



Book Review

Making excellence a habit: The secret to building a world class healthcare system in India, V. Mohan (Penguin Random House India Pvt. Ltd, Gurugram, India) 2021. 240 pages. Price: ₹ 699.00

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‘Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan “press on” has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race’.

This quote from the 30th American President, Calvin Coolidge, can perfectly depict the character and exemplary life of Dr Mohan. The story begins with how Dr Mohan brought India’s name onto the world stage. It was in June 2018 when Dr Viswanathan Mohan was awarded Dr Harold Rifkin Award for Distinguished International service in the cause of diabetes.

The book starts with the initial dreams of the author in the summer of 1968. A delightful childhood was well described as an inquisitive youngster with his love for poetry and English literature. It is humbling to read about Dr Mohan’s father, Prof Viswanathan, known as the ‘Father of Diabetology’ in India, and how he motivated Dr Mohan to take up medicine. It was thrilling to know about a 14 yr old discussing ‘research’ in India. Reading about the ‘red fort’ and the reference to ‘Psycho’ movie transported me to that time and reference to it provides a glimpse into Dr. Mohan’s psyche as a first year MBBS student. Verily, the first year of MBBS can be really intimidating and disenchanting. A poem on anatomy composed by Dr Mohan was really piquant and captured his state of mind very well. The story of Dr Frederick Banting and Charles Best was fascinating, and it is engrossing

to read how this story motivated Dr Mohan to work harder. He was driven to win the Physiology University Examination and was willing to go to great lengths to achieve this goal. There was a burning desire in his heart to attain success. Thus, the Herculean task of reading 17 physiology books and accomplishing this mammoth feat demonstrated extraordinary grit of Dr Mohan. Indeed, there is a fine line between genius and insanity, and it is said that, ‘there is no great genius without some touch of madness’.

However, tasting failure despite the hard work and having the patience to accept it is another life lesson altogether. The advice given by his father, ‘to focus on research’, which had the potential to change the world was well followed. The story of finding true love and life partner, Dr Rema during MBBS, was truly heart-touching. Only a medical student could think of ‘wooing’ a girl by offering her the ‘carefully prepared notes’.

Reading about a family full of inspirational doctors is awe-inspiring. Walking home to save the 50 paise bus fare and collecting money to buy books illustrated Dr Mohan’s passion for learning. The determination, grit, and resilience of character are also visible later in his life when several landmark studies are discussed which elucidated the unique profile of south Asians for increased susceptibility to type 2 diabetes mellitus. Getting funding from Wellcome Trust UK and fellowships from the UK and Germany was not achieved easily. The inspirational words of Dr Rema, ‘a bright future awaits us’, encouraged him to be the best version of himself. It acted as the force required for the inception and start of the Diabetes clinic in Chennai – beginning from a single clinic to 52 branches spread across the country. It just demonstrates the power of determination, hard work, and the attitude to grab every opportunity in life. Focus and resilience are the two secrets of success. Dr Rema is a shining

example of an embodiment of such marvellous grit. She supervised a Ph.D. thesis while battling breast cancer. Life is indeed for those who dare. Reading about the motivational lessons from Dr Mohan's childhood which left an indelible mark on his psyche and made him what he is today, was really thought-provoking. Father Whyte's motivational words, 'If you think you can, you will', built a foundation for his success.

Dr Mohan's exceptional passion for research is admirable. He burnt the midnight oil to read about innumerable articles on diabetes, and this gave him an extra edge. As the saying goes, he regularly remembered to 'sharpen his axe' to learn and grow. Writing a DSC thesis during flight time seemed like an out-of-this-world idea indeed! Dr Mohan popularized the concept of 'diabetes nurse educators'. However, life is not always a bed of roses. Dr Mohan harnessed the power of failure. Despite the closure of some of his national and international centres, he sprang back after every failure. This just demonstrated his mettle and power of positive thinking. He was also ingenious with out-of-the-box ideas, one such being 'Expo on Diabetes'. Thus, 'Diabetes 2000' was planned, which was an instant hit. Despite being mocked by some people for having such unconventional ideas, he always remained undeterred. He firmly believed in avoiding naysayers. CURES and ICMR-INDIAB Study, which involved the collection of large-scale epidemiological data are some other examples. Similarly, Chunampet Rural Development Project was a mega success and won him international acclaim and coverage on Discovery channel. There is no substitute for hard work, and to achieve greatness, one has to make a lot of sacrifices. Although being a workaholic, Dr Mohan was always a devoted family man and deeply loved and cared for his family. He speaks fondly of his daughter Anju and talks about how he made sure he spent his holidays with family and spent quality time with them. He had singlehandedly mastered the art of time management. When people were catching up on their sleep during flights, he was working on flights. Reducing stress and learning to laugh are also an important part of success. Undeniably, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The first step is the most difficult one, after that there will be a snowball effect.

Dr Mohan has a deep and intense spiritual craving to help people. Thousands of those who could not afford treatment were helped through free charitable clinics. He orchestrated the exemplary act of establishment of a DIRECT Charitable Trust, which provides lifelong free treatment. His acumen for research and skills were honed by international mentors and stalwarts in the medical field like Dr Podolsky. As a medical student, he was able to do outstanding world-class research on Diabetes. Even former US President Bill Clinton appreciated his efforts to combat and manage diabetes in a commendable fashion. Dr Mohan is a deeply spiritual person and believes in a strong mind-body connection. He talks about how he has been influenced by several spiritual Gurus who have guided him throughout his career. He strongly believes that positive reinforcement and spirituality can help in winning over even chronic ailments. The willpower and faith could move mountains. There are certain surreal events in our lives that cannot be explained by any logic. One such occurrence was the prediction by Dr Rema that Dr Mohan would be awarded the Padma Shri. Lo and behold, it did occur after her death! The vigorous shaking of garlands on pictures of Dr Rema and Bhagwan Sri Sathya Sai Baba just before the announcement of the Padma Shri Award was indeed like a divine connection.

Dr Mohan wears multiple hats with panache - a doctor, a researcher, a teacher, an administrator, a philanthropist and a motivational speaker. Dr Mohan's inspirational life has innumerable lessons for everyone to emulate and be inspired. The book 'Making excellence a habit' is a time capsule and beautifully teaches the basic qualities anyone needs for success. Doctors like him are one of the stalwarts in the world capable of bringing change, and his success story is something everyone should read.

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