

BUSINESS FEATURES

The odd, modern Yogi

Kambiz Naficy (MBA, MIA, MFA) is a renowned Persian meditation master and author who conducts seminars worldwide. He is on his third visit to Colombo in order to conduct his Leadership Skills and Stress Management seminars for MAS Holdings and Tata Motors. During the visit, Kambiz Naficy will also be conducting his "Joy of Life" meditation retreat for individuals at the Taj Hotel between June 15 to 23. An interview with Kambiz Naficy, Founder of the Joy of Life Organization.



Kambiz Naficy

Question: Kambiz, could you tell us a bit about yourself and your work?

K.N.: I am, first of all, delighted to conduct my third series of workshops and seminars in Colombo. This winter and last summer, some 1000 participants learnt the basics of my stress management techniques and because of the longer duration this time, we will learn more advanced theory and practices.

To give you some background about myself, back in the 80's, I completed my Harvard MBA plus another masters in international banking from Columbia University. I began my career as an international banker with American Express International Banking Corp. I was 26 and the young are also impressive; I looked with awe to the top people in Wall Street always searching for deep wisdom, vision, and a balance between personal and professional success. I couldn't find my role model there. Later, I established my own computer firm in Boston, Massachusetts; the search went on, but still the external order of things did not inspire a sense of authentic power in me. So, I decided to look within.

Q: Well I'm curious, did you find anything?

K.N.: It was a kind of a quiet stillness, a deep knowing that comes from relaxing into yourself; so totally that you come to know yourself and your potential better through stillness than through your busy mind.

All creativity, concentration, problem-solving, and charisma arise from a silent field that Einstein called "the Unified Field." All the answers are there, and I believe that authentic power emanates from that inner-knowingness.

Q: How does one access this inner reservoir?

K.N.: By lowering the busy brain waves from the Beta level (14 cycles/second) down to Alpha waves (7-6.5 cycles per second), and eventually down to Theta waves (3.5 cycles per second). The first couple of attempted relaxation sessions are difficult, but then you learn to use the breath, your oldest friend, to just let go and fall into silent depths. Letting go is much like learning to ride a bicycle.

Q: You seem to be kind of an odd, modern Yogi, linking human leadership potential to brain-wave activity!

K.N.: In twenty years of teaching, I have learnt that executives and business people like to hear scientific explanations about the potential of the Human Spirit, and how the Life Force can be harnessed to achieve success in the material world.

I help people achieve a state of relaxed awareness (Alpha and Theta waves), and in this state, concentration becomes very sharp, yet not strained. The meditative state achieved through certain breathing techniques, directly and positively impacts one's self-image, level of optimism, trust in colleagues, and one's level of "self-actualization."

Let me put it simply, to be truly successful, a leader needs to be happy at work and at home. Happiness is not possible without energy, concentration, harmony with others, calmness under pressure, and wisdom.

Q: You mentioned a Leadership Skills seminar; is that mostly a meditative seminar?

K.N.: No, actually there will be

plenty of dialogue and participants will review vital leadership skills such as: time management, delegation skills, human motivation, planning and goal-setting, steps in the decision-making process, and most importantly, how to win the cooperation and support of colleagues in projects that you are leading.

Q: When did you first become aware of the integration of the spiritual and managerial techniques?

K.N.: Interestingly enough, the Japanese became pioneers in the 1980's. In 1985, Katsuaki Oyama and Yukio Funai wrote a book entitled Super Meditation. The book immediately became a bestseller in Japan and some 500 large corporations began instituting the meditative sciences in their workplace—the results were amazing.

In every case, there was a significant decrease in physical complaints and illnesses, job-related anxiety, and inefficiencies caused by emotional reactions.

One year after implementing their corporate stress management program, Mr. Dairou Kawagoe, president of Tokyo Tahara, a candy and confection manufac-

er, reported a 112% increase in sales and 88% increase in profits.

Sumitomo Heavy Industries, a manufacturer of heavy machinery, introduced the same types of programs to 600 of its managers. A couple of years later, this is what Aimesa Funato, head of the health insurance division had to say:

"From the company's point of view, it is very good to have an easy flexible technique (meditation) to allow the managers to recover quickly from stress on their own. We as the staff of the health insurance division, would like more people in our company to learn meditation."

Q: What exactly is the Joy of Life Organization?

K.N.: I established this organization with the philosophy that authentic power and success emanate from inside-out. What I have learnt in my own life is that it is not possible to successfully manage the outer-world until one learns to master the inner-world.

Our mission statement is to raise the consciousness of management teams and individuals by integrating the ancient principles

of wisdom with modern management techniques. Thus far, we have trained some 800 people in the U.S., Indian subcontinent, Dubai and Iran. At the corporate level, we assist corporations in establishing and managing an ongoing personal development and stress management center. Your readers can learn more about the Organization from our website (www.joyoflifeorg.com).

