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Dedication

To Vinod Gupta and Kiran Gupta,

for the values you lived, not just taught.

To Vihaan Gupta,

for being there—through every debate,
brainstorm, and detour.

And to Krati Gupta,

for your quiet strength that anchors us all.

With love and gratitude—always.

FOREWORD

What you hold in your hands is not a textbook, nor is it a memoir in the traditional sense. It is a collection of lived moments, some messy, some moving, many amusing, that quietly shaped how I see the world.

I was born into a Baniya household, where business was not taught in boardrooms but around dinner tables, during roadside arguments, and in Sunday market stalls. Yet even in a family where negotiation, value, and frugality were daily conversations, I still felt the need to ask my father to teach me "business."

This book is the result of that ask.
Each chapter captures a small episode from my growing years, an ordinary moment that somehow offered an extraordinary insight when my father asked, as he always did, "So, what did you learn?"

Sometimes, I had an answer. Sometimes, I didn't. Most times, I thought I did until I heard his.

This book isn't just for those who want to "do business." It's for anyone trying to figure things out with a little help from a parent, a mentor, or life itself. I've left each story open-ended on purpose. You might agree with what I learnt. You might not. That's the point.

I hope you find, in these pages, a smile, a spark, and perhaps a question worth taking to your own kitchen table.

INTRODUCTION

I was born into a Baniya household.

For those unfamiliar with India's caste system, let me explain briefly. Traditionally, society was divided into four main categories: the Brahmins—the priests closest to God; the Kshatriyas—the warriors closest to their weapons; the Vaishyas—the traders and businessmen closest to their money; and the Shudras—the service providers.

Though we currently don't believe in the caste system, according to stories I have heard, our family used to belong to the Vaishya caste. More specifically, we are Baniyas—a subgroup often described, quite literally, as shopkeepers. In many ways, Baniyas in India are seen the way Jews are sometimes perceived on the global stage—deeply business-oriented, perhaps with a slightly gentler approach.

Business, we are told, runs in our blood. So, when I was 16 and asked my father if he could teach me business, he looked at me with amused disbelief.

"What?" he exclaimed. "You're a Gupta! A Baniya! Business is in your blood—you don't need to be taught."

But I wasn't satisfied with that answer. I kept pushing. I didn't want to inherit assumptions—I wanted to understand the process.

And that's how this book was born.

It grew out of conversations with my father—sometimes casual, sometimes intense. He believes that just growing up in a Baniya household teaches you more about business than any formal course ever could. I'm still not entirely sure about that, but as we talked, I began to see his point.

Together, we've chosen twenty real-life incidents from my life—moments that, according to him, carry valuable business lessons. While reflecting on and writing about them, I realized how much I've absorbed without even knowing it.

We have deliberately given the conclusions at the end of the book, so even before turning to it, I want you—especially young readers—to read these stories and then start conversations with your parents, teachers, mentors. Treat each story like a case study. Reflect on it, dissect it, and discover your own takeaways.

Who knows? You might uncover lessons I never even considered.

At the very least, I hope this book sparks curiosity, inspires learning—and makes for an enjoyable read.

1
NEGOTIATING THE BENDS

I must have been around 10 years old when I accompanied my mother to Crawford Market in Mumbai. Simpler, more beautiful times. I never liked letting her go alone to such a bustling and overcrowded place, so I'd always tag along. I fancied myself her protector. Also, there was the small reward of a cold Coke after just twenty minutes of walking around—enough to keep me motivated.

That day, my mother stopped at a fruit vendor whose apples looked especially juicy.

"Kitne ka diya?" she asked. "How much are they?"
"Rs. 100 per kilo," he replied.

My mother raised an eyebrow and pointed toward another stall. "But the whole market is selling them for Rs. 80 per kilo. Why are you charging 100?"

The truth was, almost every vendor had quoted us around Rs. 100. Only one vendor had said Rs. 80—but his apples looked dull and underfed. I realized my mother was bluffing. But in a Baniya family, such small fibs are not seen as immoral. Morality takes a backseat when it comes to bargaining.

The vendor hesitated before replying. He avoided eye contact, trying not to offend her. Then he said, gently, "That vendor you pointed at—he's my nephew. We live in the same kholi. We buy from the same farm. I know he can't be selling at Rs. 80 per kilo unless something's wrong."

It's difficult to say something like that without offending the other person—after all, he was indirectly calling her bluff. Predictably, my mother didn't take it well. She walked away briskly, and we never returned to that stall again.

Back home, once my duty as market bodyguard was over, I couldn't help but rat on her.

"How embarrassing was that, Dad?" I said. "Mom lied, and the vendor caught her red-handed."

My father just smiled. "What did you learn?"

"Not to lie?" I replied, unsure.

But something about the episode stuck with me. I started seeing the market differently. How do these vendors all coexist? Do they compete or collaborate? They clearly had information about one another. I remembered reading in the newspaper that during a fire, they had helped one another. And when the Municipality cracked down, they stood united.
So as a customer, how am I supposed to navigate this market? A couple of years later, I found myself back at Crawford Market.

My birthday was coming up, and I had to buy chocolates to distribute in school. This time, although my mother was with me, I was leading the way because, well, it was going to be my birthday.

While walking through the market, I noticed a shop stacked with goods. The owner was on the phone, barking orders to his helpers—but surprisingly, there were no customers. Curious, I asked our hired market helper about the shop. He told me it was a wholesale store that supplied to five-star hotels and big clients. They didn't usually deal with retail customers.

I hesitated. But since I was buying a large quantity of chocolates, I decided to try my luck.

I walked in and asked for a box of Snickers bars. Without even looking up, the shopkeeper casually quoted a slightly inflated price—probably his polite way of turning me away.

Without blinking, I told him to pack three boxes.

He looked up, slightly startled. I maintained a straight face, like I meant business. The deal was done.

A few months later, I was back in the market. My purchases were much smaller this time, so I was unsure whether I should even approach the same shop. But then I saw the owner smiling at me, as if he remembered me. I stepped in.

He asked if I wanted to try the new Oreo Strawberry Chocolate—recently launched and in high demand. I was thrilled. I immediately bought two. We ended up chatting for five minutes—about my school, his newborn son, and how he hoped to get him into my school someday, though he worried the admissions were tough.

As I left, he handed me two packets of chewing gum—new products yet to be launched.

"These are for you to try," he said.

I walked out beaming. As I passed another vendor, he smiled at me too.
At my age, I had struck a rapport with the biggest wholesaler in the market—and I was proud of it.

Later that evening, I couldn't stop boasting to my dad.

He smiled again. "So, what did you learn?"

"I'm a likeable guy," I grinned. "People enjoy dealing with me."

He chuckled at my boyish swagger, the way only a father who knows better can. "One day, you'll figure it out."

Discussion Question: Do trust, relationships, and subtle social cues shape the way business is done, even more than price or product?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

2

MY CUP-NOT HALF FULL OR HALF EMPTY. EITHER OVERFLOWING OR FULLY EMPTY!

I was buzzing with excitement—India had made it to the World Cup Finals. This was HUGE. We had to do something. We had to come together and cheer Team India properly.

My friend and I decided to host a finals watch party in the lounge of our apartment complex. We set up a big TV and invited everyone we could think of. This was going to be epic.

Food and drinks needed to be sorted. Drinks were easy. I had a great rapport with the shopkeeper downstairs, and he happily agreed to let us take as many bottles as we wanted—and return the unopened ones. Perfect.

Food, though, was a different story.

We'd invited around 50 people, but there were all sorts of wildcards. Many had backup plans with other friend groups. If the vibe at our party was great, the number might swell to 100. But if things didn't click, we could be left with just 10 people staring at a giant TV.

There were other unknowns: Would everyone stay for all 100 overs? When should we serve the food? What if it rained and the match was washed out? How many guests were vegetarian? Any Jains?

It felt more like planning a wedding than a party.

And then came the divine solution: Domino's Pizza.

Pizzas solved everything. We could order anytime, in any quantity, and they'd arrive in 30 minutes. No prep, no waste, no hassle. It was genius.

Or so we thought.

D-Day. The match. The madness.

Five friends arrived before the first ball was bowled. Eager to kick things off, we ordered three pizzas—just enough, with a little buffer.

Within 30 minutes—around the 7th over—another 12 friends walked in, true to Indian Standard Time.

Now we had 3 pizzas... and 17 mouths.

We quickly placed another order for 4 more pizzas—3 vegetarian, based on an impromptu headcount. We assumed they'd be here in 30 minutes, max.

Then came a large group of 10. Panic. We were now at 27 people. The first 3 pizzas had vanished faster than a Dhoni six.

We placed a third order—4 more pizzas—and began waiting.

But 30 minutes after the second order, nothing had arrived. We called Domino's.

They told us they were short-staffed due to the match rush and had clubbed orders 2 and 3 together. They'd dispatch everything together—soon.

"Just 10 more minutes," they said.

Fifteen minutes later, we called again. "The pizzas are being prepped," they said. "Another 10 minutes."

Meanwhile, the crowd swelled to 35. And still—no food.

Thankfully, India was doing well. Spirits stayed high.

Finally, an hour and five minutes after the first delivery, the pizzas arrived. Seven in total. And they were gone in five minutes.

We weren't going to mess up again. We placed a new order—10 pizzas—this time with special requests: thin crust, pepperoni, no onions... We were riding high. The party was a hit.

Then came the twist.

Domino's was annoyed. They said delivery would take 50 minutes to an hour. Apparently, some places had stopped accepting orders altogether.

We agreed anyway—we had no choice.

And then—disaster.

The opposition hit 24 runs in one over. The match turned. India was slipping. The mood went sour. One friend walked out in frustration. Then another. Then ten more.

I wasn't worried about the match anymore. I was worried about the 10 pizzas still being baked.

I thought of the friend who had specifically requested the pepperoni one. He'd left.

We frantically called Domino's to cancel. They refused.

"Four pizzas are already ready," they said. "The rest are in the oven."

"Divert them to other customers," we argued. "You're packed with orders anyway."

"No guarantees other customers want the exact same pizzas," they said.

The call turned into a verbal brawl.

Then—click. The line went dead.

We called back. No answer.

The order had been prepaid through the app. There was nothing we could do.

Half an hour later, the final scene:
15 of us.
10 pizzas.

Most of us stuffed from earlier rounds.
Silence.

The next morning, I narrated the whole disaster to my dad.

He smirked. "What did you learn?"

But before I could reply, his phone rang. A customer.

Within seconds, he was shouting words like MOQ, lead time, and supply chain logistics. Another howling match.

