

The focussing ‘fundaas’!

Learning to focus is quite possibly one of the best things you can do to invest in yourself. This is probably one of the most overlooked areas of self-improvement. If you focus on one single subject and excel in it, many other doors will begin to open for you. Focusing on one subject is analogous to building your own staircase. The longer you keep focus on a subject, the more stairs you can build...

Sanjeev Baitmangalkar

In the 1970's, the name Saideep CV Rathnam was little known, except for the fact that he was the grandson of Sir M Vishveshwaraiah. Astronomy was his first passion. He had a starry vision. He wanted to study literature, psychology and botany. But fate had other plans. He was sent to Tata Institute (Indian Institute of Science) to be an engineer, and then moved to the Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Bangalore. Though he never wanted to be an engineer, he went in the field to fulfil the desire of his elders. Although he worked hard to get good marks in his Engineering degree, he realised after the exams that there was so much he did not

know thoroughly. So, what did he do then? He closeted himself in his room and went to study.

He revised the entire syllabus – after the exams - until he was satisfied with himself that he knew the subjects well. Such was his sincerity and commitment to the purpose, as was his focus on excelling in what he did.

The success story

During his MBA programme, he was

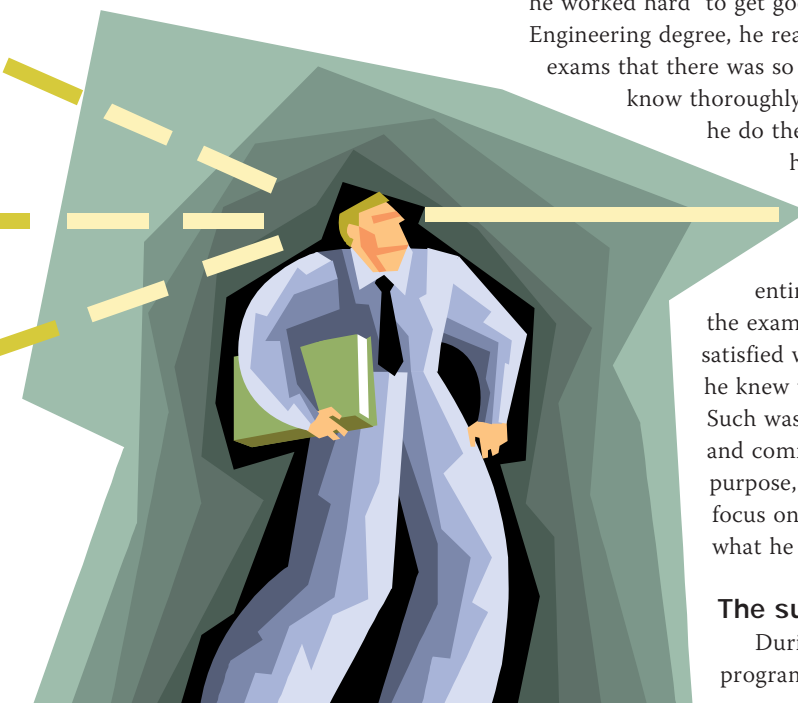
asked a question – ‘What do you want to be fifteen years from now?’

A question, that agitated his mind and set him thinking. Two weeks and four pages later wrote down the answer - ‘I want to be in teaching and consulting.’ Coming out of the Tata Institute he joined the Aeronautic industry. Four years later he took study leave to complete the MBA programme at IIM-B. He was sent to England, where he worked with great zeal, dedication and passion. He learned to live with his mental doors unlocked so that ideas could come in. At work, problems intrigued him so much that he would not rest until he had found solutions. He sometimes worked three days at a stretch in that labour unionised environment. Many a times he even slept at his work place. And you thought only Thomas Edison and Leonardo Da Vinci slept in their workshops! Seeing his passion and focus, the others would punch-out after shift and come back to work with him. He was focused on finding solutions to problems and search for answers.

The industry in England had plans for his growth. Saideep openly discussed his desire to teach and consulted his seniors at work, who tried to dissuade him with promises of growth in his job. Carrots were not good enough to defocus him from his desire and passion for teaching and consulting. He made clear priorities and kept himself focused on it. He used

“Always know where you want to go.”

- Saideep CV Rathnam





Saideep CV Rathnam never lost his focus

to ask himself - 'What do I need to do to make my dream come true?' 'What type of industry experience do I need?' His motivation and vision kept him going.

