

# THE MEANING OF FREEDOM:



# AN INNER REVOLUTION

# **THE MEANING OF FREEDOM: *AN INNER REVOLUTION***

As we move toward August 15th, preparing to celebrate 78 years of India's independence, we are reminded of a historic moment when a nation broke free from colonial rule. But as we reflect in the days leading up to it, we ask, Are we truly free today?

We freed our country 78 years ago but what about the invisible cages we still live in? Cages of fear, conformity, prejudice, self-doubt, and societal pressure. What does freedom mean in today's context, when the battles are no longer just political, but deeply personal?

This special edition of The Learning Blaze, "The Meaning of Freedom: An Inner Revolution," is not a celebration, it is an invitation to introspect.

## **EXPERIENCE TALKS...**

Stories of individuals who have broken free not from nations, but from expectations, patterns, and limitations. Their journeys reveal that the most powerful revolutions often begin within.

## **EXPERTS TALK...**

Thought leaders, professionals, educators, and mental health voices explore how freedom manifests in leadership, learning, work, relationships, and identity. They challenge us to question what personal liberty, autonomy, and empowerment really look like in the modern world.

This Independence Day, let's go beyond flag-waving and anthem-singing.

Let's ask ourselves: Have we truly unchained our minds?

Because the fight for freedom didn't end in 1947, it simply moved inward.

A heartfelt thank you to all our contributors for being part of this reflective journey. — BMA

*From the Barracks*

## 1t Col Sandeep Kapur

1t Col Sandeep Kapur is a proud veteran and seasoned leader, commissioned into the Corps of Engineers in 1988. An alumnus of NDA, IMA, Army War College, IIT Mumbai, and NMIMS, he took premature retirement in 2010 after a distinguished military career. A national-level yachtsman with over 15,000 nautical miles at sea, he has also coached India's junior yachting teams. Currently, he serves as Managing Director and Head of Corporate Services at Morgan Stanley India. Sandeep is deeply committed to diversity, inclusion, and championing Pride and veteran causes.

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## Col Amit Verma

Col Amit (Abu) Verma is a combat veteran and founder of AgileFauji, a purpose-driven advisory delivering agile, tech-first business solutions. With a strong foundation in military leadership, he brings deep expertise in infrastructure, defense tech procurement, contract management, and government relations. A futurist and deep generalist, he combines data, human insight, and a warrior mindset to lead with purpose and challenge the status quo. Guided by the ethos Naam Japo, Kirat Karo, Vand Chhako, he builds, motivates, and innovates with impact.

# **Farokh Tarapore**

## **Interview video**

**sandeep kapur**



# BOOTS ON GROUND, HEART IN NATION:

## What Freedom Truly Means

Col Amit Verma Retd - AgileFauji



Freedom is real for me, I have touched it, felt it, seen it slipping away and grabbed it back with all my faith. Freedom is not an abstract idea—it's a living thing. Army does that to you, tests your beliefs, makes you face your demons, clarity through challenges. I see it in faces of my soldiers, in moments lost and gained, in loss and courage. And often, I've seen it not in times of peace, but in the harshest conditions, right at the edge of life.

### Lessons from Loss

I'll never forget the day we lost Nk Mongchon, a young Naga warrior from a tiny village tucked away in Nagaland. We were in the middle of a counter-infiltration op near the Line of Control. He was bright-eyed, determined—a soldier and a dreamer, always talking about his family, his home, and what he'd build once he came back. When the moment came—when bullets flew and chaos broke out—he didn't flinch. He moved instinctively, shielding his brothers, giving cover. He took that hit that none of us saw coming. He didn't need to think about it; he just acted.

Writing that letter to his family that night changed something in me. I kept thinking if I could've done something differently as his leader, as his brother-in-arms. But in that moment of revenge to soothe my grief, I found something about Indian soldiering. Mongchon taught that the highest kind of freedom isn't about being fearless—it's about being free from thinking only of yourself. That kind of selflessness is rare, and he embodied it till his last breath.

### Courage in Dangerous Ground

There was a operation on the Northern Borders where we had to cross a known minefield to reach a key position. Everything got stacked against us—radios went kaput, GPS signal lost, rain clouds darkened the skies, a forest fire raced us to safety, and enemy was close as always. I had the map in my hand, of no use, all landmarks wiped out by the fire, mines exploding, a dozen lives on the line. One wrong step could take all of us out. Fear was in the air with all the smoke from the blazing flame. Any officer who says he doesn't feel fear is lying, fear is real. It's not about death, it's about honor, leading your men to safety, being brave, sometimes, a lot of sometimes, that is the only option.

In moments like these, all the feelings shut out. You fall back on your NDA training, your instinct, your brotherhood, your shared experience. If I could survive Corporals and Sergeants as a NDA Third Term, to reach the mess, anything is possible.

### Find a way or make one.

And surely enough, in that moment—right in the middle of danger—I felt a kind of clarity that only fear can ignite. A soldier kind of freedom. Because the fear falls away, the noise disappears, and you're just... there. Alive, focused, doing your job. And that's enough. We made it through. Because we trusted one another with our lives, we were brothers in the fight for our lives and we won. No other way.

### The Freedom to Serve

Our unit got pulled in for rescue of villagers during floods near the LoC. This was different from combat, but every bit as demanding. The terrain was a mess, villages cut off, people stranded. Administration counting on us. I witnessed incredible scenes during those days—my men, these fiercely proud Naga soldiers, carried elders, children on their backs, walked through neck-deep water, gave away their rations without a second thought. One of the villagers, a grandmother, broke down and hugged one of our jawans—a Naga soldier from Maharashtra. She said, "Beta, tum sahi time par aaye, bacha liya." We didn't sign up expecting thanks or blessings, but when it comes, it hits deep. That night, under the stars, with our boots dry for the first time in days, I realised we had just touched a powerful kind of freedom—the freedom to serve without any need for recognition.