I guess everyone has their bad days.

Discussion Question: How do uncertainty, overconfidence, and real-time decision-making shape the outcome of events - whether in a party, a business, or a cricket match?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

3

POUND OF FLESH

This one was tricky.

I got a call from my friend Rohit—angry, frustrated. He claimed that Virat had been speaking behind his back, calling him a cheat and a thief.

That sounded very unlike Virat, who was usually fair and balanced. And Rohit reminded me that he had repaid the Rs. 3000 he owed Virat—I had witnessed the repayment myself. So if that was true, Virat really had no reason to talk like that.

I found myself agreeing with Rohit. If the debt had been cleared, then spreading such words wasn't right.

Rohit asked me to step in. "You know all the facts," he said. "Can you talk to Virat and ask him to stop?"

So I arranged a meeting with the three of us to clear the air.

It had all started on our school trip to Goa.

Rohit, Virat, and Hardik had decided to sneak out one night for a feast at a fancy restaurant attached to a nightclub. The bill came to Rs. 9,000. Though I didn't press for details, I was fairly certain some... "liquid indulgences" were included.

Since Rohit and Hardik didn't have money on them, Virat covered the entire bill on one condition: they'd each repay him Rs. 3,000 once they were back in Mumbai.

Cut to the present: I began the conversation gently, asking Virat if he had, in fact, been saying things about Rohit. Surprisingly, he didn't deny it.

So I asked him: Why? The money had been returned, hadn't it?

Virat sighed. "Yes, the money came... but the way it happened really ticked me off."

He explained.
After they returned to Mumbai, Virat tried to call Rohit to remind him about the repayment. Rohit didn't answer. He returned the calls only days later, sounding vague and evasive.

When reminded of the amount, Rohit asked, "Was it really Rs. 3,000? Are you sure?" He even asked if I had the bill. I had misplaced it by then.

Virat was baffled. The amount had been Rs. 9,000, split three ways. Why question it now?

Rohit promised to pay the following week—but didn't. Then, week after week, he kept delaying. Two months passed.

Nothing.

Finally, Virat landed up at Rohit's house, ready to bring it up with his parents. Rohit pleaded for more time—and Virat backed off.

In total, it took six months for the full amount to come in. The money had come, yes. But the journey? Draining.

I could feel the balance shift. Though Rohit had technically repaid the money, the manner in which it had been done made it painful for Virat. Rohit's attitude hadn't helped.

I tried to do what mediators do—offer perspective.

I reminded Virat that he had, in the end, received his money. I suggested to Rohit that he might owe Virat an apology—not for the money, but for the way he handled it.

But Rohit wasn't ready to concede.

"What about Hardik?" he said. "He still hasn't returned the full amount! Why don't you speak ill of him the way you do about me?"

It seemed like a fair point. But the Virat Explained: "As soon as we got back to Mumbai, Hardik called me. He said it would be difficult to ask his dad for Rs. 3,000 immediately. So he proposed paying me Rs. 500 every month from his pocket money—over six months.

And he did just that. Every month, like clockwork. I never had to call or remind him.

Last month, I even lent him another Rs. 2,000—he's got a 'special friend' now, so his expenses have gone up. But I'm not worried. He'll pay it back."

And there it was.

Even though Hardik hadn't paid the full amount, Virat had no hard feelings—because Hardik had been transparent, proactive, and consistent.

It was ironic. The one who repaid in full was the villain, and the one still in debt was in good favor.

I shared the entire incident with my dad.

He smiled and asked, "So, what did you learn?"

"I learned that mediating between friends is no easy task," I said. "Someone always walks away upset."

He looked at me, still smiling. "One day, you'll figure it out."

Discussion Question: How can we balance flexibility with preparation when planning for unpredictable events—and when does overplanning become a liability?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

4

SWEET TRAP

My dear friend Shubham started a cake-baking business during the COVID-19 lockdown. These home-run ventures were booming at the time, and I was one of their most enthusiastic beneficiaries.

Of course, the role of a professional taster like me—ready to give honest feedback on every batch—should not be underestimated. I may not be a chocolate connoisseur, but I knew what good tasted like. And Shubham's cakes? They were phenomenal. They had that same "premium feel" you get from sipping a Starbucks coffee—even if you can't quite explain why.

Being a close friend, I was allowed to ask Shubham the behind-the-scenes questions others couldn't. How was he managing to make cakes that tasted so different?

He told me his secret: he wasn't using the usual chocolate compound that most popular bakers use. Instead, he had access to a premium imported compound—sourced quietly from a “secret” supplier. That, combined with his baking skill, was what made his cakes stand out.

The more we talked, the more I learned. For instance, I had no idea that the cakes we buy in shops usually cost half as much to make. It was eye-opening.

But I started wondering—was this “secret source” really a secret? Couldn’t other bakers use it too?

Eventually, I realized the truth: other bakers knew about the premium chocolate, but they couldn’t afford to use it. It would push their costs too high. Shubham’s cakes were already priced about 40% higher than even the most premium options in the market.

And here’s where I had a small concern I never voiced to him: I felt he was being a bit... greedy. He didn’t have the overheads of a full-scale shop or salaried staff. Why were his prices so high?

Then came our school’s annual fete. I encouraged Shubham to set up a stall there. It would be a huge platform for him.

But there was a problem: the school wanted vendors to price their items reasonably. Shubham said he’d have to lower his prices significantly to qualify—and that would mean selling at a loss.

I didn’t buy that logic. “It’s about visibility,” I told him. “It’s a matter of pride.”

We discussed it again a few days later. I suggested he try using the standard chocolate compound for this one event.

"Come on," I said, "no one's going to be a chocolate expert at the fete."

A spark lit up in his eyes. "You're right," he said. "Let's do it."

On the day of the fete, I was thrilled. There was a line at Shubham's stall. His cakes were selling out.

Later that evening, when the event wound down, a group of us sat on the school lawn eating leftovers with our remaining coupons. Riana mentioned that her favorite stall had been the Frankie stall run by another friend.

Then she turned to me and said, "Frankly, Shubham's cakes used to be amazing. But today... something was off. The quality's dropped."

Everyone around us nodded.

I felt awful. Had I pushed him into compromising? Had I given him bad advice?

That night, I told my dad about the whole episode.

He asked me, as always, "So, what did you learn?"

I said, "The food business is tough. No matter how hard you try, it's impossible to please everyone."

He smiled in a way that said, "You've learned more than you realize—but it's okay, you'll figure it out."

Discussion Question: Can a short-term compromise for growth or exposure risk damaging the long-term value of your brand or product?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

5

TREASURER

My dad seemed unusually pleased. He had just gotten off a call from his friend, who had called to check if we had reached home safely after a weekend trip to Nasik.

The trip had been a family outing—Dad, his friends, and their children. On the way back, all the kids, including me, had piled into his friend's large SUV with a sunroof. Our parents followed behind in a separate car. Once we were dropped home, his friend called to confirm we had arrived safely.

But it wasn't the courtesy call that made my dad happy. It was something his friend said during the conversation that left a mark.

Curious, I asked him what it was.

He asked me how the ride back had been. I told him it was fun. We'd stopped at a McDonald's on the way, and his friend had generously offered to treat us.

He handed me the money and asked me to go ahead and place the order while he refueled the car.

Once inside, I realized something. The menu was designed to tempt you into ordering the biggest combo meal. But I had a hunch that a lot of that food would go to waste—none of us were that hungry.

So I checked with my friends, recalculated quickly, and ordered two large combo meals to share the fries and Cokes among the five of us. For the remaining three, I ordered just the burgers.

The final bill turned out to be 30% cheaper than if we had gone for five full combos—and we avoided food waste too.

That's what had pleased my dad's friend. He'd told my dad how impressed he was with how I handled the situation. My dad relayed the compliment with a smile and said:

"Being careful with your *own* money is great. But being careful with someone *else's* money? That's truly admirable."

At the time, I didn't think I had done anything special. Many of my friends might have done the same.

But that comment stayed with me. Later, when I asked my friends what their dads did for a living, many of them said something in finance. That's when it clicked: *Finance is really just being responsible with other people's money.*

Discussion Question: Why is handling someone else's money with care often seen as more valuable than being frugal with your own?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

6

FREEBIES

Visits to the mall were always fun—especially to a store called Foodhall. It carried high-end, imported food items from all over the world. But what really excited me was something far more economical—free samples.

There were always cheerful ladies standing with trays of dips, crackers, cheeses, chocolates—you name it. I made sure to do full justice to each one. By the end of my tasting tour, I'd often be so full I'd skip lunch entirely. A delicious way to save money, if you ask me.

Now, I was aware of the marketing concept behind this. These samples weren't charity—they were meant to tempt you. You fall in love with a product during a free tasting, and the next thing you know, you're spending ₹800 on an exotic seaweed cracker you'll never finish.

But not me. I was a seasoned sampler. For three years I had taken full advantage of every offering and not once had I been baited into buying anything. In fact, I felt like I was outsmarting the system.

At least, that's what I thought.

When a new James Bond movie was released on Disney+ Hotstar, I knew I had to see it on the day it dropped. Even better, I invited a few friends over for a movie night. The plan was set.

A few hours before showtime, as I was prepping the TV setup, I got a shock. The movie wasn't on any of the platforms we subscribed to. It was available only on Disney+ Hotstar—and guess what—we didn't have a subscription.

Total chaos. Calling my mom was useless—she was already upset about my screen time. Asking Dad was out of the question.

I searched frantically and found a lifeline: a 1-month free trial. All I needed was a credit card.

I had one. Technically, it was my mother's, but I had the details from past food deliveries when my parents weren't home. I used it, signed up, and voila—we had James Bond on screen in time. Mission accomplished.

The next morning, I confessed to my parents. Yes, they were annoyed. Midway through their lecture, Dad paused and asked, "How was the movie?"

"Amazing," I grinned. "Especially the chase scene in the beginning."

That evening, he watched it too.

The next night, I saw my mom glued to a new drama series on the same app.

Fast forward two years—and yes, we still have the Disney+ Hotstar subscription. No one has ever brought it up, but it quietly renews every month, and all of us use it. I suspect my mom must've received the auto-renewal alert from the credit card company. But she said nothing.

One day, I told my dad, "You know, that free trial worked out pretty well—for them."

He smirked knowingly. "Looks like you just got case-studied by a marketing team."

Discussion Question: Do free trials offer real value to customers—or do they quietly condition us into long-term loyalty without us even realizing it?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

7

ROLLER COASTER

In our family, holiday planning is taken very seriously. We usually begin two to three months in advance so we can grab the best deals. In fact, sometimes our choice of destination is based purely on which sector is offering the best airfare at the time. It's both strategy and sport for us.

