



PRécis

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How 'self' and 'living' can bring a difference to our lives

Put 'self' before work and career, and see the difference it can make towards living a more productive and wholesome life, urges Avis, chief dreamer, Image Equity, a reputation management firm. To deserve, you must also serve, and then life takes on a whole new meaning, he says.

Work - career - family - health - self. That is usually the order of priority for a human being. Reverse that order and bring 'self' first and relegate 'work' to the end, stressed Avis, who styles himself as chief dreamer of Image Equity, a reputation

management firm he runs.

“Flip your priorities. Start looking at life first. Success is getting what you want; happiness is wanting what you get. When you start looking at your life first, you will become more productive, successful and prosperous. To deserve, you must also serve, and then life takes on a whole new meaning,” he said, pointing out the difference between 'living' and 'earning a living'.

Avis did not make it to B-School. He barely scraped through college to save his parents embarrassment, according to him. But it was a packed hall that listened to the motivational speaker who not only spoke about how the Japanese principles of Six Sigma (a quality programme that ensures that when a product is manufactured or a service is



Avis urges PRSI members to focus on the 'self' first.

delivered, the error rate is 3.7 per million or less) could be used to “shrink the error value in our thinking” but also revealed how he spent 80% of his time and energy living life to the full, reserving only 20% for earning a living. “That is enough to take care of 100% of my life's needs,” he assured the audience.

“Have integrity of purpose, all else will follow,” said Avis, who had spent ten years as a journalist writing for established newspapers and two years in the corporate sector before establishing in August 1996 Image Equity. Dwelling on his and wife Vaani's experiences, Avis said that human beings really amounted to nothing in the larger cosmic design. “I am a nobody. I observe and learn from life,” he said. As salesman, journalist, “corporate animal” and consultant, Avis said he was someone who learnt all the time and believed that sharing learning was the “blissful state to be in”.



Daniel Dass (back to camera) shares a point of view with (l to r) Kalidoss, Suganthi, Avis and Siddarth (Avis' son)

Recalling how he had ambitions of becoming the most visible entrepreneur and the richest, and about a “nice business plan” he had prepared, Avis said that his business was not moving the way he had wanted it to; he was obviously a man in a hurry. It was in March 2004 that Avis got introduced to his “teacher” not a person, but the grim reality of life. “I had a tobacco habit, was a daily drinker. That day was my daughter's birthday and I was in front of the doctor (for diabetes). I threw

our expiry date. The only thing is we don't have a barcode reader, and the only choice is to live intelligently and walk the tightrope. We live as if there were no tomorrow. We live in an instant gratification world.”

Avis's predicament led him to research human psychology and find solutions. Even as he was trying to control his

life, his anger, anxiety and jealousy, he learnt that human life was usually dominated by fear, anxiety, desire for financial success and material possession. He realized that a lot of people had the opportunity to correct this. The questions that once again popped up were: How do you stay anchored? How do you get a more productive outcome of your thinking process?

“The master plan has no flaw. It has different designs for the exotic game called life. Life is the biggest adventure. We live in surprise and amazement all the time. When it meets our expectation, we love life; when it doesn't, we term life 'unfair'. The master plan's purpose is to allow us to evolve and learn. The

way to anchor our thoughts is to go back to the purpose of our creation, to live life intelligently (stay calm amid chaos) or monotonously (amass and possess). You need to be silent, not the environment. If you can stay calm you have conquered the mind. You need to peel away the sounds around you like you would an onion. Remain silent an hour a day, for 21 days. If you practise your silence you will find new doors opening.”

Avis also mentioned that Mahatma Gandhi's principles of ahimsa (absence of violent thought as he called it) and satyagraha (practice of truth in action) had deeply influenced him, as had a poor boy who returned the loose change Avis had thrust into his hands through the car window.



Mala Bharatkumar has a question for Avis.



Mariam Andrews presents the chief guest a memento..

away the packet of gutka concealed in the car (after a grim prognosis) in the garbage bin. That night I woke up in my air-conditioned room to a meeting with my teacher (life).”

At that point, Avis's firm had employed 40. He was travelling all over the world and was ambitious. However, the question that popped up after that day at the doctor's was: “What is life?” “Life is different things at different times. It is a hard teacher the test comes first, the lesson later. That reality started staring at me more and more. What is it that keeps the poor woman on the other side of the car with no money to buy milk for her baby? It is a choice-less entry we make, and a choice-less exit. We didn't choose our parents. We all come with



A view of the packed hall at the Hotel Accord Metropolitan.

From firefighters and spin doctors, PR has come a long way in Mauritius

PR has had a strong link with the history of Mauritius and its sugar industry. PR not only helped bridge the divide between landowners and government in the years preceding independence, it has also in recent years helped in promoting the country overseas. Jean Marie F. Richard, chairperson, Public Relations & Communication Professionals of Mauritius, traces the growth of PR in Mauritius.

