

# Commencing initiative steps

Reflect within, are you an initiator? Do you look out for opportunity or do you wait for it to come to you? Are you willing to act based on your instincts or do you endlessly analyse everything? Lee Iacocca rightly said, "Even the right decision is the wrong decision if it is made too late." Ask yourself, when was the last time you took an initiative to achieve something significant...

*"Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly."*  
- Senator Robert Kennedy

## Sanjeev Baitmangalkar

Perhaps 'Kemmons Wilson' would be a heard name for people in the manufacturing world. Born at the cusp of Great Depression, he lost his father when he was less than a year old. Described as a 'hard worker', Wilson spanned industries as a youth to help support the family. His upbringing was not the one where the days were spent at pool or around nine holes of golf.

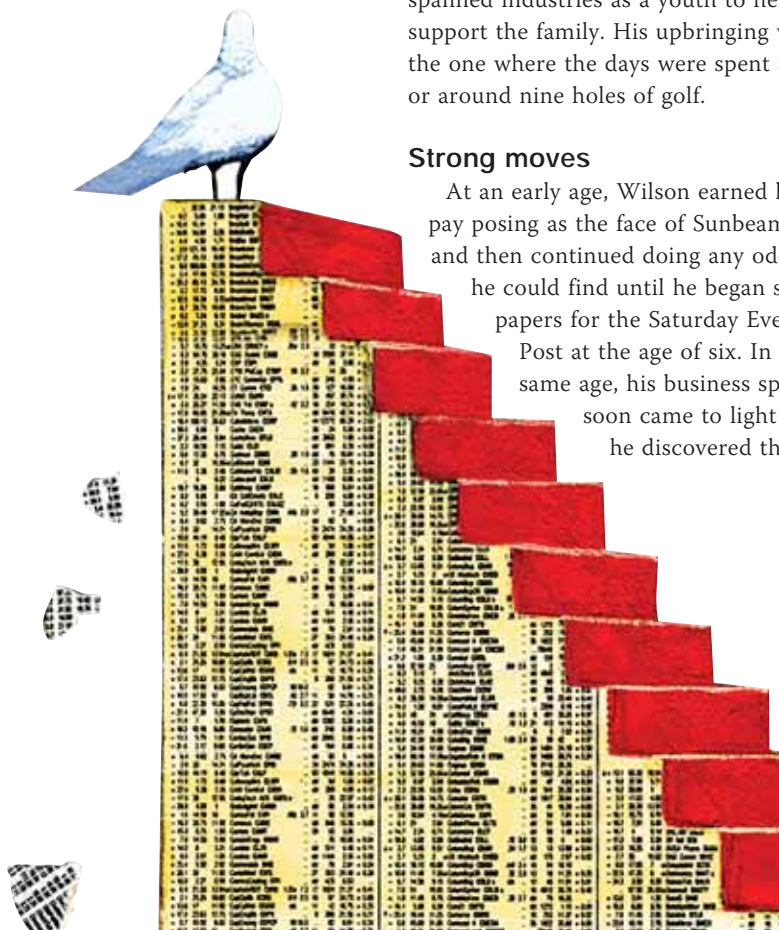
### Strong moves

At an early age, Wilson earned his first pay posing as the face of Sunbeam Bread and then continued doing any odd job he could find until he began selling papers for the Saturday Evening Post at the age of six. In the same age, his business spirit soon came to light after he discovered that the

Ladies' Home Journal publication could offer him the ability to work as a district manager and earn more money for his family. Wilson organised the neighbourhood kids as his sales force. The children sold the magazines for three cents each, one cent went to Wilson and two went to each sales person.

In 1930, with the full effect of the Great Depression, his mother was out of work and Kemmons knew that the family required to make a living. Kemmons once stated, "I had to quit school to try and make us a living. At that time, it was more important for me to eat than it to get an education." Going forward, he made it a priority to take care of his family through his business. This 'family first philosophy' was highlighted by his vow to his mother that he would never marry. However, that changed when he met Dorothy Lee, a midtown (Memphis) girl. Wilson married Dorothy after four years of dating and began their family soon after. Kemmons and Dorothy brought five children into the world and built their family on an ethical centre they could depend on – 'church'.

Wilson was well into his business developing the Holiday Inn and found himself travelling up to fifty per cent of the year. Regardless of his hectic schedule, Kemmons and his family would sit together and participate in the service of Christ United Methodist Church every Sunday. Wilson's daughter, Betty, sums up the



experience stating, “Mom and Dad gave us a tremendous Christian foundation...” This tradition went on to shape the strong moral philosophy of the family and helped them bring a consistency in their lives.

### Ready for risks

In the early 1950s, a new Interstate Highway system, cheap gasoline, big cars, and prohibitively expensive air travel meant that even millionaires packed up the family and took to the road for driving vacations. It was summer, 1951, when Kemmons Wilson, one of the Memphis’ most well-known businessmen, left on a two-week trip to Washington, DC, with his wife and five children. A highly successful real estate agent and homebuilder, Wilson was famous in Memphis for constructing bigger and better houses than his competitors, but charging similar prices. One of his pet phrases – ‘The space in the middle of a house doesn’t cost anything’ - explained his common-sense approach to both building houses and life in general.

