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# WHO OWNS YOUR ATTENTION?

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# Attention is the new currency

**THERE WAS A TIME** when attention was a by-product of interest. Today, it has become the product itself. Every platform we use is designed to hold us, study us, and shape us. What we watch, how long we stay, what we skip, and what we return to are signals in a system that is constantly learning how to keep us engaged.

For students, this is a daily negotiation. A lecture competes with a notification. A reading competes with a reel. The intention to focus is often clear, but the environment is engineered for interruption. The result is fragmentation—a way of thinking in which ideas are encountered briefly, reacted to quickly, and rarely held long enough to fully form.

This is the logic of the attention economy. It rewards immediacy, amplifies what is engaging over what is meaningful, and often favours reaction over reflection. It is why a fifteen-second clip can travel further than a fifteen-page argument, and why trends can feel more urgent than truths.

Popular culture reflects this change. Even as cinema continues to evolve—from the spectacle of RRR to the scale of Oppenheimer—the experience of watching is increasingly interrupted, paused, and resumed in fragments. Sport, too, has adapted. The rise of leagues like the Indian Premier League has also reimagined the way it is consumed—faster, tighter, and designed to hold attention in shorter bursts. Even music has felt the shift, with songs reaching their hook within seconds rather than minutes.

None of this is inherently negative. Innovation reshapes form. The challenge lies in what we lose when speed becomes the default. Depth requires time. Understanding requires patience. Original thought requires staying with an idea beyond the first reaction it provokes.

This is where Spark finds its relevance. It exists as a conscious space. A space where ideas are allowed to stretch, where arguments are developed, and where expression is not bound by the need to capture attention in the shortest possible time.

The cover story on the attention economy examines the systems that compete for our focus, but it also raises a quieter and more important question: what do we choose to give our attention to, and why? What we engage with consistently becomes part of how we see the world.

The contributors to this edition have made a deliberate choice. In a culture that rewards speed, they have chosen to stay with their ideas. In a system that favours reaction, they have chosen reflection.

As you read Spark, the invitation is simple. Read without rushing. Let an argument unfold. In a time when attention is constantly pulled outward, there is quiet value in choosing where it rests. Because, in the end, what we attend to does more than occupy our time. It shapes what we become.


## The 2-Minute Pause

A new book titled *'Wallet – Money Lessons They Didn't Teach in School'* was launched at the IITM Research Park by value investor Anand Srinivasan.

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### Attention Economy:
# WHO OWNS YOUR ATTENTION?




**THE TEAM** Successverse SPARK Vol.01 Spark 03 – 31 March 2026

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HOBBIES

# Don't ignore your love at 15

The basic human design is to feel a sense of accomplishment. Pursuing a hobby is the easiest and most effective way to achieve that.

**THERE WERE** about thirty people in the room. I asked, 'Tell me one thing about yourself that many people do not know.' The answers started coming: 'I used to collect coins', 'I was a debater in school', 'I represented my district in badminton', and so on. One by one, they shared pieces of their past—hobbies, talents, and achievements they had quietly left behind.

Then I asked a follow-up question: 'Why are you not continuing this?' There was complete silence. Then slowly, the answers came: 'I became very busy', 'No time', 'The rat race, you know'.

**Venkatesh Athreya**

*A transformation consultant, and a leadership coach*

## WHY HOBBIES MATTER

As human beings, we are designed to feel accomplished. We need to feel we have achieved something. That is basic human design. But here's the problem: when people cannot feel a sense of accomplishment in healthy ways, they sometimes seek attention through negative behaviour.

That's the difficult truth. But here's the encouraging part: hobbies give you a positive sense of accomplishment. When you set a personal goal—learn a song on the guitar, run a 5,000-metre race, or solve a Rubik's Cube in under two minutes—and you achieve it, you feel fulfilled. Because you chose it, and you cracked it.

## WHAT HOBBIES DO

At 45, I decided to learn tennis. When I showed up, everyone else was in their teens. I was the only adult. That itself was an experience. But when I was on that court, I didn't think about work problems. I didn't worry about deadlines, emails, or difficult conversations. Those thoughts disappeared.

That's what hobbies do. They pull you completely into the present. I've seen this with friends, too. Some of them started by joining a running club a few years ago. Today, they're running marathons. It has become part of who they are.

Life will throw challenges at you all the time. Problems don't stop coming just because you're busy or tired. But when you have a hobby, you have a cushion—something that grounds you and reminds you that there's more to life than the problem in front of you right now.

## THE PROFESSIONAL TRAP

Many people think accomplishment should come from their profession. Sometimes it does. But for many, professional work can become mundane. You're doing it for the monthly pay. So, there's a possibility that you won't feel a sense of engagement or accomplishment. But in the case of a personal hobby, you decide what you want to do. Interest comes automatically. Control comes naturally. And accomplishment becomes real. ■

## WHAT TO DO THIS WEEK

Here's my question to you: 'What did you love doing at 15?

Drawing? Dancing? Coding for fun? Playing a sport? Writing stories?'

If you've stopped doing that, ask yourself, 'Why?'

Here are three steps for you:

**1. Pick one thing you used to love and haven't done in a while. Just one. Don't overthink it.**

**2. Give it 30 minutes this week—not to become great, but to reconnect and see how it feels.**

**3. Notice what happens. Do problems fade? Does time disappear? Do you feel lighter?**

You don't need to be at a professional level. You don't need to win competitions. You need to do something that pulls you in. That's enough. That day, a few participants came to me and said, 'I am going to restart something I have dropped.' One person said, "I didn't realise I'd been missing this."

You might be missing it, too.

ATTENTION ECONOMY

# WHO OWNS YOUR ATTENTION?

**As information explodes, attention has become the world's most valuable resource. This story explores how it is captured, monetised, and what it means for a generation growing up online.**

## STORY…

Sometime in the 1970s, information started expanding at an accelerating, at times exponential, pace. What once took centuries to accumulate was now growing within decades. It brought us face to face with the problem of 'information overload'. After all, there is only so much data the human mind can absorb.

Celebrated psychologist Herbert A Simon observed that when information becomes abundant, attention becomes scarce. This created a gap between the overwhelming supply of information and the limited attention people can give, leading to increasing competition for that attention.

Then came the 1990s, a period of rapid technological growth, when many manual processes gradually began shifting to digital systems. With the rise of smartphones in the 2000s, social media platforms emerged, designed to capture and hold our attention.

Fast forward to 2026, and social networking has become a part of our everyday life, with user bases expanding across the world. These platforms use carefully designed features to keep audiences engaged for longer periods, and that translates into higher revenue. In today's language, it monetises attention.

However, students and young adults are caught at the centre of this battle. While there are positive impacts for learning and development, relationships and mental well-being often take a back seat. The challenge is to recognise this attention conundrum, and yet consciously reclaim control over one's time and focus.

To appreciate this better, let us delve into the world of the attention conundrum.

### INFORMATION OVERLOAD

If the 1960s can be considered as the dawn of database management systems, the 1970s turned out to be the era of structured data representation. Information got organised into rows and columns rather than inflexible hierarchies. As a result, data that was manually recorded and stored began to get computerised and moved into centralised digital storage.

Then came the advent of ad hoc queries capabilities, which allowed every user to generate reports, charts, and analytical outputs independently. A centralised database also meant that every department in an organisation had access to data.

Governments, large corporations, industry consortiums, and other institutions took advantage of this shift and leveraged the growing digital capability. But little did they understand that this growing dependence on data would lead to another challenge that they failed to foresee.

At that time, the Cold War began, new geopolitical conflicts rose, and Middle Eastern oil discoveries changed global priorities. In such a context, information was not just data; it was the new oil. And the West rushed to take control of the scenario.

### WHEN SUPPLY FALTERS DEMAND

The vast accumulation of information eventually led to analysis paralysis, where what began as efficiency slowly made decision-making more complex.

The visual representation and structured patterns did make sense, and people began to trust data unquestioningly. However, it soon became evident that not everything that appeared precise was necessarily accurate. After all, all that glitters is not gold. Interpretations increasingly relied on available data rather than the judgement of domain experts.

In turn, this led to 'data manipulation', in the sense that data got presented and interpreted in a compelling and understandable manner.

For the common man, it meant newspapers with long columns, the rise of television, radio, feature films, opinion-based news, etc. Everybody and his uncle were now experts.

For example: Sesame Street (TV show), launched in 1969 in the US for children, addressed cultural and educational gaps in an entertaining way. Content was designed to capture the attention of children within seconds, and then deliver information.

**Aravind Sundaram**
*A writer and marketing content strategist exploring consumer psychology.*

**Sesame Street (1969):** Capture attention first, then deliver information.

In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes.

This was important in an era where attention spans were shrinking. As a result, the show was highly effective in teaching real-life lessons, often complementing what children learned from their parents and teachers. In due course, it became a powerful tool, and that format of information shaped an entire generation.

This marked a phase when the demand for entertainment began to meet an oversupply of information. At the same time, people began forming ideologies from different perspectives as nations began to possess new weapons of destruction.

Amidst this rapid growth, one man offered a cautionary note on where this might lead. His name was Herbert A Simon.

## THE IGNORED WISE MAN GETS ATTENTION

Simon took note of this growing information overload. Through his theory of attention economics, he conveyed to the world that 'In an information-rich world, the wealth of information means a dearth of something else: a scarcity of whatever it is that information consumes'.

