

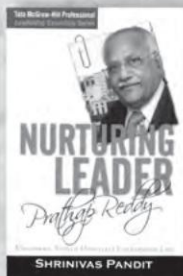
The **McGraw-Hill** Companies

McGraw-Hill Professional  
Leadership Essentials Series

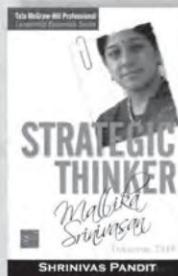
# CREATIVE BUSINESSWOMAN

*Simone  
Tata*

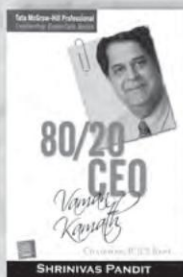
McGraw-Hill Professional  
Leadership Essentials Series



ISBN 978-0-07-061755-1



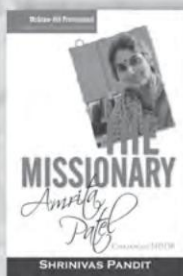
ISBN 978-0-07-061753-7



ISBN 978-0-07-061754-4



ISBN 978-0-07-062088-9



ISBN 978-0-07-065678-9



ISBN 978-0-07-065676-5



ISBN 978-0-07-063373-5

The **McGraw-Hill** Companies

McGraw-Hill Professional  
Leadership Essentials Series

# CREATIVE BUSINESSWOMAN

*Simone  
Tata*

**Shrinivas Pandit**

*Leadership Counsellor*



**Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited**

NEW DELHI

---

*McGraw-Hill Offices*

**New Delhi** New York St Louis San Francisco Auckland  
Bogotá Caracas Kuala Lumpur Lisbon London Madrid  
Mexico City Milan Montreal San Juan Santiago  
Singapore Sydney Tokyo Toronto



**Tata McGraw-Hill**

Published by Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited,  
7 West Patel Nagar, New Delhi 110 008.

Copyright © 2008, by Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise or stored in a database or retrieval system without the prior written permission of the publishers. The program listings (if any) may be entered, stored and executed in a computer system, but they may not be reproduced for publication.

This edition can be exported from India only by the publishers,  
Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited

ISBN-(13 digits): 978-0-07-065677-2

ISBN-(10 digits): 0-07-065677-0

Head—Professional and Healthcare: *Roystan La'Porte*

Publishing Manager: *R. Chandra Sekhar*

Manager—Sales & Marketing: *S. Girish*

Controller—Production: *Rajender P Ghansela*

Asst General Manager—Production: *B L Dogra*

Asst Manager—Production: *Sohan Gaur*

Information contained in this work has been obtained by Tata McGraw-Hill, from sources believed to be reliable. However, neither Tata McGraw-Hill nor its authors guarantee the accuracy or completeness of any information published herein, and neither Tata McGraw-Hill nor its authors shall be responsible for any errors, omissions, or damages arising out of use of this information. This work is published with the understanding that Tata McGraw-Hill and its authors are supplying information but are not attempting to render professional services. If such services are required, the assistance of an appropriate professional should be sought.

Typeset at The Composers, 260, C.A. Apt., Paschim Vihar, New Delhi 110 063 and printed at Rashtriya Printers, M-135, Panchsheel Garden, Naveen Shahdara, Delhi 110 032

Cover Design: Kapil Gupta, Delhi

Cover Printer: Rashtriya

RCDLCRYRLCDL

To

*Late Baroness Nancy Sear—pioneer in the field  
of Personnel Management training in UK. Nancy headed the  
Post-graduate course in London School of Economics for many  
years. She was also the leader of the Liberal Party in the  
House of Commons. Her guidance and personality shaped  
my thinking on management of personnel, and contributed  
to the success in my career*



# Preface

---

**Creative initiatives are being driven across the businesses and across the Globe by a unique brand of 21st Century business leaders-the "A" player, the leader who embodies what we call the four "Es": high Energy; the ability to energise others; "Edge" the ability to make the tough calls; and finally, Execute, the consistent ability to turn vision into result.**

**Jack Welch**

**"A" class (GE's 1998 Annual Report)**

My focus in studying effective business leaders has been on a broad range of questions: What is the background of these people? What key challenges they faced? How did they succeed? What are the techniques they used? And what can managers learn from them to become effective chief executives?

One of the important finding of my studies: The outstanding chief executives do not possess any superhuman qualities or mystical powers. They follow simple common sense practices in the daily grind of business to rise to the top.

Effective executives learn by developing innovative strategies for managing change. They study change management programmes

of other organisations thoroughly so as to understand the elements that give them competitive advantage. They adapt them to suit the particular requirements of their organisations.

Their competency in dissecting ideas and grasping themes behind effective strategies gives them an edge over run-of-the-mill executives. What helps them turn out outstanding performance year after year is their disciplined execution.

Trent (Westside) chairman Simone Tata is one such successful chief executive. Her performance provides sound guidelines on designing innovative, yet simple strategies. Her intuition, insight, grit, and listening-leadership style enables her to lead teams by example.

Simone's original thinking inspires sincere students of management and entrepreneurship. Her love for aesthetics and a calm mind to go through the process of analysis and synthesis to arrive at correct business decisions are the seeds required for executives to become truly effective in the top slot of any organisation.

Read her profile with complete concentration, absorb the message, implement the techniques with suitable modification to suit your situation; and you are bound to develop unique insights in the phenomenon of business start-ups in this turbulent century.

SHRINIVAS PANDIT



# Acknowledgements

---

In spite of her extremely busy schedule Simone Tata spared time for my study of *Exemplary CEOs*. She answered all my questions with professional precision and clarity. It was a significant learning experience for me—million thanks.

Simone's Executive Assistant, Jinny was quite helpful in arranging meetings and providing information. Many thanks.

The ever helpful Chandani Palshetkar, our neighbour in the society, worked on my computer to make a significant contribution in the completion of this project. Thank you.

My family members ignored me completely to give me my space for this book. I am grateful to them for this non-vocal support.

Thanks to all others whose names may have been inadvertently left out.

SHRINIVAS PANDIT





# Contents

---

<i>Preface</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>ix</i>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Aestheticisation of Everyday Life</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Creative Business Designing</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Assimilation of Culture</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Evolutions and Transitions</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>A Creative Businesswoman—Simone Tata</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Naval Encourages Simone</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>A Technocrat in Lipstick</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>The Evolution of Lakme</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Lakme Means Lakshmi, Unbelievable!</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>From Lakme to Westside</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Transitions of a Craftsman</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Lessons from Difficult Times</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Creativity Leads to Competence</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Competence Opens up Opportunities</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Change the Furniture in Mind</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>A Creative Businesswoman</b>	<b>59</b>
<i>Take-aways</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Author's Profile</i>	<i>65</i>



# Introduction

---

**T**HIS BOOK IS about how business in aesthetics is fertilised through the inducement of art-conscious life styles and creative business designs. It's an evolutionary process, which leads the businessman to learn customer cultures and manage transitions smoothly.

