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Title : Go Kiss the World — Life Lessons for the Young Professional

Author : Subroto Bagchi

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Lessons we can draw from . . .

MindTree's co-founder, Subroto Bagchi realised that he could create the best value for his organisation and thus for its stakeholders by becoming a 'Gardener'. No, you will not spot him tending to the plants outside MindTree's premises, even though gardening, as we understand it, is one of his many hobbies.

Instead you will find him discussing personal and professional issues on a one-to-one basis with the top 100 minds at MindTree and helping them find the path towards leadership. This 'gardening' process is well-thought out in design and approach. It begins with the interviewee having to answer a basic but wide ranging set of questions from : Who am I? to What do I want to be? Only if you can understand yourself and are comfortable in your own skin, can you lead others.

One could perhaps envy those who get an opportunity to participate in these sessions. But, take heart, the Gardener has shared his wisdom in his recently released book, 'Go Kiss the World'. In case you are curious about the origins of this title, well, this is what his mother told him, her last words to him actually, as he set off for the United States.

Promoted by Penguin Publications as being an inspiration to 'young India' and to those who come from 'small-town' India, even I who cannot claim stake to either, learnt more than a few home truths. Subroto touches various personal experiences, right from his early childhood days in Orissa; his tenure in various organisations; his special relationship with colleagues and superiors at Wipro where he put in several years of work; co-founding of MindTree and his role today. These experiences and

a willingness to learn from each of them have helped him to be a better human being and a much admired entrepreneur. There is something in this book for everyone, be he or she, a chartered accountant or a software engineer.

Let me share with you three of my favourite nuggets, before I move on to the very core of this book. I have encountered these situations and maybe so have you. But, as this book is a landmine of anecdotal wisdom, it is likely that your favourite nuggets may be different altogether.

— **Perception issues** : A change in your career? Or a new job in a new environment? Or a meeting with a potential new client? There are countless books that tell you how to appear for that job interview or how to make that perfect PowerPoint presentation. But these books miss out on an important issue — perception. People are bound to have certain perceptions about you, based not only on what little they know of you, but perhaps also, on what they have heard about you — perceptions, believe me are hard to change.

Subroto recalls his experience in this regard. He had returned to Wipro, India from overseas. Back then, Wipro was known to be a frugal corporation. Subroto was perceived as not being cost-conscious and this got reflected in his 360 degree feedback. The same feedback was repeated again. His then boss, Dr. Mitta (a well-known Bangalore-based entrepreneur) told him: While it takes long to build perceptions, it takes even longer for perceptions to change. As Subroto advises: In our work we need to be sensitive to feedback and work to correct ourselves, but we should not expect people to change what they think of us overnight. This should not cause us to lose spirit — negative public opinion most often has some basis and we must have the grace to accept it.

Carrying past baggage :

Perhaps we are not even conscious of the past heavy baggage that we are carrying. Yet, it is this baggage that could be stopping us from achieving our fullest potential. May be we are carrying the burden of an unfair appraisal, a nasty boss, office politics, personal problems or even childhood experiences/memories. Here, Subroto provides a glimpse into his father's life — who was demoted to a second-class judicial magistrate because he refused a transfer from out of Orissa to Bihar for personal reasons.

Thorns cannot be avoided; we all have to step on them sometime or the other. Yet, the important issue is how do we deal with the thorns. We need to learn from the pain and move on. Blaming the thorn (such as the officer who ordered the demotion) will merely cloud your judgement and your perception of your own life, explains Subroto.

Displacement is powerful :

Well, this point comes across in various chapters of the book. But let me relate it to something which we CA's would experience first hand. As article clerks, we knew exactly what we were expected to do — we did not have to paint a blank canvas, just assist in drawing a line or two. As we gained experience and expertise our roles changed. We may one day have to lead in painting the blank canvas, what then? Or perhaps we are already leading teams and are wondering whether we are on the right path.

At Azim Premji's (Wipro's chairperson) behest, Subroto had to create a road map to usher in change. "In times like these, it is essential to put down what you want to achieve within the next 90 days" he cites in his book. It is also vital to hold a longer term view and not get upset with minor hurdles. Taking a diverse team along with you is no easy task, more so, yes-men are not always the ideal team members. Subroto writes : The job of leaders is to build high personal comfort with contrarians who think differently, create alternative points of view and have the power to question the stage of things.

The last chapter, which is also the book title, is the core of the book. Listed in this chapter are seventeen important lessons that the author learnt in life. While you must read the book to know them all, my top three are :

The power to receive :

This is far more important than the power to give. Subroto illustrates a family with four children. The inputs from the parents were the same, yet they grew up to be very different people. "The power is then not in the giving; it is in the extended hand that receives. What matters is the capability to catalyze what you have received." After reading this book, I have made sure to listen more often and to listen more closely.

Connect with people :

Perhaps you have noticed how you are willing to walk that extra mile for that one particular boss? What is it that this person has? Well he or she has made a connection with you. "It is our empathy that helps us connect with the world. When a leader connects at the level of feelings, he can get his people to aspire to dizzying heights and create in them the will and ability to scale them." This perhaps should be read jointly with another point, "The marginal person is important". — In other words, the lesson is — Be nice to your juniors and they will walk to the end of the world for you. Do not waste your time trying to please the big bosses. When you focus on the small folk, you create a constituency that no boss can ever ignore!

Self doubt is positive :

We are all entitled to self doubt, after all, sometime or the other we do find ourselves standing at the crossroads. Go ahead, question yourself. From self doubt emerges a conviction and with it comes the capability to do it, or as Subroto says to : GO KISS THE WORLD.

Subroto's articles can be found on :
www.mindtree.com/subrotobagchi



There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance; that imitation is suicide; that he must take himself for better, for worse, as his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given him to till. The power which resides in him is new in Nature, and none but he knows what that is which he can do, nor does he know until he has tried.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson