

Conversations Today

Your journal about the world of NGOs and Social Enterprises

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Cover Story - Pg 6 Awareness Overhaul

About Tamilnad Kidney Research Foundation and its services



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Alumni Talk Pg 3

From Casual Labourer to being a Corporate Consultant
Prabhakar's efforts to bring together service oriented minds through *Ennangalin Sangamam*



Profile Pg 9

Reviving Ecosystem based approach towards Sustainable Development
About, Help Foundation in Kerala, and its work in ecosystem based development.



Chit Chat Pg 12

"I feel that we do not have proper 'Counseling' in India, mostly it is only advising."
An exclusive interview with Dr. C. Kumarbabu Psychiatrist

From the Editor

Dear Friend,

Food safety plays an incredibly important role in our health, yet some pay little attention to. We trust that the food we pick out at the supermarket has been perfectly packaged and delivered with the utmost care for safe consumption. However, food safety goes beyond these measures and doesn't receive enough of the public eye to generate change, as food outbreaks come and go. WHO states that as many as 200 diseases can be prevented if people eat hygienic food free of harmful bacteria, viruses and germs.

The World Health Organization released its theme for World Health Day 2015 as "Food safety: from farm to plate, make food safe" a topic we can all relate to and couldn't live without. It is a theme of high relevance to all people on the planet, and multiple stakeholders, including government, civil society, the private sector, and inter-governmental agencies.

This means that everyone along the production chain, from producer to consumer, must observe safe food handling practices.

World Health Day 2015 is an opportunity to alert governments, manufacturers, retailers and the public to the importance of food safety—and the part each can play in ensuring that the food on peoples' plates is safe to eat.

It is now our responsibility to spread this message and make the world a healthy place to live in.

—Marie Banu

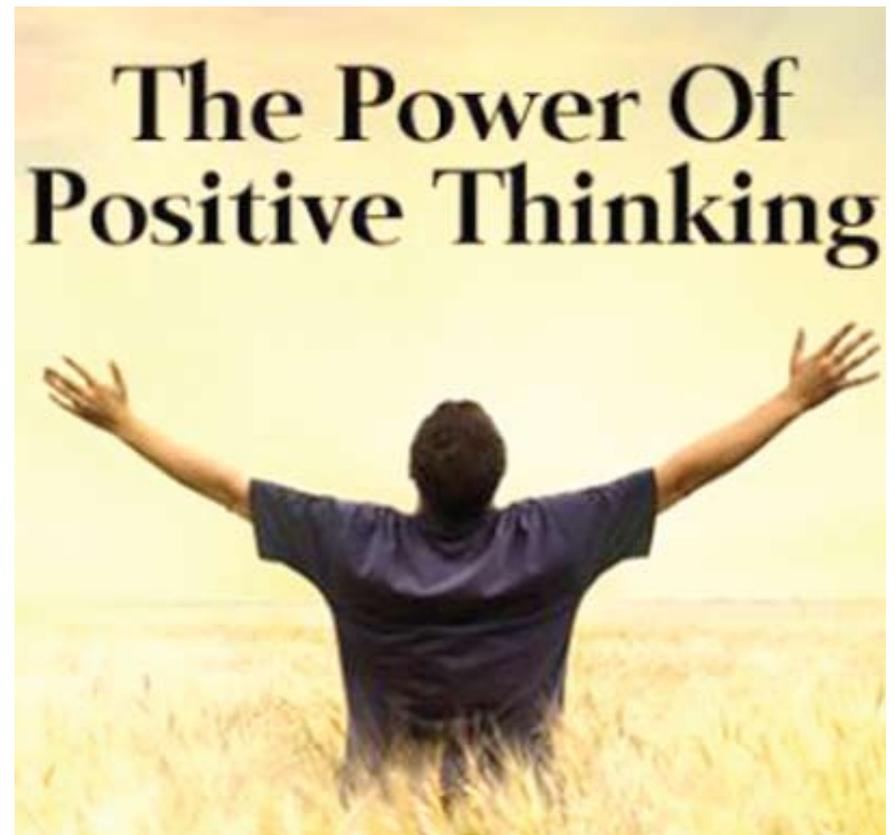
Is It World Or Is It You?

Often times we hear statements such as, "He does not care for me", "She does not respect me", "They are always finding ways to mock at me", "I am looked down upon by all my team mates", and so on. No wonder then, we come to believe that this world is an unkind and cruel place and everyone around us are just trying to get us. But is this really true?

If this is true then some obvious pre conditions are that our life is only dependent on others and we have no control on how it shapes up, behaves, or feels and that everyone is living their life for others - to hurt them, to criticize them, to demean them, etc. Are these two pre conditions true? Do they hold adequate evidence in the world, as we experience it around us? Well if we accept that these conditions are true, we are giving up control of our lives to all those 'others' we meet in life. Therefore, the critical questions begging an answer are – Am I in control of my life? Would I like to take total control of my life? Are humans not focussed on themselves and their own growth and evolution?

Once we take responsibility for our self and decide that we will take control of our life and shape it and drive it as we would like to, then the real beautiful journey of life begins. Having made such a this decision, one tends to think, feel, and act in alignment with the core being and its deepest desires. Even while the environment, people, circumstances, etc. remain the same, one learns to manoeuvre one's way through life, towards one's goals just like a stream of water manoeuvres its way across hills, forests, ridges, etc. and meanders along, over, below hurdles, to finally reach the ocean. Each of us can live life like a stream, in flow, working our way to our goals. Living thus, one never complains of the constraints but always has an eye on the ways to get through, regardless of the circumstances around.

Our purpose in life, as wise men say, is self-realization. In this pursuit, we require to unlearn and learn many things from all our experiences and constantly evaluate our values and beliefs and strengthen our core. As we are constantly cleansing our self in the fire of life and its circumstances, we experience fear, inadequateness, remorse, love, hate,



anger (with our self and others), etc. Under the influence of these emotions, our words and actions take on different manifestations. These are then directed at everyone who comes in close range of it. Therefore, in the journey of life, as we criss-cross our paths, we hurl these emotions at each other and create pleasant and unpleasant circumstances around us. These circumstances are merely projections of one's stage in their life journey. These circumstances have not been crafted purely for the other.

