

# CUT the CRAP

3

THIS THAT AND THE OTHER

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA  
SHAAKYA NATHAVITHARANA

# CUT THE CRAP (3)

THIS THAT AND THE OTHER

**Vidusha Nathavitharana**  
**Shaakya Nathavitharana**

A LUMINARY PUBLICATION



**PUBLISHED BY LUMINARY LEARNING SOLUTIONS  
FOR FREE CIRCULATION  
FIRST EDITION, 2020**

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA,  
SHAAKYA NATHAVITHARANA**

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

**EDITED BY TATUM DE SOUZA  
COVER DESIGN BY ZAFRAN PACKEERALLY**

# CONTENT

## **PART 1:**

Dealing with, and overcoming Failures

## **PART 2:**

Mistakes, owning up - and reacting to situations

## **PART 3:**

Boyfriends, Girlfriends and Parents

## **PART 4:**

Being a girl in a patriarchal society

## **PART 5:**

All work and no play makes Jill a dull girl!

## **PART 6:**

Lead, Follow or Get out of the Way

# PROLOGUE

---

Our lives, as a family, revolves around a lot of conversations. If there is one thing, we do a lot of - it is talking. Every day, around mealtimes, around tea, visiting our parents, during trips, or sometimes, just sitting out there, we talk... We don't 'just talk' - we generally tend to argue - not the heated, blood veins popping variety over high pitched voices - but the animated yet sombre variety: with just one aim in mind - to see different perspectives and viewpoints.

My grandmother was my 'sparring partner' - and I absolutely loved these long afternoons and evenings with Archchi... Sometimes, I knew Archchi was simply playing advocate: but for the vast majority of times, she was arguing with me through utter conviction... She and I were opposites in many ways - but I also loved my Archchi devoutly - and had a huge amount of respect for her. She too, unlike my mom who considered me her 'son' all the time (completely understandable - I WAS her son after all!) Archchi treated me like an 'adult' during these conversations... This meant that I would argue heartily - knowing that they were just that - arguments.

This gave way to two very important results: firstly, I learnt to express a point of view without being emotionally attached to it, and secondly, I understood, from a very young age, that there was always more than one way of looking at things... Both lessons have held me in good stead later in life - both as a professional and as a father...

When the COVID 19 pandemic hit Sri Lanka, and we eventually hit our own 'lockdown' we had plenty of time on our hands: and Shaakya (my daughter) and I thought what better way to while our time than put to paper some of the wide-ranging conversations we have had: with the hope of sharing insights, points of view, and also, introspect those lessons learnt...

Happy Reading

**Vidusha**

## PART 1: DEALING WITH, AND OVERCOMING FAILURES

“Failures are the pillars of success” - bullshit!

What utter nonsense how could the gut-wrenching feeling that comes with something that has detracted you from achieving your goals, ever be considered a pillar of success. This is the exact thoughts that were running in my mind. I couldn't get it. Failure is never easy, especially in dealing with it. However, the point is - it is inevitable. The bigger the dream sometimes the bigger the failure. Success lies not in the number of accolades you have but with how you “Deal” with your failures. Therein lies the true strength, courage and a true champion.

Amongst the many dreams, I have painted for myself one of it is to go to England and represent my country at a public speaking competition. The English Speaking Union was organizing a competition which made both these dreams a reality! A once in a lifetime two-in-one offer! We were to give a speech on a topic based on a particular theme they decided on and the winner would get to represent Sri Lanka for an international speech contest which would be held in ENGLAND. Man, I HAD to win this. The first year I participated I was the first runner up and you could imagine my disappointment because only the winner would get the chance to go to England. So, determined to win this time around I completed this year as well. This year I prepped. I practised 3 times in the morning. 3 times in the afternoon and 3 times in the night. I practised like this for 2 consecutive weeks. The competition had 3 rounds. In the first round, we had to give a prepared speech in the second round was an impromptu speech round and the final round was where we gave another prepared speech on a completely different theme. I was all fired and charged and came to win! This was mine. I got through the first round. Come the second round I gave my speech and thought I have this in the bag. The contest chair came out with the list of finalist.

"The finalist for the ESU competition are: ....." I didn't hear my name.

I was in utter despair. I didn't even make it to the finals. I went out and called Appachchi. "APP(which is what I call appachchi) I didn't make it to the finals". "Really? Your joking aren't you? Is what App asked me. At this, I started choking with tears and said "App please come and pick me up" in fifteen minutes despite my friend having have made it to the finals I left.

Despite how utterly pissed and hurt I was I got feedback from the judges. The judges told me that I sounded nervous and that there wasn't enough vocal variation on this basis I was not put into the next round. When appachchi came and picked me up all the way from Colombo (The competition was in Colombo) all the way to Kandy I was singing 90's songs and venting. I got home feeling utterly exhausted and I cried. I behaved very badly. Ammi and Malli came to comfort me instead of warmly accepting it I snapped and told them to leave me be. My dreams my hopes had shattered and worst of all - my hard work. I couldn't fathom the fact that having had put in so much of effort it had simply gone to waste. I was in no uncertain terms hurt.

Being this way, dealing with failure in this manner was simply draining. It demotivated me, it hurt the people around me and it drew me away from my goals even further, more than losing the competition did. I decided that I had to change. It is then that upon much thought about how I behaved that the rocky balboas quote came into mind. "It ain't about how hard you hit it's about how hard you CAN GET HIT and keep moving forward". I agree it hurts to fail, and we all want to have our own moment in the limelight. Some of us get it even without having to try yet some of us may have to try harder than others and may not gain victories as soon as we want it. Our goals may take time to complete. How do you deal with failure? How do you overcome it?

I joined the Toastmasters club a long-standing dream which finally became a reality. I loved every moment I spent in the club. I loved talking, I loved the people, I loved it all! This year they were having the table topics and international public speaking competition.

I decided I was going to participate in both these competitions. One of my goals for this year was to win a national speaking competition. I was going to make sure I ticked this goal off my list one way or another. So, there I was, having enlisted myself in both table topics and in the prepared speech competition. First came the club level competition in which I placed second. This meant that I could compete in the area level! I was excited and super pumped. The area contest came next and I gave my speech. As I sat waiting for the contest chair to read the results, I thought this is it! Now's my time! I'm going to get that trophy and go compete in the division competition. I lost.

I didn't even place third. Two failures right at the begin of the year. I had only one word running through my mind like a broken record - "Shit". I was heartbroken, without a doubt until Ammi came to pick me up I sat outside CEB (Which is where the competition was held) and tried reading Dan Brown but only succeeded in reading a paragraph and then burying my head in the book with utter disappointment. Yet this time I was determined to not let myself feel the way I felt when I lost the ESU competition. I was determined to be courageous. This I believe led me to discover the formula for dealing with failure. First, you vent. The instance Ammi came I vented like crazy. I told her exactly everything I felt. For a good 15 minutes, Ammi had to deal with me venting. So, vent, tell someone you love dearly and who is willing to listen to you how exactly you feel. Tell them EVERYTHING. If you hate the winners tell them so if you think the decision was unfair to say so. Say it all.

Secondly after venting sleep it off. The trick is to let out all of what you feel and let the emotions simmer down and give logic the chance to take over.