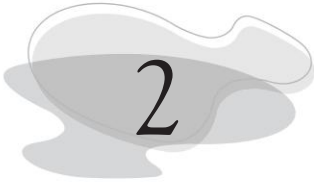
---

*We can choose to live, on a daily basis, out of the highest standard of ethics, aesthetics, or health. Holistic choices express and let us better understand our own personal aesthetic: how we like to do things, what we stand for, what we find pleasing, necessary, and life enhancing.*

—Marsha Sinetar

Elegant Choices, Healing Choices

---



# Aestheticisation of Everyday Life

---

WE SEE MASSIVE changes in life styles, in the way people have begun to live their daily lives. They appear to be making their lives into projects of beauty. They see themselves and their environments as objects of art. Therefore, the desire to see a coherent style in clothes, household furnishings, decor, and colour schemes is evident in the designer living!

When post-modernist writers describe this phenomenon as *aestheticisation of everyday life*, it sounds unfamiliar. Well it is. But the meaning is simple. It is their claim that the division between art and everyday life is being eroded. Artists and laymen, unknowingly and subconsciously, are collaborating to turn everyday life into aesthetic projects filled with art objects.

The noted Marathi humourist and playwright P. L. Deshpande, in his play *Asa Me Asamee* said, “From footwear, clothes, to hairstyles, you see everything matches, except the two in them”. His mischievous face and body language poke fun at the numerous mismatched couples. The packed theatre giggles and laughs.

Increasingly, people are realising that life is to be lived beautifully every minute. It means looks, dresses, interiors—all have become important in the unending search for a perfect match of complementarity and contrasts. Marketing creatively evokes the right emotions to sell its products. Logic does not change emotions, perception does. The perceptual change is brought about by the use of mass media, models, and stories, which provoke the search for identity, and influence choices. In this transformation, retailing got the impetus—it has acquired a new dimension.

In effect, one sees that our dream towards designer lives is conspiring with forces of globalisation to mass customise our life styles and homogenise our cultures. This provides a staple diet for social forum activists, who claim to fight for the poor and the have-nots of the world. These protagonists conveniently ignore that the size and composition of today's middle and rich classes have considerably changed. Many amongst them belonged to the poor class not too long ago.

The other fundamental, albeit forgotten truth is that neither the capitalists nor the developed countries ever advocated mass production of human beings. Excess population can be a menace. At the same time, it provides a challenge to society, to meet the needs of a growing population. Market forces sense the demand and step in to fulfil it. New ventures are born.

Former US ambassador to India, Prof. Galbraith, said “The business of business is to make man a more wanting animal” and to make him so is precisely the function of marketing. Marketing impregnates dreams, titillates desires, and produces artefacts for fulfilling the stoked longings. In upwardly mobile societies, it is more the feel of the product than the utility that matters—the look, the designer status, that become the USP.

The new sections of society are prepared to pay for products that feed their fantasies. It prompts innovative businessmen and women to invest in newer creations, evocative advertising, creative branding, and aggressive marketing drives.

Designer living has opened up a whole new business in aesthetics. Whether it is property supplements in the newspapers, new shopping plazas, the flood of ads, or the settings in soap operas and movies, they are all in designer language, icons, quotations, and statements, that enhance one's self-esteem. It eventually tempts one to go in for the buy.

It is not a "need-based" basic business, but a "want-created" business. Look at any product, whether Pond's lotions, Hindustan Lever's shampoos, or the attractive dress lines at Shopper's Stop—they all are attempting to etch messages on one's subconscious mind. That is the rationale for post-modern business. The "need to want" business journey is through the portals of brand and ad management; call it the "art of inducement [or] seduction", whatever you like!

---

*Says Ernest Sternberg, “This has led to a new stage in the development of an economy of icons. In this wondrous marketplace we find displayed not only designer clothes, but designer environments, and people with designer personalities!”*



# Creative Business Designing

---

THE BATTLE FOR inducement is fought on the mental turf. Occupation of mental space becomes crucial, and is done through creative advertising and various marketing techniques. Through colourful visuals and punch lines identifying with models, symbols, and feel-good anchors, the products are positioned in one's mind. Images are created in defining an event, a person, or an era, through electronic media and other communication devices. With repeated messages, the desire gets converted into active buying.

Whether it is the latest Sony sound system, or Madhuri Dixit certified herbal creams, or Sachin Tendulkar signature Palio car, it is the creative faculty of business people and their expert teams that design our wants, and fulfil them. They faithfully honour Prof. Galbraith's truism. It is the simultaneous designing of want and product, that creates new business.

If we were to stick to the basic, bare minimum needs of *roti, kapda, makan*, we would be glued to poverty as we have been. There is a constant shift in the hierarchy of needs shift. Once

the physiological safety and social needs are met, people move to the needs of esteem and self-actualisation. Large sections of our society are still at the basic physiological and safety needs level. These are being met through low priced affordable goods that we manufacture and sell through bazaars. It is the esteem needs—status, recognition, and sense of achievement—that the upwardly mobile class seeks, to which business houses pander.

To what extent we should go on this wanton creation is a debatable issue of societal balance. But one thing is certain—the route to alleviation of poverty and equitable distribution is through want creation; “growth first” is the underlying principle. *Our potential for creating prosperity is high but our propensity for living in poverty has been much higher.* However, the demographics are slowly changing. People are in an upbeat mood to experience prosperity, and that augurs well.

Unless the creative amongst us design prosperity, we cannot be ejected out of this all-pervasive ethos of poverty. One cannot design the future by analysing the past. Non-conventional thinking is required to move forward.

An atmosphere of free enterprise releases creative forces, which we are seeing in India. Creativity is seen in any act, idea, or product, that transforms an existing domain—the sphere of activity. Look at the way the business of banking or retailing is now conducted. Although the results are achieved through teams, at the heart of such creation is an individual, a creative person.

The creative individual is someone whose thoughts or actions changes a domain or establishes a new one. He regularly solves problems, fashions products, and raises questions challenging existing assumptions that lead to new insights and novel solutions. Jamshetji Tata and Ghanshyam Das Birla were creative businessmen.



These people use creativity as an instrument, not only for personal and social gain, but more for a deep philosophical search for meaning. The quest for meaning is an ongoing activity, which these people conduct in the terrain of their expertise, whether it is biotechnology, steel, milk, housing, banking, pharmaceuticals, petrochemicals, or IT.

Simone's transition from cosmetics to successfully establishing the retail chain Westside was also creative. In fact, many times the correct solution to a problem is an aesthetic one, and she found it grounded in her domain strength. It is not only creative product designing—Simone excelled in creatively designing the business as well. This will have a lasting impact in the field of retailing.

