



Wisdom from the Heart

Life and Career Lessons from the Life of Ashiana's Founder, Om Gupta

Madhu Chandra



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Our deepest gratitude to all those who took time out of their busy schedules and shared their Om Gupta moments, memories and teachings so that they could be presented in this book.



Om Gupta

October 5, 1947 - January 3, 2013

To laugh often and much;

*To win the respect of intelligent people and
the affection of children;*

*To earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;*

*To appreciate beauty, to find the best in
others;*

*To leave the world a bit better, whether by a
healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed
social condition;*

*To know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived...*

This is to have succeeded.

Ralph Waldo Emerson



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Foreword



Om was more of a dear friend and close companion than just a brother-in-law for me for almost 40 years. I still remember his contagious laughter and positivity.

I was always impressed by his simplicity and humility even though he was one of the few educated abroad in our times. I always appreciated his out-of-the box lateral thinking and his brilliant foresight on business and relations.

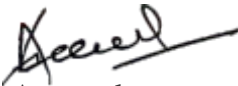
He was an avid reader and drew richly from authors as varied as Dale Carnegie, Richard Carlson, Deepak Chopra, Robin Sharma, Shiv Khera and many more. He lived by

his examples and inspired all those who knew him with his vision towards achieving excellence in life.

When I started reading 'Wisdom from the Heart' which draws widely from his personal musings, I found it simply unputdownable.

The chapters are a reflection of his character, ideologies and sound business principles which lay the foundation of success for the Ashiana Group.

I highly recommend this book to everyone, especially the youth, as it can be a guide in their life, business and relationships.



Anil Agarwal

Chairman

Vedanta Resources plc



Introduction



May 2012. The city of Delhi was hoping for a respite from the heat, dust and pollution; hoping an unexpected shower would play saviour. Inside the pristine environs of one of Delhi's top hospitals, it was the outside that was quarantined. No heat, no dust in here, just quiet efficiency and care, and huge glass windows that showed a picture-perfect line up of trees.

It was here that Om Gupta had come in that morning for his 26th chemotherapy session. Despite being in a state of extreme physical discomfort, he continued to answer queries of 'how are you' with his trademark 'Bahut barhiya' and 'Top of the world'. He spoke not more than 10-20 words a day those days, but what a lesson in

graciousness there was in those few words!

It had been almost five years since he had been diagnosed with cancer. Five years of treatment and tests, chemotherapy and radiation, doctors' visits and health bulletins, the see-saw of medical reports and compromises in life style ...

The chemotherapy procedure was set to begin in a few minutes. The nurse, competent and committed, was going about the preparations. Om's wife, Beila, noticed Om looking at the nurse; his eyes seemed to question, but he wasn't saying anything. This continued for a while. Finally, Beila asked, "Do you need something? Is something bothering you?"

Om looked at Beila, "Yes. The nurse has been here for 45 minutes. She hasn't smiled once! Tell her to smile!"

The nurse couldn't help but break into a wide grin!

That was quintessential Om Gupta to all who knew him. A warm, sunny and happy disposition. A smile that was even more infectious than a yawn! A pleasant countenance, a positive outlook in every situation, every condition. He believed that no problem could be so serious that you should become despondent; no challenge so overwhelming that you should lose your sense of humour and no situation so grave that you stopped smiling!



Om Prakash Gupta was the founder of Ashiana Housing Limited. Ashiana, for those unfamiliar with the name, is a company that has carved a niche for itself in the middle-income group housing space and is also acknowledged for its pioneering role in the Senior Living space in India. The Company has not only been named twice in the Forbes Best Under a Billion List, but is also the only real estate company from India to win this accolade.

Om Gupta set up Ashiana to give to the middle-class home owner features that were hitherto seen only in higher income level group housing: top quality construction, manicured lawns, expanse of greenery, children's play areas, swimming pools, clubs and a calendar of social activities for the whole family. Additionally, it also committed to maintaining the common areas of these buildings. Then, recognizing the need for retirement homes where seniors could lead safe, active, enjoyable and comfortable lives, Om Gupta studied international models in depth, tweaked them to suit Indian cultural requirements and created a brand - Utsav - for its Active Senior Living complexes. These are just two examples of the pioneering and visionary spirit of the founder of Ashiana.

The significance of the story of Ashiana and its founder Om Gupta lies not in the fact that Ashiana has a healthy bottom line or that Om Gupta set up a successful,

profitable business. The story bears recounting because of the principles on which the Company was founded and the personal beliefs of Om Gupta and the fulfilling life he lived. This is not the tale of an aggressive entrepreneur who vowed to make it big on his own and set himself punishing schedules and targets. The narrative here is of a business plan that focused on creating an organization that would take others along on its growth path, of creating products that would enhance the lifestyles of those who bought them and of building a successful business without compromising on principles and righteousness.

Om Gupta left the comfort and security of a successful family business in Patna for the uncertainty of a new venture in a new city. Using his civil engineering knowledge, he wanted to enter the construction business. At the time, the business was run rather unprofessionally and lacked transparency. The demand for homes for the middle-income group was much more than the supply and the tendency was to sacrifice quality at the altar of speed. Om Gupta was determined to set up a 'clean business' where quality was non-negotiable. His faith in himself and his beliefs gave him the strength and confidence to go against the tide. He was not a man in a hurry to grow big or compete. He knew 'if you did the right thing, if you had the right intentions, you would succeed.'

And what was success for Om Gupta? It was not being the biggest; it was not growing faster than anyone else, and it was certainly not in leading a one-dimensional life! A successful business for him was one that gave opportunities to more and more people as it grew from strength to strength. A business that made a positive difference to the lives it touched. Personal success was a life well-lived; sharing love, laughter and good times. It was always about ‘people’ rather than ‘numbers’.

As one of Ashiana’s brochures puts it, ‘At the heart of Ashiana lie not statistics, figures or numbers; nor stone, brick or concrete; but its people.’



His passing away in January 2013 brought forth an avalanche of letters from people who knew him in different capacities. The common thread that ran through these letters was the inspirational role that Om Gupta had played in their lives. Friends spoke about his being a ‘*yaaron ka yaar*’, employees - former and present- wrote about his sense of fair play and of being a true leader who helped them grow, other stakeholders wrote about his efforts to see that they too prospered along with the growth of Ashiana. Everyone spoke about his positive attitude, his love for people and how much they had learned from him.

There was really nothing complicated about Om Gupta's way of conducting his business or his life. With his simple strategies and beliefs, he set up a successful business. And he believed that what works for running a successful business, works for being successful in life too. The ultimate test of success was not money and status; it was Being Happy and Spreading Happiness. To Om Gupta, they were interlinked. If you were happy, you made others happy and if you made others happy, you increased your own happiness quotient.

Going through those letters one got a sense that perhaps OPG's simple, practical and straight-forward manner of doing things should be shared with those who did not know him. Perhaps, people struggling to find peace and contentment, or those yearning for greater success and happiness, would find answers in his uncomplicated and clear-headed approach to life.

Each successive generation benefits from ancient wisdom and past experiences that guide and teach; each successive generation also has new ways and new technology to improve life and enjoy it in a multitude of ways. Yet, by all reports, we seem to be enveloped by stress and strain, anxiety and angst, depression and anger.

It needn't, and shouldn't be so. Om Gupta's family members, friends and co-workers have shared with us

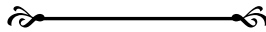
their OPG memories and teachings so as to give us an insight into the strategies and beliefs of Om Prakash Gupta. This book shares these with its readers in the hope that it will help them achieve success at work and in life.





Chapter 1

From Dreams to ‘Realty’



Bineeta Basu and C K Basu first met Om Gupta in the mid-80s when he was starting out in the realty sector in Jamshedpur. C K Basu was the Director of Industries, Govt. of Bihar, at the time. Bineeta Basu reminisces, “With his tousled hair and ready smile, Om was an endearing person and we took to him immediately. He talked about his work at Jamshedpur saying, ‘Neev to rakh di hai, ab dekhte hain kya hoga, jaroor kuch achha hi hoga’. It felt good meeting this optimistic person with a definite plan in mind! Being of a similar mindset, we struck an instant rapport.

“As we got to know him better, we realised that Om was gifted with an uncanny and unique understanding of market dynamics. He could spot opportunities. Jamshedpur had an

acute shortage of housing for the middle-class and he met that need. Today Jamshedpur and Ashiana are synonymous.”

C K Basu adds, “It was not going to be easy. But I knew he would succeed and realize his goals. He was so clear-headed. I never saw him get flustered no matter what the issue. He always remained calm; first he took time to understand a problem, then his focus was on the solution, not the problem. In his clear-headed manner, he would come up with the solution and then take action.

“Om was financially very astute and a good businessman; at the same time he was particular about beauty and aesthetic appeal and, most important, he had clear ethical and moral codes which he did not waver from. His goal was not ‘makaan bana diya, ab usko becho’. His buildings had to be clean, green and beautifully designed. He would not cheat anyone on quality and was completely transparent in his dealings. His approach to facility management was, ‘these are not ‘buildings’- these are homes for families. I want them to continue to be a source of pride and joy and to help instil community feelings.”

Bineeta Basu concludes, “Humility came naturally to him and even after achieving so much success, he remained grounded and level-headed. Om was a glorious chapter in our lives. They don’t make people like him anymore; he was truly a ‘Limited Edition’.”



In America, in the 60s, Robert Townsend took over as CEO of the loss making Avis Rent-A- Car and transformed it into a rental car giant. His 1970 best seller, 'Up the Organization', was subtitled 'If you're not in business for fun or profit, what the hell are you doing here?'

Around the same time, Om Prakash Gupta, studying for his MS in Civil Engineering at the Louisiana State University, USA, was envisioning his entrepreneurial dreams. And he was quite sure that he wanted to be in business...for fun AND profit!

As eldest son and current MD of Ashiana Housing Limited, Vishal Gupta says, "Oh yes! For Dad it was very clear - you should enjoy yourself and get a sense of satisfaction from what you did. Making money was part of the aim, but not an end in itself. The other aim was to make a positive difference in the lives of others by what you did, and you had to ensure you made money so that you could accomplish that goal too."

Om Gupta was born into a successful and well-off Marwari family. His father followed tradition in certain ways but was also open-minded and forward-thinking in others. He valued education and made sure his sons and daughters were well educated. But there seemed to be no reason to alter the status quo: the daughters would be married off well, and the sons, once they stepped into their late teens, would be absorbed into the family's flour milling business while simultaneously pursuing their studies.

Om, however, as his younger brother Prem Gupta puts it, "was always different from the rest of us. He was more out-going, friendly and confident...ready to go where none of us thought of going." What was also evident was his curiosity about the world around him, his desire to learn, to question and to imbibe. Elder brother Shiv Bhagwan Gupta believes it was these traits that lead Om to do what none of the other four brothers did - opt to stay in a hostel and study at the Birla Institute of Technology at Pilani (BITS, Pilani), then go to the US for further studies and finally, set up his own business venture instead of joining the successful family business.

None of them know where the seeds were sown, but they assume that he kept his ears open during the years he spent studying at different schools in different cities. The family spent some years in Delhi, which was unlike the environment in the more traditional Sangaria in Rajasthan. Om made friends easily and was very comfortable in the new environment. Then, while the family was settling down anew in Patna, Om, who was the second eldest, was picked to be at Vrindavan to give his grandfather company; it was accepted that he was the one who would most easily adjust to a new place. It was during these years that he heard about the Birla Institute of Technology and expressed a desire to study there. At BITS, he met students from all over India and heard about the option of going abroad for further studies. These decisions charted the course of his life.

As he met people from diverse backgrounds, he kept an

open mind, forever learning and questioning. Prem Gupta adds, “He was not only the most educated and qualified person in the entire family, but he was also more refined and soft spoken. I think he had a knack of seeing what was worth emulating in others and constantly working on improving himself. He had the gumption to go ahead and make his dreams come true, *kisi bhi haalaat mein ghabrate nahi the*. He had all the qualities required to succeed.”

Sowing the Seeds

As soon as Om Gupta returned from the US, he got busy setting up his first venture, Gupta Pipes. His father, always open-minded and encouraging, had no problems with Om’s decision to venture out on his own instead of joining the family business.

Shiv Bhagwan Gupta and Prem Gupta say, “With his inherent clarity of mind, Om saw early on that his preferred working style was different from the way the family business was run. We were following the way of our father and uncles; he had a more professional approach. He did not want to force his ideas on us; he also saw that for the business we were in, the old style was working successfully. Rather than disturb that, or be compelled to adjust to it and then feel frustrated, he decided to set up his own venture. Our father respected him for his decision.”

Raja Modi, Chairman-cum-Managing Director of Ashiana Homes, and a close friend, who was also in Patna at the

time, says, “Om could have taken the easy way, but he was an independent thinker and he wanted to do something that he would enjoy, that would give him satisfaction and be challenging. He was not the kind to take the ‘short cut to success’. He had conviction and knew what he wanted to do. The flour mill business was low management; it was a seller’s market and offered him no challenge or opportunity to put his learning into practice.”

Raja Modi continues, “At that time, there were a few of us youngsters in Patna, running our small industries or units. We set up an association, Engineers Industries Association, so we could meet and exchange ideas. Seven of us from that group decided to form a company together to achieve our goals. We had big dreams, but not the financial resources to fulfil them on our own! So we pooled in Rs. 10,000 each and set up Ashiana Engineers Private Limited. Under that umbrella, we set up a Precision Blanking unit. Soon after, we decided to venture into real estate too.”

These initial years were far from easy for Om. Gupta Pipes was doing reasonably well, but was a very tiny part of the total business of the Gupta family; Precision Blanking was losing money and while the real estate business was doing well, the money was not coming into the hands of the partners as it was being ploughed back into the business. As Shiv Bhagwan Gupta says, “Om’s early ventures were not a success in our eyes since the only way for us to measure his

success was the earning that the venture was generating for him. Thus we did not see even the real estate venture as a success even though it was definitely setting new standards in Patna.” Both brothers say none of this disheartened Om. He persevered at work and, in personal life, continued to be his jovial, endearing self. Prem Gupta adds, “I would say that for the first 10 to 15 years of his career, we did not consider him a successful businessman. In fact, we did not have the foresight to see the huge potential of what he was doing.”

When the group of seven decided to move towards real estate, their focus was on group housing. The money in their kitty was far from sufficient for the project. However, family and friends were impressed by the building plans and started booking the flats in advance. Soon every single flat in the planned apartment complex was booked and they had the finances to go ahead. By the time their first two real estate ventures of multi-storied buildings in Patna were ready, Om had realized that this was what he wanted to pursue. The group took up the ambitious Ashiana Nagar project in 1982. Raja Modi, says, “It was after a long time that a colony was being planned in Patna and Om, and another partner Kesari, were instrumental in organizing it. Om worked very hard to bring this project to life. I still remember him putting on gum boots to walk through the mud and slush in the fields to plan that project. It is possible that Om’s family may have wondered why he was doing this when he could have joined the family business and been so comfortable!”

Making Lemonade from Lemons

A chance meeting in Jamshedpur gave Om Gupta the idea of building apartment complexes in the Steel City. It was a bold move as it would be a completely new concept in a town they were all new to. But Om took the decision after doing his ground work and learning that there was a shortage of private housing in the city for the middle-class dweller. The others in the group were not really interested in Jamshedpur so it became ‘Om’s baby’.

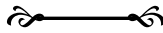
Raja Modi recounts, “At around that time, some frustrations were surfacing among our group of seven. Some wanted to move forward slowly and cautiously, others wanted to be more aggressive and take risks. Om strongly believed that there was no point in forcing relationships if things were not working out. It was better to split the company and stay friends. We all talked it over and decided to split amicably in 1986.”

If the split was amicable, he adds, a lot of the credit must go to Om. “The deal was unfair to him. While some of the other lands were valued at cost to the group, Jamshedpur was valued by including the potential profit of the project. Om was given Jamshedpur as his share of the distribution of the assets of the company at this much inflated value. Jamshedpur was at a nascent stage then - we had got the land and some planning was under way, but there was still a lot to be done. Also, the perception was that it was a

slow-moving, unattractive market.”

“Om readily accepted what was being given to him. He was well aware of the unfairness of the deal, but he believed it was better to part amicably and move on. He would certainly put forth his view when something was unjust or unjustified, but after a point he would rather let it go than prolong the argument and cause bitterness amongst friends. In fact, I noticed that he would argue more for others than for himself!”

Raja Modi, who understood his friend well, explains, “He had this belief in himself and that *‘jo hota hai achhe ke liya hota hai’*. He always said, ‘Why waste time and energy, why get stressed? It’s better to use that time and energy to move forward.’ And see how God blessed him - Jamshedpur is what made him! He got a bad deal, but turned it into a success. He worked very hard; in fact the journey up to ’89, which was the year he completed the first project at Jamshedpur, was a big struggle, but after that, there was no looking back!”



The world needs dreamers and the world needs doers.

But above all, the world needs dreamers who do.

Sarah Ban Breathnach

From Dreams to ‘Realty’

In a Nutshell

- To make the most of your life, choose a career path that gives you joy and a sense of satisfaction along with a level of financial security you are comfortable with.
- Be alert and aware: opportunities could be staring you in the face! Imbibe, learn and emulate what is worthwhile by keeping your eyes and ears open.
- If your intentions are backed by clarity and righteousness, if you have the courage of your convictions, you will naturally acquire the confidence to speak your mind and share your beliefs.
- Don't get disheartened or stressed: develop self-belief, poise and resilience by working hard, doing your best and always looking for ways to improve.



Chapter 2

The Foundation: Positivity, Clarity, Love



There are three traits of Om Gupta that all who knew him will unfailingly mention: his positive attitude, his clarity of thought and his love for people. This trinity was the foundation of how he lived his life and ran his business. His strategies and methods were extensions of these traits and in turn nurtured these very traits.

Prem Gupta says, “Family, friends and colleagues, everyone looked up to him as the person to turn to for advice. We all had faith in his clarity in understanding a situation, in coming up with the best solution and in his genuine concern for others.”

Positivity

Rohit Modi and Vishal Gupta have been friends since the age of two. It's a friendship that the second generation has taken forward - their fathers, Raja Modi and Om Gupta, were not just close friends but also partners in various phases of their business lives. Rohit started his career under the mentorship of Om Gupta, "I could not have been more fortunate. He had so much to give, and he taught by example and not by lectures. He was a strict disciplinarian, but the number of times I was pulled up was so worth it not just because of what I learnt, but also because of the love I got from him."

Rohit relates an interesting incident. "This was sometime in '97 or '98, soon after we had moved to Delhi from Patna. A major cricket match was on and my friends and I were glued to the TV set. India was doing badly, and in the typical over-the-top fashion of passionate cricket fans, we were all berating the team: 'Sack the captain', 'Throw them out', 'Hopeless, we'll never win' etc., etc. Om Uncle and Manju Aunty had come over. Om Uncle came and sat beside us. 'Kitna banaya?' he asked, and then started his line of comments. 'Itne runs ho gaye? Very good!', 'We'll make it', 'Achhi effort kar rahe hain'... I just sat there looking at him, taking in the difference in approach. Very soon, I noticed that my friends were echoing his lines! The whole atmosphere in the room changed. Would you

believe it - India won the match! I am not suggesting that we won it due to his positive attitude, but I was amazed at how he transferred his positivity to everyone in the room. It was magical!”



“*Jitna ho gaya, achha hai... yeh kar paye achhe se, bahut achha kar liya*”, these are the words Vishal remembers hearing from his father regularly. He elaborates, “Instead of harping on what was not done, *yeh nahi hua, yeh nahi kar paye*, he appreciated what had been achieved and was always grateful for it. He looked at the bright side of things and if something did not happen as planned despite one’s best efforts, then he believed that it was because *‘iss mein bhi kuch bhalai hai* or *‘iss se bhi kuch barhiya hoga’*. The amazing thing was that it would really turn out that way!”

This attitude gave Om Gupta a personality that was magnetic and drew people to him. Gian Taneja, his friend from Jamshedpur, puts it thus, “He radiated energy. Sometimes, just seeing someone gives you the energy to want to do more. That is the vibe he gave.”

OPG focused on the best in people, not on their faults; he looked for things to praise rather than criticize, and he thanked rather than regretted. It was due to this attitude that he saw opportunity where others would have

concentrated on the obstacles. His clear thought process was also in part due to looking for the way ahead instead of getting bogged down in regrets. He believed that a positive attitude helped you to achieve more in life, overcome hurdles and move forward, enjoying the best that life had to offer.

Always wanting others to also imbibe and project a positive attitude, he had his own way of passing the message around. Usha Kartha, GM, Finance and Administration at Ashiana Jamshedpur, who joined Om Gupta the day he started Ashiana, laughingly recalls, “His greeting to everyone was always a beaming ‘*Kaise ho?*’ I would reply with, ‘*Theekh thaakh.*’ When he came to know me better, he responded one day with, ‘*Yeh theekh to phir bhi samajh mein aaya, par yeh thaakh kya hota hai?*’ Now, for me, replying as Om Bhaiya did, with a ‘*bahut barhiya*’ has become a way of life!”

Raja Modi says, “He was my pillar of strength during my moments of weakness and during the failures I faced in my life; he helped me stand again on my feet with renewed vigour. During our struggling days together, he would say, ‘*Jaise hain achhe hain, kyunki iss se bhi kharab sthithiyon main ho sakte the!*’ And that would be the final word on that! My wife Madhu and I often talk about one of the biggest lessons we learnt from him and Manju Bhabhi: to appreciate the efforts made by people.

Sometimes, it so happens that we go to a party, we feel the food is not to our standards and tend to criticize it. But Om and Manju Bhabhi would say, ‘*Kitna effort kiya tha, kitne pyaar se sab ko khila rahe the...*’ I learnt from him that even if the performance is below your standards, you should appreciate the effort so that the person will be motivated to do better next time.”

