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HITESH RAJ BHAGAT is ET's resident geek

## TEAM DRINKS ON FRIDAY

I am a lady manager who has recently joined a new firm. In this firm, we are invited for team drinks post-work on every alternate Friday. While I enjoy a couple of drinks when out with my friends, should I drink at such events? Please advise.

With "happy-hour" becoming an integral part of an Indian professional's life, it's extremely important to participate at such events which are touted as "team-building" by the senior management. They offer an excellent opportunity to mingle with colleagues in a socio-business setting, far away from the stiffness of the office. As far as drinking alcohol goes, it's perfectly acceptable for a lady to order and enjoy her drink when out with her colleagues. So, set aside any fears of being viewed as "fast" and actively participate. To retain your professional image, follow these tips:

## MIND YOUR MANNERS

✓ An hour before you reach the venue, order a snack/ a few biscuits/ a handful of nuts at your desk. At the venue, order a light snack to accompany your drink - this food will line the stomach, slowing down the absorption of alcohol into the blood-stream. eat "when all is said and done".

✓ Know your limit before you reach the venue and never test it! As alcohol lowers inhibitions, if you consume two drinks when out partying with your girl friends, stick to one in this setting.

✓ If you drink fast, play it safe by ordering tall drinks. Instead of Scotch on the rocks, go with Scotch with soda & ice in a tall glass, a drink you can nurse for much longer. Stay away from delicious cocktails with multiple alcohols.

✓ If your boss/ colleagues continue to drink after you've exhausted your limit, quietly top up your glass with water / club soda. Alternately, drink a glass of water between each drink you consume, diluting the alcohol levels in your blood stream. If forced to order another drink, gracefully order it but don't sip it after the initial round of "Cheers".

✓ Don't assume the role of "the life of the party" by forcing others to drink. Stay away from dare games/ "bottoms-up" races/ vodka & tequila shots as this event is not about having fun on a Friday night. Instead, use it as an opportunity to build a closer working relationship with your colleagues and seniors.

P.S. For men and women who are teetotalers don't shy away from such events. Order a non-alcoholic drink of your choice and when asked "You don't drink?" smile and confidently answer "I'm enjoying my drink".

