

Power determined by Purpose

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JULY 30, 2015 20:40 IST

Businesses cannot be run as islands and success cannot be defined by consumption, believes Subroto Bagchi, the co-founder and chairman of Mindtree and bestselling business author.

Never did I imagine that by the time I finish chatting up Subroto Bagchi, the chairman and co-founder of Mindtree, the nation would be grieving the loss of Dr.A.P.J.Abdul Kalam, the most-loved people's president. For, a part of the conversation veered round to Indians who have impacted people across the borders. "Shoot the names," Bagchi told me, "and we will look at their life in terms of platform and purpose."

It was like a game to understand what drives people to stay motivated in life, what causes differences, the attributes that lead to impact over time, whether success can be recreated and much more.

"Narendra Modi... Sachin Tendulkar, Amitabh Bachchan...Dr.Kalam..." I reeled out. And he picked up the former President as a wonderful lesson about how life should be perceived and why he is the agent of hope.

"The whole idea of life is about one's existence," said Bagchi, and "Dr.Kalam's has nothing to do with material possessions or the number of years he spent in the high office." "He is a small town boy belonging to a simple family who grew into an exceptionally humble human being whose financial status had nothing to do with the great vision he had", Bagchi explained to put Dr.Kalam in the "high platform high purpose" corner of the paradigm of life.

The paradigm – a kind of a model framework -- is something that comes from Bagchi's engagement with people over the years and he never misses discussing it in depth during his motivational talks to businessmen and entrepreneurs, professionals and students across the world. And so of Dr.Kalam, Bagchi continued, "his success is determined by what he leaves behind, his ability to do extraordinary things with ordinary people."

At the beginning of this week, we spoke of Dr.Kalam in the present tense and today, he is no more. But as Bagchi said, he is there for everybody to learn about real values in life. One man can build only one brand. And there cannot be another Dr.Kalam.

Just like Dr.G.Venkatasamy, the founder of Aravind Eye Hospitals in Madurai, feels Bagchi. He never met him but was inspired by reading about him while studying leadership across frontiers. The man who was not scared of the scales he adopted to fight blindness impacted Bagchi so much that he has pledged support to Aravind Eye Care Systems for long-term research on finding biomarkers that will predict who as a diabetic is at a higher risk of losing vision. He also supports the Aravind-run Eye care rural vision centres.

Perhaps as a 12-year-old, it was Bagchi's defining moment in life when he saw his mother lose her eyesight overnight at the age of 50. She suffered from corneal ulcers but lived for three decades more. But it was her vision that was far beyond what her eyes could see, he says.

“As the youngest of five brothers, from the most pampered I became a care-giver. It taught me the sense of duty and the power of understanding and real love,” he says.

People with disability are like angels in our midst, says Bagchi. They come and touch you with their presence so that you remain humane, he says. And that is what has prompted him to focus on two more areas of interest – mental health and geriatric care.

When you choose your cause and do something by choice, you automatically get the courage to start anything and understand life's meaning,” he adds.

That is how after his stint in DCM, HCL, Wipro and Lucent Technologies, Subroto set up Mindtree which within a decade and a half has positioned itself as one of the leading global IT companies.

“An institution is not just about the physical infrastructure, you also need intellectual and emotional infrastructure,” he says and refers to his staff as Mindtree Minds, not employees.

“I keep reminding my leadership team that we walk in the shadow of giants. But we have got a rich intellectual and reputational capital to build on.”

Though it was his inspirational talk to IIM students that went viral a decade ago and also became a bestseller book later, “Go Kiss the World”, Subroto says writing was something he was always passionate about. As a young boy, he would write on love and revolutions in local newspapers in Odisha and later went on to write business and technology columns in several newspapers and magazines. Today, he has to his credit half-a-dozen business books -- The High Performance Entrepreneur, The Professional, MBA at 16, The Elephant Catchers, Zen Garden – that have been translated into Hindi, Marathi, Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Korean and Chinese.

Bagchi is working on a new book that also promises to be full of realistic challenges and insightful information to excellence. But he is not a man in a hurry to package information as a viable commercial option. “I write in all earnestness because I want to connect to the youth across India. They identify with me not as a rich metro kid but a shy small town guy.”

Self-effacing to the core, Bagchi dislikes the ‘celebrity’ tag that follows him now. But what he cannot deny is that with his own life story – the transition from a simple Koraput boy to a successful and respected entrepreneur -- he has inspired aspiring businessmen and entrepreneurs across small towns to take their passion to great heights. Convincing them that success is not necessarily linked to inherited wealth and high qualifications, he has gently provoked them into thinking and starting their own businesses.

“Just the spark of an idea, the purpose and ethics determines the power of a person,” he says. According to Bagchi, success is not defined by the size of your business but it is your capacity to build a legacy and leave it behind.