Bottom-line is that if each of us works on ourselves and contain the unpleasant projections and manifestations as they continuously morph their way through, then the world will become a happier place. We should, however, project the pleasantness around us, multiplying the positive ions in the environment.

In our positive energy journey, some of the things we can do to make our journey more enjoyable, while also contributing to the journey of others, are:

- a. Keep your life moving in a 'flow' – cardinal principle, keep moving

things forward, even if only a bit

- b. Live in the moment- do not dwell too much in your past or worry about the future
- c. Be in the company of people who contribute positively to your journey – 'satsang'
- d. Stay away, even if temporarily, from people who make you feel unworthy, inadequate, or helpless
- e. Build a strong core, which includes values and beliefs stemming from your own experience
- f. Always go back to your core, when in doubt or fear or confusion, pause or hibernate there before moving into action again
- g. Keep your eyes on the goal and also enjoy the journey- both are equally nourishing to the soul
- h. As you journey through life, build and practice rituals that renew all four dimensions of energy (physical energy, mental energy, emotional energy, spiritual energy)
- i. Pursue a hobby that nourishes your deepest self - the soul

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.

This intervention is being offered by GapSkills Learning Solutions Pvt. Ltd to corporates and schools. You can contact them at info@gapskills.com to design a customized intervention for your organization or join the PE open program - www.gapskills.com.

From Casual Labourer to Corporate Consultant



Corporate Social Responsibility is an obligation today for all the listed companies, with abounding clarity on what counts as part of it and what does not. Against this backdrop, it would be interesting to know how employees started engaging in social service initiatives through their companies and then took off to pursue their respective areas of concern.

Born and brought up in Sitarampetta village that is situated in the borders of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, J. Prabhakar, Managing Trustee of Networking and Development Centre for Service Organisations (NDSO) Trust, moved to Chennai after class 12 to pursue education in fine arts. Unable to seek admission in fine arts, he joined Ashok Leyland, a private limited company, as a casual labourer in 1973. Nallor Vattam was an institutional set up within the company that allowed interested employees to engage in social service activities.

“Since 1978, I began to work actively in Nallor Vattam. Workers used to meet every week and discuss about setting up tuition centres and organising medical camps in the neighbouring villages,” recalls Prabhakar who draws inspiration from Swami Vivekananda’s philosophy.

In what could be defined as a characteristic critical event, the impact of the group’s work in Theeyambakkam village in 1989, led them to work on multiple fronts and also establish a school for the village children. Most of the men in this village were brewing alcohol for livelihood. Mass mobilisation drew these people together where they voiced their concern on need for alternate livelihood opportunities. “We arranged bank loans

for some of them to run cycle shops and provisional stores amongst others. But, all these efforts did not serve to be a permanent solution,” he says.

It was at this juncture that the founder of Nallor Vattam facilitated the group’s visit to Ralegon Siddhi, a model village for sustainable development in Maharashtra that owes its transformation to Mr Anna Hazare. Drawing inspiration from his work during such meetings, Nallor Vattam decided to start a school (Tamil and English medium) in the village with funds collected from Ashok Leyland employees. “We were all earning three to four thousand per month. Every employee in the group came forward to contribute one percent of their salary towards this cause. Within three years, we mobilised 20,000 rupees for the school,” recounts Prabhakar, who immediately adds that the success of the school and its acceptance led to its replication in other places like Manali, Minjur, Attipattu and Thirunindravur in Chennai.

Prabhakar is more than happy to mention that during their camps about 100 families in Manali Newtown had come forward to donate their eyes after their lifetime. This tradition continues even today. If anybody expires, a local team coordinates the eye donation process through Shankara Nethralaya.

Amidst all these experiences that gave Prabhakar satisfaction and happiness, he decided to take voluntary retirement from the company in 2002. “I got opportunities to work on assignments with Ananda Vikatan, a local magazine, which kept my interests in fine arts alive. But, I decided to take up social service in full swing,” says Prabhakar.

Prabhakar was marvelled to see many social service initiatives across the plane, but wondered why they never came together to know each other’s story of triumph and their journey of perseverance. Deeply moved by such encounters, Prabhakar introduced the *Ennangalin Sangamam* in 2005 to bring together such service oriented minds. “My wife and I embarked on a mission to visit 100 NGOs every year and document their stories. It was imminent that they all came together on one platform. This was how *Ennangalin Sangamam* was born. More than 80 organisations in and around Chennai participate in this event, making it a success,” says Prabhakar.

Based on all the experiences, he wrote a book that was released in 2006. It was also decided that such an event would be organised on the first Sunday of every year.

“We never needed money. In the first year, the venue for the event was given by Shankara Nethralaya and food was sponsored. Friends and volunteers understood that this was not a programme or a promotional event. Everyone acknowledged that their services to underprivileged must be celebrated and honoured. Our work was mere coordination. We manage to coordinate this event from our home itself,” he says.

Prabhakar adds saying, “Being a care giver for one child is in itself a very challenging and testing task. But, these are people who deal with more than 100 children on a daily basis. Their work must be celebrated.”

Introduced to CSIM by an acquaintance in 2006 was just timed

right for him. The course allowed him to institutionalise these ideas and events through formal registration and establishing networks. “The course made me aspire for more. I wanted to reach out to many more social service institutions and bring them to light.” Thus was born NDSO Trust in 2007, that was founded by three friends.

Prabhakar and group have now met more than 1000 NGOs across Tamil Nadu. In 2014, Ramakrishna Math offered the space to conduct this event.

Commemorating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda, 100 youth were presented the Swami Vivekananda Award and were encouraged to work collectively on water conservation.

Now in its 10th year, *Ennangalin Sangamam* has honoured 20 NGOs and has also instituted the NSDO Award (Citation and 25,000 rupees). Having maintained it simple from the beginning, the trust, under Prabhakar’s leadership has attained a stature where institutions and well-wishers offer to organise space and food for the events each year.

Of late, alongside *Ennangalin Sangamam*, Prabhakar who also serves as a consultant for TCS, has begun to work with Sengalipuram village in Thiruvavur district where a study centre and a tailoring centre for women have been set up.