Once I got home even before I ate, I marched off to my room and in my competition clothes slept. I didn't set an alarm I woke up when I felt like I wanted to. Once I woke up absolutely drenched in sweat I went and had a shower. Which is another tip: shower. It's amazing how a cold shower can suddenly make you feel super refreshed.

The third point is to motivate yourself. When you've hit a low don't allow yourself, don't even give your mind the chance to think of anything negative. So sit and watch a motivational/ light-hearted movie just to lift your spirits. Once I had slept I grabbed myself a bowl of pasta and sat and watched "Big Daddy" starring Adam Sandler. The cuteness of the little boy and the warm message of the story had melted that icy cold heart of mine. I also watched two episodes of F.R.I.E.N.D.S and laughed and laughed.

Once my mood was better and lighter, I reflected on my performance. Reflection and introspection are important. Think about where you went wrong, what mistakes you made and what you think may have been the reasons behind your failure.

Once you have reflected on the mistakes you have made: talk to people about this failure ask for advice and guidance. I spoke to Appachchi and Ammi the following day and app was able to point out my flaws and tell me how I can overcome them. I spoke to those who watched me and got feedback as well. No matter how difficult it may seem to ask people for help and feedback.

It is only with the help that you can truly grow and rectify the mistakes. This brings me to the next segment of failure. Overcoming failure.

Failure too, although inevitable like anything can be overcome. In retrospect, failure is a mistake. Once I got feedback from the judges in the ESU competition and the audience in the Toastmasters competition I realized there were common mistakes:

- A. I lacked vocal variation.
- B. I didn't utilize the space of the stage effectively.
- C. I didn't think of my audience.

Both the audiences were different yet my speech in no way catered to the audience, my speech was also such that my audience couldn't really connect with me.

The mistake will repeat until the lesson is learnt. I didn't take the time to rectify the mistakes I made at the ESU competition, as a result, I lost at toastmasters. The reason we often fail either in an exam or in a competition or at anything, as a matter of fact, is because we don't take the time to scrutinize ourselves and understand where we went wrong. We get defensive because we are too puffed up with pride. Which happened to me. I thought the judges were plain blind and deaf (with all due respect) to have let my competition, a girl a few years older than I get third place and give me nothing.

I realize now while she catered to the audience all the other criteria's for judging she had nailed. She used the stage effectively, she had humour, she had a clear message and she was entertaining. Shaakya Nathavitharana was standing in one place as if she were wearing a pair of magnetic boots and had zero jokes and when she tried to crack one, she'd be the only one who got it. So clearly it was I who was blind and deaf not the judges. We like to put ourselves on a pedestal, but the truth is there is always someone better than us. So, take the time to see why you failed and think about why your competition would have won and not you.

Do not envy the victor instead LEARN from them. Once you have failed and you have identified where you went wrong: sit and put together an action plan for how you're going to rectify those mistakes and how you will make your weakness, your strengths. Then go back again compete and try and try till you fly! I may have lost but I sure as hell am going back next year and if I fail next year then I'm going again the following year!

Failures are the pillars of success only if we deal with them appropriately and choose to learn from them and grow.

## PART 2: MISTAKES, OWNING UP - AND REACTING TO SITUATIONS

It was that time of the year...

When all sanity is lost.

All sense of proportion is forgotten.

When excess becomes the norm and being sober is not on the cards...

A time to meet friends.

To take sons following in your footsteps and enculture them to age-old traditions. A time to revel. To re-live 'grand old times.' A time when men become boys again.

What others have nicknamed 'March Madness... 3 days where the only people who are interested in the score and the outcome are the 22 players on the field.

Where everyone else asks about the score through a severe headache and nausea the next day!

The 'Big Match' as we fondly call it is a cricket match between Royal College Colombo and S. Thomas' College Mt. Lavinia is the 'mother of all big matches' - and the longest unbroken cricket match anywhere in the world. A tradition that the two schools are absolutely proud about...each year it happens - and it was held even during the World Wars - making it be historically more significant than the ashes - another reason for hearts to swell with pride...

2020 was another year to us. Another year where traditions will be kept - and we will reunite with our batch mates and tell tall stories.

But this was not just another year!

The first few cases of Corona Virus had been confirmed a few days earlier, before the start of the hallowed encounter - and the entire country was on high alert. But all that occupied my mind was the match - and our revelry. The 'risk' was something negligible - after all - there were only 2 cases on the whole island - and they were being 'taken care of' - what was there to worry?

My wife did her best to talk 'sense' into me - but I have never been one to look at risks as risks: and prided myself in being rather 'machismo' when it comes to going through life without 'thinking too much about what-ifs and buts' Rowena tried - and after a while, just told me 'be careful.'

I wanted one of my colleagues (Anton - who spearheads our Sales efforts) to join me too. Having been educated in Dubai, Anton never quite understood what the 'hullabaloo' about a 'school cricket match' was all about - and this was my effort to 'induct' him to our 'way of life.' So, I bought Anton a ticket too - and we were all set.

Donned in Blue and Black, armed with our hats, we had breakfast at Raheema's (another tradition) and headed our way to the match...

We had a gala time - with not a care in the world. By four we were both quite drunk - and having some work to attend to the next day, decided it was best to go whilst we could still stand and walk (not quite straight - but walk none the less) ...

We came home. Slept things off. Posted pics on FB...

Life was good...

Then... there was the news alert about a Thomian being confirmed with the COVID 19 virus who came for the match - who had been admitted to the hospital and was being treated...



Zainul Mahas Murshid

14 hrs · 🌐

...

You know what, I'm glad I come from a young school without a hundred year old tradition that I want to keep going no matter what crap it brings down on everyone around me! Thank you [D.S.Senanayake College](#) for putting 'Country Before Self'!

P: S: I love tradition, but it has to be peppered with common sense.

P:S: to P:S: FGM is tradition in some places too..

Nish Māgoda and 23 others

2 Comments



**Crystal Koelmeyer** Your school is lit man. It has the most diverse assortment of alumni imaginable from Chauvinist Gammanpila to Ibrahim brothers who joined ISIS. Not related to your point but surprises me how schools like yours and Pathana, most diverse & open, produce characters like those.

· 48m



**Zainul Mahas Murshid** It is the fact that we are most diverse and open, that allows for such production. Because among the handful that is them, the majority are well rounded respectful contributors to society.

· 48m



Write a comment...



Yudhanjaya Wijeratne

13 hrs · 🌐

...

I don't have a hat, but if I did I'd take it off to all those Thomians and Royalites who insisted that a handful of coronavirus cases should not stop their Big Beautiful Annual Dick Measuring Contest.

Now cry havoc and let loose the dogs of panic.

<https://watchdog.team/post?id=3570>



## Infected Sri Lankan Airlines officer attended Roy-Tho; don't panic!

Marianne David; News First; Watchdog Investigations

March 16th 2020, 9:04:22 pm

The First Officer of SriLankan Airlines who tested positive for COVID-19 attended the Roy-Tho Battle of the Blues. Accounts place him alternatively at various Thomian tents, but definitely at Turf Club on 13th evening (this sentence has been edited for clarity). Multiple posts on WhatsApp urge people to self-quarantine. However, we remind you that DG of Health Dr Anil Jayasinghe has

And... all hell broke loose on social media...

