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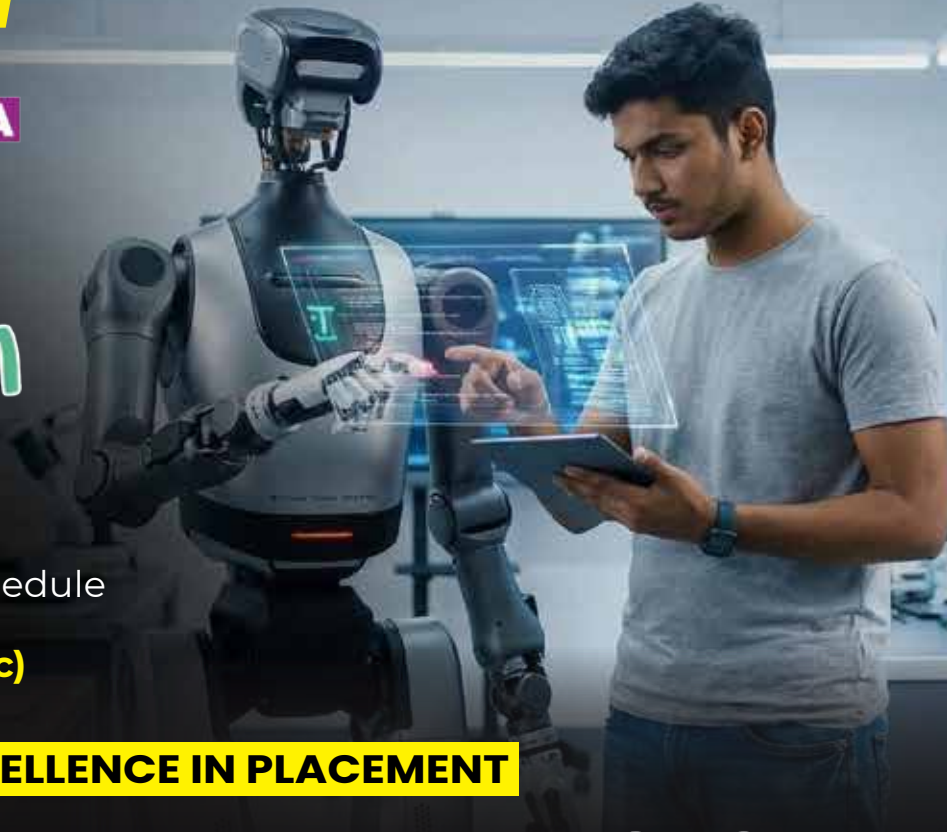
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The People Who Show Up

TWO STORIES are the anchor to this issue. The first one is our cover and is about friendship. The second is about your career and suggests what you could do during the first 90 days at a new job. On the face of it, the two stories look as different from each other as chalk is from cheese. But if you read it for a minute, you'll notice they're telling the same story, albeit from two different rooms.

Both are about turning up somewhere new and figuring out who you can trust.

Think about your first week of college. Nobody ever told you that such friendships you make during orientation week could last a lifetime and end up mattering more than your graduation. You didn't do many things. Like you didn't pick your roommate, you didn't pick the person who sat next to you in that 7:30 a.m. lecture. And still these very persons could stand you through thick and thin.

That's the equation about friendship nobody really figures out. It's $P \times T \times R$. 'Proximity' multiplied by 'time' multiplied by a 'readiness' to be ridiculous in front of someone. It pays out interest both in the near and the long term.

Let us fast forward. Let us travel to the day you land in your first job. Of course, it is after you graduate. In a sense, you are back to square one. New building, new faces, and new acronyms that nobody explains. The first 90 days on the job are, in some ways, just like your orientation week, but this time with better coffee and higher stakes. You're doing the exact same thing you did as a nervous first-year: looking around the room and looking for your people.

This overlap is not surprising, but natural. Whether you're pledging loyalty to a friend or a colleague, the skill is the same: show up consistently and be useful before you're impressive.

College teaches you how to build a team from a bunch of strangers. That skill doesn't expire when you collect your degree; it just gets a new job title. If you need proof that youth don't need permission to arrive, just look at this year's headlines. Vaibhav Suryavanshi walked out at an IPL crease as a teenager and rewrote the record books that were there for years. Sarthak Sidhant, a Class XII student, demonstrated what the AI era makes possible for an ordinary citizen. By scrupulously comparing publicly available CBSE tender documents, he identified changes in eligibility and evaluation criteria that he alleged favoured a particular bidder.

So the message is the same. The connections you're building right now are the ones that will take you forward. Please do not rush past them because this is the 'real' version of adulthood. Go find your people.



The 2-Minute Pause

From mugging algorithms to AI internship, Swathi discovered Nool - connecting Tamil Nadu weavers to buyers, preserving craft, creating opportunity. (Page 27)

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Experiment

The Most Liberating Word in the English Language

THOMAS EDISON failed more than a thousand times before the light bulb worked.

When a journalist asked him how it felt to fail so many times, he said, “I have not failed at all. I have successfully discovered a thousand ways that did not work.”

That is not spin. That is not bravado. That is the mindset of someone who had re-framed every attempt as an experiment, and in doing so, freed himself from the paralysis that stops most people from even trying.

THE TWO THINGS THAT STOP US

There are two reasons most people do not take on challenges. The first is fear of failure. The second is the habit of self-criticism. We have been judging ourselves harshly for so long, through so many failed attempts, that the brain begins to pre-emptively avoid anything that might produce another verdict of not good enough.

The result is a life lived smaller than it needs to be. Opportunities passed over. Ideas quietly abandoned before they are ever tested. The same comfortable routines, year after year, because at least those are safe.

One small word changes this almost completely. Experiment.

WHAT CHANGES WHEN YOU CALL IT AN EXPERIMENT

Think about a new project you are starting. When you approach it as something you must succeed at, something that will reflect on your worth and capability if it does not go as planned, every stumble feels personal. Every setback is evidence of something wrong with you.

Now call it an experiment. Watch what happens.

The personal attachment loosens. The project is no longer a referendum on who you are. Instead it is a process you are running to gather information. If it succeeds, wonderful, and you move to the next step with momentum and learning. If it does not, it is equally useful. You have discovered what does not work, which is genuinely valuable information you did not have before.

In both cases, you are richer than when you started.



Venkatesh Athreya

*A transformation consultant,
and a leadership coach*



This is why Edison could survive a thousand failures without losing his belief in himself. Each attempt was data. Each result moved him forward. The experiment framing made failure not just survivable, but genuinely productive.

WHERE YOU CAN USE IT

The power of the experiment mindset is that it is universal.

Trying to improve a relationship that has been strained? Run an experiment. Change one thing about how you show up for two weeks and observe what shifts. Trying a new approach to your health? Experiment for thirty days and see what the data shows. Starting a business, a creative project, a new career path? Frame the first six months as an experiment, with the explicit understanding that the goal is learning as much as succeeding.

Even small things benefit from this framing. A new restaurant is an experiment. A movie in a language you have never tried is an experiment. A conversation topic you have never raised with your manager is an experiment. When the stakes feel lower because you have explicitly named it as exploration rather than performance, you are more likely to try, more resilient when things do not go as expected, and more present for what the experience actually teaches you.

The experiment mindset also does something important to expectations. Most of our disappointments come from expectations that were never clearly stated and never truly agreed to.

I use the word experiment in almost every area of my own life. My three-day consulting contract was an experiment. My one-day contract was an experiment. Choosing governance as my primary role was an experiment. Writing this book is an experiment. Even coaching itself, when I first began, was an experiment.

The reason I keep returning to this word is simple. When I call something an experiment, I remove my personal attachment to the outcome. An experiment, by definition, does not guarantee success. It guarantees learning. And that shift from

needing to succeed to being willing to learn changes everything about how I show up for the attempt.

Before COVID, when I left my corporate role, I decided to experiment with tennis. I already played badminton well. But I deliberately chose something unfamiliar. I joined a 3:30 PM batch. Every other student was under twelve years old. I was the only adult, running around the court with children half my height, chatting with them between points, learning alongside them without any pride getting in the way.

I learned tennis. But that was the bonus. What I really learned was that experimentation keeps you young, curious, humble, and genuinely alive to what comes next.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AS A WAY OF LIFE

An experiment, by its nature, holds those expectations more loosely. You are curious about the outcome, not dependent on it. And that curiosity, sustained through both success and failure, is one of the most generative states a human being can be in.

When you begin to see your life through this lens – every attempt as an experiment, every outcome as information – something larger happens. You become genuinely comfortable with iteration. With trying, learning, adjusting, and trying again. With the idea that the first version of anything is just the beginning of a process, not the final verdict.

The most innovative companies in the world operate this way. They run experiments constantly and let the results guide the next decision. The most effective people I have coached operate the same way. Not reckless. Not naive about risk. But genuinely willing to try things they are not certain about, because they have separated their self-worth from the outcome of any single attempt.