But these were COVID years. Planning too far ahead could mean cancellations and chaos.

One evening, Dad and I casually checked the airfare to Bali. The return fare was ₹30,000 per person—not bad. We decided to watch the price trend and book soon.

A couple of weeks passed. We checked again. ₹40,000.

Panic.

Two days later, it had shot up to ₹55,000! We couldn't believe it. Apparently, "revenge travel" had begun. Everyone was scrambling to travel again after the long lockdowns.

We turned to every travel site, browser extension, and deal aggregator we knew. Still, we found nothing reasonable.

Within 48 hours, we were on the verge of giving up. It looked like we'd have to settle for Goa instead of Bali. Goa is lovely, but we'd been there many times. We had all mentally transported ourselves to Bali.

Then came the breakthrough.

While browsing, I came across a deal: Singapore Airlines was offering a return ticket from Mumbai to Singapore for just ₹20,000. I clicked instantly.

Singapore wasn't our intended destination, but it triggered a thought—what if we built our own route?

I searched for flights from Singapore to Bali. And there it was: ₹10,000 on AirAsia.

That meant we could buy two separate tickets—Mumbai to Singapore (₹20,000) and Singapore to Bali (₹10,000)—and still stay within our original budget of ₹30,000. Genius!

We were ecstatic. This was pure travel hacking.

But the celebration was short-lived.

We noticed the fine print: the AirAsia fare included *only* hand baggage. If we added check-in baggage, the fare doubled.

That was a big problem. For a family of four heading to Bali, 7kg hand baggage per person wasn't going to cut it.

A family meeting was immediately called. After some calculations, we made a compromise: two tickets with check-in baggage, two without. Between us, we'd have 2 check-in bags and 4 handbags—about 68 kg of combined luggage. Just enough.

Problem solved. Almost.

Then we remembered something else: by booking separate tickets, we'd now need Singapore visas—even for just transit. The travel sites hadn't warned us because we weren't booking through a unified route.

Disheartened again.

Until I remembered, we had gotten Singapore visas the year before. Dad and I rushed to find the passports and check the expiry.

The visa expired just two days after our return.

We couldn't believe our luck. What a ride.

We booked immediately. Finally—Bali, here we come.

Later, Dad asked me what I'd learned.

I replied, "That I need to work for a company that pays for all my travel. That's the real hack."

He laughed and said, "That's the most Baniya thing you've said all year."

Discussion Question: When is it worth going beyond the conventional route to find better value—and what risks come with trying to outsmart the system?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

8
THE WAY TO OUR HEARTS

This story is another one from our travels, and it remains a particularly sweet memory—quite literally.

We were in Phuket, Thailand. Our flight had landed early in the morning, and we reached the hotel by 8:00 a.m. The problem? Our check-in was only at 2:00 p.m. That meant six long hours of waiting.

We were exhausted. No one had slept well on the plane, and the idea of stepping out in the heat was unthinkable.

I knew my dad wouldn't sit still. Sure enough, the moment we arrived, he began his usual negotiation ritual with the hotel's duty manager, hoping to get us an early check-in. The manager was polite and promised to give us the first room that became available—but warned that it wouldn't be before noon.

Okay. Some hope. But still a good four hours to kill.

From the reception, we could see into the open-air restaurant where the buffet breakfast was being served. It looked lavish. An enormous spread. Waffles, exotic fruits, fresh pastries—everything.

We had booked a package that included breakfast, but it started only the next day. So technically, if we ate now, we'd have to pay extra.

Still, it was tempting. And we were hungry.

Dad and I walked down to inquire about the price. It was expensive. And it felt like a waste to pay for something we were anyway going to get free for the next three days.

Then, in true Baniya style, Dad had a brainwave.

On our last day, we were scheduled to check out very early in the morning to catch a boat to a nearby island. Which meant, we'd miss the breakfast that day.

So Dad went back to the reception and made an unusual proposal: could we swap? Have breakfast today in exchange for skipping it on our last day?

The manager looked surprised. He paused for a few seconds—clearly this wasn't something he had heard before. But then, he smiled and said, "Okay!"

Now, some might argue that if we had just quietly slipped into the breakfast area and eaten, no one would've noticed. Or even if we had eaten breakfast on the last day, they wouldn't have remembered.

But it was about our conscience. About knowing we played fair. And that made the food taste better.

We sat at that breakfast table for almost two hours, leisurely enjoying every bite. When we returned to the reception, the manager told us one of our rooms was ready—an hour earlier than expected.

Phuket was amazing in many ways. But that well-earned breakfast will always remain etched in memory.

Later, I told my dad, “I don’t know if this counts as a business lesson.”

He replied, “It absolutely does. You’ll understand one day.”

“I’ve already learned something,” I grinned. “Hunger is the mother of many great ideas.”

We both laughed.

Dad shook his head and muttered, “You really are your father’s son.”

Discussion Question: Is ethical creativity in negotiation more valuable than simply getting a good deal? What does ‘playing fair’ really add to the experience?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I’d take away from this story.

9

DON'T ROCK MY BOAT

This next incident happened during our trip to Rishikesh—a place known not just for its spiritual importance but also for its adventure sports, especially white-water rafting.

Now, our family isn't exactly known for daredevilry. My dad, in particular, is quite conservative. His motto is: "Just because everyone is jumping in the well, doesn't mean you have to." So naturally, I was surprised (and thrilled) when he agreed to sign us up for rafting.

We arrived at the rafting center in the early morning. A bus was scheduled to take us to the starting point upstream. There were 16 of us in total—divided into two boats of 8 each.

The other participants were a mixed bunch: a group of four energetic boys from Delhi, two newlywed couples from Gujarat, and us—our family of four.

On the bus ride up, I observed everyone. The Delhi boys were loud, excited, and clearly here for thrills. They were cracking jokes, taking selfies, hyping up the adventure. Honestly, they were exactly the kind of people I wanted to be in a boat with. I made my move—shared some biscuits with them, struck up a conversation. I was preparing to position myself in their raft. But Dad had other plans.

He noticed the two quiet Gujarati couples sitting timidly, looking like they might back out at any moment. And in classic Dad fashion, he decided they were the better bet for us.

I gave him a look. He gave me *the* look. End of discussion.

So, there we were—in a boat with four cautious strangers, while the "fun boat" was filled with pumped-up adrenaline junkies.

At first, I sulked. But once the raft hit the first rapid, everything changed. Ice-cold water splashed in our faces. We held on for dear life.

The experience was exhilarating and terrifying. But as time passed, we got better at it. The guide would call out instructions— "Left, row!" "Right, stop!"—and we followed precisely. That discipline kept our boat balanced and safe.

Then, twenty minutes downstream, we saw the other raft—stopped on a sandbank. Something was wrong.

One woman was crying. The boys looked awkward. We later learned what had happened.

Apparently, the boys were so hyper and impatient that they didn't follow the guide's commands. They overrowed, shifted weight improperly, and eventually the boat capsized.

The boys thought it was all part of the adventure. But for the others, it was terrifying. Especially the woman who now refused to go any further. The rafting journey had to be cut short.

On the ride back, both sides were blaming each other.

Our ride may not have been the most thrilling—but it was smooth, safe, and honestly more enjoyable.

That evening, my dad said something that stayed with me:

"Be careful about who's in your boat. Their actions could tip it—even if you're doing everything right."

Discussion Question: When working in a team, how do you weigh the thrill of risk against the value of stability? How much power do others have over your journey—even if you're responsible?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

10

A FRIEND IN NEED

We had a wonderful team of security staff at our apartment building—ever helpful, always polite. Over the years, I had built a warm rapport with them.

By the time I reached 9th grade, my school day often ended with extracurricular activities or extra classes. So I had stopped taking the school bus. I'd just catch a taxi home instead. But occasionally, I'd run short of money—and on those days, I'd borrow a few hundred rupees from the security guards. I always returned it promptly, accompanied by a big thank you.

Yes, I know it wasn't a great habit. But it was incredibly convenient. I never had to worry. Even if my parents weren't home, I could get home—and sort things out later.

Then one day, something unusual happened.

One of the security guards approached me quietly and asked if I could lend him ₹5,000.

That caught me off guard. I had borrowed ₹100 or ₹200 from him many times—but this was a different scale entirely. Still, he said he needed it urgently and promised to return it within a month.

I didn't say yes or no. I just said I'd get back to him.

That evening, I told my dad. I wasn't sure how he'd react. But he didn't flinch.

He said, "It's your call. If you want to give him the money, go ahead—but if you do, don't ask for it back. Once it's given, it's given."

"What?" I asked. "Why shouldn't I ask for it back if he said he would return it?"

My dad didn't budge. "Because this kind of money—especially in such situations—should come with no strings attached. It's either help or no help. But it can't be a transaction."

I couldn't accept that.₹5,000 wasn't pocket change.I slept on it.

The next day, I came up with a plan—one that my dad may have subtly nudged me toward.

I took ₹1,000 from him, calling it a "donation." Then I went around the building and approached our neighbors. I asked if they would be willing to contribute ₹500 to ₹1,000 to help out one of the guards. Since I had done collection drives before—for school fundraisers—I was comfortable asking.

The response was overwhelming. Within about ten apartments, I had the full ₹5,000.

I gave it to the guard, letting him believe it was a loan. I didn't correct him. I wanted to test what would happen.

A month passed. Then two. The money didn't come back. No excuses were offered. No conversation was initiated.

I kept my promise to my dad and never brought it up.

But since then, things have changed slightly between me and that guard. Nothing overt. But whenever we cross paths, there's a subtle awkwardness. We both remember—but we pretend not to.

Still, he remains incredibly helpful. Always alert, always ready to carry our suitcases—even at 3:00 a.m.

I think my dad wanted me to learn that he's always right. But I wasn't going to give him that satisfaction.

One thing did change, though. I stopped borrowing money from the guards. And I started carrying my own.

Discussion Question: Should generosity come with expectations, or is it only meaningful when no return is expected?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

11

BUDGETARY ISSUES

"What's your budget?"—a simple enough question, right?

Not to my dad.

He absolutely hated it. Anytime we were out to buy something—a phone, shoes, a hotel room, or a car—and a salesperson asked, "What's your budget?" he would visibly bristle.

I never understood why. I thought it was a practical question. Surely, everyone has a price range?

Was it an ego thing? Did it sound like they were asking if we could afford it?

It wasn't until the car hunt that I understood his logic.

Our existing car had become old. Not an embarrassment exactly, but it was clear that it needed replacing.

