

THRIVING PLATFORM FOR SMART WORKERS

RECOLLECTIONS FROM THE
DEPUTY VICE CHANCELLOR
MR. CHAMINDA RATHNAYAKE

Throughout my journey; most of the things that I started in my life were just a dream at the beginning, it can even be applied to NSBM in the sense we started dreaming about the University first and then developed that dream in to a reality. For instance, when I was selected to NIBM, Kandy as an Executive Officer in 2005, till my very first day at work I did not know that this had been closed for about 8 months, which gave an opportunity to for me to handle the entire project starting from zero. I was the one answering phone calls and conducting lectures while handling many other responsibilities.

Starting from your childhood, how would you explain your journey till today?

If I start from my childhood, I'm not from Colombo, I'm from Matale. My hometown is Puwakpitiya, far remote yet a very beautiful and small village and that is where I started my journey. My family background is much in to teaching and academics; my mother was an English teacher and father was a Mathematics teacher, which gave me a healthy family background and it was well suited to build an academic personality. Finally all my siblings including me have ended up as lecturers and teachers.

I shifted to Matale town with my parents for higher studies, I studied at St. Thomas' College,

Matale, did Mathematics for A/Ls and then I got in to Computer Faculty of University of Colombo. After my first degree, I completed my master's studies at University of Colombo School of Computing. I also completed Postgraduate level of the MBA Programme at University of Wayamba. Currently I'm pursuing my PhD with Stockholm University, Sweden.

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What was the turning point in this journey towards becoming the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the first ever Green University in South Asia?

The turning point in my professional life, I think was in 2010. Upon the request of the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational training, we were required to propose a project for the United Nations International Year of Youth. I received this request through our Vice Chancellor, Dr. Weerasinghe and that was a sleepless night for me. In the morning, I had the project document in my hand; Emerging Young Leaders Award (EYLA). The project was aimed at searching for and recognizing young individuals with superior leadership qualities who stand apart. We received applications from around 1500 applicants and I was personally involved in all the 1500 interviews. The outcome was amazing. Today the 10 finalists and many more are serving the country at different levels and some are diplomats. For example, Jayathma Wikaramanayake, the first runner-up of EYLA'2011 today serves as the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and Ajanthan

Sivathas the winner of EYLA holds a top corporate position.

From that point onwards, the management of NIBM started believing in me. Whenever there was a new project coming in, it was given to me with a strong confidence in my capabilities and I had the green light in most of these projects and mostly they ended up with desired objectives. Therefore I consider the project EYLA as the turning point in my professional life. One thing to add, at NSBM I was first appointed as a Senior Lecturer, and in every six months' time I was given a higher position. I was the Head of Faculty of Computing first, then the Manager of NSBM, then the Assistant Manager HRM, and finally the Deputy Vice Chancellor. I truly believe it was possible because of the confidence I have built and sustained. Further the impact when you work under a strong leader such as our Vice-Chancellor gives you enormous confidence because he is a very quick decision maker who expect results to be spot on!. And hence we are exposed to

enormous pressure which I personally take as a very positive impact individually and as an organization.

What is NSBM Green university Town, how would you introduce the institution?

I always feel, if there is an issue in a country the relevant people must take the responsibility for that. For example, if there is an issue in higher education, the responsible people are us, because we are lecturers, we are academics, so we need to embrace that responsibility.

NSBM is a unique government project, in which the academics took the national responsibility of resolving one of the issues residing in higher education sector by lighting a small flame in the darkness without blaming to system. We believe that we have given a complete solution, by giving an opportunity for the qualified students who do not receive university entrance, as well as the parents who had to send their children far away out of the country, for higher education. So, how I see NSBM is that it is a place made by a dedicated team of academics instead of just blaming the system. This team, under the visionary leadership of Vice Chancellor, Dr. Weerasinghe, has managed to make this a reality, under the existing socio, economy.

We can always blame the systems or complain about the macro or micor issues, yet NSBM never does that. We have learnt from the system and created this lovely project. That is the uniqueness of this project.

How would you explain your experience in managing an institution

with over 9000 youth? What are your challenges?

The most important thing is you should see the reality as the reality. We need to understand the students' needs and how the new generaion is different from us. We need to make sure that we give them whatever the facilities that suit them while keeping our value system preserved. For example, if they are addicted to phones, as elders we should try to understand why that is happening, rather than blaming them. Then only we can guide them by seeing the issue in independent point of view. We should always respect the generation gap and understand that the culture and technologies evolve with time.

When managing this 9000+ youth it is not efforts of only me, but of all the academics. They all take responsibility of their students. If something goes wrong they will not just turn away and go. They will interfere and try to address the issues then and there. That is the culture we have inculcated at NSBM, therefore it is well managed. Even the nonacademic staff members are very vigilant about the students. No one here would just wipe off their hands saying it's not my job. We have a very sensible set of people to run the institution, not only the managers, every employee of NSBM is sensitive of the students' needs. It's of course challenging, yet we very much use peoples' skills in managing it.

Adding to the same, another important challenge is that we need to make sure our students are inspired. Students will not just learn what we preach. For instance, if we ask them not to chew gum in a lecturer, they will not adhere unless we as a lecturer do the same. You can't

just say, this new generation does not listen they watch and get inspired. Thus, if we don't practice what we preach, then they will not take it seriously. This is one of the main challenges faced by whoever is interacting with today's youth, even the parents. The children would want to get inspired by the act of us; elders. If you want your child to engage in a sport or live a happy life, first you have to work on those. Likewise, most part of the issue can be solved based on our own actions. For example, students don't just go to a lecture to learn a subject, but they will come to follow the lectures of a particular lecturer. So, we need to inspire them in every possible aspect.

What do you think the world is expecting from an undergraduate in next 5 to 10 years' time? Are we ready for it?

Most possibly it is creativity. Most of everyday aspects are becoming programmable. For example, today we teach English Language, but in the future, it may not be about English Language but about communication, the creative communication is what matters. Of course, there are plenty of Google tools which are 99.75% accurate in language translation.

Hence, the important thing is 'creative thinking', all the other aspects will be programmable through computers and artificial intelligence. The world expects the student to be creative. The future industry might ask for adaptable and creative people than ones with technical knowledge. Thereby, it is the utmost responsibility of any university to shape creative undergraduates.