

**Speech of Mr. R. Gopalkrishnan (Executive Director, Tata Sons)
at the 'Convocation 2011' of Globsyn Business School**

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Good morning. Good morning. I know it's your convocation and you are supposed to be solemn. But as your chairman said it's a celebratory occasion and I want to be, begin by thanking your Chairman and your Director for being kind enough to invite me here. Am I audible at the back? Because you are not visible to me and if I can't see you and you can't hear me there's no point speaking. It's a sheer coincidence that I happened to be in Kolkata. I have prepared a speech, which I was asked for by the Director's office and I transmitted my prepared speech to the Director's office.

As I was flying down from Mumbai to Kolkata, I suddenly got this fear - because nowadays its fashionable to read other people's speech by mistake and as I said suppose I end up reading the Director's speech, I would have made a fool of myself so I better keep a Plan B because that's what managers are supposed to do. I then went for a walk this morning and some new ideas came to my mind and I said yes, I am not going to read a prepared speech I am going to speak extempore.

And then I came to this office here and I talked to your Chairman, who's quite an irrepressible Chairman with his ideas on entrepreneurship and how India should progress. So that gave me a few more ideas which I then jotted down. The only trouble is that your young friend Afshaan who has been compeering this show has written in advance that after I finish speaking she is supposed to say 'Thank you for your very inspiring address.' So that puts a huge burden on me. So Afshaan, I am sorry, you know, tell them about your prepared speech. But if I fail to deliver then Afshaan will fail to change what she has written and you will think that this thing is not very plausible, but I'll try. And I kept this paper close to my heart because that's where my pocket is because I want to speak to you from my heart. And not something that I have written - it's like a microwave dinner which I pull out from the refrigerator and I heat up and give you. So let me talk to you about what I feel after all these experiences this morning.

You, know, your Chairman spoke about this day being very special and he likened it to a father who seeing his daughter growing up and he is seeing his daughter go away and the connection continues. With due respect, he has no daughter, so he doesn't know what it means to get a daughter married off. I have two daughters and I know exactly what it means. But I think his metaphor was very appropriate. You don't need to have a daughter to know what it feels like to get your daughter married off. But I wanted to use a different metaphor for this day and I take this metaphor from the world of nature and animals.

If you see how a crocodile takes care of its young. You know, a crocodile doesn't look very pretty. The mother crocodile lays the eggs. And the eggs are kept inside a particular place and she hangs around waiting to hear some sounds and she knows the baby crocodiles are going to come out. The baby crocodiles come out, they are running around. After some time, a few days or weeks, the mother crocodile opens her jaw and all the baby crocodiles are put into her mouth. Initially people thought this as a cannibalistic tendency. But actually the pouch, the lower jaw of the mother crocodile is a very secure place. And all the baby crocodiles are sitting there, almost like you pack your suitcase. And then the mother crocodile goes gradually to the river or the ocean and she opens her jaw, and the little crocodiles come out and find their way into the real world to meet challenges and survive. It's a very beautiful act of nature because it is associated with this great act of motherly affection which is enacted by an animal which doesn't look very nice to the human eye.

And I would like to add this metaphor to what your Chairman has said. That today the mother crocodile is your parents, your teachers, your elders in the family, your faculty here at Globsyn are going to open their mouth and you are going to be let out of the pouch into the world to fend for yourself and for the first time as your Chairman said, you will not have the same peer group around with you. So as a representative of the mother crocodile generation, I would like to wish all our young friends, all the luck and blessings that elders can ever offer you and through your journey in life as you associate yourself with ventures, always remember what sacrifice and pain your mothers and fathers have taken, your teachers in school and college and at Globsyn have undertaken. And it is that honour that I would charge you to live your professional life as any good professionals should. So Goodluck and Godspeed.

The world that you are about to enter has to be thought off very differently. If you read many convocation speeches, they all look pretty similar, telling the young people how they should lead their lives, live with values, work hard, do good for your society and all of those are right. But I want to take a slightly different take on this. The world that you are going to go into are actually three different worlds and all those three different worlds are going to be in your head. The first world is what I call - 'My World'. It's about what you want to do in your life. You want to become a vice-president, you want to become a CEO, you want to make money, you want to be famous, you want to be rich, you want to be all of that and more. But you have insecurities. You have issues and problems to deal with and you have to manage all of these. These are the things that occupy your own mind in your private moments. And every human being has his ambitions and his insecurities swirling around his mind, known only to himself. Not even to his mother or father or his wife. They are his world or her world.

