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## Finding Your Self by Losing Yourself: Integrating Spirituality and Business

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# **Finding Your Self by Losing Yourself: Integrating Spirituality and Business**

**A Conversation with Nand  
Kishore Chaudhary**



**Nand Kishore Chaudhary, Founder,  
Chairman, and Managing Director,  
Jaipur Rugs Company**

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## **Introduction: *About Jaipur Rugs Company and Nand Kishore Chaudhary***

Jaipur Rugs Company (JRC) is India's largest manufacturer and exporter of hand-made carpets. JRC has a unique socio-economic business model wherein the firm connects weavers from rural India to consumers in the global markets. The company was founded by Mr. Nand Kishore Chaudhary (NKC) in 1978, with just 2 looms and 9 weavers. As of 2014, JRC had a network of more than 40,000 artisans manufacturing rugs for consumers in over 40 countries. Nearly 80% of JRC's artisans are women from the lower society-dubbed "castes," with no formal education.

NKC has not only provided sustainable employment to villagers, but has also revolutionized the rugs industry in India by totally eliminating middlemen and contractors, and by abolishing the draconian usage of child labour and bonded labour, both rampant in India's unorganized rug-weaving industry. JRC's innovative door-step

delivery model allows artisans to earn a sustainable livelihood without requiring them to move out of their homes. Training, loom set up, supply of raw materials, dissemination of finished products, and receipt of payments are all made at the doorstep — directly to the artisans. In addition to the livelihood that the artisans generate, JRC also runs literacy programs, free healthcare camps, and helps link artisans with government programs. In



a **NKC receiving the ToI Social Impact Award from the President of India, Honourable Sri Pranab Mukherjee**

new initiative, JRC has begun to train disabled people; in fact, the firm is likely to become the largest employer of people with disabilities in India within the next 3 to 5 years.

Over the past 35 years, NKC worked tirelessly towards complete and holistic development of the most downtrodden section of Indian society. His efforts have been recognized world-over, by both management scholars and nation-states. He is a regular speaker at conferences and business schools, including the prestigious Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Harvard Business School. He has been the recipient of several prestigious awards including the NASSCOM Social Innovation Honours 2014, IndiaMart Leaders of Tomorrow 2013, Bihar Innovation Forum Award, Times of India Social Impact Award 2012, Karmaveer Puraskar 2012, Business Gaurav SME Award 2012, Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award Start Up 2010, Distinguished Entrepreneurship Award 2010, Best SME for CSR 2009, and several awards for business excellence.

## **Need for the Interview**

Business leaders and executives often agree upon the importance of human values and spirituality within the organizational context. But the field of management has few, if any, cases of successful implementation of such initiatives. JRC is one of the few organizations that have been able to develop and institutionalize processes for integrating spirituality and business. This interview, we hope, will strengthen the conviction of business leaders that such integration is indeed possible, and positively beneficial to organizational growth and well-being of employees. This interview will also provide a blueprint for executives to develop similar initiatives in their organizations.

Finally, an entire generation of social entrepreneurs is transforming the world of business especially in the emerging markets. This interview provides important insights for such young minds on how they can nurture their talents and channelize their energies for fulfilling a social mission.

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## *The Interview*

**Q.** *You started your business with just 2 looms and 9 workers. Today you have more than 40000 artisans working for you and your business has spread across the globe. What according to you is the reason for your success?*

Wherever I go, people ask me this question. I meet journalists, students, academicians, management gurus, and researchers and all of them ask me how I grew my business and how I'm able to manage thousands of employees. They often expect me to talk about management jargon such as my business model, value chain, or systems and processes as the basis of my success. But the answer I give them often startles them. When asked what the basis of JRC's success is and what is my management secret, my answer is *Prema*<sup>1</sup> or love. This organization is run purely by love; that is my style of management and that is the reason for my success. I don't know anything beyond that! Love is one thing which I hold in highest regard — as the most critical element of business — and this is something which I continue to work on in the organizational context. Once you have love, then other human values such as empathy and devotion start flowing from it. Then management becomes very easy because things will start happening naturally. The more love you start putting in the culture of the organization, the more happiness, the more intelligence, the more wealth, or for that matter, whatever you want will come to you. That love is like the fertilizer that gives the bounty of a good crop. This, I believe, is not only true for JRC, but for any organization. This is universal. Among all values that constitute spirituality or human values — love is the foremost.

The root of all problems in the world is the ego. When "I," the individual ego, enters into the field of activity, there are bound to be problems. The solution to all these problems is only love. If you want to conquer fear, then love is the

*"When asked what the basis of JRC's success is and what is my management secret, my answer is Prema or love. This organization is run purely by love; that is my style of management and that is the reason for my success. I don't know anything beyond that! Love is one thing which I hold in highest regard, as the most critical element of business..."*

only way. If you want to bring discipline in the organization then teach people how to love and discipline will follow. If you want to bring freedom in the organization, then again, teach people how to love and freedom will follow. To bring in purity also, first bring in love, then purity will follow. If you want to build a team that works for a common goal then again, you bring in love. That will create the best team and the common goal will

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<sup>1</sup> All Sanskrit words in this interview are italicized.



also emerge. Management experts in the West talk about emotions.<sup>2</sup> Yes, emotions are important, but often they are superficial. Love is above emotions, because it is the primordial emotion. This love is present in each one of us. We just have to recognize it and nurture it. From that flows everything else. You should experiment with love because love has the power to integrate everything. That is why I say that love is the basis of business.

**Q. Can following values such as love really lead to sustained profitable growth?**

I strongly believe that sustainable profitable growth can only come when organizations follow and practice human values such as love, and not otherwise. To understand this, we must first understand why organizations fail to deliver growth. You see, the more an individual's ego interferes in decision-making, the smaller the business starts becoming. The reason for this is that my understanding of my own self is limited to my worldview which is an artificial creation of my mind, narrowly defined by the environment around me and the experiences I have had. My perception of my identity is closely related to the identity of my surroundings which are illusory in nature. In reality, I do not know myself at all. It is a false identity to which I'm sticking to. When I enter the business as an owner or founder, and when decision-making is centred on my ego, naturally the business also gets shaped in and as much a narrow



Following human values can indeed lead to profitable growth, as demonstrated by the success of JRC. Here, NKC receives the Rajasthan State Award for Export Excellence 2012 from the then Chief Minister of State, Mr. Ashok Gehlot.