Today Indians living in foreign countries come back to India because of growing opportunities and better pay packets, but during those days, some did so for either family values or patriotism. Saideep got connected to a large Indian industry group that was looking out for the right person to head a new plant. After a few years of hands on experience, he was ready to take on what he loved the most. Focus renewed him constantly, never letting him get bored, keeping him happy. He eventually got into teaching and consulting. Doing what he liked, besides other achievements, he helped in setting up of a learning institution in the abode of the Gods and the Rishis at the foothills of the great Himalayas.

A man can make big achievements, starting from the small ones. Saideep's focus and dreams do not end here. He hasn't even begun his next journey yet, but is heavily focused on it already. A patron of fine arts, with a passion for music, can turn him into a violinist any day. Or who knows, he may take up doctorate in philosophy or literature too! Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, has written, 'What people say, what they do, and what they say they do are entirely different things.' Although it is true to the larger cross section, Saideep has shown that it

can be disproved with sharp focus, keeping his mind always young and his heart always excited with the possibilities of what can be.

What does it take to have a focus to be an effective leader? The two keys we learn from Saideep's story are priorities and concentration. A leader who knows his priorities but lacks concentration knows what to do but never gets it done. A leader with concentration, but no priorities has excellence without progress. But when he harnesses both, he has the potential to achieve great things. Saideep has proved to be an effective leader, leaving his impression everywhere.

Required inputs

So the important question is how should you focus your time and energy? **Your strengths:** Always focus on your strength. Spend more time focusing on what you do well, rather than on what went wrong. The great management guru, Peter Drucker, rightly puts it - 'The great mystery isn't that people do things badly but they occasionally do a few things well. The only thing that is universal is incompetence. Strength is always specific! Nobody ever commented, for example, that the great violinist Jascha Heifetz probably couldn't play the trumpet very well.' To be successful, focus on your strengths and develop them. That's where you should pour your time, energy and resource. Invest 70 to 75 per cent of your time and resource on your strengths.

New areas: Focus on new things. If growth equals change, and you want to get better, you have to keep changing and improving - stepping out into new areas. Like Saideep dedicated his time to new things, areas of



his strength to grow more as a leader. In leadership you never stop growing, as Maxwell puts it, - 'If you're through growing, you're through.' Invest 20 to 25 per cent of your time and resource on new areas.

Your weakness: Pay attention to areas of your weakness. Do not avoid working on it. Minimise it as much as possible. One tool you can use, is to delegate to someone who is stronger in that particular area. Once you know your weak areas, you can make it stronger by working on it, changing it or improving it. Invest about 5 to 10 per cent of your time and resource in improving your weaknesses.

Sit back and rate yourself in areas of focus. How do you see yourself? Do you work on building your strengths? Have you been over spending time on your weaknesses and forgotten about your strengths? When you let people, with the least of potential monopolise your time, you have lost focus.

Bringing it home

Here are a few things to help you get back on track with your focus:

- Work on yourself – you are your greatest asset or your greatest detriment
- Work on your priorities – fight for them
- Work on your strengths – to reach your full potential
- Work with your contemporaries – you may not be effective all by yourself.

Things that will help improve your focus:

- List out the things that you really do well in your work. Find out what percentage of time, effort and resources do you dedicate. You should at least dedicate 70 to 75 per cent of your time, effort and resources in improving your self. For any reason if you can't do it, then it's time to reassess your job or career
- List out the things that you do not do very well. Find out if you can delegate



the work related to these weaknesses to someone who may be better at it. By developing a plan, you can share the responsibilities

- Look at your ability to concentrate. Find out what will it take for you to move to your next level of strength. Assess if you need any new tools to help you – training, reading, coaching, etc
- Revisit how you do your things. Find out if you are willing to make sacrifices. The time and resources that you will invest in taking yourself to the next level will be the best investment you would have made.

One must have précised focus like Saideep. There is no such thing as divided focus. Surely you must have been to a circus and seen the lion trainer carry a stool with him in the cage. Ever wonder why? Perhaps it tames the lion better than anything else. When the trainer holds the stool extended pointing the four legs towards the lion, the animal tries to focus on all four legs at once. And this paralyzes the animal. Simple trick! It works the same way in life. Divided focus always works against you. **MMT**



Sanjeev Baitmangalkar is the CEO of Stratmann Consulting.

He has an expertise in lean manufacturing, BPR & turnarounds, supply chain management, industrial marketing, machine tools and product development. He imparts training in areas of finance and leadership, is working with overseas and Indian clients.

He can be contacted at stratmannconsulting@gmail.com