With an attitude like that it is not surprising that Kuldeep Gahlaut, VP, Human Resources at Ashiana Housing, believes that OPG had a smile that a child would envy! And Atma Sharan, VP, Ashiana Maintenance Services, asks, “Can you ever picture him without a smile on his face?”

Clarity

Ashiana’s Consulting Architect Biswajit Sengupta who has had an uninterrupted professional relationship with Om Gupta for over three decades says he witnessed OPG’s clarity of thought on numerous occasions. “The services of a person I had recommended were terminated due to misconduct. When I apologized to OPG for having recommended such a person, he calmly told me that I had no reason to feel responsible as the Company had not selected the person solely on my recommendation but after a proper interview. Thus it was the Company that was responsible for the final decision. I was struck by the

unusual clarity with which he had evaluated the situation. Another incident from our early days together: I was at a construction site and saw that a certain feature that I had designed had not come up as I had visualized. I wanted to get it rebuilt so I called Om to discuss the matter. He immediately asked me how much it would cost. I told him it would be about `25,000. He replied, ‘Go ahead and get it done. And in future for similar situations, if the cost is up to 25000, then get it done without asking me; between 25 to 50, call me to get my approval; above 50 - don’t ask and don’t do it!’ How clearly and simply he had defined the boundaries of decision-making!”



OPG’s clarity of thought, his ability to take quick decisions and his systematic approach is legendary not just at Ashiana, but also in organizations like the Rotary and the BITS Alumni Association. Manohar Baheti, OPG’s batch mate as well as TT and carrom partner at BITS, Pilani, writes, “Om’s methodical ways and clear thinking were responsible for the huge success of the BITS’69 Alumni get-togethers. BITS’69 is a group of over 260 students from the 1969 Batch of the Birla Institute of Technology and Science, Pilani, who are today spread out across the world. Om was the architect of BITS’69 and its strong pillar. He kept his commitment to lead the 2011 Udaipur

Meet and gave us an outstanding event despite his failing health. Incidentally, the BITS'69 group has a place in the Limca Book of World Records for having held the 'largest alumni meet of a single batch'. We cannot forget Om's contribution in our getting this honour."

Joys Panicker was OPG's Executive Secretary and is another person who has been with the organization almost from the beginning. She says that whatever she is today is thanks to OPG. "I was 'zero' when I started to work for Om Bhaiya in Patna. He never made me feel that I was not good enough or that my English was not perfect. He taught me, patiently and with simple explanations, how to be systematic and well-organized. He also taught me the basics of different aspects of the business so that I could handle my job more efficiently. He encouraged me to ask if I did not understand something. Working with him was a pleasure because there was just no confusion or chaos no matter how much the work pressure may have been. His instructions were so clear, his files and papers so well-organised that there was no place for stress or nervousness."

C K Basu adds, "He used to tell his people that to achieve clarity of thought you should get rid of all clutter and confusion: clutter on your desk and in your drawers as well as clutter of the mind. He pointed out that confusion and

stress is caused by not having accurate information or having it but not knowing where to find it!”

Clean Desk, Clear Mind

Om Gupta entered his neat and tidy office every working day and looked at the Post-its which were always on his desk listing what had to be attended to. In his neat and small handwriting, he would have written what the issue was, what information he had to collect and from whom - just enough relevant details. The notes would be in pencil and he would carefully erase them as the day progressed, altering a detail here, adding a point there. Once the job was done, he would gently erase the point. The Post-it would be replaced the minute it looked shabby, but till then, the pencil and eraser did their job on it. It was neat and there was no wastage of paper.

Other than the Post-its, the only other papers on his desk would be related to what was being discussed at that moment. Discussion over, the papers would go back into the relevant folder and drawer. He explained that unnecessary papers - on your desk or in your drawers - made it difficult to find what you required. He also pointed out that a mountain of papers on your desk would give you a feeling of too much pending work; it would overwhelm you and affect your efficiency. He advised staff members to clear their desks every evening, put papers away in their designated places, and start their day with a clean desk.

Almost everyone at Ashiana has a ‘clean desk’ story to tell. P K Jaiswal, Vice President, Bhiwadi smilingly reminisces about the early days at Bhiwadi, “Om Bhaiya”, he starts, then smiles with evident affection and adds before continuing, “*hum sab unhe Om Bhaiya bulate the, sirf official meetings mein ‘Sir’ kehte the...Om Bhaiya hated untidiness. If we knew that he was coming down from Delhi to Bhiwadi, we would all start clearing up our rooms and our tables. But in my case, he would not be taken in so easily; he would say, ‘mujhe tumhari kursi pe bethna hain’ and then sit and open each drawer to check if they were really neat or I had hurriedly stuffed them with papers! He did this laughingly and with love, not in an I-am-the-boss manner, so you really appreciated it; you knew he was doing it for your benefit. He would tell me that I should do the same with others in my team so that I could pass on these habits.*”

Varun, Om Gupta’s youngest son, and Whole Time Director, Ashiana Housing Limited candidly admits, "For the first four-and-a-half years at Ashiana my desk was very untidy. Dad would open the door of my office every evening to say ‘bye’, he would look very disapprovingly at my messy desk, perhaps hoping I would get the message sooner than later. Well, it finally happened 6 months back and now my desk is neat - I finally learned what Dad was trying to teach me."

Paper Perfection

To function with clarity, it is essential that papers are arranged and kept systematically. In OPG's office, loose papers were an absolute no-no. All important matters requiring follow-up would be in plastic folders neatly arranged in his drawers - no originals were ever in these folders. All original papers would be in their respective files. Joys says he kept his papers and files so well-organized and labelled that he knew exactly where a paper would be even better than she did. "He never asked me to give him a paper; it was always, '*beta, yeh wali file se yeh paper nikaalna*', because he knew exactly where each paper was. Every six months, he would go through all files, discarding or shifting papers not required, making sure there were no unnecessary duplicates, and checking that everything was in order and up to date."

Om Gupta was a stickler for neatness. He was particular about how papers were stapled together (correctly aligned and stapled along the vertical top left), how papers were put into an envelope (neatly folded so that they unfolded top-side up), how they were punched for filing (perfectly centred) and even how glue was applied to an envelope (not going over to the papers inside).

B C Asthana, DGM, Bhiwadi and Neemrana, who has been with the Group for 25 years, says, "He told us to take notes as it is not possible to remember everything.

This teaching has helped me become more efficient and organised in my life and work. I learned a lot from him and still follow what I learned. I maintain 2 diaries - a large one and a small one, make to-do lists, prioritize, and yes, I use a pencil and eraser; not a pen. He did not like to see scratched-out untidy notes or an untidy desk.”

Om Gupta put it interestingly when he said, “If you have a single paper on your desk that is not required, then that is a waste of very valuable space.”

A Keen Eye for Detail

M P Singh and Seema Singh, owners of M&A Advertising, have had a long association with Ashiana. Seema Singh remembers, “We were making the creative presentation for Utsav Bhiwadi, Ashiana’s first Senior Living project. He had made one thing very clear, ‘it is not an old age home’. He would repeat this at every subsequent meeting till it became firmly embedded in our minds. Till date, whenever we talk about the project, we start with this line. He loved the logo and the creative presentation, but he had one question: ‘*Font size kya hai?*’ We told him we had used a 9 font size. ‘*Iss ko 12 kijiye.* The people who have to read this may have a problem reading a small font because their eyesight may be weak due to age.’ Good point...and we still follow it! That was his level of detailing and farsightedness.”

Love

Joys Panicker feels it was providence that made sure she was never far from Ashiana! She joined the Company in Patna, then had to leave to go to Kerala to get married. The person chosen by her parents was based in Patna, so she returned a month later and hesitantly called OPG. All he said was, “Kab join kar rahi ho?” Later, around the time that her husband got a transfer to Delhi, Ashiana too had opened an office in the capital city. She asked if she could be transferred to Delhi ...and she is still with Ashiana! “I feel proud and blessed that I was the Executive Secretary to a personality like Om Bhaiya. Hamara kya rishta tha...he always called me Beta, I always called him Bhaiya.”

Holding back her tears, she recounts a touching incident. “About seven years back I was facing a health problem and finally had to go in for an operation. I needed a month and a half off from work. When I went to ask him, he said I should not worry about the office and attend to my health. Then he added, ‘...aur beta, jitna kharcha hoga, woh mujh se lena. Abhi lena hai, to abhi le lo’.

“On the morning that I had my surgery, my anxiety was replaced by reassurance when I got an SMS from him, saying simply, ‘Love you, Beta’. His concern and his good wishes were all there in those three words! When I

returned to work, Bhaiya said, 'For the next two months, you should not take buses or autos. Take taxis, I will pay the taxi fare.' I had not asked for anything, but he just came forward like a guardian angel.

"I have no relatives in Delhi, but I always felt secure because of him. I was 100% confident that if ever my family or I need anything, Bhaiya will be there."



Ankur, Om Gupta's middle son and Joint Managing Director of Ashiana Housing Limited, says that when he was given charge of the HR Department, the single most important advice his Dad gave him was, "Love every member of your team - unconditionally! Start your relationship with love and trust; this will help you understand them better. Be responsible for their welfare and growth, motivate them towards higher goals. You will be delighted with the love, commitment and loyalty that you will get in return. This will create the kind of atmosphere that is the hallmark of a good organization."

OPG's interest in the welfare of his team was evident in ways big and small. As Varun says, "Dad's efforts to improve the lot of his people - from teaching them how to be better organized to explaining how they could improve their personality by being better groomed - these were all expressions of his love for his people. In effect, he was

saying, 'I don't care only about the work you do for me; I also care about YOU'.

OPG's business decisions were also extensions of his love for people and his desire to improve things for as many as he could. Ashiana Phoolwari schools for labourers' children and Ashiana Training Centres to upgrade unskilled labourers to skilled: these were expressions of his concern and compassion. He liked being in real estate development not just because it was financially viable, but because it meant you were creating homes for families and thus participating in a major source of joy for them. Similarly, it gave him a sense of satisfaction that through facility management and organization of events he could give happiness and comfort to Ashiana residents and help build community-feeling. The whole idea of Utsav came about because he truly felt that seniors in India should have a facility where they could enjoy their retirement years, and live with safety and self respect.

Ashok Mattoo, Director, Ashiana and close friend and associate of OPG says, "There are some who are driven by everything for 'self'; Om was driven by doing for others. Being a businessman, of course he wanted to generate money, but his focus was not on making money. His focus was on making customers happy; improving the future prospects of his employees and giving back to society...he had genuine love and concern for people."

That OPG was a 'people person' was evident even in

childhood. Prem Gupta says, “Friends have always been his life! As a kid, if I said anything against his friends, I would get a good ‘*pitayee*’ from him! But he did not neglect his family either. He was always ready to give his time, or any other help, to both family and friends. When I was about 30, I had some medical problems. He left his work to accompany me for treatment 3-4 times, even spending 10 days at a stretch with me, making sure I got the best treatment and got well.”

Sonal Mattoo, lawyer and Director, Ashiana, says, “Om Uncle was the most loving person I ever met! I really value this advice he gave me, ‘What is important is what you give, not what you get; that is what love is all about’.”

Om Gupta made long lasting friends and nurtured relationships. As Manohar Baheti writes, “Om had a magnetic personality. There was purity in his friendship, warmth in his embrace and joy in his greetings. Om, *tere jaisa yaar kahan?*”



*A good head and a good heart are always
a formidable combination.*

Nelson Mandela

The Foundation: Positivity, Clarity, Love

In a Nutshell

Positivity

- Inculcate a positive attitude by appreciating what you have and being grateful for it.
- Don't harp on what was not achieved; tell yourself that something better will happen and then work on making that possible.
- Look at the bright side of things; when things don't happen the way you wanted them to, see if there is something for you to learn from the incident.
- A positive attitude will give you energy, clarity of thought and a magnetic personality that will draw people to you.

Clarity

- Make notes, make lists and write down instructions and action plans: it is not possible to remember everything.
- Add essential information in your notes like dates for action or follow up, names of people to be contacted, etc.
- Don't use untidy scraps; maintain diaries, have an easy-to-maintain file and folder system.
- Put things away: keep your desk neat and clear of papers not required for the task at hand.
- By following these rules you will have access to information and therefore clarity in what you do.
- Get rid of clutter of the mind too - a positive mindset will be the first step to that.

Love

- You have to give love to get love.
- Trust and respect shown to others begets trust and respect in return
- This helps to create an atmosphere conducive to growth and empowerment of all concerned.



Chapter 3

The Three Rs - Right Information, Right Decisions, Right Action



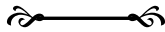
If during early school life it is the three ‘Rs’ of *reading, writing and arithmetic* that are the basic skills needed to progress, the three Rs of Right Information, Right Decisions and Right Action help us to get ahead as we enter adulthood. And as OPG often reminded his people, for a project to succeed, it was imperative that you gathered all your information before you began and made sure the information was accurate and pertinent. Accurate information was the precursor to considered decision-making and astute actions. He said, “Remember that every time we choose a path, take a decision or undertake an action, it has an impact not just on us but also on the people around us. We make our choices based on information, our beliefs and our decision-making skills.

These choices can make or mar a business; they make a difference to the quality of life itself.”

Right Information

Ankur Gupta joined Ashiana after his return from the United States where he had gone to do his Master's in Real Estate from New York University. He remembers a lesson learnt early, “I had always known that Dad was very particular about figures, data, and other information; he had it on his finger tips and made great efforts to give and get accurate information. Soon after I joined the Company, Dad, Vishal Bhaiya and I were having a meeting. Dad asked some questions. Bhaiya had his figures ready, but I had learnt just before coming to the meeting that the figures given to me were off. Knowing that he wanted answers with figures, I gave what I thought should be the correct figures, rather than admit that I did not have the accurate ones. He calmly asked me three times if I was sure. I bluffed and said ‘yes’, hoping he would let it go. I also made a mental note that I better double-check facts and figures in future. But the ‘future’ was far away - Dad gave it to me then and there! He told me sternly that this was not acceptable. ‘If you don’t have the data tell me you don’t have it, but never give me, or anyone, wrong data. It will lead to wrong decisions, wrong actions and a waste of resources, time and energy.’ It is a lesson that has stayed with me and has helped me enormously;

it has been passed on to my team members too. This incident made me understand that while Dad would be cool if you made an inadvertent blunder or took a wrong call on something, he would get extremely upset if you tried to fib, or give vague information because you did not have your facts.”



OPG had a curious mind, always seeking to learn and he made constant efforts to pass on this trait to those who worked with him. He encouraged them to ask questions and made them understand the power of information. B C Asthana says that OPG's own lack of hesitancy in asking questions and admitting that he was not aware of something had a profound effect on him and his colleagues. Their own diffidence was replaced by a willingness to learn and ask questions. He encouraged them to read technical journals, be aware of the latest developments and also be aware of what was happening in the market.

OPG explained the significance of information and reports in all situations - information gathered before the start of a project, or information put down in reports during its progress or on its completion. He cautioned his top managers that if they were not getting reports regularly, or were getting incomprehensible or incomplete reports then it meant they really had no idea what was happening. And if they did not know what was happening - were they in loss?

or profit? were they keeping to the budget? to the time schedule? - well, if they did not have this information, then they may as well shut down the business till they got systems in place, or else they would find themselves mired in deep problems. An information report, he said, is the tool that helps you take correct and corrective action.

Another factor that had an impact on the way his team worked was OPG's habit of studying all reports and charts very carefully. They knew that nothing escaped his eye and so took pains to achieve accuracy - or face his interrogations! OPG explained that he studied reports meticulously as much for his benefit as for the benefit of the person who had prepared them. The process of preparing a report itself makes things clearer and improves efficiency. Ashiana employees say that OPG's insistence on getting accurate information improved their knowledge so much and made things so much more comprehensible that they grew in confidence greatly. It also improved their decision-making skills. Where they once wavered, they now saw things with crystal-like clarity.

Ankur remembers another incident which brought home the importance of getting one's information right. "Soon after returning from the US, I met a customer who told me that there was seepage in his flat and that this, in fact, was a big problem at the project. I was alarmed and got all keyed up and burst into Dad's office exclaiming, 'We have a huge

problem, many customers are complaining of seepage...” Dad asked me for details and I stopped in my tracks! I realised I had no details, no numbers, had no idea exactly how serious the problem was. He then asked, ‘How many customers did you meet?’ I mumbled that I had met one. Dad sat me down and made me realize that I should have (a) got first hand information after meeting more customers; (b) gone into depth of what was causing the problem or where exactly it was occurring and (c) met the architect to come up with a solution, instead of just bringing the problem to the MD without a solution. He told me to probe further, and I learnt that of the 316 flats, 10 had a seepage problem, and that it was caused by the same fault. No doubt, we took that very seriously, just as we would take a shortcoming in even a single flat very seriously. But had I started taking action without going into depth, it is possible that I would have made the Company expend more resources than required or gone totally off track and disturbed the normal course of work. As appropriate action was being taken to correct this fault, I was imbibing a very important lesson: The solution to a problem will not be correct unless you know exactly what the problem is.”

Clarity of Purpose

Just as he always stressed that it was a pointless exercise to work with inaccurate, assumed or incomplete

information, he also insisted that there must be clarity on why you are collecting the information, and how you would put that information to use.

Varun had recently joined the Company when he learned about some land available in Delhi and Gurgaon. When he told his Dad that he was planning to look into it, he was asked: “Can you do middle-income there? Is it feasible for us?” These questions taught him to focus and spend time on areas which would be in sync with the Company’s core competency.

Varun adds that it also made him understand the value of the one question OPG asked when something was suggested to him - what’s the purpose? “Whether I was suggesting SOPs, new reports, a new theme, whatever it was, he would ask this question. He needed you to have clarity of purpose for anything you suggested. He had a very open mind and was open to new ideas, but he would not take a decision till this information was shared with him. He wanted to know if you had thought about what would be achieved by expending the Company’s time, energy and money on what you were suggesting. This ensured that we did not just get taken in by the latest fad or buzz word. We analyzed and had to be sure of the value of that idea.”

Varun explains further, “You could not go to Dad with half-baked ideas or ‘information’ gathered from casual

sources or hearsay. For example, if someone came to him excited about a new machine that was being enthusiastically spoken about in the trade, he would ask how the machine would help the Company. Had the person recommending it done a cost-benefit analysis? Would it be economical in the short term or the long term? Would the machine improve quality or save time? What benefit would it give to the end-user, i.e., the customer? In other words, that crucial query: what's the purpose?"

Youngsters in the Company admit that initially the number of questions he asked unnerved them; at times it irritated them too! But gradually they realized the value behind those questions.

P K Jaiswal adds, "When you went to OPG with a suggestion, you had to have all the information about it and in a manner that was useful and relevant to the purpose. For instance, he taught me that since we sell our project in sq ft terms, our costing of various components, like concrete, electrical work, staff overheads, etc., should also be worked out in sq ft terms. He explained that you cannot compare apples with oranges; you can only compare apples with apples. There was not much point in knowing that our costs on a certain head are say, 60 lakhs, until we convert that into cost per sq ft. Only then could we make a qualitative comparison and make an informed decision about the correctness of our selling price."

S. K. Palit, VP Operations, Ashiana Housing Limited, talks about how OPG took excellent decisions because he was so clear about the purpose behind any action. "In 2006, we decided to go in for a Batching Plant. The advantages were manifold; we would not only have control on the quality of concrete, but we would have ready availability of the concrete and not be dependent on suppliers which further meant that time schedules would be in our control. It was also cost effective. While sharing information about it, there was a discussion about the fact that the use of fly ash would further reduce costs. However, I was not comfortable with using fly ash since I had no experience with it. Even though we had a senior consultant who had experience with batching plants and fly ash, I was hesitant since I did not have the required experience personally. OPG understood my hesitancy and agreed that we would not use fly ash till I was personally knowledgeable and confident about it. This incident made me understand the kind of businessman he was. He could have insisted that I use fly ash since it was cost effective. But he had the clarity to take a balanced view - his basic and larger purpose was being served by setting up the batching plant. If the team had been comfortable using fly ash, he would take the additional benefit of further reducing costs; if not, he would forgo it with no regrets. It was more important for his team members to be comfortable with what they were doing, for that would ensure quality."

Managing Information

The value of information lies not only in its accuracy but also in how it is organised, how accessible it is and how it is used and analyzed.

Biswajit Sengupta remembers the time in the early years when a prospective flat buyer asked a young marketing executive questions for which the executive did not have the data and information readily available. The customer gave him a piece of his mind and left. The crestfallen executive came to OPG, told him what had happened and apologized. Always the patriarch, OPG gently replied, “Beta, we can learn something from each person who visits this office.” He then worked out systems so that Company executives would have all relevant information either at their fingertips or readily available.

As Rohit Modi says, “Om Uncle had a very sharp brain; he knew his figures really well. He also trained his people well so that they too could access and make use of information, data and figures. He would make forms and charts, explain how to enter the data received, what goes along the Y axis and what along the X; he was thorough to the core!”

Before a meeting, OPG would prepare his ‘one-page note’. All information or points of discussion for a meeting were listed and encapsulated in just one page. He felt it made for brevity and clarity. As the Company grew, meetings

were decentralized and department heads took over certain responsibilities. Atma Sharan says that OPG was unusually open-minded when handing over responsibilities. As long as the purpose was achieved, he gave his people leeway to do things their way.

Another consequence of a company becoming bigger is that there is much more data and information to study. The answer, Ankur explains, is that the leader then focuses on the outliers. “Whatever is a deviation from the norm needs the leader’s attention. Let’s say, the costs are down one month. On the superficial level it is easy to see it as a positive. But from Dad we learnt to question: Is it due to efficiency, or quality deficiency; or is it misreporting? The answer would be critical to either setting things right and ensuring return to our quality standards or making an example of it to be followed. For instance, if Dad saw that the expenses under ‘Security’ had reduced, it would alert him to enquire if that was due to a reduction in the number of security guards. If that was the reason for the drop in expenses, he would not be pleased and would ask the project head to remedy it immediately. Outliers serve as very crucial information sources in numerous ways.”

