

# BUSINESS DIALOGUE



JANUARY - JUNE 2018

CELEBRATING VISIONARY ENTREPRENEURS

2018

ISSUE 01

NSBM  
YOUNG  
MASTER-  
MINDS

PAGE 49

INTERNATIONAL  
ENTREPRENEURS

PAGE 38



VISION IS A DREAM  
FOLLOW YOUR  
DREAM

PAGE 06



DETERMINATION  
WILL GET YOU  
THROUGH ANYTHING

PAGE 34

ENTREPRENEURSHIP  
AND ITS EVOLUTION

PAGE 03

ISSN 2279-185X





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  - E2 Grounds

# CONTENTS



**VICE-CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE**

PAGE 01



**MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR -IN-CHIEF**

PAGE 02



**ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS EVOLUTION**

PAGE 03



**VISION IS A DREAM: FOLLOW YOUR DREAM**  
*DR RAVI LIYANAGE*

PAGE 06



**IT IS THE PASSION WHICH DRIVES YOU**  
*MR DINESH SAPARAMADU*

PAGE 10



**EXPECT NO SHORTCUTS TO SUCCESS**  
*MR HARINDRA ELADETTA*

PAGE 21



**PRE-PREPARATION IS THE BEST WAY, IT IS MY WAY**  
*MR HIRAN COORAY*

PAGE 26



**DETERMINATION WILL GET YOU THROUGH ANYTHING**  
*MR CHANNA WIJESEKARA*

PAGE 34

**INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURS**

PAGE 38

**NSBM YOUNG MASTERMINDS**

PAGE 48

**NSBM EVENTS RECAP**

PAGE 53



**DREAMS DO COME TRUE**  
*MRS NAYANA KARUNARATHNE*

PAGE 16



## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

It is with pride that I congratulate the second successful issue of Business Dialogue. When we first started this magazine, the primary objective was to establish a vibrant dialogue on various business related subjects among academics, business leaders of both local and international realms, practicing managers and, most importantly, students of business. Staying true to that initial intent, and our university's dedication to promoting sustainability, this issue celebrates and recaps the milestones in Sri Lanka's entrepreneurial arena while recognizing the giants who facilitated them. The readers, I believe, will be delighted to take in the awe-filled pages of this magazine of people who have come a long and challenging way and finally succeeded in making a difference.

For the second Business Dialogue, business students of NSBM along with our dedicated academics interviewed some renowned individuals on both their views as well as their personal experiences as entrepreneurs. On the one hand it gave first hand exposure and experience to our students and gave them an opportunity to witness some great minds at work. On the other hand, their young inquisitive minds posed questions which gave a fresh perspective to the topic at hand. I also believe that meeting with our vibrant students and being challenged by them reminded these seasoned entrepreneurs of the time when they started out as young entrepreneurs.

It is our duty as a university to create a platform where the different generations of entrepreneurs could meet, greet and discuss their common interests. Business Dialogue, as suggested by its very name, was a pronounced initiative in this regard. Thus the magazine presents to you essentially insightful comments by certain remarkable men and women. I hope their words of wisdom will influence you to be a prodigious personality in your respective field.

In closing, let me extend my sincere wishes and thanks to all the resource personnel, the distinguished persons, the academics as well as my dear students who contributed to Business Dialogue.

**Dr. E. A. Weerasinghe**  
**Vice Chancellor**  
**NSBM Green University Town**



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## MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



The Business Dialogue comes to you with a troupe of entrepreneurial giants who have proven themselves worthy of the title; 'Entrepreneur'. The focal theme of this issue, Local Entrepreneurship, I believe is a pivotal point of discussion in the business-academic field. Entrepreneurship became a topic of discussion many a decade ago, but of

those who call themselves entrepreneurs, few in actuality has the cause and leave to do so. This issue of Business Dialogue thus is in a way a tribute to those who chose to take delicate as well as challenging paths and managed to emerge triumphant at the end.

Entrepreneurship is no longer the mere process of designing, launching and running a business venture. In fact it has evolved into a much broader term which defines the capacity, the willingness as well as the embracing of risks displayed by an individual. This Individual is ready to surmount any obstacle that he encounters on his way towards success. In this light, NSBM herself can be termed an entrepreneur in her own way. From the days of her inception and throughout her vibrant history she has hurdled many mounds and braved many storms. She took every tidal wave in her stride and held her ground as a strong independent entity. Today, she soars victorious above the rest of the country's educational institutions and continues to grow and to provide the country with an unparalleled educational experience. For the undergraduates of NSBM, therefore, entrepreneurship is not an alien concept, rather a way of being.

It is this novel perspective towards entrepreneurship that tempted us to create a written platform through Business Dialogue, where the professionals could share their experiences which lead them towards eminence. The experiences, the views and the perspectives put forth in Business Dialogue, I believe will provide a worthy insight to its readers.

**Mr. J. Baratha Dodankotuwa**  
Editor-in-Chief

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SRI LANKAN VISIONARY  
ENTREPRENEURS  
ISSUE 01

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# ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS EVOLUTION

*By Pamudi Abeynayake*

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## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND ITS EVOLUTION

**E**ntrepreneurship has been understood in different ways; the ability to assume risks in areas which no one else is willing to, the drive for innovation, and the ability to spot untapped business opportunities in the market. The lack of a universal definition for entrepreneurship reflects the fact that it is a multidimensional concept.

The way in which entrepreneurship is conceptualized depends on whether the perspective is management or economic. On the other hand, from an economic perspective, an entrepreneur is someone who is tasked with the responsibility of making informed decisions which affect the use of goods, resources or institutions. On the other hand, from a management perspective, an entrepreneur identifies opportunities, gathers required resources and does what is necessary in a timely manner to reap benefits.

Entrepreneur, which is a word of French origin means adventurer. When revisiting the origin of this term, it is apparent that this word was first coined in the early 18th century by an Irish-French economist Richard Cantillon, who identified an entrepreneur as a person who takes risks for a financial gain. Subsequently, a French economist J.B. Say added to Cantillon's definition that entrepreneurs need to be leaders as they are the ones who bring other people together to build a single organization. Over the next century, British economists such as Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill briefly touched on the concept of entrepreneurship. Alfred Marshall, formally recognized by 1890 that there are four factors of production: land, labour, capital and organization, where organization is the coordinating factor, which brings the other factors together.

Marshall also pointed out that entrepreneurship is the driving element behind an organization. Marshall was also one of the early believers that the skills associated with entrepreneurship are rare and limited in supply. Yet, he also believed that people can be taught to acquire the abilities that are necessary to be an entrepreneur. As the discussion shows, throughout the evolution of the theory of entrepreneurship, different scholars have identified different characteristics as common among most entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurship is defined taking into account these different views which suggest that entrepreneurs are risk-bearers, coordinators, organizers, gap-fillers, leaders, and innovators or imitators. Although this list of characteristics is by no means fully inclusive, it can help explain why some people become entrepreneurs while others do not. Thus, by encouraging these qualities and abilities, governments can improve their supply of domestic entrepreneurship.

While there are different meanings associated with entrepreneurship, many agree that it aids economic growth in any country. Growth occurs through identifying, assessing and exploiting business opportunities; by creating new firms and/or renewing existing ones by making them more dynamic; and by driving the economy forward through innovation, competence, job creation- and by generally improving the wellbeing of society.

The value of entrepreneurship as an engine for growth has resulted in many developing countries such as China and India encouraging growth of small and medium (SME) enterprises. For instance, in China there are over 115 university science parks and over 1600 technology business incubators which mentor and provide legal advice and office



The way in which entrepreneurship is conceptualized depends on whether a management or economic perspective is taken. From an economic perspective, an entrepreneur is someone who is tasked with the responsibility of making informed decisions which affect the use of goods, resources or institutions. On the other hand, from a management perspective, an entrepreneur identifies opportunities, gather required resources and do the necessary in a timely manner to reap benefits.

space to budding entrepreneurs. In the Sri Lankan context too there are many entrepreneurs working tirelessly, shaping their business ideas. Yet one issue in Sri Lanka, and for that matter in most countries is the lack of access to adequate funding. The main issue with access to funding is that it is difficult for them to obtain bank loans as they seldom meet the criteria imposed by the banks. While the well-connected entrepreneurs receive support from various institutions in terms of financial support, the average entrepreneur does not receive any such help although they have innovative and marketable business ideas. As a consequence, entrepreneurs get discouraged soon. In recent years, however, particularly in

# ENTREPRENEURSHIP THE KEY TO SUCESS



the more developed countries a whole industry has grown up to fund entrepreneurs—the venture-capital industry, which funds attractive business ideas and later shares the profit outcomes of their endeavour.

Some ways in which countries can foster a conducive environment for entrepreneurship is through:

- (1) providing easier access to funds,*
- (2) facilitating entry and exist to the industry,*
- (3) other government support programmes, and finally*
- (4) promoting certain qualities and abilities.*

Access to funding could be made possible through loan guarantee schemes or access to venture capital. Entry and exit into certain industries should be made easier by reducing the number of administrative procedures which need to be conducted in either case. The government can also design various programs to assist disadvantaged enterprises. Finally, the government can promote cultivation of certain qualities and abilities such as risk taking and innovation especially

among the youth, as they are the future of a country. In fact, some governments urge their youngsters to think of entrepreneurship as a career option upon graduation, where they will be the ones hiring instead of waiting to be hired.

It is clear that for an entrepreneurial mission to be successful, both skills and capabilities and also the business environment or the country context matters. Yet, though the context in which entrepreneurs operate determine whether they are able to transform their business ideas into profit, adverse conditions itself will not necessarily be able to totally suppress their entrepreneurial nature, attitudes, skills and motivations. However, the responsibility of ensuring that enthusiastic entrepreneurs are not discouraged, and that entrepreneurial environment is well maintained, lies with a country's government.

If the current context of entrepreneurship is compared to that of about a decade ago, becoming an entrepreneur is much favoured in today's context, where most people don't want to work under anyone, but be their own boss. Back in the

day the most natural choice after graduation was to opt for either a government sector job or a private sector full time job which carried minimum risk. Entrepreneurship was a less chosen career path. The shift in this perspective is particularly visible, whereby both the government and universities are promoting entrepreneurship as a career choice. Universities are designing courses tailored to develop youth with entrepreneurial skills. Further, the media is portraying it as glamorous occupation which anyone can opt for. Yet in reality it is not for the faint hearted as there are multiple risks involved. In fact, it appears that there are generational differences which also make entrepreneurship a more attractive choice of employment. For instance, millennials are said to be more risk taking and open to failure as opposed to the predecessors.

Summing up, there seems to be a positive outlook for budding entrepreneurs with regards to access to funding and social acceptance of entrepreneurship as an employment choice. It is thus time to propel nations towards prosperity through entrepreneurship ■

# “VISION IS A DREAM, FOLLOW YOUR DREAM”

## DR. RAVI LIYANAGE

CHAIRMAN / FOUNDER OF KINGDOM OF RAIGAM

**H**ailing from a village in Horana, he has been able to put Sri Lanka on the map with his business. Coming from a very simple family background, both his parents being teachers and him being the only son in the family of three sisters, the achievements he has made are simply amazing. He is one of those few people who would not forget the past; he always remembers the university he studied at, the University of Sri Jayawardenepura, with utmost respect. Dr Ravi Liyanage is a dear husband to his loving wife, and a caring father to his two daughters and son. He was able to win the award for the Sri Lankan entrepreneur of the year 2006 for his enduring efforts to build up his local, yet internationally reputed business.

As he is one of the pioneering business leaders in the country, we invited this business tycoon for an interview with "Business Dialogue".

### Do you believe that there is a winning formula for you?

First and foremost, if you want to be

successful, whatever you do, you have to be determinant, perseverant, courageous, goal focused and visionary. If somebody asks me about the reason behind my success, I would say that there are many reasons.

