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leadership

# My journey as an entrepreneur: Alok Bharadwaj

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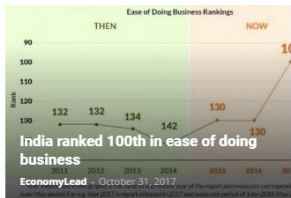
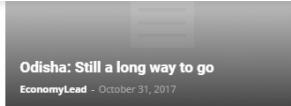


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I am an avid traveler. Journeys to fifty four countries in my life have been the best learning opportunities. Living, dining, discussing, transacting business, experiencing multiple cultures and seeing their unique impact on people behavior, have always been so very insightful. I once travelled from Zermatt to St Moritz on world's slowest train called Glacier express in Switzerland. It passes through 91 tunnels, 291 bridges and hundreds of bends. Besides seeing spectacular views, it gave me my biggest corporate lesson. Our work life and leadership journey is no different. There are many bends. You don't know what is beyond the bend and but when you cross that, a new view, perspective and script sets a fresh chapter, redefining its own worth, curiosity and challenge. Collective experiences become pearls of wisdom and the journey- a precious necklace. This is how I describe my own corporate career.

In my 32 years of corporate life, I have donned several roles and robes. Each role was a milestone. It had to be crossed to move to next. Seeing in rear view mirror is always quite pleasant and gratifying. It reinforces how personality, performance and persona altered with each milestone. While, I have led a happy and successful life journey, I must concede that happiness & success are highly relative & uniquely different for each one of us. Hence there are no easy metrics. In my line of thought, life is a journey but roles are expeditions. While journeys cannot be evaluated, expeditions are. I am happy that I have had opportunities to be a part of several teams and led several expeditions.

My journey started after my business school at FMS in 1985, with Tata group as a front line sales person and in 32 years moved across 4 companies including Motorola and Canon. My last role was Senior Vice President & Head of Asia Strategy centre in Singapore where as a member of Asia management board, supported and guided 22 countries operations. I found



roadmaps.

My tryst with leadership convinced me that leadership is all about three important elements. Building future, making strategic choices & engaging people. I have not understood any other definition of leadership. The other interesting observation is that leadership is not just skill but more importantly conduct and character.

Unmistakably, foundational values of our character are shaped in early childhood. I do attribute most of my deeper level habits to school that helped in my successful journey. One of my school teachers was a great architect in building basic values of life which meant very little that time but turned into a big lever of impact later. Foremost, she said, time is the most valuable resource given by nature to all equally. Humans differ in their approach to its use. She never ever came late to class in 10 years of my school life. She never stayed a minutes beyond allocated time. What a perfectionist on managing time. Somewhere it struck chord at a deeper level during rest of my life. Value of time is what has made me well known in my fraternity. Whether in India or in Singapore, I have always maintained high respect to appointments, deadlines and timeframes. I also learnt deep focus during my college days. I do tell people, if you want to soar high, you must dive deep. Complexity always hides simplicity but it is hidden deep. Career in a Japanese company reinforced this with 5W's (what, why, when, where, who) questioning to any business challenge.

Character formation is key to success. Lot of that is done in formative years by the family. My father is a famous scientist who researched on bacteria in his post doctorate and retired as a dean. While he was quite busy, he focused most energy in the house in shaping my attitude and mindset. "Thoughts are matter of our choice" he said. We have to choose to have positive thoughts and change texture of our thoughts to bring positive change. He told me to never think of past. He said learn from past only to think of future. That is how winning aspirations are formed. Rest is just our skill to play to win. This is what I follow but do admit its source.

First boss is always a turning point in life. I had an opportunity to work under a brilliant IIM-A graduate manager who made me learn and practise concept of accountability and result orientation. Peer learning is the most impactful. Colleagues in Motorola and Canon and enormous global exposure in leading projects worked as what 4Cs do to a diamond (cut, colour, clarity & Carat) to enhance intrinsic value.

The first critical personality trait that I have worked on as my strength, is building trust. Trust, as you know, is a combination of competency & intent. The second element, my admirers say, is dedication in engaging, developing and inspiring people. Perhaps, it comes from my strong belief that organizational capabilities are first priorities of leaders and their best lever of business impact.

My life's pursuit is not over till I set my agenda to improve on weaknesses. One of my idols is Singapore ex-leader Lee Kwan Yew, who, even at 90, was working hard to improve himself. I am working to improve on my patience. These days, I have begun to count 30 before responding. I am also working on reducing task orientation to improve my relationship quotient even more.

My journey in train has now taken another bend. From corporate top management career, my track is now going through terrain of entrepreneurship. I am passionate about helping organisations transform to build a better tomorrow. As a consultant in the domain of strategy, I know every day is different. The train will continue to go thru more tunnels and bridges but every bend will still be new all the time.

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