Om Gupta believed management of information was critical for every department so it could run smoothly and efficiently, fulfilling its assigned role in the collaborative effort that goes into running a business. B C Asthana says,

“He taught us how to make lists and keep information handy for every aspect of a project from housekeeping to materials to sales... He used to say that a store should be so well-organized and orderly that you should know exactly where each item is and also its quantity. He was against holding on to or hoarding items no longer required. He went into these minute details while teaching us. Once we started following his guidelines, it became easy to maintain our stores in that organised manner *aur store ko dekh ke ham sab ko bhi khushi aur garv hone laga!*”

Right Decisions

Shailendra Singh, AGM Estates, Ashiana Maintenance Services, remembers an incident, “The Company felt it was time to do the external repainting of a project at Bhiwadi, but there was resistance from the residents as they did not want to spend the money required. Om Bhaiya was patient; he explained that residents have to be educated about the advantages of maintaining their property. He did not see it as a point of conflict, merely something that needed to be talked over respectfully, and with full transparency about the costs. By the time we got the go-ahead from the residents, the prices had gone up and the costs had mounted. When I brought this to Om Bhaiya’s notice, he said, ‘We will absorb the extra cost. It is more important to give the residents a freshly-painted building which will

make them happy, make them appreciate the difference and teach them the value of upkeep than to get into any further discussions and delay.’ He did not waver in the least. His priorities were clear as were his decisions.”



Om Gupta possessed a clear mind and an uncomplicated thought process; there was no ambiguity in his decision-making, just as there was no ambiguity in his fact sheets. He had the ability to take quick decisions. He took a long term view of things and was always well-prepared. He involved his team in decision-making, giving people a chance to express their views and was appreciative of their contributions. When he gave his people the power to take decisions, he would build their confidence by telling them that he would back their decisions.

He explained what he meant by the power of information. When you had that power, you were not groping in the dark. For instance, as in the example above, if you decided to ‘absorb the extra cost’, you knew exactly how that would impact your budget, you knew how much you could afford to ‘absorb’, and you could plan accordingly. Through these simple yet practical explanations and through examples and case studies, he taught his people the art of decision-making.

Vishal explains, “It’s not just about decisions being right, it is also about the ability to assess situations, take quick

decisions when required and finally have the courage to face the consequences and be ready to tackle them.”

Biswajit Sengupta says that OPG’s impressive decision-making skills were also due to the fact that he had his priorities so very clear. “I once asked him what his priorities in business were. He replied, ‘My answer to that would depend on what was taking place at that point of time. When I have to start a project, the priority is land. When that is done, the priority is getting the designs ready; after that it is selling the flats, then constructing them and this cycle keeps repeating...’ With such a clear-headed approach, it’s no wonder that he was so cool and calm and took such sound decisions!”

Getting it Right

Smart decisions, it is rightly said, are the triumphs of judgment while bad decisions are opportunities to learn from and rectify strategy.

Ashok Mattoo says that OPG got it right because his goals were clear. When a quick decision had to be taken, he had the skill and clarity required to do it. He also had the patience and perseverance to go into depth and research extensively for certain other decisions. “Utsav, his retirement housing project, was unlike other projects. It was not just a business venture; it was more about giving senior citizens a better life. The next step would be to

work out how to make it into a viable business model. The idea was working on Om's mind for six years before he implemented it. When we were in the US for Manju's treatment, he often discussed the changing environment in India; the need for retirement communities and how the mindset would have to change for retirement communities to be accepted in India. During that time, Ankur was in the US too, studying Real Estate at New York University. He told him to especially study the Retirement Communities in the US. For years, he collected information about it, thinking, discussing and refining it so that it would be the perfect solution for India, and specifically for India's middle-class. Alongside, he worked out how to make it financially viable for the Company as well as affordable for retired middle-class Indians. When Utsav was launched in Bhiwadi, it was truly love's labour won! And finally, when he saw seniors leading active and happy lives at Utsav, it gave him great joy and satisfaction."

While OPG encouraged decision-making by his people, he was also conscious of the fact that as the captain of the ship, some decisions must ultimately come from him. Being able to separate these critical decisions from those that others were competent to make was another facet of his clarity of thought. He used his head, but as often used his heart too, in deciding that something should be done. But even those decisions of the heart were never

imprudent. He knew exactly what he was committing to.

S K Palit says OPG was so thorough in everything that he did that it was unlikely that he would go wrong. “He would not take a decision or take action without getting the answers to his questions. I remember a time when we were trying to sort out seepage issues. I learnt of a material that would give better results and wanted to substitute it with what we were using. OPG asked me ‘Is this the only company manufacturing it?’ His point was that being dependent on one supplier could lead to various difficult situations. A monopoly supplier could act difficult with us; or if he ran into a problem and was unable to supply the product, our project could get stuck or delayed. These were practical problems that I had not envisaged, but he had great foresight and looked at things from every angle. There was only one supplier in Delhi, and it was not feasible to get it from the other two suppliers from far-off states. So we researched further and then came up with the solution of injection grouting to prevent seepage. This is what he meant by information leading you to right decisions and actions.”

S K Palit gives another very interesting example of how one crucial bit of information led to ‘getting it right’. “We started having a seepage problem in one of our projects just four years after it was completed. On investigation to find out if the problem was with the quality of pipes or in

the plumbing, we learnt that it was the GI pipes that were corroding. GI pipes, which were traditionally used in construction, were expected to last at least 20 years but they were now starting to corrode within four years. The fact was that GI pipes were going down in quality quite drastically. Two replacements which were popular abroad had entered the market here - CPVC pipes and PPC pipes. PPC was much stronger, so seemed to be the better option. However, following OPG's directions of always getting in-depth information, I learnt that the jointing system of PPC pipes required extreme precision. I was doubtful if it would be realistic to expect our plumbers to manage that precision. At that time, more people were moving towards PPC since it was stronger and cheaper, but when I explained my reasoning to OPG, he appreciated my thinking and agreed with me. It is pertinent to note that PPC pipes ultimately did cause so many problems for those who used them that they soon practically disappeared from the market."

To get it right more often than wrong, OPG cautioned against taking a short-term view. He also pointed out that a good decision could not be made in isolation. All aspects had to be considered. Vishal explains, "For instance, the Ashiana technical team is aware that every decision they take must be 'techno-commercial'. To make this viable, the technical team is made to understand commercial aspects

of the business as well as how to measure the commercial impact of a decision. Today, this is a question our technical team members ask themselves before taking a decision - is it techno-commercially sound? For them, it was Dad's '*takiya-kalaam*', and they have imbibed it well!"

Not Taking a Decision is also a Decision

Another very interesting point Vishal makes is that OPG taught him that 'not taking a decision is a decision in itself; and knowing when to delay taking a decision is equally critical'. He says, "Dad was a very quick decision maker. He did not like to keep things hanging. So if he was delaying taking a decision, I understood that there must be a good reason for this; the delay must be a considered decision of his."

OPG explained to him that yes, it was a thought-out decision not to take a decision at a particular time. So you put that on the back burner, but you keep an eye on it. And after you see events unfold, or at the opportune time, or perhaps after you have a vital piece of information, you make the call.

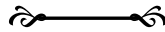
Vishal adds, "Other than in situations like this, Dad always preferred concluding matters rather than dragging them. He did not let things linger, or stretch an issue. That is probably why in our entire history, we have had no major court cases, no litigation."

With his positive mindset, OPG would rather lose some money than have pending, unpleasant issues lingering. And his life has many instances of this.

Right Action

OPG's actions displayed his organizational skills, his righteousness and his compassion. C K Basu speaks about an incident at Jamshedpur in 1997 that showcases all these qualities. "Om's ambitious project, Ashiana Gardens, was a great success. The quality, layout, design, lawns and greenery were highly appreciated. The icing on the cake was the timely delivery and the affordable price of the flats. Such was the impact that for their subsequent projects, Ashiana had clients ready and lined up! All was going well, but the year 1997 brought exceptionally heavy rains to Jamshedpur. The Subarnarekha River was in spate and the catchment area of the basin was inundated. Ashiana Gardens, being on low ground, was badly affected too and the water level had reached even the second floor of some of the buildings. The employees of Ashiana immediately took up rescue operations under Om's direction. Fortunately there were unoccupied flats on higher levels and the residents were shifted up to these safer floors. Once the water receded, Ashiana undertook the restoration of the flats and then shifted the residents back to their homes. This entire operation was done at no

cost to the residents although it cost Ashiana a substantial sum. Om and Ashiana gained the gratitude of the residents and respect of all in Jamshedpur after this incident. It is something that people still remember!”



Man - Materials - Cash: these were the three broad categories that OPG spoke about when it came to project implementation. You had to make sure that all three were available so that decisions taken could be translated into action. OPG’s systematic and methodical ways ensured there was seamless flow from the first step to fruition. And once he had decided on a course of action, he wasted no time in its implementation.

Communication

The first step in implementing decisions is ‘communication’. OPG was particular about communicating decisions to all those who would be involved in carrying them out. ‘Is everyone informed?’ would be one of his first questions. How the communication was passed down was equally important. Was it through written communication, or just passed on orally? Was it dated? Was there a date for follow up? And - have you received a response from the person you sent the communication to - in other words, can you confirm that the person has got and seen your

communication? He left no scope for ambiguity. He also believed that information and communication should be exchanged in a manner that creates a shared sense of involvement and purpose.

OPG had established a Meeting Rhythm which he believed was essential to ensure effective communication and foster collaboration. There are daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual meetings at Ashiana. At all meetings OPG's rule of taking down notes is followed. He would always remind his team that it was not possible to remember everything mentally and that it was much less stressful if you had it all on paper. Schedules and dates for action to be taken as well as for follow-up action should be drawn up in a clear and concise manner and language so that everyone involved understands them well. Om Gupta encouraged people to ask questions and seek clarifications if there were any doubts. He would break up tasks into sections and ask how many days it would take for each task to be accomplished. If you gave him a date, you were expected to stick to it. However, if you were running late, he would appreciate it if you informed him before the due date and explained your situation.

Biswajit Sengupta says that OPG had his own subtle manner of ensuring that people kept to their promised time schedules. "Om used to have regular meetings with his consultants to finalise time schedules, etc. It is the tendency of people to over-commit in such situations. If

someone committed to delivering a drawing in ten days, Om would quietly ask, ‘Should we write down twelve days?’ ‘Oh! Definitely’ would be the reply. This was an indirect way of putting pressure since he had already given you more time that you asked for! It was a very astute tactic!”

Another aspect of communication that OPG was extremely particular about was responding to communication. Joys says that no mail or message ever remained unanswered. “It might have been a one-line reply or perhaps a polite refusal to a request, but reply he would! He would get annoyed if he was not given a message that someone had called for him in his absence. He explained that it might be a minor issue for us, but could be something important for the other person. He returned every call, replied to every letter or email...it reflected his inherent respect for everyone.”

Down to Action

Om took pains over the ‘action plan’ of each project because that is what ensures on-time, on-budget and quality-controlled completion of a project. While Om Gupta believed it was important to stick to the plan if you wanted the desired results, he was flexible enough to make a change if required. If any product seemed to have gone down in quality, it would be replaced. Or if circumstances called for a change, he would discuss matters with

consultants or others working on the project to arrive at the best solution. Meetings were always very democratic. He had also learnt from experience to always have a Plan B ready for certain situations.

These processes are embedded in the culture of the Company; Standard Operating Procedures have made it possible for managers and supervisors at all locations to ensure that systems are in place and followed.

OPG was particular that construction should not get interrupted or stuck for any reason. '*Chaal kholi ki nahi?*' he would ask when visiting a site. That is construction language for 'are you ready for the next step?' It is to ensure that there is no break in the activity for want of Man, Machine or Cash. While one step of the process is underway, it is essential that the person in charge is ready with all that is required for the next step. S K Palit says that OPG personally looked after matters that were critical and sometimes difficult to handle, such as, electricity allotment, drainage and sewage, construction equipment procurement, etc., and his son Vishal now does the same.

Says Shiv Bhagwan Gupta, "Om paid attention at every stage of the work. He would replace any sub-standard material irrespective of the cost to the Company. As he learnt of new techniques and technology, he adopted them. The result is a reputation that allows Ashiana to charge more per sq ft than others, yet sell much faster than them.

He also believed that those who did not run their business ethically and fairly would not have long term success.”

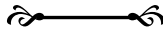
Righteous Action

Om Gupta understood the needs of his customers well. “A golf course will look pretty in a picture, but it will not serve any purpose for my customer”, he would say. On the other hand, while going through an international magazine and reading about Sewage Treatment Plants and Solid Waste Management Plants and their benefits, he decided to include them in every project. He looked at features that would improve the lives of his customers and those that were useful for society and for the environment.

During the rainy season, while on a visit to one of Ashiana’s residential complexes at Bhiwadi, OPG saw children standing in the rain waiting for their school bus. Right then, he took the decision that every complex should have a covered bus stop shelter. He asked his team to take it up on priority and now all Ashiana properties - old and new - have aesthetically designed shelters.

On another trip, he learnt that the part-time maids working in the complex sat wherever they found shade and ate their lunch there leaving behind a mess. Om’s response was humanitarian and practical. He told his project managers to create a 'Maid's Rest Area' in every Ashiana complex.

His decision to start Phoolwari schools at all construction sites for the children of labourers working on the site has made a profound difference to the lives of those children. Vishal adds, “A line heard at a CREDAI conference about the need for ensuring the safety of the children of labourers working on construction sites was enough to get him into action. Once he was convinced of something, he wasted no time.” Today Ashiana has Phoolwari crèches and schools at all construction sites of the Company. Children at the crèche get milk, food and toys and a dedicated carer. There is also a clean and secluded place for mothers working on sites to feed their babies. The class rooms are clean, bright places and efforts are made to ensure that older kids get admitted to the local government school. Phoolwari was very close to OPG’s heart and a retired VP of the Company and his team closely oversee its progress and improvement. These initiatives accomplish what Om Gupta set out to do when he became an entrepreneur: to create something that would improve lives and spread happiness. Ashiana’s old logo of ‘Nurturing Smiles’ is OPG-inspired.



*Experience is not what happens to you;
it's what you do with what happens to you.*

Aldous Huxley

The Three Rs:
Right Information, Right Decisions, Right Action
In a Nutshell

Right Information

- Information is power, so ask questions to gather information required for the purpose at hand.
- Make sure the information you have is authentic and accurate; incorrect or incomplete information will lead to wrong decisions.
- The process and result of collecting information is a huge learning; it brings clarity to issues and increases confidence levels greatly.
- Understand why you are collecting information for a particular purpose. This will ensure you ask the right questions, relate the information to the purpose and know how to put the information to profitable use.
- Organize and keep that information in a manner that is easy to access.

Right Decisions

- Have clarity in what your goal is; this will lead to right decisions.
- Prioritize and take decisions accordingly so that work happens in an orderly and stress-free manner.
- Clarity and methodical ways will help you to take good quick decisions when required.

- Assess the situation, consider all aspects, and don't take a short term view.
- Take a long term view of the impact of your decisions and be prepared to face unexpected consequences too.
- Involve team members in decision-making.
- Knowing when to delay taking a decision is also a decision.
- Look upon a bad decision as a learning opportunity.
- Make sure that your decisions have a positive impact on society.

Right Action

- Communicate: inform all those involved in the implementation of a decision.
- Make sure communication is clear and dated and that you get a response. Always respond to communication you receive.
- Any communication with the team should create a sense of shared purpose.
- Note down the process to be followed for action to be taken.
- Ensure the availability of Man, Machine and Cash required for the action to be implemented seamlessly.
- Have a plan of action, but also be prepared to be flexible when required.
- Consider the common good when taking any action.



Chapter 4 A Dream Team

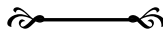


Kuldeep Gahlaut, VP HR, Ashiana Housing Limited, describes his first meeting with OPG. “I first met OPG in December 2008, when I was being interviewed to head the branch at Jamshedpur. My first impression of him was of a genial father figure. This impression was cemented over the next 45 minutes, when we talked of nothing more professional than family life and general issues. During this entire time, a smile never left his face. Later, the other two candidates confirmed a similar experience.

“It was only on my flight back to Kolkata, as I reviewed my day at the Ashiana Office, that I realized how brilliantly I had been ‘interviewed’! What an incisive

analysis of my personality OPG would have gathered as my character unfolded before his eyes! The fatherly figure, his easy manner, and the genuine interest he took in the other person, had combined to make me so comfortable that I had laid bare my personality, my traits and what I stood for. And yes, as I now know so well and follow, it was not skills that he was looking to hire, but character and the basic human being.

“This was the edifice on which he built Ashiana – a Company with an organizational character strong enough to withstand the turbulent environs of business, yet flexible enough to change with the times; its core remaining ever intact.”



It is said that if a person does not smile easily, his chances of being selected for a job at Ashiana are slim! While that may be an over-simplification, the fact remains that Om Gupta looked more intently at the ‘person’ than at the person’s qualifications. Selecting people with the right attitude has been critical to the Company’s success. Ashiana has employees who have been with the Company for over 25 years; from the day the Company was set up till date. It has team members like Usha Kartha who started out as an Assistant Sales Executive in 1984 and is today GM, Finance and Administration; there is Lal Mohan who was a Daily

Wager at Ashiana and today, seven years later, is Sales Executive. There are numerous instances of employees who, from junior positions, have risen to lead a team.

Perceptive Sagacity

Pradeep K. Chhawchharia, Mamaji to Vishal, Ankur and Varun, is ‘*mama*’ to the entire Ashiana office! He says with obvious delight, “I love the way they all call me ‘*Mamaji*’; there is a lot of respect in it. The Ashiana office is not just an office with employees; it is truly the Ashiana Family. This is because Om *Jeejaji* created an organization where every member, from top to bottom, is loved and respected. His way of assessing a person’s character and abilities was very different and beyond the understanding of most people. I personally believe that he had a special ability and extraordinary vision in such matters. And that is why he was successful in creating a ‘dream team’ at Ashiana which is the key strength of the Company.”

A good team is essential for success, and for Om Gupta, a good team meant a set of people with values that were in sync with the values of Ashiana. What did OPG look for? A pleasant disposition and goodness were paramount. After that came enthusiasm, willingness to learn, integrity, respect for fellow workers and a sense of responsibility. And then came competence, technical ability, and professional qualifications. He told his sons that “the first

step to building a good team was to hire ‘good’ people. Good people know good people, so whenever you need more employees, vendors, suppliers or consultants, you will get them through your original network.” He further explained how this translated into good business sense. “You cannot run a good business without being a good human being. Once you form a circle of good people, doing good work together, you will all prosper together. You will get good products, good work, and good prices.” The simplicity of his belief and the equally simple manner in which he put it belies the strength and potency of the idea. And his way of ‘interviewing’ a candidate was not something one would find in a Management Manual!

Some of his methods would appear to be counterintuitive. Vishal remembers the time they were to start work on the Treehouse Hotel. “I have the greatest respect for Sen Uncle (Architect Biswajit Sengupta) and his work. But I felt we needed something different for the Treehouse. I hesitantly mentioned this to Dad. ‘Why don’t you ask Sen Uncle to suggest someone? He will suggest the perfect person to you!’ was his immediate response. To my surprise that is exactly what happened. Dad explained to me that this is how things work when there is mutual trust between people; when both parties have faith that the other party will always have their best interests at heart. This trust and confidence that he had in his team, and how it was reciprocated, left a lasting impression on me.”

EQ over IQ

Om Gupta believed that a person's EQ, more than the IQ, was an indicator of various traits essential for success at work and in fact, in all areas of life. A high EQ was a sign of self-confidence, a positive outlook, integrity and loyalty. It indicated the ability to build strong relationships, to work well with others and help others to perform at their optimum level. Neatness, cleanliness and orderliness were other desirable traits that OPG believed could be taught more easily to such a person if required.

He believed that people who worked to achieve a purpose which went beyond earning money would always perform better. And he believed it was the organization's job to present employees with a 'purpose' that would motivate them. A company that focussed on quality or improving lives needed to share that dream with employees to make their working life 'purpose driven' and not just a 'job to be done'.

In management parlance, OPG would be described as an out and out Theory Y person as opposed to a Theory X person. The Theory X manager assumes that employees are inherently lazy, will avoid work and responsibility and hence managers need to use threats, coercion and enticing incentives to get compliance and achieve organizational goals. A Theory Y manager believes that, given the right conditions, most people will want to do well at work. They will seek out and accept responsibility, will be self-motivated and for them, the

satisfaction of doing a good job will be strong motivation in itself. This positive view heralds a climate of trust and immense possibilities for human resource development, which is crucial for the growth of an organization.

Compatibility over Competence

Happiness and harmony were important aspects for Om Gupta. Good and healthy relationships among co-workers were essential to ensure an amiable work place atmosphere. When people are selected on the basis of sharing certain traits, when co-workers can function well as a team, co-operate with one another and spread positive vibes around, it makes for a higher quality of work, less stress at the work place and definitely healthier and happier employees.

Atma Sharan says, “The brief to me was to select those who had the capacity to enjoy what they did and work with enthusiasm. The other trait Ashiana looks for is the ability to ‘belong’; a person who has the ability to ‘belong’, whether to an organization, a family, a group, a friend, will be able to work well as a team mate. But none of this means that OPG did not have high regard for qualifications and skill sets. He valued education hugely and facilitated the basic and higher education of numerous people. And of course, training and skill upgradation programmes are a regular feature at Ashiana. Basically, he believed that the person must have the right attitude, the rest can be taught.”

The Cultural Fit

It is imperative, for the company as well as for the individual concerned, that he or she fits in with the culture of the company. Team members must be aligned to the core values, beliefs and culture of the company, more so, a company with a strong culture like Ashiana.

