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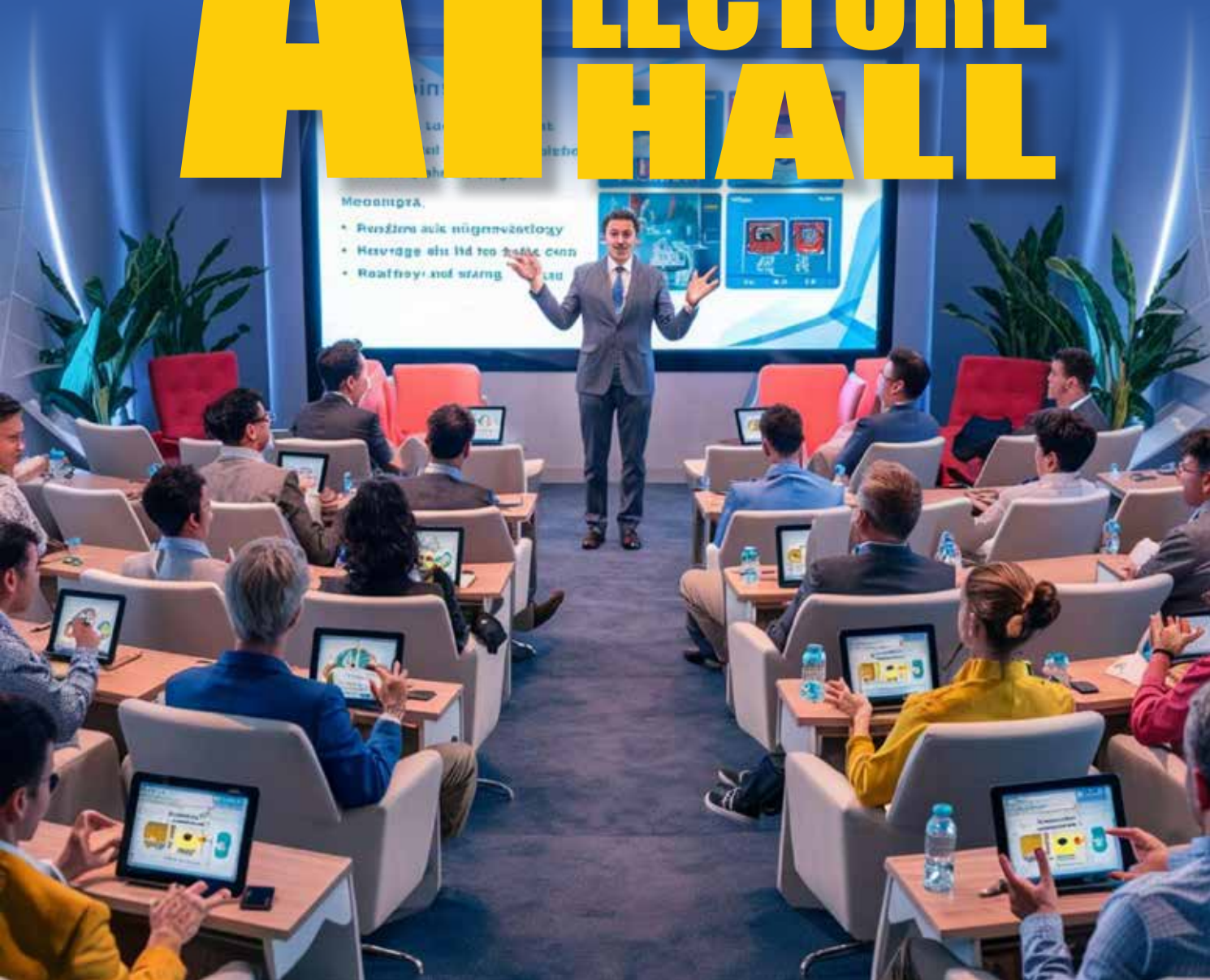
Volume 01 Spark 07 31 July, 2026 Rs.100

AI IS IN THE LECTURE HALL



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IGNITION

Lest we Miss

TECHNOLOGY is making everything faster. We can receive answers in seconds, generate presentations in minutes, learn from a professor on the other side of the globe, analyse thousands of pages of information instantly and watch an entire lecture at twice the normal speed. And yet, the most important things in life refuse to become faster.

You cannot download friendship. You cannot automate trust. You cannot acquire mastery by watching someone else do the difficult part. And no app lets us skip the uncomfortable middle between who we are and who we want to become.

That thought consumes this issue of SPARK.

In our cover story, Dr B Anbuthambi asks a simple question: when machines can answer, what should universities teach? That may be the most important question higher education has faced in years. If information is freely available, education cannot be about transferring information. If AI can produce an answer, students must learn not the answers, but how to question them. If a machine can generate ten solutions, I must decide which one to pursue. The university's job, therefore, is to develop the ability to ask better questions.

The story argues for an AI-augmented university in which technology increases human capability while human judgement remains crucial. The AI for Educators 5.0 workshop featured in these pages is an encouraging glimpse of that transition: 125 educators from 65 institutions experimenting with AI rather than merely listening to a lecture about it. Experienced teachers became learners again.

That is the attitude we need. Not AI versus human. But technology with human purpose.

Another article in this issue seems unconnected to AI at first. The Skip Button by JN Senthilkanna is about the small button that lets us bypass introductions, advertisements, recaps, and whatnot. The author says that when we practise skipping often, we may carry the habit into life.

By the way, the things that matter most are the things we cannot skip.

Mastery requires repetition. Friendship requires time. Fitness requires consistency. Grief requires being lived through. Becoming who we are requires passing through the awkward middle.

In the article on loneliness in universities, Dr Deependra Jha builds on that thought. This is the most digitally connected generation, yet many students feel disconnected. Universities, he says, need to create spaces where students can hang around, talk, and collaborate as human beings. Even the quieter pieces in this issue point in the same direction. The Geometry of Growth by Meera Venugopalan reminds us that compounding works because small actions are repeated long enough for their effect to become visible.

So this issue is really about a simple choice. We can live at the speed of our devices, measuring life by efficiency and convenience. Or we can use the extraordinary tools available to us while deliberately protecting the things that require time: thinking, learning, friendship, creativity and purpose. The future will undoubtedly be faster.

Our responsibility is not to slow technology down. It is to make sure that, as we become faster, we do not forget what is worth taking our time for, because some things in life are not meant to be skipped.

The 2-Minute Pause

What is one and one? Two, zero, one, or one based on whether you add, subtract, multiply or divide.

The situation decides the answer. So know the situation first.

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THE TEAM Successverse SPARK Vol.01 Spark 07 – 31 July 2026

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Published by: **ReadWrite Productions** (An initiative of Prime5C), 12th Cross Street, Dhandeeswaram Nagar, Velachery, Chennai 600042, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email: director@successverse.in | Tel: +91 63792 50670 | ***www.spark.successversefoundation.org***

The Power of Perspective

Which side are you looking from?

IT WAS a placement season at a college in Bangalore. I had been invited to speak to final year students. Before I began, I asked the room one question. "How many of you feel ready for the job market right now?" Three hands went up. Out of sixty. I asked the other fifty-seven — "What is stopping you?" The answers came quickly. Too young. No experience. Nobody knows who we are. The market is tough. Everyone is competing for the same roles. I wrote four words on the board.

I am too young.

Then underneath them — four more.

I have more energy.

Same person. Same age. Same situation. Two completely different realities. That is the power of perspective. Not positive thinking. Not pretending the difficulty does not exist. Simply choosing which side of the same truth you are standing on.

THE PERSPECTIVE MODEL

Most students hold one version of reality. What the world is not giving them yet. A different lens reveals the other side of the same reality. Here are three that I have seen change the direction of careers.

Perspective One. "*I am too young*" *becomes* "*I have more energy than most people starting this.*"

Youth is not a disadvantage dressed as an advantage. It is the actual advantage — if you use it. More time to experiment, more capacity to absorb feedback, more freedom to try things that someone with responsibilities cannot.

Perspective Two. "*I will get job ready once I get the job*" *becomes* "*I get the job because I am already ready.*"

This is the most expensive assumption students make. Organisations do not wait for you to arrive and then become ready. They look for evidence — before the offer. A LinkedIn article written in second year. A small project shared online. A competition entered. A workshop attended. A conversation initiated with someone doing work you admire. None of these require a degree. All of them build the signal that says — this person does not wait to be told.

Perspective Three. "*I don't know*" *becomes* "*I don't know yet.*"

One word. The limitation becomes a direction. The fixed becomes a journey.

WHICH SIDE ARE YOU LOOKING FROM?

After the workshop that day, the young woman came up to me.

"Sir, I have been seeing my age as the reason I cannot start. But I think it is actually the reason I can."

That shift — from cannot to can — did not change a single fact about her situation. It changed everything about what she would do next.

There is a book I recommend for exactly this reason — Zoom by Istvan Banyai. No words. Only pictures. Each page zooms out to reveal that what seemed like the whole picture was just a small piece of something much larger. You put it down with one quiet realisation. What you are seeing right now is never the complete picture.