The latter, which he was referring to here, is attention. An information overload leads to a lack of attention in any specific area. He argued that designers of information systems were incorrectly representing their design problems, as they had to be viewed as attention scarcity rather than information scarcity.

However, his thoughts were overlooked.

His peers argued that it was a problem that had yet to materialise, as the generation and distribution of information in different forms remained the economic focal point through the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, it was a period when money was widely considered the primary scarce resource.

However, the advent of the internet and social media redefined this thought process.

Herbert Simon's prediction began to materialise during the 1990s and gained further relevance with the rise of the internet and social media. As information became more and more abundant, it became clear that attention, not information, was becoming the more valuable resource.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Blackberry phones with a QWERTY keypad captured people's attention. It was not a mass tool, but it represented power and sophistication for a select few. CXOs and working professionals saw it as a tool of productivity.

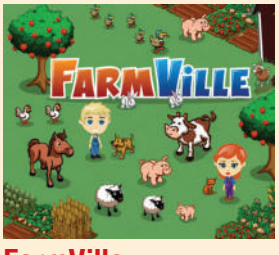
But, it did not capture sustained attention beyond its functional use.

To truly capture attention, systems had to reward user behaviour and subtly leverage the fear of missing out. This led to the introduction of features such as infinite scroll, autoplay, and push notifications, designed to encourage repeated engagement. This then marked the validation of 'attention' as the new currency, in which users pay for services with their time and focus.

When the iPhone was first introduced in 2007, it was termed a revolutionary device that would change how you live, not just how you communicate. It was also the point when curiosity and aspiration joined hands, triggering a dopamine effect among youngsters. As adoption grew, social influence amplified the effect, and many felt compelled to join the bandwagon, driven by a fear of missing out.

## Peak Popular Zynga Games on Facebook (2009–2012)

Source: Zynga IPO Filings 2011




**FarmVille**

**10** Mn daily active users


**CityVille**

**26** Mn daily active users

**Zynga Poker**

**8** Mn daily active users


**Cafe World**

**6** Mn daily active users

## HOW SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS CAPTURE ATTENTION

Features such as infinite scroll, autoplay, and push notifications play a crucial role in capturing and sustaining user attention.

Those who could not afford the iPhone chose smartphones by Samsung, Sony, Motorola, and other brands. Each brand offered new features and specifications, and touchscreen interfaces made it more intuitive for people to explore.

Initially, social networking platforms were largely accessed through browsers. This is when Orkut came into the picture. It was followed by Facebook, which gradually garnered attention for its innovation, mobile adaptation, and evolving features.

Young adults were drawn to playing Zynga games on Facebook, such as FarmVille, for hours, as they did not have to download anything or insert a CD on their computers to play. These games broke engagement into small, repeatable actions, which further compounded engagement for Facebook and Zynga. Moreover, they were offered for free, making participation easy for a wider audience.

In many ways, these games represented an early peak of what would later become the daily engagement model of social media platforms. What made these games powerful was not just entertainment, but the habit they created—users returned multiple times a day, often without realising how much time had passed.

The smartphone revolution that followed was far from accidental; new-age companies increasingly began to treat attention as a key resource.

## INTANGIBLES OF THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

As we go through all this, one might wonder what the fuss about the attention economy really is. We pay attention when something is interesting, so what is the big deal?

The fact is that in the attention economy, we as consumers often become the product, and our attention is shaped by a set of intangible forces that make it difficult for us to step away.

Those intangibles operate in multiple ways, often reinforcing each other in subtle but powerful forms.

**Immediacy** ensures that the era of information overload does not slow down but becomes more targeted. Information is delivered instantly and often selectively. For example, breaking news may reach you in your mailbox ahead of others. An expert comment can be made available through a paid subscription.

**Personalisation** makes content feel more aligned to us. When we watch reels, posts, or tweets, it appears as if they reflect our thoughts. For example, we listen to a stand-up comedy clip or a filmy conversation that embodies our values, interests, and motivations. This sense of relatability strengthens engagement.

**Interpretation** simplifies complexity through voices we trust. Influencers and specialised channels present educational content on niche topics. For example, a CA explaining tax exemptions, or an equity analyst decoding a budget speech and suggesting where to invest next.

**Authenticity** plays a crucial role. Content appears real and immediate, especially when creators respond quickly to trends. This builds trust and keeps audiences returning.

**Accessibility** ensures that content is available across multiple touchpoints, reaching users throughout the day, making engagement more likely. It should be visible across all channels that attract the audience and drive them towards the content.

**Embodiment** connects digital experiences with physical and sensory experiences. This is called experiential marketing.

**Patronage** is a crowd-funding model where audiences support creators directly. Platforms such as Patreon enable creators to fund their work.

**Findability** ensures that relevant content surfaces quickly. For example, a social media app can push your content ahead when someone searches for a specific topic.


Platforms like Instagram and YouTube sustain engagement through infinite scroll, autoplay, and notifications.

## ALGORITHMS, ENGAGEMENT, & MONETISATION

Today, every social media platform operates through a unique algorithm designed to capture and retain user attention for long periods.

Every like, tweet, repost, share, or subscription is a form of engagement. All of this leads to monetary benefits for the platform. Platforms run advertisements that are highly localised and targeted, making them effective for advertisers.

The Social Dilemma, a docuseries on Netflix, explains how social media platforms capture and sustain user attention. Platforms like Facebook build user profiles based on behaviour patterns. This allows them to predict what a user is most likely to watch next. It means every individual on the platform is a commodity.

When whistleblowers raised concerns publicly, the courts intervened. Executives, including Mark Zuckerberg, were asked to testify. Yet no strong action has been taken against these platforms so far.

This attention economy generates annual revenue in the range of US$200–300 billion, and these figures are expected to grow further.

A significant part of this revenue comes from Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, and LinkedIn, along with others like Reddit and Snapchat.

When it all started in 2009, fewer than a billion users were online globally.

Fast forward to 2026, there is a fivefold increase in users and nearly a 40x increase in revenue. This suggests that these platforms now engage a significant portion of the world's population, and many are hooked to screens.

**2009:** US$10–20 bn in revenue.

**2026:** About US$300 bn, nearly 40x growth

Source: McKinsey & Company – "The Future of Social Commerce

## LEARNING, DEVELOPMENT, & MORE

Not everything in the attention economy is harmful. Some aspects offer serious benefits. Learning and development are cases in point. Platforms like LinkedIn offer courses that are easy to understand and binge. Even creator-led educational videos provide relevant information.

Ironically, anything progressive or essential does not reward or trigger FOMO. These platforms have hardly made learning and development 'sexy' enough to binge.

On the other hand, YouTube and TikTok have leveraged short-form video content to make learning fun—because it offers instant gratification, which audiences love.

## MANIPULATION OF PUBLIC OPINION

Today, ideological perspectives are visible and flaunted with abandon. Right or wrong, people stick to their ideologies and debate with their peers. They feel the need to listen to like-minded individuals.

A dangerous by-product of the attention economy is the manipulation of public opinion. The 2016 Brexit vote is said to have been influenced by online creators with vested interests.

Similarly, in India, several politically motivated campaigns appear periodically, causing public debates, societal disruptions, and sometimes riots. For example, the 2016 demonetisation discussions witnessed large-scale polarisation.

### Instances when social media manipulated public opinion

**2016** EU Referendum
**2016** US Presidential Election
**2016** Demonetisation Discussions
**2019** Indian General Election
**2020–21** COVID-19 Pandemic

The peak of such manipulation was during the COVID-19 pandemic. People followed unverified medical advice, believed exaggerated claims of vaccine shortages, and spread panic messages about mass deaths.

The winner of all such polarisation was social media, which divided society and muddled the younger generation.

## MUDDLED GEN Z

Sixty-five per cent of India's population is under 35, and they are living through constant notifications, short-form content, and algorithm-driven feeds. Many spend nearly five hours a day on smartphone apps. Gen Z is among the most affected, accounting for a significant portion of this demographic.

This excessive time and attention lead to anxiety, sleep disruption, and lower physical activity. That means fewer real social interactions. In due course, this can lead to depression and a lack of confidence.

## RECLAIMING ATTENTION

The world today is deeply immersed in the digital age. Every new technology or wearable is something to be tested. Every new social media channel brings a new experience. At times, it may feel as though the battle for attention is lost even before it begins.

Yet individuals can reclaim their attention and engage with these systems more consciously.

A first step is to be mindful of what and whom you follow. Being cautious about what you click on, and how your data may be used, is important.

Similarly, verifying information before sharing helps reduce misinformation.

Spending time in real-world interactions also plays a crucial role. Conversations with friends, time with family, or participation in shared activities often create a sense of connection that digital interactions may not fully provide. Join book clubs, spend time with friends, or engage more with family.

Reducing screen time becomes equally important, as excessive exposure affects focus, sleep, and overall well-being.

**59%** of Gen Z in India feel anxious or stressed most of the time

**63%** report stress, irritability, and social withdrawal

**66%** see reduced outdoor and real-life interaction

**1 in 2** young individuals deal with persistent stress

Source: Deloitte Study

Allocating time to restorative activities—whether a short walk, a moment of pause, or physical exercise—can improve attention.

Developing a new skill or hobby can also shift attention meaningfully. Engaging in activities such as music, sports, or outdoor experiences not only builds new perspectives but also strengthens one's ability to focus.

At its core, reclaiming attention is not about withdrawing from technology, but about making deliberate choices about where time and focus are directed.