P K Jaiswal joined Ashiana in 1989 at Patna. When the Company started work at Bhiwadi, OPG invited him to move to Bhiwadi and be a part of its expansion plans. “I learnt so much from him but one of the most potent bits of advice he gave me was that a company’s culture is set by the person leading the team; it moves from top to bottom. If you live the values and beliefs of the company, so will your team. *Kisi ko sudharne ki zaroorat nahi padegi.*”

Ashiana fills its positions keeping in mind the traits mentioned above. With the phenomenal growth of the Company, Ashiana has been increasing its work force every few months and today has approximately 750 employees on the Company payroll. 30% of new hires are straight out of college, working as trainee engineers, trainee sales staff, etc. Ankur says, “It might be tempting at this stage to hire people who might deliver faster because they are already experienced, but we’d rather hire youngsters with no experience so that we can train and guide them in the way we do things at Ashiana. From the very beginning they get acclimatized to our culture, belief systems and core values.”

When it comes to Senior Management positions, these are filled by people from within the organization for the same reason. People who have spent time in the Company have a thorough understanding of its culture, value system and standards. They have a grasp on the fundamentals of the Company and can handle the work and their team with aplomb. This is beneficial to the Company as well as to the individual. Ashiana nurtures capabilities and all team members are given every opportunity for growth and development. P K Jaiswal is an example of the opportunity for individual growth at Ashiana. From Site Engineer in March 1989 to Project Engineer in August 1989 to Project Manager in April 1991 to Project Manager Bhiwadi in March 1993 to General Manager Bhiwadi in July 1995 to Vice President Bhiwadi in November 2004 - it is an inspiring career trajectory!

In it for the Long Haul

It is seldom that someone leaves Ashiana other than for reasons such as having to move to another city, or pursue higher education. And equally seldom is anyone fired. If they are fired, it is not for incompetency or mistakes made. They would have been fired for moral issues and for going against codes of conduct.

Joys Panicker speaks about an incident when a newly hired manager sent an inappropriate note to a young lady, who was also a new recruit. The young lady nervously brought the note to Joys, who took it to OPG. In the words of Joys, “That was

the last day we saw that person at Ashiana. And what I can never forget is the manner in which Bhaiya apologised to us - saying he was at fault for having hired a wrong person. He was extremely pained at the incident.” On the other hand, when he got a complaint that a peon was not listening to instructions, OPG’s response was, “*Uss se pyar se kaam karva ke dekho*. Maybe he just needs some love and respect.’

Varun Gupta explains, “If he was convinced about a person’s basic goodness then he would spend time and guide that person if an error of judgement had been committed. Employees not performing well would be redeployed elsewhere where they could flourish or at least be able to perform better. These lessons from his life are tied up with the most valuable advice he gave us - ‘Be good human beings’.”

P K Chhawchharia says, “He believed that you could help people improve by appreciating their qualities, instead of criticizing and highlighting the shortcomings. And the beauty of this great man’s teaching is that these beliefs are ingrained in the system of the Company.”

As Ankur explains, “There are companies that are target-driven and aggressive where employees would be fired for not achieving targets. At Ashiana, if we know that employees have worked hard and with dedication and loyalty, then we will never fire them even if they have not achieved the given targets. Instead, we sit together and try to understand the reason behind it. This was Dad's way and if the net worth of

the Company has grown at a compounded annual rate of 25% over the last 15 years then his way is certainly working!”

Atma Sharan adds, “OPG said that employees should never feel victimized. The senior person should find out why a person selected for a job is not performing. At Ashiana, mistakes made are dealt with by mentoring, understanding why and guiding. The mistakes I made were handled thus so I in turn do the same though I confess that was not my natural way of handling things. But after spending time with OPG, I realised that when you are empathetic, when you love your people, then this comes about naturally. I also saw the added benefit of this: loyalty and a sea-change for the better in the person concerned.”

In a nutshell, the reason for the low attrition rate at Ashiana is the fair treatment of employees, the opportunities for growth and the respect and love they are given.

Perhaps the most telling comment about his dream team came from Om Gupta himself. With time, he said, the culture of the Company had become such that “*jo log sahi nahi hote, woh khud he chod ke chale jaate hain.*”



When aligned around shared values and united in a common mission, ordinary people accomplish extraordinary results.

Ken Blanchard

A Dream Team

In a Nutshell

- Selecting people with the right attitude is critical to creating a dream team.
- A person's EQ, more than his or her IQ, is an indicator of whether the person possesses the traits that are essential for teamwork and are in sync with the company's core values and culture.
- People with enthusiasm and integrity can be trained in areas where they lack knowledge or experience.
- It is the leader's responsibility to create a harmonious atmosphere and to motivate team members by guiding them towards a 'purpose'.
- The leader's actions must convey trust and confidence in the team.
- The leader must create conditions for the growth and development of team members.
- Accept the fact that mistakes will happen; use them as teaching and learning opportunities.
- The right actions and attitude of the leader will result in team members feeling a sense of belonging and loyalty.



Chapter 5

The Way of the Patriarch



By 1993, P K Jaiswal and his family had moved to Bhiwadi from Patna to be part of OPG's dream. He remembers Om and Manju's concern for them. "It was always much more than just 'work' that they were concerned about. When we moved here from Patna, they both spoke to me about the children's education. They were concerned that since at that time Bhiwadi did not have any good schools, our children's education would suffer. They asked me to check out schools in Pilani and some other places around. Finding them too expensive, I gave up the idea but did not say anything to them. But it was still on their minds; Manju Bhabhi called to enquire where I had decided to send the children. I told her that the school fees were too high. This was the response, 'Aap paise ki chinta

mat kijiye. Just get them admitted to the school of your choice'. They were paying Rs. 30000/- every year for my children's school fees but they behaved as if they had not done anything extraordinary for us. They really took care of all of us at Ashiana as if we were their wards."



One may assume that a company that gives so much weight to maintaining a happy atmosphere and pleasant surroundings, and also keeps a paternal and concerned eye on its staff, may be letting go a bit on the discipline. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Ashiana could not have achieved the kind of success, in terms of profits, awards, reputation and growth, without a high level of discipline and a strong management philosophy. The Company has won awards from CNBC Awaaz, Zee Business and CREDAI, recognition from Forbes, and a nod from leading investment advisors like Dharendra Kumar of Value Research. It is regarded as the company that has raised the bar for quality, timely delivery and transparency in real estate dealings.

A visit to the Ashiana office reveals a pleasant atmosphere and a general air of congeniality. At the same time there is an air of efficiency too as employees carry out their work in neat cubicles. What is missing is any hint of stress or tension. This is attributed to the 'culture' of the Company, which embodies the beliefs of its founder.

OPG believed that the office should have an atmosphere that makes people feel happy to come to work. At the physical level, this meant well-lit, neat, and aesthetic interiors; at the emotional and mental level it meant challenging work, amiable co-workers, a shared goal, good future prospects, fairness, appreciation and a feeling that you belonged and were cared for.

People First

At Ashiana, it is first about ‘Human Relations’ - respect, consideration and love are the essentials that are practiced at Ashiana. Vishal Gupta says he learnt a crucial lesson at the age of 4 or 5 when he was locked up for having been rude to the maid at home. He was told to sit there and think about what he had done. In a family where love and respect for all was the rule, this behaviour was unacceptable. His parents explained to him that money, authority or social standing did not give anyone the right to be rude or less than polite to another.

“It is people who make the organization what it is,” OPG would often say. Rohit Modi says that making sure that his people were happy was so important to OPG that he created occasions for celebrations that would be enjoyable for all. Rohit remembers going with him for site visits where he would have lunch with the team, joking and putting everyone at ease. He moved around the complex, greeting residents and welcoming visitors while his team

got first-hand lessons in developing people skills.

P K Chhawchharia describes OPG as a fatherly figure at Ashiana. “He would say that the head of an organization should be like a father. Any decision you took with regard to your people would never be wrong since you were taking these decisions for your ‘children’ and not for ‘employees’.”

The pleasant atmosphere at Ashiana is also due to the feeling of mutual respect that is prevalent thanks to OPG’s own attitude. Vishal recounts, “When I entered the business, I heard people say that consultants were too expensive; I heard people question their worth. From Dad I heard the opposite: he valued their advice and said that in a sense, they paid for themselves because their suggestions saved the Company so much money. I believe it was Dad’s respect for others that made him recognize and appreciate their capabilities rather than join the chorus and discredit them.”

When OPG started the *Apna Ashiana* newsletter 12 years back, one of the instructions given was, “Select pictures which have more people in them and mention their names too. *Logon ko khushi hoti hai apni picture ya naam publication mein dekh kar.* Their family members will also feel proud!” This seemingly simple reasoning is validated by Dan Heath, author of bestsellers ‘Switch’ and ‘Decisive’ who says that one of the best and simplest strategies to make people feel connected to the company is to have their names and pictures appear in company publications.

A Guiding Light

Om's daughter Simran shares with us the lessons she learnt from her dear 'Om Papa'. She writes, "Om Papa came into my life when I was full of aggression, ambition and passion to become successful, but didn't have any direction. Om Papa not only recognized my desire but also channelized my energies and taught me the important principles of life.

"He told me that our lives must be governed by a meaningful purpose. Here is what he taught me on leadership and personal effectiveness:

- Have a vision: Know where you want to be in life professionally and concentrate all energies on getting there.
- Share your vision with your team: Doing so will motivate them to give their best.
- Lead your team by example: Be the ideal that you want your people to be.
- Business is all about people: Invest time and energy to understand and be genuinely interested in your employees and your customers.
- Treat your employees with respect: Appreciate in public and criticize in private, reward good behaviour and keep your promises.

- **Prioritize:** Focus on what is in alignment with your goals.
- **Keep things simple:** Simplify things and make them easy to follow.
- **Be a learner:** Read books, attend seminars.
- **Don't be afraid of making mistakes:** Take calculated risks, learn from mistakes and move on.
- **Take charge of your life:** Don't make excuses or blame others for anything that happens to you; take responsibility for your life and try to make the best of it.

Om Papa was not only a father to me, but also my life coach. Even today when I encounter any difficult situation in life, I always think of how he would handle the situation and that becomes my guiding point.”

A Strong Work Ethic

Like a true patriarch, OPG led and taught by example. Biswajit Sengupta relates this incident, “Om and I were on a site visit. When we reached the site, the security guard at the gate stopped our car and asked us to enter our names in the register before proceeding. Before any of us could react, the driver told the guard that the Company’s Managing Director was in the car and he need not fill up any such details. The guard turned to Om and said that the rules as explained to him did not differentiate between a

Director and anyone else. Om got down from the car, asked the security guard his name, shook hands with him, filled up the register and gave him a financial reward.”

OPG’s actions were enough to send the right message home. His punctuality, his methodical ways and his work ethic set the tone in the office. He was particular that staff should come to the office on time, submit work or reports on time and also go home on time, unless an extraordinary situation arose. He did not tolerate untidiness, slipshod work, tardiness, unpunctuality, dishonesty and rudeness. He was not given to berating employees in the open, but when he heard an employee being rude to another, he surprised the staff by his reaction. He made it clear that such behaviour would not be tolerated.

All employees, at whatever level, were expected to take responsibility for their work. A commitment made to a customer, or anyone else, had to be fulfilled. Coming unprepared for meetings and wasting everyone’s time was just not acceptable to OPG. When he saw a young, new employee on a social media site, he explained that it was not the right thing to do in office as once you got into these habits, *‘in ka koi ant nahi hota, koi limit nahi hai.’*

Atma Sharan explains how things work at Ashiana, “A friendly atmosphere does not mean a casual attitude to work. True, OPG was a friendly person, plus, as a true patriarch, he was concerned about each member of Ashiana. But when

it came to work, he made sure everyone knew that he meant business. Work-related instructions were never given casually. For instance, if he passed by your cabin as he was leaving, he might ask how your family was doing, or how come you were working late, but he would not give you any work-related instructions in that manner. He would have a proper, formal meeting or discussion with you. And equally, he would not accept casual work, or a '*chalta hai*' attitude."

He was particular about things and would take time to teach people so that standards were maintained. When a peon asked him to sign assorted scrappy pieces of paper with petty expense accounts written on them, he asked him to take used one-side printed sheets, neatly fold and tear them and keep them ready for petty accounts.

Follow-up was and is a very potent tool at Ashiana. Om Gupta strongly believed that your job did not end with 'I sent the report'; you had to be sure that the person had received it too. Depending on your job profile, you also had to ensure that the person acted on it. Rohit Modi says he understood this lesson after a gentle but effective rebuke from his 'guru'. "Om Uncle asked me to send someone a brochure of one of our first big projects in Delhi. I asked someone in the office to courier it and did not confirm if it was done, nor did I follow up with the prospective customer, with the result that I was not aware that he had not got the courier. A few days later, I got a call from Om Uncle, gently

enquiring, “*Beta, tumhe flat bechna hai ki nahi bechna?*” That sentence and its learning are imprinted on my mind!”

Team Spirit at Work and Play

Everyone at Ashiana looks forward to the Ashiana Family Holidays. Started by OPG, these occasions where entire families of employees take a holiday together are great opportunities for bonding. Employees, who may not have much occasion for interaction, get to know each other; family members of employees get to know each other. OPG believed that these occasions of fun away from the work place fostered good interpersonal relations which further lead to good team work.

Biswajit Sengupta says OPG had his own unique ways of explaining matters. “The Company had appointed a smart young engineer to co-ordinate work between the consultants and the construction team. In his zeal to show results, the young man would ring up the consultants every day and give schedules. One day Om asked for my opinion on how the young man was performing. I said that while he was doing a good job, at times he got on our nerves with his constant phone calls. 'Well, that's exactly the reason he is there; he is supposed to follow up regularly. Why don't you talk to him and work out a system whereby both of you can meet your commitments and objectives without causing irritation?' With amazing clarity, Om had shown me the way of getting along with people!”

Tough Love

OPG believed in professionalism with a personal touch. He knew exactly how to balance his compassion for his people with the discipline that must be maintained in an office.

In the words of Aradhana Dubey, Ex- Resident Director, Ashiana Utsav, “OPG stood for professionalism and yet did not compromise on caring for his employees. He demanded performance but made sure we also had fun. We were well aware that he wanted adherence to discipline but he also taught us the magic of an ever-smiling face.”

If you went to OPG to tell him of a blunder you had committed, he behaved as if it was a minor thing. He calmed you down and made you feel good. Then he would involve you in salvaging the situation so that you learnt how to handle it. However, if you made a mistake and tried to hide it, you were in trouble.

He would give you a firing, but the firing would end on a gentle note. He would calmly explain the problem you had caused and then guide you so that you did not repeat the mistake. He also did not harp on mistakes made by an employee. His attitude was: mistakes will happen, remedy them and move on.

He would not, however, tolerate moral misdemeanours. But even in these situations, he would try to guide the person towards the right path. When an old employee was found

to have been involved in dubious deals, he called him into his office to have a talk with him. The employee broke down, confessed, and regretted his behaviour. OPG was empathetic and did not want one error to ruin the employee's life or put his family on the brink. But it was essential to send the right message to others. So while he was not allowed to stay on in the Company, he was encouraged and assisted in making a fresh start.

As Varun says, his way of disciplining was so full of concern that the person being disciplined just felt more loved.



*Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile,
a kind word, a listening ear, an honest comment...
all of which have the potential to turn a life around.*

Leo Buscaglia

The Way of the Patriarch

In a Nutshell

- A leader must balance a compassionate, protective attitude towards the team with the essential requisites of professionalism and discipline.
- It is the responsibility of the leader to create the right conditions for great work: this covers physical attributes of the office space as well as factors like challenging work, appreciation of efforts, harmonious atmosphere, etc.
- Lead by example: you cannot expect your team to be punctual, to follow through on commitments or to maintain a neat and well-organized office unless you follow the same rules.
- Your team looks up to you as the head of a family: be the role model for them by showing love, respect and consideration to all.
- Handle errors made as you would with your children: some call for sternness, others for gentle guidance.
- Lead the way with a balanced life which combines hard work with occasions for fun.



Chapter 6

Ashiana's Money Mantras



Manu Rishi Guptha joined Ashiana in 2006 to set up the Hospitality Division of the Group and then moved to the UK. In his July 1, 2013 blog in OPG's memory, he wrote:

“A few distinct memories and ethos on which he laid the foundation of his business are embedded deep in my character. These ideals made him stand out as an outlier in the world of business.

Never grow too fast or recklessly - I once asked him that while the country is going thru a super boom in real estate, why is his progress so slow. He always wanted to bite what he could chew. 7 years later, top real estate companies ... are reeling under unmanageable debt burden and have

completely destroyed the shareholder wealth. (Certain stocks) which were once the darling of the markets and most talked about are 85% down since early 2008. Ashiana is the only listed real estate company that has '0' debt on its balance sheet. That has returned 187% in this time where others have wiped out their shareholders.

Lesson – *Do not over leverage yourself. When the tide is high its fine, when it turns, you could find yourself standing very very naked.*

Don't grow at the cost of your shareholders- *Ashiana has been very debt averse. OPG never wanted to divest or bring in white collared investment bankers telling him how to run the company. The family owns over 70% of the company and guards its holding fiercely. Listed companies are very very public in nature. Growth can be deceptive and a big sham really.*

Lesson - *Grow with internal accruals and not by over leveraging. Markets punish you hard if shareholders interest in not paramount for promoters.*

I miss you OPG and remember you fondly. You left us for your heavenly journey rather early but you left a lot behind for us in the simplicity and clarity of your thoughts and ideals.

Posted By Manu Rishi Guptha



Ashiana's financial situation could be defined in two words - Fit and Fair. Varun explains, "Like in everything else, in money matters too, Dad was extremely principled. He would not tolerate any deviant behaviour with regard to integrity and honesty. Apart from his principles, his philosophy rested on three ground rules:

- All payments to be made on time: You should not have liabilities building up. If payments are not made on time they will obviously keep mounting. And since you don't look at books daily nor can you be expected to remember accounts mentally, you will suddenly be faced with a huge financial problem. Paying on time is not only morally correct, it also makes for efficient internal financial management.
- Guard your reputation in money matters as stringently as you do in all other matters: The single most thing that can ruin all the hard work you've done is getting a bad reputation in matters concerning money. Keep a hawk's eye on this; there should be no oversight by anyone, or any carelessness or laxity.
- Take a conservative approach: Take no risks higher than the pocket can bear.

We follow these principles meticulously at Ashiana and our associates and team members are aware that Ashiana will never deviate from them."

Following this ‘conservative approach’, Ashiana has given a high return on equity- among the highest in the industry - a 30% return. Its ‘Zero Debt’ status shows excellent financial management.

All Payments on Time

When P K Jaiswal took charge at Bhiwadi, OPG gave him this directive - never delay payments and salaries. “He would get very angry if there was any carelessness on this issue. The systems he had set are followed to date. We ensure that we have sufficient money five days before salaries are due. Cheques for suppliers are kept ready on two particular days every month; whether a supplier comes to collect the cheque or not, he or she knows that the cheque will be ready at Ashiana on these particular dates. In the words of Om Bhaiya, ‘It is a huge insult to you and the Company if someone calls you to say that a payment is overdue.’”

In his inimitable style, OPG would explain things to his team. He would say, “If you are fair to people, they will be fair to you. If you are regular with your payments, your suppliers will give you good materials, good service and priority; your employees will feel safe with you and work with loyalty.” Astute financial planning is essential for such strict adherence and Ashiana always maintains a buffer that covers salaries and payments.

As Safe as a Bank

P K Jaiswal tells us with pride that when he calls up to remind a supplier that the cheque is ready, the response is, '*Ashiana ke paas hamara paisa bank jitna safe hai!*'

Customers too feel a sense of security dealing with Ashiana. Occasionally someone who has booked a flat will need to cancel the booking due to unforeseen circumstances. The money is returned without demur. P K Jaiswal feels that this has also helped the reputation of the Company. "We are so sure of our product and its saleability that we don't coerce customers into being 'locked' into a project against their wishes. Thanks to our reputation we have always been able to sell our flats without the services of brokers. Our flats are sold through our existing customers. Rather than give a commission to brokers, we have a Customer Referral Scheme where our customer and the referred buyer are both given discounts. The scheme is a great success. People in Bhiwadi wait for us to launch a project! Our new project at Neemrana sold out the very day it opened for booking - it was all through our existing customers."

He recounts an interesting anecdote. "When Om Bhaiya first came to Delhi, he did not have his own house, so he booked something in Gurgaon with a leading developer. Later, he decided to buy a place in Delhi and cancelled the Gurgaon booking. He had a tough time trying to get his money back, and when he finally got it, a large amount was held back. Manju Bhabhi teased him saying, '*yeh sabhi builder aise hi*'

hote hain! Om Bhaiya laughed heartily, then looked towards me and said, *'Bata dijiye inhe, ham aise nahi hain!'*”

Capital Values

An engineer working for Ashiana Housing decided to strike out on his own as a builder and came to OPG seeking advice. OPG passed on this priceless code of conduct: “In the beginning, you will get a substantial amount of money as advance from prospective buyers. Remember, this is not your money. It is money given to you in trust. Your primary work is to deliver what you have promised and if there is money left over, then that money is yours.”

These were the very same values that he followed. When Bhiwadi started to generate surplus funds, he was not tempted to buy more land with those funds even though land was available at cheap rates at the time. He never lost focus, never diverted funds. He was very judicious with money, reiterating that it was not ‘our’ money, but the customers’ money and must be deployed for the use it was given for. He disapproved of the practice of using money meant for one project to buy land and start another project.

Ankur explains how OPG’s approach differed from others. “He saw land as ‘raw material’, not as an ‘asset’.”

Debt-Free and Stress-Free

Shiv Bhagwan Gupta says that post ‘92, when the real

estate prices tumbled, a big builder who knew him took him aside at a gathering and said, "We builders are going through a stressful period; how come your brother is not worried?" "I explained that he was not worried because he planned his projects according to his resources. He never took heavy loans from banks and he did not get swayed by the market. He always kept reserve funds so all salaries and other obligations would be paid on time. He wanted the Company to grow, but he wanted well-planned, gradual and financially feasible growth."