In the creative process, the driving force is the desire to produce a specific time-bound result. With the solid experience of Lakme under her belt, Simone cautiously but confidently moved into retailing, using her aesthetic sense. She loved her creation enough to bring it into being. Her learning curve has been high. Learners do not assume a fixed level of capacities and expand beyond them. Creative persons practice objectively observing current reality. Their search for quality improvement in service and products is unending. In long-term projects, they are able to hold on to structural tension for years between their vision and the relevant current reality. This trait is found in creative scientists, artists, and performers. Robert Fritz says that structural tension is an incredibly powerful force in creation but it is impossible to develop if one does not know what one wants. Picture the result you want, i.e. visualise the outcome.

That's why one sees creative people:

- choose certain domains, because of a powerful calling to do so, an inner urge to dedicate life to that field

- set deadlines for organising actions, to enable people to build energy and momentum
- think to design new possibilities
- focus on creation rather than on them

While talking about their achievements I could see in their eyes glints of joy about the creation, their piece of art so to speak. The “ME” in it was hardly visible.

Through stories scripted here, or known otherwise, we know that people are born with some inherent talents. Together with that asset, factors of luck and grace of God are at work in bestowing recognition on them. Whether an artist or a businessman, without access to domain and the support of his field, he has no chance of getting recognition. However, through personal creativity a person can still make his day-to-day experiences more rewarding. With innovative thinking and new ideas one is able to substantially reduce boredom. It works as a tonic against passages of “low” feeling. I have experienced it and so have you. Haven’t you?

Creative people:

- have huge stocks of energy
- rarely get exhausted or distracted
- know how to gainfully use that flow of energy because they are less lazy
- are more disciplined in controlling their time, i.e. energy, space, and activity
- are curious about everything and cultivate interest in many things
- have the capacity to get surprised and surprise others in newer dimensions of everyday experiences

The cerebral hardware is the same but these business leaders and managers have special thinking skills. The way they think about what they think is significantly different.

---

*Says Edward de Bono “Design thinking is very different from traditional judgment thinking. For judgment thinking, the desired output is truth, or apparent truth. For design thinking, the output is value”.*



# Assimilation of Culture

---

**T**HE WORLD HAS always been multicultural. The understanding of other cultures however, has been limited. It has improved considerably with the current information age, and feelings of racial superiority have subsided to a great extent. Whether or not assimilation of societal cultures beyond a point is desirable, is contentious. Many consider it not so healthy because it gives rise to the feeling of loss of identity.

Further, a company's culture is determined by a set of priorities over a long period of history. It is made public in its mission and vision statements. It is seen in its structure and distribution of power between different functions and departments. In India, from 1950 to 1975, power was with production and manufacturing. Between 1975 and 2000, it gradually passed on to marketing.

Currently, human resources (HR) is acquiring some power, which basically means, the CEOs have begun to handle it themselves. Many CEOs spend considerable time in establishing synergy

between HR and other divisional heads rather than in playing divisive games. That malady infested a large number of organisations in the past. The reasons for this change are:

- people assets have become strategically crucial—there is shortage of talent
- HR is recognised as an integral function
- young knowledge workers demand transparency in HR policies, practices, and performance
- internet and restructuring of organisations have lead to more open communications

The style change at the top had a major positive impact on organisation cultures. There are many assumptions and beliefs which managers carry, which are debated openly. The leader's style is an important ingredient in that basket of suppositions. They stand to gain from allowing employees to air their views freely.

For creative leaders though, such reasons based on business considerations and material advantages, may not be enough for the absorption of cultures. Operating within one's domain is more rewarding and appealing even if one's business is in a foreign country. To become successful in the host country one must understand the nuances of different cultures.

It is this passion that makes a leader an eternal learner and assimilator of different cultures. Simone did not jump from cosmetics to retailing just because huge opportunities were opening up. They may have provided the trigger but what essentially led her to decide was the great urge to express her love for aesthetics.

To find the right mix of colours for fabric and design layout is the secret of brain cell's behaviour or to make the shopping ambience an experience for the customers to cherish, is in itself energising, irrespective of the rewards in it. None might know about it; yet the designer or artist in a businessman likes to engage in that self-satisfying activity. This emotion is not found in large number of managers.

Simone and her team produced Lakme. Now her Westside stores, with their collection of beautiful products and friendly ambience, offer an experience in elegant shopping. It appears that her tremendous capacity for cultural assimilation has made her aesthetic sense increasingly fertile. A Swiss by birth, her global mind has taken firm roots in local ethos. A unique cultivation indeed! I see her moves synchronised with world events.

---

*In Creativity, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi says, “Consuming culture is never as rewarding as producing it”.*





# Evolution and Transitions

---

**T**HE DISSOLUTION OF the socialist empire of USSR, advent of globalisation and internet gave a jerky and bewildering start in 1990s to the whole process of global restructuring. Now it is becoming clear that it was a start of an evolutionary process with a bang. It has forced world power blocks especially America to move from parochial divisive thinking to unitary all-inclusive global thinking. 9/11 gave it a further boost.

Evolution as we know often moves forward by leaps of transcausal events. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung said, “Synchronicity suggests that there is an interconnection or unity of causally unrelated events”. The conjunction of these events gives credence to Jung’s postulation.

People however, are finding it scary to make this transition from a world of secured lifetime employment to a unsecured world dictated by behaviour of markets where jobs are available but not protected employment of the kind we were accustomed to. However, the fact remains that markets will continue to rule for the time being and the new order will unfold within a decade from the present turbulence.

We are witnesses to a marathon between many developing countries to capture a fair share of the global market for goods and services. It is to the credit of our entrepreneurs that they took the initiative, after the government relaxed its hold on economy around the same period, 1990-1992. Their drive to coax the middle class to buy more is a major lever in the growth of economy.

Businessmen all over the world recognised this opportunity and are using all the marketing gimmicks to allure that class to newer products and services. Daniel Griswold Associate Director, Centre for Trade Policy Studies, Cato Institute said, “We need...to look at a different set of criteria for what does it take to create a truly global middle class ...in the next 50 years” (BT February 29, 2004). You can see the importance being attached to this creation. This is where creative work is involved of changing the mindset of the middle class from ‘saving’ to ‘spending’. It’s a major transition.

In this structural change, retailing presents a great global opportunity. And it was this emerging trend of bulging middle class’s potential to buy that businesswomen like Simone saw in late eighties and early nineties. It was also an evolutionary process for them. What we are currently witnessing is its unfathomable speed. The global society has vectored into higher orbit through internet.

However at the individual level you have to take time to reflect on the passages of your life. It is not that you need to think about major transitions only at the intersection of tryout twenties, turbulent thirties, flourishing forties, flaming fifties, serene sixties, and sage seventies that Gail Sheehy talked about in her best seller *Passages*. In the flow of time you need to constantly think ahead about changes in career, business, vocation, hobbies, or style.