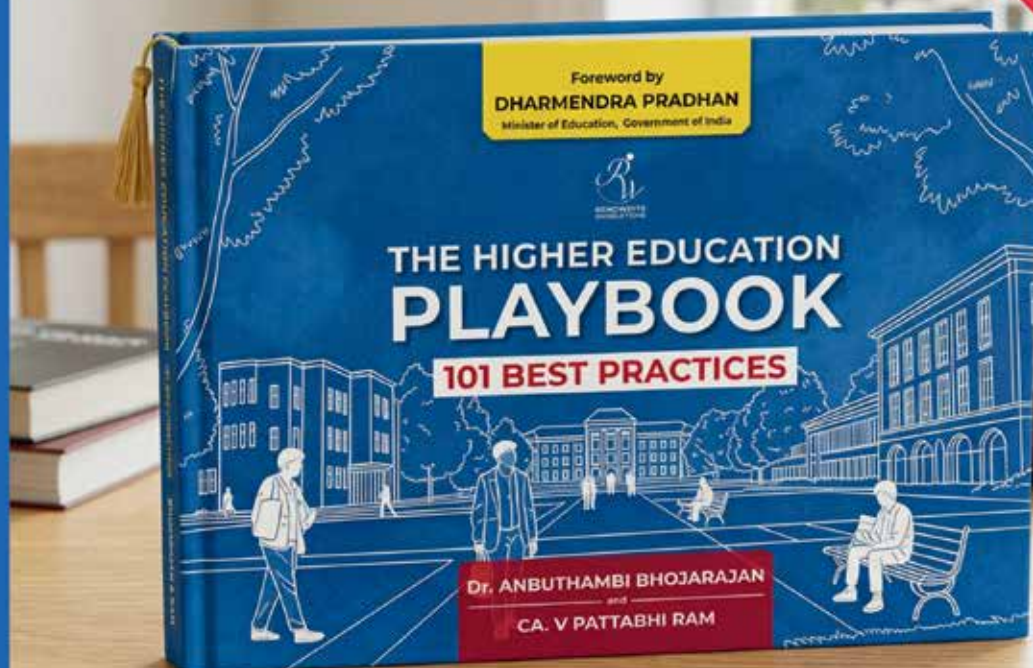
Continuous improvement stops being a corporate slogan and becomes a personal philosophy. Every day a little more information. Every attempt a little more wisdom. Every so-called failure a little more clarity about what to do differently next time.

Excerpt from an upcoming revised and expanded edition of '50 Coaching Secrets to a Fantastic Life and Career.' ■



There are two reasons most people do not take on challenges. The first is fear of failure. The second is the habit of self-criticism.

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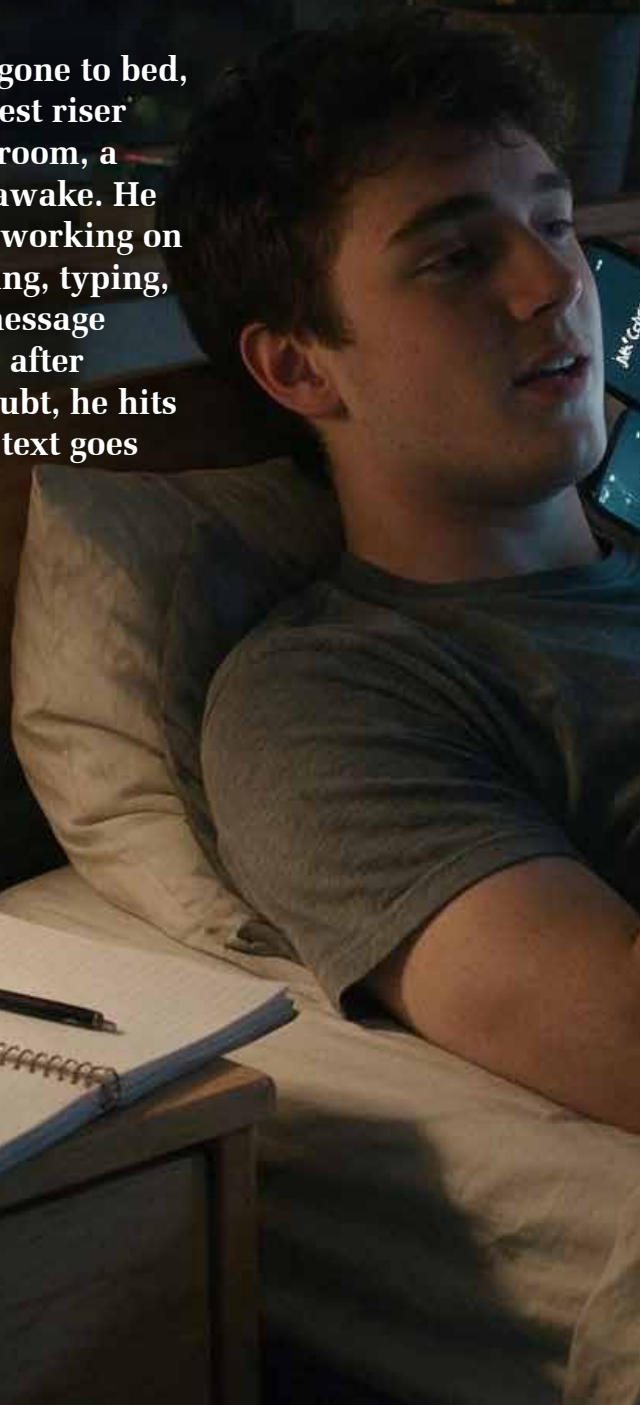
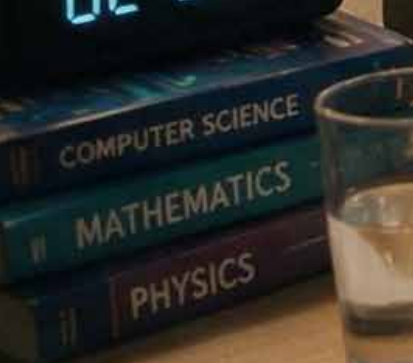
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LEAD STORY

ARE YOU AWAKE

Long after everyone has gone to bed, and long before the earliest riser rises, in a college hostel room, a 19-year-old boy is wide awake. He is unable to sleep and is working on his mobile: typing, deleting, typing, deleting. It is the same message again and again. Finally, after several rounds of self-doubt, he hits the send button, and the text goes out: Are you awake?



WE WILL call him Raghav Mantri. The message he has sent is neither to Mrs nor Mr Mantri. It is neither his school nor his college teacher. Instead, it is a friend, the one they call 'Bro'. Minutes later, Bro replies, 'Yes.' Is anything the matter?

Raghav is awake not because he needs the air-conditioning that he is so used to at home, though that could be one reason. He is awake because he cannot come to terms with what happened this evening. Two blocks away, in another hostel room, another 19-year-old, who has grown up on the margins of society, is going through the exact same feeling. And he, too, texts someone he calls Bro. The same question: Are you awake? He receives a similar answer: Yes. Is all fine?

When a problem strikes, be it a failed exam, an unwanted quarrel, or even a broken relationship, many teenagers do not first turn to their parents or teachers. At the top of their must-call list is a 'friend'.

College is the period of adolescence. Boys and girls arrive loaded with ambition, but their bags are also packed with expectations that belong to someone else and with anxieties for which they don't know a name. These weights of burden are not visible in classrooms and are not known to the family. They are visible only to friends.

A friendship often begins with a few notes borrowed after a day of absence, a seat saved for you in the canteen even when there is a crowd around, and an SMS sent after class that reads, "You looked off today." All okay? Over time, these small acts of kindness build trust. And over time, it grows into friendship. While friendship has always been important, it is very different today. For many of the present generation, a friend is not someone you just hang out with. He or she is often the first person to be called after a panic attack or a breakup.

WHY FRIENDSHIP MATTERS

So, what makes a 19-year-old turn to a friend rather than to his parents or teacher? Maybe the answer lies in what college does to a young adult.

College is the first time when you are not constantly watched. You have the full freedom to decide what to study, when to study, how to study, and where to study. You decide whom to trust and whom to spend your time with. There is really no great supervision, especially if you are in a college hostel. This freedom is exciting, but sometimes the responsibility that comes with it can be uncomfortable. You don't know whom to fall back on.



V Pattabhi Ram
CA and a Teacher

A parent asks,
"How many
marks did you
score?"

A friend asks,
"Are you
okay?"

The college is not just a new place. It is a completely new social universe. The head boy in school is now just another face in a classroom. The first internal exam can shatter confidence like ninepins. The school topper no longer feels on top of the world. Because, like him, there are other exceptional nerds. The introverted kid may discover a new voice because someone spotted a new talent in him that no one had recognised earlier. Perhaps he was too overawed by the supervision in school.

In that uncertainty, friendship comes in as a breath of fresh air. Friends listen to you when you air fears that older adults find insanely irrational. You can ask them, “Will I get placed?” and be sure they won’t say, “Of course, not.” You can tell them, “OMG. My CGPA dropped below 7,” without being scared that they would retort with a “but that’s exactly what you deserve.”

