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## SUCCESSION PLANNING IN FAMILY BUSINESS

### SMOOTH TRANSITION

Alfredo De Massis and  
Emanuela Rondi



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**Mansoor Hassan**

M: +91 9540060166 | E: [mhassan@aima.in](mailto:mhassan@aima.in)

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**Nidhi Sharma**

All India Management Association

15, Link Road, Lajpat Nagar - 3, New Delhi, India-110024

Mobile: +91-9810536427 | Email: [nidhi@aima.in](mailto:nidhi@aima.in)

Website: [www.aima.in](http://www.aima.in)



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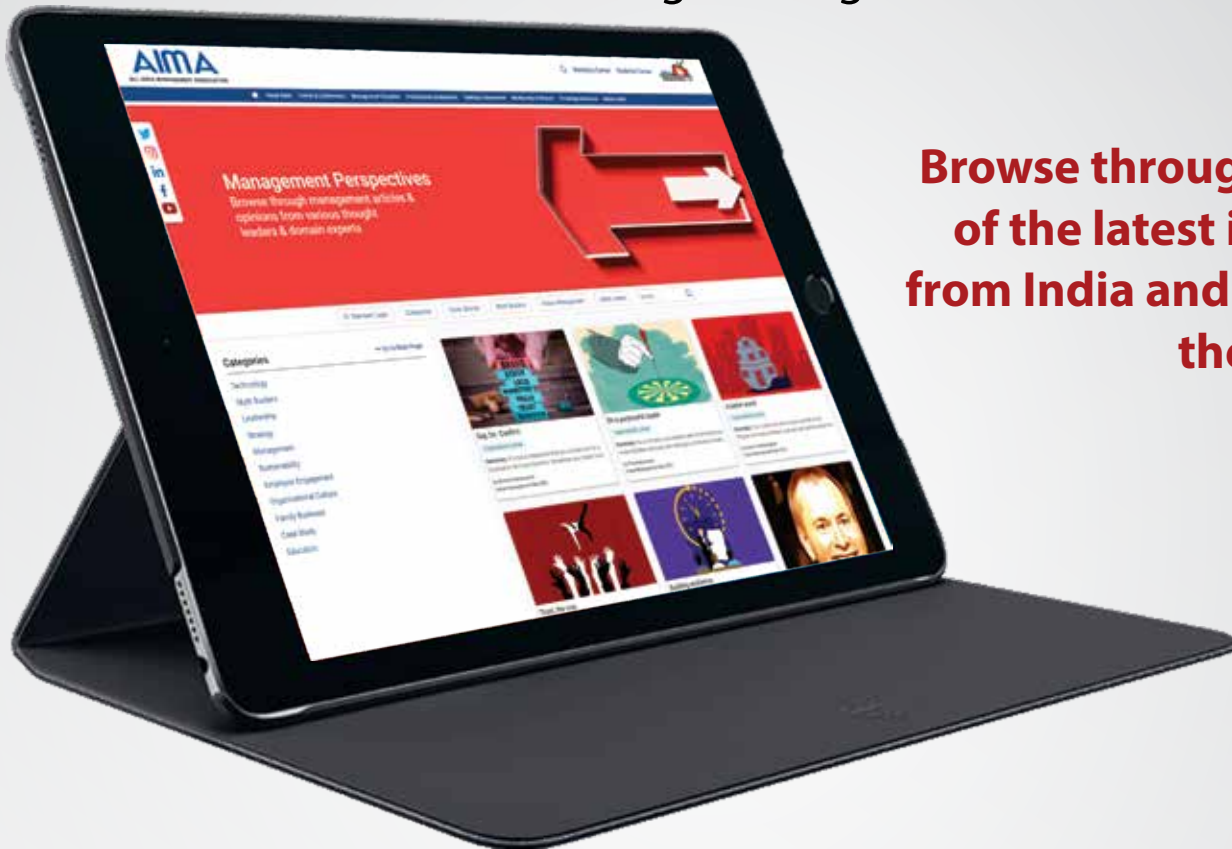
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# Succession planning: Securing the family and the business

Suneeta Reddy is Managing Director, Apollo Hospitals Enterprise Ltd.

**The legitimacy of the successor is central to the success of succession. There may be endless debates about the choice between the inheritors and the contributors, between anointment and election, between primogeniture and competence, and so on**

**L**eadership succession is a tricky issue. Many epics are about succession, and history has often been shaped by succession struggles. Succession poses a challenge for both the incumbent and the potential successor, and business families endeavour

to plan and execute a peaceful and productive transition. When there is no succession plan in place, the process can become an event with potentially undesirable consequences.

Succession choices may seem clear in the moment, but it is important to make decisions that work out as intended in the long term. The senior members of a business family have to think as far into the future as possible to establish a succession plan that

ensures the well-being of both the family and the wider stakeholders.

The legitimacy of the successor is central to the success of succession. There may be endless debates about the choice between the inheritors and the contributors, between anointment and election, between primogeniture and competence, and so on. Succession planning is a serious responsibility which could result in either unity

or disputes, consolidation or fragmentation, growth or decline.

The key to effective succession planning is to consider all options. Entitlement can be a source of predictability and continuity, but a pre-determined outcome can often have a corrosive effect on effort and ambition. The candidate pool must be broad and not limited to the eldest son or the bloodline of the founder or incumbent.

The founder or the incumbent leader must accept the possibility of significant conflict between different claimants, each believing they are the most legitimate or worthy. They must begin shortlisting future leaders early and invest in developing their ability to lead both their siblings and critical associates. They should also be prepared to professionalise the business in the event family dynamics begin to undermine the business's interests. Transitioning to a passive ownership can often protect both the family and the business.

In many family businesses, the family members depend on the business for their employment and lifestyle. Capital allocation for individual ventures of the members, or a lack of consensus on investing outside the family business, are matters of debate that may come up. Succession planning in such families must be based on a clearly stated correlation between what the next leader brings to the table and what he or she can give away from it. It is vital that such entitlement and accountability is

**For succession to work, it is vital for the retiring or departing leader to step out of the spotlight. Remaining around the business after passing on the leadership can create confusion about who the real leader is**

visible to other stakeholders, especially the employees. To outsiders, leadership must be seen as earned, and not simply granted based on family dynamics.

Identifying the future successor is best done when the next generation is still young, unless the family practices primogeniture. The contenders can be filtered by their display of initiative, ingenuity, prudence, engagement with stakeholders, and the willingness and ability to positively influence family members. It helps to make family members understudies of senior employees in the early phase of their leadership

training, rather than placing them directly under the incumbent leader.