1. ***Name one thing you are calling a disadvantage right now.***

   Now find the advantage on the other side of it. Write it down.

2. ***Do one job-ready thing this week — before you have the job.***

   A post. A project. A conversation. One visible thing that shows who you are becoming.

3. ***Find Zoom by Istvan Banyai.***

   Fifteen minutes. No words needed. The lesson will arrive on its own.

Everything has another side. The skill is simply learning to look for it — before life forces you to.

Venkatesh Athreya

A transformation consultant, and a leadership coach

A Car is a Car

Whatever you need to know about building habits towards a goal, you already know from driving a car. You just haven't noticed it yet.

Rajendran Dandapani,
Director – Zoho Corporation & President – Zoho Schools of Learning

LET' START with the rear-view mirror. It is there for an occasional glance, nothing more. Nobody steers a car by looking into it. Yet many of us try to prepare for the future by endlessly studying the past — replaying old failures, polishing old victories, and extrapolating old trends. In times such as these, when the road ahead is not like anything that came before it, driving by the rear-view mirror is useless. Glance, for sure. Then look ahead.

Now open the boot and check the spare tyre. Very few of us understand its importance. Fewer still know what state the tyre is in until they run over a nail in the middle of a lonely highway. Your Plan B is your spare tyre. Your savings, your fallback skill. Inspect it before the highway does it for you.

> Don't impair your odometer by connecting it to their speedometer.

FUEL, FRIENDS, AND FOCUS

Next the fuel tank. Too many of us play the game of stretching the E limit, proud of how far we can go on how little. Hitting the pitstop and refuelling both the car and the body is not weakness; it is maintenance. And the best time to do it is when you are not in a situation where you are forced to do it. Rest before exhaustion demands it. Refuel before empty.

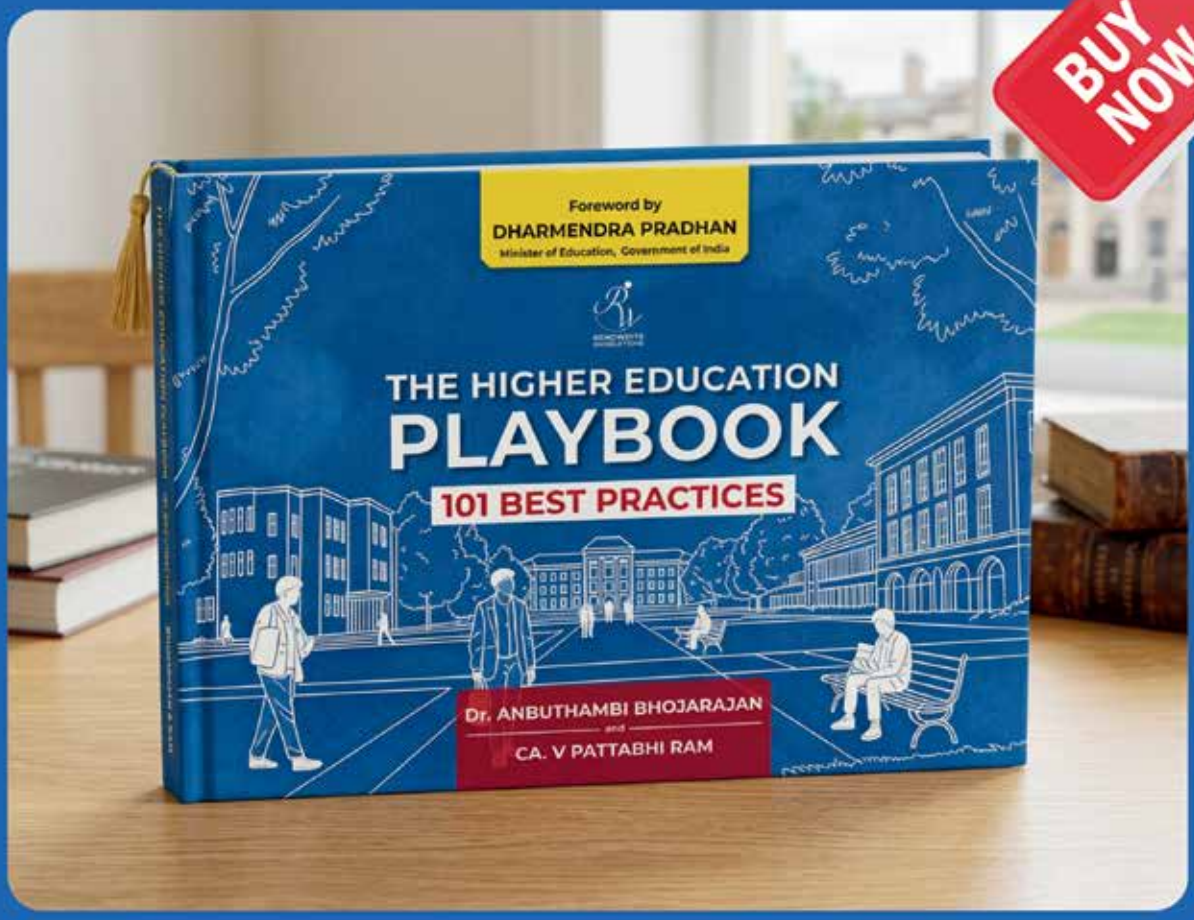
A word on road rage. I once spotted a beautiful lady in a red sports car and decided to show her who the better driver was. In my eagerness to win a race, I drove right past my exit and wasted an extra half hour on the highway — long after that lady had sailed past men. The lesson cost me thirty minutes and some pride: the moment you set your eyes on competing with a fellow road user, you take your eyes off your original destination. Each person has a different goal, and a different journey to reach it. Don't impair your odometer by connecting it to their speedometer.

JOURNEYS SHARED, NOT ALONE

Take somebody along. A car is too large for one person to sit there all alone for the length of the trip. Bring someone along for the conversation, for the learning, for the empathy, and for help when the spare tyre needs changing. Or go on a wild adventure, and offer a ride to a person walking on the road who seems to need assistance. Amazing friendships have blossomed on such occasions. Goals pursued alone are reached alone, and that is a hollow way to arrive.

Finally, remember this. When the journey is done, every car enters a garage and waits in silence for the next journey. So don't obsess too much over ventilated seats, sixteen-speaker surround sound, and hybrid EV badges. A car is a car is a car. It is the routes you take, the places you go to, and the people you meet along the way that end up really mattering.

Drive well. But know where you are going, and who is riding with you.



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AI IS IN THE LECTURE HALL

If the printing press blew the doors off knowledge, television dragged it into every living room, and the Internet put it in your pocket. Come COVID, and online learning tore up the campus map. Compared to today, these were trailers. For what we are seeing now is an altogether different beast. Something faster, hungrier, and unnerving. AI-driven technology is generating explanations, analysing information, and writing code even before the coffee gets cold.

TODAY, a student can ask AI to explain a complex concept in simple terms, challenge that explanation, and keep talking until the cows come home. A researcher can use AI to stress-test a hypothesis even before the guide sees it. A professor can effortlessly design learning and testing activities. And administrators can automate boring processes as well as clear a mountain load of student queries before it's lunch.

Beneath all this is one question that should keep every vice-chancellor awake at night: When machines can answer, what should universities teach? And that question has spin-offs.

If information is available at the click of a mouse, should we continue to test learning around information acquisition? If AI can produce a first draft, what should an assignment assess? If students can receive explanations from machines, what should happen inside a classroom? If researchers can speed up literature analysis, where's the fun in research? And if AI can perform many tasks, what skills should a graduate possess?

These are the questions pushing universities to move beyond AI adoption. Higher education's job now is not to hand the keys to the machines. Doing that would be going rogue. It is to build universities where technology increases human capability while judgement, ethics, and values remain sacrosanct. We are slowly seeing the emergence of the AI-Augmented University.

KNOWLEDGE IS NOW EVERYWHERE.

For centuries, the university was built around scarcity of knowledge. If you wanted to learn economics, you needed a teacher and a textbook. A professor's knowledge was a significant source of value because knowledge was not easily accessible.

The Internet bombed that model apart. It made knowledge more accessible, led to the emergence of digital libraries, and brought online courses to people's doorsteps. Generative AI has taken the next step. The learner can now interact with knowledge like a conversation: ask a question, receive an answer, and challenge the explanation. The relationship between learner and knowledge is becoming a back-and-forth. And that's mind-boggling.

But here is an important distinction that universities must understand quickly. While information is becoming abundant, understanding is not.

AI can generate an explanation, but that does not make it understanding. It can summarise ten research papers, but the researcher still has to verify what those papers say. AI can suggest a business strategy, but it does not live with the consequences if that strategy fails. That job is still for human beings. The university can, and should, never compete with AI in producing information. The university must become better at something far more valuable: developing human beings who can interpret information, question assumptions, and exercise judgement.

This is the first major shift in the purpose of higher education in the AI era.

QUESTIONS, NOT ANSWERS ARE WHERE THE MONEY IS.

