
WE NEED AN EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT NATION



Lalith de Silva, former Group CEO, SLT.

In a social milieu fraught with extreme levels of stress, Lalith de Silva, former Group CEO of SLT is a strong advocate on the importance of Emotional Intelligence (EI). The emotional quotient (EQ), according to de Silva, guides individuals, from children to adults, serving in different roles, to rationally guide their thinking pattern and behavior. More than 4,000 studies on emotional intelligence have shown that it contributes to professional and personal success, boosting your EQ. This is tied to more effective leadership, entrepreneurship, career success, as well as happiness and relationship satisfaction. He describes the importance of transforming Sri Lanka into an emotionally intelligent society from its current state of inattentiveness, a result of extreme levels of consistent stress. EI is cultivable through the practice of specific tips and strategies. It will train people's minds to focus on what matters, while filtering and managing emotions to be free of negativity, the correct way to enhance personal and business relationships, while benefiting the bottom-line in organizations and creating a conscientious political culture. EI is not simply something nice to have, but it is paramount for the success of organizations.

By Udeshi Amarasinghe and Jennifer Paldano Goonewardene | Photography Menaka Aravinda.

What is EI?

There are multiple definitions of EI. According to Psychologist Prof Daniel Goleman there are five main elements of EI. Self-awareness – that is to recognize your own emotions; self-regulation through which you regulate your emotions; and thirdly being socially aware, which is the ability to understand other people's emotions and reactions; Social Skills which is the ability to maintain friendships and relationships, and finding common ground with others; and the recent addition, motivation, having an interest in learning and self-improvement. It is having the strength to keep going when there are obstacles in life. These are considered the five most important traits of EI. The important aspect of EI is that unlike with IQ, which has been proven cannot be improved after about 21 years; EI can be enhanced throughout one's life.

As a nation we lack EI, so do our organizations, schools, universities, and people and society. Since EI is doubly important than normal intelligence it is required to be introduced in schools and in universities. Organizations have huge potential to focus on employee EI, but unfortunately at the Board, CEO and senior management level, the business value of EI is not understood. They think it is just a touchy feely thing, they are business oriented and not interested in it. Their attention is drawn only towards the bottom-line. In the last ten to fifteen years other developing nations have realized the importance of EI for business success and individual employee's success. EQ is a predicator of the performance of an individual. Higher the EQ, higher the engagement.

How relevant is this to Sri Lanka?

EI is a critical skill required by public, private and non-profit organizations and for a country in general to succeed. Although we do not focus on this aspect at schools or at universities, the western world has recognized the importance of EI at every level.

How do you develop EI in a company or country?

Like many skill sets, EI can be cultivated. There are multiple tools and tips available to enhance EI. One of the most important tools is

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mindfulness practice or meditation. Also some other practices like gratitude, generosity, forgiveness, other values that we have learnt from religions, although we know of them, we do not practice them. Neuroscience has proven that if we keep practicing these traits our brain can be rewired. Mindfulness and meditation are key tools that are used around the world. But unfortunately because we have heard of meditation throughout our life we do not give it any importance. EI will also enhance people's mental health and happiness. We lack happiness as a nation. I have been conducting multiple workshops whenever I come to Sri Lanka on holiday and my surveys during these programs have shown that we are low on the quality of happiness or well-being as a nation due to chronic stress. We live with stress on a day to day basis and our schools and universities do not educate people how to manage stress. One of the outcomes of improving EI is the knowledge to manage stress.

How should EI be inculcated in people?

It is like learning any other skill. For an example, a person will know to drive a vehicle after about a month's training. Similarly you practice the skills associated with EI in order to be emotionally intelligent. Remember practical knowledge or practice is more important than theoretical knowledge.