Once 'the one' is chosen, it is important for the family to signal its choice by making the successor visible alongside the current leader, with the leader occasionally allowing the chosen successor to take centre stage. The next leader will inherit not just the chair but also the investors, the board, the employees, and the business partners. While it is inevitable that the new leader would recruit new followers, some of the old timers must be retained long enough to groom the

new team. This requires succession planning for the boards and executives too.

For succession to work, it is vital for the retiring or departing leader to step out of the spotlight. Remaining around the business after passing on the leadership can create confusion about who the real leader is. This often leads to friction, which can be avoided.

While it is difficult to predict the future business environment and the smooth transition of the chosen successors, it is imperative to make succession a planned and well-orchestrated exercise, rather than leaving it unresolved, leading to conflicts among the next generation.

Family relationships are precious and business matters should not affect generational relationships anchored in love. Equally, founders and leaders care deeply about their legacy, and it is important to ensure that their contributions continue to inspire and guide long after their time. Thoughtful succession planning is an important tool to achieve both these meaningful goals. 

*The opinion expressed is personal.*

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Succession planning is a critical process in family businesses to ensure the continuity and longevity of the organisation across generations. Without a clear succession plan, family businesses risk facing leadership gaps, internal conflict, and even business failure during the transition period.

Succession planning should begin well in advance of the anticipated leadership transition, which allows time for identifying potential successors, providing necessary training, and addressing any family or business challenges. It is also important to clearly outline roles, responsibilities, and expectations which will help avoid misunderstandings and ensure a smooth transition of leadership.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of succession planning in a family business is family relationships. They can complicate or ease succession planning, so open and honest communication is essential to align family members on the vision for the business and resolve potential conflicts.

Succession planning in family business should be a planned, well-thought-out exercise in balancing strategy, emotions, and practicality. As Alfredo De Massis and Emanuela Rondi, co-authors, *The Family Business Book* write in the cover story, "While the process can be challenging, it is also an opportunity to strengthen the foundation of the business and set the stage for long-term success."

Do write in with your views to [imeditorial@spentamultimedia.com](mailto:imeditorial@spentamultimedia.com)

*Maneck Davar*  
Maneck Davar

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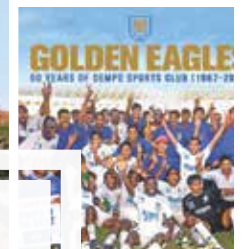
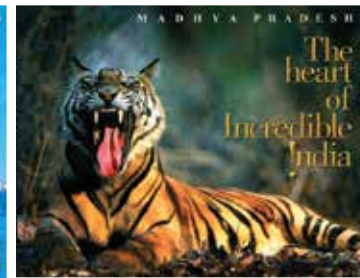
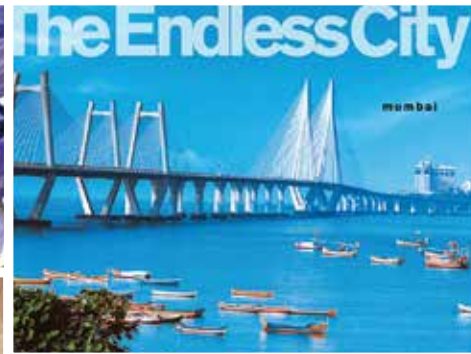
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Robert Gomes | 022-67341024  
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[bhairav@spentamultimedia.com](mailto:bhairav@spentamultimedia.com)



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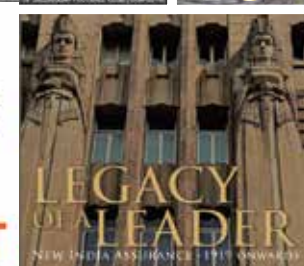
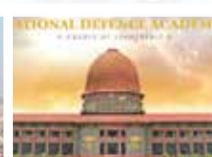
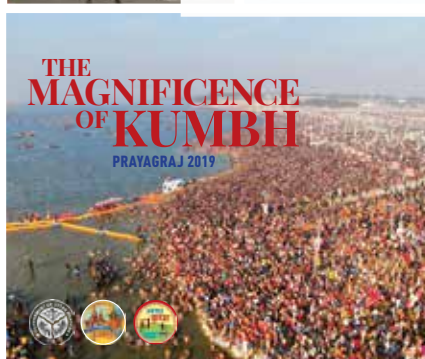
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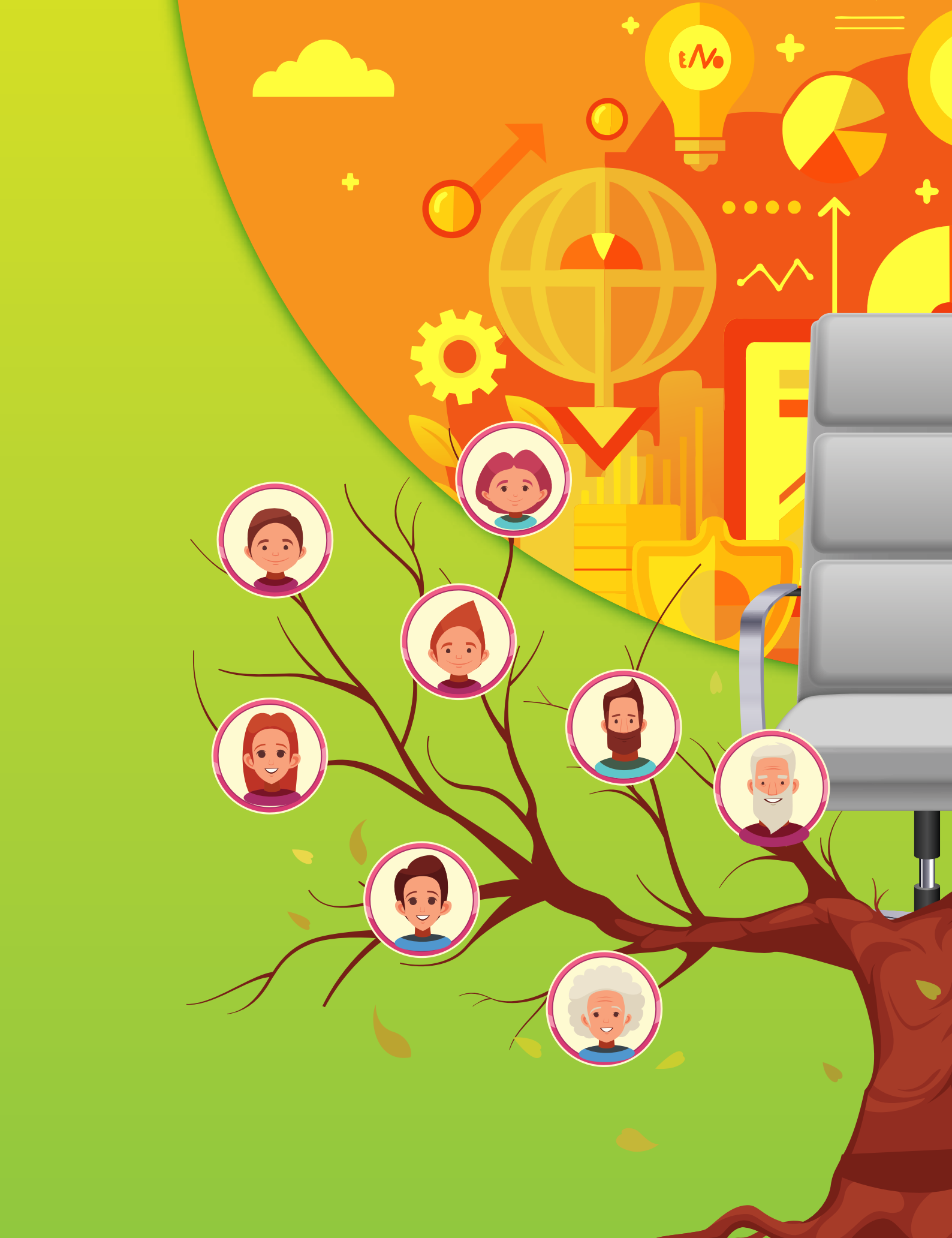
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ALL IN THE FAMILY



