

KNOW THYSELF

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We all acknowledge the role of IIMA in preparing us for our eventual career, regardless of how and where we chose to pursue it: as a corporate executive, as an entrepreneur, in the development sector, or even in academia. The rigorously designed PGP program did an excellent job of equipping us with the necessary tools – knowledge of different subjects/fields, critical thinking skills, communication skills, and more.

However, I wish we had some exposure to developing formal self-awareness as part of the IIMA curriculum. What do I mean by that? Let me explain. By self-awareness, I don't mean the popular 2nd year elective we had – Explorations in Roles and

Identity (ERI), offered by Prof Indira Parikh. If memory serves me right, that course was awarded to just 20-25 interested folks by a draw of lots.

I am referring to a structured, multi-faceted exploration of self-awareness. One that covers areas such as our natural talents and strengths, our data processing and decision-making styles, how we work with people, where we draw our energy from, what our core values are, what conditions draw out the best – and worst – in us, and so on. As we would all agree, self-awareness is a critical skill at every stage in life. Those who have worked in the corporate sector would have undergone some sort of leadership development programme (organised by HR) that would have formally introduced us to such questions as the above. Regardless of how senior we were when we first encountered these “soft topics”, I am sure we all found these useful. We all must have had our own discoveries and development plans with these learnings.

Now, imagine having awareness of these “soft topics” in the second year of the PGP programme? Additionally, if we were to learn about an ‘occupational preference/success indicator’ – based on parameters like unique motivations, values, proclivity towards different types of work, etc., that a structured test would reliably measure – imagine how much better informed our campus interview applications or even subsequent career decisions would be?

I am not suggesting that having this information would guarantee career success. Not at all. But knowing this would certainly help us to be more intentional in our career choices, and base our career decisions on intrinsic factors rather than on purely extraneous factors or be influenced by peer choices. In simple terms, this additional awareness would increase our odds of ‘success’.

As a leadership advisor and executive coach, I often meet senior executives who are looking to get their mojo back, stuck as they feel in unfulfilling jobs/careers. In many cases that I have seen, there is a lack of clarity about their purpose, and a misalignment between their jobs/careers and their inner motivations and interests. Many of them have spent years trying to be someone else at work, just so that they can be “successful”. But how long can one put on a mask and chase goals defined by others? It is enervating! And this fatigue and disenchantment

in executives is invariably an outcome of them having chosen a certain career path without a deep knowledge of how aligned it is with their true selves.

The good news for such executives is that it is never too late, and many of these issues can be addressed. The remainder of their working lives need not be an extrapolation of their careers so far. However, if all new MBAs step into the working world with good self-awareness (and assuming most continue to stay true to their inner framework), we can reasonably expect to find more people working in jobs that speak to their true selves. We would have more engagement at work and more happiness in lives.

Here's looking to more realised human potential!