For instance, one of the tools is to discern between emotions and label them immediately. Labeling an emotion helps to control it. Labeling is one of the strategic tips. The role of a Board or the CEO in an organization is to develop strategies; they see the big picture and the vision for the organization and develop strategies accordingly. But it's the employees who implement the strategies of the management. Then the leader should know how to persuade and influence them, and build a team that will collaborate to implement the strategies. Such leadership skills are developed with EI. Emotionally intelligent people are role models for their employees and for others. It is fundamental that politicians too should be emotionally intelligent. For instance, President John F Kennedy was an emotionally intelligent leader who was calm and could work under tremendous pressure and so was President Abraham Lincoln. Sri Lanka too have highly emotionally intelligent leaders that cannot be named due to election time.

You said you have workshops on EI, neuroscience and leadership. Can you elaborate on the tools that you use?

In my workshops I share specific tips and strategies for developing EI. I look at the two main categories of personal competence and relational competence, and dive deep into the key competencies including self-confidence, adaptability, empathy, assertiveness, organizational acumen, focus and managing conflict just to name a few.

I also teach participants on the basic functions of the brain. To be a good driver, it is good to know how the engine works. Similarly, if you know a little about how the brain functions and the structure, then you appreciate its power and you are motivated to cultivate EI. Science has been able to prove in the last ten years the performance of the brain under stress. The fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) technology can scan the brain and shows the damage to the brain as a result of chronic stress. In Sri Lanka we live in a highly stressful environment, whether it is at home, in school or the workplace. The surveys I conduct at my workshops have revealed the level of stress people live with. Chronic stress leads to mental illnesses like depression, anxiety and other stress related health issues, both physical and mental. Emotionally intelligent happy people are calm and do not suffer from attention deficiency, they are resilient, optimistic and generous. We see a great deal of negativity in the electronic, print and digital media such as FB but emotionally intelligent people will not be affected by negative news or allow their health to be damaged as a result.

I teach a little on neuroscience in my workshops, including how the brain works and how the brain can be rewired. This is followed by teaching the participants about multiple tools such as gratitude, and meditation. Science has proven that the brain can be rewired/restructured if a person uses these tools consistently through practice. We are hardwired to brush our teeth daily, which we were taught to do as children. Unfortunately in the recent past, we have not been taught to wire our brain from childhood to improve basic values such as honesty, respect, self-discipline, courtesy, forgiveness, gratitude and purpose of life. Instead most of our brains have been wired to compete, to be selfish and acquire material

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gains. Once you use these tools at least for a few minutes on a daily basis, your brain gets rewired and you enhance EQ while improving social skills such as leadership, creativity, innovation, inspiration, focus and general well-being. I introduce some of the tools which have been accepted in the Developed World in my workshops. Sri Lankans have known these tools for the past thousands of years, but unfortunately we do not know the science of it. Science has proven that an individual is happy if he or she is compassionate, generous, grateful and forgiving. We know all of this but we do not practice what we know.

EI is required not only for organizations but in other spheres as well. How can this be applied to Sri Lanka?

Our country mainly focuses on academic performance, sports or rational skills. There are multiple tools to inculcate EI. Although we have had these tools with us, we have not encouraged them to practice. EI can be taught at a young age, only then will we have happy children, which in turn will generate happy families, organizations, society and a happy country. We can judge whether our leaders are emotionally intelligent by watching their facial expressions and body language in public and how they manage their anger and bitterness when they are under pressure. Emotionally intelligent political and corporate leaders have great empathy towards their people, employees, and customers and society as a whole. An organization's financial objectives are its strategic objectives, and in order to achieve that, the organization lays down parameters for customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction, which can be improved only through EI. People with EI are honest and have integrity. At Board level members must be emotionally intelligent; they should be able to understand the CEO and members of the senior management. One must not use EI to achieve short term success, but rather to achieve strategically long term sustainable success in an organization or a country, and for that we need emotionally intelligent leaders. Emotionally intelligent leaders are role models for the younger generation. Fortunately, it is a skill you can learn throughout your life. Let's get started with leading families, organizations and the nation with EI.

Today, the world is focused on the happiness quotient. A happy nation is a successful nation. Most of the top universities in the world invest in research on happiness and well-being.