*"I feel that real growth cannot take place unless you have, as the foundation of business, the fundamental values of love, empathy, respect, integrity, trust, etc. These are all spiritual values, and that is why I believe that spirituality is the basis of growth and success in organizations."*

way as I know myself. So if you look at the entire picture, business will not be successful if it is driven by an individual ego such as mine, or, for that matter, anyone else's or even a small group of people who sit at the top. If you look at businesses that face imminent failure, you will often find that decision-making will be centred on a few people at the top. In reality, success of business lies in separating one's petty narrow-minded ego from the business and giving ownership to the grass-root employees. Success is determined not by control, but by freedom and democracy.<sup>3</sup> The more freedom you give to the grass-roots and your employees, the more sustainable your organization will become. If firms are run by individuals, they will remain as much as the individual has defined himself. However, to give control and freedom to the grass-roots is not simple. It requires a strong understanding of human nature,

<sup>2</sup> Emotional Intelligence is an area of research that has received significant attention over the past couple of decades in the field of management. See, for example, Goleman (2005).

<sup>3</sup> An excellent narrative of freedom and democracy in the organizational context is given by Semler (1993).

respect for freedom, and personal and organizational integrity. All this is built on the foundations of love and trust. Therefore, I feel that real growth cannot take place unless you have, as the foundation of business, the fundamental values of love, empathy, respect, integrity, trust, etc. These are all spiritual values, and that is why I believe that spirituality is the basis of growth and success in organizations. You may call it by whatever name you want; you may not use the word “spirituality,” but at the end of the day, these values are what drive growth and success. Businesses that grow without these foundations will not last long.

There are many experiments that universities and management schools in the western world are conducting. These are very important and have contributed much to the art and science of management. But there is also something missing. That is wisdom which we have in India, passed on to us by the great seers and saints of yore. These were also scientists who have given us a history of experiments with the human nature and the human mind and nature itself.<sup>4</sup> We have a long history, thousands of years old, of such experiments. What I’m doing here is just trying to tap into that wisdom.

**Q.** *You say that love is our basic nature and that everyone is capable of loving. But our observation of human behaviour is quite contradictory. Why is it that we are not able to express this love in our thoughts, words, and action?*

Our human tendencies cause us to act the way we do. The state today is that everyone is mad behind money; people only want high salaries, stock options, perquisites, and quarter-on-quarter growth to the extent that human values have been totally forgotten. Sensitivity, love, compassion, empathy have been totally forgotten and the extent of madness is only increasing by the day. And when everyone turns mad, it is difficult to identify and pin-point one mad person. The currency has totally destroyed the “human sense.” These tendencies — to own and hoard — make the mind sick. The more the tendencies, the sicker the mind becomes. And when sick minds take decisions and act, the actions will also naturally be sick. Many of us today are enmeshed in these tendencies and that is why we are not able to manifest the love which we already have.

**Q.** *You often refer to the “tendencies” in humans? What exactly are these tendencies and how do they affect business?*

These tendencies are nothing but base human desires. In the Indian scriptures, these are called *Vasanas*.<sup>5</sup> These desires are threefold – physical, mental, and emotional – and these desires propel action within us. They are shaped by our experiences, but they also shape our experiences. In my business, I look for people who have a lesser number of such base desires, who do not have much hankering for power, position, and achievements. These are people who will then be able to channelize their energies towards upliftment of society through the medium of business. Now these are brutal truths and I’m very frank about it. People often ask me, “Why is it that there are few successful entrepreneurs like you?” My answer to them is that when a person starts a business, he is enmeshed in these tendencies or *Vasanas* to such an extent that he loses the discrimination between himself and the business. He starts seeing both as

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to the philosophical texts from India, such as the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* pertaining to the *Advaita* tradition of *Vedanta* (non-dualism) philosophy.

<sup>5</sup> In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna categorizes *Vasanas* as tendencies pertaining to *Raga* (attachment) and *Dwesha* (aversion). A similar classification is given in the Buddhist texts where these *Vasanas* are said to be of the nature of *Bhava Tanha* (craving to be) and *Vibhava Tanha* (craving not to be or aversion).

one.<sup>6</sup> For business, customers are the most important. When a business is new, the entrepreneur has to acquire new skills and insights into the customers, but he forgets all this because he is so caught up in his own world of desires and tendencies. These desires overpower him and he has no power to think what is actually needed for the business. Instead of serving the society, the business becomes a medium to earn more money, power, fame, and what not. Once the ego starts interfering and demanding for personal gains from the business, the business starts declining. This happens because the distinction between the business and the personality is lost. These tendencies slowly envelope the business, and soon it starts failing. *Vasanas* are like fire that burn out your strength and will. It is my belief that humans do not get tired because of work. Work is *Ananda* (happiness), work is meditation. It is these base desires, the tendencies, which actually sap you of your energy.<sup>7</sup> These base desires quickly turn into greed for power and position, greed to accumulate and hoard. It is these desires, and not our work, that actually consume our energies. That fire of desires which burns you from within will also consume the business. That is why, if you want to do business successfully, you have to overcome these *Vasanas*.

**Q. What is the way of overcoming these tendencies?**

One way is to control these tendencies, but there is always a limit to control. Moreover, trying to control may further worsen the tendencies. That is why one must focus on transcending these tendencies and sublimating them, instead of repression and control. And again, this transcending and sublimation can happen only through love. As your love goes on increasing, you start transcending the gross human nature. Unless that happens, no business can be successful in the true sense. That is why I feel management thinkers must focus on this aspect of love and ways to bring it into organizational practice. As far as I'm concerned, I have no doubt in my mind whether love works or not. The important question is how to bring this love into the organization.