Teamwork is one of the traits. I have 1700 employees, 9 subsidiary companies

*“Entrepreneurs are dynamic people; they don't run on a theory”*

engaged in Food, Cosmetics to Furniture, 8 factories starting from Trincomalee to Hambanthota. We should also be focused, persistent and should not allow ourselves to forget our target. No entrepreneur could say that there is one particular winning formula; if they say so, it's wrong. It depends on the demand of the situation. There are no hard and fast rules in

businesses; different businesses have different formulas.

### When you set goals for your organization, what do you keep in your mind?

I'll have to give the same answer. It is a combination of various things. You can't pinpoint to one thing. I can give you a theoretically fabricated fine answer, but it is not always correct; it depends on the situation. We don't know what kind of problem will arise within the next few minutes. Entrepreneurs are dynamic people; they don't run on a theory.

The issue is that the situation in Sri Lanka is ever changing and it is hostile for businesses. So, you have to play it by your ear. When you play it by your ear, even if you have never listened to the song, you get hold of it by listening to the singer.

### Who is your greatest example?

I admire most of the American centered entrepreneurs like Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, Mark Suckerburg and Ellon Musk. I don't say they are my role models; I don't have a role



*“ There is a difference between the entrepreneur and intrapreneur. Entrepreneur risks his own money in running a business while an intrapreneur is not risking his own money. Intrapreneur does almost everything that an entrepreneur does. If the business goes bankrupt, he will mainly lose only his job. If you do business, you risk your own money. Probably the rate of losing your money is 80/20. I am not making people discouraged, but this is the reality; you need to be able to take risks in your business life ”*

model other than my father, but they are great examples. I'll quote an anecdote about John Sculley and Steve Jobs. John Sculley was the CEO of Pepsi and he had a reputation for being a very successful marketing master. John Sculley is the one Steve Jobs chose to recruit as the CEO to run the company, Apple. When Steve Jobs offered him the job, he initially turned it down. But then, Jobs came to New York to meet Sculley at Pepsi headquarters and asked him one question, "Do you want to sell sugar water for the rest of your life? Or do

you want to come with me and make a dent in the universe?" Then, Sculley said that he will choose to make a change in the world. Such people are universal thinkers. Those entrepreneurs are examples or pioneers, not role models; they are the trend setters, not by their businesses, but by their inceptions, core ideas and visions.

### What is the piece of advice you have for young entrepreneurs?

You should have a vision. Vision is a dream; you should never end dreaming. Without a vision, you can't go forward. Most of the young entrepreneurs get fascinated by things they see around them. If they see a brand new car, they get the desire to buy them despite the fact whether that is affordable or not. This leads them to lose their grip on their vision. It's a world norm that 80 businesses collapse while 20 propel. In Sri Lanka, the rate is 90/10. You have to be very careful especially because the environment doesn't support you. You shouldn't be fascinated by the environment.

And another issue I see is that the entire nation is on unnecessary communication. Now, I think, there are more mobile connections than the population; many people are addicted to social media. You should not be distracted by them, but be goal focused.

### Do you think that the environment in Sri Lanka is favourable for Entrepreneurs?

No, not at all. Although we have plenty of opportunities in Sri Lanka, most of the people repeat the same thing that is initiated by the others. All great entrepreneurs have done something new. The main reason behind the success of people like Steve Jobs is that they are innovative.

In Sri Lanka, the political, economic and cultural environment is not very positive. As an example, there are too many three wheelers on the road; there are around 1.3 million three wheelers. The cultural and economic impact created by these three wheeler drivers is not very good. Many potential skilled workers are driving three wheelers, and loitering in junctions. We can't start factory work, because there aren't enough workers. This is the economic impact. And, today, you can't drive in the road because of the misbehavior of three wheelers and private buses. There should be a discipline.

Not only those things, but lack of infrastructure facilities and attitudes of people towards businesses badly affect the businesses. Because of these problems, people do not opt for tangible entities. People invest in lands, but it is a very unproductive way of investing because such investments cater very little to the national economy.

Moreover, education system in Sri Lanka barely supports entrepreneurship. Once it was so difficult for us to select few entrepreneurs for "Pradeepa" award at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. There aren't many entrepreneurs produced from universities. There is a problem in the university education system, as well. The education system should support the industry. I think lecturers should gain more practical knowledge through industry experience. If lecturers have better industry exposure, they will blend that nicely with the great scale of theoretical education they acquired through long range higher education. That will bridge the gap between the industry and education institutes. Further, it will form nice blend of theory and practice.

There are some entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka who do not even have a basic degree, but they are very talented. The issue is, that such entrepreneurs



lack theoretical knowledge, they may have certain weaknesses such as the fear of taking risks. That restricts the opportunity of expanding their businesses; they see it as a risk. Otherwise, they have the entrepreneurial skills. Therefore, I guess, if they could be given appropriate theoretical knowledge, they would reach better heights in their businesses.

### Are there failures in your life?

Yes, always. That's entrepreneurship. We often make incorrect decisions. In average, 80% of the investments entrepreneurs make are failures. But we have to make sure that the 80% failures can be covered with the 20% success. Anyway, I can tell you one thing; I have made more correct decisions in my life than incorrect decisions. Guess my quick success proves that logic. Also there have been many failures throughout. That's the nature of a business.

Thus, Dr Ravi Liyanage, the founder of Kingdom of Raigam, shared his business experience with us with the hope of encouraging the emerging young entrepreneurs at NSBM Green University Town.

I will end this article with one specific thought he mentioned. "There is a difference between the entrepreneur and intrapreneur. Entrepreneur risks his own money in running a business while an intrapreneur is not risking his own money. Intrapreneur does almost everything that an entrepreneur does. If the business goes bankrupt, he will mainly lose only his job. If you do business, you risk your own money. Probably the rate of losing your money is 80/20. I am not making people discouraged, but this is the reality; you need to be able to take risks in your business life" ■

By Piyumi Udeshinee



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# IT IS PASSION WHICH DRIVES YOU TOWARDS SUCCESS

## MR. DINESH SAPARAMADU

FOUNDER OF hSenid  
GROUP OF COMPANIES

**W**e had the privilege to interview the CEO of hSenid, Mr. Dinesh Saparamadu, the modest man who founded the hSenid Group of Companies and Peoples HR which provide HR and mobile solutions in about 30 countries around the world. The interview was focused on the inception of hSenid, past setbacks, achievements and Mr. Dinesh's refreshing management style. He was keen on sharing his experience and advice with the budding entrepreneurs of Sri Lanka. As we were escorted through the open office, there was a relaxing and amiable atmosphere. There was a theme of lime green, black and white, and the employees seemed engaged and content in their work. We were welcomed into a pleasant office by the CEO himself.

**For the readers who are not aware of your business, how would**

### **you summarise hSenid?**

First of all, it's Senid, the 'h' is silent. hSenid is a vertical group of companies with each focused on HR systems, mobile platforms, and joint ventures with other countries or companies. On the other hand, hSenid Ventures works on bringing Japanese education to Sri Lanka, such as in terms of business mannerisms. On the other hand we have hSenid Resorts which is non-IT and goes into areas of boutique villas. Those are the four pillars of hSenid.

### **How would you describe yourself? What defines you as a person?**

I think the only way that I can define myself is that I like to work with people to get the best out of them. I am not a micromanager, I empower people, give them ideas, and kind of question them about what they are doing. For me, it's

to really look at the next big product or service. hSenid is about 90% IT so we own our own IT property, and our products are sold in about 30 countries to over thousand customers. So, my management style is, I question people, I talk to them but I get them to run their own business.

### **What do you think is the best way to empower your employees to make them work harder and be more productive?**

I think the best way to empower people is to give them the freedom to grow and explore things. A lot of our managers and teams here allow employees to explore and approve them – some of those actually become products for us, so we know a lot of our products being sold overseas are internal novel thoughts. We are working on next generation products that will be launched in the future.

## Where did your business idea originate from? Is there something specific which inspired you to start a business in the area of HR?

Not really, what inspired me was that I was looking for a good opportunity when I came back. My background is I studied and lived in the US for 10 years, came back in 1996. I wanted to start something that would have an impact, and have a way to build a company. Back then HR was not something people were thinking about and I had an opportunity because one of the first companies asked me if we have an HR system. We didn't have an HR system, but I'd previously worked on HR at Pepsi-Cola in the US, so I said let us build that together. That's how the HR thing came into place. Then when we started a new business, we spun it off as a separate one. A lot of businesses make the mistake of becoming a Jack-Of-All-Trades – they try to do all kinds of stuff but nothing happens. So we said we would be very focused and we want to be number one. If there are any install systems in Sri Lanka, 80% of them are run by hSenid HR.

## What is your typical working day like? What are the daily challenges you face?

It's different for me. What I did when I started and what I do now is very different. When I started, I used to be very hands-on. Now I look at a very different business development. My typical day

starts at maybe about five in the morning because I work from five till about six-thirty or seven in the evening. There are calls in Australian timing, US timing – today I've a call at 9 AM, East Coast time's 6:30 PM. Most of the time they're calls, then I go and do something like work out, or go out. I've three offices in the

different companies, so I go to them. Most of my work is just talking to people and seeing what's going on but it's structured. We've an Open Door policy but it's rarely that people come. Most of the time these days, it's about building partnerships and travel. I travel 50% of my time. We have some Scandinavian customers here, tomorrow we will have Japanese customers. So that's kind of the typical day.



## It sounds like you have a lot of international partners and clients. Are there any issues you face when dealing with a great number of international clients?

No. I think from the day 1, that's been our focus. We know Sri Lanka is a small country, it's a great test market. We started our first outside operation in, maybe, 2004, in Singapore which had 4 or 5 offices worldwide. We're currently setting up the Bangladesh office. There are offices in Australia, Singapore, India, Kenya – we've customers in about 30 countries.

*“ I think the best way to empower people is to give them the freedom to grow and explore things. A lot of our managers and teams here allow employees to explore and approve them – some of those actually become products for us, so we know a lot of our products being sold overseas are internal novel thoughts. ”*

## What kind of corporate culture do you envision for your business?

If you really walk around, you see all these pictures and stuff like that, right? So that's new. Culture is a very big thing for me, it all depends on what you decide. We did our first structural culture diagnostic by identifying culture,

bringing it down to the characteristics and stuff. We did that in 2008 because we were growing so fast. Then again, last year we started a culture exercise because we turned 20 years. So the corporate culture for us is all about cultural values, behavioural of that, and getting people aligned to that kind of behaviour. The issue is that you get people from all over the country or all over the world, so they come with different backgrounds. For them to really fit into an organisation, you have to have a culture.

### You mentioned that hSenid grew very fast. Did you have any changes to your vision or goals as it grew?

No, from the beginning our vision was very simple. We were very focused on what we should do and being very good at what we do. Even now, we differ in different things because the business has changed as we move into another line or area, but we are focused. It's a constantly fast growing industry.

### Entrepreneurs are full of ideas, what are your hidden inspirations? How do you generate your ideas?

I think ideas for me are the starting point. I've this saying "Ideas are cheap" because everybody gets ideas. So you can have a great idea but a poor execution would not get you anywhere. If you've a mediocre idea and you execute it well, you can make it very good. I constantly get ideas and sometimes we actually execute those ideas. Some of those things are passions more than ideas. More than ideas, it is the passion that you have to have. So have

the passion and do something, you can make it happen.

Now we're starting a huge initiative for wellness, so we want to be the next IoT and wellness company in the world. We have a lot of passion for that, and we're integrating into a lot of IoT and sensor devices.