The problem? Every time we shortlisted a model, a new launch was announced. We'd wait. Three months later, we'd check out the new car—and be disappointed. The cycle repeated.

But then Dad had a turning point.

Some Korean business associates were visiting, and he picked them up in our old car. He returned home clearly uncomfortable. It was time to act.

The following Sunday, post-lunch, we drove to a stretch of car showrooms in Mumbai. One after the other, we checked out SUVs.

But the same thing kept happening. Every time we asked to see options, the salesperson would begin with: "What's your budget?"

And like clockwork, Dad would grimace.

Eventually, at one showroom, he gave in."₹15 to ₹20 lakh," he said.

From there, things moved fast.

They showed us a fantastic SUV priced at ₹15 lakh. It looked great—until we found out that the model we were seeing was actually the top-end version, priced at ₹20 lakh. The ₹15 lakh version was a stripped-down model missing all the bells and whistles.

Naturally, we started leaning toward the top-end one.

While exploring, our eyes landed on a more premium SUV—priced at ₹30 lakh. It wasn't shown to us earlier because it was out of budget.

Still, Dad asked about it.

The salesperson was lukewarm. "This one's from December last year," he said. "It's being phased out. Only a few left in black."

That was music to my dad's ears.

Soon, the Sales Manager got involved. A ₹3 lakh discount was offered. Then ₹5 lakh. Eventually, the premium car was offered to us at ₹25 lakh.

Here's the kicker—it came with all features standard. Compared to the ₹20 lakh top-end model we'd initially liked, this one offered far more value.

Also, we *liked* black.

We bought it.

On the drive back home, Dad explained everything. "If I had said ₹20 lakh was my budget, we'd have never seen this car. But because I didn't reveal the number too soon, I had room to stretch—for something that was truly good value for money."

Now I understood.
He didn't hate the question. He hated how it limited the conversation. He wanted to know the full offering, then decide what he was willing to pay.

At the time, I was just fantasizing about when I'd finally get to drive it. But later, I remembered that lesson.

Budget isn't about what you can afford. It's about what something is worth.

Discussion Question: Is revealing your budget early a smart move—or does it prevent you from discovering true value? How does anchoring affect negotiation?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

12

A STITCH IN TIME

I got my first mobile phone at the age of 11. My parents were totally against it, but eventually relented for safety reasons. I had started venturing out alone, and they needed to be able to reach me.

Thankfully, it was a smartphone. Not because I needed to scroll Instagram—but because you can't book an Uber or Ola on a basic phone. Even my parents understood that.

By the time I was turning sixteen, though, the phone looked... prehistoric. The tech world had sprinted ahead, and I was left behind with something that took half a minute to open a browser.

It couldn't even handle basic games anymore. I found myself using my mother's phone for gaming more than my own. I knew the odds of getting a new one were slim—especially since my board exams were coming up, and my screen time was already a hot topic at home.

Still, I hoped.

The phone I was eyeing cost ₹15,000. My current one had cost ₹10,000 when I got it. I had around ₹10,000 saved from birthday money and Diwali envelopes, but I was still short.

I often visited the mobile shop near our house—the one that had replaced my screen (twice), sold me phone covers (too often), and changed my screen guards (more times than I care to admit). I was probably their most loyal customer.

One day, while eyeing the new phone I wanted, I struck up a conversation with the shopkeeper.

He said something surprising: "It's amazing how phone companies keep adding features but don't raise the price much."

I was confused. "Isn't this new model way more expensive than the one I got five years ago?"

"That's because the rupee's gotten weaker," he explained. "The price in dollars hasn't changed much. But since these phones are imported, and the rupee has depreciated, you end up paying more in INR."

So the price increase wasn't because of the features... but because our currency had lost value?

That was a revelation.

I thought about it. If imported items have gotten costlier, then everything imported must have. That means—even my old phone, which I thought had lost all value, might actually be worth something now.

Sure enough, the shopkeeper said he'd take it back for ₹4,000. That changed everything. Now I needed only ₹11,000. I already had ₹10,000. I was almost there.

That evening, I made my pitch to my parents. I explained how depreciation had worked in my favour, how the phone was a good value purchase now, and how delaying it could actually make it more expensive.

Dad looked at me, stunned. Then he smiled and said, "You've already figured out how to sell a business case. Go buy your phone."

Discussion Question: Can applying textbook knowledge in real-life scenarios (like depreciation or tax credits) be the most practical way to learn business? Why don't schools focus more on this?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

13

TAXING ISSUES

Now that we were older, our weekend outings had shifted from movies to meals at restaurants. It became a tradition—eat, split the bill, head home.

There was one friend, though, who always asked for the bill copy. That intrigued me.

Eventually, I asked, "Why do you keep the bill? We've already paid."

At first, he hesitated. Then he admitted that he gave the bills to his father, who booked them under his company's expenses to save tax.

Ah. So that's how it worked. If companies pay tax on net income—income minus expenses—then the more expenses you can claim, the less tax you pay.

It made perfect sense. I wasn't sure when I'd use this knowledge, but I knew it was valuable.

Later, I asked my dad about it. Since he ran a business, couldn't I help him the same way?

He didn't look impressed. "You're thinking too small," he said. I let it go. For now.

A few months later, my laptop began acting up. It was only three years old, but it ran like it had survived a war. I didn't want to complain, though—I knew I'd be blamed for gaming too much.

One weekend, Dad asked me to help him make a PowerPoint presentation. I worked on it meticulously, and he was thrilled with the final result. The client meeting went well, and he even told me I had a knack for data presentation.

I knew this was my window.

I began researching laptop deals on Amazon. That's when I noticed something interesting: almost 18% of the laptop's cost was GST.

I looked into it further. You have to pay GST. But if you're a business with GST credit, you can claim it back. You also get depreciation benefits on business purchases.

All of this formed the basis of my next pitch to Dad.

I explained: "Since I'm using the laptop for your business presentations, we should buy it through the company. You can claim GST credit and depreciation. I'll trade in my current laptop for ₹4,000, and I have ₹10,000 saved up. The rest is barely more than what you'd pay a freelancer for five sessions."

He was quiet for a moment. Then he smiled. “Done.”

Laptop secured. Business skills validated.

Discussion Question: Where is the line between smart tax planning and ethical compromise—and how early should young entrepreneurs learn about it?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I’d take away from this story.

14
TRAVEL - THE BEST INVESTMENT?

I love spending time with my grandfather. Our conversations feel like time travel. He carries with him the weight and wonder of a world long gone—a world before mobile phones, before computers, before Wi-Fi and GPS, even before color televisions.

Born before India gained independence, my grandfather paints vivid pictures of a country under British rule, of crowded trams and silent cinema halls, of writing letters on blue inland forms, and of a time when neighbors felt more like extended family. For someone like me, raised in the era of on-demand everything, his stories are like postcards from another planet.

He often tells me about the first color movie he watched in a theater, or how color televisions entered Indian homes in bulk right around the time of the 1983 Cricket World Cup—coinciding with India's glorious victory, which only amplified the TV boom. We've discussed everything from the price of mangoes in 1970 to the rise of Antilla, the Ambani mansion. But one conversation stuck with me more than the rest.

He once casually mentioned the price at which he had bought his house in Mumbai.

Let's just say—I calculated—that amount wouldn't even buy a square foot of real estate in South Mumbai today.

I looked around at the buildings that surrounded us, and suddenly it struck me: I was living among millionaires, many of whom hadn't necessarily run giant companies or launched unicorn startups. They had simply bought property at the right time and watched the world build itself around them. They had earned their millions through patience, not performance.

Real estate, gold, land—these had all appreciated astronomically. Some people failed at business but still retired rich because their factory plot appreciated faster than their losses.

It became increasingly clear: the right investment, made at the right time, could make you very rich—even without running a successful business.

But this story isn't just about economics. It's about a single revelation that came while I was sitting across the dining table from Dadu, sipping chai.

We were planning a short Diwali holiday. Dad had booked a beautiful villa for six people. He was determined to bring Dadu and Dadi along, even though Dadu had become increasingly attached to his armchair, his crossword puzzles, and his newspaper. He had entered the Static Inertia Zone, as we jokingly called it—content exactly where he was.

I wanted to convince him to come.

So one evening, I asked him about the first flight he ever took, and how much it had cost him. He told me the amount with pride—it was a big deal to fly back then.

Out of curiosity, I Googled the historical cost of gold in the 1970s. And here's what I found:

In the 1970s, the cost of a plane ticket from Mumbai to Delhi was roughly equal to the cost of 10 grams of gold.

Today? That same domestic flight is often cheaper than 1 gram of gold.

Boom. Mind blown.

Sure, ticket prices have gone up nominally—but compared to gold, they've dropped drastically. In relative terms, air travel has become cheaper, not more expensive.

I turned to Dadu and said, "You know, you're sitting on all this gold. And now, the cost of travel—something that gives memories—is the cheapest it's ever been. Shouldn't we make the most of that?"

He looked at me, smiled, and paused. He didn't argue.

I knew I'd won.

It made me wonder: while assets like property and gold rise in financial value, experiences like travel rise in emotional value. And sometimes, they're the best investments because their returns are measured in laughter, not interest rates.

Discussion Question: In a world obsessed with appreciating assets, could the most meaningful investments be the ones that leave no balance sheet—but a full heart?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

15

SHARKS IN THE TANK

When *Shark Tank India* launched, something inside me shifted.

I had watched *Shark Tank America* before, but back then, it felt like a distant universe—Silicon Valley, Harvard grads, complex terms I barely understood. It was cool, sure, but not personal.

But *Shark Tank India*? That was different.

Suddenly, I was watching people just a few years older than me standing in front of cameras, pitching products I had actually used. Brands I'd seen in stores. Apps I had on my phone. Founders who reminded me of people I could have gone to school with.

It was inspiring. And more importantly—it felt possible.

One evening, my friends and I were hanging out, munching on chips, lazily throwing around ideas. I don't remember how it started—but I came up with a business idea. Sadly, I can't remember what the idea was now. Funny, right? Given what happened next, you'd expect it to be carved in stone.

At that moment, it felt like a billion-dollar concept. My friends agreed.

We started discussing it feverishly. Someone suggested a different name. Someone added a feature. Someone said we should integrate AI. Within twenty minutes, we had a full-blown pitch. This wasn't a school project anymore—this was a *company in the making.*

There were five of us in the room, and naturally, I proposed a 20% equity split.

That's when the chaos began.

One friend raised his hand and said, "I should get 25% since we'll use my dad's office as our registered HQ."

