

"DREAMZZ UNLIMITED": STORIES THAT INSPIRE



CA Heetesh Veera (Partner EY)
Email : heetesh.veera0706@gmail.com

(Editorial Note: CA Heetesh Kasturben Kalyanji Veera, first CA rank holder of our community and the first youngest Chartered Accountant at the age of 21, has written this brief autobiography in his own words at the request of the C.V.O CA Association.)

Quote by the writer:

"Good, Better, Best, never let it rest....

Until Good becomes Better and Better becomes the Best....."

Preamble (from CA Heetesh Veera):

(My own story of around 6 decades of my life has been penned by me at the request of the C.V.O CA Association solely for the purpose of providing motivation and guidance to the young millennials aspiring to grow, succeed and find purpose to their lives. There are several such examples of professional people in our community who have achieved success under adverse circumstances due to their determination and positive attitude towards life.)

The Journey of 58/59 years of my Life....

Dear Friends,

First of all, I thank C.V.O. CA Association for allowing me to write and publish my own journey comprising of struggle, challenges, opportunities, success and several ups and downs. My parents, my teachers, my wife (Chetna), my leaders (with whom I have worked), my friends and all well-wishers have played a very important role in this entire journey.

My native place is Desalpur Kanthi, Mundra. I was born in a financially poor but very loving and caring family. My father, the sole bread earner of the family (at that point in time) was a low salaried person and had to change many jobs in his life. In my childhood, I had to switch four schools upto my S.S.C. grade. I started studying at Balmandir school in Desalpur and went to Hyderabad for my kinder garden to pre-secondary schooling in a English- Telgu medium school. Further, I came back to Desalpur to be admitted to 4th grade, without knowing the language 'Gujrati' (which was the basic learning language then). The school headmaster was not willing to give me admission there, as I lacked knowledge of the said language. He therefore persuaded me to restart from 1st grade. This would have been at the cost of losing three precious years of my life (1st Grade to 3rd grade). It was at this time where I had no clue as to what a tragedy I was getting into, that my beloved mother stepped in to help and assist me. My mother - who though herself wasn't educated was able to appreciate the value of those 3 years of schooling of my life. She was determined to ensure that I get admitted into 4th grade thereby taking up this challenge with the school principal promising him that I would be up to the speed of 4th grade students within 6 months. My rigorous

training of learning Gujrati started with my mother and private coaching with Miss Ratanben. With God's grace and my mother's confidence in me, I topped the 4th grade in final exams in this Gujrati medium school.

Lesson No 1:

Your parents are the most respectable and powerful source of your well-being and well-wishers of your success. Though not educated and financially poor, they will always wish the best for you -RESPECT THEM. Use their life experiences for betterment of your LIFE JOURNEY.

Slowly, while I excelled in Gujrati, I started losing grip on English as there was no practice of the said language. Fortunately, to the best of my memory, the Village Mahajan appointed one retired teacher for students wanting to learn English – as an additional curriculum. I was one of the biggest beneficiaries of the same during my 5th and 6th grade as I could get grip on my basics again during that period – extremely thankful and grateful to the Village Mahajan and the Biharlilal master. He was undoubtedly very strict but extremely good at teaching. The process of getting a grip over the English language, was further strengthened here and played an important role for my future schooling and education.

Lesson No 2:

Your teachers are equally important as they educate you and create your base and foundation – so LEARN FROM THEM AND APPRECIATE THE KNOWLEDGE THEY BESTOW ON YOU.

Equally important to note is that – “Always take up the opportunity of learning – be it new language, new course, as they will always play an awfully important ROLE in your LIFE

The struggle still continues... I had to shift to Mumbai (Bhandup region) for my 7th grade and yes switch my school again and with that came learning two different languages – Marathi and Hindi (for the first time). Again, my parents and teachers, helped me overcome this hurdle.

Soon then I had to shift to Mumbai (Chinchpokli region) wherein I completed my 8th, 9th and 10th grade at VLN High School. During my 10th grade, I topped the school with good scores.

The question was now – which field to choose and which college to enrol for? I was clueless! Back then, one of my friend's elder brother convinced me to go for Science and join Ruia College and we finalised on the same. However, the same very day, late evening they switched their minds and decided to go for Commerce instead and join Podar College. Following my friends, I decided to join Podar College as well. With utmost determination and hard work, I was successful in Commerce and topped all the 5 years of my college (i.e. up to T.Y. B Com), but unfortunately what I lacked the most was absence of guidance.

Lesson No 3:

When in doubt or clueless, ALWAYS seek GUIDANCE and TAKE VERY INFORMED DECISION. Our association, as well as our community provides excellent professional and financial support for providing guidance through such matters. It always helps! Hence do not shy away while seeking help when in doubt and need, simply worrying about the world's perception about you and your lack of knowledge. No one is perfect and everyone seeks guidance!

Alongside college, I decided to pursue the Chartered Accountancy course, because it was one of the most valued courses in Commerce at that time as well as now. It was a struggle financially as well as physically and my family sacrificed a lot for my studies as they were working and I was studying to complete the Chartered Accountancy course simultaneously. I did my GCD, CA entrance, CA inter and CA final, cleared all in the first attempt in these 6 years.