## The Inner Revolution

Serving in the Army with these extraordinary men taught me that freedom isn't always about breaking chains. Sometimes, it's about choosing the right ones to carry: duty, honor, responsibility.

It's not glamorous. You carry weight. You lose friends. You come back aged beyond your years, he'll I felt old at 21. But you also come back knowing something most people spend their whole lives searching for—that deep, quiet sense of purpose.

Every time I look at the tricolour fluttering against the mountains, I don't see just a flag. I see the faces of men like Mongchon. I see what we stand for—what we protect.

## The Journey Continues ...

Now, even though I'm no longer posted at the border, those lessons continue. Every day, we're tested in different ways. The uniform might not be on my body, but it's burned into my heart, my very soul.

Freedom, I've been taught by life of soldiering, isn't something handed over on a silver platter. You earn it. You respect it. And you pass it on—not just with words but with actions, choices, and how you live your life. It's the discipline to do what's right, even when no one's watching.

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It's the discipline to do what's right, even when no one's watching. It's the strength to speak up when silence is safer. It's the service that expects nothing in return.

That's what freedom really is—for a soldier, for a citizen, for a nation.



# SURELY, THIS IS NOT FREEDOM...

CANCELLING PLANS AND CALLING IT  
“PROTECTING MY ENERGY.”

AVOIDING TOUGH CONVERSATIONS  
AND CALLING IT “INNER PEACE.”

IGNORING DEADLINES BECAUSE  
“I WORK BETTER UNDER PRESSURE.”

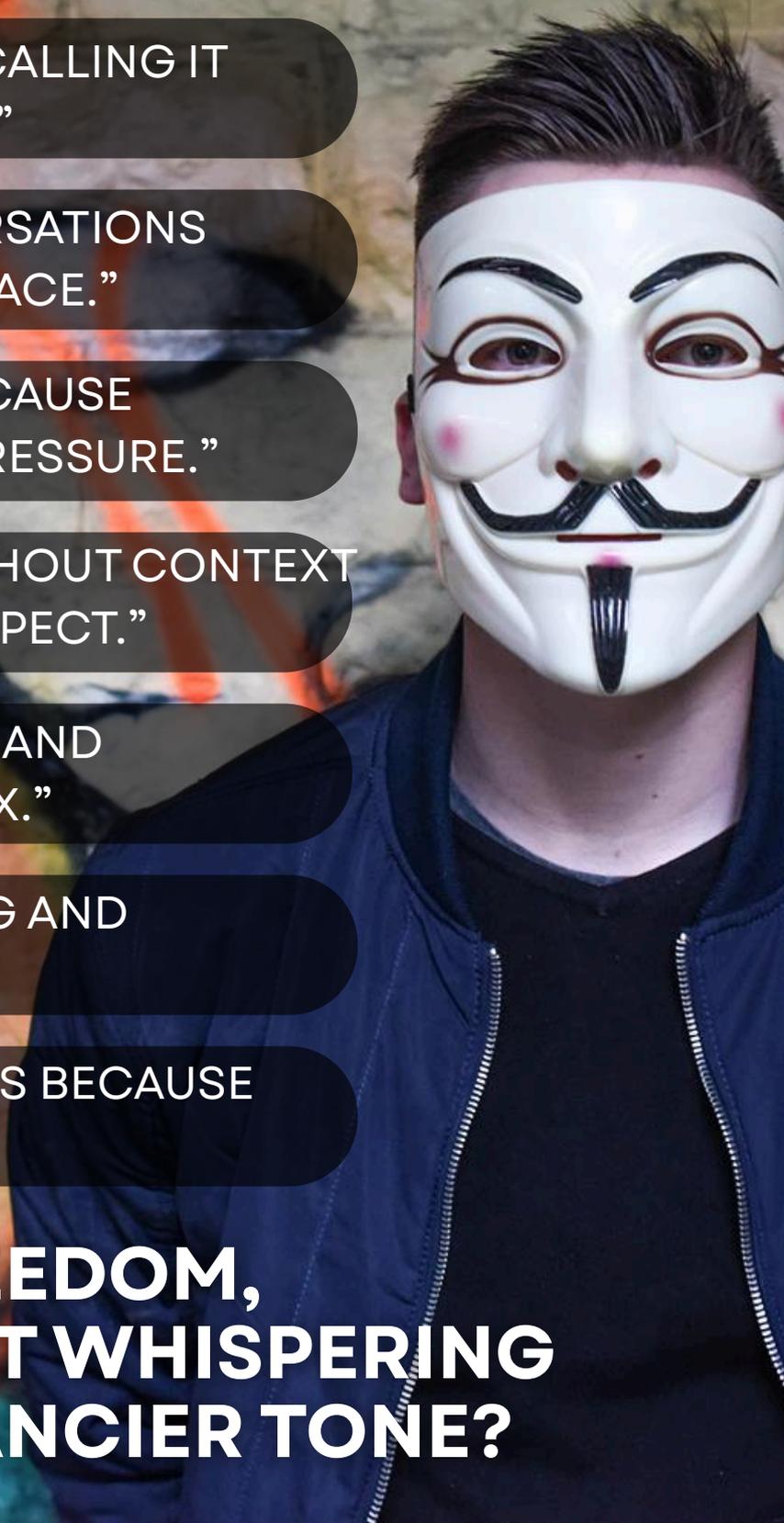
CUTTING PEOPLE OFF WITHOUT CONTEXT  
AND CALLING IT “SELF-RESPECT.”

NEVER ANSWERING CALLS AND  
CALLING IT “DIGITAL DETOX.”

SAYING NO TO EVERYTHING AND  
CALLING IT “BOUNDARIES”

QUITTING JOBS LIKE SOCKS BECAUSE  
“MY SOUL DIDN'T VIBE.”