Another interrupted, "Hey, but it's my idea—I should get a bigger share."

Yet another said, "Without my tech input, none of this works—I'll be writing the first line of code!"

The fourth suggested we bring in a sixth friend with a massive network. That would mean splitting everything 6 ways. No one liked that.

Suddenly, 100% equity wasn't enough.

Arguments broke out. Voices rose. We started staking claims to revenue from a startup that hadn't even earned its first rupee.

I insisted: "This was my idea! You can't just take it and start your own version!"

Two of them were already quietly texting each other about doing just that.

Panic set in.

Was I witnessing the biggest blunder of my life? Would I look back years later and see my friends riding in private jets, giving TED Talks about my idea, while I watched from the economy section?

The drama lasted an hour.

We had no logo. No product. No name. No website. Just egos, equity debates, and broken pizza crusts.

I told my dad everything later that night.

He listened, quietly amused.

Then, with his usual grin, he asked, "So... what did you learn?"

I sighed. "That next time, I'll figure out the valuation after I build the product."

He nodded. "Or at least wait till you earn your first rupee before assigning yourself your first crore."

I think I learned two things that day:

1. Business is 10% ideas and 90% execution.
2. Friends are great—until you divide equity.

Discussion Question: At what stage should equity be discussed in a new venture—and how do you balance fairness, ownership, and contribution before there's any actual revenue?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

16

CYCLING

Growing up in a Baniya household makes you environmentally conscious by default. Not in the "carbon offset" or "eco-activist" way—but in the deeply embedded, inherited practice of not wasting anything.

We didn't call it "sustainability" back then. We just called it good sense.

We were raised to switch off the lights every time we left a room—because "Bijli ka bill koi mazak nahi hai." We weren't allowed to waste food—because "there are people who don't get two square meals a day." Water during brushing teeth? That tap better be closed.

In fact, long before the word "recycling" became fashionable in school posters or sustainability club events, we had already mastered the art. We reused jam bottles as spice jars, wedding cards as bookmarks, and birthday wrapping paper as drawer liners. We were minimalists long before Instagram made it cool.

But if there was one area where all this conservation philosophy collapsed—it was clothes.

See, I have a twin brother. And we were growing at pretty much the same pace, both vertically and horizontally. This made hand-me-downs completely useless. There was no older sibling stash to inherit. Whatever we wore, we outgrew together—and fast.

The result? Our cupboards overflowed with clothes that didn't fit us anymore. Half of them were barely worn. The real irony? Even among the clothes that still did fit us, we'd only wear the same 2–3 outfits on repeat. So in effect, we were outgrowing unused clothes.

Giving them away was emotionally and logistically awkward. These weren't old rags—these were expensive, often branded clothes worn just once or twice. But the idea of offering them to friends or relatives—especially those not as well-off—was tricky. It risked offense. It risked awkwardness. And frankly, even if we did find someone younger who could use them, asking them to take them felt... off.

So most of the time, our clothes ended up with our house help—for their kids. Even that wasn't as simple as it sounds. We'd feel noble about it ("see, we're donating"), but I could never quite tell if they felt gratitude or just quiet discomfort. The exchange never sat comfortably with me.

In the background of all this stood the legendary scrap dealer—the one who came door-to-door every few weeks with a giant sack and a weighing scale. This man was a magician. He could make *anything* disappear in exchange for money—old newspapers, broken radios, washing machines, rusted cycles. It was India's version of eBay, only faster and without the packaging.

I had watched this process for years, fascinated. One day, I asked him, "*Bhaiya, purane kapde bhi lete ho kya*?" (Do you also take old clothes?)

He shook his head. "*Koi lena chahta hi nahi. Pehle hota tha, jab auratein bartanon ke badle kapde leti thi. Ab wo zamaana nahi raha.*" (No one wants them anymore. In the old days, women would exchange steel utensils for clothes. Those days are gone.)

I felt a little dejected. Here I was, sitting on a mountain of unused clothing, and the magician had no trick for it.

Then came a breakthrough.

One evening, my parents and I were visiting a street fair filled with pop-up stalls—young entrepreneurs selling quirky products. Among them, one stall caught my eye.

It was filled with upcycled items—colorful rugs, tote bags made from old denim, pouches fashioned from T-shirt sleeves, and wall organizers made from stitched-up jeans pockets. Not only were these products eco-friendly, they were also aesthetic—trendy, funky, and full of personality.

I was fascinated.

I struck up a conversation with the brother-sister duo who ran the stall. They were young, energetic, and passionate about what they were doing. I asked them where they sourced their materials—specifically, all those old clothes.

They smiled and said, "We have a dealer who collects from homes. If you want, we can share his number."
Boom. That was it. The missing link.

I called the number the next day. The dealer was professional and prompt. He came to our house, took one look at the mountain of clothes, and—unlike our earlier magician—offered a price.

It wasn't a huge sum, but it was a fair amount—and it felt clean. No guilt, no awkwardness, no need to explain why these clothes were hardly used. No emotional gymnastics.

Just a clear, dignified exchange.

We accepted. The dealer left with our bags of clothes. And I felt... relieved.

We finally had a way to part with our unused clothes that didn't feel emotionally messy. And knowing they'd be transformed into something useful and beautiful made it even better.

But of course, the story doesn't end there.

The money I got in hand from selling the clothes brought a quiet little satisfaction.

Until my mother stepped in.

She reminded me that these clothes were meant to be donated. So, naturally, the money earned from them should also be donated.

Sigh.

We ended up distributing the amount among our house help. And surprisingly, I think they were happier receiving the money directly. It gave them a choice. And that made the whole cycle—pun intended—feel truly complete.

I didn't just declutter my wardrobe that week. I decluttered a nagging moral conundrum.

A win-win.

Discussion Question: In a world obsessed with donating 'things,' do we sometimes forget the value of dignity, choice, and clean transactions? Can monetizing charity actually make it more effective?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

17

COPING WITH THE COPS

We were cruising down Marine Drive on a breezy Sunday morning. The roads were near empty—Mumbai at its best. The family had decided to head out for a leisurely breakfast. We were driving toward Kala Ghoda, an artsy stretch in South Mumbai known for its charming cafés and colonial buildings. The plan was simple: reach the area, walk around a bit, and settle down at whichever café had space—which on Sundays is more a matter of divine luck than choice.

As we approached the left turn that led toward Kala Ghoda, my father calmly steered into the lane. Just as he did, a traffic cop jumped out of nowhere and signaled for us to pull over.

We were all puzzled. What had we done wrong?

My dad got out of the car, visibly confident, and went to talk to the officer. Meanwhile, the rest of us stayed in the car. I was watching the whole exchange unfold through the rearview mirror. At first, things looked fine. I saw my father take out his license and point toward a traffic signal that was half-hidden behind a tree.

But then, the temperature rose.

Within minutes, my father was shouting at the top of his voice. Three more policemen appeared, seemingly out of thin air, and rushed to the scene. By now, a crowd had gathered—curious walkers, cyclists, and aunties in sneakers doing their daily rounds.

I was scared. Really scared.

My mother jumped out of the car but firmly told us to stay put. So even though I was tempted to run toward my dad, I stayed frozen in the back seat, staring through the window.

From what I could see, my mother's intervention helped calm things down a bit. She pulled my dad aside and began negotiating with the police officers. I noticed my father look toward us—our anxious faces inside the car—and that must've brought his blood pressure down a notch.

A few minutes later, I watched my mother walk back to the car. She opened her purse, discreetly pulled out two ₹500 notes, folded them tightly in her fist, and walked back toward the cops. Without a word, she slipped the notes into the officer's hand. In return, my father's license was returned, accompanied by some loud moral commentary from the officer—just to save face.

We drove off to breakfast. But our morning was already ruined.

What followed during breakfast was an all-out verbal slugfest between my parents.

My dad's version: The signal was barely visible. Left turns are usually free, and this one was hidden behind a tree. He was more than willing to pay the fine, but when the cop realized he wasn't going to get anything extra, he began asking for additional papers—insurance, PUC, pollution clearance—anything to inflate the "fine" and create pressure. That's when Dad lost it. "They're not enforcing the law," he said, "they're ambushing honest citizens."

My mom's version: "You were completely in the wrong. You broke the signal—even if by mistake—and instead of settling it quickly and quietly, you escalated it. Screaming at a cop in public? What if they had arrested you?" According to her, the situation could have been resolved at ₹200–500. But thanks to Dad's bravado, it cost us ₹1,000 and a ruined Sunday.

What can I say? A nice morning turned into a crash course in civic chaos.

This wasn't even the last time. Just a few weeks later, we were at a friend's house for a birthday party. Around 11:00 p.m., the police walked in. Apparently, the loud music had crossed the 10:30 p.m. limit. This time again, fists were metaphorically flying. The cops threatened to confiscate the speakers; there was more heated discussion. Eventually, a deal was struck, the equipment stayed, and the party continued—louder than before.

But I started noticing something: every encounter with the police left a bitter aftertaste. The *real* party—the decorations, the food, the music—was quickly forgotten. All people talked about later was the cops.

So the next time, we decided to be "smart."

Watchmen were briefed to alert us the moment the cops entered the building. One friend fluent in Marathi was designated as the "lead negotiator." We even had a code word for hiding the music system in the cupboard.

Frankly, it all felt too stressful. It sucked the joy out of the celebration.

So I tried something different.

On the morning of my friend's birthday, two of us walked into the police station with a massive cake. The cops were visibly confused. We announced that it was our friend's birthday and we wanted to celebrate it with the officers who keep our city safe.

We handed out cake slices to everyone. Smiles all around.

And just before leaving, we casually mentioned, "We're having a party tonight at home. We'll try our best to wrap up by 10:30—but if it goes a little over, we hope we'll be forgiven."
That night, the party went on past midnight.

No interruptions. No knock on the door. No shouting. Just pure fun.
Turns out, a little sweetness goes a long way.
Especially when it's served with frosting and plausible deniability.
We didn't bend the rules… We just softened the edges.

Discussion Question: What works better when dealing with authority: confrontation, compliance, or unexpected kindness? And does the method change the memory of the moment?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

18

FLIGHT OF IMAGINATION

My father had never been big on stock investing. But after the post-COVID bull run, he caught a little bit of FOMO—like everyone else. Stories of friends making 10x returns were everywhere. Even kids my age were casually throwing around stock tips between rounds of FIFA.

I, on the other hand, had my sights set on one specific industry: aviation.