Vishal says, "He always reminded me of the cardinal rule; he would ask me: have you mitigated your risk? He said one should be mentally prepared for the worst case scenario. Protect your down side, he urged, see how much you can afford to lose if things don't go as planned. Work out the maximum loss we would have to face and assess if we would be able to bear it. Is there a way we can cover up our losses if the plan does not work? What are our options? For example, before buying land, first check - is the title clear? Next question: What if we buy the land and don't get permission for housing or to construct as per our plan? Would we then be able to sell it as plots? If yes, then we go ahead, since we have a plan of action. Don't enter into deals clueless about the various possibilities that may unfold."

He applied the same rules in personal situations and guided others so that they managed their finances prudently. Joys says, "It is thanks to his guidance that I am the proud

owner of a house today. Quite some years back, my husband and I thought we should take a loan and buy a second-hand car. I sought Bhaiya's advice. He advised me against it, explaining that our expenses would mount with a second-hand car as it might need repairs every now and then. Plus, with the additional load of the EMIs, we would be under stress. It was not the right time to buy a car and we should continue to manage with public transport. Later, when the Company was offering a special discount to employees who wanted to invest in an Ashiana property, we considered taking a loan and buying a flat. I discussed it with Bhaiya and he was very encouraging. He explained the difference between an investment and a burden; the car loan would have been a burden, this would be an investment. He also worked out how the rent that the property would generate could be used to pay the EMIs. I sold that flat at a very good profit recently and bought the house in Delhi that we now live in."

Looking Beyond Profit

For Om Gupta, the driving force was not making money. It was creating something of value. He lived a good life, but was not flamboyant or excessive in his lifestyle. What he liked about making money was certainly the fact that it gave him the freedom to realize his dreams. He would never compromise on his standards, his commitments or values just to make profits.

P. K. Jaiswal talks about the time they were building their first project at Bhiwadi - Ashiana Greens. “Om Bhaiya and I were at the site when we noticed honeycomb in the concreting. Honeycomb refers to voids left in concrete; it happens if the concreting is not smooth. He immediately said, ‘*iss ko sara turvaiye, dubara banvaiye*’. It was going to cost us in terms of time and money, but he never compromised on quality. He also explained to me that by taking this step we were sending a message to those working at the site that we will not accept poor quality work. The cost to us was well worth it for this lesson alone.”

Varun explains how OPG's mind worked, “Dad was a big picture person with a big heart; he did not count pennies. The thought process was to do things which, while being financially prudent, were also socially and environmentally responsible. He always considered the larger good. He was very keen on facility management. Now, this is something that gives no return in the short term. In the long term, it is good for business because the building looks good and customers realise the value of buying from a company that will maintain the building well. But for him the main motivation was that a well-maintained building will make residents happy; that community-building initiatives like festivities and events undertaken under facility management will add to the joy of families. For anyone else, the very real pain of maintaining a building without seeing any earnings accruing from it would have been very high, but Dad invested a lot of time and

money in setting up the facility management initiatives because the purpose was so important for him.”

Another example is that of Utsav. It was his dream to create a retirement haven for seniors. Yes, his business acumen would make sure that it would sustain itself and would generate money for further improvement and more services, but the major incentive here was seeing seniors leading independent, joyous and active lives.

Creating middle-income housing with features such as sewage treatment plants, solid waste management systems, bus stop shelters and landscaped gardens came from the same thought process of giving the customer many reasons to smile.

Manu Rishi Guptha writes about another incident in his blog that confirms this thinking. “The roof of a villa sold by Ashiana leaked during rains. It was a three-year-old villa and outside the guarantee period. Yet, on a simple complaint, he made Ashiana spend a couple of lakhs repairing the roof and bought the loyalty of hundreds of residents. Ashiana has the highest number of repeat buyers in one or the other of its complexes. This is unheard of in the real estate industry that is unregulated and undisciplined.”



There is no dignity quite so impressive and no independence quite so important as living within your means.

Calvin Coolidge

Ashiana's Money Mantras

In a Nutshell

- Be extremely strict and principled with regard to money matters.
- Making all payments due on time is not only morally correct but also essential for efficient internal financial management.
- Take no risks higher than the pocket can bear.
- Do not be tempted by greed to misuse money given for a particular purpose by deploying it for another purpose.
- Be clear and fair in all financial dealings - large and small.
- Aim for well-planned, gradual and financially feasible growth whether in business or personal life.
- The greatest joy that money gives is the wherewithal to spread happiness and act for the larger good. Enjoy that feeling by looking beyond profit!



Chapter 7

Entrusting and Empowering



Both Vishal and Varun Gupta learnt the art of delegation from their father while he was delegating and entrusting them with responsibilities at Ashiana. Vishal says, “Dad had an innate understanding of the art of delegation. On the very day that I joined work, he gave me the cheque book. I was surprised but he also explained the responsibility that came along with it, saying ‘apna signature lagaate waqt sochoge hi’. The trust that this signified gave me confidence and a heightened sense of responsibility. He was a great guru, and also knew when to let go. We were starting Ashiana Bageecha at the time. He would sit with me on Sundays, teaching me about design and explaining things with clarity. However, once he saw that I was going deep into

studying the subject and that I had developed a knack for it, he left it completely to me. Sometimes he would make a recommendation, but it was never an order or an insistence that it be done his way. So, side by side, he was teaching me the three basic principles of successful delegation: clarity of instruction, confidence and trust.”

Varun says that in the two years that he got to spend with his father at Ashiana, the most valuable skill he learnt was ‘delegation’. “I remember his words to me, ‘koroge nahi, toh seekhoge kaise?’ I was taking on the responsibilities that he was giving me, but I was hesitant to delegate further down the line. Each time I would tell him that I was more comfortable doing a particular job myself, he would express the same sentiment, ‘Woh karega nahi to seekhega kaise?’ In his simple, pragmatic manner he would explain, ‘How much will you handle yourself? How many decisions do you think you will be able to take yourself without feeling overwrought? You need to delegate so you can give your attention to more critical issues. You must also delegate so people in the Company grow into bigger roles.’ He explained that mistakes will take place, but there was no better way to learn. ‘It is for you to make sure that you have prepared your team members for the tasks you assign to them.’”



A witty leader once remarked that the alternative to good delegation was a nervous breakdown! The word ‘good’ is important, for it is how delegation is handled that separates the winners from the also-rans.

As President of the Rotary Club of Delhi South Central (2006-2007), Om Gupta displayed his skill in forming a team that would help him fulfil his avowed goals for the year. Beila Gupta recounts, “Rotary Club members really appreciated the way he went about the process of selecting his team and then assigning responsibilities. It so happened that the President-elect for that year was unable to take on the presidency due to personal reasons. At the nth moment, Omji was requested to take on the mantle. Before forming his team of board members, he spoke to past presidents to understand the forte of each member and how they could best contribute. He also made an extra effort to include members who had never held board positions before but who, Omji believed, had potential. So his team was a combination of highly experienced and knowledgeable people as well as those with the capability and potential to become leaders.” This is a perfect example of OPG’s natural inclination to empower, encourage and motivate people.

Well-handled delegation is really a win-win for all: the senior person gets more time for crucial matters and the subordinate gets a chance to learn and grow into a bigger role. In a business environment, skilful handling of

delegation becomes even more crucial when a company is on a growth path. Good leadership and the art and science of delegation go hand in hand. The Ashiana story is an exemplary model of effective delegation.

Sharing the Dream

The real estate idea that materialized in Patna went on to expand to Jamshedpur and Bhiwadi, then on to Jaipur, Jodhpur, Neemrana, Lavasa, and now Gujarat and Kolkata are on the anvil too. To help him realize his dreams, OPG took along some trusted team members from Patna to Jamshedpur and Bhiwadi. He had the advantage of going to a new place with people he knew and trusted. And his team members were getting opportunities to learn and grow. That they all willingly moved along with him says as much about them as it does about OPG.

Usha Kartha at Jamshedpur and P K Jaiswal at Bhiwadi can speak with authority and experience about how OPG handled delegation. First, while at Patna itself, in his transparent way, he had shared his dream and his intentions. They were already aware of his belief system and values. OPG's style of working was to involve his people, to train them as they went along and to give them opportunities to grow by exposing them to different disciplines.

P K Jaiswal says, "He got me involved in marketing, sales and purchase at Patna itself so that in addition to the civil

engineering work I was doing, I would be able to handle these functions at Bhiwadi. What made it easier were his clear instructions, transparency, information-sharing and trust. He made me believe that I could do it!”

P K Chhawchharia believes that OPG had “a knack for unearthing hidden talents and abilities in others. Ashiana staff members have shared with me their surprise at how much they have progressed in life. They admitted that they could not have dreamt they had the abilities and capabilities which OPG brought out in them. This was a passion with *Jeejaji* - to help others recognize their potential and then to help them reach it. This benefitted the Company as well as the individual.”

D C Singh joined Ashiana in 1988 at Patna as Project Manager. He left to go on an entrepreneurial journey and recently returned to the Company as VP, Halol, Gujarat. He writes, “Om Gupta Sahib believed in developing his people by empowering them and delegating authority and responsibility. He would spend time and effort teaching us the intricacies of the business so that we were ready to shoulder the responsibility he was giving us. I still remember these five teaching from those early days, said in his inimitable style:

- Leave your ego locked in an almirah when you leave home for work
- Don't be afraid of taking a decision

- Don't hesitate to ask questions or admit that you don't know something
- Don't assume that you shall always get a 'Yes'; be prepared for a 'No'
- Don't try to bite off more than you can chew

"He would openly praise and acknowledge everyone's contribution. This was not only very encouraging but truly gave us a sense of belonging. I still feel proud of his comment made years back, *"DC ne Ashiana Gardens Jamshedpur ke project mein hariyali de kar mera sapna saakaar kar diya"*. I am proud of the fact that I worked for him; that I was associated with him. I attribute my success and development in my career to his guidance, and I dedicate it to him."

The career trajectory of Ashiana old timers like Usha Kartha, P K Jaiswal, S K Palit and many others are evidence of how well delegation works at Ashiana. Ashiana is the story of a shared dream brought to fruition by the efforts of the team. These team efforts are recognised and respected at Ashiana. When Ashiana won the Forbes 'Best Under a Billion' award the first time, OPG and Vishal received it. When the Company won the same award the following year, P K Jaiswal and S K Palit were sent to Hong Kong to receive it.

Ashok Mattoo says OPG genuinely believed that team effort was essential for success and was generous with

sharing and giving credit. “When you complimented him for an achievement, his reply would be, ‘*aap log saath the, isliye ho gaya*’.”

Pushing Decision-making Down

Vishal says, “Dad understood that people are often hesitant to take decisions, and I saw how he encouraged and often even forced them to take decisions. He increased their confidence levels by encouraging them to share their viewpoint. He created decision-making tools, like work progress reports etc., and taught them how to use those tools. He also impressed upon all of us the need to ask questions till we were satisfied that we had the data to take a call.”

OPG explained that you had to ‘push’ decision-making down or else people would just avoid taking decisions. People are scared that they might make a wrong decision and so shun responsibility. “*Log to galti karenge hee, hum sabhi karte hain kabhi na kabhi*”, he would say, “But if we have to progress, then delegation is a must. Just remember, *apne log hain*. You have to love them, take care of them and help them to grow. Prepare them for the responsibility you are giving them. Make sure you give them all necessary information, teach them how to get information; how to ask questions. It is without information that decision-making will become erroneous.”

Varun says that OPG believed in teaching by example and making people sit in on meetings. His subtle way of helping

his team develop skills was by talking through problems and encouraging others to come up with the solution. Seeing people develop these skills gave him immense joy.

There were times when OPG did things in a different manner too. If he felt an employee had potential, he would delegate a task to that person to help him get a feel of the issue at hand. Atma Sharan remembers how he was asked by OPG to prepare the financials for the Brahmananda project coming up at Jamshedpur. “Unlike his normal style, he gave no instructions on the ‘how’. He just said ‘do it on the basis of your understanding’. Coming from an army background, I was clueless about such things. I just did the best I could and took it to him. He studied it, then smiled and said, *‘Yeh kitna galat hoga, agar koi hame kahe ki hamne Company ka saamaan bazaar mein lutaa diya.’* I had done the financials purely from my point of view of sales and marketing. He explained that the job of sales was not to get the best sales figures, but the best sales figures at the right price. He then added, ‘if you had not attempted this exercise completely on your own once, you would not have understood the distinction’. I was fortunate to get this learning from him as he was brilliant with finance.”

OPG explained the finer points of effective delegating with clarity. Delegating is smoother at senior levels where people have enough experience, but when delegating to middle and junior levels, a certain amount of watchfulness

is required. The person delegating must be able to separate the tasks that are better handled at his or her level from those that should be pushed down. Out of the delegated tasks, one must differentiate between critical and non-critical tasks. For all matters critical to business, there should be a system of checks and monitoring and of giving feedback before a mistake becomes a serious problem. There should also be a corrective path ready in case it is needed. It bolsters the confidence of your team members if they know that you are monitoring their progress and will guide them at the appropriate time. The important thing to remember is that delegating does not mean that the senior person's responsibility is over. Ankur says, "Dad would say, 'if your guy messes up, I will hold you responsible!'"

The most important aspect of delegation is giving the person the confidence that you will back his decisions. As Vishal says, "He gave the courage to go ahead by saying, '*Tum karo, agar galat hua*, then it's my decision.'"

En-trust-ing

Delegation is pointless without having trust and confidence in the person to whom you are entrusting the responsibilities. Micro-managing or expecting the person to check before taking every decision or action would prove counterproductive. So while at middle to lower levels some amount of overseeing is required, at senior levels, the

person is chosen because he or she is capable of handling the task independently. Apart from capability, it is also about trust. The chosen persons must also know that they are trusted to take the best course of action.

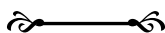
Ashok Mattoo gives his example. “Joining Ashiana as a consultant after leaving Tatas - it was a different world for me! But Om was very encouraging. He involved me in meetings and gave me a thorough understanding of the working of the Company. Soon after I joined, Manju and Om left for America to attend to another business venture. We had just bought 2 acres of land for Ashiana Greens and were preparing to start work on it. Meanwhile, another plot of 0.78 acres, adjoining our Ashiana Greens plot, had just become available. Om had placed so much trust in me that I was able to confidently take a decision and get it earmarked for Ashiana. It was a major decision, but Om had this ability to give you the confidence to take such decisions. He made you feel that you belonged and so you took decisions with the same kind of care as you would take for your own family.”

According to Rohit Modi, he understood the concept of properly handled delegation when he saw how OPG handed over construction to Vishal. “Once he saw that Vishal had the required skill and understanding, Om Uncle gave Vishal a free hand and started concentrating on issues relating to culture, processes, systems, CSR, etc.”

P K Jaiswal brings up another very crucial aspect of

delegation. He says that OPG never undermined the authority of the person who had been given a responsibility. “A group of important people came to book flats at Bhiwadi and asked for a discount. I gave what was feasible. Dissatisfied, they went to see OPG. Later they came to see me and said, ‘*Omji ne hamari khatirdaari to bahut ki, khana bhi khilaya*, but when it came to the discount issue, he said he had no power over that, it was completely Jaiswalji’s discretion and decision.”

Aradhana Dubey confirms, “The trust, respect and affection Omji showed all of us encouraged us to do more and more; become better and better. I remember an incident that had an impact on me when I was still new at Ashiana. I forget the context, but in a meeting room full of all Ashiana seniors, he said about an issue, ‘Let Aradhana decide’. Simple words, magical effect! He could very well have told a senior to take the decision, and perhaps even added that Aradhana will take the decision next time, but he did not and I am so much ‘richer’ because of that trust he showed in me.”



*The teacher who is indeed wise does not bid you
to enter the house of his wisdom but rather leads
you to the threshold of your mind.*

Khalil Gibran

Entrusting and Empowering

In a Nutshell

- Clarity of instruction, confidence and trust are the prerequisites of successful delegation.
- Effective delegation allows the senior person to attend to more crucial matters as well as focus on growth while subordinates get a chance to learn and grow into bigger roles.
- Share your dream with your team members and help them grow into more responsible roles.
- The time spent in training and preparing the team to handle bigger roles repays you many times over in the form of satisfied employees and a better organization.
- It is the responsibility of the senior person to prepare subordinates to take on delegated tasks by teaching and by sharing information.
- Enhance confidence by encouraging participation and sharing of views; teach decision-making by example and practical experiences.
- Acknowledge and give praise; at the same time support your team by assuring them that you will back their decisions, even if they make a wrong decision.
- Give subordinates a free hand to act but set up a system of getting feedback and keep an eye on critical matters that they handle. Be ready to take corrective action if required and use that as a learning opportunity for your subordinates.



Chapter 8

Continuous Improvement



O PG believed in the Japanese concept of Kaizen: that everything can be improved and that even small daily improvements make a huge impact on one's life or in an organization. 'Excellence is a continuous journey' was a favourite quote of his. Biswajit Sengupta saw many instances where, in his polite but firm manner, he enforced corrective action or urged people to improve themselves. "Om and I were discussing matters at a construction site when a young couple came by. They had come to take possession of their flat and seemed quite excited. The site engineer gave them the name of the person handling the matter and told them to go and meet him. After a while, the couple came back and told the engineer that they could not find the gentleman. Om

immediately stepped forward and introduced himself. He accompanied the couple to the office, helped them with all the formalities and gave them possession of their flat. The couple thanked Om profusely and gave him a box of sweets they had brought along. When they left, Om called his people over for a talk. ‘It is thanks to our customers that we are all making a living and it is our job to make the entire process of taking possession smooth and hassle-free. This is a very special occasion for them and it is our duty to make it a pleasurable experience. It is not proper that they should have to walk around the complex looking for someone to help them, or be asked to go find the person concerned.’ Om explained that this incident showed that Ashiana’s ‘possession taking process’ needed improvement. He immediately involved the team in setting up an improved system for the purpose and added, ‘In any case, whoever comes across a customer first, irrespective of which department he or she is from, should escort the customer to the office. Greet each customer politely, offer a cold drink and be ready to answer any question.’”



Ankur Gupta puts it best, “When Dad was learning something, or teaching something, he was in bliss!” OPG was a great advocate of ‘continuous improvement’. He used every opportunity to learn something new and loved

to share what he had learned. He taught by example and by using real situations which people could immediately connect with.

Ankur adds, “Most of us tend to throw away information on seminars that flood our post or mail boxes but Dad would go through each one. And if he found one that he or any of us could learn from, then the price of attending the seminar was well worth it. He said that unless you were open to learning and improving yourself, you would remain smug thinking you knew it all, while actually your knowledge would be limited or out of date. He also believed that you don’t always have to spend a lot of money to learn something. He would say, ‘Watch a good cleaner bring a shine to the floor and you will understand the importance of doing a job with dedication.’”

Always a Learner

Om Gupta often related this incident about Ratan Tata, saying it was a valuable lesson in Customer Care: There was a problem with an automobile part and Ratan Tata was discussing it with his team. One of them said, “It’s not very major - just 2 or 3% of our customers have complained about this problem.” Ratan Tata replied, “I am not as concerned about the 97% of our customers who are satisfied as I am about the 3% who are not.”

OPG kept his ears to the ground and was ever ready to

learn, absorb and improve. He would promptly put the learning into practice. He was a patient listener and a keen learner at every age and stage. Examples abound of his willingness to listen and learn from all levels of employees and other associates. Employees remember him pausing while walking past and asking questions about a particular process taking place. He would patiently listen, understand the technique and then thank the person who had explained it to him.

“He would not boast about the knowledge he had; he would listen and imbibe what the other person had to offer,” says D C Singh. “I remember an occasion in Patna when Om Gupta Sahib had come to the site with a friend who was in the construction business in Lucknow. I got into a long technical discussion with this friend about civil engineering subjects like pile foundation, etc. Om Gupta Sahib sat quietly listening to the discussion. A month later, I learnt that he had passed his Master’s in Structural Engineering from an American University! I was impressed by his humility; despite knowing so much about the topic under discussion, he felt no need to flaunt his knowledge.”

Ashok Gongopadhyay, who has spent 20 years with the Company, remembers a conversation when OPG and he were on their way to attend a staff member’s wedding. “During the journey he told me that he had learnt quite a few things from me. I was taken aback and was unwilling

to accept this praise but he explained that he had learnt to be punctual and maintain self-discipline from me. I realized that he ‘walked his talk’ about continuous improvement. He taught us to constantly work on improving ourselves and was not hesitant to say that he was learning something from us too.”

Renu Mattoo, Corporate Trainer and a dear friend, says, “Om was always ready to learn new things and keep improving in every way. He approached me for sessions on presentation skills and told me, ‘Renu, do not mince words when you give me feedback. Be frank and tell me what I am not doing right.’ After the session, he said that one of the points he really appreciated was the definition of Effective Listening: that it is more than simply avoiding the bad habit of interrupting others while they speak or of finishing their sentences. It is also listening to the entire thought of the person speaking rather than waiting impatiently for your chance to respond.”

Apart from attending seminars and training sessions, OPG was also a great reader of self-help books. In his generous manner, he would pass on these books to others, urging them to read. Rohit Modi says, “Om Uncle was always open to learning, but I noticed that he took to reading in a bigger way after Manju Aunty passed away. Perhaps it was his way of finding a way forward without Manju Aunty. He was mainly reading self-improvement books, and would

share the books and the knowledge gained from them. He was open and discussed things even with us younger members. He once gave me an instance of how a book helped him improve. A senior staff member at Ashiana - who is no longer with the Company - used to irritate him a lot with some of his habits. Om Uncle said, 'I realized that instead of losing my cool or getting irritated, I should try to understand him and change my reaction to him. Now that I have made this change, this person has also changed for the better.'"