**WE SCREAM FREEDOM,  
BUT ARE WE JUST WHISPERING  
EXCUSES IN A FANCIER TONE?**



*Wisdom of Experience*

## Dr. Ranjan Kumar Mohapatra

Dr. Ranjan Kumar Mohapatra is a seasoned energy sector leader, author, and global HR thought leader. A Mechanical Engineer from BITS Pilani, MBA from XIM Bhubaneswar, and Ph.D. in Management, he served Indian Oil Corporation for over three decades across operations, supply chain, and HR. As Director (HR), he spearheaded transformative initiatives—some of which became Harvard case studies—and also led IndianOil (Mauritius) as MD. A former Chair of Lanka IOC, he now serves as an Independent Director on boards like OFB Tech and MapMyIndia and mentors startups. He is the author of the bestselling book *Plain Speak Management*.

## Suparna Nayak

Suparna Nayak is a passionate and driven brand leader with about 20 years of experience in the media industry. Currently heading brand-marketing for Loksatta, a mass-market regional daily from the Indian Express Group, Suparna finds deep inspiration in the publication's credible content, independent voice, and fearless reportage. Her work is rooted in a belief that powerful storytelling can shape perception and build lasting connections.

## E.A. Vimal Nathan

E.A. Vimal Nathan is a leader who has consistently steered his career through clear vision and determination. Starting with BPCl in 1982, he rose to become Divisional Manager of Andhra Pradesh by 1997. After a decade-long plateau, he transitioned to BPCl's headquarters as All India Logistics Head in 2010 and later led the Industrial & Commercial SBU from 2017—driving strong growth in one of the most competitive segments of the petroleum industry.

## Sujata Chogle

Sujata Chogle is a seasoned HR leader and executive coach with 37+ years of experience, including as Executive Director (HR & Legal) at BPCl. She now coaches leaders on business performance, transitions, and women's leadership while also teaching as visiting faculty.

# Q&A WITH ME!

**DR. RANJAN KUMAR MOHAPATRA**

*Author & Independent Thinker Independent Director*



**LINKEDIN-**

## **FREEDOM, THOUGHT & THE INNER ARCHITECTURE OF LEADERSHIP**

***Question: Freedom is often spoken about as a right. But when have you experienced it as a responsibility or even a burden?***

To me, freedom becomes weighty when it's coupled with consequences. It is a right, which should not be infringing on other's right. I am sure every leader must have gone through it. As example, many a times, I had the autonomy to restructure my team amidst organizational flux. The technical freedom to act was unquestioned, but the responsibility to balance empathy with effectiveness was immense. It wasn't about what I could do, but what I ought to do. Freedom, in such moments, stops being liberating and becomes a sacred burden of stewardship.

***Question: What internal shifts must precede real, sustainable external change—whether in individuals or organizations?***

To me, the inner architecture always precedes the outer. I've learned that sustainable change begins not with frameworks, but with confronting our own biases, our own attachments, and need for control. For organizations, it often starts with leadership willing to let go of old identities. For individuals, it's about shedding the ego. Humility, I believe, is the first quiet shift that invites transformation.

***Question: Many talk about values and purpose. But how does one protect their core in moments of silent compromise or high-stakes decisions?***

I believe that it's the crucible of leadership. Values aren't proven in grand gestures; they're tested in the silent corners where no one's watching. One must have seen drivers stopping on red-lights, even in the middle of night, even when there is no one around. For me that's when the value is proven. Further, I've found that clarity helps. When you've taken time to define what non-negotiables mean to you, you're less likely to blur them under pressure. Sometimes, you walk away from a decision table not because you're weak; but because you have clarity. Protecting your core, to me, is about being able to look at yourself in the mirror the morning after! So called 'silent compromises' are not so silent after all. It creates volcanoes inside your conscience.

***Question: Have you encountered a moment where you felt the cost of not being free in your role or environment? How did you respond?***

Yes, vividly and many. There was a phase when speaking truth to power would have probably meant risking influence. I decided to chose silence. In hindsight, the cost wasn't just professional; it was hugely personal. A piece of authenticity went dormant. Eventually, I may have realigned, but that moment reminded me: if your voice is muted too long, your leadership begins to sound hollow rather than reverberate. Freedom at that moment meant to be truthful and more forth-coming.

***Question: In a world obsessed with speed and disruption, what do we risk losing if we don't redefine our relationship with stillness, space, or solitude?***

To me, we risk losing everything that matters. Speed gives you reaction. Stillness gives you insight. Without solitude, leaders become mirrors of noise, not stewards of meaning. Like many others, I've had my deepest clarity not in boardrooms, but in early morning walks or silent late-night reflections. If we don't revalue silence, we risk leading from impulse, not intention and mind you, that's a dangerous loss. In a nutshell, our relationship with stillness, space or solitude define who we are.

**Dr. Ranjan Kumar**



***Leadership, at its best, is less about control and more about coherence. And coherence demands inner clarity. Freedom isn't just about having options; it's about the ability to choose wisely, without losing yourself in the process.***

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# THE KEY IN MY HAND: FOR FREEDOM!

*“One of the marvels of the world—the sight of a soul sitting in a prison with the key in its hand.” —Rumi*

This quote has always made me pause and think. It emphasises something powerful that despite challenges and limitations, the power to unlock potential and experience profound freedom lies within oneself. At this point in my life, the process of finding myself has been freeing. My view of my skills, for example, is no longer limited but rather limitless.



That shift has been very useful for me, even on a basic level. Just knowing that I can improve, that I can learn something if it's important, this has had a big effect on how I live my life. I've come to see that not knowing something isn't the end of the world. If others can do it, why can't I? I used to make a huge deal out of that. But when you carry strong negative beliefs about yourself, the whole idea of change seems impossible. To set the context, around 10 to 12 years ago, when I first started this journey of self-discovery, I struggled deeply with self-doubt and low confidence.