I love planes. I can look at one flying overhead and tell you if it's a Boeing or an Airbus, maybe even the model. Airports excite me. The boarding calls, the bustle, the engines roaring before takeoff—it's all magic. Every time I stepped into an airport, it was evident: this industry was flying high. I had read about the massive number of airports being built in India, and how Indian carriers had placed historic orders with Airbus and Boeing.

To me, aviation was the future. And I wanted in.

My dad had just opened a new Demat account with his bank and started investing. He was bullish on India's consumption story—he bought stocks of companies that made everything from salt to soap, biscuits to shampoo, oil to chocolates. I liked the logic—it was earthy, practical, rooted in real-life consumption.

Naturally, I started following the stocks too. If something in the portfolio rose 2%, I'd be the first to tell him over dinner. It became a thing we shared.

But I wanted to go a step further—I wanted to make my own investment.

So one evening, I pitched it: *InterGlobe Aviation*, the company that owns Indigo Airlines.

"Indigo has 60% market share," I argued. "They're not just an airline—they're a monopoly with wings."

But Dad was skeptical. He reminded me of Kingfisher and Jet Airways—two fantastic airlines that had both collapsed despite great service and loyal customers. "Airlines are risky," he warned. "One accident, and the entire company can crash—literally."

I couldn't refute him, but I also couldn't let it go.

Then I came across an article that changed everything. It claimed that Indigo had higher food sales revenue than McDonald's India. What?! McDonald's, with its decades-long presence and massive store network, was being beaten by a *budget airline* that sold sandwiches at 35,000 feet?

I dug deeper. Indigo made money not just from tickets, but from seat allocations, extra baggage, priority boarding, and now, food. Their margins were slim, but their ecosystem was genius.

I tried again. My dad had recently added Burger King stock to his portfolio—part of his QSR (Quick Service Restaurant) bet. So I made my pitch:

"Think of Indigo as a flying Burger King. Only bigger, more profitable, and impossible to ignore."

That did the trick. He bought it.

I was thrilled. I checked the stock twice a day.

For a few days, nothing moved. Then, the price started dipping.

Then the quarterly results came out. Indigo posted record profits—yet the stock fell further.

I was baffled.

"What's going on?" I asked my dad.

He explained something I hadn't heard before: "*The market had already priced in the good news*."

Apparently, investors expected record profits. And while the results were strong, they weren't better than what people had assumed. So the stock dropped anyway.

That day, I realized something brutal: the stock market isn't driven by facts—it's driven by feelings. My IQ wasn't enough. I needed a strong EQ to navigate the market.

I had caused my father a real monetary loss.

But he didn't flinch. He shrugged and said, "Welcome to investing."

Discussion Question: In markets driven by sentiment, is knowing "what" less important than knowing "when"? And how do you balance logic with emotion in investing?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

19

ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

There was a family in our apartment complex that I absolutely adored. I used to visit them often, and they treated me like one of their own. Their house was a dream.

Dinner there was a production. A four-course meal was served on a meticulously laid table. Three house helps moved like a ballet troupe—one serving soup, another changing cutlery, a third topping up sparkling water. And this wasn't a one-off—it was everyday life for them.

They were wealthy. No doubt about it.

There was a shiny Mercedes parked downstairs. They always flew business class. Even their pajamas looked like they were tailored in Milan.

To be honest, I had no complaints. They were sweet, they included me in everything, and I enjoyed every bit of the luxury.

As I got older, I started understanding more about our own household. I began asking questions about my father's business, and slowly, the financial picture emerged.

What struck me was not the ups and downs he had weathered—it was how stable our life had felt through all of it.

We didn't splurge when things were good. We didn't cut corners when things were bad. Our dinners were home-cooked, often with my mom multitasking between the kitchen and the table. Holidays were planned with discounts and coupons in mind. We drove a sensible car. Went to regular movie halls.

And through it all, my dad stayed the same—usually in a torn T-shirt and loose shorts that he considered "formal" enough for guests.

At times, I felt nervous when friends came over. Especially when I saw their families dining like royalty, while we scrambled to make room at the dining table.

Once, I told my dad that my friend's family was planning to book the latest BMW model the moment it launched. He nodded, said nothing.

I wasn't sure if his indifference made me feel proud... or left out.

Then, one day, that friend told me they were shifting houses. I was heartbroken. "Why?" I asked.

He said they were moving closer to their factory in the suburbs. It would cut commute time for his dad.

I nodded. I tried to believe it. But something didn't sit right.

I watched them drive away in their Mercedes—still perfectly dressed. Still polite. Still smiling.

A few months later, a well-dressed stranger rang our doorbell. He had come to speak to my father, who was on the managing committee of the building. He looked vaguely familiar. He was the prospective buyer of a friend's house. It turns out that the flat was mortgaged with the Bank against loans which they were not able to repay so they had to vacate & leave.

Then it hit me.

Life is not always what it looks like at the dinner table.

Discussion Question: When appearances reflect prosperity but reality remains hidden, how do we define true wealth—and how can we resist the temptation to judge success by its shine?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

20

BOTTLED CONFUSION

We were at a wedding.

A big one. 5-star banquet hall. Flower arrangements taller than me. People wearing more gold than a Tanishq window. That kind of wedding.

As usual, I wasn't very interested in the rituals or the relatives. I was just hungry and waiting for the starters to start doing the rounds. But something caught my eye even before the food did.

Each table had two types of bottled water. One was a familiar brand priced at ₹10, the usual kind you pick up at stations and roadside dhabas. The other was a fancy brand, sleek label, imported-sounding name, glass bottle, price tag of ₹40.

And here's the funny thing.

Someone at our table took a sip from the more expensive one and said, "This is so much better. You can actually taste the purity."

Another nodded sagely and said, "You can just tell when water's alkaline. It feels lighter."

What?

I couldn't help it. I reached for both bottles and began reading the fine print. Both had the same BIS license code. Both were filled at the same plant address somewhere in Thane. Same source. Same purification process. Just different branding.

But somehow, one had become premium, while the other was utility.

At that moment, I was still trying to process this when my cousin whispered, "Don't drink the ₹10 one at the wedding you'll look like staff."

That's when it really hit me.

This wasn't about hydration. It wasn't about purity or taste. It was about signaling.

After the ceremony, I went to the pantry area where the waiters were restocking trays. I asked one of them if the water bottles actually cost the hosts different amounts.

He smiled and said, "Haan sir, the hotel charges ₹40 for this one," pointing to the fancy bottle, "but it's the same water. Just style alag hai." Then he added, with a grin, "Dikhawa chahiye na shaadi mein."

That line stayed with me.

A few weeks later, we were at another function, much simpler, more homey. This time, only the regular ₹10 bottle was being served. No one said a word. Everyone drank it like it was holy water from Haridwar.

Same crowd. Same city. Different setting.

So what changed?

Not the water. Not the guests. Just the context and the expectation.

That night at dinner, I shared all this with my father. Told him how bizarre it felt that we had created a class hierarchy out of water.

He chuckled. "Water's just the first step," he said. "Try gifting someone a pen worth ₹50 and see their reaction. Then give the exact same pen in a velvet box with a French-sounding name and suddenly it's 'premium gifting'."

He was right.

It wasn't the water. It was the story around the water.

A few days later, I noticed this happening in other places too. People paying ₹300 for a cup of coffee with oat milk and calling it an "experience." Another person refusing a perfectly good meal from a small vendor but happily eating worse food from a bigger brand because it was "trusted."

I started thinking about value in a whole new way.

We live in a world where taste, trust, and truth often come wrapped in a label. And sometimes, we end up paying extra, not for quality, but for *comfort*.

Comfort that we're buying the "right" thing. The one that "looks" correct.

As for me? I now carry my own bottle to weddings.

Just kidding. I still drink both. But I always make sure to read the fine print first.

Discussion Question: When the product is identical but the branding changes, what exactly are we paying for—and what does that say about how we perceive value?

Flip to the last pages holding lessons my father hoped I'd take away from this story.

LESSONS MY FATHER HOPED I WOULD TAKE AWAY FROM THESE STORIES

1. NEGOTIATING THE BENDS

I hope that the business takeaway for you from this incident is the importance of **Vendor Development and Vendor Management.**

When you enter the world of business, you will quickly realize how critical it is to build and maintain a strong, reliable vendor base. Your relationship with vendors will often be bittersweet, filled with negotiations, compromises, occasional tensions, and moments of shared success.

Remember, the lowest offer is not always the best offer. A slightly more expensive vendor might bring with them consistency, quality, timely deliveries, or even valuable market insight that justifies the higher cost. Choose wisely, keeping long-term reliability in mind rather than short-term savings.

Always aim to move up the value chain. The closer you are to the source, the more control you will have over price, quality, and delivery. Avoiding middlemen and traders wherever possible will improve your margins and give you better command over your supply chain.

For me, the key moment in this incident is when another vendor smiled at you as you walked out of the maarket. That moment, though it seemed minor, is a turning point. It shows that others in the market are beginning to notice you. You're not just another buyer: you are becoming a coveted customer whose business is now being sought after. That is a strong position to be in.

Make it a point to build lasting, respectful relationships with your vendors. If you treat them with dignity and fairness, they will often go out of their way to support you, sometimes even at critical moments when you most need them.

Be honest, transparent, and straightforward in your dealings. Vendors, especially those who've been in the trade for a while, often have more market intelligence than you think, including insights about your own company. Underestimating their network or knowledge can backfire.

And remember—vendors are not just suppliers, they are potential partners in your growth. You might outgrow some over time, and that's natural. But a vendor who grows alongside you and stands by you through tough times is a relationship worth nurturing for life.

I hope this lesson resurfaces when you are building a successful business backed by a robust and trustworthy vendor ecosystem.

2. MY CUP - NOT HALF FULL NOR HALF EMPTY. EMPTY OR OVERFLOWING!

I hope that the business takeaway for you from this incident is centred around a critical concept: **Supply Chain Management**.

At some point in your business journey, you will come across a term called JIT – "Just in Time". This methodology originated in Japan and was later introduced to the rest of the world. The essence of JIT is that all components and raw materials flow into your company just in time to be used in production, ensuring minimal waste, lower holding costs, and maximum operational efficiency.

It's an excellent concept on paper, and in environments where infrastructure and logistics are highly reliable, it works beautifully. However, if you're building and running a business in India, then—well—God only save you.

India's infrastructural and logistical unpredictability means that the cost of having an idle factory, waiting for parts or materials to arrive, is often far greater than the cost of holding excess inventory or maintaining storage. That's a fundamental inversion of the JIT philosophy, and something you must internalize early on.

Of course, there are sophisticated software systems and tools available to manage this aspect of operations. They can help but they're not a substitute for critical thinking and planning. This is one area where you will have to apply your mind, your logic, and your foresight.