Such reflection leads you to think how to identify periods of transitions—between ending and beginning—and learn to manage them. The stream of evolution is otherwise likely to swamp you, which you might regret later. I found in my discussions with various business leaders that when confronted with a problematic situation they take the following steps:

- Think why they are uncomfortable in a particular situation.
- Explore all sides of change; see it through a prism sort of.
- Talk to someone knowledgeable and trustworthy.
- Take a stock of the unfinished agenda of life, what is waiting in life to happen.
- Don't take strong action. Prefer not to make abrupt endings.
- Arrange temporary structures in phasing out operations in business.
- Recognise that transitions have a characteristic shape.

There is an emptiness and germination between ending one business and starting another, or while changing vocations, roles, relocations etc. How Simone, the craftsman in aesthetics, made choices in life are scripted in the serene story that follows.

---

*Said Ralph Waldo Emerson; “Not in his goals but in his transitions man is great”.*



## A Creative Businesswoman— Simone Tata

---



---

*India's best known cosmetic company Lakme (brand value Rs 200 crore) belonged to the House of Tatas. Westside, the retailing venture of Tatas (turnover Rs 112 crore; profit after tax Rs 17 crore as of March 2003) operates a chain of twelve stores in major metros across the country. The retail stores have become the darling of India's burgeoning middle and elite class. Both are creations of the connoisseur of aesthetics, its chairperson, the stately Simone Tata.*

---

SIMONE TATA OCCUPIES a small office in the grand Bombay House on Sir Homi Mody Street in Fort, Mumbai. Bombay House occupies a place of pride in every Indian's heart. From there beams India's most endearing, durable and dignified corporate brand—Tata. The Tata empire is run from this august small edifice.

Whenever I had the occasion to visit Bombay House I smelled and stored the ambience reverentially. It was because JRD Tata was, and still is, an idol for true professionals in India. His presence in that house, as in our minds, gave us the ensemble of hope, humility, the joy in doing good work, the desire to search for knowledge and strive for a successful professional career. I saw JRD's bust as I got into the elevator. His saying, *Nothing worthwhile is ever achieved without deep thought and hardwork* rang in my mind as I reached Simone's office on the second floor. Jinny, her secretary, extended the usual courtesies.

Swiss by birth, Simone Naval Tata at 73, is a graceful lady, always immaculately dressed. Simone is an honours graduate in Arts from

Geneva University. Over the years, she accompanied her husband, the successful industrialist Naval Tata, to many meetings and functions. She carries herself impressively in her European attire. Walking behind Naval, taking her seat in the front row as he walked to the dais, she always looked to me the model of a traditional Indian lady accompanying her husband.

Naval was a noble soul with a charming personality. He represented India with distinction in a number of tripartite meetings on labour-management issues. His passion for bringing labour and management together is unequalled. The more I saw them, the more my admiration for this made-for-each-other couple grew. Simone's creation Lakme had always attracted me. I was curious to hear its story from the creator. Lakme with its range of cosmetic products like powders, moisturisers, toners, cleansers, foundation creams, nail enamel, eye-liners, compacts, and many more, became a hot favourite with Indian ladies across the length and breadth of the country. My knowledge of it though was understandably limited.

With the advent of liberalisation, Lakme anticipated the entry of a number of foreign companies into India, a direct threat to Lakme's market share and leading position. To keep up with such competitors would have been an uphill task with heavy marketing investment. Instead, they turned to retailing, a green field project in an industry still underdeveloped in the country, and closer to the aesthetic proclivities of Simone.

When I walk through Westside at Hughes Road in Mumbai, I experience the atmosphere of my favourite Marks & Spencer at Oxford Street, London. These two successful brand launches, Lakme and Westside, incensed my desire to include Simone in this study of outstanding leaders.

Interviewing Simone was facilitated because she had diligently filled in the 22-page questionnaire sent to

her earlier. Interestingly, Jamshed Irani has similarly applied himself fully while filling in the questionnaire. I do not know whether this commitment to fill in the necessary forms is a discipline of the house of Tatas. But it came handy for me. A completed questionnaire provides a framework to the interviewer to prepare well, focus on important issues, and gainfully use my time—the scarce resource of such top executives.

Simone (Sim) grew up in a family of traditional Swiss values. In the value map provided in the questionnaire she had shown how her parents and her husband shaped her personality during the growth phases. While her father engraved discipline, family values and respect for others, her mother taught her care and affection.

*S: And Naval?*

Sim: Dedication, hardwork, analysis, and reading. I grew up in a post world war environment, where values were very high, economy weak, and display of wealth or power unknown. This background, coupled with my husband's personality made me what I am—a rather private person.

---

*Change the furniture in mind to develop curiosity.*





# Naval Encourages Simone

---

**S**IMONE HAD NO business education and no need to earn a living. In those days, a lady-married-to-a-rich-person stereotype was supposed to play the role of a good housewife and enjoy the party circle of the rich and famous. Simone, you will see, stood out as exceptional.

*S: How did you come into business?*

Sim: I never had to earn a living, and never had a feeling of insecurity. I started work because of the interest in business, infused by Naval. Through his wide international exposure, Naval raised my understanding of the world's problems. His dedication to the Tata group, family, and country, was quite inspiring. That remained foremost in his mind and action. His understanding of the economic, political and social systems of India and the world, their historical evolution, and business in its broad outlook, influenced my thinking.

Because of favourable circumstances, I never felt threatened. I was not dependent on anybody. Yet, everybody doesn't

necessarily feel comfortable in a new situation. Many people do not have the urge to do anything at all. Not everybody is ready for a life like that. There are sacrifices like no free time, not even for friends. Essentially, it gave me a certain freedom to experiment and act.

Naval never questioned me about my business. I was self-made. Whether it was work preparation, organisation, performance, commercial acumen, or taking challenges, I learnt it all by myself. In financial and legal matters, however, I always took advice from a senior Tata director on my Board. In finance I felt for a long time like Alice in Wonderland.

---

*Naval developed in me, a keen interest in India, and  
always encouraged me to fly with my own wings by taking  
on responsibilities.*



# A Technocrat in Lipstick

---

***T**HE ENTIRE BUSINESS world, in my opinion, was a wonderland for Simone. She came into a business environment, listening to business talks. She developed the interest. Her contacts with women who knew business were helpful. She was a happy-go-lucky person with no great ambition in her school days.*

*S: In Bombay, you could have become a party going, bridge-playing lady, but you chose a different path. What was the trigger?*

Sim: I came to join Lakme by accident. A director from Tata Sons once asked me, “Why don’t you join the Lakme board?” My first question was how much time will it take. He said two hours every 3 months, and I agreed. Not knowing how a company works I was told why don’t you do this or that, or look into development. Slowly it became half-a-day job. I began typing my mail at home on an old typewriter.

At some stage Tata Oil Mills (of which Lakme was a subsidiary) decided they needed a Managing Director for Lakme. One Board member sounded me out, but my husband’s reaction was a “no,

no, no". I asked Naval how he could make such a decision on my behalf? Besides, Lakme was so broke, it could not pay the salary of an MD.

*S: How did I not see this unpaid director on the footpaths here at flora fountain in 1964.*

Sim: Whatever we were manufacturing, inside the Sewree factory of Tata Oil Mills, was distributed by them. We had a chemist and a few people working there. We learnt the basics. We produced samples. It was on-the-job learning, reading material, and application.

---

*In retrospect, I think they offered me this job because I  
was the only technocrat in lipstick they could lay their  
hands on.*



# The Evolution of Lakme

---

**S**IM: IN MY visits abroad I used to collect samples and give them to a chemist to benchmark. I had a very fashionable cousin in Paris. When I went to Paris and my father gave me money for dresses I did not buy them. Instead, I went to beauty parlours with my cousin to learn to do a professional make-up: how to take care of skins, textures, etc. In other words, I studied cosmetics. One thing led to another. It was all an evolution.

*S: Evolution in any case is not a force. It is a process, slow in nature. What kind of structure and strategy did you have in Lakme at the start?*

Sim: Up to the 70s, our structure just evolved with the needs of the organisation, starting with basic infrastructure: recruiting a small sales force, creating a one man sales and marketing department, followed by a regional office. Structures became much more defined in the 80s. Strategies in those days were more evolutionary. An export strategy, however, was developed since the Indian market became non-profitable due to the yearly hike in excise duty, which reduced margins to almost zero.

*S: Building a team at Lakme must have been difficult?*

Sim: Some people came from Tata Oil Mills, some from IIM, Ahmedabad. The glamour attracted people. But retention was a problem. Frequent interaction, an open door atmosphere, and sharing the values of the house of Tatas gave us a feeling of camaraderie.

*S: The aura and glamour of working in Tatas must have been an advantage.*

Sim: The name Tata would also convey a certain awe which kept people at a distance. It was somewhat counter productive. Being a woman, a Tata, and a foreigner is quite intimidating.

*S: How did you overcome the counter productive factors?*

Sim: Knowledge of products, and a feel for the product and the category gives you that authority. My strength was my knowledge.

*Simone is right. As a leader you may have a charming personality but if you don't have the in-depth knowledge of your products, processes, and markets, you lose the respect of people working for you. The business of cosmetics was not known then in India. A lot therefore, depended on the understanding of the issues involved in that emerging business.*

Sim: My reading, free access to markets abroad, some aesthetic sense, and the insight I developed helped me contribute. These strengths motivated people.

---

*At the beginning, people were perhaps hesitant to approach Simone because of her reserved nature and the weight of the negative baggage that she carried, namely, that she is a foreigner and a Tata. But her open door policy led to more interactions with people. Simultaneously her knowledge of all facets of business deepened, and the dialogues became more meaningful.*



*It is difficult to dissect and say what the leader did and team did. However, in the nascent cosmetic industry of India, her expertise in shaping the identity of Lakme, the excellence of its products, labelling, packaging, and positioning, established her authority. That I think led to the acceptance of her leadership in its own right. She undoubtedly played a potter's role.*

---

*S: How did your people describe you then?*

Sim: I never bothered to find out.

*S: Where did you catch the germ of turning Lakme into the Revlon of India?*

Sim: In the 60s Revlon was the leading cosmetic company in the world. And Revlon had a number of brands (Revlon, Moon Drops, Intimate, etc.) positioned at various price level, each price level consistent with the brands. For example, Revlon was a mass brand, Moon Drops was for the women between 25 to 40 years, Intimate, a very expensive range, for very sophisticated older women. And each brand had a full cosmetic range and a perfect identity. It was excellent marketing.

*S: So you adopted it for Lakme?*

Sim: While developing Lakme, I knew that without an array of products to answer the needs of all women, we would remain marginal. Of course, some products sold very little and did not pay their way. Others became good cash cows. It is known in this industry that out of ten products, only three make money. But there is this necessity of a full offering, to retain your customer and not to let them go to other brands. What worked for Revlon, with each brand, became a model for Lakme. We introduced a number of products, well ahead of their time. Some became a big success, others hardly covered their cost, but it enabled Lakme to answer any woman's needs.

*S: And what about the quality?*

Sim: Of course, there was the quality angle, which we did not compromise on, and which put a lot of stress on our R&D department. For several years, raw materials and packing materials could not be imported and had to be substituted.

*S: So the brand was not only the driver but also Simone's vision. From her early days in Lakme, her vision was to make available to Indian women, products that were not available here, even if the market was insignificant.*

Sim: This has been, in retrospect, one of our best brand building tools over many decades.

---

*This was an evolution concomitant with India's economic development. It was not a revolution because it did not disturb any market equilibrium.*

# 10

## Lakme Means Lakshmi, Unbelievable!

---

THE STORY ABOUT how the Tatas came into cosmetic business is worth narrating. In 1948–49, Pandit Nehru decided to stop import of what he called “perfumes and powders”. When people like Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Padmaja Naidu, and others asked him what they would do without perfumes and powders, Nehru asked the Tatas to get into this business. Since the Tatas did not know anything about this business, they dragged their feet for quite a while. There were several reminders from the Prime Minister’s office before the beginning was made.

*S: Where did you get the name Lakme from? What does it mean?*

Sim: My husband was looking for a name for a cosmetic company. One day, while in Paris, he went to the Opera, which was playing “Lakme”, written at the turn of the century, by a French composer called Leo Delipe. The story of Lakme is a story of two French soldiers lost in the Sunderbans, in Bengal. It

was a kind of a desert of land-forest-swamp. These lost soldiers saw a light in the distance. They walked towards that light and found a temple. The temple keeper had a beautiful daughter called *Lakshmi*. One of the soldiers fell in love with her. The composer knew the story, changed *Lakshmi* to *Lakme*.

*S: Unbelievable! Lakshmi means Goddess of Wealth. With the use of Lakme products the beautiful women of India look more beautiful. They put on a modern look. Literally, the “Goddess of wealth” fetched Tatas Rs 200 crore when they sold their cash cow Lakme to Hindustan Lever. What a coincidence that Naval should visit that opera and come across a name that gelled in with our culture!*

---

*Many people always ask, "What's in a name?" A name symbolises some meaning. A brand is a name, a special kind of a name. Most loyal users of Lakme's various products probably don't know this story but what a profound significance it has.*



# From Lakme to Westside

---

***W**HAT PROMPTED THE selling of Lakme and the opening of a chain of retail stores? Several factors contributed to this decision, like competition from multinationals, liberalisation, the Tata group's decision to exit from non-core areas, need for huge investment in building marketing muscle and compulsions of the domestic scenario. Simone started thinking of options in 1992.*

Sim: We didn't want to see our brand face competition both from brands in the unorganised sector as well as from premium international labels. We did not want to see our brand devalued over time.