SHITAL KAKKAR MEHRA is a leading Corporate Etiquette and Protocol Consultant

## FIXING THE GAME - HOW RUNAWAY EXPECTATIONS BROKE THE ECONOMY AND HOW TO GET BACK TO REALITY

## QUICK READ

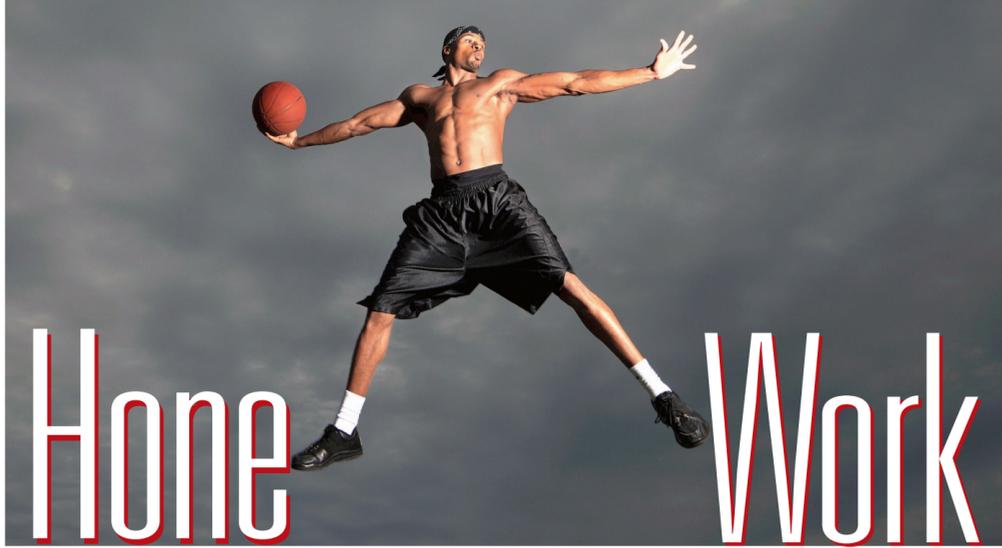


By Roger L. Martin Harvard Business Press

Roger L. Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, argues that our deep and abiding belief that the firm exists to maximize shareholder value has led to massive growth in stock-based compensation for executives, and a naive and wrongheaded coupling of the "real" market (the business of making and selling products and services) with the "expectations" market (the business of trading stocks, options and complex derivatives).

In the expectations market, investor expectations can race wildly ahead of what a company can really do, and that belief gets built into the stock price. Once that happens, actually improving real performance doesn't exceed investor expectations, it merely meets them. Investors are disappointed and react accordingly.

Martin, who is ranked among the ten most influential business professors in the world, offers five positive steps to heal capitalism and win in the real world. These include shifting the focus back to the customer and away from shareholder value; eliminating stock-based incentive compensation and creating new models that focus on real and meaningful goals; and transforming board governance. He also presents a new game plan for regulating and managing expectations market players, and changing the play patterns of business executives.



VIVEK KAUL

"He has talent that comes up from up above," is an oft repeated phrase when it comes to explaining the success of Sachin Ramesh Tendulkar.

This tendency to attribute success and failure to natural talent is accepted without demur these days. What it does not take into account are the unusual circumstances that go into the making of every champion.

As Matthew Syed is a three-time Commonwealth table tennis champion, a two-time Olympian and most recently, the author of the bestselling book *Bounce - How Champions Are Made*, explains, "Circumstance and opportunity are vital. To be a great golfer, you need access to a golf club. To be a great tennis player you need to be able to afford a tennis racket. Had I been born one house further down my road, I would not have been in the catchment area for a particular school, would never have met my coach, and would never have become a professional table tennis player".

Syed feels circumstances were very important in his becoming the number one British table tennis player. "What is certain is that if a big enough group of youngsters had been given a table at eight, had a brilliant older brother to practice with, had been trained by one of the top coaches in the country, had joined the only twenty-four-hour club in the county, and had practised for thousands of hours by their early teens, I would not have been number one in England."

Also what gets attributed as in born talent that comes from up above is almost always accomplished by years and years of practice. As Syed says "Talent, defined as inborn skill, is a flawed concept. In any complex task, it takes many years to become accomplished, years of painstaking work and dedication. Of course, some people start out better than others, but the strongest predictor of high performance is simply the quality and quantity of practice."

If that is the case, how does one explain child prodigies like Tiger Woods, Mozart and the great man Tendulkar himself who showed great success very early in life? "Child prodigies do not exist. Nobody bypasses the many years of dedicated practice that is required for excellence," says Syed.

He takes the example of Tiger Woods, who was considered a miracle golfer when he became the youngest ever winner of the US Masters in 1997. "The most talented player of all time," was the assessment of one pundit. But now consider that Woods was given a golf club five days before his first birthday; that by the age of two he played his first round of golf around a pitch and

putt course; that by five he had accumulated more hours of practice than most of us achieve in a lifetime."

The same stands true for the wonder musician to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, who saw success very early in life and was wowing the aristocracy with his piano skills as a six year old. "At the time, it seemed like paradigm case of extraordinary talent, of mystical ability, but the real story is quite different. Mozart's father was an eminent music teacher who schooled his son in the piano from the age of two. According to Mozart's most eminent biography, he had already accumulated an eye-watering 3,500 hours of practice by the age of 6," explains Syed. Look at the life of Tendulkar and you will find the same story, he feels.

Child prodigies do well in early life not because of talent they have from up above, but because their fairly unusual upbringings.