From being a casual labourer, Prabhakar has successfully been able to engage in social service and fine arts, without compromising one for the other. There is no doubt that CSR requires the able guidance of eminences like him.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Friends becoming saviors – Khasim Shareef

The most common complaint we would hear from people born in the more remote villages of India is the lack of schools and other educational infrastructure that would help people study and progress in life. Many of these people have fought this shortcoming by taking hours to travel long distances to obtain high school education. Once they are through high school, they take support from some source or the other to graduate from a college in a nearby town. Finally, the more persevering of such people end up becoming more average citizens of urban areas and focusing on building their lives. The rarest of them progress further by excelling in both their education and their first job! Some of them then demonstrate their drive by managing to go abroad, looking for greener pastures. This last phase is more common among people working in the information technology industry or in academics and research. We rarely hear of instances of someone remarkable enough to give up life on foreign soil to return to their home country with ambitions of serving the larger community. Khasim Shareef is one such extraordinary human; he returned to India to balance the demands of his professional life with the demands imposed by the exemplary work he does in the social sector, work that touches millions of Indians. In this article, we try to capture his trigger, drive and passion to make the world better for everyone.

Early days:

Shareef comes from a humble rural background in India. He was born and reared in Inumella, a village in Guntur District of Andhra Pradesh state. Like so many other Indian villages, this village did not even have a high school until 1997. To quote Shareef about the infrastructure of this village, “I remember my village had only two bus connections to the nearest town: one in the morning and the second in the evening.” In all honesty, though, one must consider Shareef to have been better off when compared to the numerous rural Indians who have to walk miles barefooted to get to a bus route or even to a school!

Shareef’s father was a school teacher in his village. One can only try to imagine how difficult it must have been for the family of a school teacher in such a remote place to make ends meet! Shareef, the youngest of three sons, has one sister. He did his schooling till the seventh grade in his father’s school, which was the only school in not only this village, but also over an area of a few more hamlets in the vicinity. Students who wanted to pursue further education had to do so in a school



in the nearest town. Like everyone else in his village, Shareef went to the nearest town, Narasaraopet, 35 km from his village, to obtain high school education (grades eight to ten). In fact, he went on to complete his post-graduation from the same town, commuting every day from his home at the village. Travelling such a distance over the village and state roads and highways of India is not easy. The average speed for a public vehicle is less than 20 kms per hour. Shareef used to leave home by 7 am and return at around 7 pm on a normal day. Life used to be even tougher during the monsoon, as the bus service became unreliable because of poor road conditions. This kind of demanding experience prodded Shareef and his family into building up their spirits and resolving to fight all odds, so they could progress on to a life of meaningful achievement.

When talking about his interests, Shareef says, “From my childhood, I was very interested in drawing. So I decided to

go in for a career in the same field.” Like most middle-class non-metro Indians, Shareef’s awareness of career opportunities was limited. Similarly, Shareef did not know what career opportunities there were in the field of drawing. The normal tendency in such a situation is to look for guidance from members of the nucleus family. In the case of Shareef, all of his siblings, who preferred government jobs, completed their B.Ed. courses and ended up as teachers. This trend ran in the family because their father motivated them. Further, the typical approach of poor rural Indians is to look for a secured future in government service, and since teaching was seen as a noble profession, they were happy. However, Shareef thought that he could take positional advantage of being the youngest in the family and pursue a technical skill-based course to get into the IT sector. Consequently, he moved to Hyderabad and earned his Advanced Diploma in Multimedia from a leading learning center.

Tough times and break through:

Shareef had to live in difficult circumstances while and immediately after doing this course. He hardly had any money. To quote him: “After completing my course in multimedia, I tried for a job. I applied at a number of companies. Sometimes, I used to walk 20 kms just to attend an interview. This was because I did not even have Rs. 5 then for a bus ticket. 2003 was a memorable year in my life, as I was appointed a trainee designer by a knowledge management company at Hyderabad. When I got the offer letter specifying a salary of Rs. 5000 per month from the company, I felt like I had won everything I wanted in my life.”

Working for that knowledge management company allowed Shareef to enjoy a much more comfortable lifestyle. He made friends and achieved social respect. He also developed the desire to be successful. He understood the power of online communities and decided that he must use this power for a social good. He

knew facilities for education in the rural sector were suffering due to lack of infrastructure. He felt that he would find it difficult as an individual to harness technology efficiently to supplement school education facilities in villages. He was impressed, however, by the many corporate initiatives that had been launched in that domain. He also felt the alternative urge to do something else in the social sector using technology and social groups.

Trigger and drive for F2S (Friends to Support):

Shareef read a number of disturbing news items on unethical blood donation practices. To quote him, “In 2000-01, a heart-rending incident was published in one of the dailies that triggered my idea of setting up a ‘F2S’ organization. Kids of age 12-15 years, who were playing a cricket match in their neighborhood, were lured by an unauthorized blood bank to donate blood, in exchange for goodies. Later, I read about another incident where rickshaw-pullers were offered alcohol to donate blood. I was surprised to note that one rickshaw-puller went to the blood bank fortnightly to donate pints. These incidents really inspired the thought of improving public awareness of proper and ethical blood donation.” Thus, F2S was inspired by the organizational malfunctioning that characterized most blood donation camps. Even hospitals had a casual attitude to blood donation and lacked a systemic approach to this sensitive issue. Although there were innumerable incidents of wrong practices, a few of them that came to Shareef’s attention left an indelible mark on him and eventually lead to the foundation of F2S. The one spark that triggered action occurred when a close neighborhood friend succumbed prematurely due to excessive blood loss. “None of my relatives, friends or neighbors had voluntarily stepped to donate to save the life.” According to Shareef, people hesitated to help because of fear of giving blood; they lacked adequate knowledge of relevant aspects of blood donation and its impact on healthy living. “When I thought over these incidents, I felt sad more than enraged. I felt the real cause behind such incidents was nothing but lack of awareness among common people of the value of timely blood donations. This lack of knowledge led to victimization of people who would otherwise have been eager donors.”

Therefore, Shareef launched F2S as a vehicle not only to create a pool of donors but also to raise awareness among common people on how to donate for a good cause without being exploited or lured.

Friendstosupport (F2S) is a website on which potential blood donors from all over the country can voluntarily register, while those in need of donors can find them very easily. “We wanted to make the common man realize that there are some things in this world for which he doesn’t have to fight, at least, not anymore. This is why friendstosupport

was started.” The website allows any person to register and volunteer to be a blood donor. Those in need of blood can choose the city, the required blood group and the kind of donor best suited for them.

Supreme sense of commitment:

While working in the knowledge management company, Shareef started the friends2support.org website. Four childhood friends, Naveen Reddy, Koteswararao. S, Phani Kethamakka and Murali Krishna from Narasaraopet, Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh joined Shareef as the cofounders of Friendstosupport, a non-profit blood donation organization that they launched on November 14, 2005. It is interesting to note how these five inexperienced friends united under the leadership of Shareef to bring about this initiative. They lacked the sophistication of urban education and rich family backgrounds, and had no exposure to business. They only had the commitment to do good to society with whatever they could command in terms of resources and knowledge. Now, almost 10 years after the launch of this foundation, one can observe the power of social media. In 2005, however, there were hardly any instances where friends got together to create an enterprise for social good using the power of the internet. That

Friends2support, which is now accessible in every corner of India, has grown to 115,000 registered volunteer donors in eight years, and has become the world’s largest voluntary blood donor database.

was the sense of commitment Shareef and his friends demonstrated. Shareef’s later actions will show that this first action was not an accident or the result of a rush of blood to the head!

After working in the knowledge management company for five years, Shareef got an opportunity to go to the UK on deputation by a mid-size IT company. To quote Shareef, “After one year in the UK, I thought that apart from the money I was earning, nothing was there for me in life abroad. Moreover, I felt that I couldn’t properly monitor friends2support.org’s work from outside India. So I came back to India to focus more on my organization”.

He joined another private company in Hyderabad as a design manager. He focused both on his profession and on the F2S activities. For someone from a poor background to have raised enough in life to get a job abroad and then sacrifice that job for a social cause back home is highly commendable. These decisions are not easy unless one has a strong vision and a sense of supreme commitment to serve society. When we study these decisions, we discover that for the people making those decisions, monetary considerations alone do not drive career decisions. They learn how to balance their need for money with their urge to contribute to society on

their own terms. Such people generally demonstrate developed leadership traits and the ability to leverage resources and teams.

Challenges in taking ahead:

Given today’s technology and the ease of access to that technology, it may look easy to create a forum of internet users as a social group. For Shareef, considering the cause for which he set up F2S, it was almost an insurmountable task. Shareef and the other founders became the first donors. As they persisted, people joined their forum, which thus grew in size. Many of them had to manage their jobs, some of which were in the demanding IT sector. The challenge spurred them to spread the idea. In their spare time, they mailed everyone they knew about the site. The recipients, in turn, spread the word to more people. Shareef and his friends held gatherings and approached people door-to-door, and that was how F2S gained popularity.

According to Shareef, “The real task was to convince people about the soundness of the idea. We faced a lot of discouragement initially. A thorough research had to be done on the myths and facts of blood donation; the present system of blood donation had to be studied; and relevant data on blood donation had to be obtained with the

who wholeheartedly come forward to donate blood? Any person in need of blood at any place in India should get it within minutes, thereby putting an end to the colossal wastage of valuable blood collected at blood donation camps. This is what we believe in. On that note, F2S chugs on.”

Friends2support, which is now accessible in every corner of India, has grown to 115,000 registered volunteer donors in eight years, and has become the world’s largest voluntary blood donor database. Shareef and F2S have won a number of awards. Shareef is the winner of the World Summit Youth Award – 2013; runner up for the United Nations World Summit Youth Award – 2009; mBillionth South Asia Award-2013; nominee for the Nasscom Innovation Honors – 2009; and winner of the Manthan Award – 2007. F2S features in the Limca Book of Records as India’s largest voluntary blood donor website continuously for the years 2010–13. F2S also features in the Asia Book of Records for 2012 as Asia’s largest voluntary blood donor website and in the India Book of Records for 2012 as the world’s largest voluntary blood donor website. F2S won the Andhra Pradesh State Government Award in 2012 and 2013 for its efforts in promoting voluntary blood donation. Though records and awards mean nothing in terms of F2S’s efforts and their value to society, Shareef feels that these endorsements make the community closer and stronger.

Family Support

For Shareef, his family has been a great motivator and supporter of his dreams. His family members have stood by him through all the actions he took to realize his dreams. As a teacher, his father had imbued him with the spirit of giving and acting beyond his own interest. He also helped Shareef learn to handle the challenging demands of time and limitations of resources. His parents trained Shareef right from his childhood to pursue his ambitions and synchronize his actions to scale up his activities. In addition to the emotional support he received from his siblings, his village and school friends, who grew up in similar conditions, have been great supports for Shareef.

Conclusion:

Shareef is a role model for many rural Indian youth to pursue their ambitions for education and involve themselves in social causes using their knowledge and their networks of friends. Instead of lamenting on the failure of prevailing systems, it is far more commendable to seize all opportunities to work to impact society along with one’s personal choice of career. Social conditions the world over would be better with more youth taking up approaches like that of Shareef.

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

Awareness Overhaul

When Dr Georgi Abraham established the Tamilnad Kidney Research Foundation in 1993, he decided to take on a killer disease that hadn't yet made a name among the more fatal ones.



For the larger part of the last two decades, awareness about several deadly diseases and illnesses has gained significant momentum. Among these are killer diseases such as diabetes, cancer, AIDS and heart disease. But when Dr Georgi Abraham established the Tamilnad Kidney Research Foundation in 1993, he decided to take on a killer disease that hadn't yet made a name among the more fatal ones. Abbreviated to read 'TANKER', the NGO's mission lay in detecting and preventing kidney disease in order to achieve its mission of good healthcare and medical facilities. In the course of its near 22-year-long existence, the NGO has established dialysis centres in Ambattur, Kilpauk (which later combined to streamline the NGO's Chennai operations), Coimbatore and Madurai. "The foundation remains as a means to get around the lack of proper awareness on non-communicable diseases," says Rajalakshmi Ravi, who currently heads the Prevention and Awareness wing of TANKER Foundation. "For the longest time, there has been so much focus on communicable diseases like malaria that awareness on non-communicable diseases hasn't quite been met with the same zeal. When TANKER was formed in 1993, we hoped we could change that."