The outcry was fair: justified: and, in hindsight, to be expected and totally warranted... Saner counsel did NOT prevail. Some other schools - like Trinity and St. Anthony's - a tradition as long as ours, cancelled out. This was not just a simple mistake: this was: as my former boss would put it: a major fuck up. The sad thing was it was not only something that affected those who went for the match and thereby may have been infected - it was something that now may well pass on to many many others.



To add insult to injury, the government declared a mandatory holiday only starting the very next day: which many saw as 'elitism' - given the two schools had many 'powers that be' who may well have been at the match themselves... All told, by Monday the number of 'positive' cases increased, and the whole island went into a state of panic - and the government declared another 3 days of mandatory holidays in an attempt to curb the spread. As the country came to a grinding halt, the backlash continued...

Rowena (my wife) kept silent - but it was easy to see the 'I told you so' in her eyes... Point taken... Silently...

And then, there were those who happily made a wisecrack at this time too...

When all of the country seemed to 'get it' there were those who were callous enough to take a cheap put shot at a serious pandemic - and demonstrate an arrogance that makes a mockery of what the institution is about - and stands for - and, quite reasonably, opens the flood gates for a torrid gush of backlash.

Amidst all this, I kept silent: and as I often do, decided to introspect...

Was this our fault?

Yep!

Could this have been avoided?

Yep!

SHOULD this have been avoided?

Yep!

Should we have thought through the repercussions - and cancelled the match?

In hindsight - yes!

Should I personally have not gone for it - and listened to my wife's logical request to 'take it seriously'

Ashamedly, yes...

So, MY fault. I can't change the world. Sure, the powers that be, should have stopped it - but I too had a personal part to play... And... in retrospect, I should have reached out to my brethren, and maybe even to the Warden, and shared concerns... THAT MUCH I could have done... For all this, I am very much at fault...

Randy Pausch in his 'Last Lecture' (click here to watch the video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5\\_MqicxSo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ji5_MqicxSo) ) spoke about how to make a proper apology :

- I am sorry
- It was MY fault
- How do I make this right...

After a night of thought, what was needed to be done was clear...

I needed to make the apology - and accept fault. Writing this is in part is about this: taking ownership and being self-critical. I also wrote to Anton and his wife - the two people whom I directly 'put in harm's way.'

The key was this though:  
what do I do to make it right?

Well, there was sweet nothing I could do now about NOT going to the match - nor about having possibly contracted the virus... But... there WERE things that could be done:

- I 'quarantined' myself - and we as a collective (as our batchmates) agreed to do this as well - and anyone who went to the match agreed to sit out for 2 weeks without getting out of their houses
- I also reached out to my batch mates - and looked at options of raising funds towards ensuring those who are affected the most can be helped

- Personally, having looked at a few options, decided to help essential items reach the elderly through a group of volunteers who took this up. I couldn't get out of the house - but there were those who could - and I started supporting them daily distribute essential items and medicine to the most vulnerable of the groups who needed help during the 'lockdown'

Did doing all this take away from the fact that it was wrong: nope... But that's not the point of the article...

See... No matter how much we pontificate: we ALL make mistakes - and it needs to be pointed out. But, once it is done, it is genuinely of no point talking about it - apart from the momentary pleasure of having vented one's frustrations at the perpetrators... Then what?

Now THAT'S the issue. Most of the time, what happens is a tete a tete: and a meaningless foray into a blame game. The accused gets defensive - the accusers get abusive: and precious nothing happens afterwards. Sadly, all it manages to accomplish is to further distance ourselves and break ourselves into camps...

This entire episode gave yet another superb example of how much being able to say what you want to say needs to be tempered with sensitivity as well - not because you HAVE to - but because it demonstrates deeper humanity that I think we all deserve it from our fellow humans...

Mistakes need to be pointed out.

Mistakes need to be corrected too.

Imagine if the response to this was more like:

- You guys were absolute dickheads for going for the stupid big match - and putting not only yourselves AND others - INCLUDING YOUR OWN families at risk...
- FOR GOD SAKE - if this ever happens again - listen to reason
- Now that it is done - BE RESPONSIBLE - and wait for our for 2 weeks - and if symptoms show, please DO get proper treatment - don't hide it!
- During this time - if you need anything, do let us know. You guys are stupid morons - true - but you are a fellow Sri Lankan too - know that we are here to help...

Two wrongs NEVER make a right...

When reprimanding - especially on social media - don't forget that rants also betray INTENTION. No good generally comes out of a bad intention - and people see through the intentions. If the intention is sincere - and generally humane - it helps ease any backlash also.

Two principles :

1. Understand what you want as an end result: if it is just to vent - then it's fine - but if it is to actually make a difference and correct a mistake - then, think through HOW you write things
2. ALWAYS be respectful and genuine in your sincerity: and remember it doesn't cost anything to be nice. SURE you can be absolutely cussed: but remember - it talks volumes about you as a person.

ALWAYS SPEAK UP - but never TALK DOWN...

## PART 3: BOYFRIENDS, GIRLFRIENDS AND PARENTS

Boyfriends, Girlfriends and parents, my oh my - couldn't there be a better trio! I've always viewed love as a complicated state of affairs.

Not only do the books and movies portray it to be so, but real-life love stories too are also very complicated. I've been in love. Only these characters don't exist. I am known most often than not, to have my head in the clouds and simply fantasize about every possible situation. So, who do I love you wonder? Well, there are 3 people. Sherlock, Cameran Black from deception and most importantly Robert Langdon. My benchmark for men is those who are in one way or another an embodiment of all the good things these fictional characters have (Uhm...saying fictional characters hurt! Because truly they are filled with so much charm and whatnot that if real men like them existed the world would probably be a better place). Romance I never paid any attention to it. My idea of a date or a romantic moment would be to have lovely teapots and decorated cups along with a delicious array of tea snacks over which I will have an interesting conversation. What do I define as interesting conversations? (Spoiler alert) Why they decided to kill Mary in Sherlock Holmes! Or why must Robert Langdon series come to an end! Or we could go on a philosophical note: what was the reason behind immorality? What made people immoral? (If your reading this and you are both scared and confused as to who would date me, I don't blame you but I'm telling you - if not for anything I'm sure to be an interesting partner). So this was my idea of romance and unlike most 17-year-olds dreaming about the arrival of their prince charming I sat and dreamed about solving crimes with Sherlock Holmes (Sorry Watson I kinda kicked you out of my daydream, Sherlock was just too fond of you for my liking). The problem with having your head in the clouds is sometimes you lose touch with reality and when reality hits, oh man it hits hard.

I was participating in a competition. Now like any girl I found one particular boy to be very attractive. He was tall, slightly muscular yet what was terribly nice and set my heart skipping beats was his voice. He had a husky, deep, beautiful voice. Before the day of the competition, we had a series of workshops on public speaking during which I happened to have spoken to him a couple of times. Now, this is where reality slaps me across the face.