### How would you separate a good idea from a bad idea?

There's no good idea or a bad idea. All ideas are good as long as you think through and look at it. There are ideas that work well and don't work well. But if you don't know whether it's a good or bad idea, do research on it. So when you research, you sometimes find out it's been done multiple times and such has been the outcome. At that point what you do is say 'fine, let's do something else.'

### What would you consider your greatest entrepreneurial achievement?

It shouldn't be one thing, but I think there are multiple things we have done, so the best thing is we have so many people going through the hSenid. We've built a great ecosystem of people who've been through the hSenid culture, we've built great products that put Sri Lanka on the map. We've helped our customers efficiently manage their HR. A couple of months ago, I was in a panel discussion where the moderator said "You all completely disrupted the HR market" and I asked "What do you mean by that?" He said "Earlier we used to have roles called 'leave clerks', 'payroll clerks' and 'attendance clerks' which were to manage attendance and leave."

So when we came in we actually automated the whole thing. So we didn't replace those people but we gave them higher value added jobs to do. We disrupted the whole efficiency of that so I think those are great achievements as a country. When you go to African countries, you see that HR and the process are 10 or 12 years of what we used to be. So you can see the potential. As a company, those are what we have been able to achieve. Individually, the best thing for me is I've a great team of people who really blossom out. We did something called 'Purpose of Existence' which for me is about polishing the unpolished gems of Sri Lanka and bringing them to the world. So that was the purpose of existence for me when I started hSenid.

### We heard you got an award from the British Computer Society; we are quite interested in the backstory behind that and how you came to achieve it.

The BCS awards was a very old one, many years old. After that I became the Entrepreneur of The Year for 3 years. That's a Sri Lankan award, which was like the pinnacle of the whole thing. There was no real background to it, it's just that you apply to it, they audit all the stuff and they score. I think we got the best marks. The guy who came 2nd had –maybe- five times more revenue than us. I definitely knew it couldn't be on revenue. A lot of those things, awards and stuff like that isn't really a way of measuring whether you're good or bad, but it's a way of recognising you're doing something right. You should never be too happy about getting awards and things like that because none of those are permanent stuff – you may get it

today, you may not get it tomorrow.

## What do you think about diversification strategy in Sri Lankan IT market?

That's where I said we're pivoting, one of the things is the turbo market that is leading here. Turbo market is actually going through a tough time because a lot of tough stuff happens when you're in it, and that is why we are moving into IoT Wellness. You want to diversify on your core competencies so you move in that area to a better but similar area. You don't completely build up there, or else you'd have to build your whole domain knowledge into that area.

## Other than your core competencies, what would you say gives you a competitive advantage over other IT firms in this country?

Every IT firm has its own core competencies. There are some firms that are very good in their software outsourcing, some are very good in their recruitment areas. Our core competencies at the moment is engineering, and the high-throughput systems that we build. If you've Dialog phones, every SMS that goes through the Dialog system is our system. During Christmas or New Year time, there are 7,000 messages a second. So those are very high-throughput systems and that is our core competency. Dialog's Idea Mart is our platform, they won an award and there are many businesses built around that. They do about Rs 50 million a month on that platform which was built by us. Those are cutting-edge, very innovative stuff because I think Sri Lankans inherently have an innovative mindset to do this. The important thing for companies like ours is to

“ I think ideas for me are the starting point. I've this saying "Ideas are cheap" because everybody gets ideas. So you can have a great idea but a poor execution would not get you anywhere. If you've a mediocre idea and you execute it well, you can make it very good. I constantly get ideas and sometimes we actually execute those ideas. Some of those things are passions more than ideas. More than ideas, it is the passion that you have to have. So have the passion and do something, you can make it happen. ”

take that and commercialise it so that you can actually bring value to that. So you create your intellectual property.

## As the business continues to grow, what are the top three countries that you would like to work with?

We don't have specifics, for me the countries we're currently working with and focusing on is the US and Japan. We have special interest in those countries. I've a Japanese team and we're building Japanese university affiliations. As you can see in this office, I've a lot of Japanese stuff, from Japanese swords called Katana to Japanese tea. Japan is a very special market

and I'm passionate about it.

## Are there any Japanese work ethics you would like to apply to your business?

Yes, very much. I actually recruit people who've worked in Japan for 15-20 years. So our teams bring Japanese mannerisms and cultural aspects into Sri Lanka. Second would be the US, it's my second home because I'd been there for so long but had given up on the US since it was too far for me. Now I want to start something and launch it at Silicon Valley.

## Just to rewind a little, what were some major setbacks you faced when starting the business?

Previously, every day had setbacks. The biggest thing is not having enough people or not enough middle managers, and the inability to access markets. Those were continuous issues for a company before, along with capital constraints. But now with the start-up ecosystem that could be an early stage thing. Those are not really setbacks, those are common things you look at and deal with.

## Did you have a lot of supportive people around you at first or was it mostly your doing?

The interesting thing about a CEO is that it's the loneliest job. You don't have that many people, although there are many people. My biggest support came from my parents, especially my mother at the early stage. She's the one who really supported me when I started. I started with 3 employees and my whole office was given to me rent-free by my mother. She gave me that to run the company. No rent, nothing, but I had three

employees and we grew from there. That's why if you look at our background, we talk about starting with 3 employees in 1997 and growing up to 500 employees. If you ask me about the support, it was my family, my mother and my wife. The problem that we have in Sri Lanka is that we don't have enough people who are entrepreneurial, who want to work and to take certain ideas and to run. Like I said, ideas are cheap, execution matters. Similarly, it's not the lack of opportunities, it's the lack of people to take those opportunities and run. That's the difference. If not, I can tell you 20 things we can do. I'm not starting anything because we don't have enough people to take that and run. If I start, I'll have to spend lots of time in it and I don't want to spend that much of time now.

### Our culture does not involve much of risk-taking, does it?

No, it's not about risk-taking, it's about ownership. Say, for example I recruit you tomorrow and tell you there's a recruitment area, I'll give you all the stuff, but I want you to run it. You have to kind of put the plan together and come say this is how it will be done. But the issue is after two-three weeks there are only two or three things that've been done. So that's where you take ownership. That's lacking in our people. Yeah we fail, but that's fine. One of the biggest things we encourage in our teams is that failures are good. From failures you learn, but the thing is you learn and then you go win, because if you keep at it, you have the right teams and the right support.

### You were talking about challenges and setbacks. Many of our readers are striving entrepreneurs as

### we mentioned. Do you have any advice?

It's all about perseverance. It's all about passion. You should follow your passion. Then you get good people around you to help you out in certain things. In the US, they're called advisory boards. In that new company I've started in the US, I get advice because they may not do exactly what you're going to do, but they've done certain things and have understood what failed, what happened, and things like that. So you talk to them. For any budding entrepreneur, that's the best thing you can do. You know, my CPO did training with me, he is my CPO now, but after finishing training he started his own company with his friends and that was very good. They ran it for 4-5 years and said they're not interested in running a company and decided to go work for somebody, then he joined me. But that experience he brings is a completely different perception and way of looking at things. That's great.

### Hypothetically, if you had a time machine and you could go back and give yourself one management tip, what would it be?

I think-I don't know- if you had a time machine you don't know whether you would do half of the things that you did before. I think the key thing, management-wise, is that you need to empower your teams, their flexibility and the tools they need. And let them do it, don't go and try to micromanage. You have to enable them, give them the tools they need and get them to do it.

### It's a refreshing culture. So, what is your next

### biggest goal and how do you plan to achieve it?

I'm thinking that the biggest thing in my mind is how to really make our products stand out. That's what we're looking for. I don't want to put it very much in detail but I think that's something we want to work at and have people say "That came from Sri Lanka" or "It was built in Sri Lanka." Once you do that, it will do enough.

So you think if one big name comes from Sri Lanka, it will cause a domino effect?

Yeah, but the biggest issue is the country currency, it's a challenge. But if we can do that, I think it'll help the country.

### What are the issues you think the Sri Lankan entrepreneurs are facing right now?

I think there are a couple of issues. I think the biggest issue is access to capital, market and access to people. We must have a framework where we recruit anybody from anywhere. In Singapore, I can recruit anybody from anywhere. If I need to find somebody to do sales, he doesn't have to be Singaporean, can be from Philippines, Malaysia or somewhere else. In Sri Lanka we don't have that framework. So it's very important for us to have what I call a 'mobility framework'. The other thing is access to capital. We don't have enough funds for our companies to grow or develop. Our markets are small and this is a great test market. Test it here, then take it out, and that we have to facilitate. But you can't borrow at 16% and build a business. In such environments, I don't think there will be enough of entrepreneurship ■

*By Henry Robert Welling & Yasashmi Wiramasooriya*





# DREAMS do Come True

*Ms. Nayana Karunaratne*

*Founder of Salon Nayana*

**N**ayana Karunaratne of Salon Nayana has been instrumental in reforming the concepts of beauty culture amongst Sri Lankans for over 48 years.

Salon Nayana has expanded its branch network in Sri Lanka as well as in India. As she loves teaching she possesses two academies that offer intensive training to aspiring professionals, known as the SN ACADEMY South Asia -for Hair & Beauty education and IMAGE CONSULTANTS – an Academy for Personality Development Training. She is also the founder of the internationally renowned Sri Lanka Association of Hairdressers And Beauticians (SLAHAB). She was recognized as the Woman Entrepreneur of the Year 2007 and Gold Medal winner for the Business Category - Large, at the annual awards ceremony organized by the Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, with a focus on evaluating the performance of women in business. We got the

*“ I value and cherish the fact that I’m a woman ”*

opportunity to interview her and here are the excerpts from our interview.

**How would you like yourself to be introduced?**

People look at me from an entrepreneur’s point of view, which I suppose is right. To me, I’m pretty ordinary, but there are few points in life that are important to me. I would say I value and cherish the fact that I’m

a woman. I am very proud to be a hairstylist and a teacher and also the fact that I conduct personal development programs. Most of what we teach is very important to me and I never try to teach what I don't know.

Business, I suppose, comes after these values. Yes, I always wanted to do business and there’s a little bit of business sense in me. I want to be successful too. But values come first. If not I would have been definitely richer. I wouldn't sell anything for anything, especially education.

**All your entrepreneurship skills inspire us- were you born with them or did you develop them later?**

I absolutely did not get any formal study or special education on that subject. Yet when I sit back and think, our upbringing was very positive. We had many setbacks in life. My father died when I was seven years old. Even though I did not



feel it at that time, it definitely was a setback for my mother and my family. Yet the family background from both my maternal and paternal side helped me to be who I am today. They were beautiful people from the lower middle class with good values. They inspired and filled me with a lot of hope, passion and ethics. Work wise Janet Balasuriya inspired me in numerous ways as she herself was a success story of a strong hard working woman.

### Looking back at your childhood days, tell us how those days were?

I was a very average student when it came to education at school. I studied at Bishops College, Colombo. But when I was in Grade 7, my mother wanted

me to sit for Scholarships exam just like my sister did and as I passed it I had to move to Visakha Vidyalaya. I think my mother wanted me to sit for the scholarship exam because she had financial issues with having both me and my sister in a private school. She was a widow by then and it must have been hard for her to manage life with four children. I did not like the change then, but today, I see the positives of both schools and am thankful for the experiences.

### When did you realize that you have this potential of becoming a beautician?

The determination had been

there always, even though I didn't realize it. As a child I always played with my grandmother's wigs. By the time I was 14, I knew I wanted to become a hairdresser.

When I was in the O/L class, somewhere in October that year my mother and I met Janet at a wedding and they discussed my interest in hairdressing. Janet was serious, and said after O' levels was a good time to start and said I could join the new batch in January. So I told this exciting news to all my friends and announced that I would be leaving school immediately after writing the exam in December. They gave me a farewell party after the last paper. My mother was

*“ I know it is harder for women to manage your career and household work. But never get disappointed. Enjoy all the work you do. Talking about myself, I always pre plan everything. Even the things I cook. I know very clearly what is going to happen tomorrow. I maintain a diary and I am very organized and I delegate ”*

angry with my decision but I was firm that I couldn't go back to school after accepting farewell gifts. As I come from a family of professors in science, my mother had to make a hard decision to send me to the hairdressing course in January.