In practice, you must always have:

Plan A (the ideal),
Plan B (the fallback), and most importantly,
Plan C (the saviour in the worst times).

You have to build resilience into your supply chain.

At the same time, don't forget the other side of the equation demand forecasting. You need to be able to predict your market, the buy-side, and be ready for uncertainty. Rarely will business unfold exactly as planned. You will either be:

Flooded with orders, scrambling to scale up and fulfill them, Or sitting idle, wondering where the next client or deal will come from.

It's almost never balanced.

So much of your business's success, perhaps more than you can currently imagine, depends on how well you manage this delicate, high-stakes balancing act between supply and demand, inventory and production, planning and reality.

I sincerely hope that the insights and learnings you gained from this incident will resurface at the right time, just when you need them most.

3. POUND OF FLESH

I hope that the key business takeaway you carry from this incident is this: **Build your credibility.**

A business, especially in its early and growing stages, is often run on tight margins and cash flows. There will be several occasions when you'll need to borrow money, whether from banks, NBFCs or even friends and family.

There may also be times when, due to circumstances beyond your control, you're unable to repay them on time. In such moments, what matters most is how you handle the situation. Face the issue head-on. Provide realistic commitments and, most importantly, honor them.

This incident should remind you of how credibility works as an asset in business. Your friend was able to leverage his strong reputation and trustworthiness not only to retain the lender's confidence but also to borrow even more. That's the kind of goodwill you need to build over time, credibility that earns you trust, flexibility, and support when you need it most.

This principle applies not only to banks but also to your vendors. In business, cash flow mismatches and payment delays are not uncommon. Be open and frank with your vendors. Don't hide. Don't lie. Seek their help when required, you'll be surprised to know how many vendors go out of their way to support a credible business partner. Many businesses have made it through their toughest times not because of investors or banks, but because of the trust and flexibility shown by their vendors.

I hope that when you are faced with a similar situation in the future, this lesson comes back to you and you remember to lead with credibility, courage, and honesty.

4. SWEET TRAP

I hope that the key business takeaway you have from this is simple but powerful: **Focus on quality, quality, and quality.**

Quality always comes at a price. Often, your consumers may not immediately understand or appreciate why your product costs more. But the companies that succeed in the long run are those that persist with offering high quality despite this initial resistance. They focus on building trust with the first few customers, knowing that these early adopters will turn into loyal followers the kind who not only come back but also bring others with them. Over time, the increased revenue and reputation they generate will more than make up for the initial cost of quality.

It's tempting to compromise, especially when you're under pressure. You may find yourself urged by clients or suppliers to cut corners, reduce costs, or rush timelines. Ironically, the same companies that pressure you to lower your price will be the first to reject a substandard product, and worse, may even tarnish your reputation in the market.

So remember: there is absolutely no room for compromise in this area. It will be difficult, it will require resolve, but if you want to build a sustainable business with a great reputation, then the only way to do that is by producing great products with unwavering commitment to quality.

As your grandfather once told me, and as I now pass on to you: "People will forget the price they paid for your product, but they will remember the experience they had for a long, long time."

5. TREASURER

I hope the business takeaway you have from this incident is that you must treat money with respect, especially when it does not belong to you. If you are a custodian of funds, whether they come from investors, customers, or even your employees, you have a responsibility that goes far beyond financial returns.

One day, I hope you build a business strong enough to be listed on the bourses, with the scale and vision to invite public investment. At that point, thousands, hopefully millions, of people will choose to invest their hard-earned savings in your company. They won't just be buying shares; they'll be placing their trust in your ability to create value, make sound decisions, and protect their future.

You must treat that money with the utmost seriousness. Think of it as capital that represents people's dreams: children's education, retirement hopes, or medical emergencies they are planning for. It is not just numbers on a balance sheet; it's the faith of people who believe that you will build something worthwhile.

What the world will remember is not how well you managed your personal wealth, but how you stewarded the capital entrusted to you. Did you grow it responsibly? Did you act with integrity? Did you stay transparent when times were tough? These are the questions that define true business leadership.

If you earn a reputation for being trustworthy with other people's money, success will follow. People will want to work with you, invest in you, and support you, not just because you make profits, but because you uphold the values that matter most in business.

6. FREEBIES

I believe you've heard me say this several times and I'll say it once again: **"There are no free lunches."** It's a phrase that holds true across life and business.

Please consider this an important business takeaway from the incident. In the business world, things that appear to come free or too easily almost always have strings attached. Yes, we like to believe we're smart enough not to fall for such gimmicks. But the truth is, at some point or another, all of us have been lured by "free" opportunities. Often, it stems from a moment of laziness, a desire to finish a task quickly, or the temptation of a shortcut. That's when we stop reading the fine print, ignore the hidden costs, or fail to see what we're actually giving up in return.

That's why I say: be overly cautious. Because even though you may feel confident that you can outsmart the system or see through the trick, escape is rarely easy once you're caught in the loop of such traps.

That said, the concept of a "free lunch" is not inherently bad; it's just about which side of the table you're on. As a marketer or entrepreneur, this can be an incredibly effective tool. Every customer loves a freebie, no matter how small. We've seen this even at a humble pani puri stall: the final, extra puri given for free is what leaves the biggest smile on the customer's face. It's a lasting impression, a memory of value and care.

So yes, use this concept thoughtfully in your own marketing strategy—create delight without deception. Just make sure you don't fall for it when you're on the buy side. Recognise the line between adding value and being taken for a ride.

7. ROLLER COASTER

Google now provides fascinating trackers for share prices of companies listed on stock exchanges across the globe. At a superficial glance, these graphs may look like they're always moving upward, an illusion of exponential growth. But zoom in, and you'll discover the real story: over shorter time spans like weeks, days, even hours, these graphs depict a rhythmic dance between profits and losses. Sometimes, the losses outweigh the profits.

That's business and that's life. Both are unpredictable, volatile, and driven largely by the complex behaviour of humans. The market reflects not just earnings and numbers but emotion, trust, fear, and speculation. It mirrors the human experience itself with all its ups and downs.

Now ask yourself: how many businesses can truly say they won their first customer on the first try? Very few. In fact, most of them faced rejection, scepticism, and even ridicule. Many were shown the door.

That's why I hope the business takeaway you have from this incident is **Perseverance.**

I'm not a fortune teller; I can't predict how your journey will unfold. But I can say this with absolute certainty: if you ever build a business, you will face failure. And not just once, but repeatedly. You will face rejections, setbacks, disappointments, sometimes even after doing everything right. There will be days when it will feel like there's no way forward.

And yet, you will have to wake up the next morning, clear your head, and give it your best shot again. That next door might still be closed, but the one after that might just open. Or the one after that. And when it does, it often makes all the struggle worthwhile.

The only failure you can't recover from is the one where you stop trying. So keep going. One more knock, one more pitch, one more day.

Because that's what separates those who dream from those who build.

8. THE WAY TO OUR HEARTS

The business takeaway from this incident is that when negotiating, always look for a **"Win-Win" solution.**

This is a lesson I learned through my business dealings with the Koreans, who excel at building lasting relationships through mutually beneficial negotiations. They approach every discussion with the mindset that both sides must walk away feeling satisfied. That's the only way to build trust and keep the doors open for future opportunities.

In any negotiation, there is always some level of give and take. Your success lies in convincing the other party that you're willing to give in and doing it in a way that feels genuine and respectful. That willingness often helps move the conversation forward and eventually close the deal.

The mistake many people make is focusing entirely on their own goals, what they want, what they need, and what they "deserve". But negotiation is not just about winning. It's about understanding. If you take the time to truly understand the other side their pressure points, their priorities, and their pain areas, you'll often find a solution that works for both.

What you give up may not feel like much to you, but it could be extremely valuable to your counterpart. It might cost you a little but gain you a lot.
For example, I recently got a vendor to match my price not by arguing further, but simply by offering to defer the deliveries over a period of three months. Through the course of our discussion, I realized that their main challenge wasn't price, it was capacity. They were overloaded with work and struggling to deliver on time. On my end, I didn't need the goods all at once anyway, so spacing out the deliveries suited me just fine.

And just like that, we found a solution that helped both sides. They got breathing room, I got my price, and we both got the satisfaction of a deal well made.

That's the essence of a good negotiation, not just securing a win, but building a relationship that lasts. One where both sides walk away, not just relieved, but respected.

9. DON'T ROCK MY BOAT

The business takeaway here is **"Choose your partners carefully."**

To grow a big business, you may feel the need to form partnerships, or someone may invite you to join theirs. The partners you choose will be one of the most critical decisions in your business journey.

I've seen many successful businesses collapse just because of one wrong partner. A great product, a solid business model, or even funding cannot save a business from bad chemistry between partners.

The initial enthusiasm fades quickly, and if your visions, ethics, or working styles clash, what follows is bickering and blame. That's why I hope this story reminds you to think deeply before tying your future to someone else.

Before entering a partnership, ask yourself: Can I trust this person in a crisis? Do we value the same things? Do we have similar expectations about effort, success, and money?

Even a minor mismatch, if ignored, grows into a major divide later.

Choose slowly. Exit decisively.

10. A FRIEND IN NEED

A lot of my friends who run large companies tell me their biggest challenge is "Managing Human Resources."

It may seem surprising, but I've heard this too often to ignore it. That's why the takeaway here is simple: Managing people is as important as managing money.

As an employer, you'll often feel misunderstood. Even when you do what's fair, people might believe otherwise. That's part of the job.

You might feel betrayed by someone you trusted, but don't let emotion cloud your decisions.

Managing people is not about pleasing everyone, it's about being fair, consistent, and clear.

Avoid unnecessary conflict. Be firm but kind. Listen, but don't get manipulated.

In the end, your team is your biggest asset, but also your biggest responsibility. Handle with care.

11. BUDGETARY ISSUES

The business takeaway from this is: "Focus on the value of the product, not just the price."

We often use the phrase **"Value for Money" (VFM),** but very few of us truly apply it while making decisions. Most people begin a purchase with a set budget and end up buying something that fits that budget, even if it's not the most sensible option.

What many don't realize is that we often use just 10% of a product's total features. The remaining 90%, which you may never need, drives up the price unnecessarily.

So, a higher-priced item doesn't always give you higher value. Buy what delivers the most value for your needs, even if that means spending less than what you planned or a little more.

If stretching your budget gives you something that truly lasts longer, performs better, or solves your need more effectively, then it's worth it.

Never confuse affordability with value. A cheap product that fails is costlier than an expensive one that endures.