Although, I very humbly admit that he is handsome and would have probably thought of him once or twice when I got home, I wasn't planning on asking him out nor expecting such a situation to take place. Oh, another thing I forgot to mention that I Shaakya am very goal-oriented and highly ambitious and as selfish as it may sound the plain truth is that in the equation of people and goals my dreams will come first (This is excluding my brother, mom and dad they're far too great to be put second). So, I never really paid any attention to him but my friends oh...oh... they were like sniffer dogs sniffing their way through something. He asked for my number which I didn't find odd, I mean isn't that what we do? Exchange numbers but what I failed to see was that he had only asked for MY number. Then on the very fine day of the competition just before I went up to deliver my speech, I happened to be sitting next to me. During which time he said something and the girls sitting next to him went all wide-eyed. I again didn't hear anything. So I asked him "I'm sorry did you say something" to which he replied, "No it won't work out I'll be leaving to Canada and you are in Kandy so I guess it won't work out". What? - What on earth was he on about? Then it hit me. Oh, I see... he likes me. Huh?! In all honesty, I was a little lost. Firstly, I'd got the good looking dude which I ain't going to lie secretly made me want to do a hair flip and secondly, how was a math student going to like a girl who...clearly...belonged in the '90s? (I was called the Shakespeare by everyone in the competition'... apparently, I spoke and acted like one).

What was I going to do? I quite simply told him "well...why don't we keep in touch?" He said great and gave me a fist bump. When APP came to pick me up, I blurted the entire incident and waited to be scolded. Instead, while I started crying and covering my face in embarrassment appachchi laughed.

Again, I was confused. He was either so pissed he was laughing sarcastically, or did he genuinely find it funny? My brain had had an overload I simply couldn't rationalize. APP looked and said, "It's bound to happen I mean if you're not going to hold a boys' hand at 17 then when?" Did I have the coolest dad ever or what!!! My mum though, on the other hand, is cool and I love her infinitely but when boys come into the equations she's like an FBI agent rummaging through my phone and interrogating me with questions: her reaction (I ain't going to lie) I feared.

I, for the first time in my life, found myself asking a question I thought would only arrive much later on..."Was I in love?" The very idea made me want to laugh. Yet it was a serious question. I couldn't answer the question. I didn't know what 'love' was - and that's was the truth... but that was not the question the real question ...the REAL question I believe is "Did I want to be in a relationship?" The answer: No! I say no for many selfish reasons: also with the understanding that I would never be able to commit to anyone unless my ambitions have been achieved. So, for the sake of my partner and myself, I say no.

Yet what I also failed to see was that I was petrified of falling in love. This was mainly because I had seen my friends who had been in relationships... be so secretive about it, it just caused a lot of hullabalos. I realize though - that it is not scary - yet must be a nice feeling. I mean my parents have a beautiful love story and are like the best of friends to the extent that if I ever tell amma not to tell anything to appachchi guaranteed, appachchi will know it. I also learnt that it was not something that you could set out in a timeline. When it happens it happens! I too am open to the possibility that I may meet someone who fits my criteria and to whom I may just not have the ability to say no to.

In terms of parents, with this entire scenario, I realized I had misjudged my mum completely she was cool about it and told me that there are things to think about... especially in a relationship and not to be hasty. I learnt then that the most difficult thing for a parent is maybe to let go of their children and what any parent wants for their child is to be happy and have the best partner - ever.

Sometimes as children our duty to sit and listen to them no matter how 'madly in love, we maybe'. Parents have always proven to be wiser...we should be wise enough to know that and give them their space.

In case you're wondering - nope, I am not dating him, and he decided to fall silent. As a girl in her prime and normative years, I say don't fear love - be open to it. And ask yourself the 2 simple yet important questions.

Do you love him/her? Do you want to be in a relationship?

If you are able to answer these then I believe you'd know what to do. While all the laughter and such come to an end we moved on to a much serious note.

APP told me that a 'crush' is different from a boyfriend and a 'boyfriend', is different from a 'life partner'. So first distinguish what you have to do when you have a crush on someone? Or are you in love? Then ask yourself what you are looking for. Do you want someone to spend your entire life with? or do you just want to be friends? Once these distinctions are made what you want and who you're looking for becomes a whole lot easier. Yet you must be bone honest with yourself about what you want. While most my friends had boyfriends and while the whole 'Idea' I do admit seemed nice, the truth was 'I' didn't want a boyfriend, I would like to be his friend?... Yes. Yet nothing more. For now, that is...

## Knowing yet not knowing

There are often things that we know, yet we don't know. I've come to understand that there really is no substitute for experience: it is quite literally the only and most effective way we learn. While writing this book I had what I believe is called a writer's block.

This block for a book of this nature that I am writing is simply because we don't have adequate experiences.

Sometimes, you have to try put things down and not be too careful because there really is no substitute for experiences.

Life is a series of experiences. Right from the very beginning to the very end. Travelling alone became an experience too. It is only at 17 that I started travelling on my own. I knew the process of travelling by bus. You go to the bus stop and wait for your bus to arrive. Yet, I didn't know how to take the bus. How could you know how to do something that you've never done?

Knowing how to do it and actually been able to do it are two completely different experiences. So, adamant to figure out how to take the bus right after lectures I walked up to the bus stop and got into the Kandy - Haragama bus. I sat and waited for the bus conductor to give me my ticket. I remember thinking this is super cost-effective that henceforth I was going to take the bus. While this was pretty straightforward, and my first time turned to be successful!

But, the very first time travelling alone by three-wheeler was not successful. This is where I learn that I knew yet didn't know!

French classes finished late and I had just 15 minutes to get to CEB where the Toastmasters meeting was to be held. Atha came to pick me up but I knew that if I went by car, I was bound to get late. So, I told Atha, not to worry that I will catch a three-wheeler and go. Atha came with me we stopped a three-wheeler. The man appeared to be all business-like and once I got in, his attitude went from all business to being "cheeky" and this cheekiness is in a creepy sense.

He asks me

“How old are you?”

This question I thought was bad - I mean what is my age to you?

“22” I reply.

“ahh... you’re in Peradeniya”?

“yes, so for that day I played the role of a 22 year old university of Peradeniya student (Peradeniya! In my dreams!).

He kept looking at me a couple of times. Now I heard of a story where a girl who waited for the three-wheeler to get caught to the traffic lights and dash out and sprint. Exactly what I was going to do! So I moved to the corner and sat clutching my bag (You’d think I would leave my bag - but no - I’d leave anything else not my bag - I love my bag!) he then got cheekier and cheekier and finally told me to sit in the middle. That’s it! I thought.

To my horror, we didn’t pass any traffic lights, so I told him to stop the three-wheeler. Paid him his fee and ran and I mean ran to CEB. I was a total mess; my frizzy hair had gone into a frenzy and my shirt which I had neatly tucked in now was out. I was a mess. For a child who likes being neat and has often been told may have OCD because I protect my pen drive by putting it in zip lock bag and then in my pencil case, this was a red light crisis and worst of all I was drenched in sweat!

Although I managed to get out. what I did was simply stupid! Firstly, you don’t make such a conversation. Even if they ask you, you pretend to be engrossed in another conversation (Put your phone on silent). Secondly, you don’t smile! (I don’t know if I did - yet knowing me I won’t hold it against me if I did). Then the other silly thing I didn’t realize was that there were no traffic lights on that road. CEB was just a 15-minute drive from Alliance (where the French class was). There were NO traffic lights. Kudos - on the brilliant idea of jumping at the traffic lights. So, as you can see - I knew yet I didn’t.