Although public relations in Mauritius is a relatively new activity, it is closely linked to the country's history. Providing a historical overview of PR in that country and how threats were changed into opportunities by latching on to the globalization wave, Jean Marie F. Richard, chairperson, Public Relations & Communication Professionals of Mauritius, for whom a visit to Chennai was a homecoming of sorts (his forefathers had left Madras shores for Mauritius decades ago to work in that country as

indentured labour) linked the country's history to the sugar industry and to the first PR department set up in Mauritius in the early 1960s the Municipal Council of Port Louis.

There was a clear divide then, with the private sector made up of landowners of sugar-based industries firmly against the country's independence. In the 1960s and 70s, the migration began to South Africa and Australia. On March 1, 1968, the PR Office of the Sugar Industry (PROSI) was established. This was followed by the most important PR event of those times, the opening of the sugar crop in July 1968. The first monthly PROSI magazine was published in January 1969. Eventually, based on goodwill, PR helped foster cooperation between the government and the private sector.

The setting up of the PR department and the mission to bridge the communication gap between the sugar industry and its stakeholders, followed by the role played by PR practitioners within the sugar industry in the 1970s and 80s had a positive outcome, Richard explained. It helped reduce the misunderstanding that prevailed, and a climate of trust was gradually established. Compared to the 1980s when there were 17 sugar mills in Mauritius, today there are only four. On the other hand, there are four or five companies engaged in PR today.



Jean Marie F. Richard provides the Mauritius PR perspective.

The mid-1980s and the early 1990s saw the diversification of the Mauritian economy, with new emerging sectors such as service and tourism. The number of PR practitioners slowly increased. Strong links with PR practitioners worldwide were established and hands-on training was provided to those interested in pursuing PR as a career. 1992 saw the creation of the PR Association of Mauritius (PRAM) with Jacques Dinan being the first president. Dinan is today a doyen in the field.

PRAM began conducting workshops and conferences to promote the profession. Strong links were established with PRSI and the PR Institute of South Africa (PRISA) to foster international relations. Today, various fields such as marketing communications, public affairs and corporate social responsibility are closely linked with PR. In November 2008, the PR and Communication Professionals Association Mauritius (www.prcpam.org) was launched. On November 26, 2009, PRCPAM formed a global alliance with PRSI and PRISA.

Richard mentioned Victor B. Sibeko, president, PRISA, referring to the alliance as “a new association for



The chief guest receives a warm welcome from Suganthy as V.S. Ramana looks on.



(L-R) - Ramana, Dharan, Harikumar - GM, Hotel Accord Metropolitan and Jean Marie in conversation

(Cont. on Page 5)

It's an organisation with character that stands out

Human beings are born to rule, to create something, says R. Gopinath, CEO, Gopast Centre for Learning. PR and communication are highly specialised skills that can build a company's good reputation, he adds.

As individuals, or people in homes and offices, to what extent are we involved (with our lives and work) and how passionate are we? When you are faced with challenges, rise above the crowd; it's the stuff inside you that matters, said R. Gopinath, CEO, Gopast Centre for Learning, providing the successful examples of M.S. Subbulakshmi and Sachin Tendulkar.

“Human beings are born to rule, not to die (unsung). Work is worship and competence is the true wealth. We are not here to witness what is happening but to create something. We are dynamic, vibrant and creative,” said Gopinath, a former chairman of the LIC of Sri Lanka who has motivated more than a thousand agents of the company with his inspirational speeches. “Leadership is not a position or a rank; it's a responsibility. A team gets built around people who are ready to sacrifice.”



Sivagaminathan and Sudhakar are all ears as is the rest of the audience.

PR, Gopinath stressed, was not a general topic needing no preparation, as a principal in a college where he was lecturing had made it out to be, but a highly specialised skill. Linking PR and communication to character building, Gopinath said that if character was not solid, good reputation would only be temporary, and no amount of lobbying would help.

“Nothing stays invisible for long. Dirt or diamond shows itself. An organisation with character stands out. It should have a vision, mission and values,” he said, convinced that morality worked in Kaliyug (the present age), too. “Great reputation brings good people, new business growth, clients, favourable credits and kind media. The PR department cannot be successful unless all other departments are successful.”

According to Gopinath, PR activity starts at the brand level and percolates down. “A particular image has to be projected. Relationships have priority over business. Profit is a good word. It is needed to pay people, fund research. But profiteering is bad. While behaviour is visible, intentions are not.”

Gopinath said that while bad or negative things were quickly reported, good news hardly got noticed. But proper communication would make that possible, he added. Creditors and clients usually helped companies with a good reputation, he said, providing the example of people in a



R. Gopinath exchanges business cards with PRSI Chennai Chapter members.

tea estate voluntarily buying tea from a company godown to prevent its wastage and deterioration after the roof was swept away by the wind.

