

# KRISH'S CORNER



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## Unlearning Yesterday

Sitting in an airport, waiting on another flight that would carry me to another destination, I began to ponder the changes we go through to stay competitive. Two decades removed from riding a scooter through the crowded maze of Indian traffic as a management trainee for a particle board manufacturer, I could not help but chuckle. Back then in India a business management degree took you very quickly to the unemployment line and the agonizing wait for productive days was comforted by watching many of your friends in the same predicament. The piece of paper that was my triumph as being one of the first in the family to complete a post-graduate degree was now a reminder of the changes that would come in the world and the need to cope with them would be serious.

Coming to America was an eye-opener in terms of both possibility and probability. The odds of making it in certain spheres were more probable because of the groundwork laid by the pioneers in technology, real estate and medicine. The possibility of making it in a sales or marketing endeavor were limited because of the dearth of role models with a unique cultural identity who could help me navigate through this maze. Yet there I was in another airport, waiting to begin a consulting assignment for a manufacturing company looking for advice on motivating their culturally diverse staff. The million dollar observation is if the person is the same, then the environment and the enterprises where the skill and will are to be used have changed.

In hindsight, most of the effort spent in the early stages of any endeavor is in resisting that which is alien and seemingly new and unproven. Instead of resistance we should begin to create room in our minds and our efforts to incorporate innovation and change. Here are some tips that help us stay competitive in a changing world.

1. **Be receptive to constructive criticism** – My desire to be published as a writer has been in me as long as I can remember. From poetry written under a mango tree that would rival Keats, to plot lines imagined on rainy afternoons, I knew I could do it. Then when my first go at a book was shot down both for content and intent by five people I trusted, I refused to look at my own chance for change and instead blamed it on another's inability to comprehend me. Being receptive to constructive criticism will enable you to do wonders with your talent.

**2. Create a Circle of Advisors**—Leadership luminary John Maxwell suggests the concept of having an inner circle of advisors that can enable you to lead with greater competence. The same logic does provide reward when it comes to including people in that arsenal who are diametrically on the opposite side of what you engage in on a daily basis. This takes time because you have to find people who can enhance you, and then solicit input from them to strengthen you. In my inner circle are theologians who advise me on spiritual choices and top-notch consultants whose business advice has been invaluable. Some of the seemingly bizarre things they shared with me as part of their vision three years ago are actually happening and I am seeing infrastructure and organizational change manifesting in ways that were once incomprehensible.

**3. Qualitative and quantitative thinking is a must** – Having spent almost a decade and a half in the qualitative realms of organizational change, I spent most of my time designing and developing programs for change that were built on soft-skill platforms. Not being technologically savvy, it was easier to rebuke the importance of systems and processes because it was not something I understood or felt I could learn. Unlearning that stigma opened up vistas of possibility wherein I realized that both the qualitative and the quantitative must co-exist for the survival of tomorrow's enterprise. If you are on one side of the spectrum, it will do your journey a great good if you embrace the other side.

**4. Teach what you know** – This is one of those self-explanatory principles that are often overlooked. In a small group at a retreat I heard a lady say that you don't need to know Shakespeare to teach a five year old how to read. Finding someone you can impact on a daily basis is not only a noble quest, it is the most liberating approach to learning. The more you share with those that don't know what you do, the more you will force yourself to learn more. Fred Smith, Sr., said we all have a right not to have a degree but none of us have a right not to have an education. A constant student will become a good teacher.

Well this flight is getting ready to land and the obligatory instructions about preparation for the same have been announced. In the days and weeks ahead, make a commitment to unlearn some of your past so you can create room for the new future of possibilities and probabilities.