When it comes to taking public transportation there is a certain way you should act. I had no idea about this. I may have known the basics yet knowing something is not only understanding the basics but understanding things as a whole. This one will only learn through experience.

Sometimes, we don't take that chance and stay in our bubble believing that it is safe. It is safe. Yet the bubble won't keep you safe always. Sometimes you have to step out of it. It is only when you do that you begin to experience and learn and truly know.

So, take a leap of faith and get to know.

### **You can't learn until you're willing to be taught**

To learn - you must be willing to learn. My friend who is, in my opinion, is the sweetest genius you will ever meet is ever willing to learn. While being a diehard fan of Sherlock like myself the distinction I see between her and me is that she wants to learn and therefore she is willing to be taught whereas I, on the other hand, wasn't willing to learn in all honesty. I didn't 'want' to learn.

Early on, even before I learnt that I was an IUGR baby and was in certain aspects mentally retarded I knew that I was far weaker than the average student. I always thought I couldn't, "Shaakya, you want 100? Are you dreaming! You'd never get it - you CAN'T" this is precisely what I thought.

Seeing the spiral of negativity and the defeatist attitude unfold appachchi started working with me. You'd think he would be cool and understanding but oh no! My appachchi was no Yoda (when it comes to getting things done), I mean if you watched Coach Carter and then thought that he is bad wait till you get 'taught' by my father!

All hell unleashed when I sat to work with appachchi. Appachchi turned out to be the Sociopath who couldn't as much as I couldn't comprehend why I couldn't understand, understand why I didn't understand - and I turned out to be the dumbfounded Lestrade. *(If you argue that Lestrade is not dumb, my rebuttal to that my friend, is that if there is a detective who cannot solve a crime and seeks help from a consulting detective almost ALL the time, that person is without a doubt is dumb, it takes a dumb nut to find another dumb nut)* While for many years I have thought of appachchi to be scary and even as old as I am would make sure that I thought twice before asking a question or even uttering the words "I don't understand" I realize now that while he was tough, he came across as superlatively tough because I wasn't willing to learn. My first block was because I thought I couldn't and drummed it into my head saying that I can't, and the second block is that I didn't want to go through the rigour.

Studies and a lot of things came across as unbelievably grueling for me and so knowing only too well about this I didn't want to go through the hassle. As a result, I skimmed through math which is the subject I found most difficult I found that when the time came for to sit for O/Levels I didn't know the very basics properly and therefore, was sitting for a basics class twice a week (My teacher was an absolute "God sent angel" so even though I was taking the baby steps all over again I really didn't mind, in fact, I must admit I very much miss my class).

When I started the advanced diploma I was of the impression that this would be simple and that I would ace it and that I wouldn't suffer as I did for o/levels, my fantasy was interrupted when our first-semester module included research methods and statistics where we had to conduct field research and submit an assignment of 5000 words. I stayed up for days on end, in fact, one day I stayed up until 4 am and even then, was able to only write 3000+ words. When I reflect on that semester, I now understand that the reason that assignment was so tough was nothing apart from my attitude.

I woke up every day resenting the assignment and hating my institute with all my guts! I stayed up till late - unwillingly. When Ammi reached out to help none of it worked because I didn't want to be taught! I didn't want to learn! I didn't want to do the stupid assignment! My friend in school faced a number of blocks herself and even though she would walk into class on certain days looking absolutely knackered she enjoyed learning and she made it fun. I was having difficulty with Science seeing this she - when no one else did - opted to help me even without me asking. Each interval she sat with me and taught me all that I found difficult! And what was so uber cool was that she taught me the lessons by drawing parallels with Sherlock and Doctor Who. This made things so relatable and way more understandable. As I've moved to Kandy and whenever I face a blockage, I think of her and solve the problems relating it to something close to my heart.

I realize now that to learn is a privilege and that it too is an adventure. Just think about it! One day you are travelling through the world of numbers and then you find yourself in the depths of the human brain dissecting every action analyzing every move. Knowledge is power. I wished I understood this earlier. As the second semester dawned, I sat and attempted our assignment for qualitative research. This time it was a research proposal that we had to submit. I worked on it this time willingly. I dropped my teacher emails I asked APP for help I looked through books and read research proposals online. Despite the result, I may obtain I am proud of that assignment because of the fact that I had the right attitude, meant I was more open to learning and that meant that appachchi didn't get angry it also meant that I understood things way faster. I did stay up late yet this time it was with the intention of seeking answers to the problem I was eager to solve not with the intention of getting it over with.

We don't want to go through trials I agree yet if you have dreams painted for yourself - then you must be willing to go through that pain. After all, what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Despite the number of obstacles, you face knowing that all of this will, in the end, amount to something greater and keep treading the path no matter how tough with the pure intention of learning and doing it with a smile on my face.

To learn to be willing to be taught. We often think that it is a teachers' duty to make the lessons interesting and that it is only then that one would feel like studying. Yet at the end of the day, it is us who is learning so we need to take the onus and not solely depend on our teachers and then blame them saying they didn't make the lesson interesting or what not.

### **Treat others the way you expect to be treated.**

I don't think anybody no matter how old they are - want to be treated like a "child". We all want to be treated as equals. My younger brother Jaith and I share a 7-and-a-half-year age gap. Despite him now being 10 in my eyes, he is a fragile, delicate, precious, being that needs to be looked after with the utmost care. I hate to see Jaith get hurt so took it upon myself to be his protector so to say. "Jaith don't go near the stove" "Malli go wash your hands they're dirty" or "Jaith go and study". I even went for a very short while and sat and studied with him. My brother began to grow distant. He hated working with me. While I took great pride in teaching my brother, malli just wanted to get away. Whenever I appeared to be upset malli would walk into my room look at me for a few seconds and then say "Akki are you ok?" to which I would reply saying "Malli you don't understand these things". My brother told me that he was smarter than I thought and marched out of the room frustrated. I didn't pay much attention to him growing distant and him finding me annoying. After all, most of my friends who had siblings were treated in the exact same manner. So, I didn't pay much attention, until... malli grew fond and I mean VERY fond of my cousin.

He loved her, he wanted to spend time with her and as for me: he gave me a cold shoulder. I was utterly confused and very hurt. How could my brother enjoy my cousin's company more than mine? I mean I'm cool (Sure, like me nagging my brother incessantly was going to make me "cool"). However, I had to find a way to get my brother back. As always when in doubt and I went to appachchi and I complained.

First came the "really? Are you seriously jealous? (...why of course! *This is my brother let me emphasis "MY" brother when it comes to my brother, I am overprotective and possessive sister*) "That's beside the point APP, Jaith doesn't like spending time with me!" After much thought, reflection and a long conversation with appachchi I found the root cause of this problem. Treat others the way you expect to be treated.

