a racial slur: and he, like me, had many friends from different races and religions: case in point, my father and my grandfather offered refuge to many of their Tamil friends during the 83 riots. However, he was deeply proud of his race - and his religion: and made a concerted effort to teach me Sinhala often chiding me (and still do) for bastardizing the language by using English words in the middle of a Sinhala sentence!

'Speak properly in any language - if you are speaking in Sinhala, speak in Sinhala, if you are speaking in English, speak in English - what is this language you are speaking!' was a chide I have heard often (and still do!)

Appachchi was worried that 'I would forget my roots' if I went to a 'elitist school': something he told me on the first day of school dropping me off at the chapel gate 'NEVER forget your roots' he told me - his words being weighed, and spoken with no room left for negotiation or questioning. That was the only 'request' he made of me in my entire schooling career: not to get good grades, not to make most of the opportunity provided, not to excel - simply 'not to forget my roots.'

I remember hearing the 'singing' in the Chapel en route to 'Buddhist Assembly': and being utterly curious about 'what happens inside the chapel.' It seemed a hell of a lot more interesting that the 'talks' we had by older boys on most days at Buddhist Assembly. So... one day, I sneaked into the Christian line, and went to Chapel, and LOVED IT! I had no clue about what they were

singing about - but loved the 'ambience' inside the Chapel, and was absolutely moved by the 'songs' (as I called them back then - 'hymns' as I was corrected by a fellow student!) I kept going to Chapel for some time: until the Sub Warden (who was also the Chaplain) 'caught' me, and asked me 'does your father know you come to Chapel?' When I said 'no' he told me to 'get a letter from dad' if I wanted to come to Chapel being a Buddhist.

You can imagine my trepidation when I went home and spoke to my dad 'about the letter.'

The conversation went something like this (in Sinhala).

'Why do you go to Chapel?'

'Buddhist Assembly is boring Appachchi - they just talk - they sing 'songs' in Chapel'.

'So, you want to sing songs too?'

'Yes'.

'Is there any other reason you want to go to Chapel?'

'No'.

'Don't you want to hear sermons by the priests?'

'We have them only during Vesak and Poson - and on some special occasions. Other times, only the Aiyas (elder brothers/students) do the talking'.

'Ok. So you can't go to Chapel and sing if you don't have a letter from me?'

'No Chaplain said I can't come to Chapel without your written permission'.

'Bring me a pen, a foolscap and an envelope'.

And... just like that, he wrote a letter in his beautiful handwriting, read it to me, sealed it, and gave it to me, addressed to the Chaplain giving me permission to 'sing' in Chapel.

I must have been the only Buddhist who sang in the Choir - and one of my most prized possessions is a certificate having won the all island singing competition organized by the Bible Society. Of course I wasn't even a good singer in any form but I was part of the choir that won first place - and that meant the world to me.

I later became the Vice President of the Buddhist Society and with our President, did our best to make it more 'fun' (clearly we lost the plot - as the purpose of the Buddhist Society was NOT to have FUN but to appreciate the Buddhist way of life a little better!)

I remember asking my dad why he gave me permission many years later and I remember him telling me 'nothing wrong with 'singing' in the Chapel.'

I recall asking him 'what about not forgetting where you came from' to which he replied 'never be limited by where you came from either son, always broaden your horizons, always learn from all cultures and religions, always be open to diversity BUT never forget your roots either. There is no reason why one has to be at the cost of the other.'

That statement stuck with me. We always make mistakes 'staying true to our roots' for being a prohibitively 'insular' thing and appreciating others' cultures, values and faiths to being a 'betrayal' of ours. The fact that there is beauty and something to cherish in diversity is lost in our quest to feel superior, in our quest to stay 'true to our faith.' Similarly, valuing our past and 'old traditions' is almost always seem as directly opposite to 'embracing change.' Being able to 'embrace change' but being rooted in our 'traditions' is possible, if only we discomfort ourselves a little, and take the time to think.

Why can't you love old fashioned books but use an I Pad to its fullest potential too? Why can't you enjoy rice and curry as much as a Bacon and Eggs breakfast? Why can't you find it spiritually enlightening to sing a hymn as much as recite the Dhammapada? Does it have to be either/or? Why can't it be 'both'?

Being a liberal does NOT mean not having roots: or about one's own set of beliefs and values. It is about truly appreciating diversity and being able to morph (?) move and grow: keeping your core and integrity and values intact. A butterfly can never be a butterfly if it remained a pupa or larvae: but is there nothing of the pupa in the butterfly? Is there nothing of the tadpole in the frog? Is there nothing of the child in the adult?

