



Birds and Beliefs

G.V. Prasad

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“
**A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking,
because her trust is not on the branch but on her own wings.**
”
– Author unknown

Dedicated to my life partner, Anu.



G.V. Prasad is the Co-Chairman and Managing Director of **Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Limited**, the India headquartered integrated global pharmaceutical company.

Over the last three decades, he has helped build and transform Dr. Reddy's into a globally respected company.

Prasad is a successful entrepreneur, a passionate advocate of sustainability and a nature lover. He serves on the boards of several non-profits and supports the causes of higher education, public health and conservation.

Introduction

Since I became the CEO of one of the Dr. Reddy's Group companies in 1990, I have been obsessed with building a great company, that everyone can be proud of. Being from the promoter family, I was parachuted into the top job with very limited real world managerial and leadership experience. I had to learn on the job, and learning became a lifelong passion. While the company was small (about 15-20 million USD), it had the potential to be a leader in its field. In the beginning my focus was to make the organisation a high-performance, sustainable enterprise that can thrive through changing generations of leaders, technologies, and products.

Later, my purpose evolved to make Dr. Reddy's, a platform where every employee could achieve their full potential. To achieve this, I had to learn and evolve continually.

Throughout my learning journey, I jotted down key insights and quotes from books I read, corporate and academic leaders that I follow, and various other sources. Only a handful of the quotes in the book are mine, and I do not even have the sources for most of the quotes. However, I deeply believed in the wisdom of these quotes, and they have guided me on my journey of building a world-class company, Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Limited. I can say with some degree of satisfaction that Dr. Reddy's today is widely admired as a leader in the pharmaceutical industry and a great place to work for talent.

I have always been interested in nature, forests, mountains, and wildlife. One of my friends, Aasheesh Pittie – a well-known ornithologist, introduced me to birdwatching, which became a lifelong passion. Another friend, Suresh Chitturi, along with my Young Presidents' Organisation (YPO) forum mates, gifted me some very expensive lenses for my camera. While initially I struggled with the equipment, Suresh helped me learn photography, and soon, with his tutelage, I built up my skills. I honed my skills while travelling to many national parks around the world with Suresh. Somewhere along the way, I became a reasonably skilled photographer.

This book is a combination of the quotes that inspired me and some select photos of birds that I took at various locations. I have combined my two most important passions of building a lasting enterprise and photographing birds to create this book – “Birds and Beliefs”. There is no particular order to the book. It just has quotes that inspired me, paired with some of my favourite photographs. The photographs are all mine, but the quotes that have turned into beliefs for me, are mostly borrowed. I regret not being able to give credit to many of the people from whom I have gained this wisdom.

Finally, I wish to thank Saurabh Chatterjee, Kunal Tudu, Anand Vishwanadha and M.S. Raju for their help in designing and putting together this book.


G.V. Prasad



Oriental Darter





Saddle-billed Stork

“
We try to remember that medicine is for the patient. We try never to forget that medicine is for the people. It is not for the profits. The profits follow, and if we have remembered that, they have never failed to appear. The better we have remembered it, the larger they have been.

”
– George W. Merck

“
This quote by George W. Merck, a member of the founding family of the innovative pharmaceutical company, Merck and Company, has been an inspiration at Dr. Reddy's for the longest period. Our Founder Chairman, Dr. Anji Reddy had this on his whiteboard in his office. Merck, an innovative science-driven company was one of his role models.

Dr. Reddy's first active ingredient product Methyldopa, a notoriously difficult-to-make product was also a Merck discovery. Our pricing strategies at the branded business in India have always been to make products affordable and typically expand access to a large pool of patients. This legacy continues, and hopefully will continue into the future. 🌿

“ **The purpose of a business is not just to maximise profits but to find profitable solutions to societal problems.** ”

The role of business in society has to go beyond just profits and must be to find solutions to people's problems.

Whenever we brainstorm new business ideas amongst our colleagues, we ask ourselves – what problem are we solving and for whom? Who is going to pay for our product or service, and why? This allows us to determine quickly whether the idea has merit or not. 🦅





Eurasian Coots and Cattle Egret

“
Revenues and profits are not the only criteria that should define success. Consumers are the most important part of the business cycle and they care about the world they live in.
”



Defining success for companies should go beyond financial profits and must include solving customers’ needs effectively. Business must make profits sustainably while making the world a better place to live.

Today’s customer also cares about how corporations view equity in society, impact on the environment, and sustainability. 🌿

“ **Chase profits and they become elusive. Instead, focus on positive impact, do the right things for all stakeholders and the profits will follow.** ”



Too many business leaders today are eager to maximise profits instead of value creation for all stakeholders, and in that race, take shortcuts. This imposes a lot of risk on the companies while also working against the broader interests of society.

It is my belief that if we focus on creating a positive impact for all stakeholders, success and profits will inevitably follow. 🌿



Great Egret



“ **Capitalism has the power to find solutions to society’s biggest problems and make them available to as many people as possible in the shortest time.**

The genius of capitalism is that it creates incentives for solving human problems and makes these solutions widely available. It is these solutions, which make life better for human beings and that should be the definition of prosperity.

”

Many businesspersons have the perspective that creating businesses is a way to maximise profits, and generating wealth for promoters and shareholders.

In a broader context, capitalism should encourage businesses and companies to solve societal problems in a profitable way, instead of taking the narrow view, that the business of business is to maximise profit – which is often mistakenly attributed to the likes of Milton Friedman.

I believe that business is the greatest change agent in the world. If we hold the view that the purpose of any business is to solve societal problems and make the solutions available to all – the power of businesses to bring positive changes in society and become a force for good becomes apparent. 🌱



Oriental Darter



Sarus Cranes



“ **Create increasing value for all stakeholders and do not trade off their interests against each other.** ”

True sustainability is attained when a company creates value for all stakeholders. Compromising the interests of one group against the interests of others inevitably leads to problems.

A great company creates ever-increasing value for all stakeholders: customers, employees, shareholders, and society. 🦋





Oriental Darter

“
Modern businesses should be defined as much by what they give as by what they get!
”



This quote is from the book “In Good Company”, focused on social justice. Today, companies leading with purpose cannot be just profit-maximising establishments; they also have to contribute to society. 