The days were very hectic. To attend college early morning, take tuitions of the same class (in which I was studying) to earn money, go for articleship and simultaneously studying from late evening until midnight in Podar college library. I cleared the CA Final exam in first attempt with an All India Rank at the age of 21, alongside enjoying life with neighbours and chawl friends, college friends and studying in the night on the terrace of the building.

Lesson No 4:

The difficult times always pass by. The positive attitude, determination and hard work has no substitute and will help you to achieve your dreams always. There is no exception to this rule.

Now the next question was, what next after qualifying as a Chartered Accountant. The thought was always to get into CA practice, but the financial health of the family came in between and I had to join 'Premiere Automobiles' company to earn for the family.

At this stage, some of my college friends who did Chartered Accountancy course, either pursued higher studies like MBA and IAS and went abroad. Intellectually I believe I was capable to pursue that, however probably my destiny didn't allow the same.

Even at "Premiere Automobiles" I started off with Indirect Tax team, rather I was forced into Indirect Taxes Team, because of my experience during Articleship. I moved away from there to join ICICI Bank leasing division as an Indirect Tax specialist, so as to get back door entry into the financial world. Again, luck played an important role. The leasing division which was to be headed by Mr K.V. Kamat who became the Managing Director of ICICI Bank then, asked to me switch to their Corporate Taxation department, forcing me to give up the hopes of getting into Financial Services. It was clear that Indirect Tax was my destiny.

Lesson No 5:

It is not necessary that you will always get what you desire. Sometimes, your bad luck or past karma plays vital role in your life. Even our Jain religion teaches the same. Accept it and move on in your life with the soul desire to succeed.

In the interim, I got married to Chetna, and both of us also started working towards brokerage of financial services, fixed deposits and investments, and also applying for public issue of shares. She has been very helpful and supportive and apart from doing this work for many years, she diligently looked after both my children and parents.

Lesson No 6:

Remember, your spouse plays a very important role for your well being and mental support. Always RESPECT him/her.

The dream of starting own practice was fading away. I was looking for other opportunities. Indian economy was opening up. I had two offers – one from a financial services company and the other from one of the Big 5's - Arthur Anderson ('AA'), which was considered as the fastest growing accounting firm in the world. The offer was only for my Indirect Tax experience as otherwise, as a thumb rule AA never recruited at a Managerial Level. You have to start from your articles only. I wondered whether I would be successful as it was an altogether new ball game. This is because AA was fiercely competitive, successful and full of extremely intelligent and hard-working people.

The concern was whether to join AA which was a different world altogether compared to traditional employment or continue with the other financial services company. I took advice from some of my well-wishers and successful people who encouraged me to take up the AA challenge.

Initial phase was difficult, but it turned out to be a great success story for me. I was the first KVO person to join Big 4/ Big 5 and become a partner there.

Lesson No 7:

Destiny always has something for you. GOD will always support you at some point in time. Generally good karma follows bad karma. Believe in yourself. Take advice and guidance from right people and most importantly at young age, accept the challenge.

Lesson No 8:

Change is constant. Be willing to change. Adopt to new skills and new style of working and set your mindset accordingly in the age of 25-35. Imbibing these qualities, strengthens your base and creates an extremely successful, professional or entrepreneurial career of next 25-30 years.

AA required change of mindset, working style and gave global exposure to skills, the way you talk, walk and behave, client servicing skills and most importantly ethics and systems, these global firms follow are a great learning experience. The life was much more stable and rewarding. All of a sudden, AA closed down globally due to Enron. Again, things became uncertain for some time. However, the leaders in India played a very vital role in merging India branch with another Big 4 – EY.

I have been with EY all along thereafter with a successful indirect tax career.

Lesson 9:

Working with good leaders always helps. Their vision and ability to take good decisions, helps you to save from chaos in the middle of your career and flourishes in the long run.

Few years before, I was in a dilemma as to whether I should push myself for higher career positions or not. After very thorough thought, I made up my mind not to push for higher career positions and be contented with what I have achieved in life.

Lesson No 10:

At some point in time, you need to take pause, breathe and decide the next steps/ milestones of your career/life. It is an individual choice.

The life has been extremely challenging but fulfilling and satisfying. It has helped me to travel across the world, meet many intelligent and professionally successful people and entrepreneurs and changed my outlook towards the world.

I have also been element of charitable activities by supporting Shree Bidada Sarvodaya Trust (village Bidada) as well as Maru hospital (Parel) on a regular basis for last 25 years to return back the deeds I owe to the society. GOD has been kind to shower his blessings on me and my family, with my son Rahul - a practicing advocate, my daughter in law Nidhi - a practicing psychologist and my daughter CA Pankti who secured an All India 13th rank, presently working with a private equity.

I have also taken wrong decisions on financial front and otherwise which have costed me dearly. The challenges continue but the experience has taught me to remain cool and calm and face the situation.

I hope I have done justice to the task given to me and helped young millennials to learn through my experience and put the same into their practice more effectively in their career and their personal lives.

Thank you and All the very Best

Best Regards,
CA Heetesh Veera