**Q. How have you been able to operationalize this love and start the process of transformation in your organization?**

All transformation starts with the individual. All transformation starts when you first start transforming yourself. If you want to transform the society or your organization, then first transform yourself. How does this individual transformation start? You know when an individual comes to this world, or when he is sent here by God, the biggest problem is that he does not understand himself, neither do his parents understand him nor do his teachers, professors, friends, or colleagues understand him. It is an irony that we have developed so many institutions and courses to understand the objects of the world and

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<sup>6</sup> The idea of losing discrimination between two different objects, and perceiving them as one, has been elaborately explained in the *Advaita* tradition of *Vedanta*. Discrimination or *Viveka* (derived from the root *Vic*, to separate) is the ability to separate the "seen" from the "seer" so as to objectively view phenomenon; inability to discriminate is described in the scriptures as the cause of misery. The topic of *Viveka* is comprehensively dealt by Indian philosopher and saint Sri Adi Sankaracharya in his tome entitled *Vivekachudamani*. Later, another Indian philosopher and saint, Swami Vidyananda, has composed a short text entitled *Drig Drishya Viveka* (literally meaning discrimination between the seer and the seen) which expounds on this topic. For a lucid translation of *Vivekachudamani*, see Swami Ranganathananda (2008) and for a terse commentary on *Drig Drishya Viveka* see Swami Tejomayananda (2010).

<sup>7</sup> Among other things, *Vasanas* create fickle mindedness, leading to the mind either engaging in the memories of the past or plans for the future. A mind that is overpowered by tendencies will find it difficult to stay in the present. According to Indian scriptures, this tossing of the mind consumes energy and leads to mental and physical fatigue. This concept is expounded by Swami Chinmayananda in his series of discourses on Self unfoldment (Swami Chinmayananda, 2010).

the mysteries of the universe, but there is no facility or mechanism for understanding yourself! This has led to the unfortunate state that we are in today, where we are actually far away from ourselves. But as we come closer to our own self, we start knowing ourselves, and then we first start loving ourselves. Self-love is the starting point. That self-love gives a lot of satisfaction — and integrity and gratitude also start developing. That satisfaction and self-love then manifest through our actions and then love starts spreading in the lives of those around us. Unless you don't know yourself, you cannot love yourself. And unless you cannot love yourself, you cannot express that love for others. The more you love yourself, the more you can love others. And the more closer you go to yourself, the more you start knowing yourself, the more love starts developing within you. Your love will then start overflowing, and then it will envelope all around you. That is why the journey that an individual has to make is within and not outwardly. If he has to change the culture of his organization, he has to change himself; if he has to change the culture of his home, he has to change himself. The more transformation comes within, the more he will see transformation happening in his home, organization, and society. That is why at JRC, what I'm trying to do is to make people go closer to themselves. Once the journey within begins then things will start happening on their own.



**NKC in a candid interaction with the weavers.**

That is the main secret.

### **Q.** *How are you able to facilitate this inward journey of your employees?*

If you observe closely, there is a stark contradiction between the way Nature works and we human beings try to work. In Nature, things happen on their own. In the forest, for instance, who is there to take care of the plants or water the saplings or protect the beings? Despite this, Nature has its own ways and things happen apparently in their own way. There is no “doingness” in Nature; there is only “beingness.”<sup>8</sup> Humans, on the other hand, want to “do” things; they want to take up things and make it the way they perceive. Such “doingness” is fundamentally opposed to the “beingness” that we observe in Nature. And that I believe is the biggest problem humans have. Acknowledging your own beingness is the starting point of this journey within. To facilitate this, at JRC, we are trying to build an ecosystem based on the workings of Nature. We are setting up a centre where everything will be natural in the sense that we will not be using any man-made

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<sup>8</sup> In the Indian scriptures, “beingness” is considered as an advanced spiritual practice, something that not everyone may be capable of practicing. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna explains this beingness as abidance in one's own nature. In recent times too, modern mystics and philosophers have propagated this idea. Indian saints such as Sri Ramana Maharshi (2008) and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (2003) have advocated abidance as a means to self-discovery. Similar ideas have been expounded by Eckhart Tolle (2006) also.



material for infrastructure and the centre will be self-sustainable in all possible ways. Of course, living here will be frugal, and we want that those who come to the centre to live with the minimum necessities. I believe that such an environment will allow beingness to flourish instead of doingness. Once that happens, people will start getting closer to their own self, and that will help revive the innate human qualities, which we have lost living this artificial way of life. Love, empathy, sensitivity, ability to perceive in the right ways, man-to-man relationship, etc. can be revived if we give ourselves an opportunity. Finally, JRC should become like an Ashram (hermitage), where life, business, and spirituality are integrated in seamless ways.

**Q. *How difficult is it to start and sustain such transformation in organizations?***

Like every process of change, this too is not easy. There will always be opposing forces in people who have not yet reached that level. They are far away from their true self and that is why they may start opposing such flow of love. When I got this thought (of spreading love in the organization) initially, I tried to implement this in my family and my organization. But I failed several times in the process. But then, I started meeting people who really believed in this idea of love and who had this love within them. That is when I realized that if you want to implement human values in your organization, you must find people who share this conviction with you and who also believe in this idea of love. You must associate with people who are innocent, humble, simple, and in whom this love flows naturally. The only thing is that such people may themselves not know that this natural love is within them. The effort, therefore, must be to bring such people together, make their team or a group and then put them to work. Wherever they go, whichever team they work, because they have this love in them, it will start rubbing on to others. That is why the first thing that we are doing is to locate and identify such change-agents in whom this love is already present. The more such people you have, the more this love starts percolating in the organizational culture. Once others experience this love, they will also get transformed. That is how the process of spreading love and transformation happens in organizations.

**Q. *How do you spot, attract, and nurture such people who have similar ideologies and the feeling of love within them? Can you share how you are doing this at JRC?***

One must understand that “business problem is people’s problem.” And I have experienced in my life that love is the solution to all problems. So I want to spread this

*“If organizations are serious about practicing human values then I think their ability to attract the right kind of people will form the cornerstone of their success.”*

love throughout my organization. But as I have told you, we need people who can understand and appreciate the meaning of love. Today, unfortunately, we have forgotten how to recognise divinity or good quality in humans. Even parents do not recognise good qualities in their children. If they see that their child is a hypocrite or a liar, they will

encourage it because they feel that this is the way to success in this world. If they see that their child is honest or wants to serve the society, parents will be the first to discourage their children. This is the unfortunate state of people today. Individuals make a society, and that is why today our society is also like that. All definitions of success, all rules and regulations, are based on untruth and hypocrisy. If organizations are serious

about practicing human values then I think their ability to attract the right kind of people will form the cornerstone of their success. This is a core capability that organizations need to develop. Once you attract such people, and then give them an environment in which these values can be nurtured, you will definitely have success.

At JRC, we have started something called the “Good Souls Project.” The Good Souls Project is a way to institutionalize the process of identifying and selecting the right people, whom we call “Good Souls,” who will fit into JRC’s culture and importantly those who understand and appreciate the role of human values in business. We are still in the early stages of this project, but I can tell you that our experiments have yielded very good results. Good Souls are basically people tending towards enlightenment. Such individuals are searching for Truth in some form or the other, and if I convert it into management parlance, I can say that they are searching for excellence. And because of this pursuit of excellence, whatever they do they will excel in that. Our attempt is to link this pursuit of theirs with their workplace. If you connect good souls to their workplace, they can do miracles. A good soul is basically someone with few *Vasanas* or tendencies. These are people who value human values and try to integrate these in their lives. In our experience, we have seen that such people do not work so much for power and position, but want to work for nobler goals in life. Because we are in the early stages of this project, we are yet to finalize all the attributes of good souls, but we have made some progress in this area. These are the basic qualities of a good soul. However, when we talk about business, good souls need to have two more qualities: good habits and intelligence. We therefore define Good Souls as being a combination of three aspects: “Good Soul + Good Habits + Intelligence.” People could be missing one of these, so this segregation has to be done. If a person is a good soul, but his habits are bad or if he is low in intelligence, then how do we convert these bad habits into good ones and how do we give him work that is suitable to his intelligence level?

Over the years, I have tried to master this capability for myself and we have now institutionalized several of these processes.<sup>9</sup>



**Visitors from across the globe visit artisans in villages. Such interactions help visitors appreciate the work done by the artisans and also help boost the confidence, self-respect, and dignity of weavers.**

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<sup>9</sup> NKC is very particular about the selection of weavers because he feels that it is like bringing in a new member in the family. For years, NKC has been selecting and training weavers intuitively, but over the past few years,

The biggest challenge here is that at any times such people themselves do not know what their potential is; they don't realise their own intelligence and devotion. So I have been thinking of how such peoples' devotion and intelligence can be connected to work. What I have done is that at JRC, we have built an informal environment where all relationships are informal. Through this informal relationship, I explain to them the talent they have, the potential they have, and what they are capable of doing. When I recognize their inherent goodness, they also recognize my feelings, and whatever I want to communicate to them becomes so easy and simple; they are able to grasp my intimate feelings. Once this is achieved, the time taken to train them is much less and they develop the capacity to make better decisions. Their confidence levels become so high that they are able to make big decisions. When we started doing this, slowly we saw that their deficiencies started falling off on their own. We then took this to the next step. We created an environment where such good souls could come together and share their experiences with each other. I realised that if such people come together, then they will be able to make better business decisions. They cannot only transform organizations, but are capable of transforming entire industries.

*"True communication can only happen when there is true love, and when there is true love, there are no separate identities. That is where the science of communication should start and that is what communication should be like."*

**Q.** *Are there any other aspects of the organizational culture that are imperative for promoting human values among employees?*

I believe that if you want to run an organization on the principles of human values, then two more things are important: firstly, a culture of spontaneity, and secondly, heart-to-heart communication with people. The problem with the human mind is that it always wants to spring into action.<sup>10</sup> The mind keeps seeking or doing. But as I have told you, the reality is that the nature of the mind is not "doingness," but "beingness." And this beingness is the source of spontaneity or spontaneous action. This is what we are trying in our organization under the initiative called "Effortless Effort."<sup>11</sup> I have understood that the more effort you put in some work, the more its quality deteriorates. But if you do that same work in a relaxed way, the efficiency just shoots up. The effort in work just keeps coming down, the more relaxed you become. Look at a driver, for instance. When you start to learn driving, you are so tensed, and the driving is so poor. But then as you develop yourself, driving becomes effortless, and even joyful. This comes with an understanding that the car is a machine. It is running on its own. My job is only to give

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the firm has developed standard procedures for selecting the right type of weavers and then training them. This includes a detailed profiling exercise of every prospective weaver, including their families.

<sup>10</sup> The entire creation, according to the Indian scriptures, is said to be a "play" of the *Gun*as or basic qualities which are *Sattva*, *Rajas*, and *Tamas*. *Sattva* is of the nature of awareness, knowledge, and love. *Rajas* is of the nature of action, attachment, and ownership. And *Tamas* is said to be of the nature of sloth, ignorance, and darkness. The tendency of the human mind to "act" is attributed to the quality of *Rajas*.

<sup>11</sup> In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna identifies three types of actions: action, inaction, and unaction. Action is acting with an ego. Inaction is the tendency to avoid work, often compared to laziness and sloth. Unaction is effortless action, wherein the action takes place without indulgence of the ego or a selfish motive. The third type of action is regarded sacred and spiritual aspirants are urged to practice such action.

direction to the machine. That way, my contribution is only a few percent; the rest of everything is being done by the machine. The more you understand this, the more relaxed you become and the better you can perform. For those who are steeped in their beingness, things happen naturally around them. These are miracles. But this can happen only through people who are selfless: those who work for the love of action, and not for the fruit of action. Such people are totally selfless and pure. And this effortless effort will only come through such people. Basically, love emerges from passion, and in love, the ego gets dissolved. The work then becomes meditation. And then when you get immersed in such work, the results will be astounding. There will be both beauty and fragrance in such work. The second aspect is that people in the organization must speak the language of the heart.<sup>12</sup> The more this starts happening, the lesser are the gaps and blindness in the organization. Gaps and blindness exist because of fear; it is only because of fear that people try to hide their problems and the problems of the organization from others. To eliminate this fear, relationships must be informal and we must do away with hierarchy and bureaucracy. And this change has to start from the top. At JRC, all relationships are informal. My relationship with my children is like that and my relationship with my employees is also like that. This will promote honesty in the organization. At JRC we actively encourage people who are honest, blunt, and straightforward. I tell the employees here that the day they stop speaking the truth and stop being straightforward, I will stop respecting them. I tell them to write down in their diaries that: "You are the most respected person in the organization." The day such people leave this spontaneity and start planning, scheming, and start getting crafty, that is where problems start. Many times such people may be perceived as insane also, and excessively emotional, but when they utter the truth, that truth changes everything. To promote such behaviour in the organization, you need to have heart-to-heart communication. I believe in the language of the heart. Whenever I talk to people, I tell them that you can only communicate 15% through verbal communication for those who can articulate; for others who are less skilled, it is much lower than this. The remaining 85% is the real communication and that happens by heart — not through any physical means. The "communication wire" is the "love" that binds one heart to the other. If there is no love or that "communication wire," you cannot communicate effectively. When there is love, the one who initiates the communication and the one who receives the communication, both disappear, meaning their egos are no longer separate identities. In communication, if there are two personalities, then there are two egos. And when there are two distinct egos, there is no communication — there is only conflict. One is proving against the other; one is trying to prove some point over others. This is conflict and struggle, not communication. True communication can only happen when there is true love, and when there is true love, there are no separate identities. That is where the science of communication should start and that is what communication should be like. I have interacted with international people and also with villagers. But wherever I have tried to establish this heart-to-heart communication I found that with such people, the performance of their work has dramatically improved, and the teams have performed much better than others. That in itself is a miracle. Outside my office, I have a board which says "University of Hard Rocks of Life." Now I have decided to change it to "University of Miracles" because what you witness here is no less than a miracle. Let me give you an example. We are making strong efforts to connect our weavers in Indian villages with customers from international markets. Now these are two totally different sets of people. They have different languages, different cultures, and different

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<sup>12</sup> Spiritual *Guru* Sri Sathya Sai Baba has often referred to such communication in his discourses on integrating spirituality and management (Sathya Sai Baba, 2009).



backgrounds. In fact, there would be nothing common in them. Despite the language and cultural barriers, however, we have found that they can actually communicate with each other. We have people from Spain, Britain, United States coming to these villages, and having complete heart-to-heart conversations with the artisans; the artisans speak in *Marwari* (the local language), while these people speak in their own language. But somehow, mysteriously, they understand each other perfectly, and that further strengthens our conviction that such communication is possible! In reality this is not a miracle. It's just the way things happen in Nature. The difference now is that we understand this working; all we have done is to understand Nature — the way it works, the way it operates — and that is what we call as miracles.

**Q.** *What kind of resources do organizations need to initiate and implement such organization-wide changes? Do you think that programs such as those implemented in JRC can be adopted and implemented even by smaller organizations?*

People often think that to do good work you need resources, especially money. But I don't believe that. I don't worry about money in such issues. Money will come. My belief is that resources will flow; what is actually needed are individuals who can carry the mission through. What is needed is a passionate individual who can work in this area. If you have money and all the resources but not passionate individuals, then all resources are of little use. You need individuals who are ready to toil. We need people who can champion a cause and strive for it. I think this is the biggest challenge for organizations where there is a clear social mission or priority of values. Today, there are big business schools with so-called world-class degrees. But let me tell you — this is not the kind of education I subscribe to. I have employed people from the best business schools but they simply fail to understand basic human values of love and empathy. I believe that education must primarily help students develop these qualities.<sup>13</sup> Once you have these within, then acquiring skills for jobs is not difficult. But today, the focus has shifted entirely from values to only job-oriented skills. Skills can be acquired by trained animals, also. But the profession of management needs humans with human values. That is missing. And that is the reason why you see that most problems in the world are caused not by illiterates, but by educated people! At Harvard Business School also — I spoke the same thing. They all laughed and clapped and agreed to what I had to say!

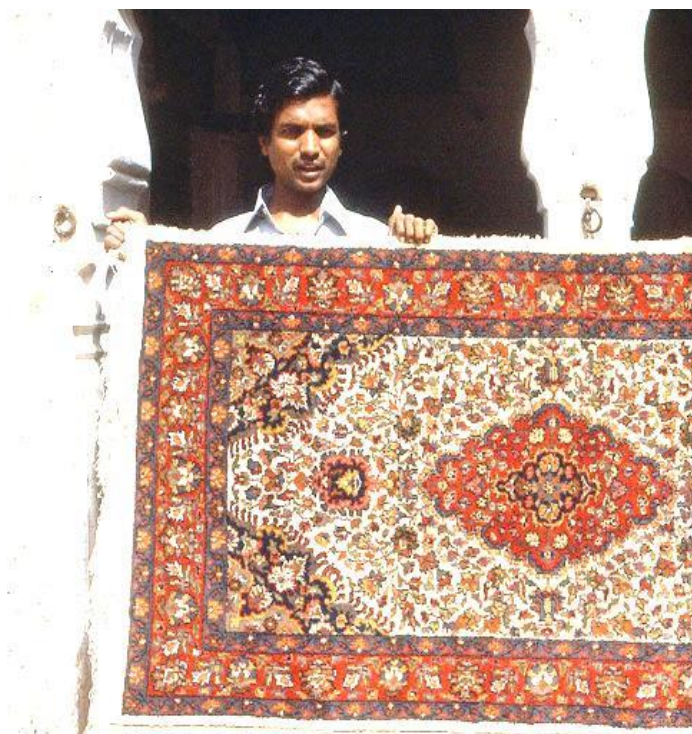
At JRC, we are now in the process of starting weaving centres especially for differently-abled. In these weaving centres, we will have training programs for hand-weaving and tufted carpets for the disabled. The location of these centres will be such that they don't have to travel much from their homes; we can have separate centres dedicated to women. So with such a broad vision, a strategy will have to be designed for the disabled people. We are also talking to the Government of India, and we have invited them to see the work we are doing so that it can become a pan-India operation. I am also planning to collaborate with other NGOs who work in this area. Even when we talk about collaborating, we need people who will go to these NGOs and spend time there, understand how they work, understand the people, the best practices, and all this requires willingness to work very hard and that will come with passion, dedication, commitment, and patience. At some level, you need people who will take ownership, otherwise because it is my idea or my passion, it will become my responsibility. That is not what is needed. That is why, the main resource needed for such initiatives is selfless,

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<sup>13</sup> Sri Sathya Sai Baba defines true education as Educare, that which brings forth from within the qualities already inherent in man (2009).

hard-working people. That is all. Once you have that, no task is impossible. Even in this initiative of ours, the way things are going, in the next 3 to 5 years, we will become one of the largest employers of disabled people in the world. Such things cannot happen with money alone. They require champions. And that is why I keep coming to the idea of having more good souls in the organization. Once you have such people, things will happen on their own.

**Q.** *There are many organizations where values get diluted as the organization grows or after the founder cedes control to the new generation of managers. How do you ensure that the values you advocate as the founder continue to guide JRC's philosophy and organizational practices even after the next generation of management takes control?*



**NKC himself is an excellent weaver. Here he is seen with the first rug he made in 1978.**

This is a very pertinent point. You see, as organizations grow, the distance between the founder and the employees starts increasing. Systems and procedures start replacing human touch, and communication becomes more and more formal. That is the point where there is a real chance of values getting diluted. To avoid this and to ensure perpetuity of values, at JRC we are working on an initiative called Founder's Mentality.<sup>14</sup> Founder's Mentality is nothing but values in action — values which the founder embodies. What we are trying to do is to create an institutional memory and bring in repeatability in practicing the values that I have lived by and which I advocate as something which is non-negotiable. Repeatability is the key word because perpetuation can

only come when things are repeatable. Repeatability does not mean doing the same thing the way it was, but it is more about understanding the underlying principles, the thought process, the critical thinking, and seeing how it applies to the current business scenario.

This first step in this direction is documentation. In my case, I can tell you that for growth in business, the first thing is love towards your work and then love towards your people. When these two come together, then skill and knowledge develop on their own as you proceed. You start developing knowledge about the intricacies of business. Once this knowledge emerges, then you document it. But you must not stop there. This knowledge has to be taught to the next generation. The next set of managers must make decisions based on the knowledge which the founder had. That is where real repeatability comes in. And that is when you can achieve profitable scale along with the values that the

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<sup>14</sup> Founder's Mentality has been conceptualized by consulting firm Bain & Company.

founder embodies. One of the ways in which I try to pass on this knowledge is by personally mentoring people, the good souls in the organization. I first give them time to explore themselves. Initially they will be fickle-minded. I know that they do not know what they want to do in life but that doesn't matter much since they are inherently pure. I give them the freedom, time, and their own space. I never stop them. Then slowly I start mentoring them and give them inputs. I always feel that whatever I have learned, I have taken so many years and I have lost so much money. Why should my people go through the same journey? That is why I try to give them all my learning and knowledge. But one critical point here is that there must be acceptance between the mentor and the mentee. Also, this acceptance does not come so easily. I will doubt people, and will also want to test them and know their capabilities. Similarly, that person will also doubt me. But in this process, both parties come to know about each other, and then acceptance increases. So the task is to bring about acceptance among each other, and then make sure that the acceptance is of a high level. That is where transformation begins. Then my knowledge of 35 years starts flowing to that person free of cost! And that saves him from several mistakes. Once I induct such people, then I also start benefitting from them. My blind spots about my company, my family, my relations, etc. start becoming clearer to me. Then that relationship further improves. So, the larger such a team becomes, the better results one starts getting.

In addition to this, when a founder starts a business, he develops a team of closely-knit people — 20 or 30 who have fully absorbed this philosophy. These are the people who are aware of the founder's mentality because they have worked directly with him. These are the people through whom the founder's mentality operates and they grow the business. So when we are creating an institutional memory, it's not only about the founder's experiences and what he recollects about business, but also the experiences

*"Founder's Mentality is something which can give companies a sustainable competitive advantage."*

of these sets of people who have fully absorbed the philosophy from the founder. There are people who have been with him from the very beginning; they have seen different aspects of him, and have been with him through all kinds of phases and ups and downs, gathering their own experiences. There are also certain things

that the founder might have forgotten, but then those incidences would have left a mark on those people with him. So, capturing that collective knowledge and documenting it also becomes very important. Finally, there will also be some probing questions which need to be asked to get to the depth of things; that is where the founder must be very open about sharing his experiences: things which went right, things which didn't go quite right. All this knowledge is dispersed, in the minds of the founder and his core team. This knowledge must be collected from diverse sources and then has to be created into an institutional memory from which the next generation of people can draw from and base their decisions upon the values that the founder propagated.

Finally, the experiences, stories, and the values of the founder have to be contemplated upon. At JRC, we have a collection of stories based on Founder's Mentality. We have several stories from different companies and different entrepreneurs from 1st and 2nd generation from around the world of how they have been able to hold on to the values of the founder. So each one of us in the organization reads those and within teams we sit down and have discussions, such as so-and-so company was facing this challenge and this is how they handled it. These were the core values and how they continued to adhere to it — stories of how the business environment had changed but the businesses did not



compromise on the value systems. So we read those stories individually and collectively, discuss and brainstorm about how we ourselves interpret it. Each person from the group will have a different point of view and will interpret the same story in a different way. And then we also talk about how that can relate to our ground realities and what can we learn from that as an organisation, what changes do we need to make, to reach the ideal scenario or if we are already doing it then how do we continue doing it and that too more often. So such group discussions are also playing a very important role in the way we are trying to implement Founder's Mentality.

According to me, Founder's Mentality is something which can give companies a sustainable competitive advantage. This is because the founder has become successful based on some values that he has followed. These values are universal; you may call it spirituality, or values, or whatever you feel like, but these are universally applicable, otherwise, the business would not have become a success. The success is itself proof of the values. At JRC, cunningness or being crafty is something that we do not tolerate. Then lying, resorting to cheating, or even covering up for lack of dexterity in work — these are some things that we want to totally eliminate. Integrity and character are two important values



**The Alternative Education Program run by JRC educates weavers in basic literacy. This program is setting the foundation for preparing weavers to take informed decisions not only about their lives but also about business.**

that we want to work on. And of course love, empathy, devotion, and selflessness are the foundations. So Founder's Mentality will help us propagate these values, and the test of this initiative will be that even the gatekeeper in our organization or the janitor will know what the non-negotiables are.

**Q. JRC is one of the most successful social enterprises in India. You have been able to provide a livelihood to thousands of people. What are your future goals now?**

Decision-making by the weavers is very important.<sup>15</sup> We want to form a weavers committee, which will include the “good souls” so that weavers have a strong say in all major decisions that we make, whether it is about production, operations, finance, or even strategy. If we are able to take our weavers to that level, they will become partners in JRC and not merely employees. But decision-making has to be supported with the right kind of information. Unless weavers get the right information at the right time, we cannot expect them to make the right decisions. That is why we want all the information about the customers that we get from the US office to reach the weavers first-hand. With the right kind of information, weavers will be equipped to make the right decisions and then a lot of practical decisions will start taking place. So what I am talking about essentially is freedom and democracy in the organization, in ways that are unprecedented. But before

<sup>15</sup> This process has already started at JRC. Twice daily, NKC conducts a conference call with weavers, quality supervisors, branch managers, and field mentors, to understand grass-root issues. During these calls, NKC urges weavers to not only express the problems they are facing, but also the potential solutions for such problems. These conference calls and the subsequent involvement by the weavers have proved extremely successful.



we do that, there is one important change that I want to bring about. Without this change, nothing will be possible. And that change is to bring about spiritual development in the employees and weavers.

Let me explain to you why spiritual development is imperative. Nowadays, people talk of sustainable livelihoods. If you give income to people, they say, then you have done your job as a social entrepreneur. This is relevant to all organisations, but especially those that want to work for social development. Experts say that giving money in the hands of the poor is enough. But this is only a partial view.<sup>16</sup> Giving money is necessary, but not a sufficient condition for social development. If you see in Indian villages, at a lot of places, you will find that men will be gambling and drinking. If they work, then their incomes will be spent entirely on this and their wives will be running their homes. Sometimes, they don't even work; they take money from their wives for these habits. Now imagine, you give employment to such a person, give him money in his hands, what will he do? First thing is that he will gamble with it and drink. If his wife is a weaver, then he will forcefully

*"...while a sustainable income is needed, it must be supported by intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. Without this, any amount of livelihood training and income generation is useless."*

take money from her and drink. Many times, such behaviour is coupled with violence also. So employment has actually done more harm than good. That is why, while a sustainable income is needed, it must be supported by intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. Without this, any amount of livelihood training and income generation is

useless. Moreover, we are talking not only about sustainable source of income, but also freedom to take important decisions. If you give freedom to people who do not have the purity of mind and purpose, then they will misuse the freedom, ruining themselves and the society. The degree of freedom an individual enjoys must therefore be determined by the level of purity. The more purity an individual has, the more he exercises his discrimination; the more selfless he is, the freedom he gets will be really beneficial to the society.

That is why the starting point is also spiritual development, and the ultimate goal is also spiritual development, coupled with the ownership and decision-making in the organization. The biggest challenge for us, therefore, is how to bring about this spirituality in our weavers and in the grass-roots. Because the more they know about the purpose of their life, and the closer they are to their own selves, the more they can love themselves, in equal or more proportion will their ability to work and the quality of work improve. This will also lead to them taking more ownership of their work, and that will make their lives much better and happier. Of course, we need to start small first. So we have decided that we will identify a few good souls, and before that, define what a good soul would be like, and then develop these good souls in some spiritual way. Even if we get 10% success, I think it is good enough, because these 10% will then inspire others. That is my purpose. I am depending on them, and I think they are depending on me. Not for money, but for bringing in some valuable change in their lives. I am talking about it now because as an organization, I think we are ready. And the greatest benefit we have is a supply of

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<sup>16</sup> The notion that basic resources such as income may not be sufficient for development has been elaborately developed in the Capabilities Approach developed by Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (2000) and Martha Nussbaum (2013).

dedicated weavers for the entire supply chain. This will bring a soul in our business. This is the goal now. And it is my conviction that such change will only multiply our business and the weavers will also be able to earn more.

So now our entire focus is on how we can work together with the grass-roots and our employees and make a spiritual organization. It is my faith and conviction that if we are able to take our organization to that level of spirituality, then we will have no competition globally. Spirituality itself will become our competitive advantage and we will be able to outperform our competitors. The costs in such organizations will be so low, and the quality will be so high, that nobody will be able to compete with such organizations. There will be a flood of innovations and there will be both inner and outer happiness that the entire organization gets transformed into a great organization. But you must understand that business growth is not our primary purpose. Our main goal is individual growth; it is my belief that once you have individual growth — business growth becomes incidental. That means that the goal of business growth will be automatically achieved if individual growth, individual transformation, and individual spiritual development happen.<sup>17</sup>

*"Our main goal is individual growth; it is my belief that once you have individual growth, business growth becomes incidental. That means that the goal of business growth will be automatically achieved if individual growth, individual transformation, and individual spiritual development happen."*



NKC has been able to significantly impact emerging social entrepreneurs and social sector leaders through his philosophy of integrating spirituality and management. Here, social entrepreneurs, business executives, and civil society sector leaders from 6 countries of the world visit JRC as participants of an international program called "Journeys for Change."

**Q.** *What role do you see yourself playing in JRC after your goals have been achieved?*

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<sup>17</sup> While NKC appreciates the fact that spirituality and human values lead to business growth, he repeatedly mentioned that spirituality and human values have an inherent value of their own. They do not derive value from the outcome that they lead to. Ethics and morality must be followed for their own good. In that sense, NKC's outlook is very close to the moral philosophy expounded by philosopher Immanuel Kant (2008).

The greatest test of this “spiritual business organization” will be to what extent I can detach myself from the workings of the organization. My children are also involved in the business, and I would like to see them doing better in the role that they are performing, but business decisions must increasingly move towards the employees of the organization and the grass-roots. I should be free from what I do today. I should become jobless! The day I have no work to perform in my organization, I will feel I have become successful. My freedom is my success. Their ownership is my success. And I am convinced that when this happens, all wealth, worldly, and spiritual will be included in it and will grow with it. Ultimately, it’s about the number of good people you have. A good business is nothing but good people. Once you have good people, then whatever you do, whether it is charity, business, running an NGO or a hospital, or whether it is running JRC, all will be successful. Good people are what you need.

I also look at spending more time to discover myself and then become part of a network of spiritual people who are part of such transformation. Yesterday, you linked efficiency with *Karma Yoga*<sup>18</sup> from the Bhagavad Gita. My feeling is that the management of the future will be based on these principles only — where wisdom is coupled with efficiency, and efficiency in turn will be driven by the state of the mind. The lesser the vagaries and tendencies of the mind, the more will be the efficiency. But these concepts are metaphysical; these have to be brought down to the level of processes. I see myself spending more time on working on operationalizing these abstract concepts.

Finally, I want to also continue mentoring people not only from JRC, but also from other organizations. The world today has become very cunning. We speak to please others. Everything we say is meticulously planned so that you appease others. In reality, however, one must speak the truth. If you find someone who seeks truth, then you must kindle that unrest within that individual so that he or she may seek the reality. The way I will develop people in the future is also like this. First, identify people who are in search of truth. And then kindle the unrest within them. That is the way to develop people. Initially, it will seem as if the turbulence within is growing, but that is the sign of success. See, the fact is that this journey of getting closer to oneself is individual. Everyone has to walk this path on their own. No one can do this for you. So I can only facilitate this process. But this journey is not so easy. In the start, one has to be willing to sacrifice a lot. Then the love and satisfaction you get will be infinite. I foresee my role in the future as someone who facilitates this inward journey

*“Entrepreneurs use business as a means to achieve their petty desires, but business is meant to achieve the purpose of life. Use your passion for the business, not the business for your passion.”*

**Q.** *There are several young entrepreneurs today who aspire to be like you and serve the society through the medium of business. What advice would you give to such emerging entrepreneurs?*

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<sup>18</sup> In the Indian tradition, four paths to self-discovery have been advocated. *Karma Yoga* or the path of action is one of the four, expounded by Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

My advice to young entrepreneurs is this: find yourself by losing yourself. The more I lose myself, the more I find myself. Lose yourself in your work. Meaning, get rid of your ego. And then you will see that the purpose of your life and the purpose of your business becomes one. Keep your desires and your ambitions out of your business. Entrepreneurs use business as a means to achieve their petty desires, but business is meant to achieve the purpose of life. Use your passion for the business, not the business for your passion. Such attitude towards life and business requires entrepreneurs to develop four qualities. These four qualities are interrelated, which means that one quality strengthens the other. These qualities are: 1) conviction in values 2) fearlessness, 3) awareness, and 4) introspection.

As an entrepreneur, the first thing you must have is conviction in your values. Along with conviction, you must also have the courage and persistence to follow those values. When I started my business many people criticized me and discouraged me for working with weavers from lower communities. But I persisted because I had conviction in what I was doing. Initially you may have to face opposition or even failure, but persist with your values and you will reap the benefits sooner or later. The second quality entrepreneurs must have is fearlessness. We are constantly competing with others and we live in a fear that others will outperform us. First, recognise your fear. That will help you in understanding your desires. Excessive and selfish desires lead to impatience and haste. Young entrepreneurs want to achieve everything very quickly. That is where you are vulnerable to committing mistakes. Desires agitate the mind, and this agitates the body. An agitated body, in turn, further agitates the mind.<sup>19</sup> Your ability to work will be reduced, and your decisions will also lead to failures. If the mind does not work properly, then you start moving away from your soul, too. The more you recognise your desires and their play and influence on your mind, the more will be your ability to deal with them and this will have a clear impact on your ability to make the right decisions. The third quality that entrepreneurs must develop is awareness. There are several things we do with habit, and few that we do with awareness. Anything done with habit is done mechanically. There is little thinking involved. Such mechanical activities damage your business.

Every act that an entrepreneur does, or any decision that he or she takes, must be taken with complete awareness. All forms of habitual thinking and mechanical dealings must be done away with. How to bring such consciousness or awareness in every act that you perform?<sup>20</sup> That is the key question entrepreneurs must ponder over. But in my experience, I can tell you that introspection plays a very important role here. Introspect whether the work you have done was done unconsciously, due to habit, or with total awareness. Your ability to introspect will improve with practice, and this introspection will further enhance your awareness. In fact, introspection is the foundation of success. That is why, the fourth and probably the most important quality every individual and specially entrepreneurs must develop is an ability to introspect. I have seen the transformation that came about within me after I started doing serious introspection. The change within me, led to a change in my vision.

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<sup>19</sup> The relation between mind and the body, or mind and matter is at the heart of Buddhist philosophy. Approaches to meditation in the Buddhist tradition often suggest exploring this relation between mind and body to verify the axioms of impermanence as given by the Buddha (Ajahn Chah, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Recent research in “mindfulness” has pursued this track of bringing awareness in everyday life. The concept of mindfulness finds significant importance in Buddhism and also in the teachings of modern saints. The state of heightened awareness that comes with mindfulness is called as Constant Integrated Awareness by Sri Sathya Sai Baba (2009).



Earlier, I used to see the world and interpret it based on my preconceived notions. But as I started introspecting, my awareness started expanding: awareness of my own desires,

"It is my conviction, based on my experience, that if entrepreneurs develop these qualities, they will be able to see the unity in purpose between business and life. They will be able to get rid of their ego and once that happens, business and life, both will flourish."

my own behaviour, and my own tendencies. This awareness itself reduced the force of these desires. I started becoming more and more relaxed. It is a cycle. You become aware, you become relaxed. The more relaxed you are, the more aware you become. And as this proceeds, you start transcending these tendencies. Then you start seeing things "as they are," objectively, instead of misinterpreting them to suit your needs and desires. The haziness diminishes and clarity emerges. Then you start seeing more opportunities in business and new talents in people and then you fill this gap between opportunity and

talent. But all this comes with high relaxation. The more relaxed you are, the more objective you become. This in itself is a journey. It is my conviction, based on my experience, that if entrepreneurs develop these qualities, they will be able to see the unity in purpose between business and life. They will be able to get rid of their ego and once that happens, business and life, both will flourish.

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## Dedication

The authors humbly dedicate this endeavour to Sri Sathya Sai Baba — Revered Founder Chancellor, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning.

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