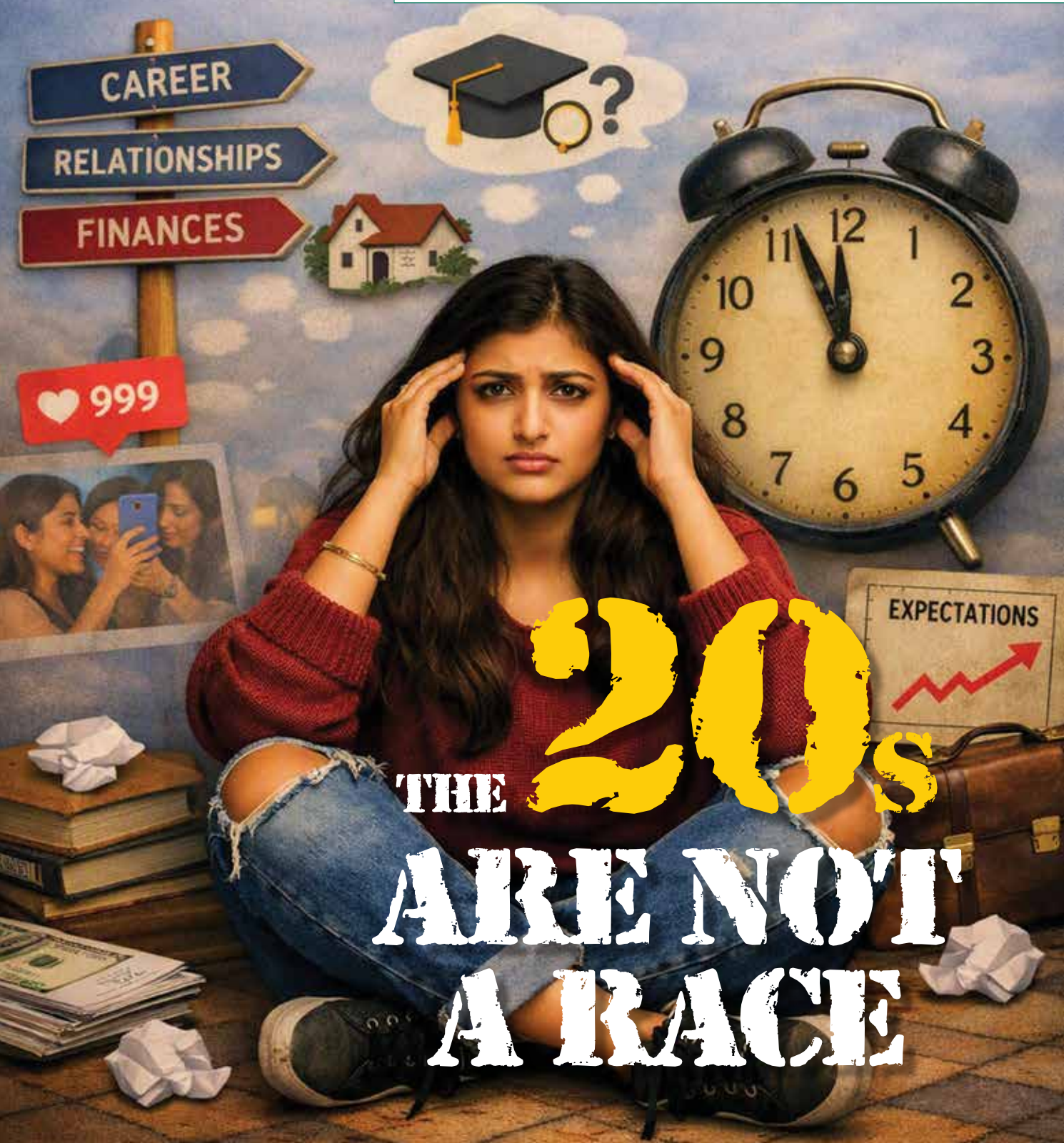






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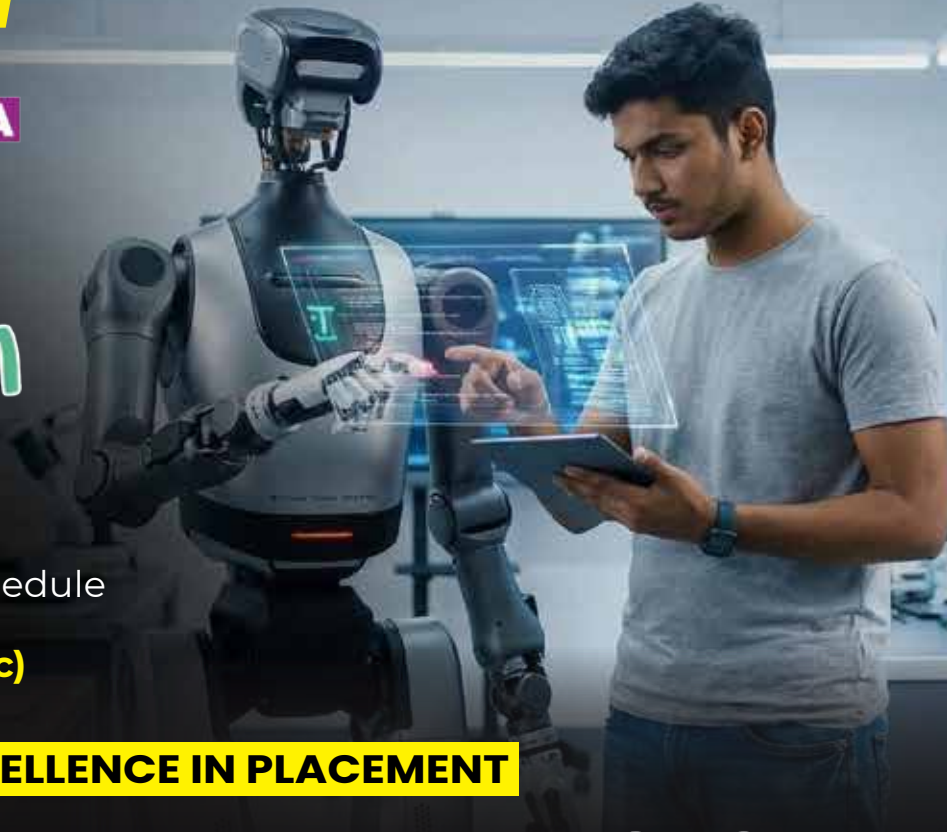
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The Race We Were Never Asked to Run

Today, at 22, everyone and their uncle expect you to know what you want to do in life, get the right job, earn the right salary, build the right friendships, and look happy doing them. LinkedIn shows someone has been promoted, and Instagram announces a trip, while you wonder what's happening with your life.

This issue therefore begins with a simple proposition: your 20s are not a race. You will live another 75 years, and there is time for everything. The 20s are the time to explore, experiment, and evolve. Hari Prasad, in our lead story, talks about these expectations and says careers rarely move in straight lines. He pulls out the stories of Ray Kroc, Dinesh Karthik, and S D Bala, among others, to buttress his point. These men found phenomenal success on the other side of the age at which society expected them to succeed.

Venkatesh Athreya takes the talk forward by asking the young to think about personal brand. His central idea is simple: talent has little value if nobody knows it exists. Your brand is the impression people consistently carry of you, shaped by what you write, speak, and create.

Rajendran Dhandapani challenges the assumption that successful people always knew where they were headed. Men like Sridhar Vembu and Tim Cook had messy journeys that, in hindsight, look like carefully crafted plans. A career, he suggests, is a marathon and not a sprint. Sudhakar Rao walks us through the digital footprint and says that while your CV tells people what you have done, your online presence reveals what you think, and so it is important to build a credible presence. Deependra Jan points out that classmates, teachers, and friends are the invisible architects who shape who we become.

