

## Understanding the Basics

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**T**he struggle to juggle one's career is an eternal challenge that we all face in life. No matter how accomplished you are or what position you occupy, every sunrise begins with the never-ending list of promises to be fulfilled. If we succeed in fulfilling even a handful of these, we might conclude that the day has been good, and go to bed with a sense of satisfaction that we have done our best. But more often than not, the opposite of this is true. We lose control of these tasks even before we step out of the house. It might be an early morning call or the first person you meet. Something entirely unexpected comes up that makes you toss your carefully laid out plans for the day into the dustbin. My life is no different. As a son, a father, a husband, a doctor, a teacher and now a leader of Indian Academy of Pediatrics (IAP), I am straddled with numerous personal and professional responsibilities. And 24 hours is all that I get in a day to fulfill them. How I fare on these on any given day depends entirely on how I handle myself, given that most of the factors are outrightly beyond my control.

I have often pondered on this existential issue. What I share with you here is an account of my personal exploration of life. I am sharing these thoughts mainly with the hope that it will help the young doctors who are yet to get their feet wet, and give them a clearer perspective on how to build on their future. One of the first differentiations I wish to make is between 'solving' and 'understanding.' Being technical people, we are tempted to look upon everything from the angle of problem and solution. Yet many of life's problems cannot be solved; they can only be understood. We cannot make problems disappear from our mind, but we can gain an understanding and try to reorient our thoughts towards deriving a better outcome.

### **CAREER DEFINED**

Robert Kiyosaki in his bestselling book 'Cashflow Quadrant: Rich Dad's Guide to Financial Freedom' presents an interesting perspective of how careers work [1]. According to him, "the world is made up of four types

of individuals: (i) Employee, (ii) Self-employed, (iii) Business owner, and (iv) Investor." Each of these has a distinct strategy and mindset to earn one's living. Each has its advantages and disadvantages, and rewards and obligations. The Employee, for example, needs a secure and well-defined work profile with the certainty of a paycheck at agreed intervals. The Self-employed person will sacrifice job security for independence, but needs expertise in a specific domain, to be sustainable. The Business owner controls an entire system of delivery of products or services and needs certain top management skills. Investors simply put their money into revenue earning streams and make their money earn more money without any personal involvement. Financial liquidity and sound judgment regarding financial parameters are their forte.

These roles are distinct. Shifting from one type to another is not easy, it needs to be accompanied with a corresponding shift in mindset of the individual. Often this is a life-changing experience. If you are a teacher in a medical college, you are an Employee, whereas if you have a private practice, you are Self-employed. If you own a hospital, you are a Business owner, and if you merely own shares in a hospital venture, you are an Investor. Practicing doctors for the most part come under the category of 'Self-employed.' You are in a sense, combining all these roles into one. You provide expert services, are your own employee, and own a system of delivery in which you have invested your money. But for all practical purposes, you are Self-employed because if you decide to take a holiday, so does your income. An Employee takes a holiday depending on the number of days he or she is entitled to, without affecting income, and perhaps financed under the terms of employment. A Business owner can go on leave without affecting one's income as there are others to take care of it in one's absence. All this does not affect the Investor as one is not at all involved in the system.

### **POINTS TO PONDER**

Herein lies the point. Once you enter into private practice,

your personal presence at the place of work becomes the focal point of your career. You become a 24x7 professional with a few hours for sleep thrown in. In order to maintain and succeed in this portfolio, one needs a specific set of skills, apart from professional expertise that is uncompromisable. I have already previously elaborated on career planning in regard to professional expertise [2]. Thus I shall only deal with the life skills needed to reach one's best potential as a professional.

1. *Utilize time:* As doctors, our lives are hectic. My own day begins at 5:00 in the morning and ends not before 11:00 p.m. And then there are the night calls. This is true not just for me but for almost any doctor. This goes on day in and day out seven days a week, and there are very few holidays. So how do we make ends meet? How do we manage to achieve our goals without feeling overwhelmed, overburdened or overworked? We have the knowledge and the skills, but what we lack is time. Why kill time when you can make it work for you? Very few people are skilled in time management. In fact, 'time management' itself is a misnomer. Nobody can really manage time. Time is a fixed entity and everyone's day has the same numbers of hours, minutes and seconds. What we have to manage is ourselves; our activities and our priorities to fit the available time. If each of us took even a little more out of time every day, our chances of success in our endeavors increase drastically.
2. *Be organized and disciplined:* Being organized and disciplined is the key to everything, especially in managing time. Maintain work-life balance. That means finding time for your family and loved ones too. Neglecting any aspect of life will prove costly one day. Take time to envision the future and prioritize activities accordingly. Every minute counts!
3. *Stay focused:* Prioritize well. Do only one thing at a time and give the task your heart and soul. Only then the results will be optimum with one-time effort. This again relates to time management and being organized. All these are interrelated ideas and behaviors. Whatever you are doing, give it your 100%.
4. *Plan your money:* People think doctors make a lot of money. In reality, we are only struggling to balance our

income with our way forward. Financial problems directly and negatively impact our performance. Unless we manage our money properly, we cannot manage our lives. Good budgeting and timely investments in income-earning assets can secure our future. Our investments should be safe, and mainly in domains that do not require daily involvement. While doing so, take care not to overreach or be driven by greed. Passive income and steady growth are preferable to high-risk and high-involvement investments.

5. *Develop people:* Develop the second line; train and trust your subordinates with your personal involvement. Actively mentor your juniors and build a team that works equally well even in your absence. This is the only way you can move forward in your career. Many of us like to feel important and make ourselves indispensable. This attitude can actually work against us, and will be standing in one's own way. Do not be irreplaceable – if you cannot be replaced, you cannot be promoted to higher roles.

These are the five principles which have helped me in life, and I am sure it will help you also in realizing your dreams. I have taken a slightly autobiographical route in writing this column mainly because I think it works. In conclusion, I also wish to share the single thought that motivates me. If I have achieved anything in life, it is because of this thought, which is not mine but which I would like to share with you. And that thought is: "Your life doesn't get better by chance. It gets better by the choices you make." At each crucial juncture in my life, I have tried to invest my time and thinking to make considered choices about my future. Many of us rely too much on luck to take us through life. On the other hand, our chances of achievement increase dramatically when we actively make our choices and build each phase of our life on solid logic. And believe me, the sense of satisfaction and joy you get in becoming a self-made person is immeasurable.

#### REFERENCES

1. Kiyosaki RT. Cashflow Quadrant: Rich Dad's Guide to Financial Freedom. Arizona: TechPress, Inc, 1998.
2. Soans ST. Traversing the road not taken. Indian Pediatr. 2018;55:851-2.