The second world you will enter is the 'World of Transactions'. There will be things happening, you will prepare a purchase order, you will deal with a supplier, you will deal with a distributor, you will raise an invoice, you will have a lot of transactional duties to perform and if you do those very well with knowledge and perspicacity you might get promoted. I call that the second world - 'The World of Transactions'.

And then there is the third world which I call - 'The World of Relationships'. And a lot of things get done through relationships. Don't take this in a bad way but you have to achieve tasks and also get along pleasantly. If you are seen as an isolationist who likes to do things only by himself it's very difficult to survive in the world of business.

All of these are importance. In fact research has shown that approximately one-third of your development happens in 'my world.' One third of it happens in the transactional world, and one-third happens in the world of relationships. But although they are equally important, the first two, everybody knows, because 'My World' is a selfish world, it's a world which you naturally think about. 'The World of Transactions' is a real world, its physical, you think about it. But I do think that many young people who come into the world of management and business have underestimated the value of the third world, the third world being the 'World of Relationships'.

So today I would like to just share with you a few perspectives on how important it is to know intellectually that one-third of your development comes from the world of Relationships. So I want to tell you a few stories and anecdotes with which you may be able to better crystallize the idea I would like to be in your mind.

There is much more that the world achieves through relationships than any other form of social transactions. If I am nice guy, if I am a helpful guy, if I am a connected guy, it's a huge advantage. But if I am helpful, connected and nice without the competency in doing something then I am a charlatan. So once you have mastered your knowledge, what you are taught in the college, whether it is financial management or marketing management, to be 'Suchismita', to be a sweet-smiling-person, to be a person who can get along other people, 'Subhashini', are very great virtues and I hope that I can illustrate that to you. Don't underestimate it because you are all exposed to newspaper and magazine editorials which suggests that a CEO has to be a tough son-of-a you-know-what. He has to be able to stare down on people, bark things at them. That's sometimes there, but it's not necessarily true and I want to touch upon that.

The important thing is that to be really interested in people and relationships, you have to be humble. And management education doesn't give you that humility, except at Globsyn, maybe. You go into the world of management thinking that you know a lot of things. It happened to me. And I am going to tell you stories about myself, not because I am a great guy but because these are common stories of common people. It's going to happen to you for sure.

Back in, long ago, 1974, I was appointed as the regional manager for Hindustan Lever in the north of India. And I went to work in the Jalandhar market with a salesman who was twice my age. His name was Mr.Sood. And since I was his boss's boss, I wasn't just his boss and I was only 28. It will not surprise you that I was a bit conscious of that, I was a bit arrogant. And he was 56, but he was a salesman. I went with him from shop to shop trying to sell products like Lifebuoy and Surf and Dalda and whatever. And in every shop he spent the first 10 minutes talking with the retailer about his daughter-in-law, his son-in-law, his brother, his sister, his wife's health. He seemed to take 10 minutes to come to the subject of how much more Lifebuoy could be bought by him. As a person with an engineering mindset, I found this very wasteful use of time.

You know, I am a bit of Industrial engineer in my thinking. I used to carry a pad in my pocket and I used to write down number of minutes spent in transacting business and number of minutes spent in making gentle enquiries. By lunchtime I came to the conclusion that 56.3 %, (I had a slide-rule in those days) is being misspent and 44.5% was being spent on selling and therefore twice the efficiency could be achieved if all 100% would be spent. That's an industrial engineer's approach. I mentioned it to him at lunchtime. He said 'You know you are right. I wish I could spend more time just walking in, telling him how much he should buy and walking out. Why won't you do it in the afternoon and show me.' And I was very upset because I thought he is challenging me. And anyway I did not know whose daughter-in-law was about to deliver a baby and whose wife was unwell. But I did it the sales calls in the afternoon.