Dinesh Bhogale

# Smooth transition

Succession planning is both an art and a science, requiring a delicate balance of emotional intelligence, strategic foresight, and practical execution.

♦ ALFREDO DE MASSIS AND EMANUELA RONDÌ, CO-AUTHORS, *THE FAMILY BUSINESS BOOK*



These statistics highlight the importance of strategic planning, open communication, and adaptability in ensuring smooth transitions. This article explores the key aspects of family business succession, offering practical insights into how family businesses can navigate this pivotal moment with confidence.

### Understanding the importance of succession planning

Succession planning is not merely about identifying the next leader; it is a comprehensive process that involves preparing the business, the family, the successor, and the incumbent for a successful transition. A well-executed succession plan ensures the continuity of the business's mission and values while equipping it to meet future challenges. Conversely, the absence of a clear plan can lead to leadership gaps, family conflicts, and even the eventual decline of the business. Effective succession planning also serves as a mechanism for preserving family unity. By clarifying roles, expectations, and decision-making processes, families can avoid misunderstandings and disputes that often arise during transitions. A thoughtful approach to succession fosters trust and collaboration among family members, strengthening the foundation of the enterprise.

### Engaging the next generation

The next generation plays a pivotal role in the success of succession planning. Younger family members often bring fresh perspectives, technological savvy, and a global mindset to the business. Encouraging their active involvement in the planning process ensures that the transition aligns with both traditional values and contemporary demands. To empower the next generation, families must create an environment that fosters learning, experimentation, and collaboration. This includes mentoring programs, exposure to different aspects of the business, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to decision-making. Sometimes, it is a good idea to establish a family academy.

**S**uccession is one of the most agonising processes for family businesses. The transition of leadership from one generation to the next not only determines the continuity of the enterprise but also shapes its future direction and sustainability. Yet, many family businesses struggle to manage this process effectively, with studies showing that less than 30 per cent make it to the second generation and only 12 per cent to the third.

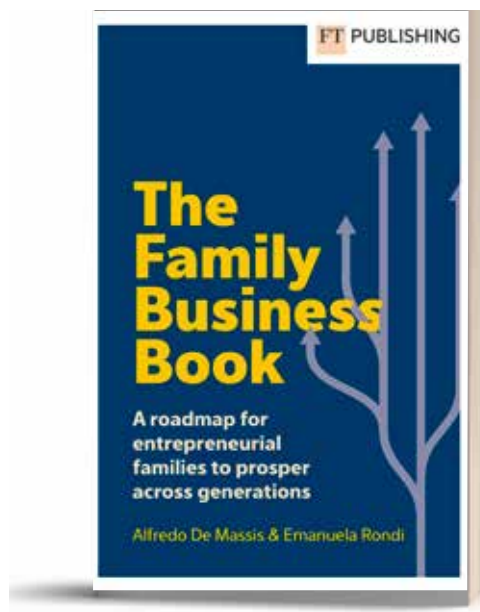
### Common challenges in succession planning

While the importance of succession planning is widely acknowledged, many family businesses face significant hurdles in implementing it. These challenges include:

- **Reluctance to let go:** Founders or current leaders often struggle to step back from their roles, driven by a deep attachment to the business and fear of losing control. This reluctance can delay the transition and hinder the successor's ability to lead effectively.
- **Unclear criteria for leadership:** Many family businesses fail to define the skills, qualities, and experience required for leadership roles. This lack of clarity can result in subjective or biased decision-making, potentially sidelining capable candidates.
- **Family dynamics and conflicts:** Succession planning often brings to the surface unresolved family tensions and competing interests. These dynamics can complicate the selection process and create divisions within the family.
- **Inadequate preparation of successors:** Successors may lack the necessary experience, training, or confidence



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to take on leadership roles. Without proper grooming, even the most talented individuals may struggle to navigate the complexities of running a family business.

- **External pressures:** Economic uncertainties, market competition, and regulatory changes add another layer of complexity to succession planning. Balancing these external factors with internal family considerations can be challenging.

### Key steps for smooth succession planning

While succession planning is inherently complex, a structured approach can help family businesses overcome challenges and ensure a seamless transition. Here are some key steps to consider:

- **Start early:** Succession planning is a long-term process that requires careful thought and preparation. Starting early allows the business to identify and develop potential successors, address gaps in skills or experience, and create a clear roadmap for the transition. Ideally, planning should



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begin years before the anticipated change in leadership. Early planning also provides an opportunity to test successors in various roles and settings, allowing them to gain practical experience and build credibility within the organisation.

- **Define leadership criteria:** Clarity is crucial in determining who is best suited to lead the business. Family businesses should establish objective criteria for leadership roles, focusing on attributes such as competency, vision, decision-making skills, and alignment with the company's values. These criteria should be communicated transparently to all stakeholders, ensuring that the selection process is fair and merit-based.
- **Foster open communication:** Open and honest communication is the cornerstone

of successful succession planning. Family members and key stakeholders should be encouraged to share their perspectives, aspirations, and concerns. This dialogue helps build consensus and ensures that everyone feels heard and respected. Regular family meetings or facilitated discussions can create a safe space for addressing sensitive topics, such as leadership preferences, ownership structures, and future roles for non-family members.