For generations, education has rewarded students for finding answers. AI is changing that fast. When a student can generate ten possible answers in seconds, the value of simply producing an answer collapses. Instead, the value of the question increases. Questions like: Why is this happening? What evidence supports it? What have we overlooked? Who benefits? and What happens if the assumptions change?

These are the foundations of entrepreneurship, professional judgement and responsible citizenship. A future manager will need to question AI-generated forecasts. A doctor will need to question AI-supported recommendations. An engineer must challenge AI-generated designs. A teacher has to evaluate AI-generated learning resources.

The AI era therefore makes critical thinking more important than ever.

A common question in higher education is: Will AI replace teachers? Wrong question. The right question is: What will an excellent professor do differently because AI exists? For ages, students came to learn from the professor. But today, when they can access multiple AI systems that explain concepts, the professor's role changes dramatically.

Dr B Anbuthambi

Director, Successverse ASK Foundation. Educationist, Author and Public Speaker. Former President of ICT Academy

MACHINES ANSWER

When machines can answer, **universities should teach people how to think.**

QUESTIONS COUNT

The value of the question increases: **Why is this happening? Who benefits?**

Imagine a classroom where students have used AI to understand the basic concepts. Before they even walk in. The professor does not need to explain definitions. Instead, she can ask students to compare three AI-generated explanations and determine which is best. She can ask them to find weaknesses in an argument, defend an opposing position or apply a concept to a problem in their community. The classroom becomes a courtroom of ideas — verdicts required. The technology paves the way for professors to do the work that matters most: mentoring, inspiring, and developing human capability.

In another example, in a class on climate economics, the students have read the fundamentals and are now given a real-world problem. A city wants to reduce carbon emissions without damaging employment. Students work in groups, use AI to explore possible solutions, analyse data, and generate alternative policies. They challenge each other's recommendations while the professor asks difficult questions. The students finally present their recommendations. The professor evaluates not merely the answer but the reasoning behind it.

This is the difference between AI-assisted education and AI-augmented education—the first bolts a tool on. The second rewires the learning experience.

THE ESSAY IS DEAD. LONG LIVE THE ESSAY.

For decades, universities have relied heavily on essays, reports, assignments and examinations. These methods remain valuable, but the formats assume that a student's output represents the student's own thinking. Generative AI has dug a deep hole in that assumption.

A student can now ask ChatGPT to draft a 2,000-word essay in the time it takes to make toast. The immediate response may be to ask, "How do we detect AI-generated work?" But the more important question is: What exactly are we trying to assess?

If an assignment measures the ability to produce a polished document, AI will ruthlessly expose the assessment's limitations. If the objective is to assess reasoning, the assessment can be redesigned. The future of assessment must therefore move from "produce an answer" towards "demonstrate your thinking."

A student submitting a business plan could be asked to explain why a particular market was selected, which assumptions were made, what alternatives were rejected, what AI contributed, what the student changed and what evidence could potentially alter the recommendation. The assessment would then reveal something important: judgement. This is a capability worth assessing.

The university should not waste its energy trying to check if students have used AI. It should redesign assessment so that learning remains visible even when AI is available.

STOP POLICING.

Academic integrity remains non-negotiable. Students should not misrepresent AI-generated work as their own when institutional rules prohibit such use. However, universities should be wary of building their entire AI strategy around surveillance.

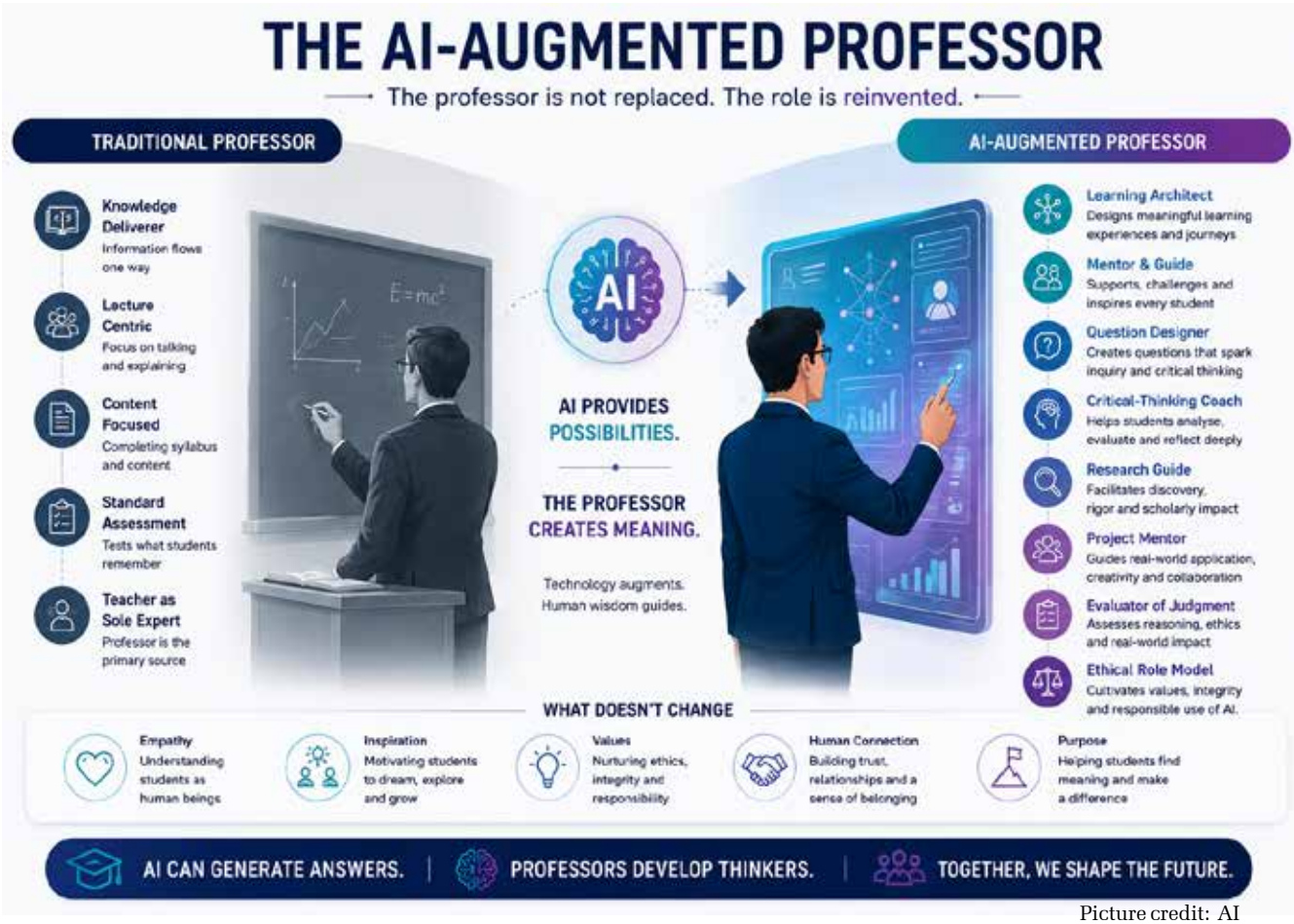
A more sustainable approach is a clear AI-use policy combined with transparency.

Students should know when AI use is permitted, when it is restricted, when it is prohibited, how AI assistance should be acknowledged, how AI-generated information should be verified and what constitutes academic misconduct. The same principles should apply to faculty and researchers.

The institutional conversation should therefore move from "How do we stop students using AI?" towards "How do we ensure students use AI without compromising learning?"

LAB COAT MEETS THE CHATBOT

AI can assist researchers across multiple stages of the research workflow, from literature discovery and synthesis to research-question development, data analysis, coding, visualisation, and academic writing. A doctoral scholar may use AI to identify themes across a large body of literature. A researcher may use AI to explore a dataset. A research team may use AI for transcription, translation or coding. A



Picture credit: AI

faculty member may use AI to improve the clarity of academic writing.

All this is fine. But one principle must remain non-negotiable: AI can accelerate research. It cannot outsource scholarly responsibility.

AI can fabricate a convincing reference that does not exist. It can confidently present an incorrect interpretation. It can introduce bias into an analysis. Therefore, AI literacy for researchers must include verification literacy. Researchers must become skilled at asking where a claim originated, whether it can be verified, whether the source actually supports the conclusion, what assumptions have been introduced and what the AI system might have misunderstood.

The most important AI question for universities is not "How do we teach students to use ChatGPT?" It is "What capabilities should a graduate possess when AI is everywhere?"

The answer requires us to rethink employability. The AI-era graduate will need AI literacy, critical thinking, problem-solving capability, communication, creativity, data literacy, collaboration, ethical reasoning, adaptability, and learning agility. These capabilities are not alternatives to technical knowledge. They complement it.

While AI may continue to perform more routine cognitive tasks, humans have to become better at judgement. AI can identify patterns, but humans must understand context. AI can identify an objective, but humans must determine whether it is worth pursuing.

Universities should ask a slew of questions. Like which lectures could be redesigned, which assignments are no longer relevant, and which elements of the curriculum need revision.

IS YOUR UNIVERSITY READY?

Given AI's breathtaking capabilities, university leaders need an institutional framework.

