
The Anatomy of Rebuilding & Recovery

A CEO LOUNGE INITIATIVE

Be-Schooled

The unspoken words of the work world

In conversation with



Anant Badjatya
CEO, SUN Mobility



Raghunandan G
Founder, Zolve & TaxiForSure, &
an angel investor



Viral Jani
EVP & Country Head, India,
Times Bridge

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Be-Schooled



A degree, despite its definite limitations, when applied in the real world, is largely accepted as a worthwhile endeavour. It is both a strong foundation and a pathway to a workplace. Work, however, turns out to be a different ball game altogether. The challenge is getting bigger with automation coming into the picture – as repetitive jobs are assigned to machines, people encounter high-value work earlier in their careers. The current demographics are solving the expectations vs reality gap through smart, iterative learning on the job but will it help them learn empathy, adaptability and vital soft skills? CEO Lounge finds out.

Words by Divya Sista

“If Thomas Edison had gone to business school, we would all be reading by larger candles,” said Mark McCormack, in his 1986 bestseller, *What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School*.

Euphoria — one word that describes the feeling of making it to a prestigious business, engineering or marketing school after months, and even years of hard work; the highway to a smooth, glorious and assured career path. This comes at a time when most college degree programmes are rallying to equip their students with skills for the jobs they want. When on the job, fresh graduates quickly realise the playing field

is starkly different from what they were prepared for. Business situations involve deciphering behaviours, being adaptive, flexible, and communicating effectively — soft skills beyond the structured learning of schools. Many times, corporate styles, cultures, theories and philosophies come to work along with people and this pushes us to unlearn, relearn and repeat.

LESSONS FROM THE PRAGMATIC LAB

Management research, its legitimacy and shortcomings have been debated for quite some time now. Certain sections of academia believe that research is not in line with practice, questioning research-led teaching.¹

“As human beings, we constantly tend to romanticise the next stage of our lives. School students look forward to college life where they can have fun, in college you look forward to decent work that makes you financially independent and so on. But, when this actually strikes us, we realise that the most difficult part of work

is not the role itself but the challenges that sometimes come in the form of other people. Schools do not exactly teach us how to cope with these challenges,” explains Viral Jani, EVP & Country Head, India, Times Bridge.

Even in B-schools, where management is taught, whether theory, through case studies or mystery shopping, one cannot categorically break down what students learn on the job.

“Being on the board of many companies made me realise that the more I knew, the more I understood that I did not know much. I have gained experience and wisdom by being in the now,” says Raghunandan G, Founder, Zolve, TaxiForSure, and an angel investor.

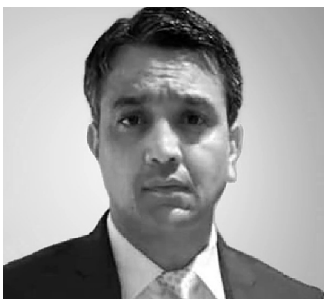
Maybe if we are taught how we could hone our abilities to make positive, active use of our instincts, work through perceptions and manage insights, productivity would collectively level up. Everyone’s career would then look like a linear, upward-sloping graph.



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Anant Badjatya
CEO, SUN Mobility

"One of the things I realised working across continents and countries is that work is all about behaviour. When I studied in B-school, we all wanted to get into finance, management, strategy and decision making. Looking back, I think I would love and actually benefit, from having classes on psychology, communication and behavioural economics. This is a common thread across geographies. The second is the art of storytelling. The last aspect is old-school sincerity where one has to give it their all and avoid checkbox-working," opines Anant Badjatya, CEO, India, SUN Mobility.

Everyone will agree at some point, that people want to work but process and policy may suffocate them. Winning is a combination of unconventional wisdom and conventional learning in the right doses.

"I had a career where everything was charted out — four years of engineering, two years of work followed by an MBA, and landing a job at a consultancy. All along this journey, we never learnt how to say no. Nobody told or taught us how to say no politely, so

much so that the first time I had to say no, it was painful. Over time, I realised that it is an art. If you have to focus, you must develop an ability to say no. Secondly, networking helps. I had a lot of contacts where professional relationships were transactional, and I had a set of friends with whom I was the real me who were different from my work colleagues where I was formal. Networking is much like building yourself. Thirdly, while studying we believe that marks are a function of your effort. But when you start working, you realise there is no direct correlation between efforts and results. We have to learn to appreciate efforts," reflects Raghunandan.

At other times, we may have to unlearn what we learnt to master business, to master an experience.

"Building habits in small iterations goes a long way. Identify what you need to build and just be at it. Over the course of time these iterations compound. It is also important that we keep learning. This comes from experience. Unlearn, learn and course correct along the way," advises Jani.

TEAMWORK — THE ART AND SCIENCE BEHIND IT

The corporate world is a playfield where everyone is playing the “climb the ladder” game. The twist, however, is that several games are played at once, and most of them are played in teams. That explains the phrase “team-player”.

