

SUBROTO BAGCHI

DAY JOB: CHAIRMAN, MINDTREE
GO KISS THE WORLD, THE PROFESSIONAL, MBA AT 16, THE PROFESSIONAL COMPANION AND THE ELEPHANT CATCHERS

KEY TAKEAWAY: ENTREPRENEURSHIP ADVICE SUITED TO THE INDIAN CONTEXT
WOULD LIKE TO READ A BOOK AUTHORED BY: TOO MANY TO LIST
ADVICE TO ASPIRING AUTHOR CEOs: WRITE WHAT YOU THINK, WHAT ENGAGES YOU ON HIS LECTURE CIRCUIT: PRIMARILY MANAGEMENT SCHOOLS AND ASSOCIATIONS
TOPICS: INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP

Walk into any bookshop and you'll see the shelf-space dedicated to Indian business leaders writing on management is only increasing. CEOs have been writing books about their experiences in the business world for a while now but what's interesting is that there's a subtle shift happening where the CEO isn't just writing (or getting someone to ghost write) a book and going back to running his business. Instead, they are investing as much time in spreading their ideas, giving lectures and advising boards, evolving very much into a modern day management guru, albeit with a full time job. While some like Ravi Venkatesan and Vineet Nayar have gone on to quit their jobs to focus on their speaking assignments along with philanthropical causes close to their heart, many continue to juggle both roles.

Perhaps the most striking example is Bill George, professor of management practice at Harvard Business School who till 2001 was Chairman & CEO, Medtronic. George says there's a severe lack of management books written by leaders and it's this void in that books like these are filling.

Closer home there is Gurcharan Das, a pioneer of sorts who quit as the head of Procter & Gamble India to become a full-time writer. Part of it has to do with transitioning into the role of an elder statesman. For many, the idea of leaving behind a legacy that goes beyond their own corporate career can be compelling. For Subroto Bagchi, chairman, Mindtree, it's about 'creating an intellectual legacy.'

Ravi Venkatesan, former Chairman, Microsoft India has realised that writing the book is the easiest part. It's cutting through the clutter that's the real challenge and to this end, he is tapping into multiple avenues to get his message out. From videos on Youtube to speaking at various events and even designing and teaching a short term course at IIM Bangalore, Venkatesan is playing his new role with gusto.

R Gopalakrishnan, executive director, Tata Sons and author of three books on management says that most of the material taught in Indian b-schools, whether books or case studies, is set in a foreign context. There is a need for an Indian voice which presents examples relevant to an Indian context and at the same time that doesn't preach to the reader.

Prakash Iyer, MD, Kimberly Clark Lever also attributes the rise in demand for books like his to the number of young people entering the workplace who may not necessarily work for the bigger organisations and could learn a lot from these books and lectures. Both Gopalakrishnan and Iyer are active on the lecture circuit, addressing students and managers on the trials and tribulations of working in a corporate environment. While this offers the audience insights into the mind of the leader and the motivations and trade-offs behind the decision-making process, it also provides a platform for the gurus to reach out to many more people, and often provides fodder for subsequent books or columns. Most of them are also active on social networking platforms, having ongoing conversations and debates with their audience.

People tend to react to a message in various ways, and a lot of it depends on who is delivering it. Speaking from first-hand experience, these leaders are at an advantage. That their books tend to be easy reads is a bonus. Nayar cautions readers against fooling themselves into thinking that if they've read it, they know how to do it. It takes a lot more hard work than that. As for all aspiring CEO Gurus, they would do well to remember not to dig up petty issues from the past to get back at people or to please some others. That hardly ever ends well.

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Photo Courtesy Susmita

Subroto Bagchi has been among the more prolific business writers in recent times, having authored six books in five years. What makes this even more remarkable is that he's done this while actively running Mindtree, the IT solutions company he co-founded in 1999. Bagchi was a regular columnist even before his first book was published and his writing has always been inextricably linked with his day-job, so much so that he's unsure how he'd find matter for his books once he retires. "Leaders who can write can truly amplify their message and build alignment. Content survives the creator and to that extent, great ideas risk death unless content is created," he says.

There is an element of a legacy, and a greater cause of nation building and creating Intellectual capital that Bagchi ascribes to his work. "As leaders, we have a twin responsibility. We must build organizations and at the same time be mindful of the process so that the knowledge gets captured and benefits a larger set."

For Bagchi, daily events and encounters are the grist for stories. While events come and go, the stories, and sometimes the lesson, lend themselves to reuse. "This is the essence of creating knowledge out of experience. "My job is to tell you what happened, how it all happened and my task is to make the situation look familiar to you. Thus in your own future, if you come across something similar, it doesn't look totally unfamiliar. You have a baseline, you have a memory, you say, "aha, Subroto said that in his book". You are able to make sense much more rapidly and make informed decisions."

PRAKASH IYER

DAY JOB: MD, KIMBERLY CLARK LEVER
BOOKS WRITTEN: THE HABIT OF WINNING, THE SECRET OF LEADERSHIP
KEY TAKEAWAY: THERE ARE LESSONS IN THE LITTLE DAY TO DAY THINGS AROUND US
WOULD LIKE TO READ A BOOK AUTHORED BY: NITIN PARANJPE AND D SHIVAKUMAR
ADVICE TO ASPIRING AUTHOR CEOs: DON'T JUST THINK ABOUT IT, WRITE IT!
WHAT ENGAGES YOU ON HIS LECTURE CIRCUIT: DOMESTIC AND GLOBAL CORPORATIONS, B-SCHOOLS
TOPICS: LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM DAILY LIFE, TEAMWORK



"I imagine sitting by the fireside with my reader, with my hand on his shoulder, giving him advice...this is what I've seen, maybe it can help," says Prakash Iyer, whose day job is MD, Kimberly Clark Lever, but whose passion is writing. He wants to share his experiences with the world, less as a preacher, more a friend. Two books old, Iyer says that the desire to write came out of wanting to share his own learnings. "If I feel that my writing has made a difference to the life or career of even one person, then well, job done," he says. "I was lucky I got a chance to work in organisations where I learnt a lot. B-school toppers don't always have spectacular careers because they don't know how to deal with people or workplace challenges."

Iyer is a regular on the speaker circuit and weekends are dedicated to addressing students and companies. His personal website describes him as an author, speaker and coach and he is now seriously considering donning the guru-mantle full time. "The idea of helping people develop their leadership abilities is my calling in life," he says. "I see it turning into a full time career fairly quickly."

Meanwhile, his third book is 'struggling to get past the conceptual stage. "The stories in the earlier books were all there somewhere inside, this one will be harder to write," he admits. While the format will likely change, it will deal with helping people figure out the right thing to do to get better at what they do. "The trick lies in breaking out of the mould but keeping the end result the same," he says.