Post 1992, several multinationals, Americans, French, Japanese, approached Lakme with projects for joint ventures or complete buy-out. Almost all the large international brands came knocking at my door. It was a rather fascinating experience. Finally, the best terms were obtained from Hindustan Lever Ltd. In early 1996 a 50–50 marketing joint venture was formed with Lakme retaining the manufacturing side. Some 200 employees from the

marketing and sales departments were transferred to the joint venture. The six members of the board had equal representation. I remained as the Chairman.

However, in 1998, HLL made an offer for the total Company, which was irresistible, and Lakme was eventually hived off to HLL.

*S: Of all the obstacles you have encountered in life, which was the hardest to overcome?*

Sim: The sale of the cosmetics business.

*S: How did you overcome it?*

Sim: I grieved silently, put up a brave front, and convinced myself that the interests of the shareholders had been protected.

*Simone was, carefully assessing various options. Retailing was closest to her heart. It was very underdeveloped in India. As a first move in December 1997, Lakme Exports, a wholly owned subsidiary of Lakme, decided to take over Littlewoods stores in Bangalore. The latter was a 100 per cent subsidiary of Littlewood PLC, UK. The final merger was effected in March 1998, and the new company was named Trent–Tata Retail Enterprise.*

*S: What made Tatas decide to go into retailing?*

Sim: I thought then that retailing was an industry of the future. It was still very underdeveloped; an unexplored territory. At that stage, Retail chains did not exist. We undertook many studies, which I presented to the group Chairman, who gave me a go-ahead.

---

*Westside is a success story. The chain of twelve stores in Mumbai (2), Delhi (2), Bangalore, Kolkata, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, and Noida, is a shopper's paradise. Ninety per cent of what it sells whether linen, pottery, or apparel, are Indian in origin.*



*Westside sources its merchandise from all over India. They work in-house on their designs, colour, and quality. Besides, they are trendy and affordable.*

---

Sim: We are definitely modern in our presentation. Our products are in line with world trends. Besides, the “value for money” equation is paramount. It is to give to the greatest number of people, fashionable products in line with western fashion but adapted to Indian conditions.

We keep giving a new look to our stores, all the while changing collections according to the seasons. Buying trendy stuff in a beautiful setting of spacious layouts, cute coffee corners, children enclosures, and light music, provides a memorable ambience.

---

*This was an organic growth for the craftswoman in  
aesthetics, lipsticks to retail.*



# Transitions of a Craftsman

---

THE SEVEN YEAR (1995–2002) period transformed Simone’s identity from a pioneer in cosmetic business to a grand dame of retailing. However, the underlying vocation remained unaffected—*a craftswoman in aesthetics*. In her passage from 65 to 72, this charming lady allowed the grown-up child Lakme to fly away. She further took a creative leap by giving birth to a brand that addresses the needs not only of ladies but also of children and men. In the process, Simone’s personal bandwidth expanded—she grew.

There is an important lesson in the transitions Simone made in her eventful journey. There is an end (Lakme), a period of distress probably in the fog of confusion (the joint venture with HLL), and a new beginning (Westside). It is seldom realised, that it is difficult to disengage from the earlier identity, the unique circumstances of our individual lives, the safe cocoons of defined roles, the responsibilities and predictable returns. In an organisation, as also in individual life, if one reflects carefully, one realises that every transition had an “end”, a “neutral zone-confusion/distress” and a “new beginning” cycle.

There are ways to facilitate such transitions. Simone went through the known process of scrutinising options, visiting various facilities abroad, talking to many people, etc. She did not abandon the earlier baby nor adopt a new one in haste. She developed new skills in negotiating the perilous passages.

More importantly, Simone arranged temporary (50:50 venture) structure, and used transitions as the impetus for a new kind of learning and discovering. She found something (perhaps unconsciously) that fitted into the texture of her fundamental know-how and liking—aesthetics, a sense of beauty! She made correct sense of life's changes. While making her choices she must have thought to herself: to what degree will the work I do reflect my basic interests? Does it allow me and the company to use our abilities fully? Lakme did, and retailing required the same chemistry. Aesthetics was the ballast of Simone's right choice.

---

*The organisation passed through three classical phases of growth viz. Ending, Transitory, and New Beginning.*

# 13

## Lessons from Difficult Times

---

*S: What challenges did you face?*

Sim: In 38 years of management, there has been many challenges, internal and external, each one of a different magnitude, some threatening the life of an organisation, like Tata Pharma or labour problems at our Deonar factory. Tata Pharma was a bad decision. There were no compelling circumstances to jump into it, and yet we made a wrong judgement. Other pharmaceutical companies like Wockhardt, Ranbaxy, Cadilla, were far more entrepreneurial. We did not have the wherewithal or the people. However, it did not disturb my sleep. The lesson in Pharma's failure was that one should not get into a completely different product line without the know-how.

*The name Tata could not salvage the pharma venture. Throughout Asia Al Ries saw the same pattern, viz. rampant line extensions destroyed brands. He said, "When you expand, you reduce the power of the brand. When you contract, you increase its power". After Ratan Tata became Chairman, Tatas exited from its non-core areas. The focus was regained.*

*The confidence of investors was boosted. The glory of Tata, the immutable brand, was restored.*

Sim: My other challenge was expanding business overseas. Visiting Moscow was a nightmare. For networking, I had to get contacts from embassies (how frustrating it was!). I know one contact leads to another. However, with meagre foreign exchange, not too many good hotels to choose from, and at first, to move alone in a foreign land in those difficult times, were quite threatening experiences. Often, there was eighteen months' time lag between efforts and results.

---

*We must guess how Simone coped with the situation to produce results. In establishing contacts and a network, the ability to communicate is critical. Simone is a person of few words. It is the body language that must have enabled her to network effectively. And who will deny that Simone is graceful. She appears to have utilised her strength productively.*

---

*It was a very difficult union situation in Lakme's Deonar factory. There was gross indiscipline, and the company was losing its right to manage.*

Sim: Ratan recommended a consultant. I took the decision that the consultant will not only advise but also implement his recommendations. Straightway, he started taking actions in the factory. Since nothing was working I did not consult anybody. It was a decision imposed from the top. It worked well in the end. *When nothing is working and the situation is speedily going out of hand—act, act, and act.*

*S: What strategies did you employ in meeting the challenges, and what did you learn?*

Sim: Patience, objective thinking, and looking for new opportunities. At some intervals consultants were called, to get an objective view, to confirm one's views, scan and advise on

strategic proposals. The sense of timing is often instinctive—the sum of many experiences, reading, and listening. There is always a ray of sunshine at the end of the tunnel. Therefore, it is essential to remain optimistic.