So as the old saying goes, practice makes perfect. It can certainly make you far far better, if not perfect feels Syed. "Indeed you will improve to levels that may astonish you. The reason, as stated earlier, is that as you practice, you build new and faster connections in the brain. The region of the brain responsible for controlling fingers in young musicians, for example, is far larger than for the rest of us. But they were not born with this; it grew in direct proportion to the number of years of training."

And it is worth noting that the scope for brain reformation is not limited to youth, but continues right through into adulthood. "As Nicole Hill, neuroscientist at the University of Pittsburgh, has put it: 'It is a misconception that brain plasticity is limited in adulthood. There is substantial evidence of changes in connection strength and neuron size for adult subjects,'" says Syed.

In fact, there is a very interesting example to show that champions can even be made. A Hungarian named Lazlo Polgar married his girlfriend Klara on April 19, 1967. Polgar firmly believed that children have extraordinary potential and it is up to the society to unlock it. He decided to apply this on his own children.

On April 19, 1969, their first daughter Susan was born. Polgar decided to train Susan in chess from a very early age and by her fifth birthday she had accumulated hundreds of hours of dedicated practice. Susan participated in a chess tournament after turning five. Most of her competitors were double her age. Her final score in the tournament was 10-0.

In August 1981, Susan became the under-16 world champion at the age of twelve. In July 1984, she became the top-rated female player in the world.

Her other two sisters Sofia and Judit were also trained in chess from a very early age. Sofia went on to beat many great male chess grandmasters. Judit, in

GOING BY THE BOOK, IT IS PRACTICE, NOT BIRTH THAT HARBOURS PRODIGIES

GURU speak

1991, became the youngest ever grandmaster - male or female and is acknowledged as the greatest female player of all time, beating top grandmasters like Garry Kasparov, Anatoly Karpov and Vishwanathan Anand.

Given this, why does the illusion of talent arise? It arises because we only see a tiny proportion of the work that goes into the construction of virtuosity, feels Syed. "If we were to examine the incalculable hours of practice, the many years ingraining excellence, the thousands of baby steps taken by world-class performers to get to the top, the skills would not seem quite so mystical, or so inborn." The expertise thus developed through years of deliberate practise is in a very narrow area. Syed recalls his experience of playing the former Wimbledon tennis champion Michael Stich. Syed having played table tennis felt that he would be able to return a few of Stich's serves. But to his surprise he wasn't able to and Stich served four straight aces. This despite the fact that the reaction time required to return a serve in table tennis is lesser than that that required in tennis. As Syed writes, "The time required to return a serve in tennis is approximately 450 milliseconds; but there are less than 250 milliseconds in which to return a smash-kill in table tennis. So, why could I return the latter and not the former?"

This where corporate and governments can draw some learning from what Syed has to say that expertise is in a very narrow area. The tendency of governments and businesses to move around executives does not work at all. It is a crazy thing to do, feels Syed. "Given that excellence hinges on many years of practice or experience in a particular domain of expertise, shifting executives around different departments is like asking Tiger Woods to give up golf and start playing tennis, and then switch to snooker, then baseball. It doesn't work like that. Our brains take years to be sculpted around the contours of a particular area of expertise."

Business schools which churn out "general" managers also need to learn a thing or two here. "This was the presumption of top business schools and many leading companies, too. They believed that they could churn out excellent managers who could be parachuted into virtually any organisation and transform through superior reasoning. Experience was irrelevant, it was said, so long as you possess a brilliant mind and the ability to wield the power of logic to solve problems," writes Syed.



Matthew Syed

## NERVE NELLIES

Anxiety erodes our confidence in all sorts of settings - asking someone on a date, interviewing for a job, making a big purchase. Figuring out how to deal with nervousness is a natural part of life. But anxiety can be especially crippling for people in the business world, short-circuiting their abilities to buy equipment, negotiate a better salary, win a labor dispute or settle the terms of a merger, according to new Wharton research.