Q: What brought you to Sri Lanka?

K.N.: Sri Lanka has an ancient link with the science of Kriya Yoga. It is also a land with tremendous respect for the inner world and the power of meditation. Most importantly it has dynamic corporations that value human resource development. The actual opportunity came through two very dear friends and students. This time moreover I was invited as a speaker at the 2nd World Yoga and Meditation Congress in Weligama. Sri Lanka has a nice and easy energy to it. I have brought my family along this time and hope to explore a bit of the emerald island.

—Mr. Kambiz Naficy can be contacted at joyoflifeorg@gmail.com

Three reasons why we are all so stressed at work

What a stress!

By Matthew Lynn

If your screen freezes, try ignoring it. As that report you've spent a week working on gets chewed up by the hard drive, shrug and forget about it.

Whatever happens, don't call the exhausted souls in the information-technology department. They are too stressed out already. The last thing they need is you shouting at them.

According to a survey released this month by Dublin-based consulting firm SkillSoft, 97 percent of IT professionals feel traumatized by their daily work. Indeed, 80 percent of them get tense just thinking about going to the office. Poor them.

Whether IT is really the most stressful occupation on the planet is something we could all have an interesting, if nervous, conversation about. What appears beyond doubt is that workplace stress has turned into an epidemic.

Why is that? After all, as the world becomes wealthier, and as billions get invested in new technology, you might imagine our working lives would get easier, not harder.

In reality, work has become so psychologically demanding because we choose to make it that way.

No one would deny that stress is everywhere. SkillSoft talked to 3,000 people to come up with its conclusion that handling the computers frazzles the nerves more than any other job. "In most of the organizations we work with, there is constant streamlining, there is multi-skilling, people are being asked to do more and more things," Kevin Young, managing director of SkillSoft, said in a telephone interview. "That is true right across different industries. The speed of change just gets faster."

Library Tension

Actually, the title of the most emotionally traumatized profession is hotly disputed, even among some fairly unlikely candidates. In the SkillSoft survey, the IT jocks came out at the top of the pile. They were followed by medicine and engineering. Yet according to a paper presented to the British Psychological Society earlier this year, librarians suffer more from stress than any other occupation.

It is hard not to sympathize with all of them. IT workers have to wrestle with technology that never seems to get more reliable or user-friendly. If our cars were as worky as our computers, we'd all keep a spare horse in the garden just in case. Librarians have to deal with people who don't bring their books back on time, or maybe fold down the edges of the

pages. (Well, maybe most of us could roll with those punches, but they are very gentle souls, which is why they didn't become firefighters or hedge-fund managers.)

Three Reasons

The rankings may well be meaningless. Everyone is under pressure at work. The interesting question is why jobs become more stressful all the time.

There are three reasons. First, hyperactivity is now a badge of honor. In the modern office, there is little place for the person who puts their feet up on the desk, pushes back the chair, and stares at the passing clouds for a few minutes. If you aren't rushing around like a hamster on steroids, the boss thinks you are lazy. You will be downsized before you've had a chance to say "manana."

Stress has been built into the DNA of office life. It's a way of proving that we are committed to our organization. If we aren't hyped up and chewing our fingernails, we aren't working.

Next, we have created an ever more demanding, round-the-clock business culture. Shops are always open in many countries. The call center will take our orders in the middle of the night. The markets switch from one time zone to another. As consumers, that's great. We can get anything we want, when we want it. As producers, it's not so great. We have to be plugged into the working world all the time — it is hardly surprising we feel under pressure.

Workplace Bullies

Yet most of us participate in the economy both as consumers and producers. So while we've benefited as the former, we have suffered as the latter.

Lastly, we have forgotten how to be polite and considerate when dealing with our coworkers, suppliers or customers. In the SkillSoft survey, IT workers cited bullying behavior by managers and colleagues as among the reasons they felt so stressed.

While people may get particularly ratty with the IT department, that is probably an experience repeated in many professions. For example, the British Medical Association said this month that workplace intimidation was rife in the National Health Service, according to the British Broadcasting Corp. Globalization, competition and the pace of change may all have played a role. Yet work is so stressful because we've chosen to make it that way. Maybe it's time we all just relaxed a bit. And perhaps even stopped shouting at the IT department — I'm really not sure they can handle the strain anymore. —Matthew Lynn is a Bloomberg News columnist. The opinions expressed are his own.

MBA is a costly route to be 'Married, But Absent'

In 1989, I completed the final examination for my undergraduate degree — a three-hour philosophy paper in metaphysics on (I kid you not) "Time." I promised I'd never sit another test in my life.