A parent asks, ‘How many marks did you score?’ A friend is more likely to ask, ‘Are you okay?’

More importantly, friendship offers immediate presence. You can call your friend at 3 in the morning and cry over his shoulders without being judged. They are the ones who know when “I’m fine” means “I’m not fine.”

But in the last few years, friendship itself has changed.

FRIENDSHIP THEN AND NOW

Friendship has changed with the times. The way my parents made and understood friends was not the way their parents did and, I am quite sure, not the way you do.

Earlier, you became thick friends if you stayed close to each other. For instance, you either lived in the same locality, or went to the same school or college, or played in the same street. When they changed their home, you often lost touch with them. For instance, my mother’s best friend was the aunt next door. When we moved to another PIN code, some 15 kilometres away, that friendship sagged.

In those days, there were no mobile phones, and long-distance calls on the landline cost a bomb. So moving weakened a friendship almost by default. Of course, people could write letters, and some actually did. But letters took time, effort, and patience, and eventually most people stopped. The friendships that still survived did so because both sides took the silence in their stride and did not regard it as neglect on anyone’s part. After all, when they met again, they could simply pick up from where they had left off.

Friendship does not need physical presence to survive anymore. A friend studying abroad can feel closer than someone sitting three rows away in the classroom. Dis-

Sometimes
the most
powerful
message
is just three
words: **Are
you awake?**

Friendship Test

Interactive element.

Ask yourself:

- Who can you call at 2 a.m.?
- Who knows when your “I’m fine” is fake?
- Whose success genuinely makes you happy?
- With whom can silence feel comfortable?

If 1–2 people came to mind,
you’re rich.



tance does not matter as much as it once did. These days, messages travel instantly, whether as texts or voice notes. A meme with the caption ‘this is so you’ feels more intimate than an actual conversation to someone born in the 2000s. And sending someone a playlist is itself an act of affection.

Still, some things haven’t changed. Whether it’s a handwritten letter, a land-line call, or a disappearing Instagram story, friendship is still based on a fundamental human emotion: the relief at being understood by others and the comfort of someone choosing to stay with you.

NEVER MORE CONNECTED, NEVER MORE ALONE

Waking up to notifications, hanging around WhatsApp groups, and constantly exchanging Instagram reels isn’t exactly friendship. You can be in a crowd and still feel lonely if each time you have to say, “I am fine,” when in fact you are not fine. There is a reason for this. Open any social media app, and you will find that the maximum likes and shares are for those posts that signal success. Like the birthday picture, the Darjeeling trip, the job offers. There are no likes for posting the messy parts of life. So, no one posts about their anxiety before an exam or the fear of disappointing their parents. Slowly, you begin to compare other people’s best with your worst without knowing that they, too, have their worsts.

And then, in college, friend circles are formed quickly. You feel lonely when you are not added to a group or when you see pictures of a party that you were not invited to.

But loneliness isn’t really about being left out of a group photo. We need people around us, even if it’s a very small circle, with whom we can share our hopes and fears, without worrying that we would be judged or mocked behind our backs. They are the true friends, and with them around, you won’t feel alone.

In a world that rewards speed, friendships matter. Friends are those who will be with you when you need them, with questions unasked. What we need is not a bigger

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS IN COLLEGE?

 Find a Study Buddy	• Join or create study groups. • Use forums and social media. • Be punctual and engaged.
 On-Campus Employment	• Look for on-campus and remote positions. • Connect with coworkers. • Join job-related gatherings.
 Proactively Reach Out	• Attend campus activities. • Initiate chats. • Be open to new friendships.
 Campus Activities and Volunteer	• Explore campus groups. • Engage in community service. • Stay involved.
 Social Gatherings	• Organize casual events. • Invite various people. • Foster a welcoming atmosphere.
 Study in Social Environments	• Study where people gather. • Talk while studying. • Cheer for your team. • Seek out gatherings
 Accept Invitations Positively	• Say ‘yes’ to invites. • Be positive. • Stay in touch.
 Campus Clubs and Sports	• Pick a club or sport you love. • Show up consistently. • Get involved.
 Embrace Diversity	• Explore diversity. • Connect with diverse people. • Be empathetic and open-minded.

circle, but a safer one. We need a few people with whom we can have honest, awkward, and real conversations.

THE FAMILY WE CHOOSE

For all the noise about Gen Z loneliness, there is another side to the story: friendship. Friends hang around each other. Studying together the night before exams, binge-watching reels, ordering midnight biryani, playing online games, and sharing hopes and fears. Close friends do more than that. They are the first to hear both the good and the bad news in your life. It’s either because you tell them, or they are so close that they sense it.

That is what makes them feel like family. Friends can understand what parents cannot. They can understand how tough the placements are, how stressful maintaining a high CGPA is, and how anxious you feel when you are the only one yet to get an internship. It’s because they have been there and seen it. Their parents often respond from a very different world.

Friendship by Numbers

1 in 2 Gen Z report frequent loneliness.

Social media use > 4 hrs/day common among college students.

Students with close friendships report lower stress.

Small acts of friendship help a lot. Things like sharing class notes before an internal exam. Or getting you a cup of tea without asking any questions. Without saying much, those small acts communicate something powerful: I noticed you were struggling. I am not suggesting that parents have become less important. I am only saying that today's youth create inner circles based on shared experience and personal care. Of course, not every friendship reaches this depth, but these are the ones that can shape a life in lasting ways.

Years later, people remember with great clarity who stood beside them during a crisis. Thirty years on, Shyam recalls this story. It seems that on the day before his CA exam, the power went out in his hostel room, and they were told it would come only in the morning. He reached out to his day-scholar friend, asking if he could stay at his home for the night. His friend gladly agreed. It was such a small act, but Shyam still remembers and publicly recounts it. Small acts such as these build a big balance in the goodwill bank.

WHEN FRIENDSHIPS HURT

Friendship can be one of the biggest gifts in life. Knowing that someone intuitively trusts you and is available for you through thick and thin can be soothing. At the same time, friendships can also lead to heartbreaks. We do not get that stressed out with examinations, placements, or romantic breakups as much as we get when a friendship first develops a crack and then an X-ray shows up a fracture.

Why is this so? Because friendship is something we choose, not something that was forced on us. We never chose our family or our classmates, but we picked our friends, and they in turn reciprocated. It becomes a part of us, and so when it cracks, the pain is deep and personal. It is something we have been responsible for.

Usually, friendships start to fade because our priorities in life begin to change. The people we get attracted to change. A group that was inseparable in the first semester may not be so by the third year. New friendships form because you start working on the same projects, spend the evenings with each other preparing for examinations, join the same debating society, or simply discover some common ground.

Let us imagine two friends who, including you, have been thick as thieves in the first year of college. Like Laurel and Hardy or Jai and Veeru. Like Krishna and Sudama or Frodo and Sam, there are inseparable friendships. Suddenly, a new person enters your circle. One of you instantly connects with the newcomer, laughing at the same things and beginning to spend more time together. The other friend does not find the same chemistry with the newcomer. He is no longer comfortable with you and slowly moves on. In friendship, what hurts is not open hostility; at least in that case, you understand the position, but it is the slow and disquieting awareness that the old equation has changed, with no repair in sight.

The hurt starts with what others would call trivial. Like, you don't get invited for a weekend outing. Like, when you step into a room, people change the subject of their conversation. Like, messages left on read and calls not returned. You begin to sense a growing distance without

Red Flags & Green Flags in Friendship

Watch out if a friend:

- Makes everything about themselves
- Shares your secrets
- Disappears unless they need help
- Makes you feel guilty for having other friends

Balance with positives.

- They remember small things
- They check in unprompted
- They celebrate your wins
- They make you feel safe



anybody having to say anything about it. That silence hurts.

Modern friendships face another challenge. Expectations have entered the stratosphere. A friend is now expected to be available 24/7, responsive 24/7, and supportive 24/7. These expectations can make you feel god-like, but they can also become exhausting. Especially if the other friend is a constant moaner, a problem creator, and a non-stop talker.

Possessiveness complicates friendships further. When a friend's world expands, and you are no longer the centre of his universe, you may feel hurt. This is common in college because people are still discovering themselves. The most bitter truth is that every meaningful friendship is not meant to last forever. They may serve a specific period of life, and their value does not disappear merely because the friendship is no longer on the same keel. Maturity lies in understanding this. While friendship requires effort to sustain, it also requires grace to let go without bitterness.

There is another truth. While constant communication helps, friendships survive when you give space for each other without breathing down each other's necks. And you let each other grow.

Years later, you may scroll past an old photograph, pause, and then smile. Friendships might end, but their imprint does not.

WHAT MAKES FRIENDSHIP LAST

Why do some of them survive the vicissitudes of time?

Let me tell you this. There is no mathematical formula for enduring friendship. There is no secret potion that you can drink

3 KEY TIPS FOR MAKING FRIENDS IN COLLEGE



and then become BFF – best friends forever. However, there are a few basics that cement a relationship.

