

List of speaking engagements

1. INNOVATING FOR THE INDIAN MARKET

Audience: executives of Aristocrat Technologies
22nd March, 2017

The speech covers three aspects. First, it touches upon a few myths about innovation with live examples to illustrate why those are indeed myths. Second the presentation covers what the triggers and teasers are for innovation. Last, it touches upon what it takes to innovate for the Indian market—why is India different, how have others done it, and finally, what are the lessons?

2. COLLABORATIVE WORKING: some lessons

Audience: Leadership teams of two chemical investee companies of Fairbridge Capital
17th March, 2017

On the one hand, human beings are distinctive because they can collaborate, unlike other species. On the other hand, it is very difficult for people to work collaboratively. Therefore the leader's task is to create a 'colloidal community' to increase collaboration. What is a colloidal community and what are the examples? Boundary spanning leaders are essential, so there needs to be an understanding of what this skill is, how it can be inculcated and what organizations should do.

3. WHY STORY TELLING IS IMPORTANT FOR BUSINESSES

Audience: Members of the Konkani Bhasha Mandal, Madgaon, Goa
8th March, 2017

Stories have been important to human evolution. There are epics, mythologies and several forms of narratives. Why do they exist in every society all over the world? Why have stories survived so long? What will they continue to be important in the future? Managers and leaders can learn positive leadership lessons from story-telling.

4. What crisis leaders do when the company faces a crisis.

Audience: Senior executives in Tata Motors Ltd
23rd February, 2017

Like individuals will face crises at certain indeterminate intervals, companies too will run into crises at certain intervals. Every CEO has the task of leading his company out of such a crisis, without knowing quite exactly how things will turn out. The CEO depends hugely on the leadership team in the company because those 'distributed leaders' are the ones who face suppliers, customers and employees on a day to day basis. I have drawn ten lessons that I have learnt through the company crises I have faced in Unilever and Tata over the last fifty years.

5. BONSAIS, PENNIES AND SIX LENSES: leadership passages

Audience: Senior executives of Hindustan Petroleum Ltd

20th February, 2017

Leadership development is a personal journey and the bends in the journey bear a significance only for that person. One must learn to reflect on experiences and failures, and what they teach the individual. I describe four such bends in a leadership journey—the point where analytics needs to be supported by intuition, the point where self-awareness assumes renewed importance, the point when obligation is perceived as the obverse of privilege and the point when one learns to view events from another's perspective.

6. The difficulty of being an independent director

**Audience: Directors of UPL Limited, a listed company
24th January, 2017**

A presentation on understanding the purpose of a company, the differing viewpoints of the directors, based on whether they are executive, promoter or independent. Using Mahabharata characters like Duryodhana, Arjuna and Bhishma as pegs, the goings-on in boards are illustrated through some examples. The idea that 'what is ethical' or 'good' varies a lot. Independent directors must be discriminating about what they oppose, support or stay quiet because this is at the root of corporate governance both in law and spirit. It exemplifies who the people are before they are viewed as directors.

7. Why story telling is important in leadership

**Audience: Managers from Tata Companies
6th December, 2016**

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8. India's zeigarnik awakening (in memory of Sri Nani Palkhivala)

**Audience: Students, faculty and guests at IIM Ahmedabad
17th August, 2016**

An important change is sweeping the world: the wellness revolution. The size of this market, its emergence over the last twenty years, the drivers, and the global trends are touched upon (not in statistical detail). This is an important development for the way consumers think and behave. In India the evolution of the ayurvedic-natural-organics market is traced, especially its rapid development in recent years as exemplified by the Baba Ramdev Patanjali phenomenon. All of these have implications for the future market developments and consumerism.

9. Learning what nobody teaches (LWNT)

**Audience: Fifty upcoming executives at Tata Consultancy Services at Thiruvananthapuram
22nd July, 2016**

This was a whole day engagement with five 75 minutes sessions. In each session, there was a power point presentation with AVs, followed by a discussion on questions such as: Who am I? What is my purpose in career? What am I a part of? How do I learn and stay relevant? Where does analytics end and intuition begin? What does success mean to me? What do I do with success once I have reached the goal?