On the trip to Washington DC, he learnt about the sorry state of the Hotel lodgings in America. Motels had sprung up all over the country since the First World War. Some were nice family places, while others rented beds by the hour. The problem was, a traveller didn’t know which he would find. Some of the places were too squalid for words, they charged for children. Wilson was particularly infuriated at the \$ 2-per-child surcharge over and above the room rent that roadside motels commonly attached to his bill on that fateful trip. The room was already rented, Wilson reasoned. Why should it cost more if a few kids are running around the space in the middle? At the end of the vacation, Wilson told his wife that he was going to start his own hotel chain.



Most people would have complained and forgotten, but Wilson - always an initiator, decided to do something about it. He told his wife, “Let’s go home and start a chain of family hotels, with a name you could trust.” His goal was to build four hundred hotels. His wife just laughed.

### Deserved success

When he returned to Memphis, he hired a draughtsman to design his first hotel. His vision was to make it simple, clean and predictable. He wanted it to have all the things that he and his family had missed on their vacation, such as a television in every room and a pool. The following year he opened his first hotel on the outskirts of Memphis. A huge fifty feet tall sign announced its name – the Holiday Inn.

It took him longer than what he had expected to reach four hundred hotels. He had only one hundred hotels by 1959. So, he decided to franchise them and it boosted the openings. By 1964 there were 500 Holiday Inns. In 1968 there were 1,000 Holiday Inns.

By 1972 a Holiday Inn hotel opened somewhere every 72 hours.

In 1979, he suffered a heart attack and stepped down from the company’s leadership. “I was so hungry when I was young,” he said,

“I just had to do something to make a living. And when I retired after my heart attack, I went home to smell the roses. That lasted about a month.” It’s just too hard for an initiator to stop making things happen.

### Qualities to possess

Wilson had a strong belief in himself; so, he was never scared of taking the initiatives. The main qualities that a leader should possess to enable him or her



Kemmons Wilson

## Here are three suggestions to improve your initiative:

- **Change your mindset:** Lack of initiative is a problem that comes from within, not outside or from others. Are you afraid of risks? Try to find out why you are hesitant to take actions. Have you had past failures that discourage you? Or are you unable to see the potential of the opportunity? Find the source of your hesitation so that you can address it. You won't be able to move forward outside until you move forward inside.
- **Go out and look for opportunity:** Opportunities do not come knocking on the door, so don't wait for them. Instead go out and find it. Be proactive. Taking stock of your talents, intellectual assets and resources will give you an idea of your potential. Look out for who is looking for the competence or expertise you have. Which group of people is dying for the skills you have. Remember, opportunity does not lie at one place - it is everywhere.
- **Take action:** Do not just see an opportunity, but do something with it in a positive sense. Every one has a great idea in the shower, only a few step out, dry off and do something about it. Pick the best opportunity you see and take it as far as you can. Do not rest until you have done everything you can with it.



to make things happen are:

- **Know what you want:** "Mental attitude plays a far more important role in a person's success or failure than his mental capacity," said Kemmons Wilson. A study of the human behaviour tells us that once people make up their mind, they are full of indecision. Remember no one can be indecisive and effective. Napoleon Hill writes, "The starting point of all achievement is desire." To become an effective leader, you must know what you want, so that you are ready when the opportunity comes.
- **Push yourself to take action:** Remember the old saying, 'You can if you will.' Initiators don't wait to be motivated by others. They know it's their responsibility to push themselves beyond their comfort zones. Make it your habit. There are many examples of initiators before your eyes. Initiators take initiative to make things happen.
- **Take more risks:** When you know what you want and can push yourself to act, your next hurdle to overcome is your willingness to take risks. Proactive people always take risks. The reason why you must be willing to take risk is – there is a price

for not initiating too. When asked, this is what John F Kennedy had to say, "There are risks and costs to a program of action, but they are far less than the long range risks and costs of comfortable action."

- **Do not be scared of making mistakes:** Failure is the stepping-stone to success. Initiators make things happen, but not without failing. They make mistakes and are not afraid to do so. The founder of IBM Thomas Watson says, "The way to succeed is double your failure rate." Do not let the failure bother you, learn from it. Remember, the greater the potential, the greater the chance for failure. Senator Robert Kennedy once summed it up, "Only those who dare to fail greatly can ever achieve greatly." If you want to achieve great things as a leader, you must be willing to initiate and put yourself on the line.

A person has to take risks to achieve. Eliminate the words, 'I don't think I can' from your vocabulary and substitute them with 'I know I can.' There are two ways to get to the top of an oak tree. One way is to sit on an acorn and wait; the other way is to climb it. Choose the latter and become an initiator... **MMT**



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