After spending a day at the London MBA Fair last week, I'm convinced that only a masochist would enlist for a Master of Business Administration degree. "It stands for Master of Bigger All," joked John Forgan, the course director at Kingston University London. "Married, But Absent," said Carl Tams of the U.K. Association of MBAs. "It really can take over your life."

Education specialists decry grade inflation, as easier exams and softer marking make it easier for each year's graduating class to surpass the results of last year's students. I'm more concerned about degree inflation; as more people sign up for MBAs, the myth that you need a higher degree to prosper in your chosen career becomes self-perpetuating.

In a London hotel conference hall stinking of aspiration, representatives of 43 European business schools laid out their glossy brochures and idealistic slogans on May 15 as bait for

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more than 700 MBA wannabes. I've seen less aggressive stallholders in a Cambodian flea market.

Pause, and an eager recruiter would materialize at your elbow extolling the virtues of Aston Business School ("Take On the World") or Cambridge University's Judge Business School ("One Year That Will Last You a Lifetime") or the University of Exeter ("Build Your Personal Brand Equ-

Future."

"These people really, really, really want you to do an MBA," said Miles Chester, 35, emerging from the crush with a fistful of cheap plastic pens and a pocketful of free mints. At the prices they charge, the schools really should be able to afford better freebies.

Cambridge charges 28,000 pounds (\$52,000) for its one-year MBA, said marketing manager Ruth Watson. Oxford Brookes

\$70,000 for a nine-month MBA program.

Empowering

Chester, a deputy head teacher at Sunnyhill Primary School in Streatham, south London, is worried that his progress to headmaster will be stymied if he doesn't gain a business qualification. Dharini Ganesan Raju, 33, wants to be an information technology consultant to not-for-profit organizations, and sees an MBA as the next step after working for Friends of the Earth.

They were among about 40 attendees who paid 50 pounds for a series of talks by the MBA association on how to qualify for business school. Two themes dominated the training sessions, which I attended. Studying for an MBA is miserably hard work, and can ruin your life. And most of the skills you can expect to acquire come via osmosis from your fellow sufferers, rather than from the school that gets your thousands of dollars, pounds or euros.

Stephan Schubert of the

Ashridge business school ("Inspiration. Innovation. Impact.") in Hertfordshire gave participants a taste of what to expect on an MBA course. "It should be an interactive experience," he said. "You should work, and I should just listen." Schubert then danced around the room, firing questions and dismissing answers like a jaded teacher killing time in a class of thick teenagers.

The core message of his presentation was that Sun Tzu's "Art of War" remains a primary source of management inspiration more than 2,000 years after it was written. "People have not added much since," Schubert said. I can pick up a copy of that for \$2.84 from Amazon.Com Inc.; tell me again why I need an MBA?

Tams of the Association of MBAs said a master's in business administration is "the global degree," and "the key business qualification."

"You learn as much from your fellow MBA students as from the lecturers," he said. There's also the alumni network and its asso-

ciated "cocktail parties" to help you get on in life.

Work the Network

The audience pressed Tams on the alleged benefits of an MBA qualification. "An MBA is evidence of dedication and commitment," he said. "Over 70 percent of MBA caliber job placements are via some form of networking. Senior executive roles mostly come from word of mouth."

So not only does most of your learning come from your fellow students, they are also the ones who will get you that shiny new job once you have qualified. "The dirty little secret of MBA candidates is that 75 percent of them want to change job or career," said Richard Montauk, the author of "How to Get into the Top MBA Programs."

Montauk gave some handy tips about playing the admissions procedure. Choose your referees carefully, for example; "you remember your life a lot better than they remember your life," he said. "So have them do a rough draft,

and then polish it up as necessary." Sounds a lot like cheating to me, but maybe bending the rules is part of the MBA learning process.

Competition is tough, "so at least pretend you know where you're heading, why you want to do an MBA in the first place," Montauk said. More than 46,000 students clamoring to get into business schools around the world sat the Graduate Management Admission Test in the first quarter, according to the U.S. Graduate Management Admission Council, based in Virginia.

For 945 pounds, a company called Kaplan Inc. will coach you through the exam, which covers analytical writing, quantitative

analysis and a verbal section to give an overall score out of 800. You'll need 680 points to get into the London Business School, the Kaplan brochure says; for Harvard Business School, the average is 708, at Cambridge it's 670 points.

Forgan at Kingston University said he's handled MBA applicants ranging from nuns to nightclub owners. Brandishing a copy of "The Ten-Day MBA" by Stephen Silbiger, he had this advice for the roomful of prospective students: "Read this. Save yourself a lot of time and money." Mark Gilbert is a Bloomberg News columnist. The opinions expressed are his own.