A Teacher beyond Compare

Brothers Shiv Bhagwan and Prem Gupta say that youngsters in the family flocked to him because they loved his stories and knew he could teach them a lot, and do it with affection and humour. He encouraged his brothers to be more open-minded too. Shiv Bhagwan Gupta says, "I had planned to go on a trip abroad with my wife. These days the entire family goes abroad for a holiday, but those days the tendency was to leave the kids behind. The foreign exchange given was very limited so we thought it would be a waste to take them along for a trip abroad at this young age. Om, on the other hand, believed that even young kids would gain a lot from such a holiday and urged us to take them along. We did, and it was truly a priceless experience for all of us."

OPG's method of teaching was mainly by spending time personally with people. In the early years, it was a small team and they did everything together, making it a great learning opportunity. His team was basically learning by job shadowing him. People were being trained to move into senior positions and many moved into VP roles gradually and smoothly.

Meetings with OPG were a learning opportunity in more ways than one. A meeting was not just about a 'to-do' list or a work completion report. It was practically a training session on how to get things done better than the last time. It was always about learning something new and making small improvements. At internal meetings, OPG would stop at a place where someone was experiencing a problem and use that as a teaching opportunity. He would smilingly praise people when they accomplished even a small improvement.

Ankur too learnt a lot at these meetings. "I job shadowed Dad when I joined the Company. I went with him for meetings, site visits, attended internal meetings... just watching how he handled people and issues, seeing why and how he prioritizes...it was the best way to learn and I picked up a lot from him every single day."

Ashok Gongopadhyay talks about some of the things he learnt from OPG, "When I joined Ashiana as Manager

(Marketing) in 1994, the first thing I noticed was his habit of clearing his desk of any papers, etc. at the end of the working day. He was allergic to untidiness and expected all of us to keep our working spaces neat and clean. He believed that untidiness affected the thinking process and customer handling. Despite his busy schedule, he would point this out to us and tell the staff to become more organized. He was very meticulous in his planning and actions. Before a meeting, he would take a white sheet of paper and divide it into two sections and draw a neat vertical line across. Issues that were discussed and resolved would be noted on the left and non-resolved issues which needed further elaboration were noted on the right side. He kept his systems simple so that they were easy to follow. His method of teaching was flawless. At that time, we did not have a proper price list to sell flats. He gave me the task of preparing a price list. When I showed it to him, he said, ‘If you had not prepared it yourself, you would have taken much longer to understand the pricing.’ Every decision and action of his was well thought-out.”

Employees say OPG helped them improve not just their work-related skill sets, but also how to be better groomed, improve their personalities, and even manage their finances better. Like a true patriarch, he would sit patiently with the persons concerned and explain, help, and guide them on various issues. On personal issues like grooming and presentation, he would handle matters with

such gentleness and affection that there was never any question of the person taking offence. There are many who are grateful for the positive change he brought about in their personalities and the unsaid emotion behind it all: I want the best for you!

Shailendra Singh is grateful for the way OPG improved his personal and professional life by his guidance. "The time that he invested in us inspired us to make a greater effort to improve ourselves. He taught with such patience and encouragement that you got the confidence to attempt new things. As the Company flourished, so did I. His way of teaching was outstanding and loving, whether he was teaching you something simply to improve your knowledge or because you had made a mistake. He had a sharp eye and no error would go unnoticed. Rather than criticize, he would say, 'a mistake is a very valuable tool for you to learn.' If he reprimanded you for a mistake, he would then explain things so patiently that by the end of it you felt better and grateful for what you had learned. He would explain what you had done wrong, its impact and then encourage you to find a way to correct it, helping you along the way."

D C Singh says that under OPG's guidance he learnt about all aspects of the real estate industry from construction to finance and accounts. "He would give us books on engineering and management to read. I still read a book

that he gave me called 'Learning for Failures'. In fact, it was his teaching and encouragement that kindled the entrepreneurial spirit in me. He wanted each one of us to make a better life for ourselves, in Ashiana or elsewhere. He not only helped my wife and me in setting up our interior decoration and aluminum-work business venture, but further supported us by giving us orders for aluminum-work for his projects. Later, when our small enterprise developed into a booming real estate business in Ranchi, Patna and Jamshedpur, he reacted with such happiness and satisfaction - as if it was his own venture!"

Aradhana Dubey writes, "I have been lucky with my bosses - both in the Services and outside. I have had mentors more than bosses and Omji remains one of the most adored ones. Every year, I would send a message of 'Thanks' to Omji on Teachers' Day. He would always reply, till the illness took over. Though I addressed him as 'Sir', I prefer to remember him as 'Omji' because he stood for so much good that I learnt at Ashiana and all good things start with 'OM'."

Be the Best you can Be

Rohit Modi says that OPG's greatest gift to Ashiana was the culture of training and continuous improvement and development. Continuous improvement is practised at the individual level and at the organizational level.

Ashiana has a strong culture of training and development for its entire workforce, from unskilled workers at site to senior management. There are several special training initiatives for unskilled workers. OPG was concerned that India did not have a strong enough pool of trained, skilled workers. He also wanted to make people more employable as well as capable of earning better wages. Woman workers at sites are given skill training so that they too can improve their earnings. Once unskilled workers are trained into semi-skilled or skilled workers, they are employed at the Ashiana site itself at higher wages.

OPG was very clear that all employees be given every opportunity for growth. It was the responsibility of department heads to help their team members grow into higher positions. At Ashiana, technical or subject-specific training is accompanied by soft skills training. Essential skills, like fire safety training, etc., are taught to entire teams, not just to the team responsible for it.

All employees are encouraged to speak up at meetings. OPG believed that public speaking skills enhance confidence and one's personality. To encourage and develop these skills, he would tell employees to prepare a piece, in Hindi or English, on any topic they liked, and speak about it at the following meeting. Some of these would be published in the Company newsletter with a picture of the author.

Taking a leaf out of OPG's book, employees are

encouraged to ask questions. Ankur calls it ‘becoming a baby again’! “You have to ask questions, be curious the way a baby is, if you want to expand your knowledge. Dad never thought he knew too much, he would ask and learn from anyone. We tell our new employees and our trainees that they will get plenty of opportunity to display their knowledge; now it’s the time to focus on asking, imbibing and learning. Without that, the tendency will be to make assumptions, jump steps and not get into the details. And, as we all learnt from Dad, the right decision is in the details.”

Seema Singh says that Omji’s focus on learning and improving made him fearless. “He was not scared of competition; he said competition is always healthy as it motivates you towards improvement. When other builders started moving into Bhiwadi, I commented, ‘*ab competition aa gayaa hai!*’ He replied, ‘More builders coming to Bhiwadi shows that there is potential for growth, and that is good for all. Competition also always leads to growth as in a monopoly market one gets complacent. This will give us the incentive to better ourselves and remain leaders.’”

S K Trisal, Consultant on Construction to Ashiana Housing Limited, writes, “My very first meeting with OPG revealed a self-made man who wanted to help his workers. He was also very conscious of the shortage of skilled workers in

the country, and he initiated steps for in-house training of workers of various disciplines. I have seen this training centre getting bigger and more organized by the day."

He continues, "After 46 years of experience in government and in a contracting company, I was keen to pass on my knowledge to the younger generation. OPG suggested that I go to Bhiwadi every Thursday and hold classes for our engineers on various aspects of Civil Engineering. This process continues till date. I used to look forward to my Tuesday meetings with him where we would discuss the developments of the preceding week and plan for the coming week.

"His greatest contribution perhaps has been the training of his sons and the good virtues of life that they have imbibed from him; it gives me joy to see how they have blossomed into successful leaders."



*We cannot become what we want to be
by remaining what we are.*

Max DePree

Continuous Improvement

In a Nutshell

- There is always scope for improvement; even small daily improvements make a huge impact on one's life or in an organization.
- If you close yourself to learning new things, you become smug in the mistaken belief that you know it all while in reality your knowledge is limited and out-dated.
- You should be alert and ever ready to learn, absorb and improve; put your learning into practice as promptly as possible.
- Be willing to learn at any age and stage, and from any person, irrespective of his or her age or status.
- One can bring about an improvement through multiple resources: by learning from others, by asking questions, attending seminars and training sessions, reading self-help books or other books.
- Encourage your team to pursue continuous improvement by noticing and praising every improvement.
- As a leader, guide your team by following simple systems which are easy to follow and teach with clarity.
- Encourage your team to be the best they can be and make the journey pleasant by handling mistakes with compassion and teaching with affection and humour.



Chapter 9

Ace the Hurdle Race



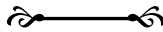
P*K Jaiswal recalls one of several instances that demonstrate how calm OPG would be in the face of problems or obstacles: “Om Bhaiya had told me that I should not waste time waiting for decisions to come from him, or even to check every decision with him. He also added that I should not be nervous about taking decisions; he would back me even if I took a wrong one. This gave me a lot of ‘himmat’.*

“We were working on our first Bhiwadi project. Sales were not happening as fast as I had expected. Om Bhaiya and Manju Bhabhi were in the US. I started worrying about how I would pay the salaries...I knew that salaries were never to be delayed. I learnt about a civil work contract and took it on thinking it would help me pay staff salaries.

When Om Bhaiya called, I told him about it. Very calmly, he informed me that I should be careful as he knew about the person I was dealing with and he was likely to default on his payments. My heart sank! But immediately Om Bhaiya said, 'Ghabraiye nahi. Bas, nazar rakhiye ki saath saath paise aate jayen. You acted with good intentions, so don't feel bad about it. Jo hoga, dekha jaayega, aap ghabraiye nahi'.

"I could not believe how calm he was! There was no reprimand, no rebuke. Just that gentle assurance of his promise to back me if I made a mistake. I could detect in his voice a concern for the fact that I was feeling terrible.

"Thanks to the forewarning, I was extra cautious and followed up for payments as the work progressed. I did manage to pay salaries for a whole year from this contract, but in the end, a final amount of over a lakh and a half was not paid to us. Even then he remained calm, just commenting that he expected it as he knew that individual's way of doing things. I had learnt some valuable lessons: do a thorough background check before doing business with someone and focus on solutions, not on the problem. I had also witnessed something special: a man who stood steady as a rock by his commitment to his people."



When OPG came to know about his illness, his reaction was so calm that the doctor thought that he had not heard him. He repeated the diagnosis. OPG just said, “OK, so now what has to be done?” He was, as always, walking his talk: accept the situation and move on to the next step. Prem Gupta says that when he was confronted with Manju Bhabhi’s illness too, he stayed calm. He kept her in good spirits, at the same time doing all he could for her treatment. In his own case too, he gamely carried on - never giving up, attending to work, meeting friends...carrying himself with dignity and partaking in the joys of others.

At the Flash Dance by Utsav residents at the Select Citywalk Mall in Saket, New Delhi in April 2012, it was a moment to cherish as Om’s youngest daughter-in-law, Ishita, requested him to join her on the floor. Sportingly, he allowed himself to be helped up from his chair and did a small jig!

Kuldeep Gahlaut remembers how, even in the midst of his own discomfort, Om Gupta continued to spread happiness and positivity in the office. “When I moved to the head office in April 2010, the first task that came my way was to re-designate OPG and convey that information to the office. He was no longer running the day-to-day affairs at Ashiana....Neither then, nor now, have I really been able to put words to the emotions and feelings that coursed through me at the time.

"Over the next two years or so, OPG would drop into the office on and off. Whenever I met him, our conversation followed a set pattern:

OPG – *Kaise hain, Kuldeepji?*

Me – On top of the world.

This would broaden his smile as he offered a handshake.

OPG – *Bachche kaise hain?*

Me – Great, Sir. Happy and enjoying life.

“He would greet all staff members the same way - a smile here, a handshake there, inquiring about their well-being. A father deeply concerned about his brood; never letting them onto his own pain and troubles but ever ready to provide comfort and succour to his children.”

Don't Lose Hope

Talking about Om Gupta's early years, Prem Gupta says that it was typical of his brother's nature that he was not demoralized by the fact that the family did not consider his ventures a success. He just continued to work hard as well as enjoy life with family and friends. He adds, “He was not the kind of person who would be shaken by events. In fact, whenever any family member faced a difficult situation of any nature, Om Bhaiya was the one we turned to. He took everything in his stride and would give the

best advice as well as extend all help.”

C K Basu adds, “He started a lot of ventures which did not work out, but he would just move forward with the faith that the next one will work. He just kept at it; he did not lose his basic values or lower his ethical standards or his emphasis on quality. He continued to work hard and succeeded in creating a life that he wanted; he was able to give happiness to many. All through these years, there was one thing that remained the same: the ready smile on his face!”

Ashok Mattoo remembers an occasion when, despite complying with all regulations, work at a site was halted by the authorities. “A lot of money was at stake, but he remained calm and purposeful. He waited patiently and did not lose hope. At the same time, he prepared himself for any eventuality. He used the waiting time judiciously. He camped at the location, and started working out the financials of how he would return the money to customers just in case it became necessary. That was his main focus.”

He was a friend you could always depend on to give you good advice. When Renu Mattoo shared her tale about being cheated by a contractor with Om, he responded in his typical generous manner. “He first offered me financial help. I thanked him and said I would remember his offer if I needed it. He then gave me Richard Carlson’s ‘Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff’ and said, ‘Renu,

you will be happier if you realise that life is not always fair. So stop feeling sorry for yourself. Just focus on the positives and move on.’”

He did not believe in dwelling on the past except to learn from it and then move forward. If an error of judgement or a mistake was committed, he would say, “Mistakes do take place; but that should not make us lose hope or think that we cannot remedy the situation. Focus on the mistake just enough for it to be a lesson for the future, then work on the solution; remedy the situation as best as possible and move on.” It wasn’t as if he never got angry in such situations, but as Vishal puts it, “He had learnt to use his temper, not lose it.” He would often ‘use’ his temper to send a message home; that such behaviour should not be repeated. He would then calmly work with the person responsible to remedy the situation. He also explained, says Ankur, that in the interest of efficient time utilization, you have to let go of some things, but explain that while you are letting go, you don’t want this to be repeated.

He always believed that things would ultimately turn out fine. Don’t waste time and energy on regrets, he would say.

Smooth Sailing Strategies

Ashok Mattoo has seen him go through many difficult situations in business. In every situation, his focus was always the solution, not the problem. “If someone cheated

him in business, he would be cool; he would just let it go. I never heard him curse anyone. Even if someone was creating problems for him, the worst he would say would be - *yeh uski badmaashi lagti hai...* that was it. Nothing more! In fact, if that same person had some qualities, he would speak about those qualities without any bitterness. He did not allow bitterness or negativity to dampen his spirits or distract him from his goals.”

Biswanath Agarwal, an advocate based in Jamshedpur had the same experience. “When Om Gupta started his first project in Jamshedpur, I was hired to handle the registration and other formalities of the project. I have remained a part of the Ashiana family ever since. At one time, after we had booked land for a project, and were working on it, we had a setback, a ‘*dhokha*’. Somehow, word leaked out and someone else snapped it up. I was crestfallen and afraid of what Omji would say. He just said to me, ‘*Chinta mat karo, jis ki taqdeer men tha, usko mil gaya. Hame is se bhi barhiya milega.*’ And then he got down to work: within the next 15 days, he returned the advance that had been given by customers. And he did this with folded hands and an apology. His humility and sense of fairness and honesty was incomparable! Even in that difficult situation, his first thought was to return the money. He never lost focus on his priorities and values, even when he was just starting out and was not the successful businessman he later became.”

OPG was a great fan of Richard Carlson's 'Don't Sweat the Small Stuff'. The ideas were in perfect harmony with his beliefs. He agreed with the author's viewpoint that 'it's all small stuff'. Money issues, dissolving of partnerships, errors of judgement...in any of these situations, OPG believed the most important aspect was getting closure, and getting it as amicably as possible. He was too positive a person to waste energy or time in retaliating or settling scores. In his own inimitable style, he would say, "*Mujhe faltu ka panga nahi lena!*"

Raja Modi says he was given an unfair deal more than once, but each time, he accepted what was given without fighting for his fair share. It was not as if a brilliant number cruncher like him was not aware of the facts. Raja says that in one case, the other party wanted to work out the division of assets. OPG said the best way to arrive at a fair division would be that one party works out the division, and the other takes the first choice. But when there was an objection to this, OPG said, 'Fine, you choose first, and I will take what is left'. Later, when both Raja and Om had achieved success and Raja brought up this topic, Om said, "*Ham ne kisi ka bura nahi kiya, woh zyada zaroori hai...aur hame uska phal bhi mil gaya.*"

Ankur says his Dad followed his belief of 'solve issues; get closure' in the way he ran the organization too. "Dad always said, 'Don't keep things pending'. At meetings, as he went

down the list of items to be discussed, he would pause if he saw an issue where there seemed to be some problem with implementation or incomplete information about it. He would ask why the person was getting stuck at that point. There would be a lot of questions to understand the problem and then suggestions would be invited to solve it and bring it to closure. Thus it would become a learning platform for all present. We follow this system even as the organization has grown. Each department has its own meetings and problem-solving is a very important aspect, even if it means that the agenda gets carried over. Dad would say that ticking points off a list without confirming that the issue has been completely resolved serves no purpose.”

Opportunity in Adversity

Om Gupta had an attitude of gratitude and saw opportunities in seemingly difficult situations. Bineeta Basu describes him as a ‘diehard optimist with tremendous will power and dogged determination’. She says, “He always reassured people that every situation had some positive potential; a light at the end of the tunnel. He believed in the proverbial silver lining, ‘*iss me bhi kuch achha hai, kuch bhalai hai*’ he would say. ‘*Sab theekh hoga*. We will make it happen!’ He also believed that something better was just round the corner.”

C K Basu also talks about this trait of his, “Before Om moved to Bhiwadi, one of his brothers had set up an

industrial unit there. This unit was not doing well and Om's brother decided to close the unit. He needed to sell the land to pay off the debts that this venture had accumulated. Since Om was setting up housing in Bhiwadi, he decided to purchase the land and free his brother from the hassle of dealing with it. Om was aware that it would be a struggle to get a permit to do residential housing on industrial land, but he had faith that he would be able to put it to use. Despite efforts, he did not get permission to convert the land to residential use. However, he was given permission to use it for commercial purposes. Om came up with the brilliant idea of putting up a small shopping-cum-office complex on the land. Today, that complex is the very conveniently located Ashiana Arcade which caters to the needs of the residents of Ashiana complexes and others at Bhiwadi."

Ankur says, "Where others saw problems, Dad saw opportunity. For instance, we take our customers for site visits to Bhiwadi from Delhi. With traffic congestion on NH8 increasing, the time taken to reach Bhiwadi also kept increasing. We saw this as a problem; we were concerned that customers would find the drive to Bhiwadi too tedious and get put off. Dad saw the congestion on NH8 as the very reason that made Bhiwadi attractive! Bhiwadi was a huge employment hub and for those working in Bhiwadi, the commute from Delhi or Gurgaon was becoming painful. With good residential options in Bhiwadi itself, it made sense to buy an Ashiana flat at

Bhiwadi and move there. We were all so intent on looking at the problem of traffic congestion that we missed seeing this aspect of the situation!”

Here is another interesting and inspirational example of OPG’s positive attitude. The Company had bought a piece of land for another group housing project. However the requisite approvals had not come. The earlier project was complete and the team was getting frustrated waiting for the approvals to come so that they could start work. OPG countered each such comment with ‘Believe me, something better will come along’. During this time, he decided to look at Neemrana, where Ashiana had a small complex but it had not seen much activity. Research showed them that it was a good time to re-launch Neemrana. That proved very well-timed and successful. By that time, the approvals for the Bhiwadi project had also come through. In the intervening time, the market dynamics had changed. The demand was high for residential units and Bhiwadi was ready for a high-rise. So, as OPG had said, something better did come along! Ashiana created a high rise complex which generated better returns for the Company than a low rise would have. More important, what would have been a low rise is now Bhiwadi’s pride: Ashiana Aangan - which went on to win ‘Best Affordable Housing’ from CNBC Awaaz and Best Residential Project (North) from ZEE Business.

Ankur points out that a key aspect of OPG’s philosophy of ‘*Jo hoga achha hoga*’ was not a sort of ‘positive fatalism’

where he sat back and waited for events to turn for the better. He made the effort to look for opportunity in adversity; he looked at how he could turn a waiting period into a time to do something worthwhile. When the approvals for Aangan were taking time, while he kept spirits up by telling everyone to stay positive, he also thought of what else the Company could do during that period. The re-launch of Neemrana was the result of that effort. He believed in the saying that those who work hard always get lucky!

OPG followed a philosophy worth emulating on how to handle problems, how to face obstacles and how to accept difficult situations. He agreed with the saying, 'Every problem has a solution; if it does not, then it is not a problem. It is a fact, a given; accept it and move on'. Biswajit Sengupta puts it well, "Om took the good and bad in his stride and I would say that he was the living example of the famous song 'Main zindagi ke saath nibhaata chala gaya'."



*I have become my own version of an optimist. If I can't
make it through one door, I'll go through another door -
or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come
no matter how dark the present.*

Rabindranath Tagore

Ace the Hurdle Race

In a Nutshell

- You will sometimes face minor problems or major obstacles in your life; you will occasionally make errors of judgement and mistakes; how you handle these situations is critical to making the most of your life.
- Teach yourself to stay calm: focus on the solution, not the problem. This is not a mere cliché; it is the only way of ensuring that you will come up with a well-considered solution.
- Instead of focussing on your problems, continue to show love and concern for others; this will help you cope better.
- Don't lose hope; stick to your goals, your principles and your standards: you will overcome!
- Don't waste time and energy on regrets; learn from whatever happened and move on.
- Bring closure to unpleasant instances in your life in the most amicable way possible and move forward towards your goals.
- Don't allow bitterness or negativity to dampen your spirits or distract you from your goals.
- Be grateful for what you have and look for opportunity in adversity - you may be pleasantly surprised at the silver lining you find in the cloud!