“ **My initial purpose was to build a high-performance organisation that can sustain and thrive through changing generations of people, technologies, products and leaders.** ”

”

This was the goal I began with, when I joined Dr. Reddy's. I joined in a time of turmoil, when a strong leader left the organisation and many people left along with him.

My purpose became very clear: to build a high-performance organisation that can sustain and thrive through change without excessive dependence on a few key leaders. 🌿



Spot-billed Pelican



Spot-billed Pelican and Great Cormorants



Common Raven

“
My vision has evolved – to transform the company into a platform that can unleash the potential in everyone and enable each to be the best version of themselves.
”



This is my renewed vision after we largely achieved what I set out to do when I started my work at Dr. Reddy's – which was to make the organisation strong, sustainable, and resilient through changing generations of leaders, technologies, and people.

After achieving the original vision, I thought that the company must evolve and become a platform where every individual can achieve his or her full potential, through their work with us.



Purple Sunbird (male, eclipse plumage)



Indian Skimmers

Red-wattled Lapwings



“
The health of a business is an organisation’s ability to align, execute and renew itself faster than competitors. Managing health of an organisation is action that you take today so that you can deliver performance tomorrow.
”

Often, companies pursue performance at the cost of health. Performance and health are two sides of the same coin – the ability to produce sustainable results now and in the future.

Senior leaders in an organisation need to focus as much on performance as on the health of the business. The ability of a company to continue to deliver performance in the future determines its health. It is critical to focus on both the company’s health and performance – the capabilities, processes, and methods for delivering results, as well as the performance itself. 🌿



Atlantic Puffin



Great Cormorants

“
No company can be exceptional at multiple things. Every company must choose its area of differentiation from competitors, be the best in those parameters and good enough in the rest.
Trying to be very good at everything makes you average overall without the differentiation that matters.
”

”

Every company needs to decide on the few parameters that they should be exceptional at, and realise that they cannot excel at everything. The company must decide what it stands for and do everything to become exceptional at that. This becomes their brand.

While everything in the organisation can be improved, improvement efforts must be focused on those aspects, which matter most to achieve strategies. A company must focus on where differentiation really matters to its customers and become exceptional at that and not waste effort trying to improve too many things, leading to a lack of focus. ✨



Great Cormorant



Great Cormorant



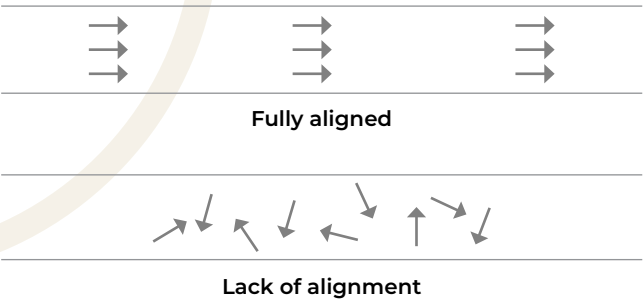
Glossy Ibises

“
It is important to have a team of leaders fully aligned to the objectives of the company. Brilliant individuals not aligned is a waste of energy.
The power of a large number of people aligned and marching to the same script is amazing.
”



Energy is unleashed when a large number of talented people work together to the same beat, and are focused on the same goal, or set of goals. However, even when very smart people are brought together, if they are not aligned, the result will be a loss of energy and limited progress.

Alignment in values, beliefs, and goals is paramount, especially in top teams. Otherwise, instead of working as an orchestra to create a symphony, they will make noise. 🦋





Indian Skimmer and Mugger

“ **Helping others succeed
is the essence of leadership.** ”



Leadership is about helping others succeed. It is about raising aspirations for the collective lot. While doing this on an ongoing basis, leaders must ensure that they use every opportunity available to help individuals discover and realise their full potential. 🌿



Rosy Pelicans



Spot-billed Pelicans



Indian Peafowl (male)

“
You have to become a better human being before you can become a better manager or leader.
”



This insight comes from my experience with leaders who have been very successful.

Every successful leader is a good human being first and then becomes successful as a leader. 

“ **Managers get work done through people. Leaders develop people through work.** ”



This is essentially the difference between managers and leaders. Managers hand out tasks and try to get the work done in predictable ways.

Leaders actually develop people through their work. They use work to enhance the capabilities of people, help them achieve much more, and build impactful and meaningful careers. 🦋





Sarus Crane

“
Difference between a Manager and an Entrepreneur – A is Aspiration, R is Resources:
• **Manager** – **A <= R**
• **Entrepreneur** – **A >> R**
”



A manager’s aspirations are usually limited by available resources, whereas an entrepreneur’s aspirations are much greater than the resources available. This is fundamentally the difference between a manager and an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurs use their creativity to combine resources in unprecedented ways to create value, whereas managers limit their thinking to the budgets they have. 🦢

“ **Entrepreneurship is moving resources from a low-yielding place to a high-yielding place.** ”



This is one of the definitions of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs find a way to combine resources in unprecedented ways to create value, and hence they move resources that are unutilised or are in a low-yielding place to a higher-yielding place. That is how they create disproportionate value. 🍃



Bar-headed Geese



Painted Storks

“ **Innovation creates disproportionate value from the same resources.** ”



Innovation is also another side of entrepreneurship. Innovation creates disproportionate value for the same resources. You see this in many new start-up businesses: they create huge value from limited resources. This is the essence of entrepreneurship.

Innovation and entrepreneurship generally come together to create unprecedented value for society. 🌱

“ **Science and technology are the foundations on which the human race advances. Modern medicine has been able to help us conquer disease, increase life spans and help lead healthier lives.** ”

One of the three pillars on which Dr. Reddy's has been built is Science and Technology. The other two being Progressive People Practices and Good Governance.

Deep Science and Technology are a part of our DNA. Our Founder was a scientist-entrepreneur and our respect for science is based on his passion for scientific innovation.