It was hot as hell in Jalandhar and I made a hash of it. I could neither enquire about the retailer's family, nor could sell any soap. And at 6'o clock in the evening when I finished, the lesson was obvious. And he put his hand on my shoulder and said 'You know, you are my officer, but you are a young man, you are like my son, I think you will do OK in life. Because you made such a mess of the job in the afternoon, but I think you learned your lesson, that if you don't have a relationship with somebody, you are not going to sell him anything. So it's a part of selling. Please don't separate the two. And because you undertook to do it, rather than tell me 'Aukaat pe aa jao - be in line and follow my instructions', I think some traces of humility through your arrogance I can see.'

And I think for me it was a great lesson in the value of relationships. Relationships cannot substitute efficient work but they can enhance efficient work. So do think of this 'World of Relationships' and this is one lesson that I learnt.

The second episode I would like to narrate is that you must know how to absorb something because observation is your next teacher. Once you finish at Globsyn there is no RCB or Banerjee or somebody is going to walk around and explain things to you. You are going to learn it by yourself. You are your teacher. And you must know how to teach yourself. It is incredibly easy to be taught in a class. It is incredibly difficult to learn for yourself. And I want to take away two little stories, not to do with me directly but to do with a sport that I love dearly. I learnt tennis at a young age here, in this city of Calcutta, for those of you who don't know, I was born in this city, I was raised in this city, I am a Calcuttan and I used to play tennis at the Bengal Lawn Tennis Association at South Club in those days. It's been a passion for me. And when Ramanathan Krishnan, who played when many of you were very young, will know that he is one of the early stars of India who went into the Wimbledon. When he was a young boy, he was somewhere in the south and in 1952, Ramanathan Krishnan, on the little budgets that were available in those days writes a story when he went to England he was allowed to take part in some of the tournaments. He had no equipment, he had round neck ganjee, you know, not T-shirts. Other people were wearing Fred Perry shorts and Fred Perry T-shirts. And he was wide-eyed and quite struck, awestruck by all the people he saw and things that were happening. And then he got to see the finals of Wimbledon for the first time in his life, in 1952. I have been to Wimbledon, without being a player and it's an awesome sight to see. And 1952 was a great match between Frank Sedgman and Jaroslav Drobny. And Ramanathan Krishnan's father was sitting by his side and he was so struck, I must tell you that he was only 14 years old at that time, 15; he was watching the face of the tennis players, Frank Sedgman and Jaroslav Drobny, looking at the elegance of their strokes. His father nudged him and said 'You Fool, if you want to understand how to play tennis, watch their feet, not their face.'

And then a great penny dropped for Ramanathan Krishnan, because you really play competitive tennis with your feet. We don't think of tennis that way. We think of the stroke, the grip and the racquet. Everybody's been taught those. Once you have learnt that, what makes you different from the others is how you move your feet and position yourself with the ball. So I found this a very good lesson.

When you watch your bosses and super bosses and see how they work. Remember this little story. Look at how they do it and not just what they do. Because it's from the 'how' that you relate, narrate your story, learn your lessons and not from the 'what'.

And there is a second story also from the world of tennis from 1953. I know this would sound as am very ancient stories to the young people but believe me they are timeless, and very inspiring, even to an old guy like myself. So Mr. Krishnan, Ramanathan Krishnan, was in the UK and he went to play Wimbledon and he got knocked out in Wimbledon, very early. But to give young people a chance, those who got knocked out in the first round and second round will be allowed to play something else called a 'Plate Tournament' - 'P-L-A-T-E'. So he played in the plate tournament. In those days there was an English tennis player who was also playing in the plate tournament. I don't know how many of you watch and follow tennis. Ramanathan Krishnan was down First set 0-6. Second set (they play best of three) he was down 0-5 and the game score was 0-40, which meant that there were 3 match points and he was out of the plate tournament and something happened to him. And he doesn't know what happened to him. He took the next 13 games in a row. And he won the second set 7-5 after being 0-5 and he took the third set 6-0.