**Suparna Nayak**

Vice President, The Indian Express Group

I used to think people who were highly confident were just born that way. I remember feeling like they came from a different universe and that I would never be one of them. I was overly cautious, avoided risk, and hesitated to pursue novel ideas for fear of failure. That brings me to my relationship with failure. When things didn't go my way, it only reinforced the belief that I was not good enough. I stayed well within my comfort zone. Anything outside of it would often send me into freeze mode. I avoided confrontations. Even the smallest bit of negative feedback would make me feel bad about myself. On the outside, I looked like an extremely hardworking person who was doing reasonably well. But on the inside, I was unhappy, stagnating, and desperate to shift out of that way of being.

Over the last 10–12 years, my search for happiness has brought me to an important realisation: the key to happiness and to true freedom is the ability and discipline to look within. This journey is ongoing. In fact, as they say, the journey is the destination. Freedom, for me, has come from building awareness of what I am thinking, feeling, saying, and doing. Of my values, my strengths, my beliefs, and also my shortcomings. By actively working to identify, challenge, and replace limiting beliefs, I've found that we can unlock our potential and live a fuller life.

Being in the present moment has been a game changer. Not carrying the judgement and burden of the past, or the anxiety of the future. Realising that actually, the present moment is most often just perfect.



## Some learnings along the way:

### ➔ Stretch Mode



Engaging with goals that involve some risk has helped me move out of my comfort zone.

Discomfort is where maximum growth happens.

### ➔ Using failure to learn



The shift in how I see failure, and how quickly I can get back up and look at

it objectively, has made a big difference.

### ➔ Self-confidence is a skill



I've found it through discipline and daily practice. I've learnt to redirect negative

better self-talk, and working with my mind rather than against it.

### ➔ Eustress isn't bad



This kind of stress keeps me on my toes. It challenges me, but in a good way.

### ➔ Feedback is information



Even if I feel bad at first, I ask myself if I can consider the feedback objectively.

I can always choose not to take it but only after really considering it.

**Perhaps the most important thing I've learnt is this: no outward challenge can truly be overcome without looking inward. The journey of self-discovery has not been easy. But then again life isn't easy. So why not choose your own hard?**

**That, to me, is freedom.**

# Q&A WITH ME!

**E A VIMAL NATHAN**

Chief Executive Officer, Vantage Logistics.



LINKEDIN-

## THE INNER VOICE

➔ **What does freedom mean to you personally?**

*T*o me, freedom is the ability to live life on my own terms—beyond societal expectations. It's about realizing one's full potential, taking purposeful risks, and staying true to one's passion with unwavering conviction.

➔ **A moment when you realized freedom isn't just external, but internal?**

*D*uring my 41 years of service at BPCL, the Bombay Management Association, and as Director & CEO of Bitumen Corporation India Pvt. Ltd., I faced various challenges. It was during the most testing times that I discovered true freedom resides within—confronting my own self-doubt and fears enabled me to lead with strength and clarity.

➔ **Mental or emotional barriers you had to overcome?**

*i* struggled with fear of failure, self-doubt, and a craving for external validation. Over time, I learned to trust my instincts, believe in myself, and remain focused on the broader vision. With experience and the support of those around me, I overcame these mental hurdles and began leading with greater authenticity and confidence. Thanks to the support of my personal and official family all along my work life period.

➔ **How did you create an environment for others to grow freely?**

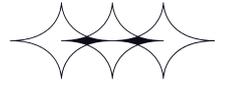
*A*s a leader, I prioritized openness, transparency, and trust. I actively encouraged my teams to express themselves, take initiative, and evolve professionally. This approach empowered individuals and enabled the organization to thrive collectively.

➔ **What advice would you give to emerging leaders?**

*T* rue leadership is rooted in purpose and passion—not titles or recognition. Focus on creating inner fulfillment rather than seeking external validation. Choose the freedom that lets you be your authentic self, take bold steps, and make meaningful impact. One book that resonates with me deeply is "Leader Who had No Title" by Robin Sharma—a compelling, though challenging, read.

➔ **Complete the sentence: "True freedom in leadership is..."**  
**"True freedom in leadership is the ability to inspire, empower, and uplift others while remaining grounded in one's values, purpose, and passions."**

# THE MEANING OF FREEDOM:



## An Inner Revolution

### Crafting a Personal Vision in Corporate Life

*In the Corporate World, it is essential to cultivate a personal vision beyond the immediate demands of daily tasks. Life is full of unexpected disruptions—job loss, role transitions, illness—yet the real struggle lies not in their unpredictability, but in our failure to anticipate and prepare for such nonlinear shifts.*

“

**Progress comes not from ambition alone, but from consistently aligning daily action with one's personal vision.**

”

-E A Vimal Nathan

### Personal Journey in Vision-Crafting

*Throughout my professional life, I have actively practiced vision-crafting to navigate my path with purpose and clarity. When I joined Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) in January 1982, I set my sights on becoming the Divisional Manager of a state. I studied the role's demands and steadily progressed, eventually assuming charge as Divisional Manager of Andhra Pradesh in 1997. After achieving that milestone, I encountered a career plateau until 2010, when I transitioned to BPCL's Headquarters as All India Logistics Head. Setting a new vision—to lead a Strategic Business Unit—I pursued leadership skills amidst resistance and eventually rose to become the Head of the Industrial and Commercial SBU in 2017 which is the most competitive Business in a Petroleum Industry. Together with my team, we achieved remarkable growth in both market share and profitability.*



# FREEDOM WITHIN: A WOMAN'S LENS ON TRANSFORMATION.



## SUJATA CHOGLA

Executive Coach, Educator and HR Advisor

Freedom is often associated with liberty and autonomy in the sense of "giving oneself one's own laws" – Says Wikipedia.

**While exploring freedom, the challenge is to seek an inner liberation through-**

### Understanding societal expectations:

Questioning and dismantling social patterns "What women should and should not do"

### Reconnecting with yourself:

It is the reconnection to your intuition, values, and essence beyond stereotypes and roles.