The first foundation is people. Faculty, students, researchers, and administrators need AI literacy. Faculty development must address AI fundamentals, AI-supported pedagogy, assessment redesign, research applications, verification, ethics, privacy, and responsible use.

The second is pedagogy. Every university should ask how AI improves learning. Does AI improve understand-

ESSAY REWIRED

The future of assessment must move from 'produce an answer' towards **demonstrate your thinking.**

ing, personalise learning, improve feedback or enable a previously difficult learning experience? If not, AI may not be necessary.

The third is platforms. Universities need to understand the technology environment, determine which AI systems are approved, understand where student data is going, establish appropriate security and privacy safeguards and consider equitable access.

The fourth foundation is policy. Universities need clear frameworks for academic integrity, privacy, research ethics, intellectual property, assessment, AI disclosure, data governance, and human oversight. Different disciplines, assignments and learning outcomes will require different approaches.

The fifth is purpose. Why is the university using AI? Is it improving learning, strengthening research, supporting students, reducing unnecessary administrative work, improving accessibility, or increasing employability? If the technology does not meaningfully contribute to the institution's purpose, its adoption should be questioned.

The objective is not to become an AI university. The objective is to become a better university in the age of AI.

PILLARS. THREE YEARS. ONE BIG BET.

The AI-Augmented University Plan 2026–2029 provides a useful institutional framework built around six strategic pillars: AI Governance, Teaching Excellence, Research Excellence, Student Success, Operational Excellence and Innovation.

These six pillars are important because they prevent AI transformation from becoming synonymous with classroom technology alone. The AI-Augmented University Plan proposes a three-year journey that begins with readiness and governance, moves into academic and operational integration, and progresses towards broader institutional transformation and leadership.

Phase One: Readiness and Governance

The first six months should be about understanding where the university actually stands, not where it thinks it stands. Institutions should conduct an AI readiness assessment, a technology and risk audit, a faculty capability assessment, a student AI literacy assessment, and a review of existing policies and processes. They should also engage key stakeholders across academic, administrative and student communities.

The blueprint recommends establishing an AI steering structure, appointing institutional AI leadership, developing an AI policy and governance framework, assessing technology readiness and building faculty awareness and competency.

This is critical because AI governance cannot be an afterthought. The university must establish principles around responsible AI use, academic integrity, data privacy, intellectual property, research ethics, assessment, student data, and human oversight.

The first institutional deliverable should therefore not be an AI chatbot.

It should be institutional readiness.

Phase Two: Academic and Operational Integration

Once governance is established, AI can move into structured academic use. Teaching and learning can progressively incorporate AI into lesson planning, assessment creation, personalised learning, learning management systems and student support. Research workflows can incorporate AI into literature review, academic writing, data analysis, citation management and visualisation. The blueprint specifically identifies these areas as important components of academic integration.

At the same time, universities should identify repetitive administrative workflows in areas such as admissions, student enquiries, timetables, document management and academic analytics. The blueprint proposes an AI automation layer to support these processes and identifies substantial reduction in routine administrative work as an intended outcome.

The guiding principle should be simple: automate the routine, augment the professional and humanise the experience.

Phase Three: Institutional Transformation

The second year should move AI beyond isolated projects and a handful of en-

thusiastic early adopters. The blueprint identifies curriculum expansion, industry integration and campus infrastructure as important priorities for this stage.

Every academic discipline should examine what AI means for its professional landscape. Universities can introduce AI electives, minors, prompt engineering, data literacy, AI ethics and discipline-specific AI applications. Engineering, medicine, management, commerce, law, humanities, education and design should each develop their own interpretation of AI literacy.

Industry partnerships should also become more important. Technology companies, research organisations, and sector leaders can contribute through internships, industry projects, joint research, mentoring, faculty development, certifications, and innovation challenges.

Campus infrastructure can support experimentation through AI innovation labs, research centres, smart classrooms, digital studios, and AI sandboxes. These facilities should not become expensive showcase projects. Their purpose should be to allow faculty and students to experiment, test new approaches and develop solutions.

Picture credit: AI

GUIDE, DON'T POLICE

The conversation must move from 'How do we stop students using AI?' to **'How do we ensure they use it responsibly?**

The objective is to create a campus where students do not merely learn about AI. They learn with AI, build with AI, question AI, and create with AI.

Phase Four: AI Leadership

The final stage is not about having more AI tools. It is about developing institutional leadership.

The blueprint describes a progression towards a globally connected ecosystem involving data-driven institutional intelligence, research and innovation, entrepreneurship, industry collaboration and international positioning.

At this stage, the university can move from being a consumer of AI to becoming a creator of AI-enabled knowledge and practice. It can develop research centres, innovation ecosystems, AI startups, industry partnerships, international collaborations, student entrepreneurship, faculty-industry projects, and applied research programmes.

The institution becomes a living laboratory. Students learn AI. Faculty use AI. Researchers create with AI. Industry collaborates with the university. The institution itself operates intelligently.

That is when AI becomes part of institutional identity.

AI MATURITY JOURNEY. FIVE STAGES.

Not every university will move at the same speed. The AI-Augmented University Plan presents an institutional maturity journey from AI Aware to AI Ready, then AI Integrated, AI Optimised and ultimately AI Leader.

At the AI Aware stage, the institution's primary task is understanding. Leaders, faculty, students, and administrators begin to develop awareness of AI and its implications.

At the AI Ready stage, the institution develops governance, infrastructure, policies and people capability.

At the AI Integrated stage, AI begins to become embedded in teaching, research, student support and selected administrative processes.

At the AI Optimised stage, the university begins using AI and data to create more intelligent, personalised and efficient institutional processes.

At the AI Leader stage, the institution begins to create new models, knowledge, partnerships, and innovations that can influence the wider higher education ecosystem.

This maturity model should not become another vanity league table. It should become a framework for self-improvement.

THE UNIVERSITY OF 2035

India has scale, a young population, enormous linguistic diversity and a wide spectrum of institutions, from globally recognised universities to colleges serving students from rural and semi-urban communities.

AI can address some of these differences. A student in a small-town institution can access high-quality explanations. Faculty could create multilingual learning resources. Researchers could navigate global literature more efficiently.

The more important question is: Can India use AI to make higher education more accessible, equitable, relevant and human-centred? That should be the ambition.

Imagine a university ten years from now. A student enters with a digital academic profile that captures learning goals, interests, projects and demonstrated capabilities. The student has access to an AI learning companion that can explain difficult concepts, provide additional practice, help organise research and support reflection.

But the student also has a human academic mentor. Education is not simply information transfer. The student participates in physical and virtual classrooms. Some learning is personalised. Some is collaborative. Some is experiential. Some is deliberately conducted without AI.

Assessment is continuous and authentic. The student's portfolio demonstrates what the student can actually do. Faculty spend less time on repetitive tasks and more time mentoring, researching and designing learning experiences. Administrative

systems become more intelligent. Research becomes more collaborative. Industry becomes more closely connected to the curriculum.

The campus becomes an ecosystem of learning, research, innovation and entrepreneurship. But the university remains human. That is the paradox of AI.

The more technology we introduce, the more deliberately we must protect the human purpose of education.

Universities have experienced several waves of educational technology. There is a familiar pattern: a new platform arrives, institutions purchase it, faculty receive training, an initiative is announced and, gradually, teaching returns to the old model.

AI cannot be approached in the same way. It is too consequential. The question cannot simply be, "Which AI tool should we buy?" It must be, "What kind of university do we want to become?"

That question belongs in the boardroom. It belongs in academic councils. It belongs in faculty meetings. It belongs in student forums. It belongs in research committees. It belongs in conversations with industry. AI transformation is ultimately a conversation about institutional purpose.

We are entering one of the most consequential periods in the history of higher education. There will be enthusiasm, fear, experimentation, failures and remarkable breakthroughs. Universities should neither blindly embrace AI nor unthinkingly resist it. They should lead.

They should experiment responsibly, carry out research, and should establish guardrails. They must also listen to students and faculty. They should measure outcomes. And they should constantly ask whether AI is actually improving education.

The AI-Augmented University Plan offers one useful way to think about this journey: begin with governance, move towards academic and operational integration, expand into curriculum, and ultimately build an innovation ecosystem capable of global leadership.

Ultimately, the goal is to move from the university that uses AI to the university that knows how to use AI to become a better university.

SO WHAT'S LEFT TO TEACH?

We can now return to the question with which we began. When machines can answer, universities should teach people how to think.

They should teach students how to question, investigate, distinguish between evidence and opinion, recognise uncertainty, and make decisions. They should teach students how to work with people who think differently, how to create, lead, collaborate, and take responsibility. And perhaps most importantly, universities must teach students how to remain human in a world increasingly shaped by intelligent machines.

AI can generate a poem, but it does not experience what the poem means to a human life. AI can analyse a business strategy, but it does not bear the consequences when that strategy affects people's livelihoods. AI can generate a research hypothesis, but the researcher must decide whether the question is meaningful. AI can produce ten solutions, but someone must decide which solution is worth pursuing. That someone is human. This is why higher education remains important in the age of AI. It becomes more important.

