

My Journey to the Top!

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When I was thinking of the structure and the contents of the topic that I had to speak on at the 'Future Marketers Conference of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Sri Lanka Region, the various learning's and experiences I had on my journey to the top kept popping up in my mind. As I do believe in the power of the sub conscious mind and as a person who is guided by my subconscious, I took the message and designed my talk on 'Inter-Disciplinary Marketing' using my own story to illustrate the concept.

As I stood in front of the 270 students to deliver my speech, my mind went back to the time I was a student with a much smaller number in my group. A feeling of gratitude swept through my mind to my marketing teachers who prepared me to embark on this Journey. Eardley Perera, who is considered the father of marketing in Sri Lanka is one of them who tirelessly ensured all of us were well prepared with all the required marketing tools and concepts, not only to pass the examinations, but also to succeed in our marketing jobs. I was also fortunate to have another of my marketing teachers, Nimal Gunewardena in the audience, who was humble enough to come to listen to his own students.

My presentation was on Interdisciplinary Marketing. I used my personal examples to highlight the interdisciplinary approach needed to become a successful marketer and prepare one's self for a future CEO role. The message was that my marketing qualification alone was not enough to take me to the top. I approached the topic from two perspectives; Interdisciplinary focus and development and Marketing 'Marketing' to the other functions.

I highlighted the steps I took to improve my inter-disciplinary focus in various perspectives. To develop my social focus I joined the Jaycees and later Rotary and got involved in various social projects that helped me to make a social contribution while developing my leadership, team work and networking skills. To develop my technical focus I used the opportunity given to me by Carson Cumberbatch & Company to learn sewing thread technology in the Coats plant in Malaysia and the opportunity given by Keells foods to spend 1 month in the factory to learn meat processing technology in addition to visiting international and local exhibitions for continuous learning.

To develop HR focus I used the opportunity I was offered to be the first Education Liaison officer of the Sri Lanka branch. Thereafter I enjoyed training my team at Keells Supermarket using the training tools I learned from my current partner and mentor Omar Khan, while being the Director General Manager of Jaykay marketing the owning company of Keells Super.

I developed my financial acumen being the treasurer of the body we formed to achieve branch status of CIM for Sri Lanka, named the Association of Members of the Chartered Institute of Marketing [AMCIM]. Thereafter when I was a member of the Rotary Club of Colombo reconnections I opted to become treasurer again to continue to improve my financial management skills.

I improved my business thinking and skills by following the CIM's CPD programme, by qualifying to receive the MBA from the Postgraduate Institute of Management [PIM] in Colombo, attending training programmes, reading widely and from the vast intellectual capital and client assignment of Sensei International whom I joined as a Partner and Consultant after leaving John Keells in 1998.

In order to market marketing to the other functions in the company, I applied the marketing concepts to my job. The first step was to understand the needs of my customers who were those working in other departments. Their need was to become successful achieving their objectives. Then I positioned marketing as a tool that can help the company and those working in the company become more successful. Once this was clear I went on to communicate both ways, i.e., obtaining inputs of other functions in marketing decision making and giving them credit for their inputs. The next steps was to deliver the promise, i.e., show business results, making sure that using marketing and thinking in a marketing oriented manner gives the desired results for the company and individuals. During the time I was Marketing manager for Keells foods in the late 80's, they became the 3rd biggest profit contributor in the John Keells Group and this was the delivery of the promise, the manifestation of my action.

I used the various opportunities that came my way to develop myself as a leader, team player and a businessman rather than only being a marketer. When I was given the opportunity to lead the sponsorship team of John Keells Holdings during the sponsorship of the South Asian Federation [SAF] games and the Australian Cricket tour of Sri Lanka I used the opportunity to complete these projects successfully and build my personal brand. When I was given the opportunity to win the Pizza hut franchise and the Dunlop Slazenger agency for John Keells, I used the opportunity to complete these projects successfully and build my personal brand. When I was appointed to lead a team to come up with a business plans to modernise the Mortlake press that was acquired by John Keells Holdings and lead the futures team of John Keells Holdings, I used the opportunity to complete these projects successfully and build my personal brand.

Little did I know that I was building a solid foundation for a greater opportunity that was coming my way. There is an old saying; the teacher will arrive when the student is ready. That is exactly what happened when I was fortunate to be a participant at the Mastery of Self Playshop conducted by Omar Khan. I understood the importance of having a clear purpose for life and wrote my own purpose for the first time back in 1995. My purpose was to use my god given talents to help others and myself become better individuals, team players and leaders so that we can make a difference to the teams we are

associated with, making a contribution to making this world a better place. I developed myself to be able to live this purpose by getting accreditation to deliver the self-development programme Mastery of Self through Neuro Linguistic Programming and its derivatives. I developed myself learning path-breaking concepts and tools in Strategy, Leadership, Continuous Improvement, Customer Care, Sales and by helping Sensei clients understand and find solutions for their challenges. I developed myself by using opportunities to run business by starting the Sensei operation in Sri Lanka, managing the Sensei operation in the Middle-East and undertaking to turnaround a company in Bangladesh as their Chief Executive Officer [CEO].

I believe giving back to the world your talents, help you to gain more strength, confidence and divine blessings. Towards this end I have enjoyed training teachers, prefects and sportsmen in various schools, helping tsunami victims with mental strength to get back on their feet and sharing my knowledge at various conferences around the world. Being in various professional and social associations such as the CIM, Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing [SLIM], Jaycees and Rotary and teaching CIM students as a lecturer in the late 80's also gave me the opportunity to give back a little bit of what I have received.

I wrapped up my presentation reminding the future marketers to use all opportunities they get to develop themselves with technical and adaptive [behavioural skills] in line with their purpose, ensuring they qualify themselves in marketing as well as in the industry they want to specialize in, as companies in the future will be hiring specialists with a marketing background or marketers with a specialist qualification.

The road to the top is steep but there are many wells of opportunity that you need to drink from as you enjoy the journey that will be sprinkled with tears of sadness and smiles of joy that will nourish us all the way. My journey continues, I feel I am starting the journey every morning and I look forward to the next baby step with excitement!