According to Rajalakshmi, the main challenge that India continues to contend with is the lack of proper primary healthcare when it comes to tackling disease like H1N1, pre-natal care and night-blindness. And that is also why the focus on non-communicable diseases like kidney disease and heart ailments is has come into being, only recently. "There are two ways we can look at tackling these illnesses," she explains. "The first of course, is to work towards treating it, and thereby cater to those who suffer from it. But the second and more important step is to work towards their prevention." She explains how several people — the elite and educated included — aren't aware of kidney disease and what it is all about.

With the aim to correct the worrying trend, TANKER has so far taken an aggressive stance in fighting kidney disease. With nearly 224 patients currently undergoing treatment in its units, the NGO has so far conducted 157,179 free, and subsidized dialysis for over 850 patients. When it began in the 1990s, the NGO also actively looked at one-time contributions to help patients in need, pay for expensive treatment. "Even today, the average medical fee per transplant at a government hospital is close to 25,000 to 30,000 rupees," Rajalakshmi explains. "The procedure like transplants or dialysis per-se is free of cost, but the cost incurred for the disposables in these hospitals, is quite high. We do our best to help patients in need, foot this bill." A patient who receives help usually falls below the income category of Rs 10,000 per month.

Over time, one of the key approaches the NGO has taken towards spreading better awareness when it comes to kidney disease, lies in educating school children. "I believe that if we spread awareness among a hundred children, we are in effect, reaching out to 200 adults," says Rajalakshmi. "That is exactly why we feel the need to spread awareness to not just high-end or corporate schools, but also take the message of awareness of kidney disease to children in corporation schools as well." With a total of 397 awareness programmes conducted exclusively for students,

TANKER foundation's data claims to have reached out to just fewer than 83,000 youngsters. This of course, is complemented by a similar awareness drive for adults, which has benefited more than 22,700 people by way of 266 projects.

"Personally, the reason why I've managed to take such a keen interest in the cause is because somebody close to me was afflicted by kidney disease," Rajalakshmi explains. "Since the year 2001, I've been a part of TANKER Foundation." By her own admission, she did not understand much about terms like 'dialysis' and 'transplant' back then: "Dr Georgi sat down and patiently explained what this was all about. Ever since then, I understood the need to spread the same learning that I imbibed to society, which was even more in need of it."

Out of the 1697 dialysis procedures the TANKER Foundation conducts a month, 1,528 are free of cost. The NGO is funded purely by donations and up until 2013, has provided financial help for over 1,588 patients to the tune of just under one crore rupees. Going into the future, Rajalakshmi believes that more awareness on kidney disease has to be worked on, to battle the disease itself. "People must be aware that the two major causes of kidney disease is high diabetes and high blood pressure," she explains. "Just knowledge of that and appropriate changes to lifestyle can go a long way in helping fight the disease."



Living The Dream

Dreams are not just a series of mental images or emotions that occur during sleep, but maybe more. For many, living the dream is one's own desire of their life time, but very few see beyond this. They reach out to others, although not physically every time, in actions that would benefit others. In other words, they reach out as 'Angels' to those who are in need and are not mindful of their own trials or tribulations.

It was inspiring to meet Ms. Beena and watch her whole hearted work for the poor. It was also a lesson on how good quality of life could be.

Beena is the second daughter in her family with three other siblings. While she was young, her family faced a lot of hardships. Her father, the sole bread winner of the family, was a watch mechanic and ran a watch repair shop.

Right from childhood Beena had an interest in painting, which later became her profession. After schooling, Beena gradually developed an interest to work with the cine industry. Her first income was 100 rupees that she earned for her drawing in Thazhampoo incense sticks.

A very particular incident had made a dreadful impact in her life. In 2000, when



Beena was sitting beside her son who was hospitalised, she met a mother with her child. She observed this mother carrying her child in her arms all the time. When she enquired about the child's health, the mother broke down and stated that her child was suffering from blood cancer.

Beena offered the child a pack of biscuits, and the child immediately accepted it. The mother cried again saying that her child had been asking her for biscuits for the past two days and she did not have money to buy them.

Moved by this incident, Beena got

determined to work for the care of such children and this led to the blossoming of Raksha.

Beena launched Raksha Art Foundation, a Charitable Trust, in 2003, and focused upon working for the welfare of cancer patients. The Trust also rehabilitates children from drug abuse and educates people on the harmful effects of drug addiction.

For the past 12 years, Beena has engaged herself in social work and has carried out several activities. She has worked with students studying in

government schools, conducted blood donation camps to benefit cancer affected children, and organised awareness programmes on child abuse and drug addiction.

"Cancer at the early stages is curable. Being ignorant about the disease makes treatment difficult," she says. A large number of college students are now teaming up with Beena to bring about cancer awareness in the society.

Beena's hard work and perseverance brought her to a better position. She also earned the fame of being the only lady banner artist in Tamil Nadu. In 2005 she had the opportunity to sell her oil painting to Maharaja Royal Club, for one lakh rupees, out of which she donated 40,000 rupees for the welfare of cancer-affected children.

Our society needs a balanced development and cannot improve if a section of its people continue to be discriminated.

The well-being of the society means the well-being of its individual. Beena is living her dream and no doubt is a role model for us all. Let us follow her foot steps to build a better society!

—Leena Dorathy

CSR Opportunities for NGOs

CSR Opportunities for NGOs – A Taster Session was organized by The Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs (IICA), established by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs for capacity building & training in corporate regulation and governance, along with Centre for Social Initiative and Management (CSIM) and Confederation of Indian Organisations for Service and Advocacy (CIOISA) on 25th March at Asha Nivas, Chennai.

87 participants from several NGOs participated in this event. The programme provided an understanding on the expectations from Corporates and the criteria for NGOs to network with them. It also served as a forum for NGOs to reflect on how they can network with corporates.

Mrs. Gayatri Subramaniam, Convener & Chief Programme Executive- National Foundation for Corporate Social Responsibility (NFCSR), IICA and Ms. Latha Suresh, Director, Social Audit Network, India & Honorary Director, CSIM handled the sessions.