Meera Venugopalan looks at the first Rs 10 lakh as a reflection of how different people relate to risk, time, and security, while Vinoth Kumar makes Excel powerful by exploring Power Query. And in CXP Read, we have a compelling book that you must turn your attention to. Together, the August issue of Spark tells us that while tech will make life better, it is up to us to decide what should not be rushed.



The 2-Minute Pause

It's important to strike the iron while it's hot.

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Your Brand is Your Silent Introduction

IT WAS DURING A CONVERSATION with a close friend that he said, "It is not enough to do a good job. People should know that you are doing a good job." Simple words. But they changed how I think about careers, visibility, and success, because talent alone is not enough. The world is full of talented people nobody has heard of. There are many singers who can sing better than Mohammad Rafi but continue to sing in their bathrooms.



Venkatesh Athreya

*A transformation consultant,
and a leadership coach*

thoughts, your learnings, your observations. One post a week is enough to start. Many recruiters and founders spend time on LinkedIn. Your next opportunity might come from someone who read your post. If you're good at talking: Attend events. Start a club in your college. Go to networking meetups. Every conversation is a chance to make an impression. The person you meet at a college event today could be your employer, your investor, or your collaborator tomorrow.

WHAT IS A PERSONAL BRAND?

When someone mentions Apple, what comes to your mind? If you said, "Innovation, cutting-edge technology, or prestige," you are thinking of an identity and not of a product. That's Apple's brand. Next think of RCB. Even without an IPL title in eighteen years, fans have stayed fiercely loyal. RCB for them is about passion, belonging, and the spirit of never say die. Fans aren't just supporting a cricket team; they are part of something close to them. That's a brand too.

Here's the simplest definition: A brand is what people consistently think and feel when they think of you. One person thinking something about you is an opinion. Many people thinking the same thing is a brand. This applies to you as a student, as a professional, as a person building your future.

WHY YOUR BRAND MATTERS

Allan Dib, in his book *The One Page Marketing Plan*, talks about a three-step journey every person must take: Know you → Like you → Trust you. Trust is where the magic happens. That's where people hire you, fund you, recommend you, and partner with you. But trust cannot happen without liking. And liking cannot happen without knowing. Knowing therefore comes first. And your personal brand is how people get to know you.

Without visibility, your skills stay invisible. You could be the best coder, the sharpest analyst, the most creative designer in your college. But if nobody knows it, opportunities will pass you by. Your brand is your silent introduction. It walks into the room before you do.

HOW TO BUILD YOURS

Here's the good news: you don't need a marketing budget or a PR team. You just need to use what you're already good at and find the right medium to express it. If you're good at writing: LinkedIn is your stage. Share your

If you're good at creating videos: YouTube and Instagram are full of young people who turned their skills and interests into platforms that changed their lives. You don't need to be famous. You must show up consistently. The formula is simple: what you're good at + what genuinely interests you + a medium that suits you = your personal brand in action.

ONE THING PEOPLE GET WRONG

Many students think building a personal brand means creating a strategy, picking a niche, and chasing followers. That's wrong. Don't look for a destination. Love what you do. When you genuinely love what you're doing, consistency comes naturally. And consistency, over time, builds your brand without you even trying. You won't wake up one day and suddenly "have a brand." But one day, you'll realise people are reaching out to you. Opportunities are finding you, and connections are forming around you. That's when you know the brand is working.

START NOW.

You don't need to wait until you graduate or until you're "ready."

- 1. Ask yourself:** What do I want people to think when they hear my name? That's your starting point.
- 2. Pick one area** that suits your strength. Writing, speaking, or creating. Just one. Start there.
- 3. Show up consistently.** One post, one event, one video at a time. Don't chase numbers. Chase quality and authenticity. Be YOU.

Your brand is being built whether you're intentional about it or not. Every action, every interaction, every piece of work you put out is adding to it. The question is: are you building it on purpose? Start today. Your future self will thank you. ▶

Not Even in My Wildest Dreams

There is a question that turns up in many interviews featuring successful business people, or even popular sportsmen and artists.



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

"**DID YOU EVER** imagine you'd end up here?"

Invariably, the answer is: "Not even in my wildest dreams."

My founder, Sridhar Vembu, has been posed this question several times too. Zoho was a small, unlikely bet when it started. He fondly remembers the days when things were a lot simpler. So yes, that tired, clichéd phrase is true.

But lately it has started to needle me. Was it that he didn't have a plan that he stuck on his almirah to wake up to every day?

What he was really failing to imagine, I think now, is a trick of memory.

Psychologists term it hindsight bias or the tendency to look at how something turned out and mistake the outcome for a plan. It also has a sibling in survivorship bias. It retains only the stories that ended well. Between the two, a life gets edited; some details tend to get magnified and others obscured to present a linear path. The detours vanish. The wrong turns vanish. Success looks designed.

BUILDING YOUR OWN KINGDOM

The Mahabharata has its own version of this trick. The Pandavas were handed their share of the kingdom – a forested, barren stretch called Khandava Prastha.

Bhima, by one account, believed they had been sent there to die. What grew from it came to be Indraprastha, a city grand enough to make everyone

jealous. Retold from this end, the wasteland looks like the first step of a plan nobody actually had.

SPRINT VERSUS MARATHON

A career, I've come to think, must be viewed like this. If I may use another metaphor, it behaves less like a sprint than a marathon.

A sprint is about speed. The body moves in a straight line, everything firing at once, and there is no time to notice who else is running alongside. The finish line is the only thing that exists. Everything else is noise.

A marathon requires a different kind of intelligence. A long-distance runner has far too many variables to contend with, so the only preparation is really adapting to anything the trial throws their way. Uphill stretches demand pacing, downhill sections need care, while long flat miles require patience more than muscle. There is time to notice the trees along the route, to trade a nod with another runner and to feel the weather turn. The goal, most of the time, is just to go the distance.

A run turns into a race the moment it becomes a comparison with the person one lane over. It turns back into a run the moment the only pace worth watching is one's own, measured against nothing but what you timed yesterday.

Tim Cook, long before he ran Apple, was given an assignment at his business school to write out a twenty-five-year plan for his own life, real boxes for real years. He found the same page decades later and summarised it: "Wasn't worth the yellowed paper it was written on."

Over the years, I have grown fond of a Zen proverb. It is better to travel well than to arrive.

These days, when I catch myself checking someone else's pace, I try to look down at my own feet instead. ▀

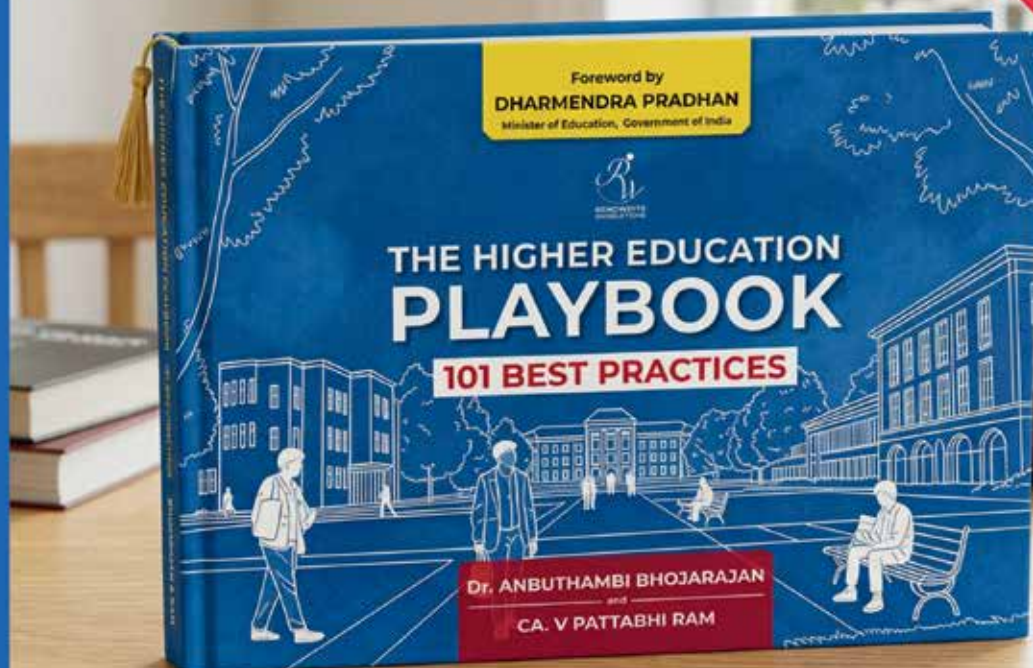
A run turns into a race the moment it becomes a comparison with the person one lane over.