The university's role is not to compete with artificial intelligence. Its role is to develop human intelligence capable of working with artificial intelligence responsibly, creatively and wisely. The university of the future should therefore not be AI versus human. It should be AI with Human Purpose.

The machines may become increasingly intelligent. The university's responsibility is to ensure that its people become more capable, more thoughtful, more ethical and wiser.

And perhaps the defining principle for higher education in the coming decade is this: When machines become better at answering, universities must become better at teaching people which questions are worth asking.

That's not a footnote. That's the whole story.

HUMAN PURPOSE

The university of the future should not be AI versus human. **It should be AI with Human Purpose.**

Preparing education for the Age of AI

AI is sweeping the world including that of education.

Dr. Anbu Rathinavel

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

RECOGNISING this, India's National Education Policy (NEP 2020) identifies Design Thinking as an essential competency for students and educators alike. However, Design Thinking is much more than a subject in the curriculum. It is a mindset that enables learners to connect knowledge, understand people, and create meaningful solutions for real-world challenges.

Traditional education primarily focuses on building skills—learning programming, finance, marketing, engineering, or science. As students continue to apply these skills through projects and internships, they gradually develop expertise. While expertise is valuable, today's challenges require something more: perspective.

Perspective is the ability to connect different domains of knowledge, identify patterns, and understand problems from a broader systems view. Innovation rarely emerges from expertise in a single discipline; instead, it is created when multiple areas of knowledge come together.

At the School of Design Thinking, we describe this progression through our SEPIA© (Five Forces of Growth) framework, which encourages learners to evolve from Skill → Expertise → Perspective. This transition enables students to connect the dots, recognise opportunities, and develop innovative solutions that organisations increasingly demand.

SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

One of the biggest challenges in higher education is that students often learn subjects in isolation. A concept studied during the first year may appear disconnected from something taught in the final semester, making learning fragmented rather than cumulative.

Effective learning happens when students understand how knowledge connects.

For example, a Computer Science student may learn multiple programming languages while separately studying algorithms, databases, software engineering, and artificial intelligence. The real value emerges only when these subjects are viewed as an interconnected ecosystem rather than independent courses.

To address this challenge, the School of Design Thinking has developed Business Wired Knowledge Maps©, a Design Thinking framework that helps learners visualise the relationships between subjects, concepts, and ideas. This approach enables students to organise knowledge into meaningful clusters, identify

patterns, and build a holistic understanding of their curriculum.

When students begin to see the "big picture," they are better equipped to apply knowledge creatively and solve multidisciplinary problems.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE REAL WORLD

Academic projects play an important role in developing collaboration and technical competence. However, the dynamics of a student project are often very different from those of an enterprise team.

In professional environments, individuals work with diverse colleagues, manage tight deadlines, balance competing priorities, and collaborate with people from different backgrounds and expertise. Success depends not only on technical ability but also on empathy, communication, adaptability, and teamwork.

Design Thinking introduces students to these human-centered capabilities through tools such as Persona, which helps them understand the motivations, challenges, behaviours, and expectations of different stakeholders. While Persona is widely used to understand customers, it can also strengthen collaboration within student teams by fostering empathy and improving interpersonal relationships.

Developing these capabilities prepares students to transition more effectively from classrooms to workplaces.

BUILDING FUTURE-READY LEARNING ECOSYSTEMS

In the age of AI, education must evolve from delivering information to developing thinkers. Answers are increasingly available through intelligent systems, but the ability to ask meaningful questions, frame complex problems, and design innovative solutions remains a distinctly human strength.

Design Thinking provides this foundation. It encourages curiosity, systems thinking, experimentation, collaboration, and continuous learning—qualities that are essential for both students and educators.

By integrating Design Thinking into pedagogy, curriculum, and institutional culture, higher education institutions can prepare graduates who are not only technically competent but also capable of navigating uncertainty, driving innovation, and creating meaningful impact.

The future belongs not simply to those who know the most, but to those who can connect knowledge, understand people, and transform ideas into solutions. Design Thinking empowers both students and faculty to make that transition—from acquiring knowledge to creating value, and from learning subjects to shaping the future.

REVIEW

Brief Forever

IN BRIEF FOREVER, CA Pragya Panda delivers a classy exploration of impermanence. Of love, choices, and the courage to live unapologetically. At its heart lies Priya Pradhan, a woman discovering the power of financial independence, the kind that feels "like breathing without permission." Her audacity in walking into Shaurya's life, smiling at his mother, wearing his ring, and planning a wedding on her own terms is the heartbeat of the narrative.

Beyond being about independence, the book also carries the warmth of companionship. At moments, the friendships echo in the camaraderie of The Three Musketeers. There are flashes of humour too, woven into everyday details, and make the narrative feel lived.

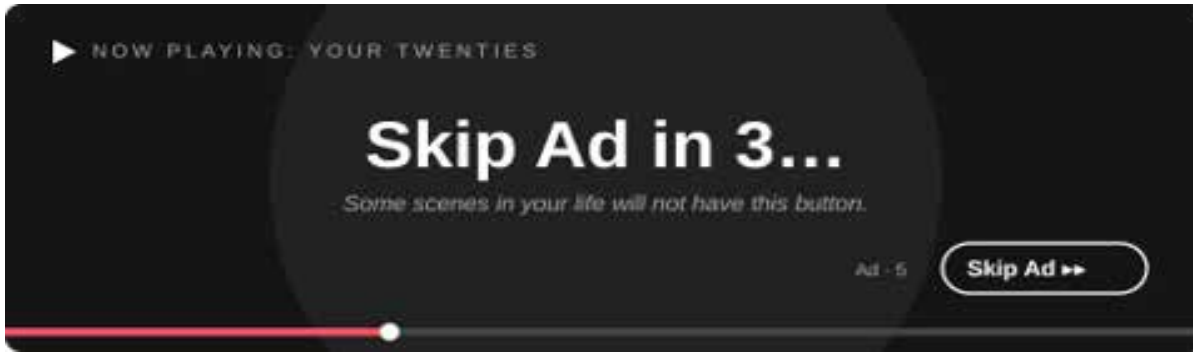
One stylistic choice, however, stands out. Each chapter is titled after famous films or literary works — from Working Girl to The Shawshank Redemption. This device feels distracting, pulling the reader's attention away from the story itself. A simpler titling approach might have allowed the narrative to breathe more naturally.

Pragya Panda's prose blends emotional honesty with sharp social commentary, though at times the narrative shifts abruptly between memoir and philosophy. Characters like Priya shine with boldness, while others remain lightly drawn, leaving the story uneven in places. Yet the fearless voice makes the book engrossing.

Brief Forever lingers as a debut that is both audacious and polished. It is less about forever, more about the brief, brilliant sparks that define us. And it does so with a rare mix of honesty, humour, and friendship.

The Skip Button

You press it 50 times a day. It is quietly pressing back.



AT 11.47 PM, Aditya is watching a series he does not particularly like. Skips Intro. Skips Recap. Sets playback speed to 1.5x. An ad appears; he stares at the corner of the screen, waiting for the grey countdown to become a button. He is no longer watching the show. He is watching for the skip button.

Aditya is not lazy. He tops his class, runs a design page on Instagram, and hears podcasts at 2x while walking to the bus stop. He is, by every measure his phone can record, efficient. But his phone does not record everything.

Senthilkanna JN
Chief Executive Officer
Sri Venkateswaraa College of Technology

A BUTTON BECOMES A REFLEX

The skip button was invented as a courtesy. Somewhere along the way, it became a practice, a worldview. Skip the intro, the ad, and then even the good part. Each skip, taken alone, is sensible. The trouble is that no skip is taken alone. You press it a few thousand times a year. A button pressed that often stops being a button, and becomes a habit. You begin to scan everything — songs, lectures, conversations, people — for the moment it will get to the point.

The previous generation waited a week for the next episode. Waiting was not a virtue; it was a shortage. But shortages train muscles. And the muscle they trained — the ability to stay inside a slow moment — is the one you now need for things the skip button cannot touch.

THE UNSKIPPABLE FIVE

Because here is the quiet catch. The five things that will decide the shape of your life have no skip button.

Mastery. You can watch a tutorial at 2x. You cannot debug at 2x. The gap between knowing and doing is crossed only at 1x, in hours nobody claps for. Grief. The mind offers skip buttons — distraction, denial, doomscrolling. Press them, and the episode does not end. It pauses, and resumes at a worse time. Trust. There is no montage version of friendship; it is built in real time. Fitness. Day 40 feels exactly like day 39. That is it working. Becoming someone. The uncomfortable middle of your story is not the boring part. It is the plot.

Notice what the five have in common. Each is what your seniors mean by: maturity. Maturity was never about age. It is the record of what you sat through.

THE 1X EXPERIMENT

Aditya tried something small in June. One thing a day at 1x. One song heard fully. One lecture without the second screen. One conversation where the pause sat unfilled. The first week was physically uncomfortable. By the third week, a 2x-worthy professor turned out to be funny at normal speed, and a friend, given thirty unhurried seconds, said something real. Nothing about his life changed. Everything about its resolution did.