“Good people need to get aggressive. Public observation about our behaviour builds reputation. Communication is also about listening and experiencing. Has there ever been a listening competition in schools? You need to know what the public is thinking about you,” said Gopinath.

Earlier, Suganthy Sundararaj, chairperson, PRSI, Chennai Chapter, set the tone for the evening, stating that the desire to excel was exclusive, irrespective of the fact whether it was appreciated or not. “Excellence is derived from inside, not outside. It's not for someone else to notice, but for our own satisfaction and efficiency,” she said.

Echoing Suganthy's views, Gopinath said, “When we individually excel, we change people around us. The job of a PR person is to build a strong brand that people will recognise. Why are there no global brands from South India? You need to use your creative juices to create such brands. God wanted us to improve the world and create excellence. How are you going to answer God at the last performance appraisal? Make your mother proud that she brought you into this world.”

(Cont. from Page 3)



The overseas visitor interacts with PRSI Chennai Chapter members

changing times... forming a part of the decision-making and strategic planning process." Sibeko had added: "CSR is an emerging sector where we have to educate corporates in-house as

well as clients to adopt a more global inclusive approach."

According to Richard, the objectives today were to bring together the smartest minds in the PR and communications field in Mauritius, to contribute to national drives, promote training, and take students on board to expose them to "real-world ethics" and best

practices. In April 2009, communication was used as a tool to promote Mauritius as a destination, showcasing the institutions involved. A partnership was forged with the faculty of

humanities of the Charles Telfair Institute and the University of Mauritius, with students teaming up with local PR and Communication practitioners.

Richard also quoted Cassam Uteem, a former president of the Republic as saying that PR and communication professionals "can help turn the situation around and contribute to making the country a model of a shared society."

It was either "adopt or perish", Richard said, with Mauritius no longer only an island. The country had diversified into manufacturing, with the financial services and business process outsourcing (BPOs) constituting the second wave, and property development, eco-tourism and medical tourism the third.

Lifetime award for past chairman

Former chairman of the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, R.V. Rajan was recently conferred the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Rural Marketing Association of India (RMAI). At the GRT Hotel Convention Hall in Chennai where Rajan received the award, his autobiography, *Courage My Companion* (published by Productivity and Quality Publishing Pvt Ltd), was also released.

Rajan is multifaceted. Basically an advertising person, he established IFRA India, now one of WAN-IFRA's (the world's leading research organization for the news publishing industry) successful branches worldwide, while serving the Asian Media Information & Communication Centre (AMIC). He was part of the Round Table and the Advertising Club and continues to be an active member of the Rotary.

In the mid-1970s, Rajan joined the PRSI, Chennai Chapter, at a time when Anand Shetty, then branch manager of *The Times of India*, was secretary. Rajan contributed significantly to revive the chapter and became secretary in 1978. It was he who organised a lecture-cum-demonstration by famous cartoonist R.K. Laxman at the Connemara Hotel during a joint meeting arranged by the



R.V. Rajan poses with his book at the launch function at Hotel GRT Grand Days, Chennai

PRSI and the Indian Society for Training and Development. In his autobiography, Rajan mentions how Laxman "framed my face with his four fingers" and how he received his caricature by registered post from the maestro later. It is that caricature that adorns the cover of Rajan's book. In 1982, Rajan led a delegation of more than 100 members to the World PR Congress in Bombay. Rajan's active association with the PRSI ended about 20 years ago.

Courage My Companion is indeed a "candid" autobiography. Rajan even mentions visits to "aunty joints" in Bombay where he spent the early part

of his career, his regular drinking of an evening, even how he used a string to hold up his trousers (his waistline was so thin then).

The book is a remarkable product because it is completely based on Rajan's memories. It is also about how, if you can dare to dream, you can achieve, how even ordinary people can make a mark and tell their stories. For example, during his 29 years in the chawls of Bombay, Rajan recalls in the book how he and the others would line up to go to the bathroom in the mornings as there was only one bathroom on a floor to cater to many. To make up for what he had missed in childhood, he constructed six or eight toilets in his own house.

Rajan started his career with Clarion and moved to Grant Kenyon & Eckhardt. He went on to become, at 31, the youngest CEO of a national agency, Advertising Consultants India Ltd, in Delhi. In 1986, he established his own agency, Anugrah Marketing & Advertising, now Anugrah Madison, the rural wing of the Madison Communication Group.

Today, more than anything else, Rajan is better known as a rural marketing 'guru'. He lectures in colleges and institutions and is the driving force behind the RMAI.