- **Prepare successor(s):** Identifying a successor is only the first step; equipping them with the skills and confidence to lead is equally important. Successors should be given opportunities to learn about the business, take on increasing responsibilities, and develop their

**It is important to strike a balance between preserving family influence and leveraging external expertise**

leadership capabilities. Mentorship from current leaders, along with formal education or training programs, can enhance their readiness. It is also essential to expose successors to external experiences, such as working in other organisations or industries. This exposure broadens their perspective and fosters innovation, preparing them to bring fresh ideas to the family business. Besides preparing the next generation to join the business, it is paramount

to prepare the senior generation to leave. Often times, next generations are competent and committed but senior leadership does not give them space to rule.

■ **Balance family and non-family roles:**

Family businesses often rely on a mix of family and non-family members to drive their operations. It is important

to strike a balance between preserving family influence and leveraging external expertise. Non-family executives can provide valuable perspectives and stability, particularly during transitions. Including non-family members in leadership roles or governance structures, such as boards of directors, can help ensure that decisions are guided by professional insights and not solely by family dynamics.

■ **Plan for ownership and governance:**

Succession planning extends beyond leadership roles to include ownership and governance structures. Family businesses should establish clear policies regarding the transfer of ownership, inheritance, and decision-making authority. This may involve creating legal agreements, such as trusts or shareholder agreements, to formalise these arrangements.

Governance structures, such as family councils or advisory boards, can provide a framework for managing family involvement and resolving conflicts. These structures also help maintain



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Alfredo De Massis** is co-author, *The Family Business Book: A roadmap for entrepreneurial families to prosper across generations.*





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accountability and transparency during the transition process.

- **Seek professional guidance:** Succession planning is a multifaceted process that often requires expertise in areas such as law, finance, and organisational development. Engaging external advisors—such as lawyers, accountants, or family business consultants—can provide valuable guidance and ensure that all aspects of the transition are addressed. Professional advisors can also act as neutral facilitators, helping families navigate sensitive discussions and mediate conflicts.

## Conclusion

Succession planning is both an art and a science, requiring a delicate balance

of emotional intelligence, strategic foresight, and practical execution. While the process can be challenging, it is also an opportunity to strengthen the foundation of the business and set the stage for long-term success. By starting early, defining clear criteria, fostering communication, and preparing successors, family businesses can ensure a smooth and sustainable generational transition. In doing so, they not only preserve their legacy but also empower the next generation to lead with confidence and vision. As the adage goes, “Failing to plan is planning to fail.” For family businesses, succession planning and execution is the key to ensuring that their legacy thrives for generations to come. **IM**

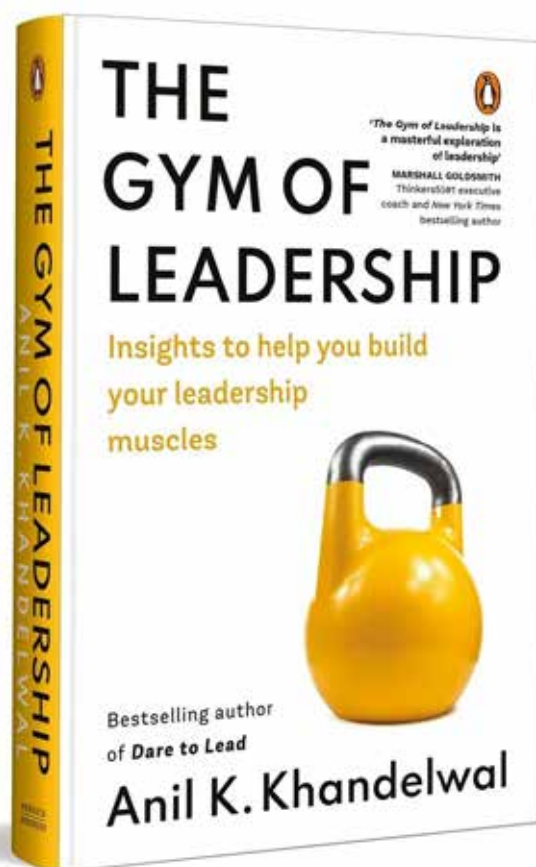


### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Emanuela Rondi** is co-author, *The Family Business Book: A roadmap for entrepreneurial families to prosper across generations.*

# The Gym of Leadership

— Insights to help you build your leadership muscles



## THE GYM OF LEADERSHIP — INSIGHTS TO HELP YOU BUILD YOUR LEADERSHIP MUSCLES

### Author:

Dr. Anil K. Khandelwal

### Publisher:

Penguin India Ltd

### Reviewed by:

Dr Aquil Busrai, an HR leader with over five decades of industry experience with Unilever in India and Kenya, Motorola in Asia Pacific countries, Shell Malaysia, and IBM India. Dr Busrai is the past National President of the National HRD Network and a Fellow of All India Management Association and Institute of Directors.

In a world saturated with countless books, articles, blogs, and oft-repeated rhetoric on leadership, one might wonder: “Why another book on leadership?” Dr Anil K Khandelwal anticipates this question right from the outset and responds with a refreshingly unique perspective on leadership development. His approach stands out for its practicality and emphasis on personal

accountability.

Dr Khandelwal underscores two crucial principles:

**1. Leadership as a personal responsibility:** Leadership, he opines, is not a quality that can be outsourced to an organisation, a coach, or a mentor. The journey begins with the individual. Unless a person takes proactive steps to embrace leadership, it remains elusive.

However, when an individual commits to this path, organisational support—through experiences, training, and mentoring—becomes a powerful enabler. This shift from external dependency to internal drive is a key differentiator in his approach.

**2. Leadership as a discipline, much like physical fitness:** Dr Khandelwal likens leadership development to fitness training: it demands discipline, passion, consistency, and guidance. Just as there are no shortcuts to physical strength, there are no quick fixes to becoming a leader. Leadership, like fitness, is cultivated through sustained effort and practice.

In *The Gym of Leadership*, Dr. Khandelwal—a transformational leader known for steering the remarkable turnaround of Bank of Baroda—offers a compelling and actionable framework for leadership. Drawing from his extensive experience as CEO and author of the widely acclaimed *Dare to Lead*, he presents leadership not as an abstract concept but as a tangible skill honed through continuous effort. His metaphor of leadership as ‘gym training’ resonates deeply, making the book a standout in a crowded field.

This is not just another book on leadership—it is a call to action, urging readers to take charge of their leadership journey with discipline, determination, and a commitment to lifelong growth.