I wanted to be treated as an adult and without a doubt so did malli he wanted to know why I was upset, what was happening in my life and just be privy and included as opposed to being excluded and shielded from things simply because he was by age small. Yet if I wanted to be treated as an adult, I first had to treat Jaith like one. So I started, whenever Jaith tells me "Akki I'm going to cook" my instant reaction would have been "Don't touch hot things till you're old enough to handle it" instead this time I said "Sure malli why don't you cook I'll watch you". I stooped prompting him to work... he was old enough to know when to study and when not to. However, if I did feel he was slacking I would sit and have a rather mature open conversation with him.

Our relationship changed completely. We enjoy each other's company and whenever we are in trouble or upset our go-to people would be each other. Jaith too started treating me like an adult by giving treating me with respect and giving me space when I needed it as opposed to pouncing on me.

I realize that if one is to be treated in a manner that one likes then one must treat others in the same manner as well. I remember observing in school an autistic girl. She was playing with a group of girls I saw that while we were often warned of her throwing tantrums and what to do if such a situation took place, she didn't throw a tantrum not a single one. The other girls didn't push her away or exclude her nor did she demand to be giving the bat (They were playing cricket) she was harmoniously playing with the other students. I believe that her reaction to this group of students was simply because the way others were treating her as to how they wished to be treated - with love, kindness and respect and not as anyone different to the rest. If respect is what you want, then treat others with respect. Simply demanding to be respected won't make people respect you.

Our Head Prefect in school last year was the sweetest sort, everyone loved and respected her infinitely this wasn't because she was the Head Prefect but simply because she treated others with respect too despite she being the most powerful girl amongst us all. Most things go both ways so treat others how you wish to be treated.

## PART 4: BEING A GIRL IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

My mother was brought up by a single mom. There were 4 kids - and Ammi was only 9 when her father died of cancer. Not only was my grandmother a single mother - but she also raised the 4 kids (one who went on to do brilliantly well in Math - winning many accolades along the way, and one who became a Doctor) AND she did so on a teacher's salary - and her husband's less than generous pension. (both my maternal grandparents were teachers).

I was brought up by a working mother: who got up at 4.30 am and cooked both breakfast and lunch for me and dad - EVERYDAY and then come home by 6.30 pm in the evening, took my homework whilst cooking dinner, and then, ensured everything was in order before she went to sleep.

I got married to a woman who preferred to stay at home though she was working when I met her. On our first 'date' itself, she told me quite earnestly when I asked her what her 'dream' was, that she wanted to 'stay at home and raise a family - as long as you can afford it'

I never thought about 'gender' as anything more than male and female until I came of age: and had a daughter...

Though the word 'discrimination' was something I had not only heard but actively 'worked against' - including cascading global business practices which we spearheaded in Sri Lanka, never did I quite encounter 'bias' than in my own family...

Both my mother and my wife are conservatives at heart: they have always drawn a line on the sand about 'men and women.' As Shaakya was growing up, I was acutely aware that I was treating her quite differently to how they treated her.

They got her pink dresses, I got her white T-Shirts and Ben 10 watches, they got her 'shoes' - I got her 'sneakers' - they got her dolls - I got her books... I took her camping and rafting - and often got chided for making her a 'Tom Boy.'

So, when Shaakya came of age, I ASKED her - would you rather play with dolls - or go hiking - or, did she enjoy both? Did she like pink dresses or white T-Shirts - or both? Did she enjoy action-packed blood and guts movies - or romantic comedies - or both (neither as it turned out - she is into Anime and Sherlock and Dr Who!) ... The issue was simple: both Roons and I were biased. I thought a 'girl' should be considered no different to a boy - Roons thought girls should be treated like girls - and poor Shaakya had to make a choice!

Why though?

Now that's the million-dollar question...

See... anything in society needs to be changed at both Micro and Macro levels if it is to be a sustained change... There is no point blaming 'society' for all ills - unless YOU make a change too. At the same time - no man (or woman for that matter) is an island and will rely on social constructs and policy to govern their behaviour to some extent. Anyone who is completely outside societal norms is deemed to be considered a pariah and doomed to be isolated.

So... I couldn't do much about how women are viewed in general: but I could do a hell of a lot at home - in how Shaakya was raised and groomed to take on a largely patriarchal culture.

The biggest philosophical and practical debate is simple: if patriarchy is bad - does that mean matriarchy is better? I personally have always felt the answer is never that simple. conversation - apart from being a fantastic debate topic.

You can argue it either way - and there is enough evidence to prove either one inadequate. The issue, as always, is why should it be either or? Why can't it be both...

The issue is that we construe society to have structures - which is essential for practical reasons.

But, if you want to be idealistic - then, you need to be idealistic all the way - not only when it comes to your own home turf...

So, the first thing I think that needs to be understood is that ALL labelling should stop. People are people - can't we let that be that - at least as a starting point...

Having got that out of the way, then, let's look at it practically - and base all practical action on one simple rule. CHOICE.

Why can't we allow anyone to have preferences...? What's wrong with a girl playing rugby - and a boy loving crotchet? Gender is a menace - in its entirety. The moment we build in gender - each party starts talking about it from their vantage point - and making a right royal mess of it...

That's philosophical - and utopian. We live in the REAL world - where REAL prejudices exist. So, as a father, the best I can do is to prepare my daughter to face up to it - not with anger, bitterness or lopsided moral indignation - but with poise, grace and positivity (but not naivety) ...

We (most of us, including me) shelter daughters far too much - born out of fears of the 'harm' them can be subjected to in public. The fear is quite fair - and actually quite understandable. I don't think there are very many women in Sri Lanka who have resorted to public transport who would not have been subjected to some form of harassment at least once...

'So, why put our daughter through it?' was my wife's constant argument. 'You don't understand what it feels like - you feel truly violated' I guess she is right - thought of being raped has never crossed my mind... 'So, Shaakya is going by van - that's it' Like most daughters in our kind of cultures - she was largely 'protected' and 'sheltered': and though she actively engaged in many extracurricular activities, she was largely naive to the ways of the world...

And... that actually was it - till we moved to Kandy, and Shaakya turned 17...

It was quite clear then that though she was very mature in many ways - and utterly sensible as a child, she was, sadly, ill-equipped to handle 'life' in general...

Shaakya joined a degree program soon after her O/Ls - opting out of A/Ls. She didn't want to go through 'having to prove herself' in a new school - and after much discussion, we decided it was for the best... So, with great enthusiasm, Shaakya started on her 'higher studies' in a 'mixed' environment - for pretty much the first time in her life. Within the first month of joining the institution, they had their 'orientation dance' - and we were fine with her going for it - with the only condition of a 'curfew' at 10.30 pm!

Fate had it, I was picking her up...

It was obvious that the moment she got in that something was amiss. The usual chatterbox who goes into intricate detail of what happened was silent.

'All ok hon?' I asked, driving slowly

'Now don't get mad' came a meek reply - and I braced myself for the worst!

'There was this guy'... She looked at me... I kept driving...

'We were all dancing...' she continued cautiously - looking at me to see my reactions...

'So...'

'This guy came and put his arm around me'

'And...'

'He took selfies with me'

'That's all?' I thought - not vocalizing it... I waited to see if there was more to it...

'He shouldn't have done that!'

'So what did you do?' I asked Shaakya... By this time, a rather big smirk was evident...

'This isn't funny A.P.P' (what Shaakya calls me - short for Appachchi) Shaakya was clearly upset....