The topics that were discussed are:

- Introduction to Companies Act 2013
- Criteria for NGOs to act as implementing agencies for Corporates
- Opportunities for CSR Partnerships
- NGO-CSR Partnership model
- Assessing Social Impact

A joint certificate was issued by IICA and CSIM to all participants.



Reviving Ecosystem based approach towards Sustainable Development

Everything in nature is inter related, one complementing the other. In the absence of a complete understanding of the ecosystem, all developmental endeavours have complicated the cause-effect relationship between man and nature, affecting every part of the ecosystem at different levels. Our own communities stand testimony to this. Consequently, any diagnosis of a social problem may not allow us to see an isolated cause easily.

Given such a premise, Help Foundation embarked on the task of course correction at each level by creating a platform that allowed like-minded and interested individuals to act appropriately. Founded by three friends in 2011, in Kollam district of Kerala, Help Foundation has put in place effective systems that can address the present crisis, and at the same time pave way for better planning in the coming days.

With an experience of 19 years in the telecom industry and abundant exposure to life in the developed countries like US, Europe and Asia Pacific, Mr Peter Pradeep, Co Founder and Chairman of Help Foundation, had been reflecting on the costs human kind pays for development. "I wanted to give back to the society. But acquaintances in the religious institutions disappointed me. Unreasonable restrictions limited the scope of work that could be done through them. That's when I decided to move on and start my own institution, with a value system that respected transparency, environment and human rights on the same plane", recalls Peter, who is well aware of the demographics of the district.

Peter values the significance of sustaining good work, which could be daunting without an organised set up. "How do you sustain your work without an organisation? No apps work without a platform like android or windows. Similarly, there must be a platform wherein all social organisations and socially inclined minds can come together to see the fruition of an idea that can impact many lives. That's what Help Foundation does", he explains. His knowledge of the region's geography,



the resultant lifestyle, the consequences of development added to his passion for environment

and the need to bring in local players to protect vulnerable ecosystems.

"Kerala is a land locked state. All wetlands and backwaters are polluted. The ecosystem that supported our water needs was shattered in our hurry to develop. No water recharging happened despite heavy rains and worse, all catchments & forests are deteriorated and has less water retentions capacity. Due to the above Rivers are perennial and lakes are shallow. Estuaries are blocked in the name of fishing harbours and Mangroves which act as buffers between the land and the sea have been cleared thus rendering no more breeding grounds for fishes. Food security is in peril!" warns Peter. Paravur lake in Kollam district for example, was about to die. Peter studied the lake and wrote a paper. Believing in the lowest arm of governance – panchayat institutions, he decided to approach them. Accepting his paper, the panchayats also agreed to work under his guidance. Thus was born one of the domains of work at Help Foundation – Empowering the Elected Representatives. Today HELP Foundation works with 15 panchayats and a Corporation in Kerala.

With all wetlands decimated and water flow disturbed, scope for agriculture in Kerala is reduced drastically. Kerala has lost over 500,000 hectares of paddy

fields between 1980 and 2007 which are also wetlands. "Food is bought from other states, including milk. As paddy fields and water systems were affected, we had to depend on food from outside. Milk coming from neighbouring states is brought in non-refrigerated containers and the long term usage of this adulterated milk has caused kidney failures in the population. Around 30% prevalence in some of the villages was shocking", elaborates Peter, who networked through six hospitals in the district to facilitate dialysis for needy renal patients. Help Foundation has supported around 1000 dialyses so far, through funds mobilised from friends and family members. Under Health domain, alongside the dialysis project, the foundation also runs the Santhwanam – a community based integrated family health care programme where members can avail emergency ambulance services, home medical service for those who need care after discharge from hospitals, all these supported by a call centre. In short HELP Foundation is working on Natures Kidney (Mangrove Afforestation) and Human Kidney, thus highlighting the need for ecosystem based development leading to a green economy.

The other domains of work include food security, women empowerment, River Conservation and child Rights. Mayyanad Panchayat have been capacitated by Help Foundation to become child friendly Panchayats, creating space for availing all government schemes like establishment of home for girl children, etc. Beginning with a membership drive, a local project integration council have been set up with

stake holders from the community who will take the responsibility to revive water bodies like the Paravur Lake and Ithikkara River. Bringing local government department officials, NGOs, community members and panchayats together in this endeavour has been a very successful and promising strategy that can sustain the work in the long run.

"I strongly believe in the ecological approach. All systems are intricate and interrelated. We cannot think of improving one at the cost of the other. Which is why it is essential to keep ecosystems intact. If one water body dies, families around it are affected. No more cultivation can happen. Food security is in danger and the community's health suffers. Aquatic life is endangered, leading to a swirl of other consequences", says Peter who also undertook litigations against paddy land conversion and promoted jack fruity & paddy cultivation through Help Foundation. Strongly backed by his two other friends (co founders), Peter dreams of seeing Help Foundation become a pioneer in wetland conservation and strengthening the existing architecture within the organisation so that it can sustain its work and impact in the long run.

Having managed all these activities through personal resources, Peter now is more confident of sustaining the work as support has begun to come in from Department of Environment & Climate Change- Kerala and the WWF. "I am not worried about finances. The office runs in my ancestral home. It is a small team and the bulk of expenditure is incurred in travelling and project costs. We can manage it", he smiles and signs off.

—Shanmuga Priya.T

Conversations with Shri Ramana Maharishi

A certain lawyer from Cuddalore quoted as follows: "Neither the sun shines there, nor the moon, nor the stars, nor lightning. How can fire shine there? All these luminaries shine in His Light only. With His Light, all these shine forth!" He asked, what does 'with His Light' mean here? Does all else shine on account of Him, or in His Light?

M.: There is only He. He and His Light are the same. There is no individual to perceive other things, because the perceiver and the perceived are only He. The sun, the moon, etc., shine forth. How? Do they come and tell you that they shine forth or does another apart from them say that they shine forth?

D.: Of course I say that they shine forth.

M.: Therefore they shine on account of you. Again consciousness is necessary to know that they shine forth.

That consciousness is your Self or you. So then you or your consciousness is the same as He and His Light by which all else shine forth.

D.: Is that Light like sunlight?

M.: No. The sunlight is jada (insentient). You are aware of it. It makes objects perceptible and chases away darkness, whereas consciousness is that Light which makes not only light but also darkness perceptible. Darkness cannot exist before sunlight, but it can remain in the Light of Consciousness. Similarly, this consciousness is pure Knowledge in which both knowledge and ignorance shine.