ALWAYS remember where you came from: it roots you: it centers you: it gives you humility and perspective: it gives you direction. But NEVER be limited by it because it often makes you a bigot, a racist, and in general, a lesser 'human' being.

In the end, we only regret what we did not do - and a few things we DID do...

Anyone who has lived to be more than 30 years, and tells you 'I don't have regrets' is plain lying. We ALL have regrets and it is unavoidable when you live life. However, whether these 'regrets' torment you every waking moment and doesn't allow you to go to sleep... now, that's a whole different ball game.

Most of the time, we have ambitions and desires which we 'kid ourselves' into believing is not important enough to pursue with the full force of our being. We find all sorts of excuses as to why we couldn't achieve it - and why it was 'not meant to be.' Most of the time, we regret it later on in life. So, if something is important to you, commit yourself to it and ensure it is achieved. Don't back down and 'forget about it' nor find a reason to not do it. Figure out a way to do it - there is ALWAYS a way. Making that commitment to do it is an important facet to your very character, as it builds discipline, resilience and also, a long term perspective.

There are plenty of self- help books these days. Read them, learn from them and find your own little 'hacks' that will work for you. Success and achieving what YOU want is a very personal journey. There are no surefire blueprints - only general guidelines.

Here are a few books I found particularly useful, that helped me immensely in pursing my dreams and ambitions:

Think and Grow Rich - Napoleon Hill

- Rich Dad Poor Dad - Robert Kiyosaki
- The Monk who sold his Ferrari - Robin Sharma
- Losing my Virginity - Richard Branson
- 7 Habits - Franklin Covey
- The Power of Positive Thinking - Norman Vincent Peale

- The Power of your Sub Conscious Mind - Joseph Murphy
- Lateral Thinking - Edward De Bono
- Mind Map Book - Tony Buzan

But remember, you DO regret things you DID do too. This often blindsides us when we are in the 'get things done' mode - pursuing our ambitions. It is important to ensure we understand that pursuing ambitions and dreams always comes at a price : and we must never get caught up in the trap of 'getting there somehow' - because a beautiful part of your being gets lost on the way - often never to be found again...

The lies you told, just to get your way...

The compromises you made - just to win...

The time you never gave - because you were too busy...

The values you 'forgot' because it was not 'convenient'...

Sounds familiar? They don't go away either. Unless you really are conscious, it is easy to resort to justifying yourself as to why you HAD to do it, but remember, you don't HAVE TO DO ANYTHING - you CHOOSE to. So, let us not bullshit ourselves ha? Let's just accept we DID do them, because we found it easier - or more convenient - or because our ambitions overrode our common sense and values.

NEVER be cornered into making compromises that doesn't agree with your heart. NEVER be pushed into making decisions you really DON'T WANT TO. All of us DO have that little inner voice that keeps us to our True North. You will be wise to listen - and pay heed.

Look around you. Look at those nearest and dearest to you. Observe those you want to emulate. Learn from them both from their successes - as well as their regrets. You will be wise to understand that NO ONE got it right always - neither will YOU. So, be conscious of the decisions you make and weigh them carefully, there are some rabbit holes you must steer well away from, because if you go down them, it is near impossible to come back out.

Whatever that is worth doing is worth doing well - but pick what you DO carefully

Your work is your signature. It defines you. It is the legacy you keep long after you are no more...

So, whatever that is worth doing, is worth doing well. Brilliantly well.

There is only ONE problem. We all have only 24 hours for a day and 365 days for a year and approximately 75-80 years to live (if you are lucky!) So, you can't really do 'everything' and expect to get 'everything' done right!

Being able to get absolutely focused on your priorities is the ONLY way you will make it great in something and this requires absolute clarity on what YOU think is important to YOU.

You can't be a brilliant CEO and also spend a lot of time with your kids.

You can't become a trainer and a musician - and hope to be a Tony Robbins or a Carlos Santana.

You can't be an international travel blogger and hope to take care of your parents and spend time with them in their old age.

Some things gotta give. It always does whether you want to accept it or not. How many 'balls you can juggle' is up to your own capacities and ability to manage time but we ALL have limits. NONE of us can DO IT ALL - and do brilliantly well in all of them.