We live in a global village and therefore young entrepreneurs and young graduates should understand that if they want to work with the rest of the world they have to be emotionally intelligent. Because when you are emotionally intelligent you don't judge people or be prejudiced, and you develop patience. Being resilient has been found to be a leading characteristic of the happiest people in the world. Such people, even if they get angry, return to normalcy with minimum effort, and it is the same when they are sad. Secondly, they pay a lot of attention to everything. People in Sri Lanka suffer from attention deficiency. For example, people don't show respect when driving on the road, and that is not because they are bad, but because they are paying less attention and not mindful of what they are doing due to lack of EI and high stress. Thirdly, they see the positive side of everything in life; they see the positive side of any scenario. Fourthly, they are very generous. Research has found that happiness is not a result of economic prosperity. Emotionally intelligent people are also happier people because they don't allow their emotions to be affected because of the external environment. Humility is an important trait of EI. People with EI know to build relationships and to be empathetic. Some political leaders fail to show emotions; therefore, people are not comfortable to be with such people.

I conduct workshops all around the world. It is my passion. I conduct workshops on EI in Sri Lanka without levying a fee for non profit organization and Government institutes to show my gratitude to my beloved country. I have conducted workshops for Armed Forces personnel, monks, substance abused individuals and for school children. If you want to transform this country, we have to develop the skills in EI among those at the top to those at the bottom. All top companies such as Google, Facebook, IBM, E&Y and other successful businesses have rooms for meditation. Similarly, all top universities have locations for meditation. We as a nation have heard about meditation for thousands of years, but we probably

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meditate just once a year for Vesak. But meditating should be like brushing teeth daily. Meditation must be done daily, not in a forest or jungle, not seated in a certain posture, it's rather being mindful in everything, which is a type of meditation. Thus, when you continuously meditate the brain gets rewired and you enhance your human values and you can start seeing yourself as opposed to seeing good and bad of others. Out of 195 countries in the world Sri Lanka is the only country that has a holiday on Poya to focus on meditation and to calm the mind. We may probably be the only country that has so many religious channels to teach spiritual values. Added to that is the structured Sunday School system and a large number of children attending Dhamma schools. But despite all this we have not changed for the better.

Furthermore, we are the only country in the world where doctors go on strike one week, followed by the nurses and then the laborers. I travel and read a lot and I know that there is no other country where all these three groups go on strike the way they do here. Our teachers, administrators and railway workers are on strike. Having lived in Australia for the past 32 years I may have witnessed probably two or three strikes. Recently there was a strike by children who came to the streets demanding the Government for tighter environmental laws.

Emotionally intelligent people do not have to take to the streets to show their emotions. As a nation, we have to do a lot to be calm. As a nation we are all good people, but we don't know how to behave and manage stress. Emotionally intelligent people know how to manage stress. Stress hormones damage the immune system, when the immune system is attacked you see children as young as ten suffering from cancer and unknown diseases. On top of that is the high rate of suicide among young children and adults. The Sri Lanka Telecom 1926 mental health hotline has managed 10,000 interventions in the last six months and more than 200 suicides had been prevented. This is really happening and therefore we need to strengthen EI. The Government needs to have a strategy for this through schools as well. We should have EQ ready schools, universities, corporate world, and an EQ ready Government.

Where do you find the problem in Sri Lanka? Is it to do with the upbringing or education?

The war in Sri Lanka drove us to live in a VUCA world, which means we were living in volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment. Therefore, when we have lived for 30 years in a VUCA environment, we develop stress hormones, which rewire our brain to live with fear, less hopes and negative thoughts. This is true for all, from politicians to children. Stress effects on the Amygdala and Hippocampus in the limbic system owing to the secretion of stress hormones, and this makes people react fast, such as with anger and decrease memory and learning capacity. Added to this is the fact that people today are living in a digital world. Most often people have no relationships, which have been replaced by the phone. This also creates stress hormones. Although some areas of the brain have been damaged as a result, we are lucky that it can be repaired by practicing tools. I have workshops for eight to nine hours and at the end of the workshop my energy levels are much higher than when I started in the morning. The reason is when you give something free with the intention of creating a better world, you generate happy hormones.