As mentioned above, the book’s central metaphor—leadership as a muscle—sets the tone, emphasising that leadership growth demands consistent, intentional effort. Rich with real-life anecdotes from Dr. Khandelwal’s extensive journey, the narrative makes leadership principles relateable and actionable.

**Core concepts: The ‘Leadership Muscles’**

Dr Khandelwal structures *The Gym of Leadership* around 18 core leadership skills, meticulously organised into four key areas of focus. These

skills are designed to equip leaders of all backgrounds—regardless of position, industry, age, or gender—with the tools to navigate the myriad challenges they encounter. The analogy to a healthy, well-trained body is fitting: just as a robust immune system fortifies the body against illness, these 18 leadership skills empower leaders to weather adversity and excel in high-stress situations.

**Section 1: Understanding the Self**

1. Self-Awareness: The foundation of effective leadership lies in understanding oneself.
2. Reflection: Deepen self-knowledge through thoughtful introspection.
3. Self-Management: Harness personal strengths for maximum impact.
4. Self-Discipline: Sustain growth and achievement with consistent effort.
5. Time Management: Optimise time to maximise results.
6. Resilience: Develop the ability to recover from setbacks stronger than before.

**Section 2: Emotional Regulation**

7. Emotional Regulation & Anger Management: Master emotions to lead with clarity and composure.
8. Compassion: Cultivate empathy to enhance leadership effectiveness.
9. Courage: Conquer fear to make bold, necessary decisions.

**Section 3: Managing Relationships**

10. Relationships: Build meaningful, trust-based connections.
11. Authenticity: Lead with integrity and transparency.
12. Credibility: Earn trust and establish a strong reputation.
13. Humility: Stand out through humility and service to others.
14. Fairness: Champion justice and equity within the organisation.

## Section 4: Communication and Conversation

15. Communication: The bedrock of impactful leadership.
16. Listening: Understand what matters most by truly hearing others.
17. Detoxifying Communication: Take responsibility for the effect of your words.
18. Dialogue: Utilise conversations to solve problems and build consensus.

Each chapter delves into these areas with practical exercises, real-world examples, and thought-provoking questions, offering a hands-on guide for self-improvement.

### Unique approach to leadership

Unlike typical leadership books filled with generic advice, *The Gym of Leadership* uses its gym metaphor deeply and effectively. Emotional intelligence is likened to building stamina, strategic thinking to precision in weightlifting, and conflict management to sparring, making abstract concepts tangible. This framework encourages leaders to push beyond their comfort zones, reinforcing that leadership development is a continuous journey requiring discipline and resilience.

### Practical and Engaging

Dr Khandelwal balances theoretical insights with actionable strategies, focusing on self-awareness, communication, and team-building. His emphasis on emotional intelligence is especially relevant today, advocating for empathy, self-regulation, and social awareness as essential skills for building trust and fostering collaboration.

The book challenges readers with self-assessments and reflection prompts, making it a highly interactive and practical tool for leadership growth.

*The Gym of Leadership* is packed with insightful anecdotes drawn from Dr Anil

K Khandelwal's rich personal experiences and those of leaders across the globe. These real-world examples bring the nuances of leadership to life, offering readers a relatable and practical guide. The book's structure makes it both engaging and actionable, with each chapter divided into two distinct sections:

- **Theoretical Foundations:** The first section provides a solid grounding in leadership concepts, supported by relevant research, offering readers a deep understanding of the skills being discussed.
- **Practical Workouts:** The second section is dedicated to hands-on exercises designed to help readers develop and strengthen these skills, much like a fitness regime for leadership.

Each chapter concludes with a reflection section, encouraging leaders to introspect and identify areas for personal improvement, fostering a continuous learning mindset.

### Final thoughts

What sets this book apart is its strong endorsements from global leadership icons such as Jeffrey Pfeffer (Stanford University), Michael Useem (Wharton), Manfred Kets de Vries (INSEAD), and Marshall Goldsmith, widely regarded as the world's leading executive coach. Additionally, several esteemed Indian CEOs, HR leaders, coaches, and consultants have praised the book for its practical relevance and impact.

Dr Khandelwal's blend of practical wisdom, engaging storytelling, and actionable insights makes *The Gym of Leadership* a must-read for those serious about transitioning from executive roles to true leadership positions. Its appeal spans generations, offering valuable lessons not only for seasoned CXOs and CEOs but also for millennials eager to build their leadership muscles early in their careers. 

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Lies, damned lies, and “the client is always right”, says Terence D’Costa, Director of Brand & Advertising, American Hospitality Academy, as he separates fact from fiction in advertising.

**MYTH  
BUSTER**

# Crack the advertising code

**I**n advertising, we often fall victim to seductive shortcuts that promise quick wins or instant fame. The truth is, the real magic happens in the details, not the glossy headlines. Success is rarely about one stroke of genius or a viral moment—it is about a well-executed strategy that resonates consistently with an audience. The true challenge lies in understanding people, not just trends. It’s about crafting authentic connections and building trust, one message at a time. We should embrace complexity, seek out partnerships that challenge us, and take the long view. Advertising is not about fast fame; it is about lasting influence. Let’s take a closer look at some of these myths, split them open, and explore why they shouldn’t dictate our approach to the craft.

## **MYTH 1: The client is always right.**

“The client is always right” is a mantra that refuses to die. In the world of advertising, this myth often manifests as an insistence to cater to every whim, even at the expense of creative integrity. While the sentiment may stem from good intentions, it’s a slippery slope to mediocre work and strained relationships.

The truth is, the client isn’t always right—but they are always essential. Effective client

servicing is not about blind agreement; it’s about partnership, education, and shared goals. A good agency doesn’t just execute instructions; it adds value by challenging assumptions, offering expertise, and ensuring that the final output is both strategic and creative.

Look at the famous ‘Daag Acche Hain’ campaign by Surf Excel. Had the agency simply followed conventional client expectations, highlighting product benefits with spotless white clothes, the campaign would never have become iconic. Instead, the agency convinced the client to embrace a bold, emotional narrative that celebrated stains as proof of childhood exploration. The result? A campaign that resonated deeply with audiences and transformed the brand’s identity.

Client servicing thrives when there’s mutual respect and a willingness to collaborate. Sometimes, saying “no” or proposing an alternative is the highest form of service. After all, clients do not just hire agencies to agree—they hire them to succeed.

Because in advertising, the ultimate goal isn’t to please; it’s to perform. And that requires courage, not just compliance. It takes two to tango, and even the biggest ideas need legs to run.