## THE ERA OF DIGITAL DETOX

Digital detox is fast emerging as a response to attention fatigue caused by endless scrolling. This is gradually building communities where people can interact in real time, creating more meaningful interactions. People are turning to journalling, group activities, real-life conversations, hobbies, and mindfulness. In this sense, digital detox is a space where individuals begin to reclaim their attention after being submerged in the attention economy.

The advent of artificial intelligence introduces a new dimension, as individuals increasingly engage with language models for a wider range of purposes. Will this deepen existing patterns of distraction, or will it offer new ways to manage attention? Much will depend on how these technologies evolve, and how individuals choose to use them. ■

DESIGN THINKING

# Relook at the student journey

Design thinking brings a new and human perspective to existing problems. It challenges the assumptions and conditioning we often follow without logical reason.

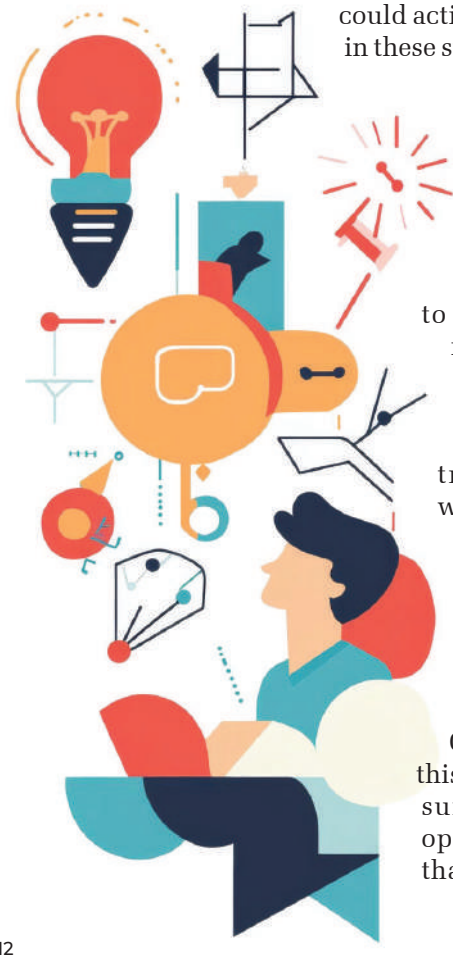
**Dr. Anbu Rathinavel**

***Head** - School of Design Thinking | Chief Design Officer - Intellect Design Arena. **Visiting Faculty** - IIM Calcutta, ISB Hyderabad.*

**THE MODERN STUDENT** journey is often fraught with uncertainty. Many are confused about their majors and future career choices. Many find their jobs detached from their degrees.

Consider these: a staggering 80 per cent of college students change majors. About 75 per cent of graduates are unsure of suitable career paths. In India, a recent survey revealed that 93 per cent of students aged 14 to 21 are aware of only seven career options. These figures paint a vivid picture of the struggles students face, often influenced by societal pressures, parental expectations, and institutional dynamics.

But what if students themselves could actively drive positive change in these statistics? They can.



The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) champions Design Thinking as a pivotal skill for the coming years. This human-centric approach to problem-solving and innovation empowers individuals to be more creative, fostering diverse perspectives. While traditionally associated with product development, Design Thinking's versatility extends to solving complex problems across domains, as well as personal challenges.

One of the first steps in this journey is questioning assumptions. Many students operate on inherited beliefs that certain careers are "better," certain paths are "safer," and success follows a predefined route. By pausing and reflecting, students can uncover blind spots that may be limiting their choices.

## VISUALISATION AND PERSONA

When students imagine a future version of themselves—what they are doing, where they are, and how they feel—they begin to see possibilities more clearly. Visualisation helps the mind recognise opportunities and resources that align with that future. While goals may evolve, this exercise creates a sense of direction and purpose.

Another important Design Thinking tool is the power of persona. Traditionally used to understand users, personas can be applied inward. By mapping their own strengths, fears, motivations, and environment, students develop deeper self-awareness. This clarity allows them to make decisions that are more aligned with who they are, rather than who they are expected to be. It also helps them understand others—friends, teachers, and family.

Academic pressure is another challenge. Students often struggle to manage multiple subjects, assignments, and expectations. Here, Design Thinking introduces prioritisation frameworks. The 10gm–100gm–1000gm approach helps students assign weight to tasks based on their importance.

## STORYTELLING FOR MEMORY RETENTION

When it comes to learning, many students rely on memorisation, especially during exams. Design Thinking encourages a shift toward storytelling as a learning tool. By connecting concepts through stories, students can understand and remember information more effectively. Storytelling transforms abstract ideas

into meaningful narratives, making learning more engaging and effective.

Perhaps the most transformative aspect of Design Thinking is how it reframes failure. In traditional systems, failure is often seen as a setback. In Design Thinking, it is viewed as a step in the process of learning and improvement. Each attempt, whether successful or not, provides insight. This mindset encourages students to keep experimenting, learning, and evolving.

### DESIGN THINKING FROM THE START

As students progress through their academic journey, Design Thinking gradually becomes a mindset. It encourages curiosity, observation, empathy, and continuous learning. It helps students connect the dots across subjects, experiences, and aspirations.

In today's world, industries are evolving, and expectations are shifting. Organisations are looking for individuals who can think critically, adapt quickly, and understand human needs. Design Thinking equips students with these capabilities. It prepares them not just for a job, but for navigating uncertainty and creating meaningful impact.

In a world full of noise and constant change, the ability to think deeply, reflect meaningfully, and act with intent may be the most valuable skill students can develop. ■

AI

# You may also like

**Asaph Abraham**
*Founder and CTO, Surfboard*

**THE RECOMMENDATION** algorithm does not know you. It just runs mathematics on what you do.

There's a common belief that Instagram, YouTube, and Spotify somehow "know" you, that some intelligent system is reading your mind, and watching your every move. It's wrong.

What these platforms run are recommendation algorithms. They look at what you do on the app, compare it with what millions of other users do, and make a guess about what you might want to see next. Sometimes the guess is good; sometimes it isn't. No magic. Just mathematics.

Platforms have millions of videos, songs, and posts. You can't scroll through all of that. So, the algorithm's job is simple: out of everything available, pick the few things most likely to keep you watching, listening, or scrolling.

There are two standard ways these systems do this.

The first is to look at what similar users liked – a method called collaborative filtering. For example, say you and another user have both liked the same ten videos. That other user has also liked an eleventh video you haven't seen. The system assumes you'll probably like it too, and recommends it to you.

The algorithm does not know if the video is a cooking tutorial or a cricket highlight. It only cares about patterns: who liked what, who watched what, and who skipped what. If your pattern matches someone else's, their likes become your suggestions.

To understand how this works, imagine a spreadsheet. Every row is a user, and every column is a video or song. Each cell shows whether that user liked, watched, or skipped it. Most of the spreadsheet is empty, because no one person watches everything. The algorithm guesses what should go in the empty cells, based on the patterns it sees in the filled ones.

The second method is to look at the content itself, known as content-based filtering. Instead of asking, "What did similar users like?", it asks, "What does this content look like, and does it match what this user usually watches?"

On Spotify, this means measuring the actual properties of a song. If you keep playing fast, upbeat songs, it will recommend more fast, upbeat songs. On YouTube, the system looks at the video's title, description, tags, and category. Newer systems can "watch" the video themselves and "listen" to the audio, to understand what the video is about.

No major platform uses just one method. In practice, they combine all of them, plus extra information like what time of day it is, what device you're using, and how long you've been on the app.

The newer development is generative AI being added on top of these systems. Spotify now lets you describe a mood in plain words, and it builds a playlist around that description. YouTube uses AI to auto-generate summaries of videos so it can better understand what they're about. These additions make the recommendations more accurate, but the basic logic underneath—filter, then rank—is still the same.

Long story short: a recommendation algorithm is a filtering and ranking system. It takes data about you and runs it through models built on how millions of other users behaved. It does not know your name, or understand why you like what you like. It merely spots patterns, and, when the pattern match is good, the suggestion feels personal. When it isn't, you scroll past—and that scroll becomes another data point for the next round. ■

WRISTWATCH AND COMPASS

# What keeps us just busy, and What keeps us steady

The clock monitors and measures our moves, but the compass ensures we are making the right ones. Seek your compass.

**Rajendran Dandapani,**
*Director of Engineering & Business Solutions Evangelist at Zoho Corporation and President of Zoho Schools of Learning.*

**ONE OF MY** fondest memories growing up was getting my own personal alarm clock — something that my father set me up with for waking up early and studying for the all-important plus two exams. Clearing that exam led me to another cherished timepiece — a HMT wristwatch.

The magnetic compass arrived differently, and without fanfare. I don't even recall it arriving. I just discovered it one day in my house, in a trunk that had my brother's trekking and mountaineering paraphernalia. Nobody talked about it at the dinner table.

Over the years, these two objects have come to hold deep lessons for me in my journey.

## BUSYBEE

The clock, like the wristwatch, is a utility device. It helps us keep time. Let us go beyond the obvious. It is a device that's always on the move, and also keeps us on the move. Every minute of the day, we pull a fresh piece of information from it: what time to wake up, when to leave, how long we have to get to the end of the workday, and so on.


The clock needs to be kept going. Without a battery, a charge, or a constant energy supply, it simply stops. Left to itself, it has no motion of its own. And what it never does, for all its busyness, is move from where it sits. Its ubiquitous nature, and its hold over our attention span, keep us asking, "Are we there yet?"

