The Dreamer with His Glass Half Full

"A mind once stretched by a new idea can never return to its original dimensions."

Sujeet Shakya quotes this sentence from Olive Holmes and begins to talk about the business of chasing dreams. He never seems to tire talking about new things, big things and "stretching" thoughts. Perhaps, this trait of dreaming is the main factor that enabled him to achieve enduring feats in the past twenty years.

His career has broadly two phases. In the first, he completed an exemplary stint with one of Nepal’s most revered corporate groups – starting as a trainee and finishing as a CEO. His second career (that of an entrepreneur) started recently and in this he has set up an enterprise that people simply cannot ignore. His recent bestseller book, 'Unleashing Nepal', has earned him admiration from all quarters as an author who can decode complex economic theories into plain fundamentals.

Meet Sujeet Shakya, a prominent writer on business and economic issues and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Beed Management, an enterprise for management consulting and advisory services.

CORPORATE EXECUTIVE WITH A SOCIETAL CONSCIENCE

Since the beginning of his career, Shakya always wanted to be a ‘corporate executive with a societal conscience’. He was lucky enough to be associated with the then growing King Mahendra Trust For Nature Conservation (now Nepal Trust for Nature Conservation). “I got an opportunity to understand the intricacies of the issues surrounding Nepal and to travel extensively across the country,” he adds. The different organizations that he volunteered for motivated him to think about strategies to bring the private sector and development together. He started talking about Public Private Partnerships early on and has to

His career has broadly two phases. In the first, he completed an exemplary stint with one of Nepal’s most revered corporate groups – starting as a trainee and finishing as a CEO. His second career (that of an entrepreneur) started recently.

It was another turning point for him -- a much wanted intervention after ten years of a rapidly progressing career. “As an eternal management student, I got the opportunity to fill in the gaps that I was noticing,” he reflects. “I was doing business development stuff, but did not have a marketing degree. I was facing problems while working on linking strategies to actions. I was good at either coming up with ideas to work on, or issues of operations in isolation, but struggled to have a firm linkage.”

During that year at the Boston University under scholarship, he completed a Graduate Degree in International Marketing and then took classes on Linking Strategy with Action, a course that he considers changed the way he thought and acted. During a class on leadership, his professor once asked him to really get into a 'stretch exercise'. “Then I thought of really doing something big. I would often think about turning the Soaltee Group into Nepal’s first billion dollar company,” he remembers. “My leadership professor and other coordinators at the Humphrey program continued to be my sounding board.”

Shakya also spent three months at the World Bank as part of his professional affiliation and built network in Washington DC. He talks about the stint as an exposure with passion. “I have been fortunate as an alumnus. I am invited to speak at retreats, which gives me an opportunity to interact with hundreds of fellows from over hundred countries. The hope for Nepal resurrects when I meet fellows from Rwanda, Uganda, Sierra Leone,
ON STARTING BEED
“I wanted to do too many things and it is not always fair to risk your employers with the fate of your public opinions and work,” Sujeet begins explaining how Beed came into being. He chose to start his own venture, breaking away in good terms from the organization where he spent close to twenty years of his professional life. “It was emotional for me to leave. I had earned the option to take the people in the consulting team with me and start on my own, also with the option to work in the future together,” he says.

With eight people, Shakya started the brand ‘Beed’ which he says is a “brand engaged in positive transformation of individuals and corporations.” While Beed Management engages in management consulting and advisory, Beed Invest is Nepal’s effectivest first portfolio management company.
And then there is Nepal Economic Forum, a not-for-profit institution that engages in policy and research. In just over a year of operations, the brand has been able to get noticed as a company built up on collaboration, innovation and professionalism. With thirty people now in his team, Shakya continues to provide services to his impressive list of clients.