In Sri Lanka stress is generated from pre-school, where parents push the child to be the best pupil, in addition to having to learn so many other new things simultaneously. This creates stress in the young child. Then in a bid to get the child into a good school parents submit a false address and the five year old child is taught to lie, which in turn creates stress hormones. The scholarship examination in grade five is another point where both children and parents get stressed, and where the brain gets greatly damaged. I met a 17 year old student who was extremely stressed because he had been pressured to be competitive from his young age. He met me to obtain advice on selecting a university. I told him to forget about going to university immediately and to take a gap year to relax and rewire the brain to reduce stress and become a happier person. He accepted my idea and confessed that he had been pressured by his parents and teachers into being a high performer.

Today the most successful business leaders and political leaders are extremely emotionally intelligent people. Most of the corporate still look for people with IQ, such as candidates with a degree. They hire ten people with a

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degree, those who have an IQ above 100, but after ten years if you measure their success, you will find that those with high EQ have reached the top. And they are the change leaders who can thrive in a fast changing world. If you want your child to be different from the rest, make him or her high in EQ, to be loving and kind, to be compassionate, generous, forgiving and non-competitive.

Are we trying to blame it on the war in order to escape?

In Thailand they have removed regimes very often undemocratically. But everyone comes out to change a corrupt regime when they see something harmful to the country. The Thai people do not wait for elections to change a regime; the people come out and make the change practicing non violent strategies. But none of them have personal or selfish goals; they all have a common vision of protecting their nation. We as a nation are so self-centered that in everything we want to know 'what is in it for me', because we have been wired to be selfish from the childhood. We have five generations that think and act differently. Currently, five generations make up our society. Each of those five generations has an active role in the marketplace. Depending on the specific workplace, the workforce includes four to five generations. These are: Gen Alpha: born 2010 onwards; Gen Z born 1995 – 2009; Millennials or Gen Y: born 1981 – 1994; Gen X: born 1963 – 1980; Baby Boomers: born 1947 – 1963; Traditionalists or Silent Generation: born 1945 and before. Leaders and parents should accept the differences and respect their views.

The difference between Thailand and us is that people in all these generations are less self-centered when it comes to national issues. But why don't we react when a regime acts arbitrarily in Sri Lanka? It's because we think of the individual and collective consequences by doing so. We lack the people who have a country first thinking. If you do a survey of Thais you will find them highly selfless, altruistic and emotionally intelligent, because they change regimes with their country first in mind, which we are not. The war in Sri Lanka caused volatility, complexity, ambiguity, and the uncertainty, which created generations of stress hormones. With stress we have been rewired into a self-centered people. When you are self-

centered you are not emotionally intelligent to respect other people's emotions. For example, when I want to take my car out of the garage no one wants to give way, the reason is because the other person is not mindful and hence not paying attention to my car, and sees only the car that is overtaking. But that doesn't mean that they are bad people. They just suffer from attention deficiency. On the contrary, emotionally intelligent people pay a lot of attention. They ask the right questions, they have good listening skills and they are good communicators. Today, parents are so busy that they are not aware of the importance of active listening skills and family relationships.

The first destruction in Sri Lanka was sending mothers overseas for work from 1981, which broke families and created unhappiness in families. The majority of recent cab drivers are doing fulltime jobs and work till late. Now it is the mobile app generated transport system that is causing issues. You will see the issues in another five years. These taxi services provide a good service, but when I ask these drivers the number of times they get out of the car, they said they do so only to have a meal or a drink. The men are out of home most of the time, while their wives are alone with the children. In contrast, in Australia, drivers get out of the car after every transaction to do breathing exercises before getting back. The worst harm to human health is not alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, fast-food or sweets, but being seated for long hours. We have not been trained to work while standing. The level of stress hormones in bus drivers going on long tours is very high because they don't take any breaks.