We were living in Kelaniya then. It was only after we moved to Colombo that I got the opportunity to learn dancing. I learnt 'Bharatha Natyam' from Mrs. Kamala Jayathilake and performed my Arangethram too. Even for that I had a lot of



determination and I never gave up.

Later, my mother asked me to pick one of the two, hairdressing or dancing, as my career. I was not good in karnatic music that is essential to become a good dancer or a dance teacher. So I decided to pursue hairdressing as my career, which was indeed the correct decision.

### When you were starting did you have an idea about this industry?

No, not on a big scale, but I had focus. When I was young, a very eligible young man from one of the Forces wanted to marry me. It was like a dream come true. He was handsome, had a good family background and everything for a promising married life. But, I had

this fear that a person from the Forces will not be able to allow me open 'A Salon', because of their lifestyle of transfers, official quarters etc. At that time I was working for Janet and all I wanted was to start up my own Salon one day. So my answer was no. I think looking back, it was a good decision. When we are young, we want to grab everything good for ourselves. It was an early learning for me that you cannot have it all, but need to take decision most suitable for you.

### Out of all possible industries why did you choose this industry?

The choice was only this and dancing. So it was kind of a clear-cut decision. I consider myself lucky to have known my career path early in life. Most

entrepreneurs realize their calling, only later in life, after experiencing some frustration.

Are there any inspirational characters that inspired you?

Yes there are many and most of them are women. Firstly, my mother, then my paternal grandmother who was a gracious and strong woman and of course Janet who was my guiding light. My Aunt, who is my mothers' elder sister, is also an amazing woman. I have not seen anyone who has faced so many difficulties in life. She is 92 years old now and still smiling. I am always inspired by her. Other than that I should mention entrepreneur Mr. W. K. H. Wegapitiya, Mr. Samantha Kumarasinghe, Mr. Mahesh Amaleen and Mr. Ruwan Edirisinghe who are great personalities.

In my professional life, the late Mr. Jun Encarnacion, the former President of Philippines Hairdressers Association and the current President of the World Federation of Hairdressers Mr. Salvatore Fodera have been great influencers. I believe if you look close and hard, you can see a lot of good things in different people and can get inspired.

### How do you want other women to see you?

"No" and "I can't" are not in my vocabulary. I always do what I think is best and do not allow other people to decide or change my plan of action to suit their time schedules.

My lifestyle is very simple and I am concerned only about the basics. I do not compete with anyone. I compete only with myself. I have a tremendous competition with myself. I am also concerned about myself and

I take care of my health and lifestyle.

### Anything that you desperately want to achieve?

No, because I believe, if you really want something you can achieve it. I strongly believe in dreams. Dreams do come true. What is important is to maintain your mental and physical stamina and then you can work hard to make your dreams come true.

### How do you manage your time, specially being a woman?

I know it is harder for women to manage their career and home. No need to be disappointed or feel guilty. Enjoy all the work you do. Talking about myself, I always plan ahead. From cooking to teaching to office work, I know very clearly today, what I should do tomorrow. I maintain a 'to do' list diary, I am very organized and I delegate. You should not do the things you do not want to do. The quality time you spend is more important than quantity of time.

### How is the support from your family?

My husband is giving me a huge support for everything I do. We have a good understanding. I believe that, without family support you cannot succeed in life.

### What was your first job?

Immediately after completing my course, I worked with a lady named Nalini for a very short time and joined Janet again as her staff. It was 48 years ago. I can still remember, my first salary was Rs. 50 and had earned it before the OL exam results were released.

*Entrepreneurship does not come with qualifications and paper. Don't ever think you can be an entrepreneur just because you have an MBA. Entrepreneurship is a desire in the heart. Entrepreneurs want money so they work hard to earn money*

### Can you tell us more about your business?

I have salons and academies in Sri Lanka and in India. I also have a company named Image Consultants that conduct personal development programmes because I love teaching.

I created the Institute of Hairdressers and Beauticians (IHB), a non-profit making institute to provide internationally recognized hair and beauty education in a range of languages, with internationally accepted certifications. IHB is running extremely well in India.

### Every morning what motivates you to begin your day?

Every day I wake up at around 4.30 am. I go for yoga, take a walk or go to the gym. I cook, do any of my correspondence and writing, as my brain works best in the mornings, and then I go to work. Before I go to bed, the list for tomorrow is prepared. That motivates me to begin my day and there are no surprises, hassles or delays.

### How do you manage your staff?

Human Resource management is the hardest. I have around 100 staff to manage and to deal with the younger generation is challenging. Their attitudes, ideas and commitments are different. I am strict, but very friendly with my staff and my doors are always open for them. We think positive, and pass that message to all youth, helping them to find their calling.

### What is the one last advice that you can give to people who wish to become entrepreneurs?

Most important advice is entrepreneurship, even though education helps, does not come from books and qualifications. You cannot become an entrepreneur just because you have an MBA. Entrepreneurship is a desire in the heart - to do new things- to think out of the box - to earn money - to achieve your dreams.

The mottos I believe in are - strong desire, good planning, hard work, and never succumb to failure, as there will be many to dishearten you. Earn money, but more important is to save money and never waste anything ■

*By Lakruwani Wimalaratne and Harshana Munaisnghe*



# MY DREAM IS TO BE A CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

“ WHEN I WAS SMALL, I WAS DREAMING OF BECOMING A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR WHO RUNS HER OWN BUSINESS. I HOPE I CAN ACHIEVE MY GOAL. NSBM PROVIDES US ALL THE OPPORTUNITIES TO GROW AS VISIONARY LEADERS ”





# EXPECT NO SHORTCUTS TO SUCCESS

## MR. HARINDRA ELADETTA

MARKETING DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER  
ESER MARKETING FITNESS (PVT) LTD



**A**s we walked towards the Eser Marketing Fitness (Pvt) Ltd. head office, we felt a sense of awe. Stepping into the premises, the ambience screamed 'healthy living'. This was further enunciated with the greeting sign next to the entrance, that indicated that we take the stairs. Walking up four staircases to meet the Fitness Guru and Entrepreneur, Mr. HarindraEladetta, instantly made us realize his steadfastness towards the company's motto, 'Leading by example'. Already in admiration of this dynamic Managing Director, we were yet to be awed by his amazing humility and hospitality.

## A man of humble beginnings:

A strong believer of 'step by step improvement', Eladetta speaks of his tough beginnings, hailing from a poverty-stricken family in Kandy, schooling in Dharmaraja College, he calls himself 'an ordinary' child with the hopes and dreams that any impressionable youngster would possess – the hope of a better future. As an avid sportsman, an excellent cricketer and rugby player during his school days, he recalls being chided by the Principal for his lack of discipline

amazing transformation from being a mischievous student, to a man the current school boys aspire to be.

## The ultimate challenge:

Commencing his entrepreneurial journey in the year 2005, with a meager Rs.2000 in hand, Eladetta, never wavered. His steadfast nature enabled him to overcome all obstacles and set up his business. As an ex-employee of St. Anthony's Consolidated, he was well versed in importing procedures and policies. With a

then had to fax. With communication lacking its instantaneous quality back then, he anxiously awaited a response for weeks, until alas! A positive response arrives, and his business can finally be launched!

## An honest and humble man:

Eladetta's honesty and humility pleasantly surprised us. When asked about his title as an 'entrepreneur', he politely declined this title, saying that although it is an entrepreneurial



and for choosing sports over education. He admits that he left school, not as a 'star' but as a student with the reputation of causing chaos. However, as a person who loves to challenge himself, in the year 2005, he gave himself the ultimate challenge – with just Rs.2000 in hand, he travels to Colombo to set up his own business, which is now a thriving fitness company with 25 branches across the island. And this year, 27 years after school, he was invited as the Guest of Honour to his school's Sports Meet – this time, garlanded by the principal who advised the students to 'be like him'. Eladetta has showcased an

trick or two of the trade up his sleeve, regardless of the many communication barriers, his determination took him to the right places to meet and correspond with the right people. He spent days in the Chinese embassy, seeking the right company to communicate to in order to import the best fitness equipment. Finally, he settles on a Korean importing company. Eladetta, speaks of this memory fondly, as he reminisces of the little communication shop in Ambuldeniya, the city he lived in at the time, and how he diligently hand wrote a letter to the Korean company, which he

*“ He believes that one must accept that perfection does not exist, and that honest people who speak their mind, must be appreciated. This way, he encourages an environment within the organization that is not only physically healthy, but also mentally and spiritually fulfilling ”*

initiative, he shall not consider himself as one until he has the ability to source everything he markets and sells, locally. He looks forward to the day Sri Lanka thrives in the manufacturing of fitness



equipment and technology, so that he may promote domestically produced products.

### **An approachable superior:**

The Managing Director of Eser Marketing is certainly an interesting man, among his many positive traits, something that stood out was his approachable and open-minded nature. He even offers himself as the opening batsman for his company team at the inter-mercantile cricket tournament every year. That in addition to that fact that he is very open to criticism and encourages his staff to call him out on any of his negative traits or qualities, makes him a congenial person to work for.

He believes that one must accept that perfection does not exist, and that honest people who speak their mind, must be appreciated. This way, he encourages an environment within the organization that is not only physically healthy, but also mentally and spiritually fulfilling.

### **The management miracle-worker:**

Harindra Eladetta is a strong believer of leading a healthy life in every way possible, from keeping to the right diet, maintaining his physique, getting the right exercise as well as striking the right balance between work and personal life. Regardless of the fact that he oversees 25 branches and trains his staff to

be the best, he always makes time for his family and friends. He adores his son and daughter and makes sure he spends quality time with them. Further, he calls his close friends every single day after work hours, just to check up on them. He does not believe in ever asking for favours from friends, which he states is the key to a never-ending friendship. Spending time with family and friends with no ulterior motives,

*“ He looks forward to the day Sri Lanka thrives in the manufacturing of fitness equipment and technology, so that he may promote domestically produced products ”*



he believes is a daily essential to de-stress and truly relax. During work hours, he is all work and no play, he even puts away all digital platforms and internet related work for 2-3 hours a day, to ensure that there are no distractions. He believes in keeping it professional in the work place and only sharing professional matters amongst staff, to further ensure a cordial working relationship that optimizes the workload.

**The strategist:** This entrepreneur places no trust on short cuts or easy measures for success. He blatantly states that short-cuts to success are indeed a dangerous method to choose, describing it to 'playing with fire'. Instead, he believes in using measured strategic movements to beat one's competitor. His primary tactic is to 'walk the talk', so that customers are offered products that are tried, tested and endorsed by the owner of the company himself. He makes it a point to know the ins and outs of every aspect of the equipment he sells and customizes his sales to suit the customer's needs. This coupled with maintaining strictly professional relationships with his staff, and being extra cautious not to overly trust anyone, has proven to be his solid winning formula.