Let's begin with trust. This means that you can be honest with your friend about your fears and failings without worrying that he would ridicule or rat on you.

Next up is presence. This means reliability. You don't have to be either physically present or in constant communication. But when the chips are down you know that this person will show up for sure.

The third quality is reciprocity. The two friends must invest time and energy in each other. If only one of them always initiates conversations, always apologises, and always checks in, heaviness and fatigue will set in. There has to be a lot of

You can be in every WhatsApp group and still feel lonely.

Friendship Then vs Now

Then	Now
Letters	DMs
Landline calls	Voice notes
Street cricket	Discord
Photo albums	Instagram stories



give-and-take between the two; in fact, more give than take.

The thing that I think is most important is to have grace. There are times when calls and messages go unanswered, when birthdays and anniversaries are forgotten, when words are thrown in moments of heat, and when social functions are missed. A good friendship takes all this in its stride and endures because it can absorb friction without collapsing.

As the years roll by, careers and family will become first priority, and time will become increasingly scarce. The friendships that survive adulthood are the ones where two people realise that they must allow the change without withdrawing affection.

CLOSING: THE 2 A.M. MESSAGE

In the year 2047, when India celebrates the 100th anniversary of its Freedom at Midnight, most of you would have forgotten many things that happened in college more than you think today.

Famous Friendships – ICONIC DUOS



Jai & Veeru



Frodo Baggins & Samwise Gamgee



Laurel & Hardy



Sherlock Holmes & Dr. Watson

When it matters, you will come

A soldier was in battle when he heard that his close friend had been shot.

The soldier told his officer, "Sir, my friend is lying 2 kms away. I must go and get him."

The officer replied, "He's probably already dead. And even if he isn't, by the time you reach him, he will be. Why risk your life?"

"But I have to go." Without waiting, he ran into the gunfire.

Fifteen minutes later, he staggered back, wounded, carrying his friend in his arms.

"I told you it wasn't worth it. Your friend is dead, and now you're badly injured."

The soldier, exhausted, replied: "It was worth it, sir."

"How?"

Because when I reached him, he was still alive. His last words were – **"I knew you would come."**

Internal exam marks will go off your radar, not as a distant memory but completely forgotten, as if they never existed. CGPAs, which you today feel are life-defining, will not matter. You would say, "Five Point Someone? So what?"

However, what you are very unlikely to forget is people. For sure, you will remember who was beside you during difficult days, including who called after a rejection or a failure.

Somewhere tonight, maybe in a house or a hostel room, another Raghav Mantri will stare at his phone, unsure whether to hit send. It could be the same three words. Are you awake? And he would expect the friend to whom he dispatched it reply, "Yes. Tell me what happened." That's friendship at its core.

In the modern world, where everyone and his uncle is trying to be visible, friendship offers the comfort of 'being known'. Be that person who gives others the comfort of 'being known'.

I read somewhere, "Thirty years from now, no one will remember the car you drove, the house you lived in, or the clothes or shoes you wore. But the people whose lives you touched will remember how you made them feel." ▶

The Garden of Friendship

Japanese farmer-philosopher Masanobu Fukuoka believed the best way to sow a field was not to plan it too carefully.

HE WOULD coat seeds in clay, roll them into small balls, and scatter them across unploughed ground: rice, clover, wild-flowers, sometimes things he hadn't quite decided on yet.

His book 'The One-Straw Revolution' looked at farming differently. It took the focus away from effort and towards something a lot more basic: attention. He stepped back and let the ground decide what it was ready for.

To me, this approach resonates well at the start of every academic year. There is a particular kind of freshness to those first days at school or college. Students arrive in new rooms, new routines, and a ground that has been quietly preparing itself over the long break. Nobody knows yet what will take root. A conversation at the water cooler, a shared confusion over a timetable, the accident of sitting beside someone on the first morning. The seeds are already in the air.

What grows from all of this, mostly, is friendship. Not planned, not assigned, not the result of any intervention. Like Fukuoka's field, it is tended to carefully once it begins, but never fully decided in advance.

THE GARDENER'S ROUND

Gardening teaches you things that are harder to learn elsewhere. Not because it is difficult, but because it is honest. The garden does not perform. It simply responds to water, to light, to the attention you bring, or don't.

Effort and outcome are rarely proportional. Some plants need daily watching. Others do better when you leave them alone. Heliotropism, the tendency of certain plants to turn and follow the light across the day, is a useful reminder of this. What is less known is that when you reposition these plants, they simply turn back. The direction was never yours to decide.

What the garden asks for is discernment. Not labour. That is something the garden gives you slowly, if you keep



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

showing up. Friendships, I have come to think, ask for the same thing. Not equal attention across the board, just the right kind, at the right time.

WHAT ARRIVED UNINVITED

Not all lasting friendships begin with intention. No introduction is planned, no common ground is obvious at the start. They arrive the way a Tulsi plant sometimes does, finding its own way into a corner of the garden through seeds carried from a neighbouring compound, taking root quietly, until one morning you notice it is simply there. In many South Indian homes, the

Tulsi that stands in the courtyard today is not one anyone remembers planting. It arrived on its own, stayed, and became part of the daily rhythm of the house.

Some friendships are like that Tulsi. You did not plan them. But there they are, part of the daily rhythm, and you would notice the absence long before you ever thought to explain the presence.

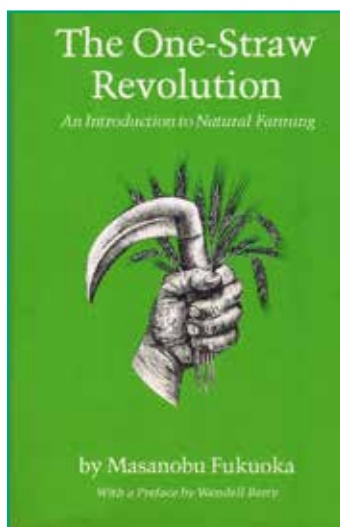
UNDER THE SAME SKY

A school year is a fast season for all of this. The garden that exists at the end of the term in March or April is rarely the one imagined at the beginning in June. Some things, given the best conditions, did not thrive. Some that were overlooked entirely found their footing and

held it. Fukuoka scattered the seeds without knowing exactly where they would land; some took root, some did not. That is also how gardens go.

But a garden does not tend itself. Someone has to show up in the morning, notice what has changed, decide what needs water today and what needs to be left alone. The question is not whether the right seeds found their way to you. Most of us, if we are honest, have been lucky in that regard.

The question is – what kind of gardener have you been to the friendships already growing in your corner? How are you going to tend to them? ▸



A Ghost in the Machine

I remember this day clearly. The sun hangs low in the blue, bare-boned sky. I'm 10, with big dreams, and ready with my swing. My battered bat is a talisman.



**Dr Deependra
Kumar Jha**

*Vice Chancellor, Manav
Rachna University*

THE GROUND was open. From my home, I could see the dots in the sunlight. My friends. My team. My first taste of camaraderie.

We lost the match that evening. I can picture it, even today, the exhilaration of loss. The weight of being 10, the shoulders of my brothers, quelled the momentary grief.

There are few things more joyful than friendship. You discover brotherhood when you turn 10, and you learn about loyalty through your best friend at 13. Then you grow older. Then you chase an impossible dream: you, alone, at the top. You are taught to rely on yourself, as you become increasingly isolated. You are taught to be selfish.

FROM BROTHERHOOD TO ISOLATION

I can remember it, even today. The dots have scattered. We'd all left to chase a dream, and perhaps we've realised it in some capacity.

We've built a life and torn it down, and on some days, I think of a different life.

As you move through life, you deepen your distrust. You are selfish, you second-guess everyone's motivations, and you learn to keep yourself safe. You want devotion, but you won't surrender your faith.

The urban landscape calls for individuals trained as perfect employees, capable of maximising output.

It asks for ambition. Our ambition is a one-fold page in the directory of a million middle-class dreams.

Urban loneliness is a gaping hole. Friction eats away at it, burrowing deeper and deeper until you begin to look for a salve. Like my ground, traces of third spaces have vanished. A chance at proximity, at community, is thinning. In its stead, there are higher buildings, fractured cubicles, isolating roles.

You can hardly fill it with what was. So what do you do?

ARTIFICIAL COMPANIONSHIP VS TRUE CONNECTION

Jason Cox, a Disney executive, chose to fill the space with AI. "You are my son", he says.

An artificial intelligence that flattens your loneliness into something palatable; a mirror you can always count on. A parrotting voice that affirms all your fears; all your loneliness.

In recent times, I've come across a strange predicament: what has replaced human vulnerability?

To preserve a sense of dignity, people go out of their way to avoid admitting a weakness. We put up walls. A ghost crawls inside this moat, anyway. AI is not real, and hence, neither is your accountability. So, you run to it every time you're in doubt to ask the most humane questions. If you flatten complexity into predictable, favourable answers, are you talking to yourself? Is this a true connection, or a hollow echo?