UNLEASHING NEPAL
The dearth of economic analysis about Nepal, in-depth as well as readable, provided Sujeet the opportunity to fill the vacuum. He began writing column in newspapers and magazines. “Writing a column and writing a book are two entirely different set outs,” he starts explaining the reasons behind ‘Unleashing Nepal’ coming in the picture. “When I saw photocopies of
my essay ‘Squandering of a Promising Economy’ in the Compendium of Nepal carried by consultants and its contents quoted by writers, I thought the time was ripe for a book,” he continues. “By then I also was of my own so I could be bolder. I was fortunate that Penguin India agreed to publish the book and then I had Gurcharan Das and Ashraf Ghani, the author of Unbound India, who agreed to write the Preface and Introduction.”

Sujeet spent a month globetrotting with his book for promotion. The second edition was out in just three months. “The book is to talk beyond the 3Ms. The discussions on Nepal get limited to the 3Ms – Mountains and Mount Everest, Maoists and Massacre – royal and sometimes animal. There is much besides these 3Ms,” he asserts. “Nepal is the forty-first largest populated country in the world. It is next to two economic powerhouses and it has half its population young.”

In the words of Kul Chandra Gautam, a former Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, “Sujeet Shakya is a dreamer; but a dreamer with his feet on the ground. In this book Unleashing Nepal, he unleashes a torrent of ideas, big and small, which cumulatively could change the face of Nepal within a generation.”

**KALIMPONG-KOLKATA-KATHMANDU**

Shakya grew up in Kalimpong, where he went to Dr Grahams Homes, a school that he says gave him the foundation and space to think. Born to a business family, his business experiments began from his small family shop. He later went to Calcutta (now Kolkata) where he got admitted to St. Xavier’s College. After finishing college, he was saddled with a big question: to become a small fish in a big pond or a big fish in a small pond? In his quest for looking for a smaller pond, he explored Sikkim and Nepal and the latter turned out to be his greater liking. On the one hand he wanted to explore his roots and on the other, he thought that Nepal would be much less competitive for his career growth.

Shakya always wanted to become a Chartered Accountant because there were so few of them at that time. “The objective was not to become a Chartered Accountant just to sign on balance sheets but to earn a name in the society,” he clarifies about the reasons for his graduating as a Chartered Accountant in 1992. He was the seventy-fifth chartered accountant in Nepal and having achieved all-India rankings in the examinations, he was highly noticed in the market. He was about to join a

The dearth of economic analysis about Nepal, in-depth as well as readable, provided Sujeet the opportunity to fill the vacuum. He began writing column in newspapers and magazines.

**PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL**

Sujeet likes his professional life and personal life to be separate and complains that in Nepal, the distinction is blurred. “People talk about work at social functions and social and political issues at work,” he says, an uncomfortable expression etched on his face. He likes to draw the line between his work hours and non-work hours. He believes in spending quality time with his wife Alpa and his eight-year-old daughter Suyasha. Family holidays and outings with friends mean a lot to him.

Being a vegetarian family, Shakya, his wife and daughter are adventurous about food. He is fond of the words ‘restaurants’ and ‘food’. He cooks occasionally at home. “Cooking is a therapeutic exercise because whenever you cook, you want the food to be good. You feel positive,” he says. His sense of optimism makes him stand out both in his personal as well as professional life. He always sees the glass half full and not half empty. He never ceases to describe Nepal as a land of opportunities. “For me it has been a land of opportunities. I would not have done better than this elsewhere. Here I have the liberty to do business, write and spend time with my family at the same time,” he adds.

The words ‘big’ and ‘dream’ make most part of his conversation. Shakya wants to spend the next couple of years building Beed into a formidable force in Nepal and perhaps take it to the regional or global level. He is more passionate about Nepal Economic Forum that he wants to see grow into an independent policy center. He wants to use this vehicle as a change agent in policy making and deliberations. He shares that his next book will feature Nepali lessons to take on some global paradigms on poverty reduction and linking capitalism to human development. “Hopefully, I will be able to take off some time to spend at a university and write this next book. By then the initiatives at Beed will certainly bear fruits,” he shares hopefully. “Beed will make enough to sustain a large number of beeds, Nepal Economic Forum and dream vacations for families.”

**HR MEET 2010**

HR Leadership - The Six Sigma Way