'I didn't like it'

'So... what did you do' I asked again, this time, unable to stop a short laugh...

'I didn't do anything - I just froze'

'Hmm...'

'Will he put these out on Instagram - I don't want him to put anything with me on Insta' Shaakya was near hysterical here... (she wasn't on any social media - a conscious decision SHE made)

I stopped the car. Turned it around. Now Shaakya was terrified...  
'Please don't make a scene'

I promised I won't...

I took devilish joy in being able to 'play hero' here - especially given that 'nothing (much) happened!

Leaving Shaakya behind in the car, I walked up to the 'hall' where the party was at. I called on one of the teachers I knew and asked for the 'perpetrator' to be 'called in' - and then, you could see everyone instinctively tense up. The word soon went out that 'something was up' and 'someone's father had come' A small bunch of 'onlookers' started gathering, and in a few minutes, the young boy came - being escorted by one of the senior lecturers...

'What happened Mr Nathavitharana' a cautious but steady voice inquired...

'Nothing' I replied - now squaring off with the young man who had 'dared' put his arm around my daughter (without her permission). I stood in front of him, hands folded, chest puffed (I was about three times his size - but wanted so badly to do the whole 'Rambo' number on him!) and consciously spoke in a low growl...

'Nothing happened Uncle' he blurted meekly.

'I know' I replied, unable to hide a devilish smile.

'Can I have your phone to erase the photos you took of my daughter' I said, taking my time to emphasize each phrase, and weighing in on 'my daughter'

'I took photos of everyone uncle - nothing happened' he managed to mutter...

I smiled again

'I know nothing happened son - if something happened you and I won't be talking'

Pin drop silence right through...

The onlookers now expected a showdown...

He extended his phone, unlocked...

I went through the photos and deleted the one he took of Shaakya with his arm around her... Gave the phone back to him...

'Next time - ask for permission son' I said, still smiling... 'How you act reflects on your parents, and your school - so, hey, be a little classy won't you?'

'By the way, I have no problems with my daughter dating anyone - nor doing anything - provided SHE wants it...

So, next time, ask...'

I left it at that...

Shaakya was in tears for about five minutes and couldn't help laughing when I recited the story back to her - adding a little salt and pepper as I generally do to make it 'extra spicy'.

'No boy is going to even sit next to me now' she wailed...

'That was the point angel' I said - laughing!!!

For the record - for nearly 6 months no boy (and very very few girls either) actually even spoke to her!

It is only when a few of her friends came home for a spend the day that the word went out that 'Shaakya's father isn't that bad'!

Roons and I spoke about this at length afterwards: and for once she understood exactly what I meant in claiming that Shaakya was ill-prepared for the 'real world.' She was 'smart' but she wasn't 'street smart.' She was good - but she was naive too. She was well mannered - but she didn't know how to 'defend herself' when required... The next phase of her education was due - in fact, overdue...

Girls should not be raised as 'girls' - this 'cripples' them for life... We unknowingly, with all good intentions, raise girls to be far more 'dependent' than boys and this costs them dearly later on in life. The main reason why most women 'put up with' all forms of abuse in relationships and marriage is down to two simple reasons: they are emotionally and financially dependent on the 'man' to be able to take a stance of their own. Though many many organizations work on this issue, the REAL work is actually in OUR hands as parents. We need to raise our daughters to be independent from a very young age - how the hell are they supposed to be independent when they haven't gone anywhere alone, never done anything but study and go to school? How can they understand how to 'deal with things' when WE have been the ones dealing with them on their behalf? We have completely taken away their ability to fend for themselves...

Two things we started doing immediately after the incident. We started encouraging her to use public transport and do her own things - giving her advice and speaking openly about the dangers that exist 'out there.' Fate had it that she encountered a few 'creeps' already - but unlike before we didn't go into panic mode and 'shelter' her - we worked with her to equip her with skill sets that would come in use - including giving her basic self-defense classes...

We started talking about domestic violence and rape and abuse from a rather early age with her - so that she understands these are 'real.' We got her a phone, but we all agreed that she will not be on 'Social media' until she turned 18. We also spoke openly to her about boys, sex, marriage and relationships (including extramarital ones and why they take place) in order for her to understand that getting married and being happily married (until death do you part) is not necessarily the same thing...

But the two things I drummed into her was simple:

1. Find a vocation - but, also, find a way of having a steady passive income that ensures you can live comfortably. She will be a mother one day should she wish to - and if that happens, and she has to stay at home because she wants to, she must have the ability to (rather than HAVING to work because the family needs the finances)
2. If a man ever gets abusive - leave him - no matter how much you love him

Being a woman in a man's world isn't easy... However, it isn't all that hard either - the issue is that we expect to go through life expecting society to be 'fair' and 'just' and 'equal' which it will NEVER be.

Being utopian in viewpoint and idealism is fine as a personal viewpoint: but trying to live life EXPECTING this idealism to translate into realistic social constructs is rather naive.

For SURE we need to all work towards a fairer, more just and equality-based society: but TILL THAT DAY COMES - you need to LIVE in the REAL WORLD. As such, I have always told Shaakya that SHE needs to learn how to ensure she is not disadvantaged by her gender. Thankfully, we live in a truly globalized era (as compared to any other time in history) - so you don't have to get 'stuck' in the country you are born to - and make THAT the excuse either.

But, no matter where you go, and where you choose to live, chances are there will always be the gender divide: and as a woman, I think it is HER prerogative to ensure things stack up in her favour...

The only other thing I told her is to never ever look at herself as a 'woman' or 'female' - I told her to always look at herself as a PERSON first - and then as everything else. I have never believed in 'feminism' (in the current context of things not to be confused with women having equal rights to men) — because by the very virtue of the fact that you are a 'feminist' gives me the right to be a 'male chauvinist': you really can't have one without the other. I have always believed that there are women who are equally abusive as men - foul as men: being a man or a woman isn't the issue: it is how you live out your values: and this is common to all genders. What is required, for both men and women to have is a healthy respect for each other as PEOPLE. However, given the many disadvantages, women DO have practically, I have personally held that the more they become financially and emotionally independent the better it will be for them...

## PART 5: ALL WORK AND NO PLAY MAKES JILL A DULL GIRL!

Work, work, work. This was (and at times still is) my mantra. I did nothing apart from this. Whenever malli came and asked me to play with him I'd shoot him down saying "Jaith leave me alone I have work to do!" When my cousin asked me to come and spend time with her during the weekend "Lilly o/levels are 6 months away, no". I was by definition a book worm. While this made me come across as a girl who was hard working and knew what her priorities were, I was undoubtedly "dull".

We had just moved to Kandy and I was pursuing an Advanced Diploma in Psychology. I had just 2 days of lectures and was thereby gifted the luxury of time, something a normal 17-year-old would be dying to have with the pressures of A/levels. Yet no I just couldn't utilize the time I had effectively.

For the five days of the week, my routine was as follows. Wake up, wash, eat, sit and bury your head in the book/ complete an assignment. If I were to go for French or for Toastmasters' I'd go for that comeback and sit work through the night. The worst part of all of this is I was so consumed by the work that I had to do that I never bothered to devote time to have some fun.