And so there's a second great lesson that he writes about. He says that 'It aint over till it's over'. There's always a chance to fight. And this is something you find happening not just in sports, (it happens in one-day cricket, I am sure there are many sports examples) it happens in the world of business as well. That act of tenacity and not giving up till you got what you wanted and yet keeping your mind open to new ways of doing it; is a skill that nobody is going to teach you. And you are going to learn and you are going to learn it by knowing 'how' your seniors do it rather than 'what' they did. Never emulate 'what' your seniors did. Always look at the 'How', that's where the lessons are.

The third thing I am going to mention is that you are going to make mistakes. There is no manager who has risen in his career without making mistakes. And it is a huge huge act of humanity and relationships to know how to forgive a mistake and yet encourage the person—whether you are the boss or the subordinate, how does one make a mistake and still walk out with self-esteem intact? In the world of business, we don't do this too well. If one quarter's results go, if one territory sales go, you write-off people. Our job is to nurture people in need. I want to tell you a story.

Many years ago, more than 20 years ago, I was very fortunate, I was lucky; I got appointed to the board of Hindustan Lever. I was only 41.

During that tenure a messy thing happened because by mistake, I had overlooked a big fault and the company suffered for that. So when I understood the problem I went to my Chairman. Dr. Ashok Ganguly and explained to him the issue and then I said that I want to resign taking the responsibility of such a grave mistake (I saw ministers doing that).

Ashok Ganguly looked at me and he said 'You know, you can't create a mess and run away. You stay back and sort it out. If you are a true leader and a true manager, it's not that you made a mistake that matters, that you sorted out the mistake, that what would count.' I stayed back and luckily for me everything worked out okay.

I am narrating the story to you to emphasize that arrogance will come to you naturally. We are all victims of it. Put my hand on my heart; let your chairman put his hand on his heart, let your director put his hand on his heart and say that 'Never had an arrogant moment.' And I will say - There's a liar. We tend to be that way. Some event happens which knocks you into shape. And that event comes out of a relationship. Somebody who is willing to forgive you and still encourages you, somebody who is willing to be forgiven and go back and do the work. Because it is the Karma for which you are employed, not for your 'Ahankar'. And this is something that would be well worth remembering. Nobody will teach you this lesson. You will learn this on your own. But when it happens to you I hope you will remember.

You have to be deeply immersed in your profession. I sometimes despair that many young people don't do much reading. I don't care whether you read on the internet or you read a book or a magazine, or attend a conference or a seminar. But for God sake do some of them. You can't be doing nothing of them. How would you then stay current in your profession unless you are immersed in what you are doing and you do 'Riyaaz'? If you are a musician you will do 'Riyaaz'. If you are a tennis player you will spend eight hours, ten hours on the court. If you are Sachin Tendulkar, you will be at the nets for ten hours a day. Managers are the only profession who expect that after graduating from whichever institute, for the rest of their life they are well equipped. They will have scant regard for professional journals. They will probably not read too many management books on the grounds that they are all rubbish, which many of them, by the way, are. They will not attend conferences of CII, All India Management Association, whoever. I don't think you can be current that way.

There is a delightful story that I remember. I used to be in my career sometime brand manager for a soap called Lux Soap. All of you remember Lux Soap? You know all the film stars use it right? That's the only way for Aishwarya Rai to be as beautiful as she is or for Hema Malini to have been as beautiful as she was. Well Lux was launched in India in 1928 and always had Hollywood actresses because in 1928 Indian actresses were not supposed to model, you know, for things like soap and cosmetics. And so we always had Hollywood actresses who modeled for Lux Soap telling Indian women that they would look beautiful if they use the same soap as somebody else. They believed them also by the way. That was very helpful to make the company what it was. For the first time in 1940 an Indian actress posed to say 'Lux makes my complexion beautiful'. Leela Chitnis. Now many of you young people would say, 'Leela Who?' Never heard of this person. Leela Chitnis was even before my generation, I would say. But Leela Chitnis broke into the world of what was then Bollywood in 1940 by sheer accident.

