



# PRE-PREPARATION IS THE BEST WAY,

# AND IT'S MY WAY

MR. HIRAN COORAY  
CHAIRMAN, JETWING HOTELS

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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 it's 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

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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.

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### **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

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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*