### Emotional Freedom:

Freeing your mind from self-doubt, fear, shame, that constrains you from speaking or changing.

### Building your Identity:

An identity which you cherish regardless of what the world wants to see you as.

However, true freedom comes with responsibility in managing the external environment-

- Role responsibilities - At home, at work and within your society.
- Constraints - In exercising your choices, whether family expectations, financial.

The choices need to be consciously made by evaluating the consequences that may follow, with a fall-back plan.

So why explore freedom? It is simply a pathway to transformation and achieving your dreams!





## Initial breakthrough -

My first breakthrough was during college days. Discovering my voice by participating in debates and elocutions. This brought about self-confidence to engage with people and some quick on the feet thinking skills. Moving from reticence to active engagement in college activities. The transformation set me free of my beliefs and brought me out of my comfort zone.

## Choosing an MBA education

In an era when jobs for middle class girls were in traditional jobs like banks etc, my choice of pursuing an MBA degree raised the eyebrows of relatives. My parents supported me at this. Choosing a different path in life required a strong conviction. The MBA degree changed my world view.

## Exploring at the job

Corporate work provided me with many options. The hardest option at that time was to get an opportunity to work in Industrial Relations. It meant working with employees and trade unions, largely a male domain. My stint in this area helped me find courage to speak out and be comfortable in my skin. A professional approach and knowledge of laws and human behaviour helped me enjoy this early job. This laid the foundation of my professional life.

## Keep learning

Transformation is also learning new skills. Moving to different areas of Human Resources -Talent Acquisition, Business Partnering, and heading Human Resource function at a major oil refinery added new skills. Raising my hand for new opportunities, like coaching, was also exciting, providing space for self- reflection and growth. My last corporate assignment was as Head of Legal - a different domain but exciting learning opportunities.

## Balancing the home with work

A tough task, but got to be done. I found the balance by keeping the values right, setting boundaries, choosing joy at home and work. Choices can be made, by weighing the consequences against your dreams. Anticipating the conflict areas and planning to manage them. A lot of creative skills needed!

## The side hustle

Teaching was a passion, leading me to be an educator to MBA students in the field of Human Relations. Helped me connect with the younger generation and changing times.

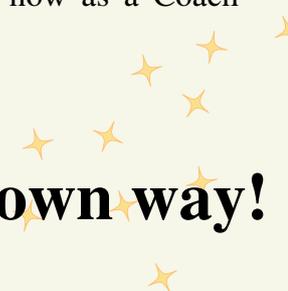
## Moving from Corporate to Coaching

After completing my corporate career, while academic work as an educator continued, acquiring a Post Graduate qualification in Executive coaching opened the world of Coaching. It helped me reconnect to my values of seeking knowledge and helping others.

## The Transformation

Working on freedom and inner liberation, fired by dreams to achieve, helped a gradual transformation in life, a truly exploratory journey of self - through younger times, corporate life and now as a Coach and Educator.

**Living life your own way!**



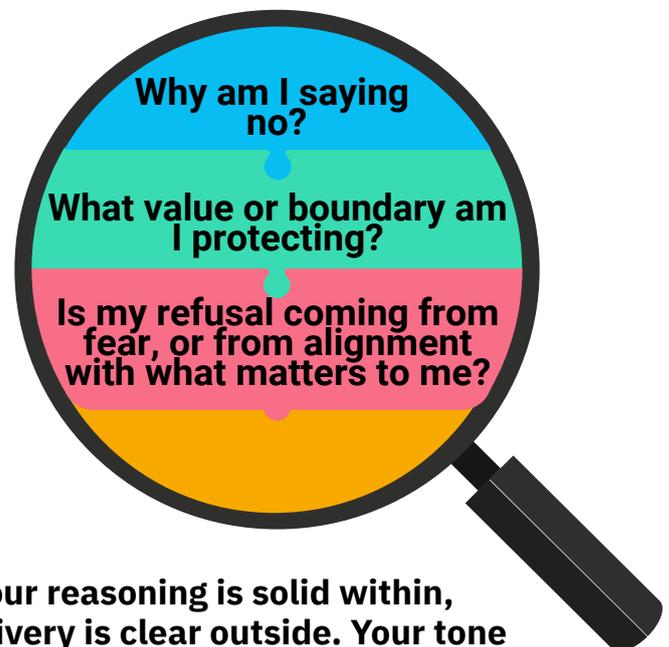
# NOT ALL 'NOS' ARE NEGATIVE: IT HOLDS BOTH POWER AND PEACE

➤ **- DISCOVER HOW SAYING NO WITH CONFIDENCE AND ACCEPTING NO WITH GRACE UNLOCKS TRUE FREEDOM AND EMOTIONAL STRENGTH**

We often treat the word “NO” as something to avoid, either saying it or hearing it. But NO is not rejection, rebellion, or rudeness. It’s a boundary, and boundaries build emotional clarity. The fear of saying no usually stems from insecurity. Will they think I’m difficult? Will I seem selfish or ungrateful? Especially at work, NO is often misread as resistance or non-cooperation. But here’s the truth: saying yes to everything doesn’t make you a team player; it makes you overwhelmed, scattered, and eventually resentful.



CONFIDENCE IN SAYING NO BEGINS WITH CLARITY. BEFORE YOU EXPRESS IT OUTWARDLY, YOU MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND IT INWARDLY. ASK YOURSELF:



**When your reasoning is solid within, your delivery is clear outside. Your tone shifts from defensiveness to assurance. The world listens differently when you are not conflicted inside.**

**And yet, there's another side to this freedom : accepting someone else's NO.**



Often, our ego gets bruised. We read no as rejection, disrespect, or disinterest. But others have boundaries too. Their “NO” isn’t always about us. It’s about their time, energy, and truth. Just as we want the freedom to say no, we must also grant others that same right without ego, without over-analysis. The healthiest relationships be it personal or professional are not built on constant Yeses. They thrive on mutual respect, space, and honesty.