That's the kind of clarity you need to develop as a businessperson and consumer alike.

12. A STITCH IN TIME

The business takeaway from this is: **"Build Assets."**

Over time, money loses value. But assets, whether they're land, infrastructure, intellectual property, or brand goodwill, tend to appreciate.

This one lesson alone can shape how you handle wealth in both business and life.

You touched on this idea yourself when you made a case for buying that phone. If you have idle money, put it into something that can grow something that will work for you even when you aren't working.

Assets have power beyond financial return.

They create long-term stability, make businesses resilient, and give you leverage.
For instance, the real estate value of a factory or office built 25 years ago becomes like a natural moat, discouraging new competitors from entering the space.

I've seen many businesses survive recessions, downturns, and market shocks not because they had cash in the bank, but because they had assets that could be leveraged, rented, or sold.

13. TAXING ISSUES

I have some news for you. Like it or not, you'll always have a silent partner in your business one who demands 30–40% of your profits and still makes a lot of noise.

Yes, I'm talking about the Government.

At first, it may feel frustrating. Why should someone who doesn't contribute directly take such a large share? But that's the system we live in. The sooner you make peace with it, the smoother your journey will be.

The business takeaway here is: **"Plan your Taxes."**
There's a huge difference between Tax Planning and Tax Evasion. Understand it deeply.

Tax Planning is strategic. It helps your business grow by using legal tools and benefits. Tax Evasion, on the other hand, is reckless. It may offer short-term savings, but the long-term cost in penalties, reputation, and peace of mind is never worth it.

Get the best professional help. Smart tax planning gives you an edge in pricing, reinvestment, and even international expansion. Make this a non-negotiable part of your business toolkit.

14. TRAVEL - BEST INVESTMENT

There are many takeaways from this story, but the one I want you to remember most is this: **KYC – Know Your Customer.**

We've come to associate KYC with paperwork, Aadhar cards, PAN, passports but the real essence of KYC is much deeper. Knowing your customer is knowing your business.

When you truly understand your customer's preferences, pain points, and motivations, you can shape your offering in a way that connects, converts, and lasts.
Someone focused on savings? Highlight cost-efficiency.
Someone driven by luxury? Focus on exclusivity and premium features.

Make KYC your mantra. It's not a formality—it's a strategic mindset.
The better you know your customer, the less you have to "sell."
Because you're no longer selling, you're offering exactly what they already want.

15. GREAT WHITE SHARKS

This one hits especially hard in today's start-up age of pitch decks, unicorn dreams, and quick wins.

The business takeaway is simple but timeless:
"Don't count your chickens before the eggs hatch."

Dream big but stay grounded.

There's a difference between ambition and impatience.
If your dreams become so big that they overwhelm you or leave you constantly disappointed, they stop serving you.

You may fall if you try to sprint before you've learned to walk.
Another powerful lesson: when conflict arises, give it time.
You don't always have to rush to resolve things. People's minds and priorities can shift quickly.
What they desperately wanted yesterday may not matter at all tomorrow.

So don't panic. Don't react too fast.
Patience is a strategy. Time is often the best negotiator.

16. CYCLING

There is a lot of emphasis on **CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)** activities in business presently. Also, the focus on sustainable economic development is growing rapidly. By the time you are in business, there will be much more emphasis on these areas, and this shift will fundamentally change how businesses operate and succeed.

In the past, businesses focused mainly on profits and growth. Today, stakeholders — including customers, employees, investors, governments, and communities — expect companies to take responsibility for their social and environmental impact. This means actively working to reduce pollution, conserve resources, uphold human rights, and contribute to community welfare. It's not just about goodwill; it's becoming a business necessity.

Also, sustainable practices often lead to cost savings (like reducing waste or energy use), innovation opportunities, and a stronger brand image. Investors, too are increasingly favoring companies with solid CSR policies, making it easier for such companies to access capital.

Remember, CSR and sustainability are not just add-ons; they should be integrated into your business strategy and culture from the very beginning. By doing so, you create a virtuous cycle where your business success enables you to give back more, which in turn strengthens your business foundation.

17. HEAT OF THE MOMENT

The business takeaway from this is that "Always think and act like an Entrepreneur." An entrepreneur's primary aim is to build a successful and sustainable business, and there is absolutely no room for anger, temper, or rash decisions in this pursuit.

In business, you will face countless challenges: missed deadlines, difficult clients, team conflicts, financial pressures, and unexpected crises. These situations can push anyone's patience to the limit. But losing your cool or reacting emotionally often leads to poor decisions, damaged relationships, and lost opportunities.

Instead, develop the discipline to stay calm, assess the situation objectively, and respond with rationality and creativity. Learn to control your emotions so that you can think clearly even in high-pressure moments.

Obstacles and setbacks are inevitable in the entrepreneurial journey. But they should be seen as stepping stones that teach you valuable lessons if you choose to learn from them.

Instead of getting stuck in frustration, use these moments to grow stronger and wiser.

One of the greatest examples of this mindset is the late Mr. Dhirubhai Ambani, one of India's most successful businessmen. The movie 'Guru' is based on his life and journey. What stands out is his relentless focus and calm leadership. No matter what challenges he faced, he always acted like an entrepreneur, staying solution-oriented, resilient, and forward-looking.

If you adopt this attitude, you will not only navigate business storms more effectively but also inspire confidence and loyalty among your team and partners. Remember, success is not just about what you achieve but how you handle the journey, especially the tough moments.

18. FLIGHT OF IMAGINATION

The business takeaway from this is **"Don't let your Conviction waver."**

Choosing the right business path is one of the hardest decisions you will face. With endless opportunities and options, it's easy to get stuck in what is called 'analysis paralysis', where overthinking prevents you from making any decision at all.

You will have to weigh risks, market potential, your own skills and interests, and financial feasibility. The sheer volume of choices can overwhelm you, making the safest option seem to be "do nothing" or "keep waiting." But waiting too long is the enemy of progress.

Eventually, you will have to take a leap of faith and plunge into your chosen venture. This initial phase of the journey will be challenging and uncertain. It will test your confidence and resolve.

During this phase, self-doubt will creep in: “Am I making the right choice?” “What if I fail?” Failures might come, and panic may set in. This is normal. Every entrepreneur experiences these feelings.

The key is to hold firm to your conviction, the belief in your vision, your business idea, and your ability to succeed. When you stay committed, you give yourself the best chance of pushing through temporary setbacks.

Remember that many successful entrepreneurs faced multiple failures before their big breakthrough. Success is often just around the corner,

Keep imagining, keep innovating, and most importantly, keep believing in your dreams. Your flight of imagination will take you places, but only if you are willing to soar despite fear and uncertainty.

19. ALL THAT GLITTERS IS NOT GOLD

While the obvious takeaway from this incident may seem to be “live within your means” and “keep your expenses under control,” there’s a deeper and more important lesson here: **don’t be blinded by competition or glamour.**

In business, you will always have competitors. It is rare to operate in a monopoly. Most markets are highly dynamic, and new players can enter at any time. So it is normal to observe your competition, sometimes even feel a little intimidated or in awe. You may see others with bigger offices, larger teams, flashier branding, or huge funding, and start to question your own strategy.

But here's the truth: glitter does not always mean gold. Many businesses that appear successful from the outside are burning cash inside, chasing vanity metrics, or running unsustainably. You don't know the stress behind the scenes, the debt they're taking on, or the compromises they're making.

Never copy or emulate others blindly. Don't be obsessed with your competition. Their path is not your path. You started your business for your own reasons, with your values, vision, and way of working. Stay true to that.

Be aware of what others are doing, but stay grounded. Don't get out of your comfort zone just to match someone else's hype. Focus instead on delivering real value, on serving your customers well, and on building a solid, sustainable foundation. That's what wins in the long run.

The key lesson? Success is not about how things look. It's about how things actually are behind the curtain. Be authentic. Run your business your way. Let others run theirs.

20. BOTTLED CONFUSION

The Business Takeaway: **"Perception creates value."**

In markets, what people are paying for is not always the product itself; it's what the product signals.

Two identical bottles of water. One sells for ₹10. The other for ₹40. Why? Because one says "hydration," the other says "luxury." And society is willing to pay extra to be associated with class, style, or superiority, even if it's manufactured.

So, as an entrepreneur, you must understand this: branding is not decoration. It's economics.

Your product's story, positioning, and packaging all contribute to how much someone is willing to pay for it. This is not about cheating the customer: it's about aligning value with perception.

If you can elevate how your product is perceived, you can unlock a whole new market — one that's driven by psychology, not just cost.

Also, a word of caution: don't fall for your own branding.
Build real value. But never underestimate what packaging, storytelling, and design can do.

CONCLUSION: STILL FIGURING IT OUT

I began this book thinking I was compiling business lessons. Real-world case studies. Practical takeaways. Something tidy.

But somewhere along the way, I realised this wasn't always about business. It was about values, perception and observation. About what stays with you long after the moment has passed.

And, most of all, it was about a certain kind of conversation, often held over chai, always ending with the same question:

"So, what did you learn?"

Sometimes I had a good answer. Sometimes I just had a good excuse. But every time, my dad would listen—smiling, nodding, occasionally smirking—and say, "You'll figure it out."

He still says it.

And maybe that's the real lesson. That figuring it out isn't a one-time thing.

It's a lifelong negotiation with the world, with your people, with yourself.
So, if you've made it this far, thank you. I hope these stories sparked a memory or two from your own life. Maybe even a lesson you didn't know you'd learned.

And if not, that's okay too.

One day, you'll figure it out.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND MENTOR: VIKAS GUPTA

Vikas Gupta is the founder of IndoHan, a company that specializes in trading steel and precoated steel between India and South Korea for a range of industrial and commercial uses. A seasoned businessman with a sharp eye for detail and timing, he brings decades of cross-border experience to every deal—and every dinner table.

In this book, his lessons don't appear in the form of lectures or speeches, but in small nudges, counter-questions, and the familiar refrain: "*What did you learn*?"

His insights, often delivered between sips of chai or on a quiet drive home, have shaped the stories in this collection more than he admits—and more than his son ever forgets.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:
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Vyom Gupta is a high school student at The Cathedral and John Connon School in Mumbai, with a keen interest in economics, science, and storytelling. He blends sharp analytical thinking with an old-school love for human stories—often set around breakfast tables, street corners, or sibling rivalries.

He is also the author of Universe in Verse, a poetry collection that explores the intersections of imagination, observation, and teenage insight.

This is his first nonfiction book, born from real-life conversations with his father, where each lesson unfolds not through lectures, but through lived experience.