We pride ourselves on our research capabilities built on the work of some of the best scientists and researchers in the industry. 🌿



Asian Openbill



Marabou Storks



Asian Woolly-necked Storks



Great Thick-knees

“ **Entrepreneurs are defined by three factors: Concept, Capability and Culture.** ”



Entrepreneurs are those who develop the concept for a product or service, build the capabilities to execute on the concept, and shape the organisational culture.

This is the definition of what an entrepreneur does as articulated by Satya Nadella when he visited the T-hub, an incubator for start-ups in Hyderabad. He talked about entrepreneurship being – creating the right concept, creating capability in the organisation, and building a distinctive culture.

The leader or the CEO should be the curator of the culture in the enterprise. 🦋

“
A leader is one who can motivate his or her colleagues and get things done without making them feel that it was the leader who actually had the idea and got the work done.
”



A leader is someone who motivates their colleagues and peers and gets things done. Real leaders do not worry about taking credit, being overly visible, or enjoying the status and perquisites of being a leader.

They focus not on themselves but on getting ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

They actually make their teams believe that they did everything and that it was their idea to complete the work without being concerned about taking personal credit. 



Bald Eagle



Grey-headed Swamphens

“
You can do a lot more and create much greater impact if you do not claim or take credit for your work.
”



We encourage our people to not use the word “I” excessively. In my view, people who use the word “I” excessively are focusing attention on themselves and not the collective. Such people cannot create impact through large teams.

People who achieve a lot do not use the word “I” too much. They do not claim credit for everything and are liberal in giving others credit. The operative word is “we” rather than “I”.

If you do not focus on claiming credit, you can achieve a lot more. 🌿

“
A great mentor is a person who sees more potential in you than you can see yourself. Such a mentor helps you become the best version of yourself.
”



Mentorship is an important element in developing leaders, and sometimes a mentor sees much more potential in an individual than they themselves can.
Everyone should have a mentor like that. ✨



Grey-headed Swampphen



Black Kite

“
If you encourage people to hire people more competent than themselves, you will build a company of giants.
If you hire people less competent than yourself, you will be like a set of Russian dolls with you being the largest doll and everyone lesser than the one above them – and it will be a company of dwarfs, with you being the biggest one.
”

”

When the leader of an organisation does not hire people smarter than him or her, then the leader is the one who defines the highest level of talent in the organisation, with the people below being less competent.

Overall, you will have a company of people with limited competence, like Russian dolls – dolls nesting within dolls. The largest doll will be the leader, and the rest will be progressively smaller.

On the other hand, if each of us hires a person smarter than us, we can be a company of giants. So, using the same Russian doll analogy, the smallest person will be the leader and everybody else will be bigger in terms of capabilities.

I believe we want to be a company of giants. 🌿



Little Cormorant



Great Cormorants

“ **Listening takes a lot less energy.** ”



God, by giving us one mouth and two ears,
may have intended for us to listen much
more than we speak.

By listening, we value the other person's
opinion and also learn from each other. 🕊



Oriental Darter and Indian Cormorant



Indian Spot-billed Ducks

“ **Smart people do not like to be controlled or told how to do things. Hire smart people, align them to what needs to be done, give them space to deliver. However, set clear boundaries on values, behaviour and alignment. Smart people if unaligned or misaligned can destroy momentum.** ”



While building Dr. Reddy's, we always placed a very high premium on intelligence, intellect and talent. I also believe that, once you hire very good people, you should not micromanage them.

You should align them to the purpose, give them the context, set boundaries in terms of values and behaviour and then allow them the freedom to deliver. ✍

“
Talented and smart people alone will not deliver results. They also need to be aligned with the direction of the company.
Lack of alignment creates huge loss of energy.
”



I have always hired very talented people but many times they come with their own minds and are not aligned to the organisation's mission.

When they are not aligned, a lot of energy is lost in the friction, and the company suffers in the end.

Competence and alignment with the company's priorities are equally important. 🦅

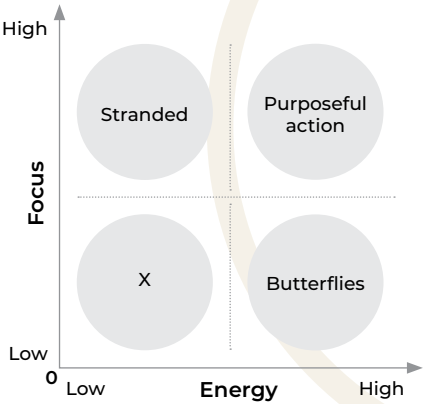


Indian Cormorant



Green-winged Teal

“ **Energy and Focus Grid.** ”



I learned this concept from Sumantra Ghoshal, a management guru and professor at the London Business School. He used this grid to explain how execution can be very good if you have both focus and energy.

We have energy on the X-axis and focus on the Y-axis on the grid.

If you have someone with low energy and low focus, it is very clear that you do not have to be worried about such a person. They should be moved out of the organisation with immediate effect.

If you have individuals with very low focus but high energy, they are like butterflies. They flit from one thing to the other, are constantly busy in action, but achieve very little.

If you have someone with high focus but low energy, they remain stranded. There is no action, only intent. You have someone who just sits and thinks about doing something, but never does it.

The ideal place to be is in the upper right hand of the quadrant, which is where you have high focus and high energy. This is the zone of purposeful action. ✍

“ **People at work are primarily motivated by:**

- **Freedom to be self-directed once they know their role and expectations from the role**
- **Opportunity for mastering meaningful skills that matter, and are in demand**
- **A higher purpose – contributing to make the world a better place**

Design your culture, policies and systems based on these three elements to build an engaging workplace. ”

It is a well-established fact that financial compensation alone has limits as a motivator. Healthy compensation is, of course, a hygiene factor. The three things that are most important for an organisation to attract and retain talented people are freedom to be self-directed, opportunities to learn meaningful skills and a higher purpose. We have to design our workplace, our culture, and our policies and systems based on these three elements.

Granting people the freedom to do their work without micromanaging them, once they know their role and expectations, is the freedom to be self-directed.

People want to achieve mastery over something that they consider meaningful, and the organisation should provide opportunities for them to attain these skills and master them.