Leela Chitnis was a middle class Maharashtrian girl who was studying in St' Xavier's College in Bombay. In the 1930s that was quite a forward looking family. And she was very interested in literature and dramatics. Then she saw and heard a stage director called Dr. Chitnis, Dr.Gajanand Chitnis. And she saw him and got quite infatuated with his general approach. Anyway they decided to get married and they got married and they had 2 children. But you know, to be a thespian is not easy, in terms of earning or living. It is not like having an MBA degree. So there were always tough times and she used to accompany her husband and take her 2 children with her. And when the husband was directing their play or acting out a role she would be sitting in the corner there, with her 2 children next to her. And she would be stitching and sewing and hemming and doing odd jobs for the theatre which would earn a little bit of extra money for the family.

And at that time there was a popular Marathi play called 'Raja Harishchandra' which was being enacted. And she sat at that corner every evening for hours together listening to the whole dialogue of this play. She was not conscious that she was listening to all these. And then on that magical day when the play was to be demonstrated, the lead actress could not come, something happened, and there was panic. The tickets had been sold and there was no lead actress. And Leela Chitnis said 'I can do that role.' They said 'Come on. Show us.' And she stood on the stage and she could emote every line, she remembered every word, she remembered every facial expression. And they donned her costumes and she played out and a new star was born. Until that day nobody knew Leela Chitnis other than Dr. Gajanand Chitnis.

Out of such accidents careers are made. Her great virtue was she attracted luck to come to her. Because she was completely immersed in what was going on. She could have been completely oblivious of the dialogues that were going on. But she was watching and she was so immersed in the art of theatre that it all registered in her head and she could reproduce it just involuntarily at the right time. I would love to see managers like that - managers who are constantly learning, managers who are observing, managers who are into it with a lot of energy. So that the magical moment, when the union has gone on a strike, when the government has denied you some license, when the competitors has launched a new product; all those lessons come to you like Leela Chitnis. I would like to wish all of you good luck in trying to become what Leela Chitnis was to theatre and film, that you can do so in business. If you succeed maybe I can get you to pose for Lux Soap as well, as an additional benefit.

I would like to conclude by saying - try not to take yourself too seriously. You probably spent the last 25 years being told to take everything very seriously. 'Study hard', you should study hard, I am not telling you not to. You should get good marks. I am not telling you not to. But don't become so full of yourself that you forget to enjoy yourself. Life is a journey through the rose garden. God has gifted you all the roses around you. What's the use of leading a life when you walk through the rose garden without smelling the roses? There are yellow roses, there are pink roses. There are red roses. And the roses are there for you to stop, feel them, nurture them, enjoy them, and smell them. And if you don't do that side of it, you can't be a rose scientist. So you cannot lead your life just doing hundred percent efficiency in work.

There's a very fine book, which I would commend you to read. It's an old book, maybe 20 years old, called Zorba the Greek. It's written by a Greek author called Nikos Kazantzakis. It's about a miner who was so fixed on opening new mines, taking out the ore and getting the best price for it that he would become very rich. And Zorba was his assistant. And Zorba was a guy who was full fun and life. They would work during the day and the evening, Zorba would sit by the fireside, he would have his little glass of wine, he would fool around with the girls, while the boss, as he called him, was serious: planning about the next day's work and how to open the next mine and how to earn the next dollar. A number of verbal transactions took place between Zorba and his boss and Zorba was tormented in his own world, with his own insecurities, his need to make money.

One day Zorba says to his boss - 'Boss, you know something; you got everything that's required in life. You got money, you got assets, you got people working for you at your command. When you clear your throat, 10 people run. You have power. But you don't have friends. You don't have relationships. You don't let your hair down. Be normal.' And the boss says 'Zorba, how do I do that?' He says 'Come and dance with the girls. Have another drink.' And then he gives him a drink. Gets uninhibited, pulls him to the fire. And the boss also enjoys himself. He dances, he talks to the girls, he talks about their families, talks about things other than mining and then he says 'Zorba the Greek taught me a lesson. There is more to life than just making money through mining.' That takes 350 pages. I have told you in about 3 minutes.

Enjoy your lives, have great fun .God could not have put you in a more fortunate position. Amongst the six and a half billion people on this planet, you and I have a very fortunate position. There is no point counting your misfortunes. There is great value in being aware of your fortunes. You go with the good wishes of all these mother crocodile - your teachers, your parents, your director. Go out there, smell the roses, enjoy your life and God be with you as you graduate from this wonderful institution. Good Luck!