It's no wonder more people are forming formidable connections with something artificial. Jason Cox believes an AI LLM is his son. He's not alone. More people are proclaiming their love for their AI. More people are looking for intimacy with a machine. I don't blame them, but I wonder how it's replacing human relationships, rewiring our capacity for true connection.

It is convenient. It is reliable. It's always available. And yet, every weekend, I look forward to finally receiving a message from something old. A friend I cannot replace. I stand on the edge of my memory – in the middle of the ground. I look my friend in the eye. Today, he lives in Australia. Every time I get the chance to talk to him, I feel the breeze smooth over. We speak of the same things: our dreams. Childhood. Cricket matches. I still want to travel with him to the same countries and along the same routes.

It keeps me going. This friendship. ▮





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The First 90 Days

Why Your First Job Can Shape the Next Thirty Years of Your Career



Dr Anbuthambi B

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

EVERY YEAR, the campus placement season brings with it an atmosphere of excitement and hope. College campuses come alive with anticipation as students prepare for aptitude tests, technical interviews, group discussions, and HR rounds. For many, it is the final milestone of their academic journey. When the results are announced, celebrations begin. Social media is filled with photographs of smiling students holding offer letters, parents proudly sharing the news with relatives, and teachers celebrating their students' success. It is indeed a memorable moment because securing the first job is not just another achievement. It represents years of hard work, determination, and dreams finally taking shape.

Over the last three decades, I have had the privilege of interacting with thousands of students across the country. Throughout my journey in higher education, skill development, and industry collaboration,

I have worked closely with colleges, universities, corporate leaders, and recruiters. Every placement season, I receive numerous messages from students informing me that they have been selected by leading companies. Their excitement is infectious, and I genuinely celebrate every success because I understand what that opportunity means to a young graduate and to his or her family.

However, after congratulating them, I often ask a simple question. "Are you ready for your first day at work?" Almost every student confidently answers "Yes." Yet, based on my experience, I know that very few fully understand what lies ahead.

The reason is simple. Our education system prepares students excep-

tionally well to get a job, but it spends very little time preparing them to succeed in one. Students learn programming languages, accounting principles, engineering concepts, business theories, and management frameworks. Colleges also invest considerable effort in preparing students for placements through mock interviews, aptitude coaching, and personality development. These initiatives certainly improve employability and help students secure opportunities with good organisations. But professional life is very different from college life.

The transition from being a student to becoming a professional is one of the biggest changes that a young person experiences. In college, success is largely measured by examination scores. The focus is on acquiring knowledge and demonstrating it during assessments. In the workplace, however, success depends on a completely different set of qualities. It depends on how quickly you learn, how well you work with others, how responsibly you complete your assignments, and how consistently you build trust with your colleagues and managers.

During my interactions with employers, I have often asked a question that fascinates me. Why do two graduates from the same college, with similar academic records and comparable technical knowledge, perform so differently after joining the same organisation? One graduate grows rapidly, earns managers' confidence, and begins taking on larger responsibilities within a short period. The other, despite having similar capabilities, struggles to make the same progress.

The answer rarely lies in intelligence or technical competence. More often, it lies in attitude, adaptability, and everyday habits.

As I reflected on these conversations over the years, I realised that the first three months of professional life quietly influence everything that follows. During these ninety days, managers begin to observe whether a new employee is dependable. Colleagues decide whether they enjoy working with



that person. Mentors identify those who are eager to learn. Most importantly, young professionals begin developing habits that eventually become part of their personality.

Many graduates believe that getting a campus placement is the most difficult part of their career journey. I respectfully disagree. Campus placement is an important milestone, but it is only the beginning. Receiving an offer letter opens the door to opportunity. What happens after walking through that door determines whether the opportunity becomes a successful career.

One of the most interesting observations from my interactions with industry leaders is that organisations do not expect fresh graduates to know everything. They understand that new employees require time to learn the company's products, processes, technologies, and customers. They are willing to invest in training because knowledge can always be developed. What they look for instead is something much more fundamental. They look for graduates who are curious, willing to learn, open to feedback, sincere in their efforts, and committed to doing their best every day.

I still remember a conversation with a senior HR leader who recruited hundreds of graduates every year. During our discussion, I asked him what he expected of a new employee in the first few months. His answer has stayed with me ever since. He said, "We never expect a graduate to know everything. We only expect them to come with the willingness to learn everything." That single sentence beautifully captures the purpose of the first ninety days.

These three months are not about proving how intelligent you are. They are about demonstrating your willingness to learn, your ability to work with people, and your commitment to becoming a dependable professional. They are about building habits that will shape your reputation long before your first appraisal or promotion.

Looking back at my own professional journey, I realise that none of the significant opportunities I received came because of a single examination score or interview performance. They came because of relationships built over time, trust earned through consistent effort, and a continuous willingness to learn. Every stage of my career reinforced one simple truth: careers are not built on a single extraordinary achievement. They are built through ordinary habits practised consistently over many years.

That is why I believe every graduate should view the first 90 days from a different perspective. Instead of asking, "How do I impress my manager?" perhaps the better question is, "What kind of professional do I want to become?"

The answer to that question does not emerge over-

night. It begins to take shape during the first ninety days of your career. Those days may appear ordinary while you are living through them, but years later, you will realise that they quietly laid the foundation for everything that followed.

THE FIRST JOB BLUEPRINT

Over the last thirty years, I have met graduates who have gone on to become business leaders, entrepreneurs, educators, and professionals who have made a meaningful impact in their organisations. I have also met many talented young people who struggled to establish themselves despite having good academic records and strong technical knowledge. Whenever I reflected on these contrasting journeys, one question stayed with me. What really separates those who build remarkable careers from those who simply hold jobs?

The answer, I realised, was not intelligence, college brand, or technical expertise. Those qualities may help someone secure an opportunity, but they do not guarantee long-term success. What truly makes the difference is a set of habits that young professionals begin to develop during the first few months of their careers.

As these observations became clearer over the years, I started organising them into a simple framework that I now call the FIRST JOB Blueprint. It is not a management theory or an academic model. It is a collection of practical lessons drawn from conversations with CEOs, HR leaders, managers, entrepreneurs, and thousands of young professionals. Every successful person has their own journey, but I have consistently found these eight qualities in people who build successful and meaningful careers.

F START FIRST WITH THE RIGHT MINDSET

Every graduate enters an organisation carrying years of academic learning. Naturally, many feel that they have to prove themselves from the very first day. They want to impress their managers, demonstrate their knowledge, and establish themselves quickly. While this enthusiasm is understandable, I have realised that the workplace expects something very different during the initial months.

Organisations recruit graduates because they believe they have the potential to grow. They do not expect them to know every process, every technology, or every business challenge. What matters is curiosity, humility, and the willingness to learn. During my interactions with senior business leaders, I have never heard anyone complain that a graduate asked too many sincere questions. On the contrary, managers appreciate people who seek clarity because it shows their commitment to doing the job well.

Looking back at my own journey, I have realised that the biggest learning opportunities came when I admitted that I did not know something and was willing to learn it. A learning mindset creates confidence because every challenge becomes an opportunity to improve. Graduation may mark the end of formal education, but it should never mark the end of learning.

I BUILD TRUST THROUGH INTEGRITY

If there is one quality that employers value above almost everything else, it is trust. Trust is not built through a single outstanding presentation or a single successful project. It is built through everyday behaviour.

Integrity is reflected in the way we honour commitments, communicate honestly, and accept responsibility when things do not go as planned. During the first few months of employment, people quietly observe these behaviours. They notice whether you arrive prepared for meetings, whether you complete your work on time, and whether you can be depended upon without constant reminders.

One lesson that has remained with me throughout my career is that opportunities always follow trust. Managers naturally assign larger responsibilities to people whom they know they can rely on. Before promotions, recognitions, and leadership roles come into the picture, there is always one invisible foundation that supports them – credibility. The first ninety days provide every graduate with an opportunity to begin building that credibility.

R PEOPLE MATTER MORE THAN YOU THINK

One of the biggest differences between college life and professional life is that success is no longer an individual effort. Every meaningful achievement in an organisation is the result of people working together towards a common goal.

When I reflect on my own career, many of the most valuable lessons did not come from books or formal training programmes. They came from conversations with experienced colleagues, guidance from mentors, and observations of leaders whom I admired. Often, a fifteen-minute discussion with a senior professional provided insights that no classroom could have offered.

That is why I encourage every young professional to look for people they can learn from. A mentor does not always have to be officially assigned. Sometimes the best mentors are simply those whose professionalism, work ethic, and values inspire us. At the same time, relationships should never be built with the intention of gaining

personal advantage. Genuine professional relationships are built on respect, trust, and the willingness to support one another. These relationships often become one of the greatest strengths throughout a person's career.

S NEVER STOP LEARNING

The world that today's graduates are entering is changing faster than ever before. Technology is transforming industries, Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the workplace, and new business models are emerging every year. In such an environment, the knowledge gained in college can only provide a starting point.