Learning to say NO is self-care!

Learning to hear it is maturity!

So, let’s shift the narrative. No is not a wall. It’s a door that opens space for authentic choices, deeper respect, and true alignment.

Because real freedom isn't just about expressing your boundaries. It’s also about honouring other’s without fear or offense.

*Expert Advice*

## Mr. Deepu Awasthi

Senior finance executive and Managing Director at Cap-Street Finmart Pvt Ltd, he brings nearly two decades of experience in investment advisory, portfolio & risk management, and research. Deepu is also an empaneled trainer with NISM, empowering financial professionals across India.

## Ashwin Pasricha

Ashwin Pasricha is a certified CXO & Business Coach (PCC) with deep expertise in leadership development, talent architecture, and performance acceleration. He partners with business and HR leaders to drive impactful transformation through strategic coaching and leadership alignment.

## Dr. Rajini Venkatadri

An accomplished academic and Associate Dean at TBS Business School, she specializes in Human Resources, Organizational Behavior, and Soft Skills. As the TBSAF Coordinator, she plays a pivotal role in shaping future leaders through academic excellence and strategic coordination.

## Yatin Ruparel

A qualified Chartered Accountant with expertise in tax advisory, GST compliance, and audit services. Delivers accurate, timely, and value-driven solutions, helping clients navigate complex financial landscapes with precision, integrity, and a commitment to long-term financial growth.

## Dr. Indira Singh

A seasoned academic with expertise in entrepreneurship, pedagogical innovation, and research. She integrates theory with practical application to inspire critical thinking, drive innovation, and shape future business leaders through impactful teaching, publications, and data-driven insights.

## Spandan Thaker

Dr. Spandan Thaker, M.D. (Psychiatry), MBBS, is a highly trusted psychiatrist in Ahmedabad with over a decade of experience. Practicing at Mood and Mind Clinic in Ellisbridge, he specializes in treating depression, anxiety, addiction, and adolescent mental health.

# ENTREPRENEURIAL FREEDOM: BUILT, NOT GIVEN



## DR. INDIRA SINGH

Assistant Professor

Chetana's Institute of Management and Research (CIMR),

**Being your own boss is great... until you realize your boss never lets you sleep.**

There is something irresistibly glamorous about being your own boss- the thought has a seductive charm. No more clocking in at 9:00 am, no one breathing down your neck for that important report, and maybe even working in pyjamas with a cup of overpriced artisanal coffee. It's freedom, right? The freedom is real indeed!

Entrepreneurship is often painted as the fast lane to personal freedom, fulfilment, and flexibility of work. The idea is enticing- the thought of freedom to be your own boss, follow your passion and create something meaningful. This appeal is not without reason as entrepreneurship promises autonomy, flexibility and the possibility of shaping your own destiny. Yet, what goes unspoken is that this freedom is not handed over the moment one launches a venture. This freedom is built painstakingly with unwavering persistence- sweat by sweat, setback by setback, and sometimes, tears by tear.

In the book "The E-Myth Revisited", the author Michael E. Gerber dismantles the romanticized notion of entrepreneurship. The core message echoes deeply with the belief that freedom is painstakingly built rather than handed over. Another notable book "The Hard Thing About Hard Things" by Ben Horowitz offers a brutally honest look at the realities of building and leading a startup. It is far removed from the glamour often associated with entrepreneurship. The central premise aligns with the idea that entrepreneurial freedom is earned, not inherited. Horowitz validates the struggle, reinforcing that resilience, is what ultimately grants founder the autonomy they seek.

The case of Falguni Nayar, the founder of Nykaa, India's leading beauty and lifestyle retail brand is an example. Falguni Nayar left the corporate world at the age of 50 and launched Nykaa- a rather bold move. The motivation was autonomy and strong desire to create something of her own. But the road was anything but easy. Her journey exemplifies that entrepreneurial freedom is real- but it must be earned.

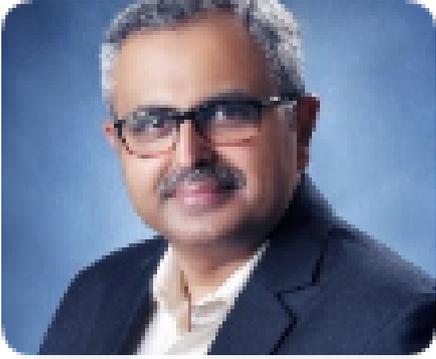
The autonomy and freedom also mean responsibility. It means waking up with numerous ideas and going to bed all stressed out wondering which one might trip the apple cart. This uncertainty clings like background music, like Wi-Fi at a crowded airport- unreliable, but always around. There will be lonely lunches, late nights and moments when the only one who believes in your idea is your cat and even, she may look sceptical.

It is about choosing your struggle. The clarity that emerges from navigating this struggle often brings a deeper understanding of one's strengths, values, and purpose. It creates not just professional success but unimaginable personal growth.

Still the question arises, why do it? It is because when you build and nurture something from scratch from ground up there is immense joy in watching it grow. It is watching your messy

# UNCLOCKED

REDEFINING WORK FOR A LIFE THAT MATTERS



**Ashwin Pasricha**  
**CXO & Business Coach, Leadership & Talent Architect**

## The Shifting Work Landscape

In recent years, organisations have increasingly embraced flexible work arrangements (FWA) to enhance employee satisfaction, wellbeing, and productivity. The post-COVID era further accelerated this shift, spotlighting the need for better work-life balance as professional and personal boundaries blurred. Remote work quickly became the new norm, shifting the focus from time spent working to outcomes achieved.

Initially, organisations grappled with bringing employees back to the office. The hybrid work model emerged as a middle path requiring a few in-office days each week while offering the flexibility to work remotely otherwise. This evolution emphasised employee autonomy, fostering a sense of control that significantly improved engagement and job satisfaction especially among Gen Z, now a growing part of the workforce.