Tim Cook

Sridhar Vembu

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THE 20s ARE NOT A RACE



*Why Confusion
at 22 isn't
Falling Behind*



TODAY'S KIDS have more access, more technology, and more opportunity than the generation before it. But behind all that jazz, many of them are silently carrying the kind of pressures that are rarely spoken about. It is seen in the scrolling on social media and in wondering why everyone else is ahead and happy, and in wondering why I can't seem to catch up. At times, it is seen in the smile you throw out at questions the extended family asks for which you don't have an answer.

When someone asks, "How are you doing?" many do not answer it instantly. However, the whistle comes out of the pressure cooker in different words. The 20-something may feel they are falling behind, and that everyone else is more successful. A few may even worry whether they chose the right career. And many keep asking: "Why does life seem to have already started for everyone else but not for them?"

Somewhere between school life and campus placements, we started believing that life comes with a timetable. By a certain age, one should have a degree, a job, a salary, and a direction in life that includes either a girlfriend or marriage. When you miss a milestone, the pressure intensifies.

The problem isn't in the goals or in the ambition. Ambition is good and important in life. It gives us direction and the drive to keep moving. The real problem lies in believing everyone's life must follow one perfect timeline. Reality does not allow for that.

I am now in my 30s. Looking back through my years in corporate India and my experiences of uncertainty and self-rebuilding, I realise one thing: the 20s are not the age where everything should make perfect sense. They are the years when you slowly begin learning who you are when life stops following the textbook.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ARE REALLY FEELING

To understand what young people feel today, we don't have to look far. Walk through a college campus, listen to new joiners talk at the office, or listen to conversations at social gatherings. There, we can see their worries and fears that they don't always say out loud.

"If I don't land an offer during campus placement week, considering my family situation, it makes me feel as if my four years of study were a failure," shared a 21-year-old final-year engineering student in Coimbatore. Nobody talks about learning anymore. The only question asked in the hostel is: "What's the CTC?" Your self-worth becomes a number before you've even worked a single day.

For others, the fear isn't only about getting a job. It's also about feeling locked in a career that is not their dream.

"I got the corporate analyst role everyone told me to pursue," says a recent graduate from Bengaluru. "My parents were proud and happy, and my announcement got hundreds of likes online. But within six months, I realised I had everyone's approval except my own. I want to shift into product engineering, but at 23, starting as an intern feels like going backwards."

Three forces shape this anxiety: self-pressure, social pressure, and status pressure. Beneath all three lies another truth—the possibility of winning the race early and still feeling lost later, aka the mid-career crisis.



CA Hari Prasad Asokan

Chief Financial Officer,
TIDEL Park Coimbatore Ltd

Placements feel like a
one-shot elimination
round.

I feel like I'm living
someone else's
calendar.





The pressure we put on ourselves

GANESH (name changed) scored an A+ grade in his secondary exam, and from there, the pressure slowly mounted. At 17, he was expected to choose an academic stream that could shape his future, but his parents and relatives made the choice for him. At 18, he had to pick a degree, leaving behind a dream he'd quietly held onto. At 21, recruiters wanted to know where he saw himself in five years. By 22, he was already comparing his confusing life with the neat one he thought he should have by then.

Without even realising it, many of us end up carrying an invisible checklist. We tell ourselves we should already know our exact career path, be fully financially independent, feel completely confident about the future, and stop being so confused. But these "shoulds" can slowly become a point of pressure, making us feel like we are failing even when we are not.

One of the biggest myths young people hear is that successful adults had everything clear from the beginning. The reality is otherwise: many adults are still figuring things out too. They have learned how to keep moving, make better choices, and take smarter risks along the way.

I relate to this lesson easily. There were periods in my life when I believed everyone else had a clearer map. Professionally, responsibilities grew; person-

ally, uncertainty persisted. Living alone for years teaches you that silence has a strange habit of amplifying self-doubt.

My perspective shifted through a simple, practical realisation: clarity comes through action.

You don't discover your life's purpose by sitting still and thinking hard. Most people discover it through experiments, mistakes, and unexpected opportunities.

Rowan Atkinson, best known as Mr Bean, trained as an electrical engineer before turning to comedy. Manohar Parrikar, a metallurgical engineer from IIT Bombay, chose public service over a corporate tech career and went on to the country's first IITian Chief Minister. Arvind Kejriwal followed suit.

Another powerful example is Aadit Palicha and Kaivalya Vohra, the founders of Zepto, who got admission to Stanford to study Computer Science. But during the pandemic, they chose to leave Stanford, returned to Mumbai, failed with their first grocery delivery idea, and then built Zepto into one of India's fastest-growing quick-commerce companies. Their story isn't about rejecting education; it is about understanding what real education means. A degree can open doors, but learning becomes truly powerful when it teaches you how to observe problems, think clearly, take risks, fail, adapt, and build something useful. A commerce graduate may become a writer, entrepreneur, educator, or national award-winning director. A finance professional may discover a deep passion for teaching or storytelling.

Being confused at 22 is not a weakness. It may be the first honest sign that you are beginning to think for yourself instead of following the crowd.



THE CAREER MAP IS NOT A STRAIGHT LINE



ROWAN ATKINSON

Electrical engineering
→ Comedy



MANOHAR PARRIKAR

Metallurgical engineering
→ Public service
→ Defence Minister



Aadit Palicha & Kaivalya Vohra

Stanford
→ Left college
→ Failed first idea
→ Zepto



The pressure society puts on us

IF SELF-PRESSURE is the voice inside our head, social pressure is the noise we hear everywhere around us.

For Ganesh, even if he follows his own dream, the pressure does not disappear. It simply changes shape. Now, people around him begin asking about his job, salary, marriage, and future. Neighbours, family friends, and even people he barely knows begin measuring his life against what they think should happen next.

The questions circle around: Which company? What package? Higher studies or job? Marriage plans? And, sometimes, even questions about children. On their own, these questions may seem harmless. But together, they create a heavy expectation: your life must move forward in ways other people can see and accept.

But life is not a standardised test. No official answer key is released after graduation.

Consider the trajectory of fashion icon Vera Wang. She spent her entire youth training as an elite figure skater. When she failed to make the 1968 US Olympic team, her childhood dream collapsed. She didn't

launch her design empire at 22. Instead, she spent 15 years working as an editor at Vogue. At 40, she launched her signature bridal salon. Many families fear that a detour means permanent failure. A student who takes time to explore different fields is often viewed with greater concern than a student who immediately enters a traditional career that makes them deeply unhappy. Yet a year spent understanding your core strengths may be far more valuable than ten years spent living someone else's expectations.

Society also imposes random deadlines. Young adults are often pushed toward marriage before they understand their own emotional patterns, financial habits, or whether they even enjoy spending time on their own.