## SEEKER

The magnetic compass is different. Place it on a table, leave it alone, come back an hour later — it is still pointing the same way. It asks for nothing from the outside. No battery, no notification, no reminder. There is something almost stubborn about it, and perhaps that stubbornness is the point.

Because no matter how much time and effort has passed from our end, the compass only points in the direction we seek. It keeps track of where we are headed.

## DRIVE THAT MATTERS

In common parlance, we call those who know right from wrong as having a 'moral compass'. I have wondered why we do not also speak of a person's 'learner's compass': a quiet, internal pull towards curiosity, towards questions, and towards the kind of work that does not need an external deadline or extrinsic motivation.

The critical difference between the clock and the compass is not really about time or direction. It is about where the energy comes from. The clock is always moving, always responding, always needing the next charge to keep going. The compass does not need winding up. When you are genuinely looking for something — a skill,

an understanding, or a version of yourself you haven't met yet — you do not need someone to remind you to keep going. The direction is already there.

### QUIET ORIENTATION

I have met many clocks in my life — in classrooms, in offices, and in the small panics of deadlines and schedules. They kept things moving, and I am not ungrateful for that. But the moments that actually shifted the direction of my journey were quieter than tick-tocks. They came when I was genuinely curious about something, not because a timetable said so, but because something inside had already begun pointing that way. Curiosity does not need a prompt. It simply arrives.

That quality, when you find it in yourself, is worth paying attention to. Not the curiosity that is switched on by a notification or a trending topic, but the kind that lingers after the screen goes dark. The kind that makes you return to a question nobody assigned you. A learner who carries that quality does not need to be wound up every morning. They are already moving, already oriented, and already asking the right questions.

The most useful notifications come from within. They are not designed by a system, not triggered by an algorithm, and not timed to keep you returning to something that serves someone else's purpose.

Be, in the truest sense, your own compass. That can lead to the most fulfilling adventures in life. ■

LEARNING FROM MATHAV

# Rethinking success

**AS A STUDENT**, I once believed that success was a simple equation: work harder, study longer, outperform others. Mathav's journey quietly challenged that belief and reshaped how I understand success.

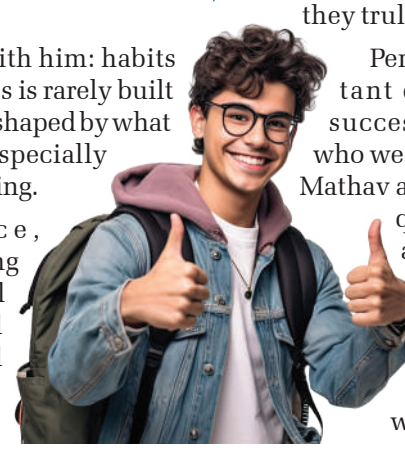
Success, I thought, was mainly about hard work—putting in more hours, pushing harder, and expecting results to follow. Observing Mathav, however, made me realise that success depends not only on how much we work, but also on how we live, think, and direct our attention.

Mathav was not an extraordinary student to begin with. By his own admission, he was less than mediocre in academics. Like many of us, he struggled with distractions—the constant pull of mobile phones, social media, and endless scrolling that quietly consumed his time and attention. Despite sincere attempts to study, his focus weakened, and his efforts rarely translated into results.

This was not unique to him. Most of us live in a constant tug-of-war between intention and distraction.

A turning point came when Mathav chose to speak openly with his faculty mentor. Instead of simply advising him to study harder, the mentor encouraged him to reflect on something deeper—the importance of inner change over mere external effort.

One idea stayed with him: habits shape destiny. Success is rarely built in bursts of effort; it is shaped by what we do consistently, especially when no one is watching.



With guidance, Mathav began making small but meaningful changes. He regulated his routine—reduced screen time, avoided unnecessary scrolling, slept earlier, and woke up with purpose. These were not dramatic shifts, but, over time, they improved his clarity, energy, and focus. His productivity began to rise.

Yet the most profound change was internal. His mentor urged him to reflect on his parents' sacrifices—the financial strain and quiet resilience behind his education. As he began to truly understand this, a deep sense of gratitude emerged. That gratitude gradually transformed his attitude.

He was no longer studying just to pass exams. He felt responsible for the opportunity he had been given. Discipline no longer felt forced; it became natural. With growing self-awareness, his concentration improved, and so did his outcomes. He went on to secure a strong GATE score, surprising many, and began a promising professional journey.

But what stayed with me was not just his achievement. The habits he built—discipline, gratitude, and mindful living—continue to guide him. They shaped not only his career, but also his character.

In today's world, success is often measured through visible outcomes—jobs, salaries, and recognition. These matter. But if they come without inner stability, can they truly define success?

Perhaps the more important question is not how successful we become, but who we become in the process. Mathav answered that question quietly—through balance, awareness, and gratitude.

And that, more than his achievements, is what stayed with me. – **Sanjana Kare**

STARTING OVER AT 50

# Building a healthier plate in Kozhikode

**In a city known for rich, flavourful cuisine, changing how people eat is no small task. This café's journey shows how small shifts, done consistently, can begin to reshape habits. Tarun Jagadhish spoke to Shyamala Ramadas, co-owner of Rasha Bowl.**

**Q: What does Rasha stand for? Is there a story behind it?**

I am the sha of the Rasha, namely Shyamala My partner in life and all crimes is the Ra, Ramadas.

We are both basically from Calicut who migrated to Chennai and spent a good part of our life in that city. That is I spent the prime time of my life, my cherished college days, my early career days, my secret marriage life, my public marriage life and my son was born there. And then we came back to Calicut.

**You started this restaurant in your 50s, when most people are thinking of slowing down. What prompted you to begin something entirely new at that stage of life?**

This was totally unplanned. I was actually planning to get back to my corporate life after a two-year break. While doing a product management course at ISB, I wrote about this new idea and began to explore it more seriously, after I felt that there was scope for this business and realised it was something I wanted to pursue rather than return to what I was doing earlier.

**Was there ever a point when you seriously considered not going ahead? What kept you moving forward through those moments?**

Not one moment. Many moments came up when I thought of not going ahead with this business at different stages. The underlying conviction and confidence in the idea has kept me going forward, even when those doubts felt very real.

**Why focus on healthy food in a city known for its rich, traditional cuisine?**

The idea of our healthy café is that we take traditional food and create a healthier version of it, without losing its essence. We are not doing anything out of the box, but rather rethinking what we already love to eat in a better way.

**How did Kozhikode respond in the early days? Were people curious, sceptical, or resistant to the idea?**

It was a very slow response. There is a general perception that healthy food is not tasty or that you

need to be sick to eat healthy food. It took us some time to break these myths, and the response has been slowly growing. We depend primarily on word-of-mouth publicity, and that takes time. So patience is key, especially when you are trying to change something as deeply ingrained as food habits.

### What did you have to learn from scratch as a first-time founder—from people and operations to sourcing and finance?

Everything. Working in a corporate environment is completely different. Being a start-up founder, you need to be completely hands-on most of the time and hands-off at certain times. So every aspect of the business has been a learning experience from scratch, whether it is managing people, understanding sourcing, or making day-to-day decisions on the ground.

### Many places claim to be "healthy." What, in your view, makes your kitchen genuinely different?

I always prefer to call my café a healthier café. What we eat every day, or what we grew up eating every day, we bring out a healthier version of it, so it still feels familiar and comforting. We also ensure that every meal is balanced and portion-controlled, keeping both nutrition and satisfaction in mind.

### Take us back to opening day. What did it feel like when your first customer walked in?

Pure excitement and anxiety about how this concept is going to be accepted, because you never really know how people will respond until they walk in and try it.

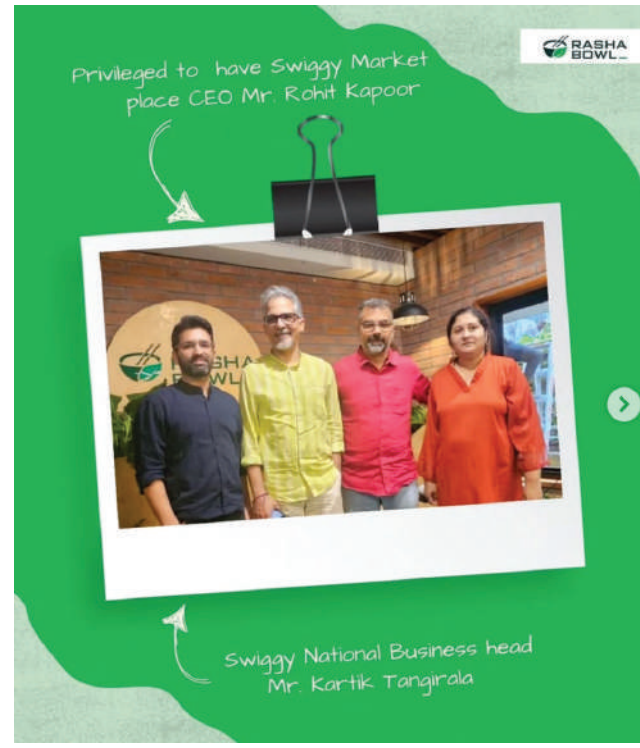
### Do you think starting up in your 50s helped you handle stress and setbacks differently than you might have in your 20s?