Every employee should see the connection between his or her work and a higher purpose. For example, in our case, “Good Health Can’t Wait”, is something that we all relate to, and each of us can understand the impact of our work on the purpose.

If we can design our work environment, culture, and policies to achieve these three elements, the result will be a highly engaged and talented workforce. ✍



Snowy Sheathbill



Indian Skimmers, Mugger and Gharial

“
Contribution, not credentials should determine a person's worth – many people believe that their education or prior work experience is the reason they should advance in a company.
However, once in a company – only performance and contribution should be the criteria for advancements, not credentials.
”



Many people with excellent credentials come into the organisation and act as if they are privileged, because of their great education, background, or work experience.

However, in my view, once someone has joined a company, credentials should not matter.

Contribution to the organisation's progress should be the only measure to judge a person. 



Barnacle Goose

“
A fish cannot climb a tree. Expectations mismatch can lead to labelling someone as incompetent; like asking a fish to climb a tree and when it cannot do so, labelling it as incompetent.
”



I have seen leaders label people as incompetent by assigning them tasks for which they are untrained or unprepared.

If you ask a fish to climb a tree like a monkey, it cannot do it. That does not make the fish incompetent. ✨

“
The defining challenge for a company’s leadership is to preserve and enhance the integrity of its most valuable assets – Values, Culture, Guiding Principles, and the Trust it enjoys.
”



A company’s most valuable assets are the intangibles – Values, Culture, Guiding Principles and Trust. These are very important for a company but are often not considered as assets.

They comprise the soul of the company, and it is important for leadership to preserve and enhance this soul. 🦋



Black-winged Stilts



Gentoo Penguins

“ **PATCOL: People Are The Currency Of Life.** ”



Nothing significant can be achieved without people. Deep, authentic relationships are key to achievement as well as lasting happiness. Relationships can help in major ways in business and in one’s personal journey.

Many major deals are based on the trust of a good relationship. Getting governments to help clear hurdles, bankers to clear proposals, and acquiring customers are possible due to good relationships.

Leaders build relationships and develop influence by doing favours and helping others without expecting immediate returns or benefits. 🕊



Chinstrap Penguin

“
Create a path that makes it easy for good people to do the right things and they will do it.
”

”

Often in business, we see people taking shortcuts, when doing the right thing involves more effort and difficulty. We have seen this in our quality systems and various compliance systems, where complexity creeps in and makes it difficult for people to do the right thing.

Therefore, my advice to management is to make it easy for everybody to do the right thing. If it is easier to do it right, they will do it. Compliance to rules and values must be made simple and easy for everyone in the company. ✍



Scaly-breasted Munia

“
A few average people cannot replace a great leader or team member. They create disproportionate impact and are not fungible.
”



Organisations have a few outstanding leaders – stars who create disproportionate impact through their work. We need to ensure we do not lose such great talent.

Talent like this cannot be replaced easily.

A high performing leader can never be substituted by a group of mediocre leaders. When we discover such stars, we should do our best to retain and keep them engaged and motivated. 🦋

“**Fire jerks ASAP. Jerks are people who treat other people badly, are abusive and bullies. Even a highly talented jerk is a huge cost to the organisation. The hidden costs of a jerk are too high. Institute a “no jerks” policy.**”

– Robert Sutton

This is from a book written by Robert Sutton, the title of which is too colourful to mention here. Certain people in the company, even if they are high performers, are bullies: they treat people badly, behave badly with peers, and treat subordinates rudely. The company should eject these people as soon as possible because the cost of a jerk is very high.

Every company should be wary of tolerating such people just because they deliver results. We see this a lot in companies.

We should also not hire such jerks, and a “no jerks” policy is something that is recommended by the author for all organisations. 🕊



Yellow-throated Longclaw



Crimson-breasted Shrike

“
You cannot be a great professional unless you have some functional depth. A generalist without depth and functional excellence is hollow.
”

”

Without depth in a discipline, one cannot gain credibility. Everyone needs some functional depth before they look for breadth.

This is my advice to leaders who start out in an organisation. Especially, MBAs who want to move quickly into general management positions.

If you do not gain functional depth in the initial years of your career, you will never have the opportunity to gain it again, and you will be somewhat superficial. ✍



Chinstrap Penguins

“ **Authenticity is perfect congruence between:**

- **Who you think you are**
- **Who others think you are**
- **Who you really are**

”



Authenticity is when who you think you are, who others think you are, and who you are – all are in perfect congruence and are aligned. When they are not aligned, you feel like an imposter, and it creates a state of inauthenticity. 🌿



Purple Grackle

“ **Four ways to create the foundation for great leadership, a great organisation, and a great personal life:**

- **Authenticity: Being and acting consistent with who you hold yourself out to be for others, and who you hold yourself to be for yourself. To be authentic about your in-authenticities makes you more authentic**
- **Being cause in the matter: Taking the stand that you are the cause of everything in your life. You give up the right to blame others or the environment**
- **Commit to something larger than oneself: Being committed to something bigger than your personal concerns for yourself. This becomes the source of your passion**
- **Integrity: A commitment to honour your word and inform others affected that you will be unable to honour your word as soon as you become aware that you will not be able to keep your word**

”

– Adapted from Harvard Business School NOM Research Paper No. 14-027 by Werner Erhard and Michael Jensen

This set of foundational knowledge is shared with the participants in our New Horizons Leadership Program (NHLP). This is our signature leadership development effort for senior and mid-career leaders.

Being authentic is about recognising our own inner qualities. Each of us is inauthentic in some ways, and to understand that and be open about it is in itself being authentic.

The second point here is about “being cause in the matter”. This implies that you take responsibility for whatever is happening in your life. You do not blame others. You may not be the person causing this whole issue, but you still take responsibility for fixing the issue.

For everything that is happening in your career and in your life, you give up the right to blame others or circumstances and instead take personal responsibility to deal with the situation and find solutions.

The third point is about committing to a cause that is larger than you are. This is about being purpose-driven, contributing to the world, and making it a better place.