Being single at 25 is not a crisis. Being trapped in the wrong life or relationship at 35 can be. Society celebrates outcomes, not processes. It sees the job offer, not the panic attacks before the interview. It sees the wedding photo, not the difficult conversations behind it. It sees the foreign university admission, not the loans, loneliness, or uncertainty that follow.

Many young people think everyone else is moving smoothly through life because they only see the public chapter, never the private struggle.



The pressure to appear ahead

A FEW GENERATIONS ago, comparison usually stayed within a small circle — a cousin who got into a better college, a classmate who landed a good job, or a neighbour's child who seemed to be doing well. Today, that circle has expanded. Comparison now follows us through our phones, across cities and countries, every day, with endless social media posts that keep showing us someone else's highlight reel.

Open LinkedIn and you'll see rapid promotions, corporate awards, and polished milestones. Open Instagram, and you'll see aesthetic lifestyles, travel highlights, and curated success stories. The result is a steady feeling that everyone else is doing something remarkable while you are still trying to get through your day. This creates a modern-day anxiety: "the need not only to succeed, but to appear successful in real time".

A quiet, stable, meaningful life rarely goes viral. A polished announcement does. Having spent years in finance, I understand money's undeniable importance.

Financial independence matters deeply. Economic security provides freedom. But I have also seen how dangerous it becomes when salary turns into a person's entire identity.

Imagine two 24-year-olds: Person A earns a massive compensation package, but hates the daily work, sleeps poorly, deals with chronic stress, and feels entirely trapped. Person B earns a modest salary, but works in an environment with high learning velocity, supportive mentors, healthy hours, and space to build transferable skills.

Who is actually ahead? You can't answer that by comparing salaries alone. It depends on their choices and priorities, not their paycheck.

Borrowed vs. Sustainable Metrics

Borrowed Metrics	Sustainable Metrics
High starting package (CTC)	Learning velocity and skill-building
Impressive job title or brand tag	Psychological safety and growth
Early speed, such as becoming a manager by 25	Stamina and avoiding burnout
External approval and social media posts	Peace of mind and quality sleep

THE RULES OF AGE & ACHIEVEMENT

We are often told that if we don't "make it" by our 20s, the window permanently closes. That is a myth. Your birth certificate doesn't determine real success. It is shaped by your work ethic, adaptability, resilience, and willingness to keep learning. Look at three extraordinary individuals who rewrote the rules of age and achievement:

S D Bala spent 37 years in banking. Instead of slowing down in retirement, he took on India's notoriously difficult Chartered Accountancy (CA) curriculum. He completed his internship alongside teenagers and cracked the CA exams, qualifying at age 60. Then, Dinesh Karthik spent much of his 20s sidelined, navigating inconsistent form and losing his national squad spot.

Instead of fading away, he radically transformed his fitness and batting technique in his mid-30s. He reinvented himself as a world-class finisher, forcing a legendary national team comeback for the T20 World Cup at age 37. And Yusuf Dikeç didn't start competitive shooting until age 28. Decades later, at the Paris Olympics, the 51-year-old went viral worldwide. Wearing casual gear, without specialised lenses or heavy headwear, and with one hand casually tucked into his pocket, he calmly shot his way to an Olympic silver medal.

When you feel overwhelmed at 22 by everyone else's loud announcements, remember the lesson of these lives: True competence is quiet, stamina matters more than early speed, and your potential does not come with an early expiration date.





When the rabbit becomes exhausted

WE ALL GREW up with the fable of the tortoise and the rabbit. As children, we were told the moral was simple: “Slow and steady wins the race.”

As adults, the deeper lesson becomes clear. The tortoise did not win simply because it was slow; it won because it kept moving at its own sustainable pace without being derailed by comparison.

Many young professionals today operate on an aggressive “rabbit strategy”: maximise salary as fast as possible, say yes to every demand, maintain constant, visible busyness, and postpone sleep, health, relationships, and self-reflection.

The underlying assumption is always: “I’ll enjoy my life later.”

But “later” often arrives with burnout.

This is the hidden side of the corporate rush. Many professionals who appear wildly successful in their late 20s experience a profound mid-career existential

crisis in their 30s. They checked every box society gave them: earned the degree, secured the job, got the promotions, built financial stability. Then one day they look in the mirror and ask: “Is this the life I actually wanted?”

The crisis is usually silent. Meetings continue, emails are sent, salaries arrive. From the outside, everything looks seamless. Inside, exhaustion, resentment, and the quiet fear creep in: years spent winning a race that wasn’t worth running.

Consider Ray Kroc. Before transforming McDonald’s into a global enterprise, he spent over 30 years as a travelling salesman selling paper cups and multi-mixer machines. He was 52 years old when he partnered with the McDonald brothers. His defining story didn’t happen in his 20s—it began long after most people assume their major opportunities have passed.

The goal of your 20s is not to become the fastest success story in the room. It is to build a foundation strong enough to carry your growth, health, curiosity, and purpose for decades. A career is not a 100-meter sprint. It is a long journey with different seasons, unexpected turns, and many chances to begin again.



Rebuilding the pace of your life

OVER TIME, a few practical principles helped me stop treating my 20s like a sprint. If you feel overwhelmed, these ideas may help you slow down, breathe, and reset:

Pillar 1: Health as Infrastructure, Not an Afterthought

In your 20s, it is easy to treat sleep deprivation and chronic stress as badges of honour. Society glorifies hustle culture, but your body keeps score. Burning the candle at both ends at 22 doesn’t make you faster, and it guarantees you will stall at 30. Sleep, movement, proper nutrition, and mental downtime are not rewards you earn after work; they are the essential infrastructure that makes long-term growth possible.

Pillar 2: Solitude over Social Noise

A profound difference exists between being alone and being lonely. In an age of constant notifications and public metrics, intentional solitude is a superpower.

Time spent reading without an audience, journaling, walking, or sitting quietly with your thoughts allows you to separate your authentic goals from the demands of public expectation.

Pillar 3: Compounding Skills over Surface Titles

A prestigious job title can disappear during a corporate restructuring. What can never be taken away are transferable, compounding skills: concise communication, financial literacy, empathetic leadership, problem-solving, emotional resilience, and adaptability. Focus less on what your business card says at 23 and more on what real problems you are learning to solve.

Pillar 4: Defining Success on Your Own Terms

Success becomes immensely simpler when you stop borrowing society’s definition. Define it for yourself. True success is a combination of meaningful work, financial independence, health, trusted friendships, freedom to keep learning, and the ability to sleep peacefully without feeling that your life belongs to someone else’s expectations.

SUCCESS DOESN'T HAVE AN AGE LIMIT



28 Yusuf Dikeç

Started competitive shooting



37 Dinesh Karthik

T20 World Cup comeback



40 Vera Wang

Signature bridal salon



52 Ray Kroc

McDonald's transformation begins



60 S D Bala

Qualified as a CA

The decade that makes you

If I could speak directly to every student or young professional reading this who feels anxious, delayed, or uncertain at 22, I would say this: You do not need to have your entire life figured out right now. You need enough courage to keep learning, enough humility to change direction when needed, enough discipline to build steady habits, enough resilience to survive disappointment, and enough patience to let your story unfold at its own pace.

HEALTH

Sleep
Movement
Nutrition
Mental downtime



SOLITUDE

Read
Walk
Journal
Think



COMPOUNDING SKILLS

Communication
Financial literacy
Leadership
Problem-solving
Adaptability



YOUR DEFINITION OF SUCCESS

Meaningful work
Financial independence
Friendships
Learning
Peace



The people you admire today are not finished products; they are simply further along in their own chapters. Some bloom early. Some bloom late. Some reinvent themselves repeatedly across different seasons of life. The real tragedy is not starting late. The real tragedy is spending your entire life running hard along a path that was never truly yours.