Chapter 10

Leading with Wisdom and Imagination



Aradhana Dubey joined Ashiana after her five-year stint with the Indian Air Force Short Service Commission. Now working as Plant Head - HR and Admin for a Japanese MNC based outside Delhi, she writes, “Ashiana was the right start for my corporate journey. Coming from the strict Services background, I was a bit wary about how profit-making companies operate. But then I saw a live demonstration of transparency in business dealings and an upright manner of conducting things.

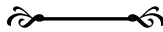
“Omji asked a colleague and me to represent the Company in a discussion with residents who were disputing the service charges for maintenance. Prior to the meeting, Omji answered all our questions and explained the

rationale behind the charges. We were instructed to carry these details along and not hide any facts or manipulate any figures. We were also told that any decision we took post the meeting would be respected and carried out.”

She continues, “Ashiana’s acceptance of a woman in a leadership role, that too for a maintenance team, had already made me realize that I was working for a visionary and a leader. This incident confirmed that belief. I became a true admirer of Omji from that day; I was happy to know that I was working for a person who knew what he wanted, knew how to get it and who was upright in his dealings.

“Omji was a true leader - one whose confidence in his employees actually made them perform better than their normal best. And like a true leader, he inspired, transformed and enriched many hearts and many lives.

“I thank God for the presence of Omji and Ashiana in my life. May his soul rest in eternal peace!”



What would the world be without those visionaries who can see, with imagination and wisdom, how the future can be made better? And where would we be without those pioneering souls who implement these visions and make them happen? When these two attributes combine in one person, we have a true leader.

OPG was certainly a leader, one who had the courage and tenacity to use his special talent, knowledge and wisdom to create something of value that would improve the lives of people. His methods were righteous, lawful and humane.

Like a true leader, he had the natural ability to connect with people, giving and receiving love, trust and respect. In the words of Beila Gupta, “At Rotary, his qualities came to the fore. He worked to accomplish the mission of community service and fellowship; at the same time he made extra efforts to make the programmes interesting. He would try to involve more members in the activities of the club as well as involve their family members; he would invite other clubs to join in certain activities. He said that he was fortunate to have received the trust and support of members in discharging his responsibilities. But members always spoke about his special ability to connect with others.”

At Ashiana, he put together a team that became a cohesive unit; he encouraged them towards confidence and, leading by example, gave every opportunity for growth and improvement. In the words of Rohit Modi, “With his vision, his pioneering mindset and his passion for training and development, Om Uncle’s leadership was what one reads about in management manuals.”

The Middle of the Pyramid

If Bottom of the Pyramid was C K Prahalad's suggested focus 'to do good and to do well', Om Gupta could well be the person who proved that focus on the middle-income group would result in a similar 'do good and do well' scenario.

Jamshedpur lacked middle-income private housing. OPG filled that lacuna and went beyond: he gave the middle-income group homes that would delight them; quality that would make them feel proud of their homes and features that would enhance their lives. When Ashiana Gardens was coming up, the greenery and landscaping of the project became the talking point of Jamshedpur.

Usha Kartha remembers those early days at Jamshedpur, "There was no housing colony here other than the ones for Tata employees. It was a pioneering step by Ashiana. OPG did everything to make it a success; he would visit prospective customers' homes and explain the features and costs in a transparent way so that they knew their money would be safe with Ashiana. In time, Ashiana created such a buzz that people were proud to be associated with it. Customers would bring other prospective customers to the site and say, 'I was their first customer, *maine hi sabse pehle yahan book kiya tha...*' I asked Omji, how do I tell them that they were not the first? Omji understood the sentiments of people well. He explained to me that a home was not just the biggest, but also the most significant purchase for anyone,

more so for a middle-class person. This was just an expression of the sense of pride and joy they felt. “If it makes them happy to believe they were the first to book with us, let them feel happy, why should we spoil it for them? It just shows how much they are looking forward to their new homes. Now we have to ensure that we do not let them down.”

Bineeta Basu and C K Basu were witness to those days, “It was heartening to see Om’s way of functioning. His vision was futuristic, yet he was very much in touch with ground realities. He would assess feasibility factors, situations, political climate conducive to business ventures, social impact and of course, profitability. His focus was to create something good for the middle-income earner’s family. Attaining a sense of satisfaction and achievement in what he undertook was important for him as was sticking to his ethical standards. He was also very good at human relations and people took to him with ease. You could see his leadership qualities even in those early days.”

Rohit Modi remembers the inauguration of Ashiana Gardens, the second project at Jamshedpur, which was attended by top Tata honchos like Russi Modi and J J Irani. “The celebration was done to a certain standard even at that early stage of the Company; Om Uncle always wanted to do things well. The other thing I remember is that even with VIPs present, he did not ignore the rest. He gave everyone the same respect and attention.”

First Mover

The expansion towards Bhiwadi was even more of a pioneering step. Bhiwadi, considered a dominant player in the National Capital Region today, was an unknown entity in the residential sector when Om Gupta started his first residential project - Ashiana Greens. The town had 1500 factories and barely any residential areas; all it had were Rajasthan Housing Board flats. Almost all the people working in these 1500 factories in Bhiwadi commuted from Delhi or Gurgaon.

P K Jaiswal remembers those days when no one had even heard of Bhiwadi. “We took a taxi from Delhi and the driver took us straight to Bhawani...today people are more familiar with Bhiwadi than with Bhawani!”

Ashiana is credited with turning Bhiwadi into a real estate magnet. For the first ten years, Ashiana was the only builder operating in Bhiwadi. Now, having seen the growth and potential, and with over 3300 factories, there are about 30 builders vying for customers. The competition has been good for Ashiana; it has cemented Ashiana’s position as the first choice despite a premium price. People know they are in safe hands; the quality is unquestionable, the financial deals are transparent and delivery is on time.

OPG understood the requirements of Bhiwadi well. He focussed again on middle-income housing, worked hard with his trusted lieutenants to create the kind of residential

space that Bhiwadi had not seen. A lot of concepts were new to the team, so he would explain the purpose they served. “*Horticulture se project mein jaan aa jati hai*” is something they still remember. He explained the purpose of the sample flat: it is not just to show customers a sample. A sample flat also gives clarity to engineers, supervisors, and to the marketing team. When they see the end product, they can judge what needs correction. OPG would ask everyone present for comments and make a note of all points made. His way of working with his team ensured that they all shared in his dream, and they still do.

The Ashiana Advantage

With every project, at every location, OPG raised the bar. Ashiana was creating middle-income housing at affordable rates with features not seen in this segment. There were landscaped gardens, children’s play areas, walking tracks, clubs, swimming pools and facility management. Soon, there were covered bus shelters and maid’s rest areas too. The number and variety of events and competitions for children as well as adults keeps increasing. Ashiana creates communities, not just people living in flats who do not know who their neighbour is.

P K Jaiswal says that one of the factors that makes each Ashiana project stand out is the landscaping. “It’s what we call the ‘wow’ factor today. Om Bhaiya would always say, first start work on the landscaping; when customers see a

landscaped garden it gives a good look irrespective of the stage of construction. Manju Bhabhi was also very particular about greenery, she would take a lot of interest, pointing out if she felt it was not good enough and appreciating it warmly if it was.”

Apart from the features that are synonymous with Ashiana today such as well-maintained green areas, open spaces, neat design and high quality, another Ashiana trait that draws customers is the reputation that Ashiana has in the market. Customers know their money is safe; that they will be kept in the loop of how their dream home is shaping up through regular progress reports and finally, that they will get timely delivery. As Ashok Gongopadhyay says, “OPG wanted to be different from others in the real estate industry. He proved that even in a notoriously non-regulated field like real estate, it was possible to do business with transparency and integrity.”

A Dream for Seniors

Utsav - Ashiana’s housing project for senior citizens - was another pioneering step which Om Gupta took in a country which traditionally frowned on what they perceived as ‘old age homes’. Due to the changing scenario in the country, senior citizens were often being left alone to handle their affairs. Children could be working in far off places or busy with the need for double incomes; seniors were increasingly feeling

insecure and lonely. Children too, in many cases, were suffering from guilt feelings of leaving their elderly parents on their own. A housing complex made to cater to the elderly was an idea whose time had come.

Equally important was the thought in Om Gupta's mind that old age should be a time to celebrate; a time to enjoy and do all that one had not had the time or resources to do in one's working years and while bringing up children. With better financial and physical health, senior citizens were in a position to do all this - they just needed the right arrangements to make this happen. And that was the birth of Utsav: a place where seniors could live in safety and comfort, dignity and independence and pursue interests and a life style of their choice.

He worked hard to change the mindset in the country; people in India saw a retirement home as a place where old people ended up, unwillingly, because their children had no time for them. He realised that there were older people who wanted to lead independent lives, who wanted to enjoy these years after discharging all their duties. There were children who would feel happy and relieved that their parents could lead the lives they wanted in safe environments. He called his retirement housing 'Utsav' to emphasise the idea of celebrating life. His Utsav Active Senior Living complexes, at present in Bhiwadi, Jaipur and Lavasa, are far from being dull grey old age homes. They

are beautifully landscaped complexes with walking tracks and large open areas; there are monthly occasions for celebrations, weekly coffee and games events, a lot of singing and dancing, or options to pursue passions and learn new skills.

Today there is hard core data and there are studies about the potential of this market, but when OPG set up Utsav, it was simply a desire to give India's aging population a great facility. Today Ashiana has 1,100 senior housing units; the projection is that in the next five years, there will be a requirement for at least 300,000 senior housing units. The interest in the sector is growing and there are around 30 projects in the pipeline being developed by other builders.

Building Happy Communities

Ashiana complexes are more than buildings of brick and mortar. OPG saw them as homes for families. He wanted to have certain facilities in place so that the exterior of the buildings would be maintained, common areas and greens kept clean and community-building events initiated. His pioneering initiative of introducing Facility Management as part of the package of an Ashiana home was aimed towards this end. Rohit Modi says, "Om Uncle introduced this in the mid-80s when no one was doing it here, no one was aware of the concept. Builders made a building, then they created a Residents Welfare

Association (RWA); there would be a nominee from the builder's side who would act as a buffer between the builder and the residents for two years. Post two years, the nominee would be gone and the RWA would be on its own, not really competent to oversee the upkeep of the building. Thanks to Om Uncle, Facility Management is now a market compulsion. It is not a revenue-generating business as such; it is more about long-term benefits. When Om Uncle did it, he was thinking more about the larger purpose: that it would add value for his customers. The benefits that the Company would also garner from it was the secondary thought. The time and effort he put into it was not really proportionate to any direct revenue it would generate, but then, his priority was always value for the customer.”

The Facility Management arm of the Company, Ashiana Maintenance Services, looks after the common areas and has a team on hand for maintenance. It also organises functions and competitions; it gets children involved in environmental issues, holds sports and debate competitions, and celebrates festivals. OPG's dream of happy communities living at Ashiana complexes is very much a reality today.

Environmental Concerns

OPG's understanding and appreciation of the importance of greenery was always evident. He became interested in

environmental issues and made efforts to learn about them in greater detail. He would return after a trip and share with the team the water conservation tips in his hotel room. He would read magazines and discuss what was being done to care for the environment and what Ashiana could do. He passed a directive to use both sides of a paper while taking print-outs. During construction too, he passed on the message of prudent use of resources.

Garbage collection was already being carried out in all Ashiana projects by the Maintenance team; in 2002, he decided to go in for Solid Waste Management systems and provided the resources and land for it. This was a first for a small town like Bhiwadi as well as a first in mid-income housing. In fact, long before these environmental initiatives became mandatory, Ashiana projects had Sewage Treatment Plants, Solid Waste Management systems, Rain Water Harvesting arrangements and CFLs.

Ashiana Facility Management teams monitor the use of water in each Ashiana project, educating residents about prudent use of water, alerting them of overuse and lauding them when usage is within limits. It was OPG's astute strategy to get the children of the residents involved in environmental issues, knowing that they would be passionate about the cause and influential in changing their parents' habits. Today Ashiana residents, young and old, involve themselves in environment-related initiatives like planting trees, cleaning up the town, etc.

The Genius of the ‘And’

In ‘Built to Last’, Jim Collins and Jerry Porras say that great businessmen do not function under ‘the Tyranny of the OR’, but carry out their business with ‘the Genius of the And’. They describe how choosing between seemingly contradictory concepts - focusing on this or that - leads to missed opportunities. Is the product low cost or high quality? Do I focus on short-term opportunities or long-term strategy? Should the company be bold or conservative? Great companies that continue to succeed year after year, instead of choosing between ‘this or that’, find a way to have both.

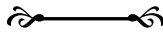
Ankur read the book and realised that his Dad had exactly the same thought process. For him there were no conflicts of interest in the way he ran his business. As a businessman, he had every intention of running a successful and profitable venture. And he knew how to combine it with his humanistic, ethical and law-abiding beliefs. These were the very traits that made him a leader to look up to. Some examples of OPG’s Genius of the And:

- **Quality AND Affordability** - This is considered by many to be the outstanding feature of Ashiana: mid-income affordable housing with quality
- **Discipline AND Fun** - Ashiana is run in a totally professional manner where discipline and rules are adhered to, yet the atmosphere is family-like and there

are many occasions for having fun

- **Humanistic AND Business Savvy** - He created a company that followed the righteous path while keeping shareholders happy; he followed his heart but made sure that he did not hurt the interests of those who were dependent on his business - employers, shareholders or other stakeholders
- **Profitable AND Transparent** - He believed it was absolutely possible to be profitable while being transparent, fair and honest in all dealings.

Om Gupta left behind a family of Ashiana associates who still look up to him as a guiding light. They remember the lessons he taught them and those they learned by just seeing how he lived his life.



*Do not go where a path may lead, go instead
where there is no path and leave a trail.*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Leading with Wisdom and Imagination

In a Nutshell

- A true leader is a creative, far-sighted thinker who thinks and acts in the interest of the maximum number of people.
- To lead others, your own behaviour, actions and words must display clarity, righteousness and courage of conviction.
- Compassion, love and respect for others bestows a natural ability to connect with others and draws them towards you.
- An ideal leader is a visionary who is in touch with ground realities; the pioneering initiatives of such a leader are practical and useful.
- Confidence in one's own self - and the ability to instil confidence in others - is an essential quality of a leader.
- A leader has a strong set of values and principles and is ready to face the consequences of following them.
- A leader has that special knack to run his life and work using 'the genius of the AND'.



Chapter 11

An Inspiring Role Model



A *tma Sharan, VP, Ashiana Maintenance Services, says the most valuable lesson he learnt from OPG was 'Humility'. "You follow a leader for the way he lives his life, his values, his logic, his reasoning and his charisma; you follow him because he inspires you to be your best. And that is the kind of leader OPG was. He never gave the impression that you had to follow him because he was the boss. OPG completely disarmed you with his humility, his affection, his intent and his fairness; no one could ever feel upset when scolded or corrected. There was so much trust in the relationships he developed with his people that never ever could the intent of what he said or did be under question. You knew it was for the best; for your best.*

“Even though he was the boss, he respected everyone, he respected their time. If he was coming to Bhiwadi for some work, he could well have asked me to be available for a meeting. But no, he would say, ‘Are you free for some time today? I am coming to Bhiwadi, would you be able to make time to meet me?’ His behaviour sent home a message: if he respected people and their schedules, if he went by the rules, then how could you not be inspired to do the same?”

“His personality was such that one felt a great sense of comfort talking to him; he would put you at ease in every situation. Even during a job interview, he was never intimidating; he could put a candidate at ease within seconds. This sense of comfort in dealing with the CEO of a company is rare.”



Biswajit Sengupta describes Om Gupta in these words: In success, he was magnanimous; in work, he showed determination; in life, he spread goodwill.

OPG was the ideal role model: confident, positive and successful, yet humble, respectful and approachable. The high ethical standards he lived by inspired those around him because his life was a testimony to the rewards of living by those values. Just as he shared his knowledge, he shared his insights too so others could benefit from them.

Ankur says that recently, while attending one of Robin Sharma's programmes, he heard a line in connection with someone else that was so appropriate for his Dad: 'The goal of his life was not to live forever but to create something that will'.

'Achhapan'

Vishal says that the most important lesson he learnt from his father was '*achhapan*' - doing good deeds. It makes him happy that consultants, government officials and others that OPG dealt with remember his father as a 'good person' more than as a 'good businessman'. "His sense of right and wrong was very clear and he lived by his convictions. He would say to us, be a good person, everything else will follow. You will attract good people. Run your business with good values and you will be successful."

Describing Om Gupta as an 'outstanding human being', Ashok Mattoo says, "Om was very principled and had respect for the law. He made sure that in every action he took, he did right by his employees, his customers, all stakeholders...in a nutshell, I would state that you could not fault his actions."

Rohit Modi adds, "His values were not a convenient set of beliefs to be flaunted; to take the moral high ground when it suited him and to compromise when it did not. Even if

others were taking a certain route and making more money or getting things done faster, it would not bother him. He would stick to his code of ethics.”

It was this conviction, Rohit believes, that made him stand out from the rest. It gave him the confidence with which he carried himself. “It was inspiring to see him conduct himself with such dignity. I saw him with India’s corporate leaders, with senior IAS officers; he was very respectful, just as he was with everyone else, but he was not in awe of power. There was no ‘*mai-baap*’ or ‘*Sir-Sir*’ attitude. He maintained his dignity and established great relationships because others respected him equally and appreciated him for what he stood for.”

C K Basu says that OPG’s concern for the aging population and his respectful attitude has been passed on and is evident at Ashiana even today. “The culture of the Company is one of mutual respect. Elders who have been with Ashiana for long are regarded with special consideration. Om’s sons give great respect to all seniors in the organization and their opinions and advice are sought out just as in a typical Indian family.”

In the words of Ashok Gongopadhyay, “Over the years I realized that OPG was more of a man than a ‘business’ man. He wanted to see everybody happy at work and in life. The staff in the office did not just respect him, they also loved him because of his unselfish nature. He would

come to the office with a smile which was infectious and the entire staff would be smiling, ready to start a new day. He created a business with love, affection and sincerity as his capital and succeeded in his endeavour of winning the hearts and minds of people.”

Varun puts it succinctly “If Dad had to be proud of us, he would be proud of us if we were good human beings.”

Imparting Values

Om Gupta had a dream for India: he wanted the country to have a clean and transparent business environment. He wanted to create and run a clean business and prove that contrary to the perception, you could do business ethically and still be successful in India. Shiv Bhagwan Gupta says, “When Om moved to Delhi, the real estate business in the city was run in a very unprofessional manner. Irregular practices were the norm those days. There was a lot of unaccounted cash in the business, you were expected to build beyond the approved plan ...this was just not his cup of tea! He did not want to compete in such a market. He was practical enough to realise that he was too new to try to make a difference in Delhi’s business environment. In Bhiwadi, he set the standard. He set up a clean and transparent business venture and a straight-forward way of doing things. He inspired his team to follow his ways in business and in personal life.”

Seema Singh says that developers who started housing projects in Bhiwadi after Ashiana are unanimous in their regard for him, saying, “*Sab ko saath leke chalte the, sab se bahut pyar se milte the, kabhi bhi phone karo to sahi advice dene ke liye hamesha ready the*”.

Raja Modi believes that indeed, with Ashiana Housing, Om Gupta succeeded in proving that one could conduct business in the real estate industry with transparency and in compliance with the law. He adds, “Very few builders in the country work with this kind of transparency.”

OPG was an inspiration to better oneself; to set higher standards for oneself, in myriad ways. Biswajit Sengupta says, “Om introduced the concept of house-keeping at the construction site. It has sometimes even been commented that Ashiana’s construction sites are neater and more orderly than the finished occupied flats! In his inimitable style, he brought home the message of cleanliness on site. Those were the days when both of us smoked. I was smoking as we went around a construction site. When I had finished my cigarette, I threw the butt on the road. Om did not say a word; he just bent down, picked it up and threw it in the nearby bin. That was the last day that I ever threw anything on the road or where it did not belong.”

Jayant Singh, MD of Karma Hospitality, the company that manages Ashiana’s Treehouse Hotel, remembers his first meeting with OPG. “I was making a pitch for operating the

Treehouse Hotel. I walked into Uncle's cabin. (Yes, despite the professional relationship, he will always be 'Uncle' to me, or I refer to him as 'my mentor'.) The table was absolutely clean, no papers, no clutter. That was the first thing that struck me. I left the office with a smile on my face, for no particular reason other than that Uncle just made you feel good.

“The day he made me the offer to look after the Treehouse Hotel was a life changing experience for me; one of the best things that has ever happened to me. It got me associated with Ashiana, the family he created. My entire value system has undergone a change since my association with Uncle and with Ashiana. Once, seeing me tense while working on the financial projections, he said, ‘Never get stressed about these things. Make a budget and do your best, give your 100% and you will see how well everything turns out’. I really don't know if he could see the future, but that was the last day that I ever stressed about money in my life!

“I still regret not spending enough time with him, but I know that when I deal with Ashiana, I deal with him. I deal with the value system he created. Complete Transparency, Honesty, Integrity - these are not just words in the dictionary, these are the principles by which Ashiana functions, these are the principles by which all of us associated with Ashiana lead our lives.”

Inspiring you to give your Best

Ashiana has a strong culture of training, developing and helping individuals to reach their potential. This was a passion with OPG and he was great at boosting a person's confidence. Rohit Modi describes one of his early experiences when he was being mentored by OPG, "We were pitching for the Oil India project. For the first meeting, we were to go to Assam. On learning how expensive the air tickets were, I said I would not go. To me, it was clear that I was the most easily dispensable! Om Uncle turned around and said, 'But how can you not come along, you are the star, you will be making the main presentation that day!' At the meeting, he left the stage to me, and set me free! I stopped looking over my shoulder since that day. Even though the foundation had been laid by him, Dad (Raja Modi) and Sen Uncle (Biswajit Sengupta, Ashiana Architect), he increased my confidence tenfold by giving me credit and a pat on the back."