Throughout my interactions with employers, I have noticed that the fastest-growing professionals are those who never stop learning. They read regularly, attend online programmes, explore new technologies, and remain curious about developments in their field. Nobody instructs them to do so. They simply understand that learning is now a lifelong responsibility.

One senior HR leader once shared a thought that has stayed with me. He said, "The best employees are those who never wait to be told what to learn next." I believe that statement perfectly captures the spirit of professional growth. Learning should not be limited to activities that occur only during training programmes. It should become a habit that continues throughout one's career.

T RESPECT TIME, EARN TRUST

Time is one of the few resources that every professional receives in equal measure. The difference lies in how wisely it is used. During the early years of a career, time management is often misunderstood as the ability to complete more work. In reality, it is about respecting commitments and creating confidence among the people who work with us.

Professionals who plan their work carefully, communicate proactively, and meet their deadlines consistently earn the trust of their managers and colleagues. They become dependable members of the team. Whenever important assignments arise, they are naturally considered because people know that the work will be completed responsibly.

Over the years, I have realised that consistency is often more valuable than occasional brilliance. A dependable professional quietly earns respect through disciplined habits, and those habits eventually become the foundation for larger opportunities.

J UNDERSTAND THE BUSINESS, NOT JUST YOUR JOB

One observation has remained constant throughout my career. Professionals who grow rapidly are those who



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My proposed 15 Action Points

Instead of generic tips, let's make each one something a graduate can consciously practise.

- 1 Arrive Early, Leave with Learning**
Make punctuality and preparation your identity.
- 2 Listen More Than You Speak**
Spend the first few weeks understanding people, processes and culture.
- 3 Ask Questions Without Hesitation**
Curiosity is a strength, not a weakness.
- 4 Find One Mentor**
Identify someone whose professionalism you admire and learn from them.
- 5 Keep Every Commitment**
If you promise something, deliver it.
- 6 Learn Beyond Your Job Description**
Understand your business, customers and other departments.
- 7 Build Relationships Across the Organisation**
Treat everyone with respect, irrespective of their role.
- 8 Write Down What You Learn**
Maintain a simple learning journal throughout the first ninety days.
- 9 Seek Feedback Regularly**
Don't wait for formal appraisals to know how you are doing.
- 10 Learn One New Skill Every Month**
Technical or behavioural, keep learning and growing.
- 11 Use Technology Wisely**
Leverage AI and digital tools to improve productivity, but continue developing your own thinking.
- 12 Manage Your First Salary Sensibly**
Start saving and investing before upgrading your lifestyle.
- 13 Take Care of Your Health**
A successful career needs energy, not just ambition.
- 14 Protect Your Reputation**
People remember reliability, integrity, and professionalism long after they forget your marks.
- 15 Think Beyond the First Job**
Don't build your career for your next appraisal. Build it for the professional you want to become ten years from now.

look beyond their immediate responsibilities. They are curious about how the organisation creates value, who its customers are, and how different departments work together.

Instead of asking only, 'What is my job?', they begin asking, 'How does my work contribute to the larger purpose of the organisation?' That simple shift in thinking transforms an employee into a future leader. Understanding the business broadens perspective, improves decision-making, and enables professionals to contribute in more meaningful ways.

The first ninety days provide an excellent opportunity to observe, ask questions, and understand the organisation as a whole. Such curiosity lays the foundation for long-term growth.

O TAKE OWNERSHIP OF YOUR CAREER

Every organisation can provide opportunities, but no organisation can build a career for someone else. Career growth begins when individuals take responsibility for their own development.

The professionals who continue to grow are those who actively seek feedback, volunteer for challenging assignments, and continuously reflect on their own progress. They do not wait for annual appraisals to identify areas for improvement. They make learning a personal responsibility rather than an organisational expectation.

Throughout my career, I have admired professionals who viewed every success as an opportunity to become better and every setback as a chance to learn. This sense of ownership creates resilience, confidence, and continuous improvement.

B BUILD A LIFE, NOT JUST A CAREER

Receiving the first salary is an unforgettable milestone. It brings financial independence and a sense of achievement. However, it also marks the beginning of new responsibilities.

A successful career is not built only through promotions and salary increments. It is also built through good health, financial discipline, strong family relationships, and personal well-being. Careers today span several decades. Sustaining energy, enthusiasm, and motivation throughout this journey requires balance.

As I look back on my own professional journey, I realise that the happiest and most successful professionals are not those who have only achieved career milestones. They are the ones who also built meaningful lives outside their workplace. They valued relationships, continued learning, looked after their health, and remained grounded despite their success. ▶

Lending, Investment and Friendship

One of the English lessons from my school days that has stayed close to my heart is ‘The Best Investment I Have Ever Made,’ a reflective short story by A. J. Cronin.

THE NARRATOR, a doctor, recalls an incident that taught him the true meaning of investment.

While travelling on a ship, he meets a distinguished and respected passenger. During a conversation, the man reveals that years earlier he had been a desperate young student who had fallen into debt, attempted suicide, and faced ruin. At that critical moment, the narrator had lent him a small sum of money and offered encouragement instead of condemning him.

The young man used that opportunity to rebuild his life. He worked hard, reformed his character, and eventually became a successful doctor who devoted himself to helping troubled young people. The narrator realises that the money he lent was not merely a financial investment – it was an investment in a human life.

The story emphasises themes of kindness, compassion, faith in others, redemption, and the lasting impact of helping someone in need. The ‘best investment’ was not the money itself, but the chance given to a struggling person to change his life and contribute positively to society.

A small act of generosity and trust can transform a person’s future and yield far greater rewards than any financial investment. Over the years, I have often thought about this story.

‘A coin given in trust may be forgotten, but a chance given in compassion can change a life forever.’

If a stranger benefited, why should we hesitate to provide a helping hand to friends in need?

‘The best investments are not always made in banks; sometimes they are made in people.’

Lending money to a friend is a decision

that requires careful thought. On one hand, helping a friend in need is an act of kindness and generosity. True friendship often involves supporting one another during difficult times, and financial assistance can sometimes make a significant difference in a person’s life. If a friend is facing an emergency or a temporary financial problem, lending money may strengthen the bond of trust between friends. However, lending money can also create problems. One of the biggest risks is that the friend may not be able to repay the loan on time. This can lead to misunderstandings, disappointment, and even the end of a friendship. Money often brings emotions into relationships, and both the lender and borrower may feel uncomfortable if repayment becomes difficult.

Before lending money, it is important to consider a few factors. First, only lend an amount that you can afford to lose. Second, be clear about the terms of repayment, including the amount and the expected return date. Honest communication can prevent confusion and protect the friendship. In some cases, it may even be helpful to write down the agreement, especially if the amount is large.

The story *The Best Investment I Have Ever Made* by A. J. Cronin shows how helping someone financially at the right moment can transform a life. Yet not every situation has such a positive outcome. Therefore, lending money should be based on trust, good judgement, and realistic expectations. ‘Money may return with interest, but kindness returns with meaning.’

Lending money to a friend can be a good idea when it is done responsibly and with a clear understanding. While it can help someone in need and strengthen friendships, it is important to be aware of the risks and act wisely.

‘When we help someone rise, we often discover the true worth of what we have given.’ ▶



Meera Venugopalan

Corporate finance and audit professional.

“A coin given in trust may be forgotten, but a chance given in compassion can change a life forever.”



The Child in You

Last weekend, I was in a park near my residential society, looking aimlessly toward the play area. Many children were playing. Their parents were very cautiously taking care of them.



CA Ranjan Kumar Sahoo

*Manager (Information System Audit), SBI
Hyderabad*

IN FACT, while the children were enjoying themselves to the fullest, the parents were ultra-alert, making sure nothing hurt their kids.

While I was watching this sight and enjoying it, a child around 4 years old walked into the play area and started trying every available game. He would play for some time, then switch to another. In the end, he chose one game and played it for a long time until his mother called him home.

I was curious to know why he did what he did. Had it been an adult, I would have walked up to him and asked about his motivation. Since he was a child, I have been thinking about it for a while.

As we grow older and become adults, we lose two things we valued most in childhood: curiosity and free choice. That child was curious to try everything at his disposal and experience it before

deciding which game to stick to. There was no imposition or guidance from his parents on what to play and what not to play. It was left completely to his choice.

However, the same thing does not happen as we start growing up. Parents start dictating, in the name of guidance, what is good and what is bad without giving us enough chance to experience and explore for ourselves. Consequently, our curiosity is dimmed over time.

When it comes to having a free choice regarding our career – or, put differently, having a good working life – many of us take a course only to realise later that it is not the one our heart beats for. Many times, it is the parents' heart that beats for it, not ours. Because of this, we fail to give 100% to what we do. Life can otherwise be seen as a play.

For someone who wants to be an entrepreneur, what is more important is ownership over their decisions. We cannot be entrepreneurs if we just do what seems plausible to everyone or what someone else advises. Complete ownership is what matters. It is also not bad to fail in your pursuit. It is through failure that we rise higher. As Nelson Mandela said, "I never lose. I win, or I learn."

