

## Dr. N H Atthreya : Celebrating 100 years of excellence

I was all set to chill during my summer break after my BSc Final Year exams in 1993 when my father passed me a small clipping from Times of India classifieds which read something like, “MMC School of Management is hiring interns”. With a little bit of prodding and nudging I was on my way to Court Chambers at New Marine Lines in Mumbai to attend an interview for an internship post.

My first impression of Dr. N H Atthreya was that of a warm, gentle and caring individual who made me so comfortable and welcoming, that it erased away any residual resistance I would have about wasting my time over internship rather than whiling it away watching the newly launched cable channels like Star World in the early nineties.

Taking that clipping of the classified ad and walking into the offices of MMC School of Management that summer of 1993 was one of the most pivotal events of my life. The lessons I learnt, both functional and life, have given me direction, confidence and comfort in my professional and personal journey alike and has a very key influence on the person I am today.

As we celebrate 100 years of Atthreya Sir, I am honoured and privileged to share some of those learnings through my personal stories over the years.

1. **Redefining Luck; PLUCK** – when opportunities meet preparation, you create Pluck. This is something I heard during a workshop Sir was conducting for TCS Software Engineers. I used to tag along and help Sir by passing out the handouts during the class and manning the book counter during the breaks. Reframing Luck to PLUCK immediately moved one away from a victim mindset to an optimistic and proactive space. Sir used to say, ‘opportunities are always knocking on your doors, it is just that you are not in a mind-frame to notice them and even if you did notice them, not prepared to take it on’. Most of my growth in my career came by staying true to this mantra.
2. **Create an environment for people to realise their potential.** I had a stressful ‘stress interview’ at Xaviers Institute of Advertising and came to the office next day feeling very depressed. Sir came around his desk and gave me a warm embrace, he used to believe in passing on physical energy, creating abundance of positivity. He said two things that day that has stayed with me. One, never put anyone through a stress interview, instead run the person through a confidence interview to gauge their potential. Two, in case one has to conduct a stress interview due to the nature of the role, as an interviewer, it is your job to reinstate confidence in the interviewee after the stress interview. In the many years since, leading organisations across Asia, never have I put anyone through a confidence beating interview process and I can humbly say that we’ve had some very good hires who have gone on to realise their potential.
3. **Live Life as an Exclamation, not Explanation!** This one didn’t come directly from Sir but a very close friend of his from Nashville, Tennessee, Mr. Larry Knauff. As an intern, one of our tasks was to correspond with publishers and authors across the world. In the pre Internet, pre Amazon, forex regulation era, it was very difficult to buy internationally published books. Sir would write to the authors gifting them his books and in most cases would receive their books by way of reciprocity. It was innovative and path breaking in many ways. It was one of the best ways to exchange

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ideas across the world. This was his way of telling us that there are a million reasons not to achieve something, none of those routes will lead to a life, lived as an exclamation.

4. **The Joy of Role Excellence.** One of the handouts given to the executives in his sessions on Practice of Excellence was a one pager on the Joy of Role Excellence. The mere fact that when one achieves excellence, both in function and at a human level, they experience great joy and satisfaction, was very insightful. Couple of key messages have stuck with me from these sessions over the years that has deeply influenced my leadership style. One is a quote by John Gardner, “An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society that scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity, will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy”. The other one is on Human Excellence by Dr. N H Atthreya, “Great doers benefit themselves and, incidentally, others. Great givers, on the other hand, benefit others, and incidentally themselves.” This was my initiation into servant leadership.
5. **Transaction Analysis** – taking sessions on conflict resolutions, I remember being introduced to the Parent, Adult & Child ego states in each one of us, where understanding and acknowledging the ego states of both parties in a conflict, allows one to navigate the discussions to an Adult ego state where one has the highest chance of resolution.

Atthreya Sir was very intuitive and caring, he would wear the heart of a Parent, when we were vulnerable; nudge us to be independent, Adult up, giving us the freedom to accomplish a task with a framework; and Child-like in his curiosity of how the world works. His curiosity of the WWW, led me to discover dial up internet in early 90s, directing me to visit a couple of IIT students, who were running a dial up subscription model from their 1 bedroom flat in Powai.

A life long learner and educator, Atthreya sir has blessed many amongst us to realise our potential. And through transitivity, many more lives, exponentially impacting the wider humanity. It has been a privilege and an honour to have spent my formative years under his tutelage.

In my family, we have a very special place for Atthreya sir in our hearts, fondly remembered for his compassion and inspiration, a divine being.

I started the internship at USD 10 per month that over time went up to around USD 30 per month. The life lessons I've learnt, the blessings I received, are priceless and continues to grow in value, as we celebrate 100 years of Sirs' impact on our collective consciousness.

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