*S: Judging a situation in hand is extremely difficult. How does one decide whether it is an opportunity or threat, strength or weakness, crisis or hope, and if there is the chance of success?*

Sim: One knows, often by instinct, almost immediately where the land lies. Sometimes the strengths and weaknesses, hope and crisis, or chances of success and failure go together. I always draw a list of pros and cons and attempt to be totally honest with myself.

Instinct is a natural aptitude, a spontaneous specific response to environmental stimuli. It is animated by an inner agency operating below the conscious level. Simone draws a list of favourable and unfavourable factors to reason out, and take a truthful call on the uprightness of her action. The rationale is to test the validity of impulse against certain values that form the fabric of a personality. The methodical approach of Simone works.

---

*This manner of systematic thinking falls in the stereotype of great thought leaders. Philosopher George Santayana, “Well-bred instinct meets reason half way”.*

---





# Creativity Leads to Competence

---

**S**IMONE SENSED GROWTH opportunities basically through situational analysis of national and international scenarios. Watching carefully their evolution and trying to balance the needs against world developments, she even took the risk of being too far ahead of times.

Sim: For me, innovation is based upon study of projections, economic trends, common sense, and most importantly, identifying the gaps in the market. If we were not pioneering a concept or product, we came out with a competitive product of a better quality, or refined an existing concept and brought it to the market with better delivery.

---

*The competence to identify gaps is the foundation for the creative upsurge, coupled with a competitive urge to stay ahead of the competition by catching the trends upstream. Simone did exactly that. I was delighted to attend the function on June 21, 2003, when Bombay Management Association conferred on Simone a special award for innovation.*

---

Sim: I have always believed that one should never be satisfied, even with success in hand. One has to constantly question, re-work, improve and re-invent. Innovative thinking is often the result of feedback received, or thoughts gathered from reading, but especially of teamwork and brain storming sessions which stimulate everyone present.

The Lakme team functioned that way, by creating a beauty culture that did not exist or was frowned upon by society at large. Hence, market expansion became a focus point for 25 years, till a certain threshold was achieved. This characteristic is seen in the new Trent team, which has launched the first “own brand” chain of department stores in India.

*Simone and team took advantage of demographic and life style changes that emerged in the evolution of the society. Barring the growth of the middle and upper class, the rise in their income, and the emergence of youth as a new class of customers, were a big change in the consumer goods sector.*

Sim: The drive comes to me from colleagues working under me, my team. I deal with them with affinity. I can feel their vibes, feel their personalities. My team inspires me.

---

*Creative people possess a high degree of self-sufficiency. They have need of others but they do not allow them to short-circuit the free flow of creative energy; they select them who are aware and responsible enough not to become blockages in their creative space. Simone has come to know this, the poise says so.*

*If you are like Simone, you can create products and markets, build effective teams and organisations. In India, seniority used to signify status. The concept has been on the stretcher for a decade now. In the knowledge driven economy, creativity will determine status. It is creativity and competence that matters, as Simone’s example shows.*

*Simone’s creativity is not abstract—it is concrete and result driven.*

---

---

*The competence to fill in the gaps in market with products  
and services of a unique value morphs the grammar of  
creativity.*



# Competence Opens up Opportunities

---

**I**F ONE DEVELOPS the skills to identify gaps, analyse trends, build scenarios, and stretch one's intellect to improve perception, one will be able to envision opportunities where none exist. Competence opens up opportunities. Simone did with beauty care.

*S: How did you spot opportunities?*

Sim: Scanning the world through reading and travelling. Backing market research, which often threw clues and going rather deep into the details of the products, and the ability of the company to execute and deliver. Opportunities knock at the doors of those who are prepared to take them.

Opportunity brings along with it an element of risk. One has to weigh the risk. The whole subject of risk analysis has become important in modern day business venture. Venture capital is available. One can take money from private investors. But there are no free lunches. Each one must assess the element of risk involved.

Lakme took a risk in venturing into pharmaceutical business, which was a failure. We launched Tata Pharma without expertise or adequate professional team. The division lost money every year and finally had to be sold; all its fundamentals were beyond repair and a restructure would have needed large investments.

*S: Entrepreneurs take risks. Can you comment on entrepreneurial and executive competence.*

Sim: Entrepreneurs do take more risks because they run their own business. You require entrepreneurial competence in the beginning. In a public limited company, shareholders' interests prevail. You become structured, more organisational. Your authority is embedded in the team, its consensus. It is issue and interest based.

In a limited liability company, the risks directors and employees take are also limited. They assess the worth of their individual competencies and capacities. However, you must have the entrepreneurial streak. The sum of individual competencies must add up to more than the tally of individual competencies. The whole is greater than sum of the parts. In the summation, there are the seeds of growth and discernible value addition of the team.

*S: How do you compare the beginning of Lakme with the beginning of Trent?*

Sim: When I joined Lakme it was still a 100 per cent subsidiary of Tata Oil Mills, a little subsidiary which did not attract any attention from stakeholders. Hence those years were comparatively easy, away from the spotlight of the stock market. But when Trent was launched, we were a public company and cash rich too. The spotlight was very much on us and the jump into a hitherto unknown industry created some anxiety as much in the

Tata Group as with our shareholders. “What is retailing?” was the question asked to us.

However, between the two start-ups, the world has changed. Management has evolved rapidly with each passing year. Information technology, which did not exist in 1962, has been the backbone of Trent. People with more relevant skills were available and putting together a team made the start quicker and easier.

---

*The ability to see things and situations differently, and  
make an innovative combination of its ingredients to usher  
in a new reality is what makes only some CEOs  
exemplary.*



# Change the Furniture in Mind

---

*S: Where did you get entrepreneurial competency from?*

Sim: Through an inborn curiosity, which is still insatiable today.

*S: I appreciate curiosity may be largely inborn. But what can be done to develop it?*

Sim: Hardwork, a tendency to reach to solutions quickly, discussing problems with seniors and experts, and working on systems. I admire the works of Homi Bhabha, Vikram Sarabhai, Raja Ramanna, JRD, Kumarmangalam Birla, F. C. Kohli, and Jamshed Irani. Kohli is no more in the limelight but what a pioneer he has been for the IT industry!

*The influence of scientific minds seems to have refined Simone's creative faculties. The basic commodity is of course a seamless attribute, curiosity-creativity. I probe for her insight in this value creating alchemy.*

Sim: I follow my instinct and intuition. There are so many things amalgamated in the storehouse of your brain (pointing her finger at her head), philosophy, religion, art, and science, all put together.