As a result, many companies began shifting toward results-only work environments (ROWE), focusing on clearly defined goals, performance indicators, and accountability frameworks. Technologies such as collaboration platforms, cloud-based tools, and hot desking infrastructure enabled seamless work across geographies, making the workplace truly global and increasingly agile.

## Benefits & Challenges of Flexible Work

Flexible work offers compelling advantages across various sectors particularly in technology, creative, consulting, marketing, and sales. The top five benefits include:

1. **Higher Productivity:** With fewer distractions and reduced commuting time, employees focus on delivering results over simply logging hours.
2. **Greater Accountability and Transparency:** Clear KPIs and real-time analytics foster mutual trust, data-driven decisions, and reduce bias.
3. **Improved Employee Engagement:** Empowering individuals to manage their schedules enhances ownership, motivation, and performance.
4. **Better Work-Life Balance:** Flexibility allows employees to integrate professional and personal priorities more effectively, reducing stress and burnout.
5. **Enhanced Wellbeing:** Autonomy in scheduling supports mental and physical health, improving overall life quality.



Yet, FWAs come with challenges that require thoughtful navigation:

1. **Organisational Culture:** Lack of in-person interaction can weaken team cohesion and emotional connection to the workplace.
2. **Leadership Capability:** Leaders must shift from control to empowerment fostering trust, fairness, and inclusive practices.
3. **Communication Barriers:** Over-reliance on digital tools may cause delays, misunderstandings, or reduced collaborative energy.
4. **Performance Management:** Transitioning to output-focused evaluation demands new tools and a mindset shift to avoid micromanagement.

**Compliance & Legal Complexities:** Adapting employment policies, ensuring data security, and meeting labour laws require updated governance.



## The Future of Work: Human-Centered Design

Looking ahead, it's clear that flexible work is here to stay. Organisations are now exploring human-centered design (HCD) a problem-solving approach that places employee needs, experiences, and aspirations at the heart of how work is structured.

This begins with inquiry: What does a life that matters mean to you? By posing this question to employees, companies can co-create work environments that genuinely support fulfilment and purpose.

A valuable tool in coaching is the Wheel of Life, which helps individuals assess satisfaction across key areas of career, relationships, health, finances, etc. Ratings are plotted on a circle, creating a visual snapshot of balance.



This fosters awareness, prompts reflection, and identifies areas for intentional growth. In the same spirit, organisations can reimagine employee experience by leveraging AI-powered platforms to personalise development, monitor wellbeing, and enhance performance striking a dynamic balance between productivity and personal growth. In redefining work, we are ultimately redefining life. And a life that matters is one where work adds meaning not just output to the human experience.

# Freedom Through Doing the Right Thing: Ancient Wisdom for a Competitive World



**DR RAJINI VENKATADRI**

Associate Dean and IBSAF Coordinator  
IBS Business School



In today's fast moving and cutthroat world, it is easy to believe that doing the right thing is a disadvantage. Many of us feel that to stay ahead, we have no choice but to go along with shortcuts, office politics or decisions that do not sit well with our conscience. But if we look closely, ancient wisdom, especially from the Bhagavad Gita, tells us a very different story. It reminds us that true freedom is not just about outer success. It is about having an inner space that is free from guilt, confusion and regret.

The Bhagavad Gita, though set on a battlefield thousands of years ago, is actually a guidebook for the battles we face in our daily lives. It could be in boardrooms, dealing with clients, managing teams or even the quiet struggles we fight within ourselves. Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna was very clear. He told him that staying true to his dharma, his duty and his values, was the real key to inner freedom.

## AS PER CHAPTER TWO OF THE GITA.

There are three strong pillars that support this idea of self management. These are **Stitapragna**, **Nishkam Karma** and **Sattvic Guna**. Together, they give us a very practical way to lead a balanced and meaningful life even in today's demanding corporate world.

**Nishkam Karma** teaches us to give our best to our work without being obsessed with the results. In a world that chases targets, numbers and recognition, this is not easy. But think of how draining it is when we tie our peace of mind entirely to outcomes we do not always control. When we focus on putting in honest effort and let go of worrying about rewards, we actually enjoy our work more and sleep better at night.

**Stitapragna** is about maintaining steady wisdom. It means staying calm in success and in failure. This is not about being detached or cold. It simply means not letting every up and down shake us to the core. In organisations today where uncertainty is the norm, being a person who can hold their ground calmly is a huge asset, not just for oneself but for the teams and people we influence.

The third pillar, **Sattvic Guna**, is about nurturing qualities like purity, transparency and compassion. It means being fair, being genuine and doing the right thing even when no one is watching. In the short run, it may seem like others who cut corners move ahead faster. But in the long run, trust and respect are built only on these sattvic qualities. They bring a different kind of success that is solid and lasting

Interestingly, we see these ideas coming back even in modern leadership conversations. The growing focus on emotional intelligence, ethical leadership and leading with empathy are nothing but echoes of these timeless lessons from the Gita. Leaders who act with humility and take decisions rooted in values stand out not just because they reach the top, but because they take people along with them and build workplaces where others can grow too.

At the end of the day, freedom is not just about the choices the world gives us. It is about being free inside, from fear, from chasing endless validation and from the unease of knowing we compromised on what we believe in. The Gita gently reminds us that this kind of freedom is always within reach if we are willing to act with integrity, no matter how tough the circumstances.

In a world that often measures success only by how high we climb, it is worth asking ourselves another question. Can we sleep peacefully with our choices? Because that, in the end, is what real freedom feels like.

True success is not just about winning outside, but about finding calm within by doing the right thing, always.



**spandan**



# THE ART OF *Letting go*

*When excellence turns toxic, freedom lies in embracing the imperfect.”*

Perfectionism often starts with noble intent of desire to excel, to do things right, to hold oneself to a high standard. In my counseling practice, I meet high performers who take pride in precision and care deeply about outcomes. That’s admirable.