D.: If God is all why does the individual suffer for his actions? Are not the actions prompted by Him for which the individual is made to suffer?

M.: He who thinks he is the doer is also the sufferer.

D.: But the actions are prompted by God and the individual is only His tool.

M.: This logic is applied only when one suffers, but not when one rejoices. If the conviction prevails always, there will be no suffering either.

D.: When will the suffering cease?

M.: Not until individuality is lost. If both the good and bad actions are His, why should you think that the enjoyment and suffering are alone yours? He who does good or bad, also enjoys pleasure or suffers pain.

Leave it there and do not superimpose suffering on yourself.

—Excerpted from talks with Shri Ramana Maharish

Project Charter – First step in Project Integration

Effective project management enables efficient decision making. Having spoken about the body of knowledge in project management in the previous article, we go ahead to explain each critical element in our future articles. One of the most integral purpose of organizational vision and values is to make appropriate choices leading to meaningful and value adding decisions. While understanding decisions we need to know that every decision is connected to three dimensions (*Sampath. J.M.2007- DNA of decision making*)

- The foundational elements – which are vision, values, clarity on vision and values
- The life cycle elements connected to the foundational elements – which are purpose, process, standards
- The execution elements connected to life cycle and foundation – which are goals, strategies, choices, context, appropriateness

All these lead to 'Decision'. This implies that every decision has to be connected and related to the vision and values of the organization. To make every decision actionable clarity on every action becomes important. Answering the 5w 1h (what, where, when, why, who and how) of the project and the elements of the project will provide the necessary clarity for the project. The 5w 1h would help in identifying

- the objective of the project (what)
- the location of the project (where)
- the timing of the project (when)
- the cause and impact envisaged by the project (why)
- the person responsible for the project (who) and
- the process methodology used to run the project (how)

An excellent project is one in which all the resources, people, machine, materials, and all that's required and related to the project are well integrated. Critical focus in the Integration of all activities would include

- **Developing a Project Charter:**

This is a document that formally authorizes a project or a project phase. This is a basic document, one of the first document to be developed that is like a manual guiding all the actions that are critical for project execution.

- **Developing Project Management Plan:** This document enables efficiency through documenting the actions necessary to define, prepare, integrate, and coordinate all subsidiary plans into a project management plan to enable smooth flow of the project.
- **Directing and Managing Project Execution:** This is the action dimension where the work defined and detailed in the previous two documents are undertaken to achieve the project's objectives.
- **Monitoring and Controlling Project Work:** This addresses the actions related to tracking, reviewing and regulating the progress to meet the performance objectives defined in the project management plan.
- **Performing Integrated Change Control:** This relates to reviewing all change requests, approving changes and managing changes to the deliverables, organizational process assets, project documents and the project management plan.
- **Closing of Project or Phase:** This phase relates to finalizing all activities across all of the project management process groups to formally close the project or a project phase. The closure also ensures the sustainability of the project outcomes.

Project charter is one of the most important document that outlines all the elements connected to the project. It is a live document that is small, concise, most referred to, all through the life cycle of the project. For a long time it was believed that social organizations do not work on measurable and specific goals and

therefore documentation did not get the needed attention. But today there is a realisation that social organizations require project charter as much as any IT organization. The project charter should have in minimum the following details :

1. **Project purpose or justification** - the vision and mission of the organisation to connect to the goals or Project of the organization. The purpose of this goal is detailed in the charter using 5w and 1h and SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound) methodology.
2. **Measurable project objectives and related success criteria** - the specific objectives have to be measurable. This is one of the most challenging tasks in a social organization. If the benefits accrued are not measurable, it becomes subjective and vague. The numbers would bring some element of objectivity and pre-post comparison data into the project.
3. **High – Level/ broad requirements documentation** - The project charter should clearly identify the expectations from all the stake holders including the sponsor and the recipient. This is done at a high level and is broad to be used as a guideline for action. The challenge in a social organization is to ensure that the needs of the sponsor and the recipient are met equally.
4. **High – Level project description** – This document is more elaborate, granular and describes the objectives in detail.
5. **High – Level risks identification** - The 'what if' scenario are identified and reviewed right in the beginning. This document looks at limitations, loop holes, cost overrun, delay, resources not being available and develops some directional path forwards to handle the risks. Social organizations touching vulnerable social issues need a good preparation in risk management.

6. **Summary milestone schedule** – This details the milestones to be achieved along with specific timelines. This is used in project reviews.
7. **Summary Budget** – This relates to the finance connected to funding and allocation of funds along with timelines in which they are received and dispatched.
8. **Project approval requirements** – The authorized person for every part of the project is detailed along with the basis on which the sign off would take place.
9. **Assigned project manager, responsibility, and authority level** – the person who will own up this project and what he/she will do and how related to his/her roles and responsibilities are detailed. The grey areas to a large extent are cut leaving lesser human conflicts and confusion.
10. Name and authority of the sponsor or other person(s) authorizing the project charter needs to be specified.

Appropriate templates are to be developed to document all elements of the project charter. Project Charter therefore would have all that is critical to run and execute the project. Developing this charter would be the first and foremost effort. The charter is communicated to the sponsor and all team members and deciding authorities of the recipients as a guideline for all decision making within the project. In a social organization which intends to make a big difference to the world and the people in it, management of the project with highest level of clarity becomes all the more basic and important.

While the vision and mission of the social organization may be in a flow and emerging with the need of the hour, yet building a structure to operationalise it, will only add to the efficient execution of the project and not take away the essence of the same.

—Dr. Kalpana Sampath and Prathaap B

Marie Banu Wins Karmaveer Chakra Award



The very versatile & spontaneous Marie Banu, Chief Editor of Conversations Today, has received the REX Karmaveer Global Fellowship and Karmaveer Chakra Award (instituted in partnership with the UN) for her commendable work for the society. She received the fellowship on the 23rd of March in New Delhi at the exclusive award function which is a part of "iCONGO's REX Conclave.