Looking back, the 20s rarely make perfect, linear sense. They are the decade that introduces you to yourself, through work, responsibility, travel, solitude, friendship, mistakes, pressure, and the uncomfortable freedom of making your own choices. Life is not asking you to arrive fully formed at 22. It is asking you to keep growing without becoming bitter, to keep learning without letting comparison steal your peace. Your 20s are not a countdown to being settled. They are a laboratory, a rehearsal, a workshop, an unfinished draft. And unfinished drafts are not failures; they are how every worthwhile story begins.

So take a deep breath. Work hard, learn deeply, travel when you can, build your health, protect your peace, invest in real relationships, and allow yourself the grace to begin again whenever necessary. Whenever comparison starts stealing your peace, remember this: A meaningful life is not built by reaching milestones early; it is built by reaching the right milestones in your own time.

The 20s are not a race. They are the season in which you begin discovering what is truly worth running for.

And that discovery is far more important than finishing first. ▶

STOP COMPARING YOUR CHAPTER 2 WITH SOMEONE ELSE'S CHAPTER 20.



LEADERSHIP LOUNGE

CONVERSATIONS WITH
THE LEADERS SHAPING EDUCATION

EPISODE 01

EPISODE 02

EPISODE 03



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Chairman, Sairam Institutions

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COMING
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Your Digital Footprint is your Second Resume

For decades, students were taught to build a good Resume.



Sudhakar Rao

Author, Brand Strategist,
and Director at the
ICFAI Group

GET GOOD grades, add internships, collect certificates, polish the CV, and prepare for the interview. There is now another document that recruiters read before they meet you. You didn't consciously write it, and probably you don't even know exactly what is in it. It is called your digital footprint.

A CareerBuilder survey found that 70% of employers use social networking sites to research job candidates. And 47% of employers in the CareerBuilder survey said

that if they could not find a candidate online, they were unlikely to call that person for an interview. In other words, having no digital footprint is itself a signal.

So, the question for students is no longer, "How do I prevent my online presence from hurting me?" The question is, "What do I want my online presence to say about me?" Your Resume says what you have done whereas your digital footprint can reveal what you think about. That difference is important.

A student who writes "interested in marketing" on a CV is making a claim. A student who regularly analyses advertising campaigns, comments intelligently on consumer behaviour and discusses why a brand succeeded or failed is providing evidence. A Resume can say, "good communicator." Your writing online can demonstrate it.

But the same digital footprint that can open a door can close one.

ONLINE JUDGMENT

The world recently witnessed a demonstration of this. Following the killing of US activist Charlie Kirk in 2025, more than 30 organisations suspended or dismissed employees over their social-media reactions. The episode triggered an intense debate about free speech, political expression and the extent to which employers should judge what employees say outside work. But the sad reality is that the distinction between "personal" and "professional"



online behaviour has become porous.

India offers an equally powerful backdrop. Recent youth protests demonstrated how rapidly social media can mobilise people, amplify grievances and change public narratives. A political party replacing its social-media head following the protests is a reminder that political organisations now treat digital communication as a strategic capability.

Students therefore need not become politically silent online. Nor should they manufacture a bland, corporate personality. Having opinions is not the problem. Having opinions without judgment can be. There is a difference between challenging an idea and abusing the person who holds it. There is a difference between political conviction and political trolling. There is a difference between humour and humiliation. That distinction is becoming more important because technology is making the digital footprint easier to analyse.

CREDIBLE PRESENCE

AI-powered hiring and screening tools can analyse large quantities of candidate information.

So the future recruiter may not simply Google your name. An algorithm will help interpret what it finds. This is where you need to be watchful. Don't build an online presence that is artificially perfect; build one that is credible. Talk about the things you genuinely care about. Showcase projects, write occasionally, and participate intelligently in professional conversations. Follow people whose thinking challenges you and correct yourself when you are wrong.

Importantly, don't confuse visibility with reputation. Posting every day does not build a brand. I would suggest one simple exercise to every student: Google yourself.

THE DIGITAL FOOTPRINT TEST

Before you post, ask:

Would I be comfortable if this were seen by...

 1 A RECRUITER? Will it help or hurt my chances of getting a job?	 Employers screen. Don't risk unnecessary doubt.
 2 MY FUTURE BOSS? Will it show me as professional and reliable?	 They assess attitude, judgment and how you represent the team.
 3 A CLIENT OR CUSTOMER? Would I be proud if they saw this?	 Your online presence affects trust and confidence.
 4 MY PARENTS OR FAMILY? Will they be comfortable seeing this?	 If you wouldn't show it at home, rethink posting it.
 5 A JOURNALIST? Could this be taken out of context or misinterpreted?	 Screenshots travel fast and stay for a long time.
 6 MY FUTURE SELF? Will I be okay with this 5 years from now?	 Protect your future reputation, not just your present mood.

II If the answer to all six is YES, post with confidence.
If any answer is NO, pause.

BUILD A POSITIVE DIGITAL FOOTPRINT

 Share what you learn. Curiosity attracts opportunities.	 Add value to conversations. Thoughtful > Argumentative.	 Showcase your work and ideas. Projects speak louder than claims.	 Be respectful, even when you disagree. How you disagree defines you.	 Protect your privacy. Review settings. Control access.	 Review regularly. Clean up today, thank yourself tomorrow.
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“In the digital age, your reputation is built one click, one post and one choice at a time.”
Make each one count.

Then ask a friend to do the same. Compare what the two of you discover. What appears first, what is missing, what is embarrassing, and what is impressive?

That exercise is worth doing because your future employer may perform it before your interview. Your Resume may get you shortlisted. Your interview may get you selected.

But your digital footprint may answer a more fundamental question: "Who is this person when nobody is interviewing them?" That is why your second Resume deserves at least as much thought as your first. ▶

**Your Resume says
what you have done
whereas your digital
footprint can reveal
what you think about.**

**That difference
is important.**

The Invisible Architects: the People Who Shape You

Do you remember the person who sat next to you at the university orientation?
Or the first manager you ever reported to?



**Dr Deependra
Kumar Jha**

*Vice Chancellor, Manav
Rachna University*

PEOPLE ARE turning points. At every pivot in your life, there has been someone standing with you. Whether it was the camaraderie of a friend or the guidance of a professor, most of us can trace our careers back to the 2-3 people we meet between 18-25 years of age.

The process of becoming is a long, slow, and arduous one. There is only so little that is tangible and the rest of this architecture is invisible. The architects, too.

When you're young, unsure of yourself, you're defined by the people you surround yourself with. They are the glass ceiling. Their ambition is the blueprint. You're still forming your identity, your values, your vision; you borrow a sense of being from the people around you. Your classmates are mirrors; your mentors are a lighthouse.

It feels casual; you'll never identify the moment in which they've changed you. Years down the line, when you come face to face with the same peer who sat next to you at the orientation, you think it is inevitable.

I've been motivated by watching my friends risk everything to pursue a passion. I've watched them trade stability for fulfilment, no matter the price. It has given me the strength to disrupt. These moments don't

feel big. They are not monumental, and they hardly register. These little moments compound, though. For all the best-laid plans, one conversation can change everything — life unfolds in these interactions.

In my 20s, I wanted to be an engineer. I'd never dreamed of being an educator. But something pulled me to education; I was split between the two worlds, and the risk seemed larger than life. I remember this confusion, and I remember meeting my professor. I remember the conversation that gave me conviction.

My professor asked me to weigh my options, draw a T-table, and note the options against each other. When you write down the positives of one, forget the other choice exists. Prioritise what matters most. It's a system that helped me choose my path.

THE RIPPLE EFFECT OF PEOPLE

We tend to overlook this. At 18, you're still malleable, you're still forming. You join clubs to spend time with your friends and discover a passion accidentally. You talk to your roommate in passing and reconnect with them at a new job. The window is small, but the impact ripples through your life.

I wonder why we underestimate the power people have over us. Don't focus on the people, we say, and focus on the task at hand. Study. Work. Network, but in transactions. We underestimate how much happens by proximity. By accident. By the people who happen to be in the room. Your five-year plan did not get you here. It did not influence what you became.

We choose futures based on people we meet. You cannot choose the path that leads to your future, but you can choose the people. The path will follow. ▀



**Your classmates
are mirrors;
your mentors
are a lighthouse.**

Investing First Ten Lakhs

Once as I was sitting with a friend who had Rs 10 lakhs of saving. He opened his notebook and drew three circles, calling them in turn: near, middle, and far.

IN THE FIRST circle, he wrote “fixed deposit.” It was the place where a portion could sit quietly, earning modest interest, untouched by the markets. He liked the certainty of it. In the second circle, he wrote ‘mutual funds.’ Here, he imagined the money flowing into equities and debt, shifting with the economy. He didn’t expect to master it; he only wanted to be near the pulse of growth, and watch how small sums could stretch over years. In the third circle, he wrote “index fund SIP.” This was his long horizon, the far circle. A steady drip each month into the broader market, staying present in the tide.

What struck me wasn’t the instruments themselves. It was the way he treated them as companions in time. The deposit was for the near term, the fund for the middle, the index for the far.



Later, another friend divided her money differently. She placed a portion into digital gold because it reminded her of her grandmother’s bangles. It was a way of keeping tradition alive in a modern form. Another part went into government bonds, where she saw the quiet strength of safety. The rest she allowed into equities, small amounts, learning to watch the daily dance of prices. For her, the act was about learning to sit with uncertainty. She said to me, you should always keep a sum equal to 100 minus your age in equity.

A third friend carried his ten lakhs into a very different space. He placed it, not into markets or deposits, but into a start-up idea he had been working on for months. The start-up was a small platform for local arti-

sans to sell their work online. The money became laptops, rented space, and a few salaries. It was not security he was buying, but possibility. Watching him, I realised that investing can sometimes mean stepping into the unknown, where the return is not measured in percentages but in whether the idea breathes long enough to stand.

And then there was me, who used the sum as an advance for a home. I adjusted the amount with some help from my sister, stretching the figure into a down payment. It would, for the time being, be co-owned with the bank. The debt sat beside me like a shadow, but so did the image of walls I could one day call my own. For me, the ten lakhs were not scattered across instruments. My loans were repaid.

Ten lakhs, in these stories, was never a map to wealth. It was a mirror, showing how each person related to time, risk, and memory. Some leaned toward safety, others toward growth, and many toward a balance that felt less like strategy and more like rhythm. The examples are real, but they are not prescriptions. They are glimpses of how young people in India have begun to place their first sums into the world.

Perhaps that is the quiet truth: investing is less about choosing the “right” product than about finding a way to live with your own decisions. Ten lakhs can be scattered across deposits, funds, gold, bonds, start-ups, or homes. What matters is how those choices sit beside you, whether they bring steadiness or restlessness, whether they feel like companions or burdens. The numbers will change, the markets will move, but the rhythm you choose will stay with you. ▶



Meera Venugopalan

Corporate finance and audit professional.



Power Query: The Data Transformation Revolution

Power Query enables users to connect to multiple data sources, import data, clean and transform it, and load it into Excel for analysis.

POWER QUERY has become an essential feature for anyone who works with large volumes of data. It provides an efficient and automated way to collect, organise, and prepare data from various sources, making it easier to create accurate reports, dashboards, and business intelligence solutions.

In today's business environment, organisations generate data from multiple systems such as ERP applications, CRM software, accounting packages, and Excel workbooks. This data often comes in different formats and structures, making manual consolidation and cleaning an error-prone process. Power Query addresses this challenge by allowing users to extract data from multiple sources, transform it into a standardised format, and load it into Excel with just a few clicks.

Power Query follows an ETL (Extract, Transform, Load) approach to data preparation. The Extract phase involves connecting to various data sources. The Transform phase allows users to clean the data by removing duplicates, filtering rows, changing data types, splitting or merging columns, replacing values, pivoting data, and whatnot. Finally, the Load phase sends the transformed data into an Excel worksheet or the Excel Data Model for advanced reporting and analysis. The resulting data can then be used to create PivotTables, Pivot Charts, and other reports.

AUTOMATION FOR CLEAN, RELIABLE DATA

A big advantage of Power Query is automation. Earlier, users had to manually copy and paste data from multiple reports, adjust formatting, and prepare the data before analysis. These repetitive tasks consumed significant time and increased the possibility of errors. With Power Query, every transformation step is recorded automatically. Whenever the source data changes or new records are added, users simply click Refresh, and Power Query repeats all the transformation steps automatically, producing an updated dataset in seconds. This significantly improves productivity while ensuring consistency and accuracy across reports.



Vinoth Kumar R
Microsoft Certified Trainer

Power Query offers a user-friendly graphical interface that requires little or no programming knowledge. Users perform transformations by selecting options from menus and ribbon commands instead of writing formulas. Advanced users can edit the underlying M code to create custom transformations, but for most business users, the visual interface is sufficient to perform complex data preparation tasks.

A key strength of Power Query is its ability to combine data from multiple files. For example, if a company receives monthly sales reports from different regional offices, all reports can be stored in a single folder. Power Query can automatically consolidate all these files into one master dataset without opening each workbook individually. As new files are added to the folder, refreshing the query automatically includes the latest data.

Power Query also supports data cleansing. It can remove duplicate records, eliminate blank rows, standardise date formats, convert text to numbers, trim unnecessary spaces, and validate data before it is loaded into Excel. Since these transformations are applied consistently every time the query is refreshed, users can rely on clean and standardised data for reporting and decision-making.

Another important capability is data shaping. Often, source data is not arranged in the format required for analysis. Power Query enables users to transpose rows and columns, pivot and unpivot data, merge multiple tables, append datasets vertically, split columns using delimiters, extract text, create conditional columns, and calculate new values.

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

Power Query integrates seamlessly with other Excel features. Once the transformed data is loaded into Excel, users can create PivotTables, Pivot Charts, conditional formatting, slicers, timelines, and interactive dashboards. The data can also be loaded into the Excel Data Model, enabling high-performance reporting using Power Pivot.



Power Query in Excel 365

From Raw Data to Reliable Insights

Connect. Transform. Combine. Refresh. Analyse.
All in Excel.

Why it matters?
Up to 80% of data work is preparation. Power Query automates the hard part—so you can focus on insights, not cleanup.

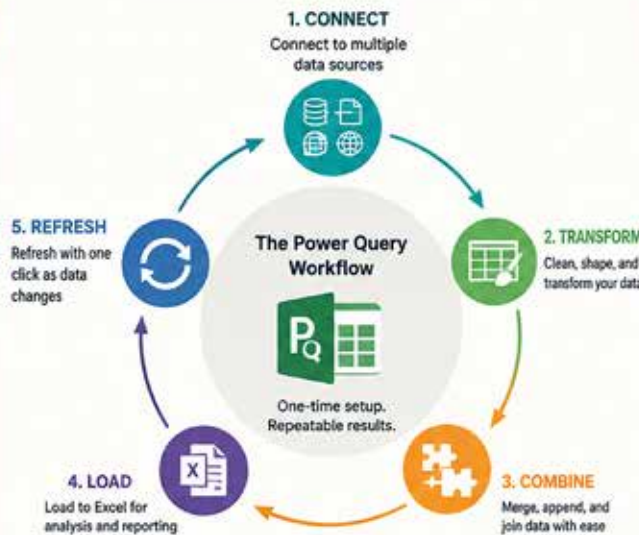
What is Power Query?

Power Query is a powerful data preparation and transformation tool in Excel 365 that helps you connect to multiple data sources, clean, reshape, and combine data, and load it for analysis.