The last point is about integrity. Integrity is about honouring your word. If you make a commitment, you must honour it. That would be the operating principle, and if you know that you are not going to be able to meet your commitment, you should communicate this right away to the affected people. ✍

“
My Life is My Message”
– M K Gandhi

Mahatma Gandhi's statement, "My life is my message" is very inspirational to me. Gandhi's life conveys his philosophies much more powerfully than anything written by him does.

When leaders speak, followers are not just listening; they are also observing what the leader is doing. Your actions speak louder than your voice. Values and philosophies are best lived before they are preached. 🕊



Indian Roller



Cape Starling

“
Authentic leaders align people around a shared mission and values, empowering them to lead, while serving all stakeholders and collaborating with others to sustain superior results.
”

”

An important role for leaders in a company is to build alignment – alignment around purpose, mission and values. This makes it clear what the company will do and what it will not. This leads to empowering everyone to do the right thing and in that process work well with each other, collaborating to deliver better outcomes for all stakeholders. ✍

“**Find your Ikigai – your reason for being – at the centre of passion, mission, vocation and profession. Find meaning in your life, how does your life make the world a better place?**”

”

I was very inspired by this Venn diagram reflecting the Japanese concept of Ikigai.

“Ikigai” is a word in Japanese that combines the terms “iki”, meaning “alive” or “life,” and “gai”, meaning “benefit” or “worth.” In broad terms it stands for what drives you and what you stand for – your very reason for being.

My advice to many upcoming leaders in the organisation has always been to find that sweet spot where you love what you’re doing, what the world needs, what you can be paid for, and what you can be very good at.

When you find that sweet spot, pursue it relentlessly. 🌿



Baya Weaver (male)



Bald Eagle

“**Find the work that you love. Find meaning, purpose and passion, and once you find that go after it with all your energy.**”

– Inspired by Steve Jobs



Steve Jobs, in his commencement speech at Stanford University, urged students to look for meaningful work.

This is similar to the concept of Ikigai. When he tells people to find work that they enjoy, he is asking them to discover meaning, purpose, and passion. And, that once they find it, they should go after it with all their energy. 🌿

“
Have some passion outside of work and encourage passion of the team outside work.
This will bring the passion back to the work place.
”

”

Passionate people are the only ones who can change the world. I try to encourage people to pursue their passions, whether it is a hobby, dance, art, sports, science, or anything else.

People who do not have passions outside of work are unidimensional and not very interesting as individuals.

People want their leaders to be versatile and interesting. I also believe that passionate people bring some of their passion to work and that makes a huge difference. 🌿



Eurasian Hoopoe



Indian White-eyes

“
Be a conceiver. Conceivers are passionate strategists and big picture thinkers with broad intellectual strengths, who can absorb large volumes of information at a glance and quickly identify what is most important.
”



This is about a leader being a conceiver. Conceivers are very rare. These people can think big. They are broad in their intellect, can absorb a large amount of information quickly, integrate it, rapidly identify what is most important, and then drive action.

Conceivers are passionate strategists who look at the big picture holistically, think end-to-end from the value chain perspective, and focus on the most important priorities.

The best leaders are conceivers first. 

“

Happiness is:

- **Peace of mind – freedom from guilt, fear or anger**
- **Good health and high energy**
- **Financial independence**
- **Loving and caring relationships**
- **Meaning from work**
- **Realising your potential**

”



These are some key takeaways that I learnt from some friends. We discussed what happiness means to each of us, and when we put it together, we came up with this definition.

This is what happiness means to us collectively. 



Pied Bushchat (male)



Purple Sunbird (male)

“**Worrying does not stop the bad things from happening but stops you from enjoying the good things that are happening.**”

”

Worrying about future situations that may occur will not prevent bad things from happening. However, you lose your perspective of the current moment, and become unable to enjoy the good that is happening right now. ✨

“ **Living a meaningful life never comes easy. It is difficult but fulfilling. You cannot lead a happy life without meaning in what you do; without purpose and passion!** ”

Often, we give up on finding meaning in our work and just drift through careers, without a strong purpose or passion.

“ We need to put in serious effort to find meaning in our work. We will still have a lot of difficulties and challenges along the path, but that work will be truly fulfilling, when it is meaningful and aligns with our purpose. ”



Black Drongo



Green Bee-eater and Purple Sunbird

“**The only way to be truly satisfied is to do what you believe is great work, and the only way to do great work is to love what you do. If you have not found it yet, keep looking, and do not settle. As with all matters of the heart, you will know when you find it.**

And, like any great relationship, it just gets better and better as the years roll on. So keep looking, don't settle.

”

– Steve Jobs

”

This quote is from Steve Jobs. I have seen many people do shoddy work with a mind-set of “it doesn't matter” and “it is not so important in the overall scheme of things”.

I come across many trivial mistakes in the work done by leaders. They do not pay attention to the little things and let shoddy work pass through. A plausible reason for this lack of passion for excellence might be that they are not doing the work they love. It is my belief that whatever you do is worth doing well.

According to Steve, the only way you get inner satisfaction is by doing great work. To do great work you need to do the work that you love. Steve's advice is to keep looking until you find the work that you truly love, and not to settle and do mediocre work that you do not enjoy doing.

You should not settle until you find work that you truly enjoy doing, and you should pursue greatness through your work. ✍

“
No matter what people do to us, we can always choose to respond with grace and spiritual strength – we can always control how we respond even if we can’t predict how others will act.
”

This reference has been taken from a book by Mo Gawdat about happiness. It is about people reacting adversely to a situation.

