

Pramod Bhasin

President and CEO of Genpact

'The business of business is not that profound'

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Pramod Bhasin, President and CEO of Genpact, the largest BPO company in India, and credited to have initiated the BPO industry in India.

What does spirituality mean to you?

It only means peace and contentment within who I am, the ability to live within myself.

How do you achieve it in your day to day life?

It is so easy to lose it and get caught up in the realities of daily life, of one's turmoil. So I have to constantly pull myself back and look at what I am doing, the circumstances I live in, and ask myself – is this me? Am I doing those things for who I really am? Does this bring me peace? Does it bring peace and contentment to others?

It happens in scattered ways for me – when I take a smoke break, when I sit alone in a car or in a plane. It certainly is a fight to get there and a conscious effort to get away from my activities. Most people would not describe me as a peaceful person. But in fact, internally I know I can achieve great peace. I know that at times I am a like an overheating car and I must take a break.

One very useful characteristic I have in that respect, and in finding peace, comes from my childhood and my education: the capability to forget bad experiences, my memory's very efficient "delete" button. We are blessed in our family with the capability not to dwell on issues and concerns, not to keep grudges on people. I always had this ability to fall back and be content with what I had. It does not mean I have not been ambitious – actually I have had tremendous amounts of ambition, with the desire to excel, but I was never driven to be someone I am not. I always had a clear sense of what I am not and knew how to stay away from it. It came with a strong sense of security and confidence imbibed from my family. And I am unbelievably blessed in that way. A lot can happen around me without affecting me.

Religion is also of significant help in finding peace. It is not about beliefs, but about an anchor that brings peace into my life. Religion and hawans were present at home. And even though I never understood the meaning of most mantras we would recite, it nevertheless grounded me and still does. To this day, it takes me back to the sense of security we had at home. It brings me peace and calm.

Do you believe you are guided and protected by a superior force?

I do not believe in destiny, I think we make our own destiny. But somewhere I have this concept of a divine force, of things like luck and good timing, of coincidences helping me along the way. Otherwise, based on my IQ or academic achievements, there is no way I should be where I am. We created an entire industry in India, the BPO industry, based on a very tiny idea, and without the smallest inkling that it would explode the way it did and become so successful.

Do you believe you have a special mission or purpose in this life?

I do not think there is a meaning to our lives, but there is a purpose, which we create over time, or rather, which unfolds over time.

It would be arrogant of us actually to think there is a meaning to our lives. I believe we unnecessarily complicate things by trying to find answers to questions which can't be answered. Our inability to accept it gives us much grief and angst. I have actually the security to say that I do not know those answers, and also, that I never heard anything, or met anyone who ever suggested convincingly that there may be one.

Yet, I believe there is a purpose. When I was a kid, I had none. I was just a happy-go-lucky kind of person, I did not have a clue about what I would do, I absolutely did not care. That is the power of security I got growing up. Then, things unfolded in ways I could have never planned or fathomed, and in the end, we developed a whole industry. We were driven by the desire to excel in whatever we were doing, and we did so with integrity, with speed, with aggression. As we have been affecting so many lives, and setting new standards, one found a purpose within it.

Also, I would say that the purpose is about taking people well beyond their capabilities – even though my team would say I am too aggressive, or too tough in doing so, but I think they would agree that I do so with fairness and justice.

What is the role of spirituality in your work?

There isn't enough of it in my work actually. And that is one area where I have perhaps failed. I always tell people that in ten years from now, they will not remember the money but the friends they made. In that context, I am not sure I have done enough to promote it within the company.

We are known as a very tough, energized, fast-moving company. We have a very strong culture, the way we push ourselves is ridiculous. So you either keep the pace or fall on the wayside.

Of course I could argue that those who survive within that pace are those who thrive with it, therefore finding some kind of peace along the way. In these extremely hard times, I can see how they have gone all out, on the offensive, never on the defensive. Had it been a very different kind of environment, it would or could get in the way of excellence. The adrenaline and invigoration that come from it are tremendous. But again, can they find peace in it all? I can only hope so.

Can you tell us about a unique experience that shaped your life differently?

In the last two years, my two closest friends as well as my father, who was my mentor, passed away. It has been a tremendously unsettling experience, in ways I may not even be aware of.

Family and friends matter so much to me, they are the core of who I am. After such a shock, you forget how to laugh, you forget how to smile.

It is like losing some foundations. And you have to find other ways and means to be.

As you do not have someone you have grown up with to share things, you must accept it will never be the same, and maybe you retreat more within yourself and stay there, learning to cope that way, hoping that time passing will change things.

In fact, I think it was important for me to miss, to go deep within myself and face the pain, deal with it. Otherwise it is like skimming it, and not paying justice to who they were. The depth of that emotion has to be so intense. It is the only way to move forward. Otherwise you carry that pain forever.

Unfortunately, at the time those events took place, too much was happening in my life, we were having an IPO and so on, and maybe I did not take enough time and space to miss them as deeply as I should have. My reaction was to crank up at work more than ever, because I am never defensive but always offensive. And that is perhaps why I did not take a pause as much as I should have.

Of course I can find that kind of soul connection again, but I first have to admit it will never be the same, and also, I must be open to it. And to get my "antennas open" I must shed some baggage. We carry so much baggage with us and complicate our lives, especially when we are successful. Instead, we should always simplify things. From time to time we should stop and shed.

I remember when I was in London, we had no money, so we kept moving from one house to the other and I was proud that all our belongings could fit in two suitcases. Today, had I to move, I would need many trucks. And trucks of what? Of nothing. So the problem is to make the time and space for those connections.

What have been your main spiritual inspirations?

I have not had spiritual gurus or anything of the kind, but I have been shaped and inspired by family and friends, starting with my father. The way we were brought up taught me about who I am, it grounded me and gave me the security to go through life. I never saw my father being petty about people or anything else. And I have had the immense fortune of being surrounded by very noble, outstanding friends, much smarter than me. I always learnt much from them. And my role was very clear, I was there to make them laugh, I was the buffoon!

If you were to be reincarnated, what would you like to be reincarnated as?

I would come back very differently. My father had this ideal of taking sanyas and I think that somewhere it is within me – this ideal of being completely content within myself, and much more of an ascetic.

I guess that today, I do not have the guts or the willpower to shed what I do and who I am, the luxuries I enjoy. This other life is too uncertain, I fear it will not keep me happy and I do not know how long I would be able to live that way.

And I enjoy what I do, the drive and the adrenaline that lie in this ambition to always exceed and excel. Yet, I am not convinced it is the purpose of life. I am not convinced that the business of business is that profound. And I know that the extreme moments of peace I have had were not at work. These days for instance, I find tremendous peace at my friends' graveyard, or spending time alone in my house in the mountains. And of course, it is the antithesis of what I do most of the time.

If there was one question you could ask God, what would it be?

I would first ask how can there be so much suffering in the name of religion, how can so many killings and awful acts be justified by it?

And also, I would have to say: if there is a purpose to life, why don't You just tell us? If we are simply meaningless, if we are all here to just manufacture parts of a switch, as they said in "2001 Space Odyssey", why don't You just tell us? Release us from having to guess and from wasting our time! We can handle it.

What is your idea of happiness?

Peace.