## **MYTH 2: Great advertising is all about the ‘Big Idea’.**

The oft-romanticised notion of the ‘Big Idea’—a singular, transformative concept that can instantly revitalise a brand—is a seductive myth. It may seem poetic, but in reality, it is a comforting delusion perpetuated during countless coffee-stained brainstorming sessions.

Advertising success rarely hinges on one grandiose concept. It’s not about conjuring mythical beasts of creativity but about weaving a seamless tapestry of strategy, execution, and consistency. The ‘Big Idea’ may grab the spotlight, but without the unsung heroes of data insights, targeted media placement, and meticulous execution, it is just a lone performer on an empty stage.

Examine Coca-Cola’s ‘Share a Coke’ campaign. A marvellously simple idea: put names on bottles. But its brilliance was not the idea itself; it was the ecosystem around it—personalisation, social media activation, and the emotional resonance of sharing. The sagacity was not lightning striking; it was countless little sparks working in harmony.

So let us not mistake a catchy tagline or visual for the entire engine. Advertising is a discipline, not a divine revelation. The true mark of excellence lies in turning a thousand moving parts into one cohesive masterpiece.

Ideas may shine, but execution is the real showstopper.

## **MYTH 3: Big budgets equal big impact.**

The glittering allure of hefty budgets often creates the belief that handsome investments in fancy equipment, sprawling sets, and dazzling post-production automatically translate to outstanding video content. While resources matter, this myth conveniently overlooks the essence of impactful storytelling: creativity and audience connection.

Take Thailand’s viral commercials as an

example. Many are produced on modest budgets but resonate deeply because of their emotional storytelling. Ads like Thai Life Insurance’s ‘Unsung Hero’ or TrueMove H’s ‘Giving’ are simple in execution but profoundly moving. These videos gained global acclaim not for their lavish visuals, but for their ability to tug at heartstrings and reflect universal human experiences.

Contrast this with some opulent productions that rely heavily on visual spectacle but fail to deliver a coherent narrative or emotional impact. Without a compelling story or a clear understanding of the audience, no amount of drone shots or CGI wizardry can save a lackluster video.

Closer home, reflect on the Cred ‘Not Everyone Gets It’ campaign featuring Rahul Dravid’s ‘Indiranagar ka Gunda’ moment. Despite a relatively simple production setup, the ad went viral for its unexpected humor and clever twist on Dravid’s calm persona. The campaign became a cultural phenomenon, sparking memes and conversations across social media. It wasn’t a high-budget extravaganza but a masterclass in leveraging creativity and cultural relevance to grab attention and create buzz. This example proves that relatability, wit, and a strong understanding of your audience can outshine any lavish production.

In Asia, where cultural diversity and emotional storytelling reign supreme, the most memorable videos are often those that focus on connecting with viewers, not just dazzling them. Because at the end of the day, audiences remember how a video made them feel—not how much it cost.

## **MYTH 4: Viral content is the ultimate goal of social media marketing.**

The siren song of virality often deludes brands and clients into believing that one spectacular post or trending meme can be the silver bullet



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to solve all their marketing challenges. It is an enticing myth. After all, who wouldn't want millions of views, likes, and shares? But the truth is far less glamorous: success on social media isn't about being a one-hit wonder; it is about creating sustained, meaningful engagement.

Viral content might spark temporary attention, but attention without a solid strategy is like fireworks, briefly dazzling before fading into the night. True social media mastery lies in consistency, authenticity, and value. Brands like Fevicol or Zomato have set themselves apart not because they chase virality, but because they've built a track record of delivering content that resonates with their audience over time. Whether it's Fevicol's clever, understated humour or Zomato's witty and culturally relevant posts, their success lies in knowing their audience deeply and speaking to them in a way that feels natural and genuine.

Virality, by its nature, is unpredictable and ephemeral. Even if a campaign or post goes viral, the impact is fleeting unless it aligns with a broader strategy. Think of social media marketing as a marathon, not a sprint. Building trust, fostering loyalty, and nurturing a sense of community requires patience and persistence.

The brands that win are those that prioritise a lasting connection over a fleeting moment of fame.

At its heart, social media is a relationship-building platform, not a popularity contest. Success isn't about chasing trends; it's about being a brand that audiences seek out, value, and remember long after the buzz dies down.

Because in the end, consistency doesn't just beat virality—it outlasts it.

### **MYTH 5: Advertising is all about selling products.**

Consider now the ancient relic of a notion: advertising exists solely to sell. As prehistoric as Doordarshan's rainbow screen, this idea hobbles in like a 'babu' with a dusty ledger. To dismiss advertising as merely a merchant's sales pitch is like reducing cricket to just bat and ball—technically true, but missing the heart of the game.

Here's the greater truth, gilded in modern relevance: advertising isn't simply about sales—it's about storytelling, connection, and most importantly, aspiration. It shapes perception, defines culture, and builds brands into icons. Nike? More than shoes. Apple? A symphony of innovation. Advertising sells not just products but possibilities.

Would Chanel No. 5's ethereal allure endure, were it hawked with, "Smells nice, buy one?" Hardly. Advertising transforms the mundane into the magical, the tangible into the timeless. It whispers narratives, not prices.

So let us not diminish its artistry to grubby cash registers. Advertising is not a roadside fruit stand; it is the 'Louvre' of commerce, where ideas are curated, elevated, and immortalised. Sales may be its endgame, but belief, crafted with precision and wit, is its most powerful tool.

"People don't buy products; they buy better versions of themselves." Case closed. ■



*Indian sports authorities, management, and sports persons have a huge task at hand if they hope to strike 'gold' in the upcoming Olympic games.*

♦ KRISHAN KALRA , ALL INDIA MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

**MANAGEMENT**

# Win some, lose some

**I**ndia's contingent—117 athletes and 118 support staff—to Paris 2024 Olympics has come back with a haul little lower than what we had bagged at Tokyo and drastically below our expectations of 'at least double digits'. There were moments of joy and glory when Manu Bhaker was awarded two bronzes on successive days and many heartbreaks like the same brilliant girl getting fourth place in another event (actually her favourite) or weightlifter Mira Bai Chalu ending up at the same unfortunate spot or our fancied shuttler Lakshya Sen's near miss in the singles; also fourth places in mixed team archery, mixed team skeet, and men's 10 m air rifle. I can't forget Manu's response when a reporter asked her, "Despite having won two medals, why do you look so crestfallen?" Poor girl, in tears, responded with a forced half smile "because fourth place is never good."