Even if people are rude to you or not nice to you, you can always control how you respond. You can act with grace and your inner spiritual strength. Once you do that, you can always retain control and not become reactive. 🌿



Oriental Pied-Hornbill



Thick-billed Murre



Ring-Billed Gulls



Spotted Owlet

“
**Be careful about what you say to
someone today as you may not have
a tomorrow to take it back.**
”



Once you make a negative remark, it is very difficult to take it back. Being thoughtful and considerate when expressing your views is necessary to avoid damage to relationships. ✨



Black-legged Kittiwakes

“
**If someone else wants to do it,
let them.**
”

“
**You can’t push a noodle, find
the right angle and pull.**
”

– Some thoughts I borrowed from
Rajat Gupta’s biography

”
In a workplace, often someone in your team will want to do a task, which is your responsibility. The author created goodwill and space for himself by allowing others to do the work if they wanted to. This is a way of becoming more productive and more effective. 🌿

”
Sometimes, you cannot force something forward. You cannot push things, when there is a situation that is analogous with a noodle – you can only pull a noodle, pushing it does not work. This means that you need to understand – when you can pull and when you can push, in order to drive outcomes. 🌿

“ **The softer you blow your trumpet,
the louder it will sound.** ”



Talking about yourself excessively is counterproductive. Even if you do not blow your own trumpet, other people will still recognise your contribution. If you remain humble, they will still value you for your contribution. 🌿



Black-legged Kittiwakes



Egyptian Geese

“**Shifting focus – fat rabbit chase.**”



“Fat rabbit chase” is a phrase used by some of my American colleagues. When a person takes aim at a rabbit and, from the corner of his eye, sees another rabbit that is bigger and shifts his gun to aim at that rabbit. Then, in the meanwhile, he sees another fat rabbit and again shifts his aim, and so on. When your aim and focus are constantly shifting, you never get to shoot the rabbit.

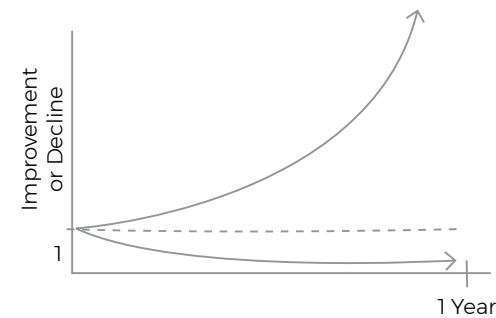
This is called a “fat rabbit chase”.

Achievers keep their focus consistent on identified priorities and don’t get constantly tempted by other seemingly better opportunities. 🌿

The Power of Tiny Gains*

1% better every day $1.01^{365} = 37.78$

1% worse every day $0.99^{365} = 0.03$



“ **Small daily improvements lead to stunning results over time.** ”

“ **One of the great keys to transformation are the daily wins that stack up into a Tsunami of change over the coming months.** ”

The context for these quotes is the significance of pursuing continuous improvement. In Japanese management parlance, they call this approach – Kaizen. If you improve a little bit every day, the cumulative impact of these small improvements over time will be very large.

If you improve 1% every day, you will be 37 times as good as you started the year with. This is the power of compounding, the benefit of compounding every improvement – small improvements every day, can add up to transformational change over time. 🕊



Little Bee-eaters



African Fish-Eagle



Indian Cormorant and Oriental Darter

“
**We overestimate the pace of change
in the short-term and underestimate
it in the long-term.**
”

– Bill Gates



This quote from Bill Gates is based on his point of view on the pace of technological change. It takes a long time to build the initial momentum for the technology, and then it builds and builds gradually, and suddenly you see the massive impact of change. 🌿



Common Kingfisher



Common Kingfisher

“ **Efficiency advantages come from reimagining the non-routine. Evolutionary advantage comes from abandoning routine – a tough balancing act.** ”

– Gary Hamel

A company needs to evolve constantly to remain relevant and competitive.

However, there are two types of competitive advantages. One is efficiency – driving efficiency by converting non-routine work into routine work. Converting work into processes, using computers to digitalise the process, and other ways to standardise. That is one type of competitive advantage – the efficiency advantage.

Competitive advantage can also come from abandoning the routine and finding new ways of doing things. This is done through creativity, innovation, and using new technologies. This type of competitive advantage is called evolutionary advantage.

Companies need to do both, reimagining the routine as well as abandoning some routines to find new ways of doing things. 🌿

“
**A process if not improved over time
will deteriorate. There is no steady
state. Either you are improving or
you are deteriorating.**
”

”

Process excellence is about continuously improving a given process. Processes if not improved on an ongoing basis tend to drift downward in terms of effectiveness – they do not stay stable with the improvements unless there is the pressure of continuous improvement. If you stop improving, the process will deteriorate.

Either you are improving the process or it is deteriorating. There is no such thing as status quo in terms of process effectiveness. So continuous improvement is very important to maintain the gains made and not let improvements unravel over time. 🌿





White-throated Kingfisher

“
Designing systems that impose greater control results in attracting people who are not smart, or who don’t take initiative.
”

”

When organisations develop policies, the emphasis on design should be not to constrain but to liberate employees.

We frequently create policies and control systems for the 1% of the population that misuse the system. However, 99% of people must endure the agony of mindless controls, designed to prevent misuse by that 1%.

When systems are highly controlling, smart people feel discouraged. We need to design systems that empower and liberate employees, not control them. 🐦

“ **Avoid creating dead-end jobs, they will come back to haunt you. Create opportunities for growth for everyone.**

Whilst many will outgrow their current responsibilities and some will move on if there are not enough opportunities within the organisation for everyone, they will add value as they transit through your company, and the ones who stay back will make a big difference.

This is a real win-win-win strategy – for your company, for the individual, and for society. ”

This describes the philosophy behind the Self-Managed Teams system in our industrial operations at Dr. Reddy's. As part of this system, we bring in people after the 12th grade and provide them training and formal education, while they work. They get a formal education with a degree while they work in a job, learning while earning and become very useful executives.

The idea here is that every employee, whether it is a factory worker, an office worker, or an executive, needs to have the opportunity to grow, and sometimes a lack of formal education gets in the way of vertical or horizontal growth.

We want every job to be an avenue for the person's growth. This being the operating principle, we created this system for the least-skilled jobs. Hiring talent for the Self-Managed Teams, moving them up the skill ladder, giving them a formal education, and making them people who can grow in the organisation. In essence, we do not want any job in the organisation to be a dead-end job, but rather a job from which people can advance.