Before Power Query

Time-consuming. Repetitive. Error-prone.

- Manual copy-paste and imports
- Inconsistent formats and errors
- Complex joins with VLOOKUPS
- Rework every time new data arrives
- Low productivity, less time for analysis



After Power Query

Automated. Accurate. Insightful.

- Connect to many sources in seconds
- Clean and transform data with powerful tools
- Combine datasets easily (without complex formulas)
- Refresh anytime with one click
- More time for analysis, not data wrangling



Where Power Query Helps



Financial Reporting
Consolidate data from multiple files and systems



MIS & Dashboards
Build reliable data pipelines for accurate reports



Data Integration
Combine data from Excel, CSV, SQL, Web, APIs and more



Automation
Eliminate repetitive tasks and save hours every week



Better Decisions
Trustworthy data leads to better insights and decisions



Power Query turns messy data into meaningful insights—so you can decide with confidence.

One of the major benefits of Power Query is that it is non-destructive. The original source data remains unchanged. Users can modify, delete, or rearrange transformation steps without affecting the original files. This provides greater flexibility while maintaining data integrity. Additionally, every transformation step is visible in the Applied Steps pane, making it easy to review, edit, or troubleshoot the data preparation process.

Power Query is used across various business functions. Finance departments use it to consolidate monthly financial statements and automate budget reporting. Sales teams combine regional sales reports to monitor performance across territories. Human Resources departments consolidate employee attendance and payroll records from multiple locations. Supply chain teams integrate inventory reports from different warehouses, while marketing teams merge campaign data from multiple platforms to evaluate customer engagement. In every case, Power Query reduces manual effort and ensures reliable reporting.

Excel 365 has further enhanced Power Query with expanded data connectors, better integration with Microsoft Power BI, and enhanced support for cloud-based data sources. Since both Excel and Power BI use the same Power Query engine, users who learn Power Query in Excel can easily transition to Power BI for enterprise-level data analytics and dashboard development. This makes Power Query a valuable skill for professionals.

In conclusion, Power Query is a transformative feature that simplifies the process of importing, cleaning, transforming, and consolidating data from multiple sources. It eliminates repetitive manual tasks, improves data accuracy, automates report preparation, and enables users to build reliable analytical models with minimal effort. As organisations continue to rely on data-driven decision-making, mastering Power Query has become an essential skill for Excel users. ▮

Mobile with Mission

In the late eighties and early nineties, many households couldn't afford a landline connection also.

PEOPLE TOOK the help of the neighbours to reach their near and dear ones. Then came mobile, the age where the tiny communication device started travelling with us. Then came a mobile in each one's hand, connecting everyone with each other. Then came the internet, and we got uber-connected with each other. This changed the dynamics of communication, and with it, communication etiquette changed. Earlier, in the days of landlines, not getting a call back within 7 days was considered bad etiquette; today, not replying to a WhatsApp message within 7 hours is considered so.

It's not just the device we use that has gone through a transformation; instead, we as individuals and the culture of communication have changed. Our patience and attention span has gone down significantly, earlier we could see three-and-a-half-hour family drama films, today many would not want to devote that much time.

However, we should also see the other side of it. Not watching a three-and-a-half-hour movie does not necessarily save time, instead many would prefer to watch the addictive web series that goes for six and seven hours. The content has changed its format and the user has changed his consumption style. Are we living a better life? I am not the one to judge that.

MOBILE'S MISSION BEYOND COMMUNICATION

Coming back to mobile, when mobile came to this world, it never knew that it would displace the camera, television, radio, and MP3 player. It just evolved over time. And today it has a mission to be the one-stop solution for everything man faces. Every interaction with the world happens through a screen in our palm, be it groceries, be it gadgets, or be it going abroad.

We have come a long way from using mobile phones to mobile phones us-



Ranjan Kumar Sahoo

ing us, more often than not. The true and real resource that every human has is time. And now the mobile is the primary resource that everyone else is trying to get out of you. There is a huge competition we can hardly imagine for our time.

I am not saying not to use mobile. Instead, what I am trying to say is that we should be conscious of our mobile usage. If we use unconsciously, we won't realise

where our time is going. Every ping in Whatsapp would require our attention. It is time we protect ourselves from the mobile which is deadlocked in its mission to get the maximum amount of our time (read life) and attention (read energy).

As budding entrepreneurs we should be very careful about what we are giving back to society. As money is not the only thing that defines success, in fact, meaning has a bigger role in entrepreneurial success. And more often than not meaning that truly contributes to people's life brings money as a by-product. Every business doesn't need an app, but if you are building an app be mindful of the time of the targeted audience. While you deliver value, never forget to respect their time.

RESPECTING TIME IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There is a measure becoming popular in the world called value per minute (VPM). Design your app or website in such a way that you provide maximum value in the minimum time spent by your target audience.

They would love to come back again to your application, because audiences are realising the value of their time, and they would equally value you if you value their time.

The higher the VPM, the higher the audience retention rate.

While you are holding mobile, be mindful to hold it with a mission, because the mobile already has its own. ▶



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The Typing Bubble

Three dots appear. Nothing arrives. Still, a whole story begins.

AT 10.38 PM, Riya sends a message to a friend. “Everything okay?” The message is read almost immediately. Then the three dots appear. Someone is typing. Riya waits. The dots disappear. They return. Disappear again. Thirty seconds pass. Nothing has been sent.

In that small gap, Riya has already received several messages — none of them from her friend. Maybe I said something wrong. Maybe she is upset. Maybe it is something serious. Maybe she just doesn’t want to tell me.

The phone remains silent. Her mind does not. There is something curious about the typing bubble. It was designed to tell us that a reply is coming. Yet sometimes it does the opposite. Instead of reducing uncertainty, it gives uncertainty a shape. Three moving dots. Enough information to know something is happening. Not enough to know what. And that small distance between the two can become surprisingly crowded.

WHEN THREE DOTS BECOME A STORY

I have noticed versions of this moment in many places. A student waits outside a faculty room after being told, “Come and meet me.” Someone finishes an interview and spends the next two days replaying one answer. A project-group message gets read by six people and answered by none. A friend says, “I’ll tell you later.” An email arrives with the subject line, “Regarding your application.” Before opening it, there is a second when the future seems to contain every possible version of itself.

We seem remarkably capable of living inside unfinished sentences. A silence rarely stays empty for long. We fill it. Sometimes with hope. Sometimes with fear. Mostly with whatever story was already sitting quietly inside us. The interesting part is that two people can receive the same silence and hear completely different things. One sees a delayed reply and thinks, They must be busy. Another sees the same delay and thinks, I have done something wrong. The silence has said neither. Yet both reactions feel real. Perhaps that is why uncertainty can be exhausting. It asks the mind to wait, while giving imagination complete freedom to move. Phones have made many forms of waiting visible. Delivered. Seen. Online. Typing... Last seen. Read at 10.41 PM. These tiny signals appear factual. And they are. But facts can end quickly. The message was seen. That is the fact. Everything after it can become fiction.



Senthilkanna JN
Chief Executive Officer
Sri Venkateswara College
of Technology

THE MESSAGES THAT NEVER ARRIVED

A few years ago, I watched a student repeatedly check his email after an interview. He was not waiting for a job offer. It was an internship, something that would last barely six weeks. Still, every notification made him reach for the phone. By evening, he had discussed every possible outcome with himself. Perhaps they liked him. Perhaps they had already chosen someone else. Perhaps his final answer had sounded foolish. Perhaps the interviewer’s smile meant something. The email eventually came the next afternoon.

He had been selected. What stayed with me was not the result. It was everything that had happened before the result existed. For nearly a day, he had lived through rejection, acceptance, embarrassment, relief and disappointment — while the organisation itself had said nothing at all. The mind had written an entire season before the first episode was released.