I am really not sure. But if there is one thing from my 20s that I would like to have now, it is the energy and the don't-care attitude, which makes you take risks more easily without overthinking.

### Looking back over these two years, what has been the toughest lesson entrepreneurship has taught you?

Many lessons. The toughest lesson has been that if you have conviction in your idea and business, the temporary setbacks are temporary, and you will get the strength to get through them, even during phases when nothing seems to be working, and get to the next sunshine.

### Your restaurant has a warm, inviting ambience. How important was it for you to create that kind of space?




Food is an experience. It is very important to experience it in an ambience that makes you relaxed, so that the experience is enjoyable, and people want to come back not just for the food but for how it makes them feel.

### Has this journey changed your own lifestyle, health, or outlook on life in any way?

This has made me more self-aware and self-conscious, both about my choices and how I approach everyday life.

### What would you say to a student who wants to start something of their own but is afraid of failing?

Be ready to fail. Fail multiple times. While it is easy to say use every opportunity to bounce back, it is easier said than done. But in my case, I did not have an option, I did not have a plan B. So I had to get up and keep going after every failure. This worked for me. Your story will be different. Your reason to get up and go will be different. If you do not have a reason, that is also fine. If you do not want to go forward, that is also fine, but the decision has to be yours and only yours.

**KICKER:** *In the end, there is nothing dramatic about the journey—no sudden turning points, no overnight success. Just a quiet conviction, tested repeatedly, and the patience to stay with it. In a city that takes its food seriously, that may be the most meaningful shift of all.* ■

LEARNING EVERYWHERE

# Thirty-six frames of resistance

In an age of infinite, weightless images, a professor reflects on what we lose when nothing costs us anything—and why slowness, friction, and choice may be the last proofs that we exist.

**Dr Deependra Kumar Jha**
*Vice Chancellor, Manav Rachna University*

**AT FIFTEEN**, I loaded a roll of film into my Yashica for the first time. The weight of the metal pressed against the softness of my palm, and I remember the ritualistic click of the canister settling into place. The sound faded quickly—the small sound of a door closing.

I had thirty-six frames. Thirty-six memories to immortalise. It was an act of preservation; what I chose to save, and what time swallowed. Back then, I pointed it towards anything—the light filtering between the trees, the emptiness between two tall buildings, the skyline mellowed by grey clouds.

I held a frame in my eye and looked into the future; I wondered, would it matter to look back?

Then, almost absent-mindedly, I waited for weeks to reveal what I had sought. In the pause, anticipation filled my days: a yearning to return, to adjust the angle, to hold on to the final image. All I knew was this: it was mine to keep.

I would wait, for days on end, and think—I wish there were another way.

The screen of my iPhone camera glares brighter than the sun. The colours are saturated, loud, and artificial—eerily close to something real. Often, without intention, I produce hundreds of images a month that I will never look at again, stored in a cloud somewhere, flattened into a grid of thumbnails that I scroll past without ceremony.

I admit it is convenient. The stench of developer fluid does not linger. My memories aren't divided by thirty-six.

This innovation promises efficiency. It promises perfection. The light is corrected, the frame adjusted, and the flaws quietly erased. There is a version of the film camera for each of us. Quietly and efficiently, the internet has taken from us without ever asking permission. The digital demolition is a great flattening. No photograph costs anything to take, which means no photograph costs you anything.

Every experience can be shared in real time, which means the living of it and the performance of it have collapsed into a single, hollow gesture.

This is not new. The internet is increasingly curated, manufactured, and unreal. We're tourists in a strange city, burdened by the grief of abundance without any weight.

Our attention has become currency—shaped, directed, and held a moment longer than we intend.

We have been nudged, over time, to fill every silence. To reach for our phones at every lull in the conversation. It takes something quieter from us: our tolerance for slowness, our capacity to wait, and our resistance. These are not trivial losses. They alter how we experience being alive.

The radical act, today, is to slow down.

Some of us are returning to tangible rituals as a form of resistance. We are, in small ways, choosing friction again.

To use a film camera is to commit. You seek it out, carry it home, and load the film. You cannot edit a flaw. You are, by design, in a relationship with the thing you chose. It matters. The inconvenience is not a bug waiting to be fixed.

For too long, we've been sold a myth; the destination as performance. The analogue revival is a reminder that the means matter as much as the end. The journey forms us. The process builds us. The resistance makes us.

This reclamation is not a Luddite gesture—choose your ritual: your favourite tune, a specific time, a cherished chair. They are

quiet decisions about how you spend your most finite resource—your attention.

This is the drag path. A deliberate slowing, a chosen friction—the evidence that you are.

I have been thinking about loading a camera again. Not because I want to be fifteen, or that film is better, but because I want the ritual of something ordinary—the learning curve, the drag path.

That is what people are reaching for when they buy a book they could download in seconds. Not the object itself, but the weight of their own choosing. The proof.

In a culture of infinite, weightless content, that weight feels radical. It is not an aesthetic preference. It is a way of being alive in the world that insists on presence—on the before and the after, the ritual and the residue, the thirty-six frames you were given, and how you decided to spend them. ■

INCOME – EXPENSES – SAVINGS

# The quiet arithmetic

## How income, expenses, and small pauses slowly reveal the shape of money

**SOME SCENES** appear quietly in the early years of adult life. A receipt folded into a wallet. A mental calculation before ordering something. A pause in front of a shelf.

**Meera Venugopalan**
*Corporate finance and audit professional.*

### THE FIRST SHAPE OF MONEY

Money, in those years, begins to take shape.

**Income is one shape.** It arrives sometimes regularly, sometimes unexpectedly. A stipend, a scholarship, a part-time payment, a gift from home. When it arrives, it feels like water poured into a vessel. The vessel seems full.

**Expenses are another shape.** They do not always arrive in a line. They appear scattered through the day—transport, food, books, a cup of coffee with a friend, a late-night ride home. None of them looks very large on its own. Yet, by the end of a month, the vessel that seemed comfortably full often looks different.

**Savings are quieter.** They do not announce themselves. They remain after something has been used.

For a long time, these three—income, expenses, and savings—move around without being clearly named.

In Chennai, it is often said that for the first nine months of the year, the city faces water scarcity. Then, for a few months, the rains arrive with such force that water seems to be everywhere—too little, then suddenly too much. Yet, regardless of how the sky behaves, people still need water every day. When there is more water than needed, some of it is stored in tanks, buckets, and containers. When there is less, people borrow from a neighbour or wait for the next delivery.

Money moves in a similar rhythm. At certain moments, income appears abundant—perhaps after a payment arrives or during a period of steady work. At other moments, it seems thinner, stretched across several needs. Through both conditions, daily life continues. Meals are eaten. Books are bought. Buses are taken.

The vessel, like the pitcher in the corner of a kitchen, quietly fills and empties. Over time, one small habit sometimes appears almost naturally: noticing what leaves the pitcher. Not in a dramatic way—just a gentle awareness. A meal here. A ride there. A subscription that renews itself silently every month. A small indulgence that was pleasant at the moment but forgotten soon after.

### NOTICING THE FLOW

Some of these flows are necessary. Many of them give life its texture. Others drift by almost unnoticed.

Occasionally, someone discovers that when a few of those unnoticed streams slow down, something interesting happens. The water level in the pitcher does not fall as quickly. The amount left at the end of the week looks slightly different. It can feel, in a quiet way, like having a little more income—even though nothing new has been earned.

No announcement is made when this happens. No rule is written down. It simply appears as a pattern: when spending becomes a little more deliberate, the remaining water becomes a little more available—for books, for travel, or for something genuinely needed later.

The pitcher itself does not change. It still fills and empties. But the person holding it begins to notice its weight differently. ■

WALLET – MONEY Lessons they didn't teach in school

# Launched at IIT Madras Research Park

In a significant step towards strengthening financial literacy among young Indians, the book Wallet was officially launched at the Right to INR – Financial Empowerment Summit on March 14 at IIT Madras Research Park.

**Dr Anbuthambi B**

*Director, Successverse ASK Foundation. Educationist, Author and Public Speaker. Former President of ICT Academy and Head-Strategy (EduTech) of Larsen & Toubro.*

**THE BOOK** was released by finance expert and value investor Anand Srinivasan, in the presence of industry leaders, academicians, entrepreneurs, and students. Anand spoke about the intrinsic importance of money and discussed the contents of the book, agreeing with many of its views and offering a few thoughtful disagreements.

The first copies were received by Dr. A. Anbuchezian, Principal of Annapoorana Engineering College, Salem, Sudhakar Rao, Director – Branding, ICFAI Group, and Rajendran Dhandapani, Director at Zoho.

In a notable initiative, Wallet was distributed to all participants as a practical guide to managing their financial journey.

## A CONVERSATION BEYOND NUMBERS

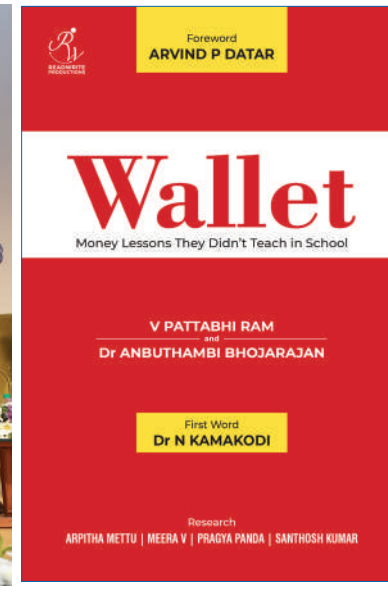
In an incisive talk, Dhandapani spoke about the art of spending, drawing extensively from Morgan Housel, and emphasising that if money does not bring happiness, it often reflects a lack of understanding of how to spend it well.