*S: Any effort at self-improvement activates that faculty.*

Sim: You should read literature, get out of the routine, go to concerts, to exhibitions, to conferences, and you will learn a lot. Observe how other people live, travel, eat, behave, generally study their habits. *Take more interest in others than you do.* Don't remain in your shell: look out; and that will show you how to look within. You should always be searching for fresh inputs for yourself. *Change the furniture in mind to develop curiosity,* it depends upon how passionate you are.

Author of the best seller *Notes to Myself* Hugh Prather (1970) said, *"Just when I think I have learnt the way to live, life changes"*. By cultivating a niche, an edge, a talent, creative artists make a difference. Cultivation means, the use of intellectual labour to change and improve the yield, product, service, performance, or whatever.

*S: If we feel that westerners put on an air of superiority in their demeanour towards us, then this statement from a Swiss of singular achievements on Indian soil should change that opinion.*

Sim: *God has not made me a genius, I need others.* Not having been brought up in India, has deprived me of the finer points and particularities of Indian society.

*S: How did you develop the art of intrepid "Out of Box" thinking and unique doing?*

Sim: The thinking was not so intrepid and the doing not unique. No kidding, please.

*S: What enabled you to show sustained performance?*

Sim: Luck only knocks at one's door 4.5 times in one's life—I think that is rather correct. Respect and learning from my teams, trust in delegating, and then often passing to someone the ownership of ideas.

*I learned to learn constantly and update myself to understand what motivated people* to build teams and to forecast markets. I learned to listen more and talk less, especially to learn from middle aged and young people, and to absorb the movements, which take place with each new generation, new management, theories, the evolution of societies leading to better forecasting and efficiencies.

---

*British actor Peter Ustinov said: "Once we are destined to live out our lives in the prison of our mind, our duty is to furnish it well". Simone goes a step further when she says change the very furniture in mind because change itself is permanent.*



# A Creative Businesswoman

---

I DID NOT discuss with Simone if she, Naval, or the house of Tatas believed in the significance of coincidences, as some corporate do. The Swiss psychologist Carl Jung has seriously studied “meaningful coincidences”. He called this phenomenon *synchronicity*, a term currently in circulation in the management fraternity. It suggests that there is an interconnection or unity of causally unrelated events, and postulates a unitary aspect of being. Managers have realised synchronicity fetches better results than silo mentality.

Simone constantly mentioned how one thing led to another in evolution of Lakme. That led me to remember James Redfield’s best seller, *The Celestine Prophecy*. Redfield states that, “evolution often moves forward by leaps of transcausal events. Coincidence is the mechanism of growth, the how of evolution. Life has a purpose ... events happen for a reason!” I believe coincidences play a major role in the evolution of our thought. Coincidences are watermarks in evolution. Both develop intuition; provide direction.

Graduating from a carefree student life, marrying a foreigner, settling in a different civilisation, and stepping into an unknown business world are all significant transitions. At once they prove one thing, Simone has in her that streak of adventure and confidence to take on challenges. Negotiating these transitions must have been tough. No pain, no gain!

In the process, however, she became a successful businesswoman, a role model for ladies whether foreigners or Indians. Simone set an example and *examples have more followers than reason*. And Simone at 73 is highly motivated, isn't she?

Simone, the mother figure, leads in her characteristic nurturing style. She believes that Indian people are far more receptive to a nurturing CEO than the citizens of many other countries. To suppress their voice and prevent them from expressing their views, would be as damaging to the individual as to the organisation. They also have much talent.

This observation corroborates the conclusions reached by Prof. Jai B P Sinha in his study *The Cultural Context of Leadership and Power* (1995). Sinha notes that the nurturant style of leadership is more appropriate in our context. Employees feel comfortable when someone takes care of them, guides them, tells them what to do and what not, and they are happy to build one-to-one relationships with emotional linkages.

A foreigner, married to an Indian, came to an entirely different cultural continent. To adjust to a culture entirely different from her's must have been difficult. In India, she discovered a different world entirely different from Europe. She learnt to grow in it and own it. She did not tread the beaten path. She chose to be different and scooped profound meaning out of her life.

Simone made elegant choices in marrying Naval, joining Tatas, leading Lakme, and creating Westside. These show beauty,

courage, and quality. Simone's career shows her search for the creative evolution of beauty. Leveraged through her domain, *aesthetics*, and with significant value addition, she built two classy brands. It is not the form or polished appearance of her craft that is mesmerising, although the pull is not denied. It is not even the sense of propriety and aesthetics in her choices. It is the quality of her discretionary faculty in selecting fertile fields for giving expression to her personality, which is most appealing. We have plenty of scope in refining our choice-making abilities by applying Simone's touchstone.

Although Lakme had made a formal beginning before Simone joined, she nurtured its healthy growth, gave it an identity, and made it a popular brand. Westside is outright her conception. These are no mean achievements in a foreign land. These are an artist's creation in aesthetics.

On the merits of performance, and the bottom line figures, she has proven her credentials as an executive of exceptional talent, in a business world dominated by men. In this colourful and sublime journey, Simone reflectively scripted her story and deservedly secured a place as a creative businesswoman in the *enclosure of exceptional* Indian businessmen. We admire Simone!

---

*In Transitions, William Bridges (1996) says, "Genuine beginnings depend upon this kind of inner re-alignment rather than on external shifts, for when we are aligned with deep longings we become powerfully motivated".*



# Take-aways

---

- An awareness of the embedded process of coincidences and evolution is essential for developing intuition and providing direction.
- Understanding the culture of the country, and owning its nuances is required for carving out a niche in that society.
- Elegant and aesthetic choices trace the correct paths.
- A fulfilling career could be designed with a unique blend of competencies.
- Transitions need management in the light of your deep longings while passing through life's perilous passages.
- Learning to learn is fundamental for innovation and business success.
- Nurturant style of leadership is effective in the Indian milieu.
- Changing the furniture in mind empowers curiosity and creativity.
- Our potential for creating prosperity is high but our propensity for living in poverty has been much higher.





# Author's Profile

---

Shrinivas Pandit is a veteran HR professional and a leadership counsellor. His clients include Dian Graha ElektriKA, Indonesia, Biocon Group, Bangalore, NABARD, and Pitambari, Mumbai.

Previously, Mr. Pandit was Executive Vice-President (Personnel) Siemens Ltd. Prior to that he headed the human resource divisions of Blue Star, Herdillia Chemicals and Johnson & Johnson.

Mr. Pandit is a graduate in economics and law; and obtained a postgraduate diploma in personnel management and industrial relations from the London School of Economics. He is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel & Development, UK.

He has previously authored three widely acclaimed books—*Thought Leaders*, *Design Your Career* and *Exemplary CEOs*. He has also written numerous articles on career guidance, organisation cultures interpersonal relationship, leadership, conflict resolution, mindset change, etc. He has conducted many in-company workshops, seminars and addressed public conferences.

Shrinivas Pandit can be reached at [shrinpandit@hotmail.com](mailto:shrinpandit@hotmail.com)