College life contains many such unfinished spaces. Waiting for marks. Waiting for someone to call back. Waiting to know whether a friendship has changed. Waiting for a parent’s reaction. Waiting for an opportunity. Waiting to discover whether the version of life imagined at eighteen looks anything like the one appearing at twenty-one. Not all questions arrive with blue ticks. Some remain unanswered for months.

A few take years before we understand what they were asking. That may be why the typing bubble feels larger than a phone feature. For a few seconds, it places us directly in front of something human beings have always found difficult: something is happening, but we do not yet know what it means.

Later that night, Riya’s phone finally lights up. Her friend has replied. “Yeah. Sorry. Was typing and my mom called. Long story. Tell you tomorrow?” That is all. No argument. No hidden anger. No disaster. The dramatic conversation that occupied Riya’s mind never actually took place. She looks at the screen for a moment and smiles. The three dots had disappeared ten minutes earlier. The story she created around them took a little longer. Perhaps that is the strangest thing about the typing bubble. It does not only show us that someone else is writing.

Sometimes, for those few unfinished seconds, it quietly reveals how much we are writing too. ▀

Beyond the Uniform

As a proud cadet of the TN Artillery Battery NCC, attending nine camps has been a life-changing experience for me. It demanded immense effort, but it shaped me into the leader I am today.

WHEN I FIRST stepped onto the parade ground as a first-year cadet, I was filled with wonder. Watching my seniors execute a flawless drill left me in awe. Soon, our official parades on alternate days and the unexpected, unofficial 'fall-ins' became part of my reality. Today, I realise that those early days laid the foundation for a transformation.

While I am now pursuing my fourth year of engineering, my NCC journey began during my second year of college. As an introvert battling stage fear, I initially hesitated to join. But because I wanted to conquer my anxieties, I leaped during my second academic year and stepped onto the parade ground.



heart out and cleared the round. In Camp 3, we bonded like a family. I was selected for pre-IGC as the lead singer for the group singing event and for the group dance. In the final camp, it came down to two singers: another cadet and me. By the third day, my name was proudly on the main list. But on the sixth day, the group dance required a table-lift sequence, with yoga to be performed on top. Because of my short stature, I was dropped from the final roster. I was heartbroken that night. But as the tears dried, my resolve hardened. Republic Day Camp remained an unforgettable memory because it taught me that rejection does not erase the effort, courage, and growth that brought me there.

Next, I was selected for the Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat (EBSB) Camp at the Mechanised Infantry Regiment in Maharashtra. As guest cadets from Tamil Nadu, we integrated with the host cadets from Maharashtra, and I was assigned to Bravo Company. We engaged in collaborative PPT presentations and shared our cultural histories. I was also selected to sing Vande Mataram on the final day.

FROM SETBACKS TO STRENGTH

Returning to Coimbatore, it was time to prepare for the B-Certificate examination, with daily fall-ins and intensive theory and practical sessions. But my journey was far from over.

I was selected for the TSC Firing (Service Shooting). I was placed seventh at the end of Camp 1, but I worked hard, increased my score by 20 points and finished second, competing alongside experienced seniors who had already reached IGC in previous years. As I stand here today at my third TSC Camp (Training 2), looking forward to representing my directorate in Delhi, I look back at the girl who did not even know how to hold a rifle in her first year.

NCC has taught me that discipline is about choosing to give your best even when nobody is watching. It has given me the courage to face challenges that once frightened me.

– **Cdt. Vidhyaa A S**, 4th year, B.E. CSE at Hindusthan College of Engineering and Technology. ▀

BITTER TASTE OF REALITY

In my very first year, the Mavlankar Shooting Selection arrived. I knew nothing about rifles. My seniors patiently taught me the basics, and through sheer determination, I cleared the initial rounds at Hindusthan College of Engineering and Technology and moved on to the intense two-day selection at Kongu Engineering College, Erode. I was thrilled.

There, on the first day, I shot exceptionally well. However, on the following day, my scores plummeted. Someone had altered my weapon's zeroing, and I did not know how to detect or correct it. I was rejected. It hurt, but it taught me my first lesson: never lose hope; instead, learn the mechanics of the challenges you face.

My second year began with the Annual Training Camp (ATC), conducted by the TN Artillery Battery NCC unit. For ten days, we followed a rigorous and disciplined routine from 6:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. From morning roll calls and physical training to drill parades, the camp taught me the beauty of structure and discipline. During this camp, the seeds for the Republic Day Camp selection were sown, with competitions for Best Cadet, Drill, and Cultural events at the inter-unit level.

THE DREAM ALMOST CAME TRUE

My progression was smooth. At Camp 1, shaky nerves turned into fierce determination, and by Day 8, I had made the selection list. At Camp 2, I found a new level of confidence. Standing in front of a crowd, I sang my



V Pattabhi Ram
CA and a Teacher



Every claim in this book is backed by a well-remembered case study. Newport writes on the basis of research, anecdotes, and interviews, not motivational rhetoric. It gives the argument teeth and makes it a must-read for college goers.

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.

So Good They Can't Ignore You

CAL NEWPORT, a computer science prof, takes aim at the piece of advice that 40-something corporate uncles love to bandy about: “follow your passion.” His argument is simple. Most people don’t have a passion waiting to be discovered. He says that skill comes first. Become a superstar at something valuable, and both opportunity and passion will follow. It’s not the other way round. This eminently readable book is organised around four rules, each backed by memorable case studies.

RULE 1: DON'T FOLLOW YOUR PASSION

Newport begins with the celebrated Steve Jobs as his example. Jobs’s 2005 Stanford commencement speech is famous for asking graduates to keep ‘searching’ until they find the work they love. Newport digs into Jobs’s background and finds a messy story. Jobs began life with a modest ambition to make some money. His vision for Apple grew in stages, and at first he had no real passion for technology. While his co-founder Steve Wozniak was genuinely obsessed with electronics, Jobs was more drawn to Eastern spirituality.

Newport cites a 2002 survey in which 96% of collegians’ self-described “passions” turned out to be hobbies.

RULE 2: BE SO GOOD THEY CAN'T IGNORE YOU

The title comes from a 2007 interview in which comedian Steve Martin said that the secret to show business was to become so good that people couldn’t ignore you.

Newport writes about two mindsets:

- The passion mindset — focused on what the world can offer you.
- The craftsman mindset — focused on what value you can produce.

He introduces the concept of career capital: rare and valuable skills you accumulate and then trade for the traits that make a job

great (creativity, impact, autonomy). Newport describes tracking his own hours of deep, focused work each month to hold himself accountable. He also profiled surfboard shaper Al Merrick and radio host Ira Glass, both of whom spent years building skill.

RULE 3: TURN DOWN A PROMOTION

Lulu Young, a math grad, had a boring job as a QA tester. But instead of letting that frustrate him, she learnt UNIX so that she could automate testing. This saved her company both time and money, and helped her negotiate for more autonomy. In the end, she persuaded her company to give her a reduced 30-hour week so that she could pursue a part-time course in philosophy.

Newport uses her story to describe two “control traps”:

- Wanting autonomy before you’ve built the capital to support it
- Employers resisting your bid for control once you’re too valuable to lose.

He then contrasts that with a medical resident named Lewis, whose company refuses to let him take time off to start a company. Newport argues that employer resistance is the first sign you’re doing something right.

From these examples, Newport derives the Law of Financial Viability: don’t make a major control-based career move (going freelance, quitting your job) until there’s concrete evidence that people will actually pay for it.

RULE 4: THINK SMALL, ACT BIG (THE IMPORTANCE OF MISSION)

The final section shifts to disease researcher Pardis Sabeti as an example of someone with a genuinely compelling life mission. But Newport’s point isn’t just “find a mission” — it’s that missions require career capital first. You can’t credibly chase a big calling before you’ve built the skill to execute on it. ▀

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