The whole idea of the REX Karmaveer Global Fellowship (RKGf) is to recognize people who have the courage of conviction to think differently and walk the path less trodden and to act on

alternative/innovative ideas which may make a difference in our world. RKGf helps life-changing innovators from around the globe to integrate within the REX and Karmaveer community. It helps them share their impactful ideas for action with a million audiences and transform lives through projects and ideas of hope. The idea is to bring together like minded, socially responsible individuals who have a desire to learn more, be more and do more to make a difference.

Karmaveer Chakra is the National Medallion of honour for proactive voluntary citizen action to Be & Lead the

Change. These awards were instituted with a simple passion mantra - to recognize real life unsung heroes who believe 'It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness'.

Marie Banu is the Director of Centre for Social Initiative and Management Chennai. She is a Management Graduate with over 20 years of development work experience. She has worked for national as well as international developmental organizations— Danida, Action Aid and Oxfam International. A Social Auditor trained by Social Audit Network, UK, she is also a trainer in

Fundraising, Media, Communication, Advocacy, Social Entrepreneurship, Management, and Social Audit.

The management of REX, which selected Marie Banu's nomination after thorough due diligence said that they were glad to have found a true champion of social justice issue who was being the change and role models for other citizens to follow.

The CSIM team congratulates Marie Banu for possessing the conviction and compassion to stand up, speak out and lead the change with her positive attitude!

—Latha Suresh

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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Please visit: www.csim.in.
CSIM also facilitates Social Audit for social enterprises through Social Audit Network, UK and SAN, India.
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“I feel that we do not have proper ‘Counseling’ in India, mostly it is only advising.”

Dr. Kumarbabu shares with Marie Banu how one can improve and maintain his mental wellbeing.

Dr C. Kumarbabu MD; DPM; Ph.D has more than 30 years of experience in counselling. He held the post of Reader in Psychiatry at the Government Stanley Medical College and Hospital, Chennai. He is also a corporate consultant in Stress management, emotional Intelligence, value based goal setting and work life balance. His article on the management of Common Mental Disorders was published by the Oxford University Press in 2009.

In an exclusive interview Dr. C. Kumarbabu shares with Marie Banu the need for more awareness on mental wellbeing.

How can one improve and maintain his mental wellbeing?

The basic function of the mind is to protect the body. In this process, we start seeing threats where there are really no threats. That is what we call “Anxiety”. Many stimuli in the environment are seen as potentially harmful. Thereby, we are constantly focused on threats and that is what we call negative thinking. So, whether the threat is real or not, the effect it would have on the body because the mind is thinking about the threat, is sufficient to cause all the reactions as if the stimuli are real.

For instance, a person is walking on the road and someone is following. Regardless whether he is really following him or not, he thinks “someone is following me”. Then whatever bodily changes that would occur if someone is really following with malafide intent would happen. That would have been just another person who was simply walking on the road!

The mind cannot differentiate between what is real and what is powerfully imagined. So, people constantly imagine the wrong and unwanted outcomes and this affects the system. This is called worries, anxiety, tensions, or stress.

How does one overcome stress?

The bottom line is to see all potential threats as challenges. This will help us to develop and improve our coping skills.

The more scared you are, the more you will think negatively. The more negative you think, the more threatened you feel. The more threatened you feel, the more negative you feel. This is a vicious circle. We need to break this by developing coping mechanisms.

What is the worst outcome possible? Can I survive it? If I can survive, why bother? This is the line of questioning. If it does not kill me then it will make me stronger. Remember the ancient



Photo: Marie Banu

Chinese saying: “smooth seas never made a good sailor”. Trials and tribulations make us stronger.

It is really essential to look at one’s belief systems. We will have to develop certain profound rational philosophies as a mental compass to guide our living.

People don’t want to experience any uneasiness and don’t want even a small thing to go wrong. During summer, we are morbidly worried if there would be a power cut even when there is power supply. When you do something irrational, it creates a lot of negativity. We try to control people and environment. We can never really control them.

Clients come to me saying that they are afraid of death. When I ask them, what is it that you want to achieve? They say that they want to live. I then tell them: “Right

now you are living, and you are not enjoying it!” The paradox is: “In the process of pursuing happiness, we make ourselves extremely unhappy”.

Having traveled across the globe, what are your views about counseling in India when compared to other Countries?

I feel that we mostly do not have ‘Counseling’ in India. On many occasions it is only advising. The term ‘counsel’ is very difficult to translate in our regional languages. People talk about giving counseling. You cannot ‘give’ counseling.

Counseling is a process where we discuss with the person and explore possible solutions to a problem. In the process, we explore their strengths and weakness; their baggage from the past,

their belief systems, and their cognitive distortions etc. The outcome should be to explore all possible solutions to the actual problem and agree to initiate one specific action towards solving the problem.

People who really require counseling are the very people who deny that they have a problem. Someone brings a patient without their knowledge and introduces the counselor as a common friend. There is a huge stigma around mental illness in our country.

How can we bring about more awareness on mental illness?

We can start working on positive psychology. We can create modules on the management of mind. We can make this subject as an optional course for 10th, 11th and 12th standard school students and also offer as an elective course for college students.

Can you give us some pointers on how we can achieve work life balance?

When someone offers you a huge salary, they expect you to deliver huge results. Unfortunately, many people are not capable of doing this. So, they go through stress because they know that they cannot meet the demand. When they come home they are not peaceful, as this fear keeps stalking them and they are preoccupied and worried.

In the private sector, there is a constant downsizing of staff as they can employ four people instead of one for the same salary because we keep churning out millions of “qualified” graduates. The term ‘cyber coolie’ captures the prevalent situation. Therefore, the companies undercut the salaries, extend the working hours, and make the job expectations very huge.

The effective way of managing is to be mentally very strong. People live on hopes of an expected future income. When a person earns a salary of one lakh rupees a month, he immediately buys on instalment a house for 60 lakhs and a car for 10 lakhs. But, when faced with a pink slip, the house and car are gone. He then jumps off from the sixth floor. Do not ever confuse a liability for an asset. Enroll for a financial education class and learn the fundamentals of money management.

Do not mix business and pleasure. Work place affairs can wreck your peace of mind. These two: financial failure and love failure are the common cause for suicide.

Make work ethic a fundamental value. The whole purpose of life is to be happy and contribute to others. That is the true north principle to guide your life.