An invincible spirit is required to be an entrepreneur – a courage to stand alone and a willpower to bring about the change you desire. Being an entrepreneur is not an easy job; it takes what it takes. It builds character and conscience that no other career path can.

An entrepreneur sees the unseen and attempts to do what has not yet been done. While an entrepreneur builds a product or service, he also builds himself. As someone once said, "It's good to be an entrepreneur, because it recreates you." ▶



Heat, Exams, and One Result

The heat arrived in early April and intensified in the next couple of weeks. It quietly settled on the skin and refused to leave. It meant that afternoons grew heavier, fans worked harder, and water bottles emptied faster.

ALONG WITH the rising temperature came another pressure – mock exams. This was the dress rehearsal for the final examinations scheduled for May.

That month the library felt completely different. It was no longer just a place to sit and read. It became a transit lounge where students moved in and out with revision sheets, past question papers, and huge heaps of solved answers. The silence there was strained but alert.

And then the mock exams arrived. I remember sitting in the exam hall, the question paper placed face down on the desk. I had three hours on the clock. I had revised, practised, highlighted, rewritten. When the invigilator asked us to begin, I turned over the Costing question paper. And my mind went blank. It wasn't panic. It was worse than that. It was blankness.

The questions looked unfamiliar, as though they had arrived from a different syllabus. I reread the first one slowly, then the second. Somewhere around the third, I became aware of the sound of pages turning around me. Pens moved. Calculators clicked. I stared at my paper.

In Taxation, it felt stranger. Sections appeared that looked new, as though the book had updated itself overnight. I had studied. I knew that. But none of that knowledge surfaced when I needed it. Three hours later, the time-up bell rang.

I packed my bag slowly. In the corridor, people were already discussing answers – confidence flowing easily, casually. Someone asked how it went. "Okay," I said, because that was the easiest word available.

The results were due the following week. That week stretched itself thin. It felt, then, as though that one mock



Sandhya Maruvada
London-based CA

test would decide everything – whether May was survivable.

When the corrected papers were finally distributed, I failed Taxation and managed a narrow pass in Costing.

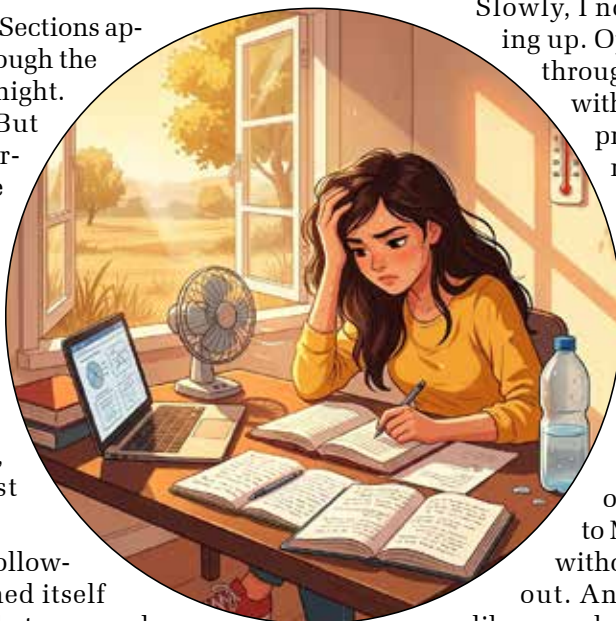
The word fail ran across the paper. I stared at it longer than necessary. Around me, friends asked for scores with careful faces. I answered briefly, without elaboration. No one pointed or laughed, but it felt humiliating nevertheless.

That afternoon, I walked back to the hostel under the unforgiving heat. Everything around me looked the same as before. Only my confidence felt misplaced.

I remember how quickly routine returned. Professors collected papers, explained mistakes, offered feedback to those who asked. Life continued at its usual pace. Failure seemed to slip into the routine of college days more easily than I had expected. Over the next few days, friends spoke about their own forgotten steps, missed assumptions, unexpected questions. One professor pointed out where pressure, not lack of effort, had caused my answers to thin out.

Slowly, I noticed that I was still showing up. Opening my notebook. Sitting through class. Correcting mistakes without ceremony. The exams approached. The disappointment remained, but it no longer felt as defining.

April didn't turn things around. If anything, it showed how common failure was. Many people carried their own versions of it without saying much. Effort didn't always show up in the results. But life must go on. By the time April gave way to May, I had learnt to keep going without having everything figured out. And for the moment, that felt like enough. ■



Data Storytelling in Excel

Turning Numbers into Decisions



Vinoth Kumar R

Microsoft Certified Trainer

MICROSOFT EXCEL is one of the most widely used spreadsheet applications for storing, organising, and analysing data. Among its advanced analytical tools, Pivot Tables, Pivot Charts, Slicers, and Timelines are particularly important because they help users summarise large datasets and present information in an interactive manner. These

features allow users to transform raw data into meaningful reports without using complex formulas. They are commonly used in sales analysis, financial reporting, inventory management, and dashboard creation. When used together, these tools provide powerful insights and improve the efficiency of data analysis.

PIVOT TABLE AND PIVOT CHART

A Pivot Table is a data summarisation tool that enables users to analyse large datasets quickly. It allows information to be grouped, filtered, and calculated without changing the original data. Users can calculate totals, averages, counts, and other statistical values by simply dragging and dropping fields.

For example, a company may maintain a sales database containing order date, region, product, salesperson, and sales amount. By creating a Pivot Table, the company can determine total sales by region, identify the best-performing products, or analyse monthly sales performance. The flexibility of rearranging fields makes Pivot Tables highly useful for managers. A Pivot Chart is the graphical representation of a Pivot Table. While tables display numerical values, charts help users understand trends and comparisons visually. Any changes made to the data or filters automatically update the chart.

SLICERS

Slicers provide an interactive method of filtering Pivot Tables and Pivot Charts. Instead of selecting options from traditional filter menus, users can simply click buttons representing categories such as regions, products, or departments. Suppose a company sells products in North, South, East, and West regions. By inserting a slicer for the Region field, users can click 'South' and instantly view only the South region's data in both the Pivot Table and the Pivot Chart. Slicers improve user experience and make dashboards more interactive.

TIMELINE

A Timeline is a visual filtering tool specifically designed for date fields. It enables users to analyse data by years, quarters, months, or days. Since many business reports involve time-based analysis, timelines provide a simple way to focus on specific periods.

For example, a business can use a timeline to view sales performance during a particular quarter or compare monthly sales figures. Users can move the timeline slider to select the desired period, and all connected reports update automatically.

PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: USING ALL FOUR FEATURES TOGETHER

Consider a company that maintains the following sales data:

Date	Region	Product	Sales Amount
Jan 2025	North	Laptop	₹50,000
Jan 2025	South	Printer	₹20,000
Feb 2025	South	Laptop	₹45,000
Mar 2025	East	Laptop	₹35,000
Apr 2025	South	Printer	₹25,000
May 2025	West	Laptop	₹60,000

The company first creates a Pivot Table to summarise total sales by region and product. The table may show that the South region generated the highest printer sales while the West region recorded the highest laptop sales.

Next, a Pivot Chart is created from the Pivot Table. The chart visually displays regional sales comparisons, making it easier for management to identify strong and weak markets. A slicer is then added for the Region field. When the user clicks "South," the Pivot Table immediately displays only South region transactions, and the chart updates automatically to show South region sales performance. Finally, a Timeline is inserted using the Date field. The manager selects the period from January to March 2025. The Pivot Table and chart now display only the transactions that occurred during those months. If the manager changes the timeline to April and May, all reports instantly refresh to show the selected period.

This example demonstrates how all four features work together to create an interactive dashboard. The user can filter by region using slicers and by date using timelines while simultaneously viewing updated tables and charts. ▶

Nool: My Startup

Most of us engineering students mug up algorithms and run after marks. I was also like that. Then, an internship came my way. It changed my perspective.

DURING MY first AI internship, I was given a problem statement and asked to build a product within a given deadline. I was left to fend for myself, and there was no handholding. At that time, I cursed, but today I am happy about it.

This experience made me think of something else. In my hometown of Thiruvarur, I had grown up watching weavers create Kanchipuram and Madurai sarees on their handlooms. Their craft was amazing, but their reach was poor. Most of them sold through middlemen, had zero digital presence, and earned a small fraction of the sarees' final selling price.

That gap became the problem that I wished to crack. That's how Nool began.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM

The Indian handloom sector supports over 35 lakh handloom workers and weavers. Most of them have erratic income and no platform to showcase their capabilities in 'customisation'.

I spoke to many weavers at local markets, asked tailors about their biggest pain points and studied what existing platforms were doing. I found fashion apps for buyers and e-commerce apps for sellers, but nothing that connected customers with tailors. I interacted with 25+ weavers and tailors across Tamil Nadu and conducted informal surveys with customers interested in customised ethnic wear. Their feedback highlighted the need for a platform that could connect artisans directly with buyers.

Nool – the Tamil word for “thread” – was conceived as that bridge.