I started learning French but even that I paid no attention to because of my degree and as a result, I now have to repeat the entire semester all over again because the only words I can utter are "Tres Bien" and "Je ne sais pas" (which means I don't know, it was a great escape when the sir asked questions, I may not have answered the question properly but hey! At least I spoke in French). I was a sad, miserable 17-year-old. Which is when appachchi in his usual philosophical tone said: "Remember all work and no play makes Shaakya a pook face".

It then dawned on me that this truly was a reason to be dull. Naturally, who wasn't going to be dull having have studied abnormal psychology for more than 12 hours. I believe that being a "workaholic" is sometimes a comfort factor. We take comfort in saying "You know I studied for 15 hours' yesterday" or "I got no sleep at all". This is all little things we say and do to feel comfortable because even if you fail, your comeback is at least I studied till late. There is so much to do and explore apart from being fenced in by four walls and a buried textbook. As the pandemic unleashed and we were all under house arrest I am slowly realizing that there is a lot we can do in a day apart from simply studying and with that my mood has improved significantly.

I started devoting time slots to work and having fun. So, for instance when I wake up in the morning after having breakfast I will take 2 hours and study. I will then take a break during which I will do something I enjoy like read a book. I will then get back to studying for another 2 hours after which I will exercise. Just like this, I allocate time slots to study and to take a break. for this having a diary of sorts where you can plan is truly very helpful. You needn't allocate just two hours to study and then take a break you could do a 5-hour study session and then take a huge long break. Once I look at my planner I realized that compared to the previous months this month I have been more productive, I've learnt something new, I have read more and I have had a fair share of movie nights and spent quality time with my brother and the other amazing thing is that the once distant relationship with Sherlock (Who is my pet dog, I couldn't resist it he just had to have that name) is beginning to patch itself and I believe that in no time after luring him with a few doggie treats that he and I will be best of friends.

If studying and being a book worm is a comfort factor or you simply don't seem to want to do anything else well don't let that be so, I'm sure there must be something that you like to do, maybe a new recipe you've been dying to try or a friend that you have been meaning to visit.

The trick is to not get too comfortable studying nor not studying the idea is to create a balance. Once you've struck this balance you will truly feel in a sense lighter. So, remember all work and no play makes Gill a dull girl.

## PART 6: LEAD, FOLLOW OR GET OUT OF THE WAY

It was one of my first ever 'projects' outside of my core job. I was absolutely excited. At 23 to be part of something as big as a regional rollout of global standards was not something everyone got as an opportunity.

I took this up with both excitement and trepidation - because I knew I will be working with some rather Senior members from both the US and the UK. I wanted to make sure they were 'impressed' by me: knowing full well that their perceptions of me will surely shape my career within the Corporation in the future.

The project was simple: to roll out the Global Business Practices in Sri Lanka as part of a global rollout program... Given that this was the first time Sri Lanka was being part of it, I wanted to make sure we put out little island nation (and unashamedly me) on the map... The core planning work had already been done at the Chicago Head Offices: but we were given the liberty of 'bringing our own flair' to it. Our Project Chair often told us 'you know your country best - so tell us what will and what will not work in your respective regions - and we will do our best to accommodate'

I was on fire.

I wrote emails everyday...

I gave ideas...

I gave my opinions...

I revelled in the feedback I got...

And then, after a week or two of intense activity, came the time to make decisions and 'get on with it' - and this is when I got cold feet. Till now, I thought I was only supposed to 'coordinate' things - rather than 'drive it.' I thought I could give some super ideas, and they will take it on from there... But oh no - whatever I boldly proposed were considered 'great ideas' and now I was being told to actually do it...

I proposed an 'opening act' at the with the company logo being 'animated' to live music, showcasing traditional and retro drums, knowing full well this required a hell of a lot of rehearsing to get it precisely right...

I proposed all the material being printed was on hand made recycled paper: to go with our focus on the environment: knowing full well printing on hand made recycled paper in bulk quantities was a challenge.

I proposed cocktails afterwards - knowing full well there were budgetary constraints

I proposed food based on here-say - rather than actually having understood what went into preparing those 'fusion' canapés and action stations given the setting we had already decided on...

It is only when I was told to 'take it on' that all the 'buts' started coming out...

My project lead - the then Senior Vice President of the Corporation sent me a simple mail that read...

Dear Vidusha

Lead,

Follow,

Or get the hell out of the way'

Regards

Steve

I think I reeled the entire day: and possibly smoked a pack thinking about it over and over again...

Eventually, I replied...

Dear Steve,

I will lead...

Regards

V

I never got a reply...

Neither did he ever speak to me about it ever again (and we worked for nearly 3 years together - and have been friends since I left, and his retirement!) The message he taught me defined my career - to this day...

See, in most situations at home or at work, we have a simple decision to make. Do we want to lead? or do we want to follow? Being on the 'sidelines' and taking Shot puts at those who do things is a cowardly act.

However, without quite realizing it, nor accepting it: that's what we do most of the time - take shot puts at those who DO things... Criticizing something is important: and a vital part of any activity - but this must be done with the intention of actually helping the activity at hand - NOT merely passing comments because you have the God-given right to...

Similarly, following simply because you have 'no choice' and then making a wisecrack about 'told you so' is also equally cowardly and irresponsible. At the same time, when you lead, we all have to take full and total accountability and responsibility for the negative outcomes... It goes all ways.

Have the 'balls' to lead...

Or be humble enough to follow someone who IS leading... NEVER be a bystander: NEVER be a spectator: never be an armchair warrior. GET INVOLVED and get into the action. Participate: Actively. Or for god sake - just get out of the way and allow those who are trying to do something (no matter how flawed it can be) to actually get on with it...

# EPILOGUE

---

I guess the 'moral of all the stories are rather simple: it's easy to talk - hard to actually do...

Most of the time we become rather critical of others - but fail to actually hold ourselves to the same high levels of idealism we impose on them. We also fail to actually be critical of ourselves: or reflect thereby disabling learning...

Learning the 'right' lessons becomes important: rather than merely learning 'lessons.' If we are not able to take a cold hard look at ourselves and try and improve ourselves, spending more time finding fault with others, we become, at best, the same as we were always, and worst, hypocrites.

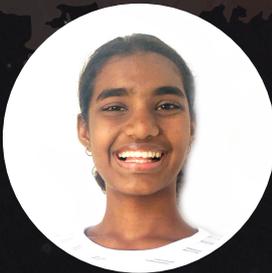
The 'lockdown' during the Corona Pandemic gave everyone lot of time to truly introspect and also, to engage in wide-open conversations that showed both Shaakya and me that we are, as always, at best, a work in progress. However, through dialogue, meaningful criticisms and open should searching, we all have the opportunity to learn and learn from each other...

# CUT the CRAP 3



## VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



## SHAAKYA NATHAVITHARANA

Shaakya is a full time student, reading for her Bachelors in Psychology. She completed her secondary education at Methodist College Colombo 3, where she was voted in as a House Vice Captain a member of the school committee. Shaakya has secured places in 3 national speaking competitions, and is a member of the Kandy ToastMasters Club. When not writing assignments and prepping for exams, Shaakya reads, writes poetry, cooks, swims and plays 'army' with her 10 year old brother.