**The sage advisor: Humble Harindra generously advises all aspiring entrepreneurs;**

1. Never compare your world with others – everyone has problems
2. Use hidden talents to empower yourself at the right time/place/situation
3. Eladetta looks up to Lord Buddha for inspiration, and therefore believes that one is successful only if you possess the four principles;



- *Aththisukha – the happiness of earning wealth by just and righteous means*
- *Bhogasukha – the happiness using wealth liberally on family, friends and meritorious deeds.*
- *Ananasukha – the happiness of being free of debt*
- *Anavajjasukha – the happiness of doing all the above in the right, ethical and legal way*

**The strive towards a healthy Sri Lanka:** Harindra Eladettahas had a track record of being a natural athlete; the personality and disposition of his profile, certainly indicate this as well. Thus, being a lover of sports and its many benefits, it was only natural that he become a Fitness Entrepreneur. As a person who

strongly believes that one must lead with example, this is the industry he is sure that he can give more than his best to. He states that it is essential that the businessman knows everything there is to know about the product/service he/she sells before recommending it to the customer. Thus, he offers all customers curated equipment to suit their various needs; the customer is not hassled or haggled to buy equipment just because it is trendy. Instead, Eladetta, through his expertise and his expert staff, shall recommend the best equipment to suit the client's fitness regime and requirements. This he states, is the secret to his journey. Displaying his confidence in his abilities, Eladetta sends out a challenge to the fitness world, 'Run at least 5 km with me, and prove your worth!' ■

**By Natashya Chamba**



# MY DREAM IS TO BE A BUSINESS LEADER

“ THAT'S WHY I CHOSE  
NSBM GREEN  
UNIVERSITY TOWN,  
FOR IT IS THE PLACE  
THAT PRODUCES  
FUTURE LEADERS ”

**AACSB**  
The highest standards in business education

WITH  
PLYMOUTH  
UNIVERSITY

Affiliated exclusively to top-ranked universities



**VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY**  
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN  
AUSTRALIA

Transfer to Australia





# PRE-PREPARATION IS THE BEST WAY,

# AND IT'S MY WAY

MR. HIRAN COORAY  
CHAIRMAN, JETWING HOTELS

**M**

Mr. HiranCooray is one of the leading businessmen in Sri Lanka in the field of tourism. He is also a

leading role model to all the budding entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka.

## How do you manage this busy business life being a very friendly person?

Well, generally most of businessmen work with an ego, and they are not friendly. When it comes to me, I'm totally a different person. Yes, it's true that sometimes being egoistic, self-centered, helps to maintain a stable personality. But in my field, when I'm working, I maintain a friendly nature and I work with my heart. Therefore, I love my workplace and I'm very much interested in engaging myself with this work. So, I'm happy and I'm a good companion.

## Are you a person who works with an Ego?

Well, no matter how friendly I depict myself, the branding or the description about myself depends on the eye of my customer. Some people may see me as a very strict person whereas some might see me as a very helpful and friendly person. Irrespective of what others are saying, if I get a chance to explain myself, I will say that I'm a very friendly, very helpful and earth bounded person. Yes, I do have an ego, but I never put down or disgrace anyone by using it. After all, we all are humans, so we must stick with each other.

## How do you deal with your competitors?

You always have to be ready; you need to keep analyzing and should be aware of the business field. You have to identify what will be there

on your future path. Pre-preparation is the best way, and its my way.

## Do you have a specific philosophy or a method to deal with your competitors?

Well, we have a board of directors, senior managers, so it's a collective decision. It's not "I decide and they do". We have strategic meetings and brainstorming sessions. We do SWOT analysis; we analyse everything to see where we are, what more needs to be done, so it's a continuous process. Basically, what we did 10 years ago might not be relevant to current context. The world keeps moving, we have to change and adapt ourselves to the new system. My company is 45 years old, and we are still evolving, so it's a continuous process and within this dynamic nature we are facing many new things and by

*“when we start something new, you are not only responsible for yourself but also responsible for all the employees who are working for you in your business. You have to make sure that all the necessities are well handled. If you are willing to take that risk, as I said earlier, “higher the risk, higher the gain”, so you can either work in a business and learn that business and get evolved or you can start your own business. So, sometimes experience is as important as education”*



adapting to each and every situation, my other fellow members I are moving forward together.

### **When you first gained this huge responsibility, how did you feel, and how are you feeling now?**

Well, obviously at the start I was nervous. Everyone is like that, it's because we are immature at the beginning. However, with time, we face new experiences and this helps us to be more mature and become more comfortable. As I mentioned in the previous one, we can learn and evolve. For me, the best method of being confident and matured is through listening, observing and mainly through by learning from our mistakes, and I guess I'm still continuing that process.

### **You said that there were some mistakes. What was the greatest mistake you made within the last 30 years?**

Well-I don't know-they are uncountable. Well, there is one. Among the mistakes I made within the past 30 years, I think that could be considered as one of the major mistakes we have made so far. We had a chance to build a restaurant in Maldives. And unfortunately, by a mistake we missed that opportunity. This incident happened during 1990s and I'm still regretting. So yeah, that's one of the major mistakes we have done so far.

To mention another one, we had a good business partnership with another company, and we trusted them too much. However, the partnership ended with a massive loss. Well, there

were many more mistakes and these two are just only examples.

### What was your key driving force to this field?

I think my father is the one who taught me this. He offered me responsibilities since I was very young. I was 25 when I started working. And from that time onwards he gave me confidence. Most of parents don't do that. Generally, when children take part in family businesses, the parents or the senior members of the family won't allow them to make decisions. My father was not like that; he gave me that chance to make decisions. It gave me lot of confidence and courage, and I learnt and I moved forward. Even at my school, I played many sports, and from the experience I gained from the school as well, I learnt many things. Higher the risk higher the gain. I was moulded by my father and my school to be confident enough to take risks.

### What were your strategies to uplift your company?

We don't look at local competitors. International brands and standards are the benchmark for us. If you want to be a world leader, you shouldn't compare yourself with the others in the same level, you have to look beyond them and set the highest goals and objectives. Dealing with the local market is not a competition. We have to market ourselves in the International arena. After getting a clear idea about the international standards of our target organizations, we try to work up to those standards.

On the other hand, we try to learn about the international market or follow it by decreasing our draw backs because our customers are both local and global. So, when international customers come, if my company is able to provide the maximum service for them while following their own choices or the style of their particular country, the customers will be more than satisfied. They will be judging us

based on our service and compare us with other international organizations. If we are able to get a good feedback from our global customers, I think that's the best we can gain for our organization.

### So, when it comes to the current political system of Sri Lanka, do you think that it is stable?

If you are an entrepreneur, you will not allow yourself to be led by too much of politics. There are people who make money with the support of politicians. However, depending on their support is a high risk because if the politician loses the election, the businessmen who was behind him will also face bankruptcy. Therefore, my vision is to be completely independent. That is the strategy that Jetwing is following. We are not aligning our company with any political party or any politician. This is our own effort and our own success.

And, no country in this world is



politically stable. There is always dissatisfaction, competition, challenges, etc. The same situation is happening in every country in the world, not only in Sri Lanka. So, for the question, "is the political system stable?" the answer is 'no' and it will never be. What is important here is, to see whether the policies are stable, and whether the constitution is stable. The policies are more important than politics. The stability of the policies affects the businesses of a country. But unfortunately, that is the exact place where we have the problem. This is a country where the policies have become the choice of the politicians. In other countries, the policies will remain the same. On the contrary, in Sri Lanka, the politicians are changing the policies for their own benefit. This is a very pathetic situation. Whenever a new government comes into power, all the articles get amended again and again according to their own will. This situation is not very healthy for a country. If we compare our political stability with other countries, this is the only drawback. The administration is not stable. For the business world, a stable policy is the fundamental necessity. Unfortunately, we don't have that stability in Sri Lanka. Politics, will never ever be stable in any where in the world due to the desire for power. Till we die, this power struggle will be there. So the best choice is to be independent businessmen without depending on any political party. And also there should be stability in the policies not only regarding the business world, but regarding every other field.

And as businessmen, or entrepreneurs, we should take risks and we should create the

*"And as businessmen, or entrepreneurs, we should take risks and we should create the necessary environment for our work place, we should never ever wait till somebody gives us the opportunity to create or gain what we want. We should always create the necessary background or the surrounding for us"*

necessary environment for our work place, we should never ever wait till somebody gives us the opportunity to create or gain what we want. We should always create the necessary background or the surrounding for us.

**We've all kept hearing that 'entrepreneurship is all about grabbing opportunities and innovative thinking'. What is your advice to young entrepreneurs?**

Well, we have to decide whether you want to join a business or start a business. Not many can start a business. You have to have a lot of courage and confidence to go on your own. Because when we start something new, you are not only responsible for yourself but also responsible for all the employees who are working for you in your business. You have to make sure that all the necessities are well handled. If you are willing to take that risk, as I said earlier, "higher the risk, higher the gain", so you can either work in a







business and learn that business and get evolved or you can start your own business. So, sometimes experience is as important as education. So, it's a combination of both. So my advice would be, first you start working with the knowledge you have and gradually gain more experience and knowledge and be more mature and successful. We have to balance between the theoretical and practical knowledge as businessmen.

### What is your greatest

### Entrepreneurial achievement so far?

I think transforming the company "Jetwing" in to a high-end product, is my greatest achievement. At the beginning we were 2-3-star hotels, but today we are one of the biggest hotel chains in Sri Lanka.

### If I ask you to define success, in what way will you define it?

To me success is how well you live

your life. Success must never be measured with money, but with honesty, love and trust. If a person maintains his or her life without doing any harm to anyone and enjoys life through his own effort, he is experiencing real success. The successful person starts his path from the family. Therefore, success can be defined as the process of how well you have lived your life, how much of love you have shared with others, how you educated others and helped others, how you enjoyed your life without being a burden to any one else, how much of opportunities you have created etc.



**Within these few minutes, I was able to identify that you are a very elegant, happy, friendly, creative soul. Is Jetwing you?**

No not me. It's an organization of over 4000 people who are directly employed and over 12,000 people who are indirectly employed. So definitely it's not me. Jetwing is "us" because all of us contribute to the success of Jetwing. I only provide the leadership. My team is the reason for the success of Jetwing. Therefore, Jetwing is not only me it's the entire team.

**In terms of managing human resources, do you have a specific methodology to manage this huge number of human resources in your organization?**

We have to create certain facilities and opportunities for the staff. As a company we have evolved a lot with the time. So, of course the necessities of my staff will change time to time. So the fundamental target is to maintain a healthy environment for my staff to work with me. I always reward them; I give them financial rewards, a good salary, learning opportunities, accommodations and a happy, free and conducive environment to work. I provide neither a frightening nor a fearful environment for my staff. So, it's a continuous process of evaluation of how well you are managing. No matter the number, we have to treat them with equity and equality. I do not favour anyone nor do I ever change my policies. Therefore, I

*"when we start something new, you are not only responsible for yourself but also responsible for all the employees who are working for you in your business. You have to make sure that all the necessities are well handled. If you are willing to take that risk, as I said earlier, "higher the risk, higher the gain", so you can either work in a business and learn that business and get evolved or you can start your own business. So, sometimes experience is as important as education"*

think, my staff is secured and they are happy to work with me. Most of all, I'm happy to work with them. when we are dealing with our human resources, first of all, we have to identify each and every one of them, and we have to be aware of their capacity, otherwise, if we give them too much of work, and if they can't handle it, it will be a loss for the company. Therefore, we have to be very sensitive and friendly.

**For an Undergraduate in the field of business, what is the advice that**



## you can give?

You must learn to trust people. A lot of people do not trust. Honesty is a very important thing: you need to be honest in your private life and also in your professional life. That is the ingredient which no business school can teach you.

Secondly, it's the humbleness. No matter how qualified one can be, the best and the most qualified business teachers are religious leaders as Lord Buddha and Jesus Christ. Their philosophies are not written in management books. But when you read the

teachings of Buddha and when you read the Bible, you will learn all of that. Everything else you can learn from the schools and the universities. As the youth today, you all have so many opportunities to learn. But the values which our religions are teaching us, are the most important ones.