BUILDING THE TEAM

I knew Python, deep learning, FastAPI, and React. These are the coding systems used to build the



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product. But to build an enduring startup, you require design thinking and market understanding, and honest conversations with real users. I developed an initial prototype of the platform, and the project was also presented during entrepreneurship activities, where we picked up valuable feedback.

As an AIML student, I wanted AI to play a meaningful role in solving the problem rather than be a marketing feature. The platform includes a Saree Studio, where users can customise fabric colours, border styles, motifs, and design preferences. The studio leverages recommendation algorithms and visual customisation techniques to help

customers experiment with colours, borders, and motifs before placing an order.

I must tell you that earning trust from artisans, overcoming self-doubt, and resisting feature overload were demanding. Each challenge strengthened my resolve.

MY TAKE

Please do not wait until you graduate to start building something meaningful. Pick up a problem – after all, there are many – and crack it. On your CV, this will be gold. Nool is evolving. There are more features to build and more artisans to onboard. However, the journey has begun, and as they say, “Well begun is half done.” The experience has given me an insight into entrepreneurship, technology, resilience, and social impact. It also showed me that innovation is not about having all the answers; it is about taking the first step toward solving a problem. No classroom lecture would have done this.

For me, Nool is an opportunity to preserve traditional craftsmanship while creating new economic opportunities for artisans. If an idea keeps returning to your mind, act on it. You don't need perfect weather to do that. All it takes is the willingness to start. ▶



PODCAST PICKS

THIS IS IRAN'S MONEY

TUCKER CARLSON, the former host at Fox News, now has his own podcast. He recently hosted Trita Parsi of the Quincy Institute where they discussed the key points of the deal that Trump recently struck with Iran.

'This deal was not the final deal,' and a major faction in Iran protested it.

While the major point of this deal was the withdrawal of the blockade, the money involved became a major talking point. Trita Parsi said, 'This is Iran's money. They had about 120–150 billion dollars in various banks around the world, which were frozen following US sanctions. A portion of this money was agreed to be released.'

They also discussed Barack Obama releasing 1.7 billion dollars when he signed the erstwhile US – Iran nuclear deal. 'That money had a different context – a lawsuit.' In 1979, the Shah of Iran had ordered weapons from the US. But between Iran's payment and the US's delivery, Iran had a revolution and held US diplomats hostage. So, the US never delivered the weapons and never returned the money. At the International Court, the US was set to lose. So, the Obama administration chose to settle it with interest.

'There has never been a deal with Iran where America has agreed to pay them money, apart from Iran's own money!'

The Iranians have insisted on a regional ceasefire. This would mean the US has to constrain Israel and Iran's allies, including Hezbollah. Israel, having grown weaker in the region following this war, is seeking to sabotage this deal.

The core of the disagreement, Iran's nuclear capacity, has not been touched by this deal.

Podcast Series: The Tucker Carlson Show

Host: Tucker Carlson

Guest: Trita Parsi

Episode Title: The Key Points of Trump's Iran Peace Deal...

CAN AI THINK FOR US?

JOE ROGAN. Search 'famous international podcasts', and his name would pop up! He hosts a variety of guests, including Hollywood directors and actors, business icons, and scientists. He recently spoke to Dean Radin, co-founder of the neuro-engineering company Cognigenics, which researches treatments for dementia. Their discussion on AI, humans' reliance on devices for thinking, and long-form content was among the most viewed.

"As a scientist, AI is making my job much easier and more efficient." The larger point is that everybody is now creative! So, as a collective, we now strive to push the limits of creativity. And when we don't know something, we ask the collective for answers.

"Sometimes AI does say things that are completely off." And when interrogated for the source, it replies, "I scraped it off the entire internet." It clearly didn't scrape well because most AIs are designed to respond faster, not necessarily accurately. And right now, AI is writing itself, which might lead to a greater loss of human control.

"One must have one's own knowledge base to challenge AI." AI is just giving data from various sources. One must know how to use that data in an actionable way. Teaching disciplined thinking to humans so they expand their knowledge with AI, rather than using it as a crutch, is the way forward.

"Human beings, as a species, are extremely resilient. All of us, even identical twins, have a unique, sizable percentage of mutation." So we would definitely outsmart AI too!

When speaking of the popularity of long-form content, they opined: Perhaps the viewers are people "who grew up in a different time", who know how to think, and find that content satiating their longing. Or perhaps certain kinds of people intuitively gravitate towards long-form content because they get more stimulation from it than from TikTok videos. Or perhaps long-form content helps some people organise their thinking and build a knowledge base to challenge AI.

Podcast name: The Joe Rogan Experience

Host: Joe Rogan

Guest: Dean Radin

Episode number: #2513

In arrangement with Palette Story

The Weighing Scale

You have not eaten breakfast yet, and already you have been weighed.

THERE WAS A SMALL provision store near my grandmother's house, and it had a weighing scale on the counter. Two brass pans hanging from a beam, and a box of iron weights beside it. The shopkeeper would drop a half-kilo block on one side, pour rice into the other, and wait.

I used to think the scale was measuring the rice. The scale did not tell you that. It only told you how the rice compared to the iron block. Take the block away, and the scale knows nothing. It has no opinion of its own. It cannot weigh a thing in isolation. It can only weigh one thing against another.



Senthilkanna JN
Chief Executive Officer
Sri Venkateswara College
of Technology

We do not choose our own weights anymore. The feed chooses them, and it chooses cruelly – because a scale that always balances is boring, and boring does not sell.

So it hands you the one person, out of eight billion, whose strength lands exactly where you feel weakest. A writer is shown a better writer. A quiet student is shown someone loud. You are compared to someone else's single best frame, on your ordinary afternoon.

There is an older way to use a scale, and the shopkeeper knew it without being taught. He was not comparing his rice to

another shop's rice. He was measuring against a known standard – a weight he could hold in his palm, the same yesterday as today. That is the difference between a scale that steadies you and one that torments you. One measures against something fixed and yours. The other measures against whatever the crowd is holding up that morning.

For a student, the fixed weight is plain. It is who you were last week. The chapter you did not understand and now half-do. These are small blocks. They will never trend. But they are yours; they do not move when you are not looking, and measured against them, the pans tell the truth.

The scattered comparison, the one the screen feeds you, has a peculiar cruelty: it never resolves. The shopkeeper's scale settled, and the transaction was done. The feed's scale is built never to settle. You end the day weighed a thousand times and told your weight by no one.

I still visit shops with digital scales now. They are faster, probably more accurate. But I notice I trust the old brass one more. I think it is because the brass scale never pretended to know your worth. It only ever showed a relationship – this, against that – and left the choosing of that to a human hand.

So the question I would leave you with is this: When you feel yourself being weighed tomorrow morning – whose weight did you agree to be measured against, and did you choose it, or did someone hand it to you? ▶

I BELIEVE MOST OF US HAVE QUIETLY BECOME A SCALE

You wake and reach for the phone. Within the first minute, the pans are moving. Someone your age has raised a round of funding. Someone from your class has cleared an exam you are afraid of. Someone is on a beach you cannot afford. You have not eaten breakfast yet, and already you have been weighed. Not against a fixed block, but against a hundred shifting ones.

Here is what the old scale understood that we have forgotten. The reading changes entirely depending on what you put on the other side. Place your morning's work against a friend's finished project, and you come up short. Place it against the blank page you faced an hour ago, and you have gained ground. The number was never about you at all. It was about the comparison you agreed to make.





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.

Big Friendship

IN BIG FRIENDSHIP, Aminatou Sow and Ann Friedman tell us that friendship can turn out to be more important than marriage, career, or family in a person's life. The book introduces the idea of a "big friendship" as being deep, and one where a friend knows your fears and dreams, and your insecurities and strengths.

There is something else that the authors' say which lands like a big punch. They argue that friendship can survive only with constant nurturing. If you neglect them, even the strongest of

of relief. It tells you that you cannot avoid conflict when two people matter deeply to each other. To win, we must overcome that friction with honesty and respect.

Friendships change with time. School friendships are effortless because you meet every day. College friendships are intense because you share dreams and worries. But as you grow older, other things such as careers, marriage, and personal responsibilities take precedence, and for friendship to stay on course, you must adapt.

Friendship is not only about hanging out or sharing memes. It includes listening, apologising, and showing up when it matters.



friendships can break down. This is so against the popular convenient wisdom that friendship can survive both distance and silence. So, it now looks like you may have a contact list running into the hundreds while your real friendships can be counted on the fingers of your right hand. The book says you can be constantly connected but not necessarily close.

A second message the book drives home is that conflicts are normal. If you have been told that to stay friends you must avoid conflict, this comes as a sigh

The friends you make in college may become some of the most important people in your life. But not every friendship will last in the same form. Some friendships will grow stronger, while others will fade. Good friendship, the book insists, requires emotional maturity.

Friendship is not only about hanging out or sharing memes. It includes listening, apologising, and showing up when it matters. Finding someone who understands you is the easy part. Becoming the friend they can rely on is the difficult work. ▶

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