CA V Pattabhi Ram delivered a keynote on "How many of us believe we are sensible with money?", where he shared key lessons often realised late in one's career. His session highlighted the importance of staying calm, controlling lifestyle inflation, and starting early.

Dr. Anbuthambi Bhojarajan chaired a panel discussion on personal finance, featuring CA Ashvitha R and Srikanth Meenakshi, Founder of PrimeInvestor. The panel discussed practical approaches to managing money, investing behaviour, and financial habits across different career stages.

## A FINANCIAL STARTER TOOLKIT

Wallet is designed as a financial starter toolkit that addresses a critical gap in education—the ability to manage money wisely. In an age where earning begins ear-


lier and financial decisions become inevitable, many individuals still lack clarity on how money works.

Wallet offers a structured and practical approach to personal finance. At its core, the book is designed for students, young professionals, and first-time earners seeking clarity and confidence. Unlike traditional finance books that rely on complex terminology, Wallet simplifies financial concepts into clear, actionable ideas.

What sets Wallet apart is its focus on application. The book does not merely inform—it guides behaviour. Through relatable examples, it enables readers to apply concepts to everyday life.

### WHY 'WALLET' MATTERS

Authored by CA V Pattabhi Ram and Dr. Anbuthambi Bhojarajan, the book brings together financial expertise and educational insight. The research team, largely comprising chartered accountants, ensured the content remains practical and relevant. The book is further strengthened by contributions from respected figures across law, banking, and industry, adding credibility to its message.

In an era where incomes are rising but financial understanding remains limited, Wallet addresses a critical gap. For students, it serves as an early introduction to money as a life skill. For young professionals, it becomes a guide to navigating real-world financial decisions.

The launch of Wallet at IIT Madras Research Park reflects a strong commitment to building a financially aware generation. By combining expertise with practical guidance, Wallet is positioned as a meaningful step towards making financial literacy accessible and actionable. Over 650 people attended the launch. ■

**To learn more and grab your copy, visit: *www.readewriteindia.in/wallet***

## CAMPUS RECOGNITION

The Successverse ASK Foundation recognised Annapoorana Engineering College, Salem for its role in nurturing financially aware citizens.

At the "Right to INR – Financial Empowerment Summit," co-organised by the Foundation, the institution was conferred with the "Award for Excellence in Student Financial Literacy." This recognition highlights the college's initiatives in promoting financial awareness among students and the wider community.

The award was received by Dr. A. Anbuchezian, Principal, who has been instrumental in driving these initiatives.

Congratulations to the leadership, faculty, and students.

IPL

# When a game became a brand

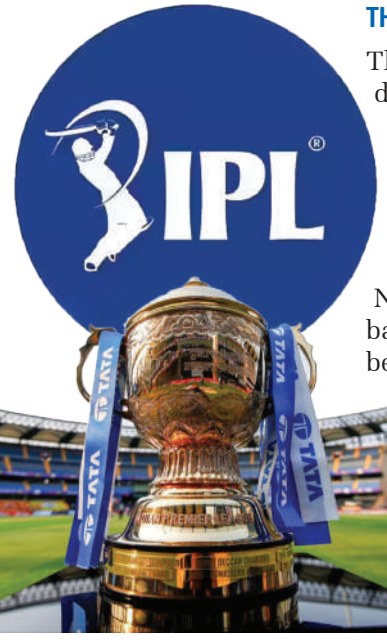
Innovation does not always mean inventing something new. Sometimes it simply means reimagining what already exists and packaging it for a new generation. That's what the IPL achieved.

**Sudhakar Rao**
*Author, Brand Strategist, and Director at the ICFAI Group*

**IN 2008**, when the Indian Premier League (IPL) was launched by the Board of Control for Cricket in India, many thought it was simply another cricket tournament. What unfolded was a marketing revolution that transformed cricket into one of the world's top entertainment brands.

Less than two decades later, the IPL is arguably the most successful sports league innovation of the 21st century. Its estimated business value has crossed $18.5 billion, with the standalone IPL brand valued at about $3.9 billion. In the hierarchy of global sports media rights, the IPL today stands second only to the National Football League (NFL).

For students of marketing, branding, and media economics, the IPL offers a fascinating case study of how strategy, timing, and storytelling can transform a traditional product into a global phenomenon.




## THE STRATEGIC DESIGN BEHIND THE IPL

The success of the IPL is built on a series of deliberate marketing strategies.

### 1. The 'Cricketainment' Model

Instead of traditional teams, the IPL adopted a city-based franchise model, similar to American leagues such as the NFL and NBA. Teams such as the Mumbai Indians and the Chennai Super Kings became symbols of local pride. Fans began identifying with cities rather than just players. This strategy created emotional loyalty while also opening up regional sponsorships and fan communities.

Opening ceremonies, music, celebrity team owners, cheer squads, and stadium spectacle transformed matches into large-scale events. Bollywood personalities such as Shah Rukh Khan owning teams blurred the boundary between cinema and cricket.

### 2. The Perfect Consumption Format

The league adopted the Twenty20 format, where matches last about three hours and are scheduled during prime-time evenings. This made the game ideal for television and digital consumption. For broadcasters, this format created predictable advertising slots and massive viewership spikes. Sport became premium prime-time content.

### 3. Auction as a Marketing Event

Even the player selection process was turned into entertainment. The annual player auction became a media spectacle where franchises bid for cricketers in real time. Dramatic bidding wars, record-breaking contracts, and surprise team combinations ensured that the IPL remained in the news even during the off-season.

In marketing terms, the league created continuous engagement beyond the matches themselves.

### 4. Multi-Layered Sponsorship Architecture

Another innovation was the layered sponsorship ecosystem. Instead of relying on one or two sponsors, the IPL introduced multiple tiers, including title sponsors, official partners, strategic time-out sponsors, digital partners, and stadium sponsors. Major corporations such as the Tata Group and Vivo invested heavily in these partnerships. This structure diversified revenue while ensuring constant brand visibility.

The structured approach to building the IPL is particularly interesting for people

who are building a business or intend to build one. The ecosystem is built on inclusivity and reaching the audience where they choose.

## BUSINESS LESSONS

Beyond cricket, the IPL offers several lessons relevant to business, entrepreneurship, and brand strategy.

First, build ecosystems rather than products. The IPL is not just a tournament. It is a network of franchises, sponsors, broadcasters, digital platforms, players, and fans. The value lies in the entire ecosystem.

Second, entertainment amplifies attention. By blending sport with spectacle, the IPL dramatically expanded its audience.

Third, local identity can drive national scale. City-based teams created emotional connections that translated into nationwide popularity.

Fourth, scarcity creates value. The limited number of franchises has ensured that team ownership remains prestigious and financially valuable.

Finally, keep the conversation alive year-round. Through auctions, transfers, social media debates, and fan engagement, the IPL ensures that the brand never goes off-season.

## THE BIG TAKEAWAY

At its core, the IPL demonstrates a powerful idea: a traditional product can become a global brand if it is redesigned for the media age. Cricket existed for over a century before the IPL arrived. But by combining sport, entertainment, technology, and marketing strategy, the league transformed it into one of the most valuable sports properties in the world.

For students observing from the sidelines, the IPL offers a valuable lesson. Innovation does not always mean inventing something new. Sometimes it simply means reimagining what already exists and packaging it for a new generation. ■

# 12 ANGRY MEN

**By: Alex Vitale**

This column will track classics that you may like to watch.

Some films grip. 12 Angry Men is one such movie. A 12-member jury. One room. A decision that cannot be deferred.

A boy's life hangs in the balance. Eleven of the jurors are ready to hang him. Juror Eight is not ready yet. Because he is not yet sure.

That hesitation is the film. It is a slow, disciplined journey of thinking. Certainties are worn down. A question here, a pause there, and a detail revisited. What looked obvious begins to look hurried.

Juror Eight, played by Henry Fonda, does not argue to win. He insists on the right to examine. He separates belief from proof. He introduces doubt as duty. Around him, the room reveals itself as a cross-section of human instinct—impatience, prejudice, wounded pride, casual indifference.

12 Angry Men asks what it means to be a responsible citizen.

The film's power is in its restraint. No raised voice feels unnecessary. No silence feels empty.. For Indian viewers, the conversation finds an equally compelling echo in the desi adaptation Ek Ruka Hua Faisla.

You must watch this movie because we are quickly judgmental. The film suggests that the gravest errors are not born of malice, but of haste. And that justice is not a verdict, but a process.

More than sixty years on, the film asks for attention. And it leaves you with a discomfort that lingers about the standards we hold ourselves to when we decide the fate of others.

**Overall Verdict:** A film of rare discipline and enduring relevance. What unfolds is not a courtroom drama, but a study of how judgement forms, falters, and is questioned.

**Takeaway:** The obligation to decide must be matched by the willingness to doubt.

**Director:** Sidney Lumet

**Lead:** Henry Fonda

**Genre:** Courtroom Drama

**Best Scene:** The final unravelling of Juror Three, when argument gives way to something more personal, and the resistance collapses as self-recognition dawns.