The third aspect is reading. If you read, you gain knowledge. Keep reading because reading matures you. You need to read not because you are doing a degree, or to prove that you are qualified, but through reading we can gain more knowledge

than the knowledge that we are getting from a 3-4-year degree. Degree is something like an insurance policy because that gives you confidence. You have a better chance of being promoted when you have educational qualifications. But how you keep growing is from what you are continuously learning. So learning is a continuous process. It will be there till you die. So, these are the things that I have to say for any student. Be honest, be humble, be educated, read a lot and be knowledgeable ■

*By Amanda Ekanayaka*



# DETERMINATION WILL GET YOU THROUGH ANYTHING

## MR. CHANNA WIJESEKARA

MANAGING DIRECTOR, LEEMA CREATIONS

**M**r. Channa Wijesekara, Managing Director of Leema Creations is a leading entrepreneur in Sri Lanka. He started

his career 35 years ago and now has developed his industry to a remarkable position in the country. It's really interesting to go through his timeline. He was born and raised in Matara district and his father was a Principal and a well-known, well established personality in the region. Little Channa had the opportunity to grow up amongst village boys since he went to a village school with minimum facilities, while his elder sister and brother was sent to major schools in Colombo & Galle to study in the English medium.

However, he took it as an opportunity to learn how to deal with different personalities and to be social and popular among them. At the completion of his primary

education, he was sent to Richmond College for further studies and half way through he joined Nalanda College, Colombo and it was the beginning of a new era.

He has proven his talents through many extracurricular activities and was good in acting; therefore, he got the opportunity to act in several stage dramas including two movies. While maintaining the proper balance in his life, he focused much on vocational training to gain practical skills. After his secondary education he joined the University of Moratuwa and followed the Diploma in Civil Engineering Course after which he joined as an assistant irrigation officer, which was his very first working experience. At that time he was involved in many curriculum developments with NAITA for vocational training and he got the opportunity to join some carpentry workshops and it was his





main inspiration to start his career.

He was a lecturer at NAB and taught carpentry and wood work related disciplines. The main turning point of his life is the scholarship he won to do his further studies in Germany, on carpentry and woodworks. Two year full time course was fully comprehensive with practical exposure, and he gained the skill of

dealing many types of machinery and other craftsmen skills. He was able to complete his course with extraordinary achievements and returned to Sri Lanka and continued his journey again as a lecturer. In 1987, he followed the "Diploma in Educational Administration" Programme at Landau University in Germany.

During this time, he had started a consultancy service on wood works and got involved in curriculum development. In 1995, he was appointed as the Deputy Principal at ATI and at the same time, he joined University of Moratuwa as a Visiting Lecturer for the program of Bachelor of Designing (Furniture). Secondly, he joined a leading construction and interior company as its Production Manager in charge of furniture, wood productions and

interior sections and worked for 3 years. Then he worked as the Factory Manager of leading furniture export company and an interior production company for another 02 years.

He was motivated by many life lessons learned throughout his journey and had the desire to start his own business. In 1999, he chose the wood & interior industry to rejuvenate his career, by investing 800,000 LKR initially. The knowledge he gained through the time he spent at NAITA was very useful for him, and the excellent reputation he got from Germany was a blessing to him. The beginning was a tough period to him and he humbly recollected that he had only one machine, and one worker and the other worker was himself. Bearing all the difficulties,

*“Disregarding all marketing strategies and competition he could get from other similar industries, he trained them and transferred his knowledge to other business colleagues wholeheartedly, and with a cheerful smile, he said, “now they all have started competing with Leema but still, they are unable to shake my business!”*”



he initially produced some pantry cupboards which cost 30,000 LKR and now he handles more than 1000 projects with more than 550 million turnover, a year.

His business grew, so did his ambition and determination. He looked for ways to expand it and to start with, he invested in a land, with an extent of 1 1/2 acres to put up a factory. This factory with small beginnings is now equipped with latest state of the art sophisticated and computerized machinery with no other furniture manufacturer could match.

Unlike many entrepreneurs, his knowledge was not limited to theory, he has the ability to handle any type of machinery and possesses excellent skills in carpentry. Thus, he knows how to teach the others and how to motivate them to do their best, as well as how to train them properly. He has proven that designing furniture should not be limited to a paper qualification, it needs to come through advanced skills gained by an individual.

Not only that, he is a visionary futuristic leader, who has the capability of providing many employment opportunities to people, and he really enjoys looking at how they personally achieve and develop their lives. His vision can be categorized into 3 main objectives;

1. Providing various employment opportunities to many
2. Producing high quality products to the market
3. Serving people

Through this journey, he was able to raise his business to a remarkable position and now many are following his footsteps. The secret behind his success was, he dumped everything he earned from the business to develop it and now he is in a very stable position, where the

others feel difficult to compete with. The most intriguing and admirable aspect I heard whilst interviewing him, his amazing confidence and belief in himself and his abilities, he stated that he knew from the very start that he would be successful in the future.

From his point of view, his key driving force was the foreign exposure he gained when he was in Germany. Furthermore, he is a very good listener with very humble attitudes and can certainly be identified as an inspiring personality and a role model in the Sri Lankan wood industry. He currently employs over 225 workers and is very happy to groom them all. Disregarding all marketing strategies and competition he could get from other similar industries, he trained them and transferred his knowledge to other business colleagues wholeheartedly, and with a cheerful smile, he said, "now they all have started competing with Leema but still, they are unable to shake my business!"

Now "Leema" is a well-established brand in this region and can be identified as a pride to the nation. His vision and mission was recognized by many prestigious national and international awards and following are some of them:

1. Brand Excellence in Interior Decorators and Designers Award for the SAARC region at the South Asian Partnership Summit and Business Awards Ceremony held on 29th October 2017 at Le Meridian Hotel, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
2. National Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2016'
3. Provincial Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur Of the Year 2016'
4. National Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2015'

5. Provincial Gold Award (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur Of the Year 2015'

6. National Bronze (Large Category) – 'Entrepreneur Of the Year 2014'

7. National Merit Award at 'CNCI Industrial Excellence Award 2014'

8. National Bronze Award – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2014'

9. National Bronze Award – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2013'

10. Provincial Bronze Award – 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2013'

11. National Merit Award – 'CNCI Industrial Excellence Award 2013'

12. Merit Award at 'Best Web 2013-Best Consumer & E-Commerce'

13. National Merit Award at 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2012'

14. Provincial Bronze Award at 'Entrepreneur of the Year 2012'

Winning the SAARC award was another milestone of his journey and now he focuses most of his time to build the community, via many community service programmes and donations of large amounts of items and funds.

This generous entrepreneur, with all his attributes and accolades to his name, is indeed one of a kind. As someone who loves to share his knowledge and know-how with anyone who seeks it, he has also been a great support to the NSBM Interior Design undergraduates, many a time, at no cost at all. Countless training sessions and workshops conducted by him and his team, including hands-on experience at his factory has indeed been a precious and valuable contribution.

Mr. Channa Wijesekera is indeed an entrepreneur who never stops giving, and for that, we and so many others, would always be immensely grateful ■

By Archt. Upeksha Hettithanthri

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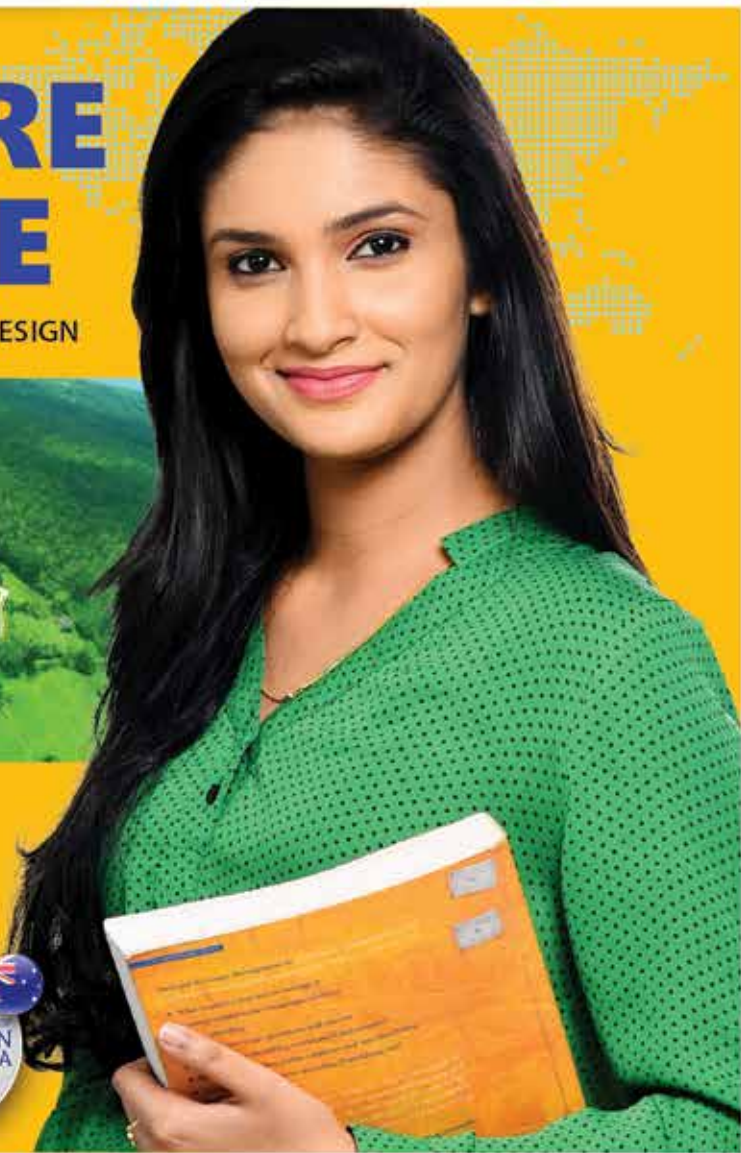


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**2018** BUSINESS  
DIALOGUE

# INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEURS



SIR RICHARD CHARLES  
NICHOLAS BRANSON



ELON MUSK





STEVEN  
PAUL JOBS



BILL GATES



MARK ELLIOT  
ZUCKERBERG



KIICHIRO  
TOYODA



JEHANGIR RATANJI  
DADABHOY



INDU JAIN



# SIR RICHARD CHARLES NICHOLAS BRANSON

BORN: JULY 18, 1950

BUSINESS: FOUNDER OF VIRGIN GROUP

Born on July 18, 1950, in Surrey, England, Richard Branson struggled in school and dropped out at age 16, a decision that ultimately led to the creation of Virgin Records. His entrepreneurial projects started in the music industry and expanded into other sectors, including the space-tourism venture Virgin Galactic, making him a billionaire. Branson is also known for his adventurous spirit and sporting achievements, including crossing oceans in a hot air balloon.

His father, Edward James Branson, worked as a barrister. His mother, Eve Branson, was employed as a flight attendant. Richard, who struggled with dyslexia, had a hard time with educational institutions. He nearly failed out of the all-boys Scitcliffe School, which he attended until the age of 13. He then transferred to Stowe School, a boarding school in Stowe, Buckinghamshire, England.

Still struggling, Branson dropped out at the age of 16 to start a youth-culture magazine called *Student*. The publication, run by students, sold \$8,000 worth of advertising in its first edition, launched in 1966. The first run of 50,000 copies was disseminated for free, with Branson afterward covering the costs through advertising.

He is best known as the founder of Virgin Group, which comprises more than 400 companies. At the age of sixteen his first business venture was a magazine called *Student*. In 1970, he set up a mail-order record business. In 1972, he opened a chain of record stores, Virgin Records, later known as Virgin Megastores. Branson's Virgin brand grew rapidly during the 1980s, as he set up Virgin Atlantic and expanded the Virgin Records music label.

<https://www.biography.com/people/richard-branson-9224520>



# ELON MUSK

BORN : JUNE 28, 1971

BUSINESS :

CEO, LEAD DESIGNER OF SPACEX

CEO OF TESLA, INC.