“The concept of a team is a given. You have to be a team player even when you are working remotely. It largely is about basic goodness — being a good listener, stepping up for your mates, being real and staying empathetic. More often than not when I speak to someone I try to respond with empathy and have an open mind that I do not know everything. Showing your vulnerability is not a sign of weakness but important, as it makes you authentic; it makes you real,” explains Badjatya.

The rules of the corporate game are not very different from actual team sports.

“I have always been a team sports player and I learnt that I am only as good as my team. When we work, we quickly understand that a day has only 24 hours, and the only way to get more work done is to get more people to work

on it. It is the only way to increase your bandwidth. We always go through phases of insecurity, self-doubt and vulnerability. People relate lesser to machomen in a team than real mates. Even in the gym, people do better with a buddy than on their own. You can’t sustain on your own,” analyses Raghunandan.

Darwinism trumps every playfield. And the corporate structure is a great example where there is a herd, safety in numbers and above all trust amongst the subtle antagonism of predatory food chains.

“When we talk about any team, trust is crucial. No amount of processes can work when there is no trust. You build trust only where people understand each other,” observes Badjatya.

COMMUNICATION — YOUR EMISSARY TO THE WORLD

It is widely known and accepted that verbal and non-verbal communication skills are highly valued in the workplace. It is simple yet complicated.

“We don’t do rocket science — and for most of our daily work, we do not need a 200 IQ. But what is important, is setting the right context. If you



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share the right context with people, everyone will arrive at the same conclusion, making the team work. The second part is storytelling. I had a misconception that storytelling is only for sales or marketing roles. At school, we learn that things are black and white, and analytical. We don't ask why we are doing something, we ask what we are doing. This is simply because the way in school is clear — you've got to clear an exam. But, when at a job, the why is super important. When you answer the why, you can get anything done. Look at Uber. What we call a taxi, they called it a personalised chauffeur service. People instantly connect with it. The way you position it, the way you build it, is amazing through a story,” points out Raghunandan.

Jani agrees, “Storytelling is one of the most underrated softer aspects of your skillset. It can set the right narrative and asking ‘why’ can make or build your work. Silicon Valley builders do a fantastic job of it, which

explains the raging success they are party to,” he adds.

Every job requires human interaction in some form, whether with colleagues, higher-ups, clients or vendors. Being good at it would therefore translate into better productivity and easier work.

“If there is one skill if you have to choose and rate right at the top, it is open communication. If you are not clear, you are bound to fail. It is not just oral or written communication. It is everything you do, see and act. You learn a lot of things when you encourage two-way, open communication. When you want to communicate something, like precis writing in school — it has to be clear in every line. Remember everything you do is sending out a message and that is communication in some form,” remarks Badjatya. That said, the way we communicate has changed. From the medium of communication to the platform and time — everything is open, available and accessible.

"Today every email is perhaps competing with an Instagram post. Some of the nuances you learn are life lessons. E-mail etiquette, for instance — have a subject line and a small TLDR write-up that is crisp and polite. How you capture the reader's attention is crucial," mentions Jani.

THE CHILD IS THE FATHER OF MAN

The world we are in today is changing by millisecond. It is increasingly shaped by technological, regulatory and competitive forces. Continuous learning is the only way you can stay relevant. Just like open-channel communication, learning has also emerged into a two-way process — where you learn from not just superiors and seniors but peers and juniors as well.

"The way my younger colleagues look at the world is very different from the way I look at it. There are no territorial imperatives. While we never shared stuff, and significant parts of our lives were private, for digital natives, everything is in the public domain — 60-70 per cent of their life is out there on social media. Which is why they are

very outgoing. But, my biggest learning from the current crop of youngsters is that they are masters of their fate — they have the power of choice. They make choices that we never knew existed," propounds Raghunandan.

The current workforce demographic, given their exposure, wears their thoughts on their sleeve. Observes Badjatya, "They are very clear with what they want to do, which gives them a lot of clarity in purpose and doing. It has to do with the fact that we have moved a lot collectively as a nation. They are ready to try out things, and they know that it is ok to fail. They have no fear of failure. They are more conscious, have a stronger sense of morality."

Building a career is so much more than browsing professional networking sites, applying for jobs online, or tweaking resumes to meet the requirements of written words on company websites. Even at the workplace, simply following the stated rules of the workplace will get us nowhere. It has a lot to do with the unspoken rules of the game, and ways of doing things that are expected but seldom explained.

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TAKEAWAYS

- 1 **The world is a classroom — we have to constantly unlearn and relearn.**
- 2 **Teamwork is crucial in the corporate workplace — you cannot be a lone wolf.**
- 3 **Communication and learning are two-way streets — you have to encourage two-way communication and practice two-way learning.**
- 4 **The way we communicate, when we communicate, has changed — crisp, value addition in every word is what works.**



¹ <https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance-and-criteria-on-submissions/guidance/>

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