I conduct a workshop for parents of drug addicts on how to help their family member in the recovery process. People in general have no respect for a drug addict. Moreover every drug addict impacts a minimum of 25 family members, who are also discarded by society because we fail to see the pain that they are going through. An emotionally intelligent person will see the pain that people go through in life and they will show respect, so be compassionate, and be loving and kind. What do we do when we see an ambulance? The response I received in all countries, including the USA and Denmark was to give way. That is because we have been wired to do so. But if we are compassionate, we will pray for the sick person inside, for healing

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and for the driver to make a safe trip to hospital. This also forms a type of meditation, which calms our minds. Then the rest of the journey becomes much easier for us. The University of Harvard conducted a research among 800 selected people, whose blood pressure, pulse rate, sugar level, weight and fat, and all other health indexes were checked. They were divided into two groups of 400. One group was employed in hotels. When the researchers asked how many of them frequented the gym, it was probably a mere one percent, as the rest said that they had to work very hard from morning till evening. The researchers showed them that although they weren't going to the gym; their work was similar to three hours of workout in the gym. They told them that the person who spends three hours in the gym will burn fat and weight and sugar levels. This group was told to remember the benefits of their employment when they go to work every day and to leave work with the same positive thoughts. The other 400 were not briefed on how they were burning calories through their work.

The 800 in the research were gathered again. Four hundred knew the benefits from the type of work they were doing, while the other group did not. Those who knew the benefits of their work had reduced in weight and improved their health indexes. That research proved that we should do something only if we know the benefits of it. So whatever you do, do it believing in its outcome. Rather than merely going to a temple with the hope of attaining nirvana that you have not seen, you will see results if you believe in the mental and physical wellbeing of engaging in meditation. In EI you need to believe. The important message is that without EI CEOs and people in top management positions cannot implement strategies, because only emotionally intelligent leaders can bring their people together, can make them collaborate, cooperate, persuade, and inspire them to finally get the required result.

It's not only our children who are hooked to smartphones, children around the world are. But children in some of those countries don't become victims of smartphone usage. What are your thoughts on that?

In the USA alone 48 percent of millennials are suffering from depression and anxiety or

are highly stressed. One root cause for this condition is the use of smartphones. It has become an epidemic around the world, including in Sri Lanka and it is happening to a very great extent. I promote the use of phones, but we need to achieve a balance, without which we will be ruined as a nation. And so my workshops include a session on living in a digital world. Smartphone addiction is akin to drug addiction, as it secretes dopamine. The more you are addicted to the smartphone it creates a sense of happiness through the secretion of the dopamine hormone. Eventually the individual has so much dopamine in the body that he or she is not conscious of the presence of other people, including the mother, the father or siblings. Today, the rate of divorce is a worrying issue in Sri Lanka. Unlike those days when happiness was a result of being with the person you love, today happiness is created by the digital world. People are on their phones even when they are on their honeymoon. When I was at dinner in a leading hotel in Colombo I saw a set of grandparents, parents and children who had come to have dinner and were on their phones, when the purpose of their outing was to spend time together. I was shocked because they wouldn't even enjoy their food. Such a trend will definitely affect marriages. Just a few months ago we entered the Guinness Book of Records for a divorce that took place even before the wedding festivities could end. The relationship ended because of a lack of control of emotions. The absence of EI is when we can't control anger, and other feelings.

In Sri Lanka people have come to depend on alcohol to subdue their stress for at least a few hours, because alcohol generates an opposite hormone to the stress hormone. Unfortunately at the end of three years the individual becomes an alcohol addict. We can address these through tools such as mindfulness, which will create happy hormones in the body. Your body secretes positive hormones when you stay calm for a few minutes. Most of the doctors do not tell people these facts because they are doing a business. When a person works from morning till late in the night, the last few hours in office are not productive. I don't think doctors who begin seeing patients late in the evening are very effective in treating patients, because they are tired and can