**Where to Watch:** YouTube


**3 Wisdoms**

- **Doubt is not weakness; it is the beginning of responsibility.**
- **Prejudice speaks loudly; reason works quietly.**
- **Justice is not delivered by systems alone, but by the integrity of individuals within them.**

MUSCLE MEMORY

# When driving teaches...

A simple driving lesson reveals a deeper truth about learning, leadership, and why the best organisations are built not just on vision, but on People, Process, and Technology.

**CA Ranjan Kumar Sahoo**

*Manager (Information System Audit), SBI Hyderabad*

**LAST MONTH**, I tried teaching a friend how to drive. I thought I would just explain a few things and somehow manage. But something surprising happened. I discovered a teacher within myself.

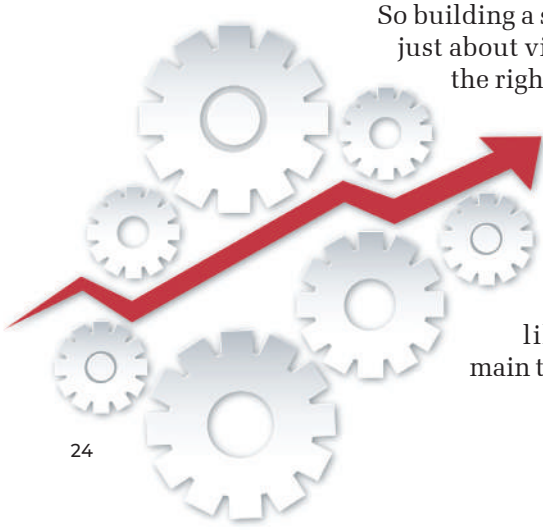
I was helping him learn reverse gear, and I saw the same pattern I had experienced two months earlier. At first, he was very cautious about every move of his legs and hands—brake, accelerator, mirror, and steering. He made several mistakes initially.

But about an hour into practice, his muscle memory began to take over. The cognitive load reduced. That's when I realised the power of the subconscious mind.

It made me think that perhaps the reason we struggle in many areas of life and business is that we try to do everything consciously. We forget that real mastery begins when things shift to the subconscious. And that requires consistent practice.

As entrepreneurs, our job is much the same. We should not just tell people what is right. We should build an environment where the right things happen automatically—where integrity is natural, not something people have to be reminded about. The only real way to do that is by example. People don't learn much from what we say. They learn from what we do.

So building a strong organisation is not just about vision. It is about creating the right environment where the conversion of vision into action is natural and requires minimal cognitive effort. There are three things that every great organisation does. They may sound like clichés, but they remain the basis of success.



## PEOPLE ARE THE FOUNDATION

A friend of mine hired a very skilled employee. On paper, the person was perfect; with great experience and strong knowledge. But within a few months, things started breaking down. There was constant friction in the team. Later, he realised the problem was not skill, but attitude and alignment. The person didn't fit the existing culture of the organisation. Remember, people are not "resources". They are the foundation. If the foundation is weak or misaligned, nothing can stand upright.

## PROCESS IS THE INVISIBLE WIRING

I saw a business where everyone was talented, but there was chaos. The same task was done differently by different people. Everyone was busy, but results were inconsistent. Then they introduced simple processes: checklists and clear ownership. Suddenly, things started improving. Errors reduced, speed improved, and people felt less stressed.

Process is like the wiring in a building. You don't see it, but it ensures everything works smoothly.

## TECHNOLOGY IS THE AMPLIFIER

In 2015, a small business was tracking data in notebooks, following up through calls, and managing work through memory. The results were poor.

Then they shifted to basic tools— Excel, Google Forms, reminders, etc. Interestingly, the same team, with the same effort, started achieving more. Technology didn't replace people. It acted as an amplifier of their capacity.

Remember the simple framework of PPT—People, Process, and Technology. These are the building blocks of every successful and scalable organisation. ■

PROCRASTINATION

# Why the smart still procrastinate

Why do capable students delay the work that matters most? The answer lies less in laziness and more in how the brain handles stress.

**It's 2:00 AM.** Six Chrome tabs are open. A cup of chai has gone cold beside your laptop. In the middle of the screen, a cursor blinks on a blank document. You tell you'll start in five minutes, then ten, then tomorrow.

So why are you watching a 15-minute video about the history of the paperclip instead of writing your thesis?

**Sherwyn Kalyan**

*Organisational Behavioural Strategist*

## THE ANSWER ISN'T LAZINESS.

For many high-achieving students, procrastination is less about discipline, and more about how the brain handles discomfort. Psychologist Timothy Pychyl argues that procrastination is an emotion-regulation problem, not a time-management one. People delay tasks not because they misunderstand deadlines, but because they want to escape the negativity associated with starting them.

When your brain encounters stressful work, two parts play a major role: the amygdala, which detects threats, and the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for decision-making. Ideally, they work together. But when a task feels high stakes (like a thesis, an exam, or a major project), the amygdala can overreact. Instead of seeing a task, it registers a threat: to your grades, your reputation, or even your identity as a "smart student".

The result is what psychologists sometimes call an amygdala hijack. Your brain shifts into avoidance mode. That's why watching random YouTube videos can feel comforting. Your brain isn't relaxing; it's creating distance from what it interprets as danger. The moment you close the document and open YouTube, the pressure disappears. But the relief is temporary and the unfinished task remains.

## SELF-PROTECTION

High-achieving students ask: *What if I try my absolute best, and it still isn't good enough?*

Start early, give everything you have, and a mediocre grade can feel like a verdict on your intelligence. Start the night before, and there is a safer explanation available: "I didn't fail because I'm incapable. I just didn't have enough time." From a psychological perspective, procrastination allows students to protect their sense of ability, even if it quietly undermines their performance. It is not helpful, but it is understandable.

Another cognitive bias operates in the background. Brain imaging studies suggest that the brain treats "future you" almost like a stranger. This is why people who would never sabotage a friend's project often postpone their own work.

The bias behind this is called temporal discounting. It's our tendency to value immediate rewards more than distant ones. A dopamine hit from YouTube today feels more concrete than a deadline next week. So when you say, "I'll do it tomorrow," your brain is outsourcing the work to someone else. Unfortunately, that someone else is still you.

## BREAKING THE LOOP

Research on procrastination suggests a few ways to interrupt this cycle.

First, make the starting point obvious. Instead of thinking "I should study tonight", specify the first step: "If it's 5 PM and I'm at my desk, I will open the textbook to page 42." Second, shrink the commitment. For many students, working for just five minutes can make the task feel manageable. Third, psychologists describe something called the Zeigarnik Effect: unfinished tasks tend to stay active in the mind. This is why beginning, even imperfectly, can be powerful. A rough sentence is often enough to create a mental thread your brain naturally wants to return to.

Progress rarely begins with perfect clarity. More often, it begins with an imperfect start. Procrastination is often framed as a failure of discipline, but research increasingly suggests something complicated. It sits at the intersection of anxiety, identity, and the brain's preference for immediate relief. The challenge isn't understanding the material. It's learning to start.

And then, at 2:00 AM, that blinking cursor stops looking like a judge and starts looking like an invitation. ■

PRESENT IMPERFECT

# Month before the exam

Those 30 days have their own charisma and chaos woven together. I found myself amidst the aroma of dosas and exam anxiety, while slowly gaining confidence for the exam.

**Sandhya Maruvada**
*London-based CA*

**MOCK TESTS** and preparation schedules arrived with increasing enthusiasm. Everyone around me appeared to be revising past question papers with nervous reverence.

In the library, the textbooks waited for me. The small print made me wonder if the authors wrote it expecting students to carry magnifying glasses. I reread a paragraph thrice—none of the words made sense. My attention behaved like a fluttering butterfly, hovering from one flower to another.

Somewhere in the middle of this, I remembered my old second-hand blue Walkman, the one that required gentle taps to behave. I remembered how the songs felt slower. You couldn't skip them instantly. You had to wait, listen, and let them unfold.

That evening, I found a playlist of those old songs online, plugged in my earphones, and walked around campus listening. Something inside softened. The rhythm was familiar, like a hand resting on my shoulder, offering reassurance. In the middle of all the digital noise, this felt like breathing.

The college campus was vibrant. A group of students were rehearsing a skit in the auditorium; their laughter reached the courtyard. I didn't watch the rehearsal. I absorbed the echoes. Something about that quiet persistence felt grounding in a month otherwise full of scattered minds and mock test countdowns.

Moments like that—silent, unexpected, and arriving without effort—carry more meaning for me today than they did then.

On some evenings, the nearby dosa bandi became a small refuge. I watched one group discussing exam strategies, others arguing about which topics were "most likely to be asked". I didn't join. I just listened, letting the steam from the dosa swirl around me like a quiet, edible distraction.

Digital life tugged at everyone. Some students watched last-minute revision videos, while others switched between solving mock papers and checking who had viewed their status. None of it felt unusual. It was the way the month before the exam behaved. Some days, I gave in to this digital pull. Other days, I placed my phone face down and let it hum against the table like a restless insect.

One night, while revising a difficult subject, I noticed the faint smudge where my hand had brushed over key sentences, assuming a question would come from that paragraph. There was something calming in knowing that my notes had their own imperfections, that my focus did not have to be immaculate to be sincere.

By the end of that month, I realised I was not trying to find focus. I was learning how it paused in the middle of a lecture, how it returned without warning during a walk on campus, how it sometimes arrived only when I was listening to an old melody through my earphones.