The biggest disappointment was, of course, the exceptionally brave wrestler Vinesh Phogat getting disqualified for being 100 grams over the 50-kg class she was competing in. Then, there was the ecstasy of beating England in men's hockey and agony when the same wonderful team lost to Germany. Our men later got their due by winning the bronze against Spain—a

precious back-to-back bronze after Tokyo. It was also disappointing to see our valiant Neeraj Chopra surrendering the gold to his Pakistani rival Nadeem who threw a literal monster full 3-1/2 meters ahead of our man's best.

Throughout the two weeks of the competition, in addition to the excruciating hard work and training of the competitors and the help of their support staff, there were also the prayers of 1.4 billion Indians but life and sports competition can be cruel. All of us want our teams to bring home more medals from international events and we actually did well at the Commonwealth and Asian Games. Our desires are big, and why not?

Everyone desires infinitely more than what we end up getting but there is a huge difference between desires and ground realities and we must do an honest, objective, and dispassionate introspection of our strengths and weaknesses. And all this must be done before we start preparing for the next big event. Before I come to that, a I have a few words to share about the unfair, unwanted, and cruel criticism of our boys and girls who fail.

We love, adore and hero-worship our Olympians, we celebrate their victories, but when one of them fails to make the grade,

**We love, adore and hero-worship our Olympians, we celebrate their victories but when one of them fails to make the grade, without giving even a moment's thought, we switch to cruel criticism**

without giving even a moment's thought, we switch to cruel criticism that does huge damage; it demoralises them and makes them feel guilty. I have heard people making snide remarks like "Six medals *aur* population 140 crores." Some troll the players on social media, some start finding faults in the system of selections, while some become experts without knowing anything about the game.

Imagine what it does to players' psyche. Our politicians are, of course, in another league. Sticking to their 'opposition *dharma*' they shout "conspiracy" when Phogat gets disqualified! Pray, conspiracy by whom? Are the referees and judges hatching a conspiracy against our players? They demand 'thorough investigation' into

technical reasons behind the disqualification and add that "the truth must come to the fore." All this happened in the backdrop of the gutsy girl going through a lot in her personal and professional lives.

Before I move to 'what needs to be done' let me also mention here that in the midst

of all this gloom and despondency, we must not forget a silver lining. Six medals is definitely sub-par but let us also recall that after Norman Pritchard (his Indian nationality is still disputed as our rulers claimed that he was British) won two medals at Paris in 1900, it took Dhyan Chand's boys 28 years to clinch the hockey gold in Amsterdam—and the Indian hockey team kept winning in LA (1932), Berlin (1936), London (1948), Helsinki (1952), and Melbourne (1956) but it was only in 1952 at Helsinki that wrestler KD Jadhav won India's first individual medal! After another long drought, it was in 1996 that Leander Peas broke the jinx at Atlanta, by winning a bronze in tennis—the first Asian in Olympic history to win a tennis medal and the only Indian till date. We moved from three medals in 2008 to six in 2012, two in 2016, and the crowning glory of seven in 2020 at Tokyo. Fourth places are agonisingly painful, but also show a flicker of hope that we can improve in 2028. Of course, we have to thoroughly overhaul our systems and approach and work very hard for the same.

### **What needs to be done**

- Let me begin with our sports federations and who runs them. Except in case of athletics, no president is a sports person!





The hockey president is both a sportsman and a politician, which is great. Even in the case of Sr. VPs/Honorary Secretaries, no one is a sports person except for athletics and table tennis. In the third rung—VPs—only six out of the 60 odd office bearers are sports persons. These federations are responsible for preparing and sending our teams to the Olympics! If only we could fill up all federations with acclaimed sport persons as heads and even three– or four lower rungs, give them autonomy, make sure that there is no political interference, government allocates sufficient funds, training is scientific and meticulous, get them adequate international exposure, ensure objective and transparent selection process, then we can see rapid progress.

- Let's now look at our training platforms. A recent IE report came with the startling findings that the National Collegiate Athletics Association of USA, which administers the inter collegiate athletics, is the real topper in the Paris medals tally. NCAA schools sent more than 1000 former and current athletes, who represented 100 different countries to the

Paris Olympics. Between 272 of them, they won a mind boggling 330 medals for 26 countries—more than the combined haul of USA (126), China (91), Japan (45) and Australia (53). Which school, college, or university in India can claim anything in this area? Colleges and schools have to be our nurseries for nurturing talent! Chhatrasal Akhada in North Delhi has proven to be the 'real nursery of our Olympic winners in wrestling'. Out of our cumulative eight Olympic medals six have come from Chhatrasal. Why don't we replicate a thousand such *akhadas* all over the country?

- We can't start with a small base of, say, five or ten thousand athletes at our few academies (SAI-2, Regional Centers -11, Centers of Excellence -14, Training Centers - 56 and Special Area Games -20); grand total 103) and hope to win a large number of medals at any international meet. China, for example, has an estimated 300 million playing table tennis—out of them about 10 million at a competitive level. Reportedly, they have one table tennis table for every seven people. That



is how the Chinese dominate the game. In football, I understand, most European and South American countries have 100s of professional clubs in major cities. They also have semi-professional and amateur clubs. Similarly, badminton and swimming are practised religiously in China, USA, Australia, and Great Britain. Same is the story of South Korea for weightlifting and Iran for wrestling. To succeed in a big way, in any discipline, it has to become a culture in the country—like chess has become in India and we have found glory internationally over decades.

- There is also a culture of ‘giving back to society’ by top sports persons and athletes which is, sadly, not as common in our case as one would like to see. There are a few athletes and sports persons who have contributed to their sports in different ways after retirement and there are also those who have been running coaching academies; but the number of such people is limited. They are all famous, loved by fans, honoured by the government, admired by the companies who engage them for endorsements, but I wish many

more were actively involved in helping and coaching juniors aspiring to excel in their sport.

## Surprising media apathy

Even though media reporting of the two-week-long Olympics was admirable, curiously an important event at Paris, on August 11, went virtually unreported! On this day, at a special session of the International Olympics committee, our 2008 shooting gold medalist—the first Indian to win an individual medal (Beijing 2008) Abhinav Bindra was awarded the ‘Olympic Order’ for his exceptional services to the Olympics mission and propagating Olympic Values. Unknown to most of us, this media-shy, quiet gentleman has been involved with a ‘values education’ program that will benefit 15 million children in Assam and Odisha and also a sustainability project to plant one million trees in Odisha.

We have a long way to go—from six medals at Paris to, hopefully, 15 at LA, and in geometric progression thereafter—but we will need to do a lot of cleaning up and hard work. **IM**



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Krishan Kalra** is a past President of All India Management Association

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♦ DR STEPHANIE W CAWTHON, AUTHOR, *DISABILITY IS HUMAN*

# Breaking down barriers

**H**ere's a startling fact: up to one in four people have a disability at any given time. This includes many people in our workplaces and those who seek to make meaningful contributions, both for their own careers and in their communities.

Disabilities vary greatly, ranging from conditions people are born with to those that are acquired later in life. Disabilities can be physical, sensory, cognitive, psychological, or neurological in nature. Some last for a lifetime and some are temporary. Many disabilities are hidden—up to 70 per cent are not apparent to a casual observer—especially those that are related to chronic health and mental health conditions.

Even though there is such a high percentage of people with disabilities, they experience far lower success in the workplace, both in entry-level jobs and, far more so, in leadership positions. This represents an area for growth in our global marketplace and our communities, one that is often overlooked in our strategic planning for both developing workplace talent and reaching a broader customer base.

In an era where retaining high-performing employees is a strategic imperative, many organisations are still struggling with this crucial aspect: Accessibility for all employees, including those with disabilities. This accessibility gap results in lost opportunity not just for individual employees, but for entire industries that seek to reach clients and customers, many of whom also have disabilities and need accessible products and services.

But accessibility is the endpoint, not the starting point. Recent research reveals that the greatest obstacle to accessibility is not technological or financial—it is the need to build an accessibility mindset. Accessibility mindset is more than a checklist of to-do items—it reflects our understanding of disability and how we plan for accommodations and flexibility in our work.

Negative attitudes about disability have a cumulative and demoralising effect on employees: “The hardest part wasn’t dealing with my disability. It was dealing with people’s assumptions about what I couldn’t do,” shared one professional, highlighting the critical need to challenge preconceptions. Starting at “no” is a common experience for disabled people seeking accessibility at work. When an accommodations or accessibility request appears, here are some typical responses:

“If we say ‘yes’ to this, it will open the floodgates for more requests.”

“I can’t give access to that because I don’t know how.”

“Accommodations make it unfair for everyone else.”

“That’s a lot of money to spend on one person.”

These reactions reflect a deficit approach to accessibility: framing possibilities for disabled employees around the limitations and costs instead of the value of potential and organisation-wide benefit.

Consider these reframed responses:

“How can implementing this request help us build stronger policies?”

“Where can we build organisational capacity and scale our processes?”

“What does this accommodation request tell us about accessibility in our business?”

“How is this RoI measured in retention and future recruitment?”

Notice that each of these is now a question—a place of curiosity—instead of a flat-out denial based on negative assumptions. Accommodations and accessibility are rarely about serving one person or one need: they are about setting up your organisation for success both now and in the future. Asking good questions will compound the value of each accessibility decision for you and your organisation.

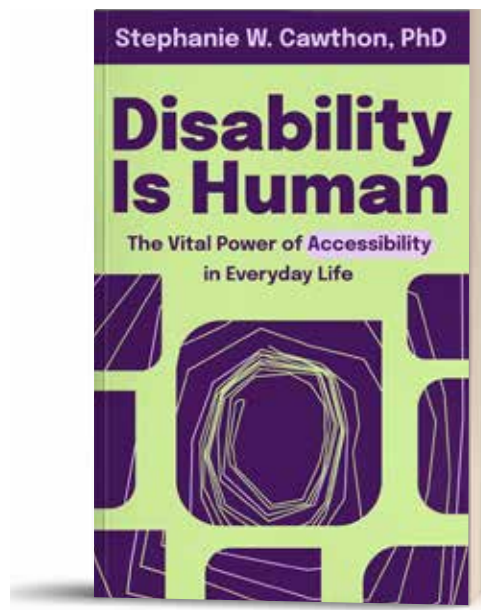
### Three pillars of effective accessibility

Working on accessibility may take time, but every step along the way is important. It is like building muscle—each flex gives us practice lifting a heavier weight—making us stronger and more resilient for future challenges, which become opportunities for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

Here are three key elements that organisations must embrace for long-term accessibility:

#### 1. Valuing disabled perspectives:

Organisations need to intentionally include



disabled individuals not just as workers but as decision-makers. Setting the tone that disabled people can make meaningful contributions at all levels—from entry-level to leadership positions—changes the culture of an entire organisation. This will not happen without a plan.

**2. Uncovering hidden ableism:** Negative attitudes about disability and disabled people are pervasive, and yet we are often unaware of how much they impact people. The basic definition of ableism is that disabled people are seen as less than non-disabled people. This can manifest in many subtle (and not so subtle) ways, including how we talk about disability and our capacity to include the full range of human functioning in our business processes, products, and services.

**3. Comprehensive access:** Accessibility must extend beyond basic workplace functions to include networking events, conferences, and informal social interactions. Think about how everyday accessibility practices



extend into the full professional life of your employees. If you're hosting an event off-site, are supports in place to make sure everyone can participate? If you are producing media, are you including the accessibility features so that it can be viewed, read, and understood by your audience and potential customers?

## Benefits of workplace flexibility

A recent LinkedIn poll revealed that over half of professionals have experienced significant career impacts due to health issues. Embedded workplace flexibility options reduce the need for cumbersome and individual accommodation requests.

For example

- Core shared working hours for team success balanced with flexible independent work.
- Remote work options to accommodate medical appointments or unexpected events.
- Clear hybrid meeting policies and practices, with materials prepared ahead of time.
- Testing and implementing technology options that allow for multiple ways to contribute.
- Encouraged use of leave benefits to support long-term sustainability in the workplace.

## Moving forward

The case for disability inclusion is compelling and attainable. Organisations that create truly

inclusive spaces report benefits in creativity, adaptability, and innovation—and become places where the strongest talent wants to stay and thrive.

And yet as a manager or leader, it can be difficult to figure out where to start. Sometimes we are unsure of what to say or how to talk about disability in the workplace. Sometimes it feels like we are only being reactive, not proactive, and therefore, wasting time and energy that could be used more effectively.

At both an individual and team level, here is a three-step framework for organizations looking to improve their disability inclusion practices:

1. Acknowledge knowledge gaps and where you need more information about accessibility.
2. Ask specific questions about needed accommodations and ways technology can help.
3. Focus on solution-oriented approaches that build capacity throughout your organisation.

As businesses continue to evolve in an increasingly diverse world, those that prioritise disability inclusion and accessibility will see enhanced innovation, improved employee retention, and stronger competitive advantages in the global marketplace. **IM**



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Dr Stephanie W Cawthon** is a tenured Professor of Educational Psychology at The University of Texas at Austin, where she founded the National Disability Center for Student Success. Dr Cawthon is author, *Disability is Human: The Vital Power of Accessibility in Everyday Life*.



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