WHICH BUTTON ARE YOU?

The skip button is not your enemy. Skip the ads, and the recaps. Just know what you are training every time you press it, and keep one thumb educated in the older skill: the ability to stay. Because one day, in an interview, in a hospital corridor, in a relationship worth keeping, life will hand you a long, slow, unskippable scene.

The people who cope are not the ones who never skipped. They remembered how to watch.

The Geometry of Growth

I remember watching a small plant in my garden. Initially, it didn't appear to be growing for days on end.

THEN ONE MORNING, a new leaf popped up, and then another. The growth was steady, almost invisible until it became real. I couldn't deny the plant was taking shape. Money too behaves like that plant.

A few years ago, my friend's daughter put Rs 100 every month into a digital deposit. You will agree that the sum was small even by the standards of Gen Alpha's needs. Yet, over time, something happened. She built a rhythm or what you might call a habit. It was the small habit of repeating something until it paid off. That's compounding for you.

EFFORT MULTIPLIES LIKE INTEREST

Freelance work is something similar. You can take to teaching, designing, selling or whatever you are comfortable with. The result is not instantaneous. You keep doing, and one fine morning it all falls into place. Compounding is not only about interest rates but also about energy multiplying when effort is repeated.

THE CHESSBOARD LESSON

There is this old story about a chessboard. You place one grain of rice on the first square, then double it on each square until the 64th square. By the tenth square, the pile is just over a thousand grains, but by the twentieth, it is a million. And presto, when you hit 64, the sum is astronomical; something like eighteen quintillion. That's far more rice than the world can grow. This story is neither about rice nor chess, but about how repetition, when left undisturbed, snowballs into something big. It's also known as compounding.

So if you start saving a single rupee each day, and doubling it every day, you can hit a fortune. I know you may not have that kind of money. So consider even putting the same amount every day. The result may not be as astounding as the earlier exercise, but it would still add up to a pile. The point is that what feels small at the beginning can become astonishing over time.

FROM RUPEES TO PORTFOLIOS

Digital finance makes this easier to see. Notifications replace passbooks. A few clicks move savings into deposits, or investments into mutual funds. The repetition gives it weight.

Remember my friend's daughter. By the time she came out of school, she had built a small portfolio formed by the habit of saving. She realised that compounding is less about sudden wealth and more about the steadiness of repetition. I am sure that over the years she will make a lot of money.

For you students, the rhythm is important. If you repeat a side hustle each week or a deposit each month, it is like the grains on the chessboard. They do not look like much at first, but they exceed expectations.

Compounding is not a secret. It is a way of noticing how repetition shapes the future. It reminds us that growth is often invisible until it is undeniable.

Meera Venugopalan
Corporate finance and audit professional.

> Compounding is not only about interest rates but also about energy multiplying when effort is repeated.

The Epidemic of a Lonely Network. How Universities can Help.

Technology does not set precedent for connection. For a small world.

Dr Deependra Kumar Jha
Vice Chancellor, Manav Rachna University

I'VE BEEN HEARING echoes of it for a while — the diminishing space for vulnerability, for the connections AI has replaced. 'Eommisae' is an interesting phenomenon in that way; I'm thinking of all the lonely, ageing parents who have found companionship in their children who drift and come right back.

South Korean youth are increasingly choosing to hang out with their mothers over friends or romantic partners. There are more reasons than one: financial independence, declining interest in dating, urban loneliness. Ease. Convenience.

It's a strange feeling to be sitting in the middle. Our students are connected — more than ever. Every tool at their disposal. They're networked, messaged, pinged, and perpetually reachable. And yet, here we are — paradoxically, loneliness on campuses is epidemic. The contradiction isn't accidental.

Connection has become transactional. It's a message sent, a like received, a notification that someone acknowledged. Belonging is different. It requires presence. Vulnerability. The risk that comes with being genuinely known.

Universities have optimised for connection at the expense of belonging. We've built digital ecosystems — learning management systems, social platforms, online communities — that create the illusion of closeness while enabling distance. A student can attend lectures, submit assignments, and graduate without ever having a real conversation with another human being.

This isolation is designed. Easier to label, easier to track, easier to manage. We're reducing our students into data points, and it isn't a coincidence that they're becoming lonely. It's by design.

WHAT SHOULD CHANGE, THEN?

Unfortunately, it cannot be solved by more technological integration – not another platform, another app, or another online community. The instinct to build will only deepen the crisis. What students need can't be digitised.

We need physicality. We need tangible, deliberate spaces and structures that demand genuine encounter. Not forced socialising or mandatory events, but intentional spaces that enable conversations.

This means redesigning common spaces. Not the sterile, corporate atriums most campuses have become, but places where students actually want to linger. Where informal gathering happens naturally. Where conversations can begin without an agenda. It's striking how many universities have eliminated the very spaces — courtyards, commons, lounges — where unstructured belonging used to occur.

It also means restructuring how learning happens. Universities should prioritise smaller seminars, tutorials, and collaborative work where students encounter each other. Where professors know students as individuals and students know each other across differences.

But this requires something harder: universities need to slow down. The industrial model of higher education—maximise efficiency, process students quickly, measure success in credentials—is incompatible with genuine community. Belonging takes time. It requires redundancy, inefficiency, repeated encounters that seem purposeless.

Universities should also reconsider their advising structures. A student sitting alone in a dorm room, confused about their major or struggling with depression, needs more than an email response from an overworked advisor. They need someone who knows them, who checks in, who cares about their actual wellbeing—not just their academic progress.

This is expensive. It requires more faculty, smaller class sizes, actual institutional commitment to students as humans rather than enrolment numbers. But the cost of not doing it—epidemic loneliness, mental health crises, students graduating with degrees but no sense of belonging—is far higher.

Beyond structure, universities need to be honest about what they're actually teaching. If the curriculum emphasises individual achievement, competition for grades, and careerism, students will internalise these values. They'll see peers as competitors rather than community. Universities that claim to value community while structuring everything around individual success are creating the very loneliness they lament.

Finally, universities should model what belonging actually looks like. If faculty are isolated in silos, if administrators don't know students, if the institution itself feels fragmented—students will feel that fragmentation. But when faculty engage with each other across disciplines, when they're genuinely curious about students, when they prioritise presence over efficiency—that changes the culture.

The crisis of student loneliness is fundamentally a crisis of meaning. Students are connected but not rooted. They have access to everyone but belong to no one. They're achieving milestones but not building lives worth living. Universities can't solve loneliness through apps or algorithms. They can only solve it by returning to what universities were actually supposed to do: create communities where young people encounter each other, struggle together, and discover what it means to belong.

This requires universities to stop optimising for efficiency and start optimising for human connection. To value presence over productivity. To believe that the deepest learning happens not in lectures but in the spaces between—where students become friends, where vulnerability becomes possible, where loneliness begins to dissolve.

That's the work. That's what universities should actually do.

> Students can graduate without a single real conversation. Isolation isn't accidental – it's engineered. Easier to label, track, and manage. We've reduced them to data points, and loneliness is the design.

AI for Educators 5.0

When Educators Became Learners Again – Executive Workshop

AT A TIME when Artificial Intelligence is rapidly transforming every dimension of higher education, AI for Educators 5.0 – Cohort 1 brought together 125 faculty members from 65 institutions across South India at IIT Madras Research Park, Chennai, creating a vibrant day of curiosity, experimentation, conversations, and hands-on learning. The cohort represented a unique mix of academic leadership and teaching experience, with 5 Principals, 60 Deans and Heads of Departments, and 60 Professors coming together with a shared objective of understanding how AI can meaningfully transform education.

Led by CA V. Pattabhi Ram and Dr. B. Anbuthambi, the Executive Development Program was designed to help higher education educators move beyond simply understanding AI and discover how it can be practically applied in teaching, assessment, research, academic administration and everyday academic productivity. What made the programme particularly distinctive was its hands-on approach, with every participant arriving with a laptop and actively participating in the learning and experimentation throughout the day, turning the workshop into a genuine AI learning laboratory.

The educators were introduced to the rapidly expanding world of Generative AI tools including ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Google NotebookLM, and several other emerging AI applications, giving them an opportunity to understand the strengths and possibilities of different platforms. Instead of simply watching demonstrations, participants worked directly with these tools, experimenting with prompts and exploring a wide range of real-world use cases in education, including lesson planning, content creation, assessment design, research, presentations, academic communication, and productivity.

The energy in the room was evident as educators moved from one experiment to another, testing ideas, comparing outputs, and discussing how these applications could be adapted to their own disciplines and classrooms. The presence of laptops across the room transformed the workshop into a genuine AI learning laboratory, where learning happened through experimentation rather than observation. Experienced professors who had spent decades teaching were once again in the role of learners, discovering new possibilities and challenging their own assumptions about technology and education.

To ensure that the learning continued beyond the one-day programme, every participant received a comprehensive Workshop Handbook containing the presentations and learning resources, along with a specially curated collection of '101 Prompts for Higher Education', designed to help educators apply AI to practical academic tasks even after returning to their institutions. The intention was to provide

not just exposure to AI, but a practical reference that educators could revisit and use in their everyday academic work.