CEO OF NEURALINK

FOUNDER OF THE BORING COMPANY

Elon Musk is a computer programmer, designer of rockets and electric cars, and entrepreneur who founded or co-founded PayPal, SpaceX and Tesla Motors. In his late teens he came to Canada to avoid the draft in his native South Africa, and in his 20s he earned degrees in physics and economics. In 1995 he quit a doctorate program at Stanford to market Zip2, a software system that became a widely-used publishing platform for newspapers' on-line editions. Four years later he sold his interest in Zip2 for more than \$300M, and used the proceeds to found X.com, a system for processing payments via email. In 2000 X.com acquired its cross-town rival in Palo Alto, Peter Thiel and Max Levchin's Confinity, and in 2001 X.com was renamed PayPal. In 2002 PayPal was sold to eBay for \$1.5B, and as Musk was majority owner before the sale, he presumably walked away with \$700M or so.

In 2002 he established Space Exploration Technologies (also called SpaceX), a company that offers transport services into outer space, and has successfully launched rockets of Musk's design, placed a satellite into Earth orbit, and delivered a cargo payload to the International Space Station. In 2004 he provided the funding to establish Tesla Motors, manufacturer of all-electric vehicles which have sold briskly among those who can afford the rather steep price tag.

For fun he owns and flies a unarmed test version of an Aero L-39 Albatros military jet fighter, and he has said that he intends to retire on Mars. Jon Favreau, director of the original Iron Man movie, has said that Musk was his inspiration for the movie's characterization of eccentric inventor and billionaire Tony Stark.

<http://www.nndb.com/people/021/000245283/>



# STEVEN PAUL JOBS

BORN: FEBRUARY 24, 1955

BUSINESS: CO-FOUNDER, CHAIRMAN,  
AND CEO OF APPLE INC.

PRIMARY INVESTOR AND CHAIRMAN OF  
PIXARFOUNDER CHAIRMAN, AND CEO OF NEXT

Born in San Francisco, California, to parents that were unable to care for him, Steve Jobs early life was a struggle for identity. An adopted child raised by caring parents, one of the early wishes of his biological parents was academic success. The Apple Inc cofounder reflected on this publicly in one of his famous speeches, explaining how important academic success was to his biological family.

Most of Steve Jobs' life was not a very happy one. His early life was filled with confusion, chaos, and search for his biological parents for whom his Education was an imperative thing. His faith and belief got turned on its head more times that one can count, and he faced several issues in his life for being the Outstanding Individual that he was. He was quirky, lived in his head, way too intelligent for his own good, and thought very differently than most people. Although at times, it almost made him a pariah, his life's journey is a story of a man who made his life count for something, and gave to the world as best he could.

<https://successstory.com/people/steve-jobs>

# BILL GATES

**BORN:** OCTOBER 28, 1955

**BUSINESS :** PRINCIPAL FOUNDER OF MICROSOFT CORPORATION.

Bill Gates is one of the most famous entrepreneurs of our era. The richest man in the world, Gates has a net worth estimated to be over \$79 billion. He's held the title of "world's wealthiest individual" for 16 of the past 21 years.

Co-founder of the world's largest PC software company, Microsoft, Gates was one of the defining figures of the personal computer revolution.

Gates showed an interest in computer programming at a very young age, spending all of his free time creating programs on the teletype terminal computer his

school had donated. Gates went on to create Microsoft and develop the Windows operating system, which continues to be tremendously popular.

Bill Gates is, like many other famous entrepreneurs, also known for his philanthropic activities, donating very large amounts of money to charitable organizations and scientific endeavors. Gates established the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in 2000, a private philanthropic foundation dedicated to reducing poverty, enhancing health care, improving education opportunities, and providing access to technology worldwide. Gates himself has donated over \$28 billion to the foundation, which he continues to work for.

<https://www.inc.com/larry-kim/11-most-famous-entrepreneurs-of-all-time-and-what-made-them-wildly-rich.html>



# MARK ELLIOT ZUCKERBERG

BORN : MAY 14, 1984

BUSINESS : FOUNDER AND CEO OF FACEBOOK

Mark Zuckerberg, in full Mark Elliot Zuckerberg, (born May 14, 1984, Dobbs Ferry, New York, U.S.), American computer programmer who was cofounder and CEO (2004–) of Facebook, a social networking Web site.

After attending Phillips Exeter Academy, Zuckerberg enrolled at Harvard University in 2002. On February 4, 2004, he launched [thefacebook.com](http://thefacebook.com) (renamed Facebook in 2005), a directory in which fellow Harvard students entered their own information and photos into a template that he had devised. Within two weeks half of the student body had signed up. Zuckerberg's roommates, Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes, helped him add features and make the site available to other campuses across the country. Facebook quickly became popular as registered users could create profiles, upload photos and other media,

and keep in touch with friends. It differed from other social networking sites, however, in its emphasis on real names (and e-mail addresses), or "trusted connections." It also laid particular emphasis on networking, with information disseminated not only to each individual's network of friends but also to friends of friends—what Zuckerberg called the "social graph."

In 2008 Zuckerberg's new worth was estimated at about \$1.5 billion. After Facebook's initial public offering (IPO) of stock in 2012, Zuckerberg's net worth was estimated at more than \$19 billion.

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mark-Zuckerberg>





# KIICHIRO TOYODA

**BORN :** JUNE 11, 1894

**BUSINESS :** FOUNDER OF TOYOTA  
MOTOR CORPORATION

Kiichiro Toyoda was the son of famed inventor and entrepreneur Sakichi Toyoda, and the driving force behind establishment of Toyota Motor Corporation. As a young man he studied engineering at the University of Tokyo, then traveled to England, where he worked at Platt Brothers and Company, a leading manufacturer of textile machinery. He later came to the United States, where he studied American manufacturing techniques. After returning to Japan he worked at his father's loom-making business, Toyoda Industries Corporation, where he engineered improvements to the looms' high-draft spinning frames, and patented a carding machine. He began his research into automobiles by dismantling and reassembling an imported motorcycle, and briefly considered the feasibility of a charcoal-powered engine.

After his father's death, he convinced Toyoda Industries' new president, his adoptive brother Risaburo Toyoda, to fund research into auto-making. Kiichiro Toyoda purchased a new Chevrolet and brought in several of Japan's top engineers to disassemble and reassemble it. By 1934 Toyoda and his team had designed and built their first gasoline-powered

engine, and convinced stockholders to fully fund his new division. In 1935 Toyoda built the prototype for its first car, combining Japanese components with Ford and Chevy parts under a Chrysler body to construct what they called Model A1. According to legend, Kiichiro Toyoda drove the prototype to his father's gravesite, to show what he had accomplished.

Toyota vehicles were manufactured beginning in July 1935, and in 1936 the spelling of the nameplate was altered from Toyoda to Toyota, as Toyoda himself believed the new name was easier to pronounce (the family name, when presented in English, remains Toyoda). The auto division was quickly successful and was spun off as a separate business, the Toyota Motor Corporation, in 1937, with Toyoda as Vice President. He became president in 1941, but in 1950, with the business near bankruptcy in Japan's post-war recession, Toyota Motor Corp announced massive layoffs and its workers went on strike. To settle the strike, Toyoda and other top executives tendered their resignations, and Toyoda died two years later.

<http://www.nndb.com/people/433/00173911/>



# JEHANGIR RATANJI DADABHOY

BORN : JULY 29, 1904

BUSINESS : TATA AIR LINES AND TATA MOTORS

A visionary ahead of his times, bestowed with India's highest civilian award Bharat Ratna – Jehangir Ratanji Dadabhoi Tata was truly a multi-faceted personality. An avid aviator, he became the first person to obtain the first ever issued pilot license in India. It was his passion for flying that gave birth to India's first commercial airline, Tata Airlines which later became Air India.

JRD Tata was born on July 29, 1904 in Paris. He spent his childhood in France and attended the Janson De Sully School in Paris. He also went to the French Foreign Legion, a unique military unit in the French Army. JRD Tata belonged to affluent family and the parents had the means to fulfill all his desires. Despite of being from the wealthy family, on his father's wish, JRD Tata started working as an unpaid apprentice in the Indian company Tata & Sons. In 1938, at an early age of 34 years, he rose to the position to head the company as its Chairman for next 50 years. Under his able and insightful guidance Tata Group touched the newer heights

of financial success while maintaining strong ethical values.

Under his chairmanship the assets of the Tata Group raised from \$100 million to \$5 billion. He started with 14 enterprises under his leadership – Tata Motors, TCS, Tata Telecommunications, Tata Tea, Titan Industries, Voltas – which till date, are India's one of the best business entities. From information technology to automotive, from electronic appliances to house hold items, JRD Tata expanded Tata groups in various spheres.

More than being just a successful business, the group played a very active role in making the Indian society better. He launched host of initiatives in the employee welfare, education and healthcare.

In 1992 he was honored with United Nations Population Award for his incessant endeavors towards initiating and prosperously implementing the Family Planning Movement in India.

<http://success-stories.in/jehangir-ratanji-dadabhoi-tata/>

# INDU JAIN

BORN : SEPTEMBER 08, 1936

BUSINESS : BENNETT, COLEMAN & CO.LTD

A strong supporter of women's entrepreneurship, equal rights and empowerment in society, Indu Jain, has shown not only the whole nation but the whole world that a woman can make her story unique and powerful by herself and she doesn't need to sacrifice her family, culture and ethics to do that. Today she is known as the chairperson of the Times Group.

Besides being an entrepreneur, she is also known as a great educationalist, spiritualist and a believer of the values of arts and culture. She belongs to the Sahu Jain family which is one of the leading industrialist families of the country. Her dedication put her on the list of Top 20 richest person in India while at the global level she ranks 317 in terms of monetary value. Born in Uttar Pradesh, Indu Jain, with her knowledge, experience, vision and hard work, made the Times Group one of the largest media industries. Bennett Coleman & Co. Ltd, which is the foundation associated with

the Times Group, was founded in the year 1838 under the ownership of Ram Krishna Dalmia. The Company reached new heights when his son-in-law Sahu Shanti Prasad took it over. Currently, it is running under Sameer and Vineet Jain, the two sons of Indu Jain.

The Times Foundation today is the proof that care, focus and sincerity about building a company can make anything. The foundation has clinched many awards and acclaims nationally as well as internationally and the main reason behind that was Indu's hard work and sheer determination.

<http://passionconnect.in/articleview/articleid/How-Indu-Jain-has-taught-us-the-real-meaning-of-entrepreneurship-and-women-empowerment>



**FEATURING  
NSBM YOUNG  
MASTERMINDS**



# JALITHA NARTHANA

## FOUNDER/CEO - SAGA SYSTEMS

**J**alitha Narthana is currently a final year student at NSBM following the B.Sc. Computer Science degree under Dublin University, Ireland. Before starting the degree he completed the Foundation programme at NSBM. He joined NSBM straight after completing his GCE Ordinary Level Examination at Ananda College, Colombo 10. He had heard about the NSBM Foundation program when he was studying at school. That is when he had decided that he should follow the path NSBM was showing them, young students, to

enter the industry even in their young ages.

Jalitha agrees with the many people who state that NSBM is much more than a university. In his own words, "it's where the magic happens." He entered the university with high hopes and big dreams and that's exactly what he achieved at NSBM.

From his first day onwards he was given the privilege of meeting new people and learning from the best. According to him, the lecturers were like his own family, because that's how they cared about the students they were teaching. Students, even the seniors had been very friendly.

So from his first day onwards he had no cause to feel different at NSBM. He knew that if he could follow the path NSBM was showing him, he could definitely achieve the dream he had had for a long time.