If that presentation was the stepping stone for Rohit, OPG's handling of the final negotiations for this project became another inspiration for him. "Only Om Uncle and I went for this meeting. We were 2, they were 22... but he owned the room! The confidence and clarity with which he spoke, explaining the cost analysis, the processes...it was not as a contractor begging for work, but as an equal stakeholder in the project, one who was fully capable and committed to doing a great job."

Atma Sharan says OPG made people feel they mattered; he always had time for his people. “I had initiated the ‘huddle’ at Ashiana and was very keen that he attend the first one. At the same time, I was aware that he may be too busy to attend. He delighted me, and all of us, by not only being there, but by giving each speaker his full attention. He made each of us feel special and motivated us to do our best. I think he understood how much it would mean to us and he took time out for it. It was also a lesson for us to see how well he managed his time; always being there for all of us.”



When we love, we always strive to become better than we are. When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better too.

Paulo Coelho

An Inspiring Role Model

In a Nutshell

- An inspiring role model is one who possesses extraordinary qualities that one can look up to; at the same time the person must be humble and approachable.
- People look up to those who are passionate, determined and committed; those who have integrity and confidence; charisma and a positive approach.
- Magnanimity is an essential characteristic of those who have the ability to inspire. They are generous with their time; they share their insights and are keen to see others prosper.
- They have a clear sense of right and wrong and do not waver from their code of ethics.
- People are inspired by those who are self-confident: those who are neither in awe of people of higher standing or riches, nor dismissive of those with less money. They treat all with equal respect.
- Role Models inspire those around them to give their best; they also set high standards for themselves.



Chapter 12

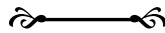
The Ashiana Family



He was different,” says Ashok Gongopadhyay, expressing in those three words a wealth of sentiments as he tells us about the care and concern OPG bestowed on him and his late wife, Mala, “In 1996 Mala was detected with cancer. OPG promptly assured me of every kind of help and even gave me the liberty to use the office for any kind of support that I needed. He was one of the first to visit Mala in hospital and assured her too of all support. Mala lived for 17 years thereafter and whenever they met, OPG showered her with great love and affection. He encouraged her to live a normal life. This perhaps gave her better healing than the medicines she was taking.

“Once when Mala was not well, I called OPG to say that I would not be coming in to office as I was taking her to hospital. When I reached the hospital, I saw Radhe Shyam, the Office Assistant, waiting for me there. OPG had sent an envelope of money....It would not have been possible to keep Mala alive for 17 long years without his support.

“Another incident took place in 1996 that again displayed the compassion and thoughtfulness of this great man. I was in Alwar for a day in connection with some official work when I received a call from the office asking me to return to Delhi immediately and to contact my family in Kolkata. I called home and learnt that my father had expired. I rushed back to office, reaching there in the late evening. I was surprised to see OPG’s son, Vishal, waiting for me with an air ticket for Kolkata and some cash. He expressed his condolences and informed me that OPG had asked him to meet me and hand over the ticket and cash to me. Those days there were no ATMs, and being so late in the evening, the banks were closed. OPG had thoughtfully made all the arrangements for me. His acts of kindness and consideration are a beautiful and inspiring memory; his thoughts and teachings will guide thousands of his admirers who came in contact with him.”



Om Gupta had a large family: a family beyond the ties of blood. That was his Ashiana Family: employees,

consultants, contractors, vendors, associates, shareholders, and of course, his customers. While there was obviously a closer relationship with those internal stakeholders that he interacted with on a regular basis, his concern and desire to ensure the satisfaction and improve the happiness quotient of external stakeholders was also on his agenda.

“We should all grow together” was something many associates remember him saying. He was generous and did all he could to help; it could be in the form of financial assistance to help an associate expand his business or pay a hospital bill for a member of his staff. He was happy if the advantage of association with his Company gave a supplier a benefit, and if he read a useful book, he would buy multiple copies to pass on.

He helped in intangible ways too. In the words of Bineeta Basu, “His never-say-die attitude rubbed off on others and filled them with hope. He had a soothing and comforting effect on those going through a lean phase. He seemed to sense when people needed support. At one point of time I was required to go through various diagnostic procedures. Om called and asked who was accompanying me to the hospital. When I told him that I would be going alone he responded with, ‘No, Manju will be going with you.’ She spent the entire day with me at the hospital. I was deeply touched by this gesture of kindness and concern.”

The 'A' Team

OPG expressed his concern for his employees in numerous ways. He believed it was his responsibility to see that every member of the Company gets opportunities for growth and learning. The training centre to turn unskilled labour to skilled labour is a continuous initiative at Ashiana. The trainees are given stipends during their training in addition to uniforms and all training material. Enthusiastic about encouraging women to progress, OPG motivated the female labour on site to sign up for skill training too and Ashiana conducts sessions specially for them.

Ashiana regularly holds diverse training and personality development workshops for employees. The amount of time he personally spent teaching was also an expression of his love. He worked with people on their mistakes so that they would learn and improve; he would work on building their confidence too. He also started the Manju Gupta Memorial Merit Scholarship for the children of Ashiana employees in 2002. As Vishal puts it, "His desire to help people grow, develop and become better could be called a passion."

Shailendra talks about the fact that at Ashiana you are treated like a family member, not as an employee. "In my 17 years with Ashiana, any mistake I have made has been handled lovingly; OPG's main concern was whether I had

learned from my mistake or not, just as we do at home with our children. In other ways too, he guided us as if we were his children. In 2003, he offered a discount to employees wanting to book flats in the new Ashiana complex. He was keen for all of us to prosper and a house being a good investment, he wanted to help us own a property. Out of the three of us who took up the offer at that time, I was the junior most, and when I learnt that I was getting a lower discount than a senior person, I got upset and withdrew my application. He called me and asked me why I had changed my mind. I sulked and kept quiet at first, but in his gentle manner he got it out of me. He explained the basis of the decision from the Company's point of view. When I told him that I would have a problem servicing the loan without the higher discount I had expected, he said, 'Don't miss this opportunity to buy your own house. If you run into any problem, I will be there to help you'. It is only thanks to him that I own a property today which is my home plus a great investment."

The feeling of being treated like much more than an employee is a recurring theme at Ashiana. Manu Rishi Gupta, ex-GM of Ashiana Housing's Treehouse Hotel, now CEO of an investment firm in Bangalore, wrote in his blog, "OPG would always spend a few minutes talking to me and asking about the welfare of my family. He knew everyone in my family and would

show concern that I needed to get married at 32 (my age then) and even suggested a few matches. Small gestures and courtesies that he extended towards one and all made him a great man.”

While OPG believed in giving equal opportunities to the male and female staff at Ashiana, he was practical and conscious of the realities of life. In the event that a female employee had to stay back late in office, he would be particular about how she would get home. In general, though, he did not believe in extended office hours. ‘*Time se aao, time se jao*’ he would say. He explained that only if one kept disciplined hours, could one be home in time to attend to family responsibilities. This applied to both men and women. “When matters at home are looked after well, you will be able to work with more concentration at office.”

Joys points out that in all these years she has never seen anyone go to him with a genuine request and return empty-handed. Ashok Mattoo agrees, “He never made a fuss about his generosity. If he learned of an employee facing a problem, he would say, ‘He has done so much for me and my Company, now it is my turn’.”

Like a true patriarch, he also wanted the staff to have a good time. Occasions for celebrations and outings are an integral part of the Ashiana calendar. The Annual Ashiana Family Holiday is a great bonding exercise.

Aradhana says that when she thinks about OPG, she is filled with “gratefulness, affection and respect many times over. I sincerely feel that people like Omji do not pass away, their essence passes on... inspiring, transforming and enriching many hearts and many lives.”

Customer Care

Customer care was more than a department for OPG; it was something that came from his heart. He always believed in giving more than he promised. If cost of construction went up after flats were booked at a certain price, he did not take the route that many others do - that of cutting back on the quality. His instructions were that “we have to give the quality we promised”.

OPG wanted to delight the customer; he would look at things from a customer’s viewpoint, anticipate the expectations and grievances and give them a place they would lovingly call ‘home’. He created platforms for interaction and built communities, not complexes or buildings.

Always humble, he would thank customers for their business in his letters in the Company newsletter. He enjoyed meeting and talking to them. Customers are much more than mere ‘buyers’ of Ashiana properties; they are part of the Ashiana family.

Strong Bonds Forever

Om Gupta was not person you would easily forget. More than that, he was not a person you wanted to forget! Letters from associates and friends give us an insight into the strong bonds of friendship that he built.

P K Chhawchharia pens his thoughts thus: “From the very day that my sister Manju married Om Gupta, the two of us forged a special bond. We spent great times together and people referred to us as a ‘tikon’ - Manju-Om-Pradeep! To me, he was everything: a father, a brother, a true friend and a well-wisher. Interestingly, I always told him, ‘I learn something from you every moment’, and he would reply, ‘And I learn something from you every moment!’”

Raja Modi and Om Gupta shared an unusual bonding that went beyond the exigencies of business. The friends became business partners in Patna and then decided to set up independent businesses, but the bonds of friendship remained as strong. Saying that whatever he is today he owes to Om, Raja shares an exemplary story of friendship. “When I moved to Delhi in 2001, I rented a first floor accommodation in a three-storied building. After a few months, the owner came up to me and said he was selling the house and would like to give me the first option to buy it. He added that in case I did not buy it, any other buyer would have to honour the two-year rental lease that I had so I need not worry about where I would go. It was a nice building in a nice

area, but buying it was way beyond my financial resources so I declined. Om, on the other hand, thought it would be a very prudent purchase and insisted that I buy it. My son Rohit went ahead and spoke to a bank about a loan but they needed a guarantee. Om readily said he would give the guarantee. It was a large amount, but then Om was a large-hearted man. So, we bought the property. And Om, Manju and Vishal were probably more excited and happy about it than I was! I was still at that stage not very comfortable that we had taken this huge loan; it was the three of them who bought mithai and distributed it around!”

Dimple Uban, another close friend of Om and Beila Gupta, shared a special relationship with her dear ‘Om Bhai’. Originally from Patna, Dimple is grateful for the time she got to spend with him after moving to Delhi, “We always exchanged jokes; there was a lot of playful teasing, banter and laughter when we were together.”

She writes, “The last time I saw him was just a week before he passed away. My husband Ravindra and I had gone to Max Hospital to see him. He had slipped into a state of unconsciousness and was in the ICU. To our surprise, when we reached the hospital to look up Beila and enquire about his well-being, we were allowed into the ICU and spent close to half an hour there. It remains a very special memory.

“The lines that have repeatedly rung in my ears ever

since I heard of his passing away, may sound clichéd, but are so appropriate for our dear friend: ‘*Om mara nahi; Om marte nahi.*’”

Ronald D’Costa of The Boulevard Hotel at Jamshedpur writes: “Wonderful people never go away; they stay with us because they have touched our hearts.

“Thirty five years ago Om and a partner walked into our office. They required space to set up an office to start operations in Jamshedpur. They spoke about their goal: to give to the people of Jamshedpur what they had dreamed of...security - their own home. I wanted to be part of that dream! So, Ashiana moved into The Boulevard Hotel, first to the Oak Room and then to Room # 4. They operated from our hotel till the turn of the millennium.

“From Om I learnt how to look beyond an inaccessible marshland and create value beyond the wildest dreams of middle-class wage earners. I learnt from Om how to part as friends no matter how bitter a disagreement may have been. I learnt that delegation with guidance and direction is the only way to move ahead. His confidence in people made them achieve more than they thought they could. Finally, Om’s ability to get on with life is what I hope has rubbed off on me.

“We did not have to meet often to know that he was just a phone call away. And today that call is for free... for Om lives on in our hearts.”

Advocate Biswanath Agarwal of Jamshedpur is another of OPG's long time associates. He says, "I was just a small player, charging Rs 200-400 for a case. My meeting with Om Gupta in November 1985 was a turning point for me. Today, I have grown beyond my expectations; I was able to send my son to London for higher studies and feel proud that he practices in the High Court. Everything that I have today is 99% thanks to the goodwill of Ashiana; the goodwill that I have earned by being associated with Ashiana and Om Gupta. He was a man who took great interest in the welfare of everyone who was associated with him. He was always there to support, to see that all of us benefited along with the growth of Ashiana.

"However, my gratitude is not only for the financial benefits or stature that I have earned thanks to Ashiana. It is also for all that I learnt from the attitude of Om Gupta. He was a man who stood by his promises and did not want to cause pain or trouble to anyone. A partnership with him was forever so long as you were upright and '*imaandaar*'."

M P Singh writes, "One of the outstanding traits of OPG was his ability to convert casual acquaintances into lifelong relationships. Years back, we were conducting a shoot for a client. The client was present at the shoot with some friends of his. OPG was among them, silently watching from a dark corner of the room.

After the shooting was over, he walked over to his friend and asked him if he could meet me for a few minutes. He greeted me with a warm handshake and a charismatic smile. He then asked me if I would be interested in doing some ‘small business’ with his newly set up company in Delhi.

“I met him at his GK II office; he wanted to release some classified ads for his upcoming project at Bhiwadi. There would hardly be any income for us from this job, but there was something about this charismatic person across the table that compelled me to take it up. It may have been the respect with which he spoke to me or the humility and honesty with which he accepted that it was a small job that he was offering me - he made no high-flying promises. That was the beginning of a relationship that has lasted over 18 years and has percolated down to the next generation.

“As the Company grew, so did the advertising business we got from Ashiana. But more than that, it was the family-like feeling and the respect that kept us involved. Many projects later, when the business was already doing well, we had gone for the *bhoomi-pujan* ceremony of Ashiana Village. After the prayers, as the pundit was about to put a tilak on OPG’s forehead, he told him to first put the tilak on my forehead. This honour is still fresh in my memory and it instantly created a sense of partnering the project rather than just being an agency.

Till date, that same feeling endures.”

Seema Singh adds, "For MP and me, he was like a father, a brother, a friend, a family member, a partner...True to his name - '*OM*' *ji jaisa koi nahin*"

OPG was always there for his Ashiana Family and as he often said, '*Main hoon na!*'



***Teach this triple truth to all: A generous heart,
kind speech, and a life of service and compassion
are the things which renew humanity.***

Gautam Buddh

The Ashiana Family

In a Nutshell

- To live a fulfilling life, to experience the joy that comes from knowing that ‘even one life has breathed easier because you have lived’, you need to have a large heart and a large family!
- Think of all your associates, friends and stakeholders as part of your family and be loving, caring and compassionate towards them.
- Some gifted people have a natural thought process which sees in the success and happiness of another, their own success and happiness. Be inspired by them and inculcate these qualities in yourself.
- To be loved, to draw others towards you and to surround yourself with joy and positivity follow the principles of fairness in dealings, develop a helpful nature, be thoughtful and considerate.
- Surround yourself with people who can inspire and guide you to greatness.



Tributes To A Brother



My Brother, My Hero

My brother was a charmer - known for his 'jaadu ki jhappi' which drew everyone to him. I always had a very special emotional bond with Bhai, all the more because we spent a lot of quality time together at Jamshedpur.

I am fortunate indeed that I got his unconditional love and his blessings and guidance throughout my life. This helped me become more confident, adaptable, versatile and full of positivity. Bhai was someone with whom we could share everything.

He believed that 'quitters never win and winners never

quit; that losers live in the past while winners learn from the past'. He said, 'To win, you have to compromise - and compromising with our near and dear ones doesn't mean that we are wrong and the other is right - it just means that we value our relationships more than our ego.'

He also believed, as our father did, that competitors and critics contribute to our improvement and growth; one should always thank them and bless them.

I used to say jokingly that my brother was the best heart surgeon in the world because he could make an instant place in anyone's heart without a surgeon's knife or spilling any blood!

Bhai, you went laughing and smiling, giving endless love and devotion to our family. You lived every moment of your life to the fullest. You made every celebration in the family special and memorable.

We miss you Bhai; we miss your wonderful sense of humour, your full-throated laughter, your caring nature...you were special in every way: nice, gentle and kind.

Someone like you is so, so very difficult to find!

Urmila Kanwatia



OM is Peace

OM is Shakti

OM is Positivity

Yes, this is my Om Bhaiya. I still remember when Om Bhaiya came back home after finishing his MS from Louisiana State University: good looks, great orator, stylish yet at heart a simple man; how proud I felt as a sister! I always looked forward to Bhaiya attending my school functions so that my friends could see what a handsome brother I had and envy me!

Our house in Patna was built by Bhaiya. It was his first creation as a civil engineer and it became the talk of the town. It was rated among the three most beautiful houses in the city. Bhaiya was very well-read and had created a grand library on the first floor of our house. The library had the most spectacular collection of books by great legendary authors. Books by Dale Carnegie and Robin Sharma were a source of inspiration for Bhaiya and played a significant role in shaping his life. Bhaiya made sure that I was also introduced to this 'gyan'. He taught me the way of living a full life, to live and let live and to see the positives in life.

I got my first electric guitar as a gift from Bhaiya. This was not something easily available those days and it was a dream come true for me. During the same trip he also got me a stylish black and white dress which I cherished as it was my favourite colour combination. It was amazing how well he understood me.

Bhaiya was an ambitious and focused businessman and always thought differently and out of the box. He was very passionate about his family and friends too. He would never miss any of his school or university annual alumni meets and kept in touch with his vast circle of friends through calls, letters or visits. He was extremely busy, but always managed to make time for all of us. He was a patient listener and ever-smiling; he had a hearty laugh and was a go-getter.

When Manju Bhabhi was suffering from cancer, he was always by her side and would make sure that any visitor coming in would enter with a smile and positive attitude. After her demise, she still lived on with Bhaiya in his letters, conversations and in the interiors of his house. His letters to me always ended with, 'Yours Om, Manju and Beila'. He was the best father there could be and understood his children very well; he was always there for them. He addressed his staff as 'beta' and made sure that

everyone who worked for him was secure with regard to *roti, kapda aur makaan*. No wonder he was known as '*Main Hoon Na*'. My brother was a complete man.

A few lines for my dear brother:

Bhaiya, tune hee to mujhe bada kiya,

Tumhari baton se jo seekha wohi maine jiya.

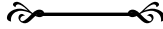
Tere sikhaaye huye usulon ki ghoonto ko jo piya,

Phir to mano jeevan ka jal utha alokik diya.

Aur kyun na ho, agar tum jaisa ho ek bhai,

Jaise aasman se utarra tha koi Masiha.

Kiran Agarwal





A Loving Wife Remembers...



I think of Omji and my face lights up with a smile! And that is what he would have wanted: always cheerful and pleasant, he believed in being thankful for what one had, rather than regret what one did not have. And I am thankful to God for the years that I spent with Omji.

He was a complete man: he was conscientious, responsible and hard-working; he was also full of positivity, warmth and friendliness. In fact, he was the most positive person I ever met. This is not just a wife's sentiment; it is the sentence I have heard from everyone who knew him. And, above all, was his charming child-like smile!

Out-of-the-box thinking and the ability to make the most of any situation, however adverse, were his extraordinary qualities. A self-made man with great vision, his journey from the small town of Sangaria to Ganganagar, then Patna, Jamshedpur and finally to Delhi, is an inspirational story. He gave his unique touch to whatever he did: he offered middle-class families an enhanced life style with his projects; he gave senior citizens a place where they could live joyous lives with dignity and comfort. He believed in giving back to society and involved himself in many such endeavours. His clarity of thought and his vision, combined with his love and compassion for people made him a respected member of society; a personality one could learn from.

In his personal life too, he was very clear in his thinking and actions. When he decided to re-marry, he shared his feelings with everyone concerned - his children, the rest of the family and his friends. He introduced me to the children - Vishal and his wife Rachna, to Ankur and to Varun. He took me to meet his close friends, Renu and Ashok Mattoo Bhaiya, Madhu and Raja Modi Bhaiya as well as his friends from Patna and the morning walk friends circle. And, of course, we met his father, who supported his decision and gave his blessings. He also made great efforts to get to know my side of the family. My mother and both the children - Tarun and

Simran - got very fond of him. He often said, “Beila, people in India have doubts and misgivings about second marriages; we have to set an example for others.”

When I attend a spiritual talk and hear the speaker describe a ‘good soul’, I think immediately of Omji. He had the very qualities that they speak about and I am reminded once again of how fortunate I am to have been the wife of Omji.

Beila Gupta





Madhu Chandra has been associated with Ashiana for over 12 years bringing out the newsletter 'Apna Ashiana' and writing for their brochures. After graduating from Lady Shri Ram College in 1970, she studied

Textile Designing and also wrote for the Sunday Hindustan Times, Dateline Delhi and Youth Times. Equally interested in both fields, she has worked for Central Cottage Industries Emporium, Vichitra Sarees, Indian Textiles and Good Earth in the textile field. She was Contributing Editor for Super and Movie, and while living abroad from 1984 - 1997, she wrote for travel magazines and The Westminster Arts Journal. She now writes copy for marketing and advertising purposes and was the Editorial and Research Assistant for Penguin's 'Foreign Correspondent: Fifty Years of Reporting South Asia'. She can be contacted at cvmadhu@gmail.com

The significance of the story of Om Gupta, the founder of Ashiana, lies not just in the fact that Om Gupta set up a successful, profitable and pioneering business or that Ashiana is the only real estate company from India to have been named twice in the Forbes Best Under a Billion List. The story bears recounting because of the principles on which the Company was founded and the personal beliefs of Om Gupta and the fulfilling life he lived. This is not the tale of an aggressive entrepreneur who vowed to make it big on his own and set himself punishing schedules and targets. The narrative here is of a business plan that focused on creating an organization that would take others along on its growth path, of creating products that would enhance the lifestyles of those who bought them and of building a successful business without compromising on principles and righteousness.

Om Gupta's family members, friends and co-workers have shared with us their OPG memories and teachings so as to give us an insight into the strategies and beliefs of Om Prakash Gupta. This book shares these with its readers in the hope that it will help them achieve success at work and in life.