It offered the insight that distraction is not failure, and that some songs from an old Walkman can slow the world down just enough to make room for breath.

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EXCEL IQ

# The deadly combination

The combination in Excel of the Table Feature + Column Based Name Manager is simply unbeatable. Master it.

**Vinoth Kumar R**
*Microsoft Certified Trainer*

**CONSIDER** this scenario. You want to calculate the average monthly sales in your college canteen. Column A has the Jan, Feb, Mar, and April while column B has the corresponding amounts, viz., Rs 1200, 1500, 1700, and 1600. You would normally use a formula like: =AVERAGE(B2:B5)

Now, if you add the Sales of May, June, and July, you must manually change the formula to =AVERAGE(B2:B8)

Next you want to insert Region and Product between column A and B. You must ensure formula changes to =AVERAGE(D2:D8)

Then, you want to find out total sales, lowest sales, and highest sales. You need to add formulas: =SUM(D2:D8); =MIN(D2:D8); and =MAX(D2:D8).

Finally you want to add columns E and F for Sales Returns and Discount, and update the formula logic as average of Net Sales. That is Sales – Returns--Discount. Your formula must now change to =AVERAGE(D2:D8)-AVERAGE(E2:E8)-AVERAGE(F2:F8). You must do the same for SUM, MIN, and MAX formulas.

If you are already exhausted, welcome to some cleaner formulae.

These are like =AVERAGE(NetMonthlySales); =SUM(NetMonthlySales);=MIN(NetMonthlySales); and =MAX(NetMonthlySales). And imagine not having to manually update the formula every time columns and rows are added. That's what you get when you combine Table feature and Name Manager!

## WHAT IS TABLE

Table is a formatted data range with built-in functionality to transform ordinary data ranges into structured, intelligent datasets. With Ctrl + T, you can convert any data into a Table. The most useful advantage of Tables is automatic expansion. When you add new rows or columns, the Table instantly includes them—along with any formulas and formatting.

Tables also introduce structured references, allowing formulas to use column names instead of traditional cell references. For example, instead of writing =SUM (B2:B20), you can use =SUM(Table1[Sales]) making formulas easier to read.

Tables also integrate seamlessly with PivotTables, charts, and Power Query, ensuring all analysis always reflects the latest data. Because Tables are dynamic, linked reports update automatically when the source changes—saving time and preventing inconsistencies. Other advantages include built-in filtering and sorting.

## WHAT IS COLUMN-BASED NAME MANAGER

As spreadsheets grow in size, managing formulas with traditional cell references can become error prone. This is where Excel's Column-Based Name Manager helps. By assigning meaningful names to entire columns, users can replace cryptic cell ranges with clear, readable labels making spreadsheets easier to build, understand, and maintain.

The Name Manager allows you to define names for ranges, constants, or formulas. Instead of writing formulas like =SUM (B2:B500), you can simply use =SUM(Sales). This approach dramatically improves formula clarity, especially in large datasets.

Column-based naming ensures consistency and error reduction. When new rows are added, named columns can automatically expand, ensuring formulas continue to work without manual updates. Financial models, dashboards, and reports become easier to audit because formulas describe what they calculate rather than where the data lives. For example, =Revenue–Expenses communicates intent far better than =D2–E2.

From a productivity standpoint, Name Manager supports centralised control. All defined names can be viewed, edited, or deleted from one place. Names can also be scoped locally (to a worksheet) or globally (to the entire workbook), offering flexibility for complex projects.

So, what are you waiting for? Go ahead and start using. ■

DIGITAL AGE

# Building something small

Most people pass through a phase that looks like learning but, after a while, starts to feel like standing at a window.

**YOU CAN** follow conversations about a campaign that underperformed or a tool that reshaped someone's workflow. The vocabulary makes sense. But you are still outside it, and at some point that becomes hard to ignore.

This shift rarely arrives with a clear decision. It comes through a small, slightly uncomfortable attempt. A student designs a post instead of just saving one. Someone runs a modest ad to see what happens. Another writes a short piece, puts it online, and watches how people respond—or do not.

**Dharaneetharan G D**
*Founder, Social Eagle and the 21DC Community.*

The first attempt is rarely clean. What looked straightforward turns out to have layers. The design does not match what you imagined. The campaign runs and nothing moves. The writing reaches no one. There is always a gap between following something and doing it. The first attempt reveals how wide that gap really is. That gap is also where something useful begins.

## WHAT INVOLVEMENT ACTUALLY CHANGES

When you try to build something—even something small—the way you look at things begins to shift. A post on social media stops being just content. You begin noticing timing, phrasing, and the small decisions that determine whether something travels or disappears.

A website stops being just a page. You notice where attention lands, where it drops, what holds someone for a few extra seconds. A campaign stops being just an advertisement and starts looking like a set of choices—each one carrying an assumption about who is watching and what they care about. None of this arrives as a formal lesson. It becomes visible only when you are involved.

## HOW THE QUESTIONS CHANGE

Something quieter shifts alongside all of this. When you are only consuming, you can agree or disagree and move on. When you are building, the questions become sharper: Why did this not work? What happens if I change just one thing? What did I miss?

The questions also become more honest because the results sit in front of you. You begin to see that most things do not work the first time. This is not a failure of the idea but a normal part of how things develop. Waiting for a perfect starting point reveals itself as a delay.

This does not arrive as a dramatic realisation. It shows up in how you approach the next attempt—usually a little less hesitant than the one before.

## SMALL EXPERIMENTS AND WHAT THEY PRODUCE

There is a tendency in college to wait for the right scale—a larger project, a proper brief, a moment when everything feels organised enough to begin.

But most real learning happens in smaller loops. A short piece of content posted. A basic page put together. A simple campaign run with whatever budget is available. A tool used for an actual task rather than just explored.

These do not look impressive from the outside, and they are not meant to. What they produce is something that reading and watching cannot: direct, hard-to-ignore feedback.

Over time, the attempts build on each other. You understand tools differently because you have used them. You recognise patterns because you have seen them play out. You feel steadier in unfamiliar situations because you have already moved through a few.

Some remain at the level of observation for a long time. Others move into participation—not because they are better prepared, but because they become more comfortable with imperfect attempts.

In certain environments, this shift becomes easier. Places where people are building alongside each other, using digital tools, AI, and marketing not as separate subjects but as part of the same ongoing practice.

Nothing shifts dramatically overnight. But at some point, you are no longer watching how things work. You are inside it, figuring things out the way most people actually do. ■

**V Pattabhi Ram**
*CA and a Teacher*

This column will share the executive summary of a book. Read it, internalise it, and you can hold conversations on it with anyone. If you are excited, read the book.

# Good to Great

What separates companies that are merely good from those that become truly great?

**In 1971**, when Darwin Smith took over Kimberly-Clark, he was an unlikely choice. Quiet and understated he did not fit the traditional image of a transformational CEO. Yet, under his leadership, the company outperformed its competitors and became a standout example in Jim Collins' Good to Great.

Collins describes leaders like Smith as **Level 5 Leaders**—individuals who combine personal humility with intense professional will. This idea challenges one of the best known myths in business: that greatness requires charisma. In reality, it often requires the opposite, restraint. Think of Lionel Messi, rarely the loudest of persons, letting performance speak louder than personality.

The book is built on rigorous research. Collins and his team studied companies that delivered exceptional, sustained performance over 15 years and compared them with similar companies that did not. What emerged was a set of patterns.


One of the most striking is the principle of **First Who, Then What**. Great companies, Collins argues, focus first on getting the right people on the bus, and the wrong people off it, before deciding where to drive it. With the right people, strategy becomes clearer and execution more reliable. You see this in films like Chak De! India, where success begins with assembling and aligning the right team.

From people, Collins moves to clarity. He introduces the **Hedgehog Concept**, drawn from the idea that while the fox knows many things, the hedgehog knows one big thing. Great companies simplify their strategy into three questions: What can we be the best in the world? What drives our economic engine? And what are we deeply passionate about? The power lies in focus. It is the difference between doing many things moderately well and doing one thing exceptionally.

Equally important is how success happens. Collins calls it the **Flywheel Effect**. There is no dramatic breakthrough, no single defining moment. Instead, success comes from consistent effort, applied in the same direction over time. Like pushing a heavy flywheel, each small push builds on the previous one until momentum becomes unstoppable. The career of Cristiano Ronaldo reflects this: relentless training, incremental improvement, and sustained discipline compounding over years.

Discipline is what sustains this momentum. Great companies cultivate a culture of discipline through self-driven people operating within clear systems. Bureaucracy reduces, accountability increases, and execution becomes consistent. In cinema, this is often invisible. The hours of repetition, retakes, and refinement that ultimately make excellence look effortless on screen.

Interestingly, technology is not treated as a primary driver of greatness. Collins finds that great companies do not chase trends. They adopt technology selectively, using it to accelerate what they already do well. In that sense, technology amplifies discipline. In a world chasing every new platform or shortcut, this restraint is a lesson in knowing what not to pursue.

Finally, there is a quiet idea: the ability to confront the brutal facts. Great companies do not operate on blind optimism. They face reality as it is, while maintaining the belief that they will prevail. This balance between realism and confidence creates resilience.

Good to Great ultimately makes a simple argument: greatness is not a function of circumstance or sudden brilliance. It is the outcome of disciplined people, disciplined thought, and disciplined action.

And perhaps that is what makes the book compelling even today. ■

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