10. Overcoming some myths about innovation

Audience: Executives and invitees of Ericsson Company at IIT Delhi
22nd April, 2016

The subject of innovation has acquired many beliefs and myths, which are accepted without questioning. Some of these myths are broken during the speech with examples to illustrate. There are also some realities about innovation and these tend to be overlooked in organizations. Together these myths and realities serve as lodestars for organizations which are serious about innovation.

11. How toppling from the leadership perch bears different lessons from climbing there

Audience: Alumni of IIM Calcutta
15th March, 2016

The skills and priorities involved in rising are different from those involved once an executive has reached the top. The speech mentions some of the differences, including the 'hidden toxins' in leadership positions. Leaders tend to continue doing what has worked in the past successfully. That paradigm has to be modified—by the leader, consciously and consistently.

12. Sarthak krishi yogana at nabard

Audience: Executive from NABARD, Mumbai
22nd January 2016

In the forum of Executives from NABARD, Gopal walked them through the Sarthak Krishi Yojana which is a scheme / research paper jointly developed by R Gopalakrishnan and Dr YSP Thorat. In the research paper What India can do differently in agriculture, they outline

an integrated national framework to execute a "mindful agriculture" programme, the Sarthak Krishi Yojana, by better coordination among independent agencies and institutions to address India's agricultural problems. The paper articulates the key pillars and features of the framework and ways to implement them. A holistic plan, encompassing the five pillars of technology, risk, institutions, policy and skills (TRIPS), will form part of Sarthak Krishi Yojana. To ensure the success of Sarthak Krishi Yojana, it should be a collaboratively driven project with the state

13. Creating customer value

Audience: Cochin Management Association 35th Annual Convention
21st January 2016

Gopal was the keynote speaker at Cochin Management association's 35th annual convention, the topic of his speech was How to create customer value and he covered the following points with relevant examples from nature and his experience :

- It is a VUCA world but always had been so
- Every Individual & Business is languishing in to a complex ecosystem. Therefore everybody and every institution has to be a salesman of Product, Services and Ideas.
- Nature teaches us that every ecosystem is focused on being effective, not necessarily efficient for e.g. Photosynthesis & water flowing down a mountain stream
- With regards to innovation it is a myth to believe that the true measures are items such as R&D, First in the Market (FiM) & products rather than Business model

It is customer empathy that is the key competitive advantage. Every firm must create a magnetic experience for its customer. This theme was developed further

14. Strategies for growth

**Audience: Executive education professionals of Shailesh J Mehta School of Management
13th January, 2016**

Using anecdotal examples from history and his personal experience, Gopal spoke to professionals undergoing Executive education at Shailesh J Mehta School of Management about what Strategy for growth means for organisations along with a concrete case study for Auto Component Company. Gopal urged that a modest strategy with superb implementation is always considered greater than a superbly ideated strategy with modest implementation. He quoted several examples about how the management fails to show the big picture to its employees and fails to align goals. He stressed that growth have several dimensions. It is not just pushing our product or service in the line of business which we are present in. Growth is fundamentally creating what people love before they know they want it. To put it simply, he said growth is not what it's visible in physical sense. He stresses that growth is that which enables and enhances one's mind-set. Strategy is all about changing of people's mind-sets.

15. Executing a change vision

**Audience: 100 leaders of a global software products company
15th September, 2015**

Gopal has learnt lessons out of his twenty five years' experiences with organizational transformation at Unilever Arabia, Brooke Bond Lipton and at Tata. Transformational challenges do not pick a time to descend on leaders. Leaders just walk into the challenges. Using metaphors from Nature and based on his book (The case of the bonsai manager), Gopal crystallized ten lessons on how animals and plants respond when faced with transformational challenges. The discourse is not instructional, it is inspirational. It allows accomplished corporate leaders to imagine what they might do rather than prescribe what they should do.