Many students think when you enter a university it's all about learning and focusing on studying materials only, but that's where many students fail. University is not only about getting the theoretical knowledge. It's about building yourself so that you can be that complete person you always wanted to be. For an example, NSBM organizes events throughout the



year, such as NSBM Siyapath Siya Udanaya, Talent Show, NSBM Walk, NSBM Sathkara and so much more. From year 2014 to 2016 he was one of the chief organizers for most of those events. He was also a senior member of some clubs at NSBM which gave him the privilege to get to know so many industry leaders. He worked in collaboration with his friends, lecturers, NSBM staff in organizing those events which gave him the opportunity to learn so much more. When you join these committees you get the advantage of learning new things, which you will not learn inside a lecture hall. That's why participating in extra-curricular activities at NSBM is very important.

On his third year he received the opportunity to do an internships as

a part of his degree program. While everyone was looking for jobs in different places, he thought "Why work for someone else, when I can work for myself?", so he had a discussion with few of his close friends (who were NSBM undergraduates as well) and they thought of using the knowledge they gained from NSBM to start up their business. His parents had also played a major role in helping them to achieve what he was dreaming for. So by the end of year 2016 they started the firm "Sage Systems (Pvt) Ltd"; an organization which develops technologically advanced solutions to industry's leading organizations. With the knowledge they gained from NSBM they were able to use the latest and greatest technologies to find solutions to organiza-

tion matters, such as C#, SQL Server, AZURE Cloud Technologies, Devexpress etc. Their aim is to develop and provide integrated & automated ICT solutions for organizations to computerize their business processes using cutting edge technologies.

Every experience he got from NSBM helped him to become the person he is today. The lecturers still help them in major ways to achieve what they believe in. And he is sure that all the fresh undergraduates at NSBM will conquer the world and that one day they will change this world. Because that's what NSBM does, they give the best knowledge available to the students so they can keep on achieving their dreams. That's why he calls NSBM his "second home."



# SMART VALLEY A SMART VENTURE OF FIVE SMART NSBM UNDERGRADUATES

THE LEGENDS' PARADISE OF  
TECHNOLOGY, SCIENCE & ART



Being in the second year of the university and starting business as computing undergraduates? Doing innovative things to learn while earning some cash?

That's what these five smart young men of NSBM Green University have done. Being undergraduates of School of Computing ManoRanjana De Silva, Mayuka Wijerathna,

Sankalpa Sudheera, Warnaka Fonseka, Akila Rathnayake have initiated "Smart Valley" a startup which helps to begin unlimited startups with wonderful ideas. Formally, Smart Valley was started with a concept then it was expanded covering a vast area which may beat thousands of concepts in connection with technology as well as business in the noble near future.



**ManoRanjana De Silva**  
Head of Operations/  
Co-founder



**Mayuka Wijerathna**  
Director in Operations/  
Co-founder



**Sankalpa Sudheera**  
HR Director/Co-founder



**Warnaka Fonseka**  
Director/Co-founder



**Akila Rathnayaka**  
Co-founder

According to them, the basic goal of this awesome concept is growing a self-employed culture among the students who pay for private higher education defeating the financial barriers of Sri Lanka. At a glance, the core expectation of Smart Valley is building a space to all the students of the university to express, and to evaluate billions of innovative ideas and to make them into a productive and profitable outcome.

This great imagination has become a reality thanks to the valuable support of Dr. Prabath Weerasinghe, senior lecturer at School of Computing, NSBM Green University. Now, the Smart Valley is monitored by above students under the guidance of Dr. Prabath Weerasinghe, Dr. Rasika Ranaweera, Mr. Chaminda

Rathnayake and all other academic staff of School of Computing, NSBM Green University.

At present, the Smart Valley is growing and it has attracted several type projects and researches of different companies, universities and clients. By now, a lot of startups in different areas have been initiated with Smart Valley. iMobilehub is a major startup implemented focusing mobile based software and hardware development under Smart Valley. Including iMobilehub, there are few major startups being developed covering different areas such as Web Development, Data Analysis & Data Warehousing, Cyber Security, Standalone Application Development. Also, Smart Valley has a research team for handling deep and critical researches.

In the upcoming future, Smart Valley hopes to power-up more startup covering Internet of Things (IOT), Multimedia, Event Management and many more. The final goal of this beautiful conceptual startup is to be expanded to other universities covering the entire island. Not only that, the next step of the Smart Valley is to change the rhythm of technology, art and science and everything all over the world with innovative ideas and humanity.

To encourage this innovative idea and company, the university has decided to reserve an office room for Smart Valley to grow their businesses. This local office was opened by Dr. E.A Weerasinghe, Vice Chancellor of NSBM Green University on 8th February 2018. Their official website was also launched by Dr. Weerasighe.



Smart Valley's new office opening at Incubation Center of NSBM



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A/L

TAKE YOUR NEXT STEP WITH US  
TO BE A GLOBAL GRADUATE



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BSc in Business Management (Project Management) (Special)  
BSc in Business Management (Industrial Management) (Special)  
BM (Honours) in Accounting and Finance  
BA in Business Communication

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH - UNITED KINGDOM

BSc (Honours) International Management and Business  
BSc (Honours) Accounting and Finance  
BSc (Honours) Marketing Management  
BSc (Honours) Operations and Logistics Management  
BSc (Honours) Events, Tourism and Hospitality Management  
BSc (Honours) Business Communication

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN - IRELAND

BSc (Honours) Management  
BSc (Honours) Human Resource Management

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY - AUSTRALIA

Bachelor of Business: Banking and Finance &  
Financial Risk Management

## SCHOOL OF COMPUTING

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OFFERED BY NSBM

BSc in Management Information Systems (Special)  
BSc (Honours) in Software Engineering  
BSc in Multimedia  
BSc in Computer Science  
BSc in Computer Networks

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH - UNITED KINGDOM

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BSc (Honours) Computer Networks  
BSc (Honours) Computer Security

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN - IRELAND

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# ICOBBI 2018

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON BUSINESS INNOVATION

## BUSINESS RESURGENCE & GREEN LIVING

25TH AUGUST 2018





## GLOBAL VILLAGE 2018 AT NSBM

19TH JULY 2018





## NSBM DECLARES OPEN ITS IT R&D AND BUSINESS INCUBATION CENTER

08TH JUNE 2018



# 2018 BUSINESS DIALOGUE



## CHAKRA 2018

25TH AUGUST 2018



13TH JULY 2018

# NSBM GRADUATES TO GET JOB PLACEMENTS IN JAPAN



## MOTIVATIONAL SPEECH BY LEGENDARY **ASANKA GURUSINGHE** TO NSBM SPORTS COUNCIL

18TH JULY 2018



# eMINDS 2018 EXHIBITION

23TH JULY 2018



# VIVADA 2018 All Island Inter School Debating Tournament

11TH JULY 2018







# UiTM INTERNATIONAL SPORTS FIESTA – 2018

31ST JULY - 05TH AUGUST 2018





# NSBM POSON CELEBRATION

25TH JUNE 2018





# ರಿಸಂ ರಿಸಂ ಪ್ರಶಸ್ತಿ 2018

24TH APRIL 2018



# SUMMARY

**T**he second issue of Business Dialogue brought to its readers views and insights from highly acclaimed entrepreneurs on local entrepreneurship. To add value to those views, profiles of certain revered international entrepreneurs were also included. Along with that were profiles of NSBM graduate and under-graduate young entrepreneurs who are currently on their formative years towards success.

Dr. Ravi Liyanage, Founder of the kingdom of Raigam, shared with us his journey from his humble beginnings as the only boy in a family of four to being an entrepreneurial giant. With the 2006 award for the Sri Lankan Entrepreneur of the year, he was able to mark his presence in the entrepreneurial arena. Mr. Dinesh Saparamadu, Founder of hSendi group of companies educated us about the workings of his organization and shared with us how he achieved success through his refreshing management style. His employees and even the interior of his organization seemed to share his positive outlook. Award winning Managing Director of Leema Creations, Mr. Channa Wijesekera disclosed to us the secrets of his 35 year career, having a similar background to Dr. Ravi's. He has fond memories of his childhood and believes that the values he acquired from those experiences are what propelled him to great success in his later years. Mrs. Nayana Karunaratne of Salon Nayana shared her thoughts and views on entrepreneurship as well as female participation in entrepreneurship while giving priority to what she believes as of prime importance; values. Her insight as a female entrepreneur who celebrated her womanhood provided us with fresh perspective. Mr. Hiran Cooray, one of the leading businessmen in Sri Lanka in the field of tourism disclosed to us how he manages to stay happy and positive amidst the daily bustle of the tourism field. Marketing Director and Founder of Eser Marketing Fitness (Pvt) Ltd, Mr. Harindra Eladetta shared with us his story of how an ordinary boy grew up to be an extra-ordinary personality.

Dr. Liyanage disclosed that his secret to success was determination, perseverance, courage, focus and vision. He set a great example to NSBM's under-graduates who were lucky to receive first hand advice from such a legendary personality. He also mentioned that there is no exact winning formula; adaptability and individuality played a major role in his journey towards success. Dr. Liyanage does not necessarily believe in theoretically accurate definitions. For him, being an entrepreneur means being able to tackle any challenge that comes his way and converting that situation into a profitable one. Mr. Dinesh shared a similar idea in a different manner when he said that what inspire him are opportunities to do something novel. According to him there is no use of having a great idea that is not executed properly, neither is there a point in magnificently executing a bad idea. It is a combination of both, along with passion that makes a great business venture for him. He believes it is important to be focused on one thing and do it right other than try to do all and end up doing everything half-way. Mr. Wijesekera on the contrary was motivated by what his own failures taught him. For him, it's a constant attempt of climbing higher and higher while Mrs. Nayana also placed her fundamental values as a woman and a teacher above her business success. She shared with us her upbringing and believes that it is her family background which molded her into a business woman who treasures values even when she has had no formal education in the business field. She connects with her mother's strong personality and says she found her passion at quite a young age. Her risky but passionate decision to drop out of school has most certainly paid off. Mr. Hiran had a unique point of view in this regard. What he values most is working 'with the heart.' It is his friendly personality and his constant drive to stay happy and positive which he believes has helped him climb up the ladder. Knowledge, according to him can be achieved, but your personality is what resonates. Mr. Harindra, on the one hand is someone who leads by example. On the other hand, he is someone who has an inviting and accommodating personality. So these two qualities in

him makes him a strong leader with an exclusive style of management.

When asked who his role model was, Dr. Liyanage remembered his father with love and said that although there are many American entrepreneurs he looks up to, his role model has always been and always will be his father. His sensitivity and warmth towards his family which was apparent throughout the interview is certainly one thing which makes his success all the more special. However he also talked with passion about the visionary entrepreneurs and found the vision behind a business to be of more importance than the business itself. That was the message he wanted to send across to the young aspiring entrepreneurs; that materialism should always be superseded by personal values and universal vision. A similar vision was shared by Mr. Dinesh who invests his valuable time more on people than on material things. When asked to describe himself he defined himself as someone who likes to bring out the best in people. Being an involved and caring leader, as exhibited by all our revered entrepreneurs, is a key element of being successful. Mr. Dinesh believes personal space and freedom to be the two things which encourage creativity. Apart from this for him, culture is a concept of interest. Given the nature of his organization, which is involved in many over-seas businesses, he interacts with people with various cultural and behavioral practices. His ability to be open and accepting of all these different cultures is a great example for today's young generation.

Mr. Dinesh did not speak favourably of the economy of the country. He made some valid, practical arguments against the existing economic structure. These ideas were more-or-less agreed with by Dr. Ravi who was critical of the Sri Lankan political, economic and cultural environment. He stated that it is in no way suited for business. He talked about how the Sri Lankan education system is unable to create free thinking innovative individuals and how that translates into a lack of entrepreneurs being generated from higher educational institutions.

*By Editorial Board*

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