As we are recruiting people who cannot afford education, and giving them a formal education, a means to grow, earn a living, and be part of a company with a purpose, this will benefit the individual and society while creating value for the company through a highly trained and motivated worker. 🌱



Baya Weaver (female)



Pied Kingfisher

“
To grow vertically a company must have strong horizontal and cross-functional processes. Accountability to deliver value to the customers must be clear for every role. Strong horizontal processes to manage workflow and outcomes are the foundations essential for growth.
”

Sometimes, in our rush for growth, we do not focus on how value is delivered in an organisation. While management processes and functional departments are organised vertically, most processes to deliver value to the customer are horizontal.

The value chain cuts across various functions and businesses, and hence, designing those processes to deliver value across functional silos is critical.

Without strong horizontal processes, vertical growth is not possible. Handling scale is difficult without good horizontal processes. They will grow a little and then fail. Horizontal processes should be fixed before pursuing scale and growth. 🐦



Black Oystercatcher

“
De-constrain the business – recognise what is constraining growth and work on that aspect.
Everything in life can be improved; however, the overall results improve only when the constraint is addressed. If you improve many things, but the constraint is unchanged, results do not happen.
Often the constraint is at the top (the bottleneck of the bottle is at the top of the bottle).
Often, CEOs are acting one or two levels below their level, doing what they love the most – not what needs to be done to create value.
”

”
The bottleneck, as we all know, is at the top of the bottle. At times, it is the CEO, who becomes the bottleneck for an organisation, because instead of doing what is required for the organisation, they work at a position one or two levels below their own because they enjoy doing that work.

They are happy doing work with which they are familiar. This results in the long-term health of the company suffering, and people below them not being accountable for their areas of work.

To de-constrain the business, the CEO should not be the bottleneck of the company. A CEO should recognise how they can become the bottleneck and play their role effectively. 🌿



Black Oystercatcher



Black Oystercatchers

“
**The most important work of a CEO
is to hire the right people and fire
the wrong people.**
”



The primary role of a CEO is to ensure that the top team consists of the best available talent to execute on the organisational agenda.

Often, CEOs do not act on changing the composition of the team for fear of disruption. They end up compensating for the ineptitude and tolerate underperformance.

In my view, this leads to poor outcomes. I believe that the most important task of a CEO is to hire the right people and move out those who are not suitable. 



White-throated Kingfisher



White-Eyed Buzzard

“
**Ensure the monkey is on the back
of the right person.**
”

– Harvard Business Review article
by William Oncken and Donald Wass

”

I borrowed this phrase from an article in the Harvard Business Review about effective delegation.

The idea is that once you put a monkey on someone else's back, if that person is the right person for the job and the monkey is the job to be done, you should always make sure the monkey does not return to you.

Inadvertently, when you delegate a task, the individual comes back to you and asks you a question about the task, and suddenly the monkey has jumped from their back to yours. You need to ensure that the monkey is not on your back, but on the back of the right person to complete the task. 🐒





Pied Kingfishers

“
**The 3 I’s that I look at, when evaluating
leaders and potential hires are:
Integrity, Intelligence and Integration.**
”

Someone asked me the question, “What do you look for in a person when you hire leaders?” This was my answer:

I first look for integrity. If the person does not have integrity, nothing else matters.

Second, I look for intelligence. Intelligence is a proxy for competence, capabilities, or the ability to manage work and people effectively.

Third is integration. The ability to get along with and work well with people, lead teams, and develop other people’s skills. 🕊

“
The harder a CEO is pushed to increase shareholder value, the more the CEO will be tempted to make moves that actually hurt the shareholders.
”

”

It is time to discard the popular belief, that first and foremost, corporations must maximise value for their shareholders. This is inhumane and tragically flawed.

In recent times, CEOs have been pushed hard for financial outcomes. Quarterly numbers matter a lot, but when you put excessive pressure on the CEO, there is every chance that the CEO will make moves that will actually hurt the shareholders in the long run, like cutting important capital investments or not doing the right things, to show short-term results.

A good CEO has to take a holistic perspective and not trade the long-term for the short-term. 🦋



Common Ostrich



Lilac-breasted Roller

“
**Never compromise the long-term
for a short-term benefit.**
”



This is advice given to me by a business leader I respect.

I have seen many CEOs and leaders compromise the long-term benefit of the company for a short-term benefit. It is like, for example: cutting R&D because we want to meet the quarter's numbers. The quarter's numbers are important, but doing the right kind of R&D is even more important. Similarly, developing people is very important. 🦋



Spotted Owlets



Collared Owlet



Dusky Eagle-Owl

“
**The CEO is a stage manager,
not the lead actor.**
”



A CEO is not the lead actor. CEOs should not be overly concerned with being the ideal heroic and charismatic leader all of the time. In reality, they are stage managers orchestrating actions on the stage by placing and directing the right people.

They have to find the right actor for each role or the right executive for every task, helping them to achieve excellence and success at work. 🦋



Common Ostrich



Himalayan Griffons

“
If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.
”

– Antoine de Saint-Exupéry



You cannot do great things or achieve greatness by dividing a task, giving it to people; asking them to do it, and closely supervising them. You need to inspire them with the greater purpose of what they are doing and get them excited about the larger outcome.

For example, we find solutions to unmet medical needs. We make our products more affordable, making them more accessible to many people.

If we can inspire people around a purpose, their commitment to work and finding meaning in their work come together and drive a much higher level of performance. 🌱

“
Sustainability to me is:

- **Creating positive impact for the planet and people, while creating profits**
- **Meeting the needs of today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs**

”



Many people have various views and definitions about what sustainability is. One example is creating value by enhancing the planet's health and people's needs while generating profits.

This is the 3P model of sustainability – Planet, People, Profit.

The other definition is about meeting today's needs without jeopardising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. 🌿



Ruppell's Vulture



Lappet-faced Vulture

“**Balance your view between the “here and now” and the future.**

Think of yourself as someone who can:

- **Be a performer on the dance floor and also see the entire dance from the balcony**
- **See both the forest and the trees**
- **Zoom in to focus on the details and zoom out to see the bigger picture**

”

Looking at the details as well as seeing the broad perspective, are referred to here, as being on the dance floor and the balcony.

Suppose you are on the dance floor. You are busy dancing, so you cannot see the whole dance from end-to-end or the larger patterns of the dance. If you want to see the dance from end-to-end, you need to go to the balcony.