16. Creating a firm that is both respected and loved

**Audience: CTOs of companies
8th September, 2015**

In a very distinctive address on an unusual subject, Gopal addressed the subject by comparing companies with human beings. After all a company is a social system comprised of individuals. He asked and addressed questions like: Is the birth of a company like the birth of a child? When applied to a company, what does respect mean and what does love mean? He then spoke about the five lessons that he has learnt over his career about what corporations must do to first earn respect, and later nurture the respect into love. It is indeed possible to become a company that is respected and loved, but it is a challenging task.

17. Responding to rapid change with intuition

**Audience: CIOs of corporations in Mumbai
22nd May, 2015**

There is no doubt that events are unfolding at an ever-faster rate in our lives. However the tools that we have to cope are also evolving faster. That is why individuals and institutions are able to become more 'technically responsive.' Analytics and workforce productivity

have changed dramatically in recent years, thanks to incredibly valuable automation and tools becoming increasingly available. These help take the drudgery of process out of HR and workforce practices.

However the human brain evolves in a much slower way compared to the speed of technology evolution. The issue therefore arises about how we can get a higher degree of the 'human responsiveness'. This is essential if we are to really become more productive. This requires the development of human intuition.

Humans spend their lives assuming that they are rational, when, in fact, for most of the important decisions in their lives, they decide intuitively. A few examples from Nature were used to illustrate the role of intuition and relationships as compared to analytics and rational decision-making.

18. What the ceo really wants form you

**Audience: 75 leaders of a Malaysian Bank in Kuala Lumpur
21st May, 2015**

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19. Building a corporate brand

**Audience: 75 leaders of a Malaysian Bank in Kuala Lumpur
10th March, 2015**

Gopal used three words in the context of corporate brands. The first is SPIRIT—something that is ethereal and difficult to touch. The second is MANIFESTATION—the elements that are palpable and easy to touch. The third is DISCIPLINE—the processes and thinking frameworks to execute brand plans. As an example he stated that Berkshire Hathaway has the spirit of efficient asset management, Warren Buffet and Charlie Munger are the manifestations of the firm, and their discipline is their annual statement to shareholders. He went on to distinguish the lexicon and the marketing tools for corporate brand building as compared to product brands. He also developed the concept of the "soul" of a brand and the "body" of the brand—a somewhat distinct, philosophical approach to brands and what they stand for.

20. Engaged employees create successful companies

**Audience: leaders of a nationalised, general insurance
Company 20th February, 2015**

Using a real-life film clip of how even a well-run company treats its customers in a very routine way, Gopal developed the subject of engaged employees. He described the data which adduces to the regular and alarming decline in EE, not just in India but globally. Gopal argues that the real task of a manager is to lead his people. Provocatively he states that what he or she produces are

disengaged employees, so is today's manager a bit akin to a doctor who finishes off patients or a lawyer who loses client cases? He argues for a different mind-set among corporate leaders to restore a commitment to the real reason for their job—to engage employees who, in turn, can implement great ideas for great customer satisfaction.

21. Lessons from personal leadership moments

**Audience: top leaders of an electronics multinational company.
January, 2015**

Reflecting on his 48 years career, Gopal spoke to 30 corporate leaders of a leading electronics MNC about what he had learnt from the experiences he had during his career. The lessons were captured through memorable quotations and the supporting examples were chosen from his career. For example, one of the lessons was a Vincent Van Gogh statement, "The little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it." Another was from Aristotle, "Where the needs of the world and your talents cross, there lies your vocation."

Gopal also touched upon the emotion and time it takes to invest in a branded consumer business. He discussed why marketers have more knowledge of launching superior brands into existing markets and how marketers have forgotten how to generate demand into new categories. What does it take to create demand generating marketers?