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not focus. When I took my ailing mother to Australia to live with us, we found that four medicines out of the eight prescribed to her were banned in Australia. My mother used to constantly complain about loss of appetite, but once she stopped them she regained her appetite. Her condition was a result of being prescribed banned drugs. Doctors are not super heroes and they are stressed while working beyond a certain time in the evening. These are people who have been pushed to be doctors from childhood because the perception is that as a doctor you can earn money. So the brain is wired to earn money as a doctor, leaving aside the role of treating and curing people of their ailments compassionately. Compare the way an injection is administered in Sri Lanka and in Australia. Here, they will tell you to not behave like a child when you fuss and express fear, but in Australia they will reassure you, and the compassion they show eliminates the fear and the next moment you don't even know that the injection had been administered. The difference is that they are taught to be compassionate. The best medical college in the world is MIT in the US, where meditation for medicals students are taught. They have developed mindfulness based stress reduction (MBSR) and mindfulness based cognitive therapy (MBCT). These are areas of the course where the students are expected to spend time outside in meditation, because doctors' minds have to be healthy before they treat others. World population is 7.5 billion, and at this very moment as we speak 500 million of them are in meditation. But we don't meditate, because we have it free, which is very sad. In other countries people spend at least 500 USD for a week's meditation, and these sessions draw big crowds and they change people for the better.

Sri Lanka is a religious country and we have many places of worship. Then why don't our people have mindfulness?

The root cause is people don't know the benefits of mindfulness. Christians go to church with the intention of going to heaven, Buddhists go to temples with the hope of attaining nirvana, Hindu and Islamic believers also want to go to heaven. All these people have a target, which is very good. But for people to be inspired and motivated, they must seek the multiple benefits of meditation, but

people are not aware of its benefits. Buddhism is a philosophy that teaches a lot on meditation. When I conducted a workshop for 175 monks, some of them admitted that had they known the benefits of meditation 20 years ago when they joined the order, they would be meditating daily, as they now don't even meditate on Vesak day. That's because they were not aware of the benefits of meditation. The physical and psychological benefits of meditation are many, it takes away depression, anxiety and stress, you become a happier person and individual focus, concentration, patience and attention levels increase. As a result you are able to cope with pain. In short you can become a different being. Meditation becomes attractive only when people know of its benefits. It's like selling a mobile phone, where you attract the customer by telling its benefits. The physiological benefits of mediation are many, such as it normalizes blood pressure, sugar levels and pulse rate. People will be attracted only if they know of the benefits. The benefits of meditation are manifold; it has organizational benefits such as enhancing efficiency, productivity, loyalty and less absenteeism. Giving employees time for meditation is the biggest investment any company could make.

India under Modi is focused on meditation and China is following him. We have so much, but we do very little. Why is that?

Your organization has a big role to play through the Business Today magazine as at least 90 per cent of top people in business and in the country read it. You have a role to play in encouraging to use these tools to rewire the brain and creating awareness of EI and tools such as mediation. The biggest CSR project you can do for this nation is to organize a seminar for people at the top on EQ, mindfulness and neuroscience. It's sad that those in organizations think that they know everything. But when we look at any big company to gauge the level of happiness of its employees, we will see that it's very low. I always say if you want to grow your business you have to have passionate workers. Having content workers is the best way to ensure success. You know that you have a content workforce when they are not driven by money or the salary. When I was CEO of SLT, people used to ask how I left office with a smile every day and my response was that I

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wanted to make the world a better place by making telecommunication technology accessible to all, which I did with a great deal of passion. When I am not tired at the end of the day, my spouse too reacts positively when I am home after work. Generally, from the moment we wake up, getting ready and driving to office is stressful. And in office we have to listen to criticism, more fault finding than good. That in turn creates more stress. Added to that is the return journey home, which is also stressful and then the interaction with the spouse is also stressful and people go to bed stressed. After about three years this turns into chronic stress and a brain scan will show this condition in the brain, which damages all the good qualities in us. This damage has to be repaired and it can be repaired.

Once when I went to the Kachcheri in Anuradhapura to attend to a matter I spotted a board that read 'Zero corruption zone', which was a first for me in this country. This was augmented with inspirational quotes from strong people such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. I was thrilled. I was told the types of services on offer. I chose the one-hour service, but they completed the task in five minutes. I inquired about the boss as I had never seen such an organization in this country. I was told the boss is the GA and so I went to his office. The GA had no security, and he had an open door policy. His table was neat and clean. I introduced myself and told him how impressed I was with his vision. His response was that he had been working there for many years and in all those years everyone that walked into his office did so with a complaint and that it was for the first time that someone had walked in to say something positive.