Leaders need to be both on the dance floor and occasionally also on the balcony to see both the details and the end-to-end perspective.

A similar analogy is about seeing both the forest and the trees. I learnt to see the big picture and the forest from Dr. Reddy – my father-in-law, and the details from my father. My father was a very detail-oriented person. So I developed the ability to effortlessly zoom in and zoom out – analogous to my photography skills with the camera. This helps me understand both the intricate detail and the context of the larger perspective. 🕊

“ **The secret to having it all is recognising that you already have it all.** ”

”

Each of us is already blessed with many things in life. Contentment with what we have and gratitude for everything positive in our life is the secret to happiness. Recognising this will provide us with the satisfaction of having it all. 🌿



Lappet-faced Vulture and Ruppell's Vultures



Bateleur

“**Every business has a higher purpose. It is the job of the leaders to clarify it and align the organisation to this higher purpose.**”

”

This quote came from my reading of the book, “Refresh” by Satya Nadella on his journey to reinvent Microsoft.

While Bill Gates, the original founder, had the vision of putting a desktop on every desk, the world had evolved and Microsoft needed to clarify to itself what its purpose was. Satya did this and re-energised the organisation by redefining its vision to help people do more in their lives. ✍



Crested Hawk-Eagle



Spotted Owlet

“ **There are four paths, often to be pursued sequentially to build a start-up into a business which is successful.** ”

Path to a differentiated product or service – This phase requires the founders to think deeply of the problem they are solving through their offerings. They need to think of the difference the product is making to the potential user, what is the value of what they are providing, who the customers are, and why they will pay for the product or service

Path to profit – This phase requires the entrepreneurs to think of how they could get to profitability as fast as possible. Understanding and building the business model, cost structure, break-even points and driving to making the business cash flow positive and profitable are the priorities

Path to excellence – Once the viability of the business is established, the start-up must focus on operational excellence. This includes defining work process across functions, standardising whatever should be repeatedly performed, building the capabilities that are needed, driving ongoing and continuous improvements, focusing on customer delight, and, of course using the tools of digital and IT to drive excellence

Path to scale – Path to scale is possible when all the above three paths are navigated successfully. Market share expansion, new customer segments, new geographies and other ways to expand the target market become priorities 🦉



Spotted Owlets



Gentoo Penguin

“ The Living Company ”

– Arie de Geus

Early on, in my career, I was deeply influenced by a book “The Living Company” written by a Royal Dutch Shell executive Arie de Geus. The book summarises the characteristics of long-lived companies.

These companies know who they are, understand how they fit into the world, value new ideas and new people, and husband their money in a way that allows them to grow their future.

The defining elements of these living companies are:

- Conservatism in financing
- Sensitivity to the world around them
- Awareness of their identity
- Tolerance of new ideas
- Valuing people, not assets
- Loosening the steering and control
- Organisation for learning
- Shaping the human communities

I shall refer to companies, which have these characteristics as living companies.

In my own ways, I have tried to incorporate these ideas into the companies that I have stewarded over the last three decades.

In the following pages, I have tried to describe each of the elements, which I have extracted from the Harvard Business Review article by the same author (March-April 1997 issue). ✍

“ **Conservatism in financing** ”

Living companies treat their capital with great care. Being conservative in investing, frugal in spending and always having buffers has helped these companies be prepared for unexpected adversities as well as attractive opportunities. Financial strength allowed them to govern their growth and evolution as most appropriate. 🌿



Bald Eagle



Crested Serpent-Eagle

“ **Sensitivity to the world around them** ”



Living companies are able to adapt themselves to changes in the world around them. They keep track of environmental changes; changes in macroeconomics; technology trends, and are well prepared to react in a timely fashion when needed.

They excel at learning and adapting. 

“ **Awareness of their identity** ”



Living companies have complete clarity of who they are, what their purpose is and what their role in the world is. Each unit has a sense of belonging to the larger organisation and its achievements.

Leaders in the living companies consider themselves as stewards of an outstanding enterprise; their top priority is leaving the institution healthier and better than it had been, when they took over. 🦅



Black-shouldered Kite



Indian Peafowl

“ **Tolerance of new ideas** ”



Long-lived companies not only tolerated out-of-the-box ideas and experimented, but also actually encouraged new business ideas and innovative processes.

Breakthrough technologies resulted out of the tolerance and encouragement of activities seemingly unrelated to the core. 

“ **Valuing people, not assets** ”



Long-lived companies value their people much more than their physical assets. It is apparent in their culture; the way they react to adversities as well as how they manage themselves, that the enterprise is primarily its people. 🌿



Peregrine Falcon



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater

“ **Loosening the steering and control** ”

A living company gives its people space and freedom to develop ideas.

With greater autonomy and some degree of tolerance for failure, the leaders in such organisations may bring more freshness in their ideas and thinking, leading to true innovation.

In adversity – thoughtfulness in pruning costs and people, leads to greater commitment from people and greater resilience to the organisation. 🌿



Grey Heron and Little Ringed Plovers

“ **Organisation for learning** ”

A living company places high emphasis on learning. Not just individual learning but organisational learning.

In the book the author describes how in flocking birds – Blue Tits, every bird in the species learns a new skill, whereas in territorial birds like Red Robins, only few enterprising individuals learn.

Thus, a living company is more like birds that flock together and learn new skills and adaptation from each other like the Blue Tits rather than territorial birds like Red Robins which end up not learning as a whole species. 🦋



Common Kingfisher

“
Shaping the human communities
”



A purpose-driven company committed to long-term sustainability and to create value for all stakeholders is like a river.

The river is a self-perpetuating community with its own built-in guarantees for the continuity and motion of water within its banks. A company by its action with its stakeholders can emulate the river’s longevity and power.

Like new water entering the river and also leaving the river, people join the company and some of them leave. The river is ever changing but is also constant in its flow. The river is perpetual unlike a puddle of water.

Living companies are like rivers whereas companies focused on the short term are like puddles of water.

A puddle is temporary while the river is perpetual. 🌿



Indian Nightjar





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PHOTOGRAPHY