In a recently published paper, "Can Nervous Nelly Negotiate? How Anxiety Causes Negotiators to Make Low First Offers, Exit Early, and Earn Less Profit," in the journal *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, professor of operations and information management Maurice Schweitzer and graduate student Alison Wood Brooks document the effects of anxiety on business negotiations, demonstrating that anxious participants end up worse off than confident ones. The implications for business leaders and executives, they say, are broad and deep.

"Anxiety is the most important emotion in negotiations," notes Schweitzer. "Negotiations are contexts where people are often doing something a little bit unfamiliar, a little bit risky, where things might go badly wrong. There's the prospect of confrontation; there's the prospect of triggering somebody to become angry or losing a deal."

Anxiety is a complex emotion that includes fear, frustration, stress, worry, tension, nervousness and apprehension. It's important to understand anxiety in a business context, Schweitzer says, because it is ubiquitous, yet under-reported: "We're unlikely to tell people... I'm feeling a little bit anxious, but I'm likely to calm down 20 minutes into the meeting."

Through a series of four studies, the two researchers found that anxiety harmed negotiators in several ways. Anxious negotiators made low initial offers, responded to offers more quickly and ultimately settled with worse outcomes. Anxious people are motivated to get out of a negotiation situation as quickly as possible, even if it means losing money. "Whereas feelings of anger motivate

individuals to escalate conflict, feelings of anxiety motivate individuals to escape or avoid conflict," the researchers write.

They used multiple methods to analyze and induce anxiety, including manipulating anxiety by way of music and video clips. "We used very different bargaining and negotiation contexts to try to triangulate this effect to really understand it," Schweitzer notes. In the first study, they induced anxiety in a pool of 134 college students by making them listen to the *Psycho* theme music and then put them to work negotiating a cellphone shipment via a computer instant messaging program. Anxious participants earned less profit than non-anxious ones - who listened to Handel before negotiating - by mak-

ing lower first offers and responding more quickly to offers.

A second study examined the specific link between anxiety and initial offers. Students assigned to the "anxious" condition watched a clip from the movie *Vertical Limit*. The pool of 159 students also negotiated over cell phones, but every participant was cast in the role of seller, negotiating against a computer with pre-programmed responses. Anxious participants, this study found, made significantly lower offers than those who were not anxious.

The third study looked at bargaining situations, using a version of the "shrinking pie game" in which 179 college student players had to divide a sum of money that shrinks by \$.50 every second. In the study, the first play-

er to quit stops the clock and establishes the size of the "pie," but only claims 25%. Schweitzer and Brooks found that anxious negotiators gave up after about 19 seconds, compared to non-anxious players who exited after about 25 seconds, supporting the idea that anxiety causes players to quit early.

And the fourth study, involving 159 college students, also used the shrinking-pie game, but first gave participants false feedback on a "Negotiation Aptitude Test." Half were told that their negotiation aptitude was average and half were told that their aptitude was far above average. Those who received the self-confidence boost were far less sensitive to the anxiety condition.

So what can negotiators do to fight anxiety and come out stronger in the end? Brooks suggests that nervous negotiators reframe their situation, noting that the physiological signs of anxiety are almost identical to the signs of excitement. "You can tell yourself, 'I'm really excited, this is a great opportunity, and I'm going to do great,' or you can frame it negatively and say, 'Oh, I'm so anxious, this is very threatening, I could really fail.'" Those two emotions are very similar except for the way that you appraise them.

The research also notes that incentives could help negotiators fight the anxiety-induced desire to quit early. "Quite possibly, [with the enticement of an incentive] even anxious individuals may be persuaded to persist until they reach specific goals," according to the paper.

In addition, the researchers are starting work on a project examining how anxiety can be contagious in a group setting. "There has been little work done on how anxiety spreads between people and in groups, and what expressions of anxiety will do to the other members of the group," Brooks says. "I would hypothesize that the number of people in the group who feel anxious matters a lot, and potentially having one member of the group who is very calm, very confident... can make a huge difference."

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## WHY NERVOUS NELLIES AND THE ART OF NEGOTIATION ARE POLES APART