The key is this. Figure out what you CORE is and give the bulk of your time for that. The others are what you 'dabble' in. ALL of us have more than one interest, more than one 'thing to do' and more than one 'passion' in life. Figure out what matters the most and allow the rest to be things you do 'whenever you have the time.'

NEVER 'follow your passion' blindly. Remember, it is more important to understand WHAT MUST BE DONE, rather than figuring out 'what I like to do': differentiate between the two. What we like to do is often at the cost of what we are 'good at' and what is 'needed to be done.'

I am a foodie, and I love my rice and curry - specially the Red Pork curry and the Kiri Kos (jak fruit curry) and a good cream caramel afterwards! That's what I LIKE - yes! But, what I NEED to do is cut back on the starch - and the quantities and lose weight - 15 kilos of it!

I am a movie buff: and can happily binge, watch the entire set of seasons of Game of Thrones back to back: but what I NEED to do is to sit and complete my dissertation which is due in a week!

I LOVE to travel: and I would enjoy taking a few months off and travel with the kids to distant faraway places immersing myself in the local cultures and customs. However, first, what I NEED to do is to ensure my kids are educated, and that I have enough money saved up to ensure my parents' last few years are happy and 'burden free.'

There is a trade-off - ALWAYS. For sure you need to do what you LOVE too - what would life be without some joy and thrill: but NEVER think this is ALL there is to it. Life is as much about your responsibilities as your sense of accomplishment: as much about your kids as it is about your career: as much about your parents as it is about your car: as much about your wife as it is about your six pack... Life is almost never this OR that. It is about both. BUT, you DO need to compromise SOMETHING at some point and this is what you need to be ok with.

Have a set of non-negotiables so that you have a simple yard stick to measure what is most important to you. Priorities will, and MUST change as your circumstances change.

Here are three of mine:

- Until I built my house, paid off all my loans and had a reasonable 'nest egg' sorted, my career and 'making money' was a non-negotiable. This meant Clients came before my wife or kids.
- Having sorted 'that' out to a certain extent, my non-negotiables currently are my kids' education (I personally take their lessons most of the time) and the time I spend with my parents (being acutely aware that their time is 'limited')

- Time off as a family was another non-negotiable we put early when the kids were small. Each year, at least 3 times, a week's trip is organized and made to a place we have not gone to - either within the country - or, as much as possible when budgets permit, overseas.

The one other thing I always committed to - no matter what, was to educate myself continuously, not purely from a 'qualification' perspective: but to continually seek new learning in multiple channels and methods. No matter what, I generally commit some time every day to read, every month to 'experience' something new, and every year to 'formally learn' a new area of interest.

CHOOSE what you spend your time on wisely. COMMIT to doing a few things RIGHT rather than a lot of things 'haphazardly.' I know it is 'cool' to be seen to be doing 'a lot' but no one I know really made a mark in anything who 'dabbled' in too many things. Don't divide your focus and attention. Zone in on one or two things and get it done right before moving to something else.

Don't take this out of context. PLEASE don't be a tunnel visioned boring fellow who has just one thing and only one thing in your entire life. Have varied interests, have hobbies, have breadth to your experiences in life but FOCUS on a few things that MATTER so that you do a sterling job of them. Be it being parent - or being a world class painter.

Don't die before leaving your mark. WHAT that mark is no one else can tell you. You will know it. So, ask yourself 'How do I want to be remembered' and it will give you the answers you need.

If you haven't figured it out by now, having read all this, then hmm...

Well actually, having finished writing this book, I had the same question - so I don't blame you. The purpose of the book was NOT to prescribe how to achieve success - rather, to spur thought that might enable you to figure it out for yourself. It was a challenge to conventional wisdom.

However, I do accept that it is sometimes easier to just cut the crap and give it straight!

But I didn't want to spoil it for those who will do just that - figure it out for themselves - and take great pride in doing so.

So, I am doing a sequel to this - Cut the Crap 2 - How to Achieve Success. Don't worry - this is not a sales gimmick - as this book, as it has been with all my other books, is also FREE...

So, pick it up if you want it straight up!

CUT *the* CRAP



Cut the Crap is a no holds barred look at success, happiness and life in general. Taking the usual 'no nonsense' approach Vidusha is rather well known far, the book takes a detailed look at how to plan out your life and how to achieve success : gleefully taking put shots and conventional wisdom. A witty, often humorous rambling, with serious undertones the book forces to reassess your fundamental beliefs. Written in his usual story telling style, the book is also a chronicling of those 'moments of truth' for the author which made him the person he is today..

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA