

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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When Education Meets Development

About Girivanvasi Educational Trust in Maharashtra and its activities



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From the Editor

Dear Friend,

The holiday season is a time of tradition, family and giving.

Charity comes from a Latin word: carus - it means "dear". In the past, charity meant doing something good for the society. Charity begins at home and sometimes it takes a little festive cheer for us to realise that there are many others out there who would love a small gift or a fun day out.

A business house considered constructing a hospital or a school or a temple as its obligation. But today, every corporate is now focusing on sharing their resources with the society and through the recent Companies Act 2013 it has been mandatory to do so.

There are a number of charities in our country, and there are also plenty of fun ways to donate.

In the coming week, please take a minute away from the holiday and find a charity that's important to you and give.

May our happiness double through the peaceful spirit of generosity!

Wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year!

—Marie Banu

How do you measure your success at work?



Being relaxed, at peace with yourself, confident, emotionally neutral, loose, and free-floating - these are the keys to successful performance in almost everything." Dr. Wayne W. Dyer

In our workspaces, we are often focused on performance. We feel successful by achieving targets and goals. Our appraisal systems are also performance-focused. We often tend to miss the learning dimension of work, which enables our continuous growth and the experience dimension, which makes us enjoy what we do and feel energized too.

You may have heard about the Performance-Learning-Experience model for work. All three dimensions are important measures of one's success at work. However, a disproportionate emphasis on performance is leading to

Performance anxiety. In short, performance anxiety means, getting caught in action to the extent that we forget the purpose of our action. An individual, who is caught in performance anxiety, neglects learning, growth, and the inherent quality of the work experience.

When we journey through our work-life like a travel, we learn and cherish the experience of doing the work as much as the actual performance itself. When the measure of all three dimensions begins to matter, we are able to reflect positive energy in the way we do our work. Both, learning and experience, invoke supportive emotional energies that enable high performance.

However, it is also important to remember that too much focus on only learning can lead to a performance deficit and too much emphasis on

getting a good experience of work can narrow one's opportunities.

Therefore, performance-learning-experience, in a rhythm, is the mantra to holistic success. Bringing such a rhythm into our existence is the first step to stop "bullying" ourselves and other people into performance anxiety, performance deficit, and narrowed opportunities.

Typically, when we want to recover from performance anxiety, we take a sabbatical or go on a vacation. During this time we attempt to pursue learning and create enriching experiences for ourselves. How realistic is it to switch our external environments to toggle between performance, learning, and experience, simply because our workplaces do not value all three dimensions equally?

We can begin this journey at our workplaces by including all three dimensions (performance, learning, and experience) into our self-appraisal. When we begin to value learning and experience as much as performance, we create a sustainable work triangle, where one dimension feeds and strengthens the other. When the effects of this process become evident to those around us, they are also likely to value and embrace them. And soon we can collectively reflect positive energy in the way we do our work at our workplaces.

It is time to look at our work from a spiritual dimension. When we do that, leaders and team members will be able to expand the definition of success at work to include learning and experience also. This, in turn, will intrinsically support workplaces where individuals perform from a loose, free-floating, peaceful and confident state.

Yours Energetically

Dr. Bhulakshmi V and Ms. Bhuvaneshwari Ravi are trainers and facilitators of the Positive Energy (PE) program. They are spiritual seekers with a vision of transforming their own energy state from surviving to being. In this journey they have gathered deep insights and are continuously working towards creating a pathway for more seekers. With years of exposure to spiritual practices like yoga, reiki, and personal development interventions like coaching, the authors are working in the Organization Development and Leadership Development space.

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Safe on the Road

“I was surprised to know the difference NGOs were making in different sectors and their success made me aim higher in terms of goals to be set for my trust.”

The formative years in school informs children about basic traffic rules—look to your right and then left while crossing a road, cross the road only on zebra crossing, green signal means a ‘go’, etc. “We are also told that over speeding is not good. But, who values these rules?” laments Mr J Krishnamurthy, Founder, R-Safe Charitable Trust, Chennai.

For Krishnamurthy, road user safety is his passion. All his life, he has worked to make sure that road safety was not mis-prioritised by road users as well as the service providers from the government departments. Beginning with a degree in Engineering and a Post Graduate Diploma in Road Transport Management, Krishnamurthy retired as the Joint Director at the Institute of Road Transport in Chennai.

Having served in various capacities, Krishnamurthy was also keen in promoting awareness on road user safety. His experience as a Certified Technical Assessor at National Accreditation Board of Laboratories allowed him to understand the complexity in technical details that were crucial to ensure road safety. Road safety has been a concern in all countries. However, the attention it has gauged is in varying degrees. In fact, it is shocking to know that only 28 countries in the world that account for 7 percent of the world’s population, have comprehensive road safety laws on five key risk factors: drinking and driving, speeding, failing to use motorcycle helmets, seat-belts, and child restraints.

Krishnamurthy feels that the UN Assembly declaring 2011-2020 as the Decade of Action for Road Safety is in itself an indication that there are fatalities resulting from inadequate checks and measures in place. Globally, the number of road accidents stands at an alarming 1.24 million per year and in India, 231,000 people are killed in road traffic crashes every year. Presenting such



“All we want to do is to make the younger generation aware even before they reconcile to the careless practices, with an even more dangerous mind set or indifference.”

figures and trends, the Global Status Report on Road Safety that was released in 2013 draws our attention to the criticality of reprioritizing road user safety in the planning of our cities.

While Chennai’s roads are said to be the most dangerous amongst other cities in Tamil Nadu by the National Crime Records Bureau, Chennai along with seven other districts in the state holds the dubious record of accounting for 45 percent of road accidents and fatalities in the State. For Krishnamurthy, figures speak louder and he wanted to work for promoting awareness through different activities to multiple stakeholders so that attitudes of road users can be influenced.

After his retirement, he was certain that he would work on such services through an NGO. But, he had no knowledge base of NGOs, their functioning and sustainability. This was when he learnt about CSIM from his sister who was running a de-addiction centre. “CSIM has been very instrumental in bringing me to establish my NGO—R-Safe Charitable Trust—in September 2014. The course provided me all appropriate information

and guidance on establishing an NGO, its registration, mobilizing resources to ensure sustainability, and liaising with the present networks to be able to have a concrete impact,” he shares.

According to Krishnamurthy, CSIM also helped him realize the new meaning in serving the nation. “I was surprised to know the difference NGOs were making in different sectors and their success made me aim higher in terms of goals to be set for my trust”.

With his Trust being only three months old, he has already established contacts with schools and colleges in the city and has organised awareness programmes and other activity based programmes for students. “They are the next generation of road users. Shaping their attitude towards rules for road safety and helping them comprehend the difference can lead to a significant change,” he says.

Krishnamurthy feels more enthusiastic about his role in the Trust as all his services had been towards promoting road safety and the Trust gave him the most fitting representation to approach various stake holders.

R-Safe Charitable Trust has developed three modules that can be used for students of classes 6, 7 and 8. There are also separate modules used for high school and college students, attempting to impart knowledge with the sensitivity these matters call for.

“All we want to do is to make the younger generation aware even before they reconcile to the careless practices, with an even more dangerous mind set or indifference,” warns Krishnamurthy. To him, accidents on the road are a ‘silent disaster’. An average of 150,000 killed in accidents per annum results in a loss of 75,000 crores of rupees for the government. The loss of property, hospitalization costs, compensation provided, legal matters that ensue and the amount of time spent on all these affairs not only lead to losses, but also affect the morale of the families involved and more disturbingly, projects the costs on inaction.

R-Safe Charitable Trust is one small, yet significant step in this direction.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Get inspired and rejuvenated: G V Subramanian

The community college – Swami Vivekananda Rural Community College – now has a 3-level state-of-the-art facility in Keezhputhupattu village near Puducherry that can train 1,000 students per year in up to 18 trades or professions.

Hard work is natural for someone who has travelled the long way from being a mediocre student to a successful banker. One advantage was the robust common sense G V Subramanian (GVS) showed during his climb to become a senior management professional, to begin with in India's central bank, the Reserve Bank of India and later with its wholly owned body the National Housing Bank. As could be expected, he strived hard to grow in the industry. Rarely does one come across people like GVS, who listen to their conscience, and speak and act with rare confidence for social causes! GVS felt divine direction in pursuing work for the good of youth in the country. Swami Vivekananda and Roosevelt spoke about the power of youth and the need to ignite their spark, but society needs professional like GVS to do what is necessary to give shape to the dreams of great men about benefiting the youth. We need to understand how a person like GVS was inspired by the spark to serve society and the odds he faced in realizing his dream.

Early days: GVS was born in Mumbai and lived his early days at Kalyan, a distant suburb of Mumbai. We have mentioned that he was an average student. However, he had excellent common sense and analytical skills. More importantly, he practiced two virtues, namely, self-introspection and the ability to communicate effectively even during the most distressful of times. His father ran a small business and was barely able to make ends meet. GVS had two elder sisters and along with their parents, they formed a closely attached family. One of his elder sisters was suddenly bedridden and passed away. This drained the family emotionally.

GVS's father was upset that GVS was not achieving a higher level of academic performance.

After school, GVS worked in a factory while pursuing his graduation in chemistry with success. He then passed a competitive examination to recruit staff for government-owned banks. He worked hard and became an Assistant General Manager in time. He married Anuradha, also from Mumbai, and was blessed with three sons. After his early years at Mumbai, GVS had a long stint in Delhi and a shorter period in Bangalore. Even at work, he was always thinking out of the box, looking for opportunities to achieve an independent identity. He was spiritual and read a lot of spiritual books. He believed in sincerity, in commitment to

whatever one pursues and in being totally honest.

Trigger: GVS strongly felt that the knowledge he had gained came from society. He thought everything he had was the result of the efforts of people who made up that society. There was a need to give back to society.

One eventful day GVS was travelling in a train to New Delhi with his wife. He met the Reverend Fr. (Dr.) Xavier Alphonse, former Principal of Loyola College, Chennai. The Reverend is the Founder

form to his thoughts and wanted to go ahead actively. Most of his relatives and friends believed that he was being outrageous in pursuing such a dream when he was doing well at his job and was enjoying a decent life, with social and economic security.

Times of apprehension and dismays: GVS owned an apartment at Mumbai in which he lived with his family. His two younger sons were still students. Firm on what he wanted to do, he took voluntary retirement in June 2003, eight years ahead of time, and moved with his family to

purchase. Even then, GVS was short of rupees sixty-five thousand. He approached one of his friends, stating that he needed this money in about 24 hours, or he would lose the land targeted for the project. His friend hesitated initially, but within an hour, transferred rupees one lakh to GVS' account after thinking over the commitment with which GVS was pursuing his vision. The persuasive skills of GVS and the good-hearted support of friends were critical factors that kept the idea moving forward.

GVS mentions that he motivated himself every day while at his prayers by visualizing the community college he wanted to build. He felt he was going to touch thousands of school dropouts and make their lives meaningful. Probably the power of visions is what gave him energy!

Infusing the trust: GVS was a stranger to the village in which he had bought the land for his project. Hence he was not able to get the required local support. He went around and met all the key stakeholders like the village officers, local leaders, community heads and other key individuals. Some were suspicious of what brought him there. Every day, GVS went around meeting people and sharing his vision. Though some of them were not clear about his vision, they encouraged him. He launched the college in a thatched shed and moved to a house, in a close-by locality.

He spoke to auto rickshaw drivers and visited hair stylists' shops and various other places, including telephone booths, while pursuing his idea. He went to villages within a 30 km radius and discussed his project with people there. Neither the local youth nor their parents appreciated him.

It was painful for someone like him to have left a secure job and pursue this dream day after day. After sustained efforts over a few months, he managed to get a few students to respond. The first batch was started in July 2008. He thought he would begin with courses on Refrigeration & AC mechanism and electrical wiring. He also thought of offering nursing courses so that girl school dropouts could benefit.

Initially there were few takers: there was not much facility at the site and he could not attract qualified faculty members. None of these issues dissuaded him. He relentlessly pursued his ideas. One particular day, four girls came showing interest in the nursing course. They later brought in another seven girls, and the first batch was signed up. He had only a



Director of the Indian Centre for Research and Development of Community Education (ICRDCE), Chennai. During their conversation he talked about community colleges and about how he was working to developing them.

GVS told him that he had always wanted to give back to society what he had gained from it, and he has been envisioning something like this in Pondicherry. Fr. Alphonse did not take him seriously then, and this became a defining moment for GVS. He thought the best way to serve is to rejuvenate and inspire youth who have dropped out of school. According to him, it was divine inspiration that directed him to do this in Pondicherry, a place with which he had no connection. This came up because of his daily introspection and practice of connecting with God. His path ahead was unclear until he met Fr. Alphonse. After his interaction with the Reverend, he was able to give concrete

Chennai. He sold his flat at Mumbai and used his savings to buy some land in Pondicherry.

However, though he was still short of the money needed for the land, his determination and connections got him the support he needed. He went through a tough time, when he had to give up possessions like his car and chauffeur. He used public transport to travel when meeting people to solicit support. Many of his friends could not understand why he was doing this! He believes it was the hand of God, and timely help from a few benefactors, which saw him through. The most notable of these benefactors was a well-placed employee (not an entrepreneur) from Singapore, who met him and listened to his plan.

This gentleman visited Pondicherry with his family and after getting familiar with GVS's vision, donated a substantial sum of money to enable completion of the land

stethoscope and a blood pressure monitor. A doctor from Ashok Nagar, Chennai came to his help and started the classes.

GVS had ensured that visitors came to Pondicherry every Saturday/Sunday from Chennai or elsewhere to study and understand his mission. He would take them to the community college site and share his thoughts. He did this for three years, which gave him reasonable strength and visibility. Here the toughness with which he pursued his ideas is what we should find praiseworthy! He received all visitors warmly and fed them at his home. Visitors were exposed to his personality, and were able to see his selflessness. It was not easy for someone who had led a cozy life as a banker some time back!

Treasure of gems: GVS had a gem in every student. The author would like to narrate incidents relating to a few of them and link them to GVS's character. Names are disguised because gems may still prefer anonymity.

There was one student named Sharda. She had been married when young and had two children. Her husband was a daily wage earner and an alcoholic. She had to do hard labor to survive and feed her children. She connected with the community college when she came to work there as a laborer. GVS admitted her to the college and mentored her. Sharda used to get up at 4 am and read for about an hour and half. Then she would cook for the family and send her husband to work and her children to school. She would cycle to the college and back. This continued till she completed the nursing course. She is now a staff nurse at a medical college hospital.

Another person worth mentioning was Sheila. She was from a fishermen's community, and they were of the view that she must get married. They felt it was her responsibility to take life onwards from there. But Sheila wanted to be independent and support her family even after marriage. GVS visited her village and talked to her parents and close relatives on a number of occasions. Finally, the family agreed to drop her at the college and pick her up every day. GVS gladly welcomed the idea. Today, the girl works as a staff nurse and earns around rupees ten thousand per month.

Sharif was another gem of the community college. His father was an

agricultural laborer and was hardly able to get sufficient work. After completing his schooling, Sharif could not pursue further formal education. He joined the community college to be an AC mechanic. Sharif now works in the Middle East and supports his family.

One can keep narrating such stories, because there are many of them. The author met a male student who commuted for three and half hours each way to do a course here. This boy beams with confidence, and is clearly a spark that when ignited will bring financial independence to his family. This boy wants to set up his own garage. Asked how he plans to do that, he says that he draws inspiration from his mentor, GVS! These are the ambassadors of GVS and of his community college.

About 500 students have passed out so far from this college. This may not compare with the number of students that regular educational institutions deal with. However, what one has to consider is GVS's interest in getting school dropouts with no hope back into the mainstream as sensible, result-oriented and focused youngsters. The community college – Swami Vivekananda Rural Community College – now has a 3-level state-of-the-art facility in Keezhputhupattu village near Puducherry that can train 1,000 students per year in up to 18 trades or professions. The College costing over Rs 35 million has been built entirely with hard-earned donations and contributions from socially conscious philanthropists and corporate houses.

To quote GVS, "I have ensured continuity for this institution by forming a Trust with fourteen more community-conscious persons and getting all matters related to the College discussed and decided by the Trust in formal and informal meetings. The documentation of all actions, decisions, finances and operations is meticulous, to say the least. This is governance at its best."

One should look at the towering impact GVS has on youth and their parents by giving them an option to revitalize their life. It is not just the tangible aspects of the project that are important; most of all, it is the desire to carefully nurture youth, like a dedicated gardener with his roses, and shape them that is worth highlighting! It is not social entrepreneurship that distinguishes GVS from others. It is his

touch of humility and humanity in encouraging the deprived to pursue a path of resurrection to a new life.

Virtues that carry: GVS believes certain virtues are required if one has to render this service. One needs to connect with people who can share time, touch, treasure or talent, or any combination of all these ingredients. It is important for him to get people who are down to earth and have been successful. When his students see these successes, they are inspired. GVS has to be humble to draw such people to his college.

Another important quality of GVS is to act the way he talks and ensure that he means what he says. According to him, one shows attitude by being prayerful. More importantly, it is action that connects him with God. He draws his energy through that connection.

A third quality is the ability to give equal respect to all stakeholders. His students, their parents, visitors and donors all receive the same degree of attention. He believes that being transparent, objective and honest to the core is all that matters. These qualities need to be practiced and clearly seen by all the stakeholders to sustain action and energy.

His fourth quality is that he involves his students in community work. At 62 years of age, he also works along with them. He believes that more than saying, doing impacts youth deeper.

One can talk a lot more about his discipline and sense of orderliness. Expressing virtues through deeds remarkably well is what GVS teaches to his students and other stakeholders.

Family support: His wife Anuradha (Anu) is a pillar of strength in his endeavors. From the day she married him, she synchronized her life to his like any traditional spouse. They respected each other's independence and still arrived at a common platform on which GVS could pursue his mission. When GVS wanted to sell his flat, resign his job and put all his savings into his dream, she never hesitated. She was like a rock, and was willing to go along with him even if that meant going through ordeals. GVS had been so transparent with his wife and children about his financial position and the need to give back to society that they absorbed his obsession as their passion as well.

Anu mentioned to the author that her father had groomed her in the art of giving. She always felt that one does not need to keep anything beyond what one needs for a decent living. Anu was categorical that by giving, she has not lost the comforts of life; rather, she has helped impact many other families to improve their standards of living. She brings a lot of positive energy to GVS and the students there. She has groomed her children the same way and given them the courage to face life, whatever limitations may crop up!

It is not that GVS and Anu have not had setbacks. They have taken setbacks in their stride and worked with total focus and courage to pursue GVS's dream.

GVS's mother has always supported him. When GVS resigned his job to pursue his dream, she was old and had some health challenges, but never complained about the inconveniences of not having a car or comfort support system. On the other hand, she encouraged GVS to pursue his mission and managed the house and her grandchildren with Anu's support while GVS was out and about. It is important to note that an understanding family is a key factor in the successful pursuit of missions of mercy like the resurrection and inspiration of youth who might otherwise have lost out in the struggles of life.

Conclusion: India is a country where there is a lot of youth power and all demographic indexes support the concept of using this youth power for growth. However, the existing infrastructure and system are inadequate for effectively harnessing the potential of youth. GVS's institution today attracts members of the national and international social work community to study his success and its replication potential. For a man to have sacrificed his comfort zone to pursue his dream is a phenomenal achievement. He is still humble; he is still crusading to expand his operations to achieve a larger area of impact. Our society becomes a far better place because of the youth that people like GVS harness, rejuvenate and inspire – both those who have dropped out of school and those who are pursuing high-end skills.

— This is part of the book *"Incredible Champions"* authored by N. Chandrasekaran and published by Partridge Publishers 2014.

Editorial

Latha Suresh
Marie Banu

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL INITIATIVE AND MANAGEMENT



Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) is a unit of Manava Seva Dharma Samvardhani. It is a learning centre that promotes the concept of social entrepreneurship. **CSIM offers training and consultancy to social enterprises – for-profits and non-profits – to facilitate**

them to apply successful business practices and yet retain their social mission. It also offers training and hand holding support to prospective social entrepreneurs and enable them to launch their social initiatives. CSIM operates in Chennai, Coimbatore, Hyderabad and Bangalore.

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CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.
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When Education Meets Development

“The schools here were all Marathi-medium institutions Marathi is a language alien to the Warli people. That is when we decided that we had to quickly adopt a focus-based teaching model.”

Photos: Marie Banu

It was 1974 when Padmabhushan Karamshibhai Somaiya established the Girivanavasi Pragati Mandal, a public charitable trust. The aim was simple: achieve what few trusts back then succeeded at — integrated rural development. Today, the fruit of his work sits on 11 acres, and is formally known as the Nareshwadi Learning Centre. It is in a nutshell, a continuance of the seeds that Padmabhushan Somaiya sowed, when he decided that integrated rural development was the way forward. “Being someone who couldn’t finish his schooling owing to his family background, he decided that he needs to pledge his life to educating children, communities who do not have the means and resources to pursue further education,” explains Dr Patricia Gokhale, CEO of the Maharashtra-based trust. “He would travel all over Bastar, interior areas of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan for health camps and eye camps,” she adds. It was during these travels, Dr Patricia explains, that Padmabhushan Somaiya concluded that he needed to establish a centre for training, livelihood and education, and thereby, the need for vocational training institutes.

“He started with livelihood, imparting knowledge to the local tribes by way of training workshops and programmes, helping them to grow with better agriculture practices,” says Dr Patricia. “But at the same time, he said if he was to start a school here, it would have to be a residential school.” This was chiefly because Padmabhushan Somaiya realized that continuity was the key to educating migrant, agricultural labourers. “Being a one-crop area, after October, the whole family migrates, taking the children with them,” says Patricia, emphasizing on the need to establish a residential format of education back then.

Integration of vocational training, agriculture and education was no doubt, the way forward. Residential education soon ensured that continuity in instruction was established. The school that Padmabhushan Somaiya built was later registered as a Zilla Parishad. “The first

Class 10 batch of the school appeared for their examinations in 1994,” recalls Susan, “There were no more than two students who made it all the way to Class 10.” It was, however, a small step in realizing the dream of integrated education and training.

Six years since 2007-08, Nareshwadi has focussed on re-living Padmabhushan Somaiya’s dream. This, it has achieved through renewed quality education. “By way of this revised approach to learning, we began paying a lot more attention to teacher training, health and community outreach, all of which became core issues in this mission to achieve quality education,” says Dr Patricia. Along the way, the NGO has battled challenges like school dropouts, including striving hard to improve the percentage of girl students in these schools. “From a relatively humble number of 22 percent enrolment of girls, we’ve brought that number up to 47 percent,” Patricia says, “Our aim is to take it up to 50 percent even as we continue to witness improved attendance records.”

Through these advances in education, attendance and gender inclusion, Nareshwadi hasn’t forgotten its original mission of integrated rural development. Two hrs per day (between 9 and 11 am) are spent on agriculture, sericulture and dairy. Along the way, the focus also shifted towards improving attendance records through one of the most unique studies conducted on this front. “It was always a known fact that if we needed more children in our schools, parents should not have to leave the village and go out in search for work for work,” explains Patricia. In an attempt to tackle issues like this, Nareshwadi Trust brainstormed the formation of what would then go on to become a one-of-its-kind resource-planning group run exclusively by children. “The children decided that the first thing they needed was electricity,” Patricia says. Incidentally, the village had no electricity until 2010. “Electricity was the responsibility of the Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB). We gave the MSEB a call. Our children learnt to write out applications, requesting for power to these villages. They were successful.” The focus then shifted to another problem: drinking water.

Through all these efforts, the target of the

group’s activities has been Maharashtra’s Warli tribe. Introducing Warli children to mainstream education, however, was no mean task. “The schools here were all Marathi-medium institutions,” Patricia explains, “Marathi is a language alien to the Warli people. That is when we decided that we had to quickly adopt a focus-based teaching model.” According to this model, children would be taught language and mathematics in a language that was familiar to them, which in this case, was Warli. “When the time was right, we decided to slowly introduce them to Marathi,” Patricia adds.

An effort like this required teachers. “We approached Cognizant with a request to support the payment of salaries for four

new teachers,” says Patricia, “The company agreed.” As part of the new teaching programme, these teachers taught the children songs and poems in Warli. This was followed by a slow introduction to Marathi. “Based on the competencies

that the child needed to develop, we broke up the syllabus,” Patricia continues, “That’s how we got children into mainstream education.” If there was one little detail that the teachers were keen to follow, it was the need for inclusive

education. “No child was ever dubbed a slow learner,” Patricia explains, “There were children who coped well, and others who needed extra attention. We never gave children the impression that they were being graded on the basis of performance.”

Today, the Nareshwadi Trust continues to introduce tribal children to mainstream education, with great success. Dr Patricia for one, believes, that the focus-based model of teaching must continue. Challenges also exist in large numbers. Thirty-two teachers, after all, can take a toll on funding. However, what remains unchanged is tireless work towards improving the quality of education and the continuance of integrated rural development, which could soon become a benchmark for other learning modules.



Staying true to ‘corporate character’ means, realising that trust is not transactional

Corporate character is not determined by how many questions we ask our customers, but by how we question our customers, how we answer them, and how we collaborate with them

We are moving deeper into an era where consumers have unprecedented visibility into shop floors and board rooms, and that gives new relevance to a time-honoured truth: Trust is not transactional.

Because, stakeholders can experience and judge goods and services as never before and instantly share those judgments with others via Tweets or clicks. As a result, companies must now make plain their reason for being, their emotional resonance, and the credibility of their culture.

Employees shop for employers in a similar fashion. More than two-thirds (69 percent) of the 1,000-plus working-aged U.S. citizens polled by Corporate Responsibility Magazine and Allegis Group Services indicated that they would not take a job with a company that had a bad reputation—even if they were unemployed. Additionally, 84 percent of these survey respondents said they would consider leaving their current jobs if offered another role with a company that possessed an excellent corporate reputation.

Sustaining a trusted and trusting culture also requires tough decisions—including the decision that some customers are not a good fit for the company.

It's always been true that unhealthy corporate reputations repel, while stellar reputations attract. But, consumers now respond to corporate reputations with a new urgency.

More enterprises are becoming what I call “committal companies”—organisations that want to attract “their type” of customers, people who believe in the company's character, its purpose and values-based mission. But, attracting and serving these customers is difficult. Just ask REI, an outdoor retailer that has operated as a cooperative for 75 years. The company halted its longstanding “no-questions-asked, no time limit” return policy and replaced it by limiting the return window for most products to one year from the date of purchase. REI's decision was greeted with pointed criticism, but this response really isn't about return policies. Instead, it's about a deeper issue: how a company can deliver meaningful customer experiences in ways that are consonant with corporate character. It's about building communities where both company and customer can trust each other.

Why did REI reboot its policy? It turns out that some customers betrayed the company's trust—big time. Too many customers, it appears, were returning too many items, including decades-old items and products that REI never even sold in the first place. One REI “member” (it's a cooperative, remember) even bragged to *Outside* magazine about returning loads of non-REI gear to help fund his adventure travels and activities.

More than 150 passionate commenters weighed in online, in response to a *Wall Street Journal* article reporting on REI's policy shift. They were by turns critical of the previous policy (“Now I know why REI's prices are so high” ... “About time REI woke up to the abuse of the return policy”), morally normative (“bring back shame”), consultative (“customer service should not include fraudulent and abusive merchandise returns, which raises prices for the rest of REI's customers”), and philosophical (“...lack of personal character and integrity from the minority creates a direct economic cost upon the majority who do maintain a minimal standard of integrity”).

Here's what many critics and supporters of this policy



change get wrong: the premise that REI could turn its trusting culture on or off with the flip of a policy switch, even if it wanted to do so. Developing and sustaining corporate character is complex and nuanced. It takes long, hard work on essential strategic questions. It also requires an ongoing conversation among all stakeholders and, more broadly, continual vigilance.

That's why REI's returns decision is relevant and instructive to so many organisations. In March, former Nordstrom sales person Jessica Swenke wrote a tell-all about how the department stores' “no-questions-asked” returns policy slashed her sales commissions. Her pay, which was based entirely on commissions, would take a hit, she wrote, when “[w]e salespeople have to just stand there and allow people to come up with the strangest lies so they can get money back for something they either regret buying or stole.”

Developing habitually healthy customer and employee experiences requires uncomfortable two-way conversations—sometimes involving passionate, unnamed counterparts—with many different stakeholders and communities.

Sustaining a trusted and trusting culture also requires tough decisions—including the decision that some customers are not a good fit for the company. REI competitor LL Bean has had a similarly trusting returns policy in place since its founding in the early 1900s. The company founder guaranteed 100 percent customer satisfaction—a policy that sometimes requires the proclamation of a principled, resolute “No.” LL Bean said “No” a few years ago to serial returners who were scouring garage sales for old items to return for cash. The company also told those serial returners that they were no longer welcome as customers, allowing 99.9 percent of LL Bean's customers to continue to enjoy the benefits of a

trusting returns policy.

Think about this approach as an inversion of the traditional supply-and-demand equation. In our transparent, hyperconnected world, sellers can be—and should be—much more intentional about the behaviours they seek from buyers. The LL Bean decision was, in essence, no different from banning a shoplifter from a store.

My sense is that REI's leaders also have their eye on the long term. And it's plain to see that their complicated efforts to sustain their character continue. With more clarity about what can and cannot be returned, REI employees will no longer have to roll their eyes when they are required to accept returned products for bogus reasons (e.g., an item being “too fuzzy”) from customers who do not behave cooperatively. But is a year-long expiration date on returns enough to preserve a trusting relationship between a store and its customers? Hardly. That relationship, and the construction of corporate character, is far more nuanced.

Our debates and discussions about what it takes to develop and sustain corporate character likewise have been too fuzzy and limited. They are not just about zero-questions-asked return policies. They are really about what is necessary to create and sustain unique customer experiences with customers who share the company's values.

Corporate character is not determined by how many questions we ask our customers, but by how we question our customers, how we answer to them, and how we collaborate with them.

—Dov Seidman

This article was first published in The Smart CEO Magazine (www.thesmartceo.in)



Adding value to lives by the SEA

Adding value to lives by the Sea. The life of fishermen, as we can recall from yesteryear movies and the media coverage they have had so far, is very challenging and requires them to settle with the minimum that has been provided for them. With no alternative sources of income at hand, and lack of any other skill, the fishermen community are very much inclined to engage their children, especially boys in fishing. This leads to their children's education taking a back seat. Society for Education and Action (SEA), based in Mamallapuram, Kanchipuram district was founded in 2000 by Mr Desingu to free children from this vicious circle before they get reconciled with it and lose all interest in education.

As the Founder Director, Desingu has been involved in the complete journey of SEA, shaping its growth and reach through each of its programmes. With a background in psychology, he was exposed to multipurpose health work during college days. While engaging in community health work projects, he was appalled by the status of education and the alarming dropout rate of children from the fishermen community. "Only 40 percent of the fishermen children were educated. It was too shocking for me to note that even their parents were not keen in their education. The task of educating them was daunting and we had to work with the children as well as the communities simultaneously," recalls Desingu.

Having decided to focus on coastal areas, Desingu and team consciously worked with children engaged in labour and those who had dropped out from school in order to supplement their family's income. Preventing these two circumstances is a task that has drawn multifarious players into the picture. "These issues are so entangled in the lives of the fishermen communities that reorienting them was very painstaking. We had to be very innovative in our strategies," he says.

SEA started motivation centres in every village in Mamallapuram to encourage children and members of the community to prioritise education and readmit their wards in schools. Every centre catered to 25 children at a time. As these children were getting ready to be re-enrolled in schools, the schools required attention. With 1:80 as the teacherpupil ratio in the nearby government schools, SEA had to intervene to ensure that children attended schools regularly.

Realising the criticality in the role of teachers in this process, their availability in adequate numbers was inevitable. Therefore, SEA decided to entrust this responsibility with the local students who had passed class 10 and 12. As these new teachers recruited by SEA were from the local community, they were able to take personal interest in ensuring that all children were regular at school. "We capitalised on the community bonding. It worked very well for us," shares Desingu.

Soon, SEA worked on raising the quality of teaching by bringing in those with a Diploma in Teacher Training. With many more teachers recruited by SEA, there was still a large number of vacancies that needed attention. The Higher Secondary School in Mamallapuram had 800 students studying from class 1 to 10. Since the last three years, children did not have the option of studying economics or commerce, owing to lack of teachers. SEA recruited two candidates from the local community who had completed MA and M.Com so that the children could learn these subjects.

Appointing new teachers in a government school was no easy task. SEA had to go through the Parent -

Teachers' Association to enrol new faculty as supplementary teachers. To support students who were weak in their studies, SEA also initiated a non-residential bridge centre to coach them subject wise. After passing the supplementary examinations, these children were mainstreamed in schools or admitted in polytechnic colleges. So, far 300 children have been mainstreamed through this bridge centre, with many working

funds mobilised from different sources like community members, local/state/central governments, donor organisations, doctors, corporate partners, local leaders, etc.

"Initially, the jitters was very much there. It was very difficult for us to talk to the community members. They were very rude to us and collectively ignored us. They asked if we could compensate the money their children would otherwise earn for them," smiles Desingu, who is now a respected member among the people and is more than happy to see children coming out of schools successfully.

15 villages around Kalpakkam were surveyed by SEA over two years, revealing a very disturbing trend. The survey identified 136 mentally retarded children falling in the age group of 5-15 years. Physiotherapy, ocular therapy, speech therapy, music therapy were provided to these children through a special school started by SEA in 2011. Alongside, SEA is also providing vocational

opportunities to widows and destitutes in these villages by introducing them to a six-months course on tailoring and craft making. Women, after completing this course usually join apparel companies and earn a monthly salary of around 7000 rupees.

After 15 years, SEA is now planning to focus on promoting awareness on child rights by reaching out to different stakeholders like the PRI members, village officials like the VAO, representatives of civil society like the Lions Club, SHG members, Anganwadi workers, Police personnel, etc. "With UNCRC celebrating its silver jubilee, we have a long way in realising it. We have decided to begin by promoting its awareness, along with other legislations like RTE, RTI, POCSO, etc," concludes Desingu.

—Shanmuga Priya.T



as software engineers. It is in this context that Desingu urges the significance of mainstreaming children, not just in schools but also in communities.

SEA's emphasis on engaging teachers from the local community paid off as they took special interest in ensuring that there were no school drop outs. If there were children who did drop out, then they followed it up personally and ensured that they re-enrolled with renewed interest. This, however, was not done by the government teachers. This close follow up increased the community bonding and helped SEA achieve its objectives.

SEA also provides scholarships for 100 students every year by aggregating

Conversation Between Ramkrishna Paramahansa & Swami Vivekananda

A rare conversation between Ramkrishna Paramahansa & Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekanand:- I can't find free time. Life has become hectic.

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Activity gets you busy. But productivity gets you free.

Swami Vivekanand:- Why has life become complicated now?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Stop analyzing life.. It makes it complicated. Just live it.

Swami Vivekanand:- Why are we then constantly unhappy?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Worrying has become your habit. That's why you are not happy.

Swami Vivekanand:- Why do good people always suffer?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Diamond cannot be polished without friction. Gold cannot be purified without fire. Good people go through trials, but don't suffer.

With that experience their life becomes better, not bitter.

Swami Vivekanand:- You mean to say such experience is useful?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:-

Yes. In every term, Experience is a hard teacher. She gives the test first and the lessons.

Swami Vivekanand:- Because of so many problems, we don't know where we are heading

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- If you look outside you will not know where you are heading. Look inside. Eyes provide sight. Heart provides the way.

Swami Vivekanand:- Does failure hurt more than moving in the right direction?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Success is a measure as decided by others. Satisfaction is a measure as decided by you.

Swami Vivekanand:- In tough times, how do you stay motivated?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Always look at how far you have come rather than how far you have to go. Always count your blessing, not what you are missing.

Swami Vivekanand:- What surprises you about people?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- When they suffer they ask, "why me?" When they prosper, they never ask "Why me?"

Swami Vivekanand:- How can I get the best out of life?

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- Face your past without regret. Handle your present with confidence. Prepare for the future without fear.

Swami Vivekanand:- One last question. Sometimes I feel my prayers are not answered.

Ramkrishna Paramahansa:- There are no unanswered prayers. Keep the faith and drop the fear. Life is a mystery to solve, not a problem to resolve. Trust me. Life is wonderful if you know how to live.

—Source: speakingtree.in

Belongingness Dimensions –Quality of Life - Quality of Being

Last 31 articles have been a dialogue with Belongingness and HR role in a social organization to stimulate and enhance belongingness. This would be the last article in the series to converge all the thoughts shared in the previous articles with the essence of belongingness.

Recapping the meaning of Belongingness

'The feeling of belongingness is a state of being in which one experiences value for oneself, being cared for with a space to express the same and continually evolve fulfilling the purpose of existence and beyond'. The need to belong is innate and perennial in its existence. But it needs constant stimulation and sense of fulfillment to meet the expectations of the need to evolve. The generation Y and Z professionals look for self fulfillment and actualization through their work and contributions. Therefore, the focus has to be inside – out rather than outside – in.

The HR professionals in the organization who are accountable for the quality of life of every employee therefore have to move into a newer paradigm of quality of being. Quality of life from yester years has been usually connected to Job flexibility, compensation, comfort and infrastructure and very less about job meaning, job satisfaction, job fulfillment. An employee with higher level of meaning and purpose in life, feeling fulfilled at work is likely to be more at peace and happiness than an employee devoid of these but just a high pay packet and excellent physical comfort. The discussions in the previous series have highlighted each of the spaces that would impact the employee self fulfillment and actualization process. The CORDS – convergence and connectivity, openness and innovation, relationship and recognition, development, sensitivity and sustainability as the Organizational climate dimensions provide the environment and space for the employee to connect their self

and organizational evolution to fulfill the need for growth and development.

Quality of life for the employees in the consciousness era could be viewed as a process in the model below. Tetrahedron has been adopted as a design methodology to connect the four cornerstones of life; six bridges as processes and four outcomes. The outcomes Acceptance, Humility, Peace and Love are those that are experienced by others when they are in interaction with the culture of the organization. The processes to experience these as outcomes are to be built within the person, namely, faith, introspection, non-judgmental attitude, commitment, sadhana (relentless pursuit) and balance between work and relationships in life. The endeavor at work and connect in relationships from the key dimensions whose interplay affects the quality of life directly. Employees in the consciousness era seek inner fulfillment which is to be one with the Universe and live in harmony within oneself. Gratitude is the minimum that one needs to have to attempt being human and connect to Universe. The model below depicts the connections.



While this may seem as a personal journey of individuals, it is also the important for the organizational processes to be aligned to create the environment and

possibilities for the individuals to do this journey.

As explained in the previous articles the nine dimensions of Belongingness fall under three aspects.

1. Maintenance aspects:
 - a. Professionalism
 - b. Reward and Recognition
 - c. Material comforts

The maintenance aspects are those that are the minimum essential for the employee to feel connected and belonged to the organization. They may not contribute or enhance but they are essential elements that constantly stimulates the feeling of belongingness.

2. Compliment aspects
 - a. Values
 - b. Ownership
 - c. Emotional Satisfaction

The compliment aspects are those that contribute substantially to sustain the feeling of belongingness. They being softer and intangible dimensions grow gradually into the psyche of the employee and strengthen the bonds of connectedness. These have the capacity to even overrule the maintenance dimensions.

3. Enhancement aspects
 - a. Shared Vision
 - b. Exploration and development of potential
 - c. Value for contribution

The enhancement aspects are those dimensions that grow and evolve the employee's connectedness and feeling of belongingness over a period of time. Without these it is very difficult to stimulate the feeling.

These nine dimensions are connected to the five processes of the individual journey.

- The organizational vision has to instill the commitment of the employee and allow for sadhana. When the vision evolves continually, the pursuit evolves too. Sadhana is beyond relentless pursuit with a deep purpose that drives the efforts. Professionalism and recognition gives space for

everyone to realize their potential.

- The foundational elements of learning and development activities should instill the ability in the individual to introspect periodically and live a life of awareness. Introspection brings in awareness and in turn innovation and evolution.
 - The sense of ownership and focus on emotional satisfaction needs to instill the faith within individuals that they are safe and secured with connects that go beyond the work sphere. The purpose connects them all at a heart level.
 - The well established professionalism and value for contribution allows people to accept everyone and see their value to realize the organizational vision. The ability to be non-judgmental and support each other becomes a reality.
 - The alignment of values with well established material comforts enable the employees to balance the demands of work and relationships.
- The HR professionals are only the facilitators in the process of enabling organizational and individual excellence that is evolutionary in nature. When the employees feel they are growing and evolving they connect and feel belongingness.

Reflections:

1. To what extent do the three aspects exist in my organization?
2. What are the processes that enable me to have a continuous check on the nine dimensions within my organization?
3. What are the specific actions taken in enabling evolutionary excellence amongst the employees in my organization?

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath, PhD.

Creating a CSR Roadmap

Management Development Programme conducted by



Dates: 9th & 10th January, 2015

**Venue: The Savera, 146, Dr.Radhakrishnan Road,
Chennai – 600004**

Program Overview

Social Diagnosis

Understanding & assessment of the prevalent issues in society

CSR Strategy

Nine step process to evolve a sustainable social change idea

CSR Partnerships

Identifying & Building partnerships to effect the change

CSR Team

Competencies & Skills needed for effective implementation

Social Audit

Capturing & Reporting the Social Impact of the CSR activity

RESOURCE PERSONS:

- IICA team - Dr. Bhaskar Chatterjee, DG & CEO, IICA & Ms. Gayatri Subramaniam, Convener & Chief Programme Executive- National Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (NFCSR), IICA
- CSIM team - Dr.Madhuri Ravindra Kumar, Prof. Peter Pradeep, Ms.Marie Banu, Mr.Sanoj Herbert & Ms. Latha Suresh

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

- Indian Government's expectations from CSR projects
- Composition of the CSR team
- Identifying CSR stakeholders
- Building strategic partnerships
- Creating a CSR Roadmap for delivering a CSR strategy
- Assessing & reporting the social impact of your CSR

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

- Corporate Executives/Managers/CSR Heads involved in strategic and operational functions, including finance, corporate strategy, CSR, human resources, supplier or community relations, and government affairs
- Corporate lawyers who wish to improve their understanding of new company law developments concerning corporate responsibility
- NGO Directors/Project Managers involved in strategic and operational functions, including finance, CSR, or corporate relations, and government affairs

COURSE FEE:

Corporate employees: Rs. 15,000/- for one participant or Rs. 25,000/- for two participants from the same organization.
NGO representatives: Rs. 3000/- for one participant or Rs. 5,000/- for two participants from the same organization.

FOR REGISTRATIONS:

Please contact Mr.Sanoj Herbert @ 95000 78804
or write to csimconsultancy@gmail.com.

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“The amendment to the Companies Act is certainly an advantage as the companies are compelled to contribute to the social sector.”

Dr. V.A. Vijayaragavan, shares with Marie Banu his thoughts on Companies Act 2013 and how this could benefit NGOs.

Madras School of Social Work (MSSW), established in 1952, located in Chennai, South India, is an Autonomous Institution, NAAC accredited and affiliated to University of Madras.

MSSW was founded by Mrs. Mary Clubwala Jadhav under the auspices of Madras State Branch of the Indian Conference of Social Work (renamed the Indian Council of Social Welfare) and the Guild of Service (central). The school is run under the aegis of the Society for Social Education and Research (SSER). Madras School of Social Work is a member of the Association of Schools of Social Work in India and the Asia - Pacific Association of Social Work Education. The School is also affiliated to the International Association of Schools of Social Work and is rated 3rd Best Social Work College in India and First in South India.

In an exclusive interview, Dr. V.A. Vijayaragavan, Principal of MSSW, shares with Marie Banu his thoughts on Companies Act 2013 and how this could benefit NGOs.

What motivated you to study social work?

I studied in PSG College of Arts and Science. When I graduated, social work was a noted programme in my college. There, the social work students were outgoing and not campus-confined. Having associated myself with NSS activities, I was naturally inclined to study social work. The department itself was friendly and vibrant. I got attracted because of that. There were also one or two professionally trained social workers who were known to me and they served as my role models.

About teaching social work and your association with MSSW?

I've been into teaching since 1983. I started my career as an Assistant Professor in 1983 at Department of Social Work, Bishop Heber College, Tiruchirappalli. I moved to Madras School of Social Work in 1986 and thereafter continued with MSSW as a faculty, and in different administrative capacities.

Do you have a lot of students from abroad who study at MSSW?

Yes. We ensure that we have a mixed group. Only when there's an eclectic bunch of students across countries, can education of social work really happen. Previously, social problems were local.



Photo: Marie Banu

After globalization, it has become global. For example, across the world, the youth are connected through social media. A number of problems occur, because of this. They either get lost, or addicted, or isolated. So an Indian child faces the same problem that a child across the globe, faces. So when there are globalized problems, we need to have a cross-cultural learning environment.

Having trained social workers, what are their placement prospects?

Students opt for social work because these courses are employment-oriented. Students who choose Human Resource Management as their Specialization get an opportunity to work in organisations as HR / Training / Recruitment / Industrial relations / CSR executives, and rise to high levels and earn well.

The fact still remains that people who study community Development / Medical and Psychiatric Social Work or any other social work related specializations work

quite hard. This disparity in growth is due to each one's skill-set.

Our MA in Human Resources is a Management programme, where students study business and finance in addition to social work.

The Companies Act 2013 has made CSR mandatory for corporates having a networth of INR 500 or more. This gives an edge for CSR projects, unlike NGOs, as funds are not a constraint. Is CSR therefore a threat for NGOs?

They are not exactly threats. In a way it is a deprivation of space for NGOs. Previously, there was a philanthropic attitude amongst industrial houses. That way, small NGOs were in a position to benefit, and carry that benefit to the grass-root level.

Even before the amendment was introduced in the Companies Act, industrial houses started reducing contributions to NGOs. In fact, they started consolidated work in the name of

their own foundations, like Microsoft's Bill Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation, Infosys Foundation, etc. So, the inflow to NGOs were reduced.

The amendment to the Companies Act is certainly an advantage as the companies are compelled to contribute to the social sector. When they are compelled to contribute, not all of them have foundations and are aware of the grass root level needs of these communities in which they are situated or the administrative expertise to work with the communities. So, they look towards NGOs, who work on the field, for support.

Indian NGOs are already starved of funds. Salaries and privileges to its employees are poor. So, NGOs will now start looking for funds from international funding agencies. This again is a problem today, because funds from foreign countries are being regulated.

If networking is done through employer federations, field level activity is carried out by the NGO in areas where the corporates is interested in, NGOs stand to gain.

When you say that financial statements need to be audited by chartered accountants, why can't social work institutions be run by qualified social workers?

If you take foreign countries, there are norms which state that to be a professional social worker; you need to be an accredited person. Unfortunately, that prerequisite doesn't exist in India. We need to form a council, wherein a person who completes social work should enrol, and only then be allowed to practice. But this idea has not taken off because we are unable to distinguish what is professional social work and what is not.

Almost all NGOs are small organisations, with a limited number of employees. So, that being the case, the founder of the organisation will be at the scene on a daily basis, and would like to have the administration under his or her direct supervision.

The big issue is to do with the nature, size or capacity of the NGO. So, bigger organisations like CRY, World Vision or Childline are bringing in professional social workers, because they require people with knowledge about running the organisation and executing the project.

Social work needs to be systematized. Accountability is needed, but sadly, it isn't happening today. In the near future we can expect this to happen and I hope that Social Work will gain a status like any other profession.