We fail to see the good in anything because from childhood our brain has been wired to see the bad in everything. In Australia people who use the public transport thank the driver as they get off the bus and the driver must be receiving hundreds of positive acknowledgements as he goes about doing his work; under such circumstances the driver will only want to do his job better, because he always hears words of gratitude. I asked participants in my workshops whether they have ever thanked a bus driver, and none of them had. When you appreciate someone with a thank you the stress

hormone in that individual ceases. Our bus drivers drive recklessly because they are stressed. The reality is that most of them control their stress with drugs. We always speak of politicians' corruption. Even when roads are constructed we accuse politicians of corruption. I bought this 20 perches of land 30 years ago for 10,000 rupees, today a perch is more than two million rupees. The value has increased because the roads and surroundings have been developed. But no one ever appreciates that fact or gives credit to the politician who did that. Even in an office environment we are so reluctant to speak good about our bosses. I am not reluctant to tell even the leader of this country if he has said or done something good. If you are emotionally intelligent you criticize someone out of kindness, not to bring him down.

How would you know the benefits of what you have been practicing?

You will not reap the outcome of a gym workout if you are not aware of its benefits. In addition, when you want to improve something that you have been doing, measuring it is a key factor. Similarly, people who meditate must understand the outcome of meditation and start measuring its outcome. In anything that we do, including going to the gym which is for the benefit of the body and meditation which is for the mind, one needs to know the outcome. It's not about the number of hours you put in. The outcome should be measured frequently, at least once or twice a month. It's important to ask friends and family whether you are doing well in managing anger, whether you are being kinder than before. It's pointless engaging in meditation for the sake of meditating, without knowing its benefits and measuring the results. Failing to do so will not bring about the change that you desire. Spreading the Dhamma will be a challenge when 80 percent of Buddhist monks in this country don't give priority to meditation because they are busy with day-to-day rituals. The basis of Buddhist teachings is meditation, which cleanses the mind. Meditation is not about retreating to the forest. You can drink a cup of tea, but do so mindfully, eat your food while mindfully consuming it. Some leaders meditate, but they don't know the benefits of it. One must know the benefits of anything before doing it. And improvement comes with measurement.

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Then again there is another scenario. Take for example someone who has been going to the gym for some time, suddenly gives up, and the outcome is obviously physical change. Similarly, when someone who has been meditating and using the tools, suddenly gives up, they fall back. If such a person had issues with anger management earlier, then it becomes worse once that person gives up meditation. Meditation must be a habit like brushing one's teeth, and then you will always be calm. Top leaders in the world, including people like Bill Gates spend time alone in the present moment. That half hour in meditation becomes the most valuable asset for family and business success alike. Our politicians who speak at press conferences are angry and make hateful speeches. And that's what our children see. Children in turn think that leadership is about speaking the way our leaders do. Our leaders are not seen as calm, as individuals capable of bringing people together and possessing the ability to solve problems.

Given your diverse experience can you tell us about your background in the corporate sector?

I am an Electronic Engineer specialized in Telecommunication. I come from a diverse business background and I have also worked in diverse cultures. I have worked in Saudi Arabia, Australia, USA and Sri Lanka. My first job was with IBM Sri Lanka and then I worked as a System Specialist for IBM Australia. I was employed as a Senior Advisor to Saudi Telecom. I was also the CEO and a Director of Mobitel in 2002. During that tenure I was able to transform the company to a more Sri Lankan management style and I was also able to deploy the fastest ever GSM network in the world, in nine months at Mobitel. I also worked in the capacity of advisor for the Sri Lanka Telecom Board and was a board member of Sri Lankan Airlines on an honorary basis. The job of a CEO is mostly to bring about change and change involves execution of large and complex projects and programs. Being in the ICT industry has helped me greatly. A key experience that I have is managing complex and mega ICT projects. My overseas experience and understanding of the best practices in multinational environments have been useful during my tenure as GCEO of Sri Lanka Telecom in 2012- 2015. ☐