One of the most inspiring aspects of Cohort 1 was the participation of five Principals, who chose to experience the programme alongside their faculty members. Their presence demonstrated an important principle for the future of higher education: institutional transformation must begin with leadership that is willing to learn, experiment and understand emerging technologies firsthand. Alongside them, 60 Deans and Heads of Departments brought valuable institutional perspectives, while 60 Professors contributed their classroom experiences and practical insights, making the conversations richer and more relevant.

The diversity of the 65 participating institutions added tremendous energy to the programme, with educators from different disciplines and academic environments exchanging ideas, sharing experiences, and discovering possibilities that could be adapted to their own institutions. The day became more than an AI workshop; it became a shared exploration of how educators can use technology to enhance what they already do best.

At the heart of the programme was the idea of the AI-Augmented Educator, where technology is viewed not as a replacement for educators but as an enabler that can help them become more creative, productive, and effective, while keeping human judgement, academic integrity, and responsible use at the centre.

The photographs from Cohort 1 capture more than an event; they capture a mindset in transition, with educators moving from awareness to experimentation and from curiosity to practical application. 125 educators, 65 institutions, laptops open, AI tools being explored, educational use cases being tested, and a handbook and 101 curated prompts to continue the learning—the day demonstrated that the future of AI in education is not something to wait for; it is something educators can begin shaping today.

This first cohort has laid the foundation for a growing community of AI-ready educators, and registrations are now open for AI for Educators 5.0 – Cohort 2, scheduled for 2 September 2026 at IIT Madras Research Park, Chennai. As the journey continues, we look forward to welcoming more educators and institutions to build a more confident, responsible and AI-augmented higher education ecosystem.

PODCAST PICKS

From Dishwasher to 80 Franchises

Alex Filipuk is an immigrant business owner. Hailing from Belarus, Alex Filipuk traversed Poland and Denmark before settling in Canada. There, he built the second-largest siding company for fibre cement materials across North America.

"For my grandparents, the most important thing was education. And for my parents, it was housing. In Belarus, a house cost $30,000, but salaries were only about $300 per month. And citizens didn't lean into loans because interest rates were at 25% p.a."

Alex grew up in a one-bedroom condo shared by five people. He was good at math, logic and problem-solving. His first shot at business involved buying a couple of used phones in Poland every two to three weeks and selling them in Belarus.

After working for PayPal in Europe, he went to Canada. He started as a dishwasher in Cactus Club. "It was a very good experience where I got to see how affordable fine dining works. I observed that people on minimum wage were trying hard to be the best." After he got his Canadian PR, he tried several businesses: a digital magazine, lead generation, and digital marketing. "The perfect business in my head was to be a digital nomad, so I could travel anywhere I want."

After a few unsuccessful attempts with recruiters, he decided to launch a business. In digital marketing, he generated leads for 'siding', which in construction is the protective outer material attached to the exterior walls of a building. He found franchising in 'siding' lucrative, and zeroed in on Fiber cement and vinyl, which had negligible competition. He initially tried to set up a centralised back office in Belarus to handle administration, marketing, and design. But finding English speakers willing to work night shifts became difficult there, and so he established that office elsewhere.

Alex has now successfully penetrated the US market and has almost 80 franchises in the United States.

Podcast Series: Canadian Dream Podcast
Host: Elton Hubner
Guest: Alex Filipuk
Episode Title: How Alex Filipuk built Ideal Siding from scratch

The Journey from Shelter to Home

Krystyna Lloyd, the CEO of Safe Haven Foundation, shares her journey. Having survived an unsafe home during childhood, Krystyna is personally connected to its mission.

Safe Haven Foundation supports girls and young women who are at risk of homelessness. Unpacking their trauma and connecting them to resources so they move from survival mode to pursuing what they want in life is the goal of this Foundation. First, the girls are connected with good-hearted people who help them experience home. Once they find joy in life and can identify what they want, their life skills are tested: the young women are given access to a community apartment where they pay affordable rent, experience independence, while still having access to transition coaching.

Krystyna says it is important to pick up the early signs that a young person is living in survival mode. Generally, the biggest sign is the inability to talk about what they want to do in life. In younger children, it may look like going to school in the same clothes, spending unusual amounts of time at friends' homes, and avoiding going home. Identifying these early signs can stop homelessness before it begins and prevent wrong people from exploiting the situation. It can also attract unsafe people into the home environment.

Conversations are an important part of the healing process, something that government-arranged shelters might not be able to provide. Safe Haven Foundation also helps its alums buy homes. "We have pooled a fund by women realtors who donate a portion of their commission. Any alumna can seek us when they buy homes on mortgage, and we gift them their down payment!"

The goal is to help people like this become asset owners and ultimately reach a position of power.

Podcast Series: Canadian Podcast with Zak
Host: Zak
Guest: Krystyna Lloyd

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Building Dynamic Business Dashboards

With Excel's Advanced Reporting Tools

Vinoth Kumar R
Microsoft Certified Trainer

AN INTERACTIVE Excel dashboard is a visual reporting solution that enables users to analyse, filter, and explore data dynamically. Instead of manually reviewing hundreds or thousands of rows of information, users can view summarised reports and interactive charts that instantly respond to their selections. By combining Excel Tables, Pivot Tables, Pivot Charts, Slicers, and Timelines, an interactive dashboard transforms raw business data into meaningful insights that support better decision-making, performance monitoring, and trend analysis.

The interactive nature of the dashboard allows users to click filters, select categories, or choose specific time periods without modifying the original dataset. So, users can quickly answer questions and monitor performance indicators in real time.

CREATING THE FOUNDATION WITH EXCEL TABLES

The first step in developing an interactive dashboard is converting the raw dataset into an Excel Table. Suppose a worksheet contains sales information with columns such as Date, Region, Product, and Sales. For example, one record might show that on 1 January 2026, the North region sold Laptops worth ₹50,000, while another record shows that on 2 January 2026, the South region sold Mobile phones worth ₹25,000.

To convert this data into an Excel Table, you have to select the entire data range and press Ctrl+T. You can also choose Insert > Table from the ribbon. Whichever you choose, Excel asks whether the table contains headers, and once you confirm, the data is converted into a structured table.

Using an Excel Table has several advantages. When new rows are added, the table automatically expands to accommodate them. Structured references simplify formulas, and the table becomes a dynamic data source for Pivot Tables and charts. Since all dashboard components can reference the table, any newly entered data automatically becomes available after refreshing the reports.

SUMMARISING DATA WITH PIVOT TABLES

Once the data has been converted into a table, the next step is to summarise it using a Pivot Table. A Pivot Table enables users to analyse thousands of records in seconds by grouping and aggregating data to meet different business requirements.

To create a Pivot Table, the user clicks anywhere inside the Excel Table and selects Insert > PivotTable. Excel prompts for the location of the Pivot Table, and choosing a new worksheet helps keep the dashboard organised. After creating the Pivot Table, fields such as Region can be placed in the Rows area, Product in the Columns area, and Sales in the Values area using the Sum aggregation.

The resulting Pivot Table summarises total sales for each product across all regions. For instance, the North region may show Laptop sales of ₹2,50,000 and Mobile sales of ₹1,20,000, resulting in total sales of ₹3,70,000.

Pivot Tables provide flexibility because users can instantly change the analysis by dragging fields into different areas. They support math calculations like Sum, Count, Average, Minimum, and Maximum, and allow grouping by period.

VISUALISING BUSINESS DATA WITH CHARTS

While Pivot Tables summarise numerical information, charts convert those summaries into visual representations that are easier to interpret. Charts help users rec-

ognise trends, comparisons, and patterns much faster than reading numerical tables.

After selecting the Pivot Table, the user chooses PivotTable Analyse > PivotChart and selects a chart type. It could be a line chart, a column chart, or a Pie or doughnut chart, depending on what information is being shown. For example, a monthly sales trend displayed as a line chart clearly shows seasonal increases or decreases in revenue.

ENHANCING USER INTERACTION WITH SLICERS

An important feature that makes dashboards interactive is the use of Slicers. A Slicer is a graphical filtering tool that lets users filter Pivot Tables and Pivot Charts by clicking buttons rather than using traditional filter menus.

A Slicer is inserted by selecting the Pivot Table and choosing PivotTable Analyse > Insert Slicer. Users can then select fields such as Region, Product, or Salesperson. For example, a Region Slicer may display North, South, East, and West, while a Product Slicer may include Laptop, Mobile, and Printer. If the user selects North, all connected Pivot Tables and charts update to display information only for the North region. Slicers improve dashboard usability because they are visually appealing and easy for non-technical users to understand.

FILTERING DATA BY TIME USING TIMELINES

Business reports frequently require analysis over different time periods. Excel provides Timelines specifically for filtering date fields within Pivot Tables.

A Timeline is inserted by selecting the Pivot Table and choosing PivotTable Analyse > Insert Timeline. After selecting the Date field, Excel displays an interactive horizontal timeline.

Users can filter data by calendar by dragging the timeline selector. For instance, a sales manager may choose to analyse only the second quarter of 2026. Every connected chart and Pivot Table updates instantly to reflect the selected time period.

DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE DASHBOARD LAYOUT

Once all reports and visualisations have been created, they are arranged into a professional dashboard. A well-designed dashboard presents the most important business information at a glance while maintaining a clean, organised appearance.

At the top of the dashboard, Key Performance Indicator (KPI) cards display summary metrics, including Total Sales, Total Profit, Total Orders, and Average Order Value. These KPI cards immediately communicate overall business performance.

Below the KPI section, the Region and Product slicers are positioned side by side.

The central portion of the dashboard contains the primary visualisations. A column chart compares sales across regions, while a line chart illustrates monthly sales trends. Another chart may display product-wise sales performance or profit contribution.

At the bottom of the dashboard, a summary table highlights the top-performing products. Presenting this information alongside charts enables users to compare numerical values with visual trends.

A professional dashboard should use consistent colours, aligned objects, readable fonts, and sufficient spacing between components. Excessive visual elements should be avoided to help users focus on the most important information.

CONNECTING MULTIPLE PIVOT TABLES

An advantage of interactive dashboards is that one Slicer can control multiple Pivot Tables. After creating several Pivot Tables, the user can right-click the Slicer and choose Report Connections or PivotTable Connections. Selecting all relevant Pivot Tables applies the same Slicer filters to all connected reports and charts.

Interactive dashboards are designed to work with continuously changing business data. When new records are added to the Excel Table, the table automatically expands to include them. After selecting Data > Refresh All, every Pivot Table, Pivot Chart, Slicer, and Timeline updates to incorporate the latest information.

This capability makes Excel dashboards suitable for daily operational reporting, weekly management reviews, monthly financial analysis, and executive performance monitoring.

CONCLUSION

An interactive Excel dashboard integrates Tables, Pivot Tables, Charts, Slicers, and Timelines into a single reporting environment, enabling users to explore business information efficiently. The process begins by storing data in an Excel Table, then summarising the information with Pivot Tables and presenting the results with Pivot Charts. Slicers and Timelines provide intuitive filtering capabilities that allow users to interact with the dashboard without changing the underlying data.

When designed effectively, an interactive dashboard provides users with real-time insights into organisational performance.

The Odyssey of an Entrepreneur

I have seen the recently launched Odyssey. It is truly a classic story told 2,000 years ago. It could travel to today so seamlessly because of the eternal value it carries within the story.

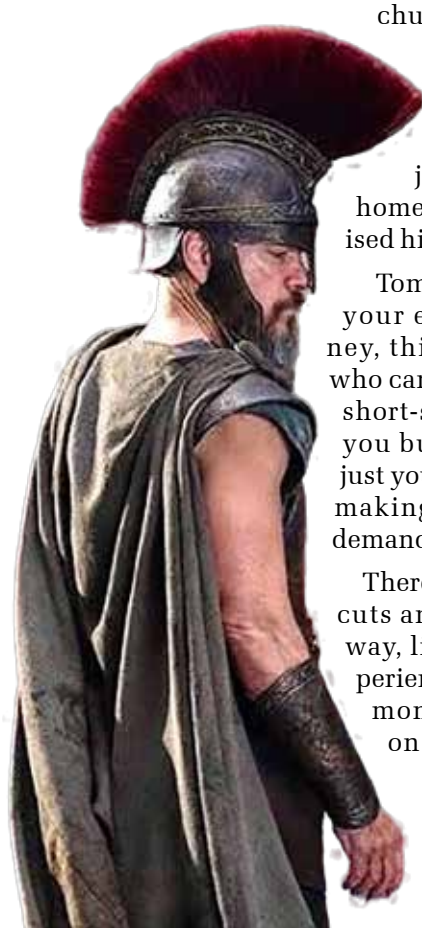
CA Ranjan Kumar Sahoo

Manager (Information System Audit), SBI Hyderabad

IT SIMPLY shows a man's journey home, but it also shows everything that a man strives for and loves. It is relatable, and even more so today, because in some way or the other it captures a slice of our own journey in a different form.

When we graduate from college, many of us select good corporate jobs that pay well. But what we truly enjoy – that which I call our home – nobody thinks through. The journey begins, and we get lost midway. Then a moment comes when our heart pines to return home, however imperfect it may be. It could mean fighting monsters and sorcerers. But that is a worthy fight.

In the character of Odysseus, we see the love for the meaning he carries for decades. The meaning of reuniting with Penelope, his wife, and meeting Telemachus, his son. It was not to become king and gather praise for the glory he had achieved in the war of Troy. He just wanted to return home because he had promised his wife.



Tomorrow, when you start your entrepreneurial journey, think long term. People who can't see far actually have short-sighted vision. It's not you building the castle; it's just you doing your part in the making of the castle as time demands.

There would be many shortcuts and comforts along the way, like what Odysseus experienced, but you should be monomaniacally focused on your goal or purpose. It's not about having it all; it's about having something that you can call your own. And while doing that, you can claim that you have contributed to the world around you through the organisation you have built or people you have developed.

In your purpose, others might not see the meaning, but that is not essential either. What is essential is whether you are able to see the meaning behind what you are doing and give your 150% to it. Be the most capable entrepreneur that you can become.

Alibaba founder Jack Ma said, "When you are young, work to learn, not to earn." Your learning defines your future earning. Your horizon and your exposure would give you the confidence that you would need later.

There were many key traits of Odysseus that helped him reach home. However, patience and resilience defined his 10-year journey back home. He had that indomitable hope of reaching home and the ability to bounce back and start his journey again after multiple debacles. In the end, he lost every one of his companions, but not himself. That's the core reason why he could reach home.

Never be afraid of the journey, because to experience life to the fullest, you have got to choose a voyage. Reaching the destination is secondary because every point of the journey is a destination too. Be the best version of yourself at every point in time. Impact and inspire the people around you.

Odysseus once said, "Each man delights in the work that suits him best."

In the end, neither the beginning nor the ending matters; it's the journey that counts.

What is your Odyssey?

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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.

What Naval Ravikant can Teach a Collegian

THE ALMANACK of Naval Ravikant is a collection of Ravikant's ideas on learning, work, judgment, wealth, and happiness, drawn from his interviews and podcasts. Beneath it all is a simple idea: the purpose of building wealth is to gain the freedom to live life on your terms.

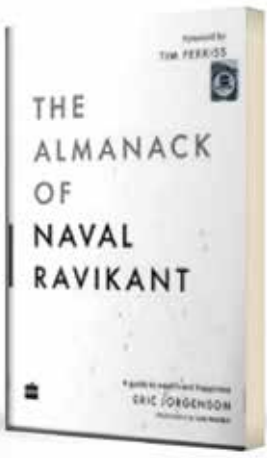
For a collegian, this is a smart way to plan ahead. Yes, getting a degree, finding a job, and earning a salary are important. But Ravikant argues that money is only one form of wealth. Real wealth lies in holding assets that keep creating value without you having to keep slogging. A business, a piece of IP, a book, an investment, or a strong personal reputation can become such an asset.

The first step is to discover what Ravikant calls 'specific knowledge'. This is knowledge that cannot be taught through a standard course. It comes from your curiosity, experience, and interests. What fascinates you may seem ordinary to you because it comes naturally to you. But that unusual combination of interests and abilities can become your greatest advantage.

Enter leverage. Technology, capital, and networks allow you to multiply the impact of your effort. Write a good book, and you can reach thousands of readers. Record a course that keeps teaching 24/7, and you end up reaching lacs of students. The world rewards people who combine knowledge with leverage.

Ravikant says you must learn to both build and sell. 'Building' means creating something invaluable. 'Selling' means persuading others to recognise its value. You need both. A brilliant idea that nobody knows about cannot create an impact, while excellent selling without something of quality loses its power.

> Happiness is not merely the reward for becoming successful. It is a skill we can cultivate. Much of our unhappiness comes from comparing our present position with what we desire to have.



Another idea he throws out is about playing long-term games. Careers, relationships, and reputations compound over time. If you work only for immediate rewards, it won't pay off. Instead, build relationships with trustworthy people, develop expertise patiently, and protect your reputation; and those small advantages accumulate and become invaluable over decades.

The book then moves to happiness. Happiness is not merely the reward for becoming successful. It is a skill we can cultivate. Much of our unhappiness comes from comparing our present position with what we desire to have. We want more money, more achievement, or more approval, and then postpone contentment until we obtain them. That, he says, is a tad sad.

This does not mean that ambition is wrong. What it means is that one can strive for a better career, greater wealth, or a larger contribution while remaining at peace with the present. Naval also advocates solitude, independent thinking, and constant learning. In an age of endless notifications and opinions, the ability to sit quietly, read deeply, and decide what you actually believe is becoming increasingly rare. Education should therefore not end with college. The most valuable skill may be teaching yourself what you need to know next.

I think the most important lesson of The Almanack of Naval Ravikant is that success should be measured by freedom. Wealth gives you freedom from financial dependence. Knowledge gives you freedom from intellectual dependence. And inner contentment gives you freedom from the constant need for external approval.

For a collegian, that is a powerful definition of success. The book is a must-read.

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