31st All India PR Conference

Chennai Chapter gets two awards, *Precis* is best newsletter; Hyderabad is best chapter

The Hyderabad Chapter of the PRSI was adjudged the Best Chapter at the 31st All India Public Relations Conference held in Chandigarh at Hotel Shivalikview. Along with the Kolkata and Tirupati chapters, the Chennai Chapter of the PRSI won the Best Programmes Award.

The Chennai Chapter also bagged a second award for producing the best newsletter, *PRCis*. *Precis* had won the award in earlier years, too. Mumbai received the Best Website Award. B.D. Sharma, chairman, PRSI, Shimla Chapter, was given the Best Chairman Award, while Soumyajit Mahapatra from Kolkata won the Best Secretary Award.

The three-day conference was inaugurated by Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda. Six technical sessions were organised during the conference. At the valedictory function, Wajahat

Habibullah, chief information commissioner, was the chief guest; Hemant Kumar Sharma, chairman and managing director, Satluj Jal Vidyut Nigam, presided.

The Hindustan Times reported that Habibullah lauded the role of PRSI in bringing talent from across the country in the field of PR and corporate communications on one platform. He cautioned PR and media persons against taking quick reports in the race to file the event ahead of others. Quick reports tended to be kneejerk, he said, and not necessarily accurate. He asked media to take advantage of the Right to Information Act and strive to paint a clear picture with authentic proof, the report added.

Ajit Pathak, national president, PRSI, announced the PRSI agenda for 2010, which includes a thrust on programmes for national unity, anti-terrorism and right to information.



Delegates registering on the opening day of the three-day conference. K.S. Varalakshmi, Chennai Chapter joint secretary, is at extreme left.



Haryana chief minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda is flanked on his left by PRSI national president Ajit Pathak, and national vice president (south) R.K. Dharan, and on his right by H.E. M. Choonee, the High Commissioner for Mauritius in India.



Suganthi Sundararaj receives the Best Programmes Award from Wajahat Habibullah, chief information commissioner, Government of India, as Ajit Pathak and V.P. Sharma, (Chairman, Chandigarh Chapter) look on.



V. Kalidoss receives the Best Newsletter Award for *Precis* on behalf of the Chennai Chapter from Habibullah.



Vinitha PM Swamy, asst. mgr - PR, Murugappa Group, receiving the 'Second Prize' in the 'House Journal' Category from Bhupinder Singh Hooda, Haryana CM at the 31st All India PRAwards, Chandigarh, as Ajit Pathak looks on.



Dr. Sundari Krishnamurthy receiving the award from Haryana CM for her contribution to PR Education.

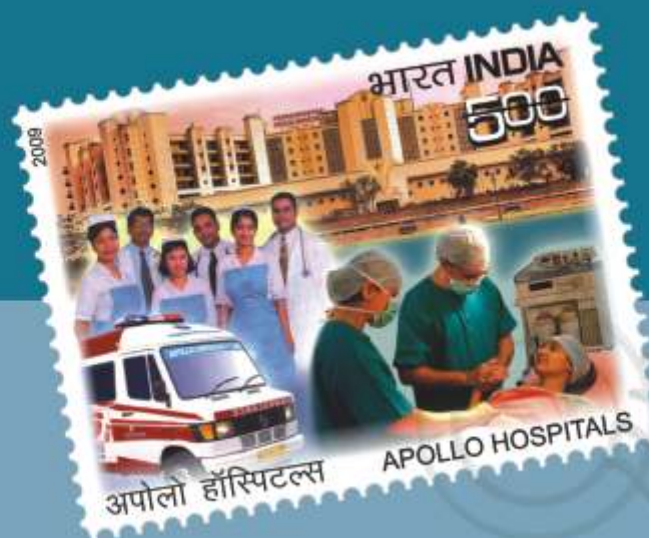
Year-end brings members, families together

It was a joyous occasion at the Suguna Vilas Sabha on the evening of December 30 as PRSI Chennai Chapter members and their families got together to celebrate the year (2009) that was, with cocktails and dinner. There were various games and prizes won, music and dance, and even karaoke. The tombola took a major share of the time spent, with R.K. Dharan conducting the show. A flavour of the evening in pictures.



1. Alex, Thirumurthy, Ramana and Suganthy have a whale of a time crooning a popular number.
2. Meenakshi, Jayashree and Vani Vasanta select songs from the karaoke album.
3. Anusha (daughter of Dharan) and Mini Sindhu exhibit their talent.
4. R.K. Dharan takes charge as the tombola session is on in full swing.
5. It's musical chairs for the ladies... and R.K. Dharan is still in control.
6. R.K. Dharan is 'caught out' as the other men hold on to their seats and Varalakshmi can't help applauding.
7. Sabir Qureshi (Huma's son) receives a gift from Suganthy
8. It's dinner time...

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