But when perfection becomes the only acceptable standard, it stops being a strength and starts becoming a strain. Not just on yourself, but on others, too. Creative thinkers often feel stifled by perfectionist expectations.

When every draft must be flawless, there’s no room to explore, risk, or innovate. Parents, leaders, and managers who unknowingly demand perfection can create environments where people feel judged rather than inspired. I’ve worked with professionals who feel paralyzed by a boss’s impossible standards, second-guessing their every move, fearing failure more than they seek growth.

Over time, this leads to stress, disengagement, even resentment. Perfection doesn’t just exhaust the perfectionist. It weighs down the people around them.

So what’s the alternative?

Three mindset shifts I encourage:

**1. Progress over perfection.**

Let things be a little unfinished while they grow. Creativity and clarity often emerge in the mess, not the polish.

**2. Curiosity over control.**

Mistakes are not setbacks, they’re sources of insight. When we replace judgment with curiosity, we allow people (and ourselves) to evolve.

**3. Compassion over criticism.**

Whether it’s your inner voice or how you speak to a team member and lead with empathy. It unlocks more than pressure ever will.

**Here’s the truth:**

perfection is a myth but excellence is a mindset. It values effort, integrity, and growth. It creates space for people to rise, not shrink. When we let go of the need to be perfect, we don’t lower our standards, we raise our humanity. And that’s where real freedom begins.



**yatin**

# 5 STEPS BYE DEBT!



## Get Clear

Make a list of all your debts—how much you owe, the monthly EMI, and the interest rate. Separate them into useful and avoidable debts. Start by paying off the high-interest ones first.



## Choose a Repayment Strategy

- **Debt Snowball:** Pay off the smallest loan first. This builds confidence.
- **Debt Avalanche:** Pay off the loan with the highest interest first. This saves more money overall. Pick the one that suits your mindset—and stay consistent.



## Build a Financial Safety Net

Create an emergency fund worth at least 6 months of expenses. Even saving ₹5,000–₹10,000 per month can protect you from taking new loans in future crises.



## Follow the 30-30-30-10 Rule

Divide your monthly income as:

- **30%** – for living expenses (food, rent, transport)
- **30%** – to repay loans or EMIs
- **30%** – to save and invest for the future (SIPs, PPF, etc.)
- **10%** – for fun and relaxation (dining out, vacations, hobbies)



## Change Your Money Mindset

Most people follow: **Income - Expenses = Savings**

Instead, switch to:

**Income - Savings = Expenses**

This small shift helps you prioritize the future and avoid overspending.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Escaping the debt trap is not about avoiding loans forever. It's about **borrowing wisely, spending mindfully, and saving regularly**. With awareness, discipline, planning and small changes, **anyone can move from financial stress to financial success**.

Debt may be a reality, but staying in it is not your destiny. Take control of your finances, because your journey to freedom starts with one good decision today.

**deepu**

## 5. Managing Debt & Liquidity

We must have liquid assets to cover 1 year's expenses. It is prudent to avoid lifestyle debt; and use strategic leverage only for appreciating assets. We should regularly review home / other loans and explore refinancing opportunities to reduce the burden.



## 6. Optimizing Tax & Compliance

We can use tax-efficient vehicles i.e. retirement plans, trusts, HUF, offshore structures to optimize tax payouts and better growth in assets. We should also look at various tax saving options i.e. section 80C, 80D, capital gains, gifting, etc. to reduce out tax burden legally. Filing IT returns on time & maintaining documentation for past years is basic hygiene for future peace of mind.

## 7. Succession Planning when I am not around

We should discuss succession and financial values with spouse and children and update nominees across bank accounts, demat, insurance, properties etc. It is always advisable to have a valid & updated Will to avoid future family feuds.

Financial freedom does not come quickly—it is a long-term game. Avoid get-rich-quick schemes or risky investments, invest regularly, and have patience to reach your destination.

And remember, when you achieve true financial freedom, numbers stop dictating your emotional state. This is a stage where your self-worth is not tied to income, net worth, or how you are doing relative to others; here, your inner satisfaction becomes the prime goal.

Finally, take an expert's guidance to plan your finances in a systematic way. An expert can guide you on your needs, plan out your financial goals, determine the corpus required, and help you achieve those goals by selecting the proper assets. Taking an expert's assistance ensures that you are moving in the right direction.

# 12 SIGNS, 12 ESCAPE PLANS



## Aries



### The "Burn it all down" Freedom Seeker

Quits, blocks, vanishes. Freedom first, logic never.  
**Motto:** "Chaos is my coping."

## Taurus



### The "Soft Life" Freedom Seeker

Luxury, naps, and zero calls. Escapes via food and fluff.  
**Motto:** "Nap > nonsense."

## Gemini



### The "Freedom of Speech" Seeker

Overshares, debates self, posts, deletes, repeats.  
**Motto:** "I said what I said."

## Cancer



### The "Freedom From Feelings" Seeker

Blocks friends, Unblocks. Cries. Sends meme.  
**Motto:** "I'm fine. Thanks for asking."

## Leo



### The "Main Character Energy" Freedom Seeker

Freedom = spotlight + drama + outfit change.  
**Motto:** "I am the revolution."

## Virgo



### The "Hyper-Controlled" Freedom Seeker

Plans spontaneity. Bullet-journals rebellion.  
**Motto:** "Freedom, but organized."

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# 12 SIGNS, 12 ESCAPE PLANS



## Libra



### The "Can't Decide" Freedom Seeker

Wants freedom, approval, and a group consensus.  
**Motto:** "You choose... no wait, I will... no you do."

## Capricorn



### The "Financial Freedom or Nothing" Seeker

Wants wealth, control, and no small talk.  
**Motto:** "Freedom = compound interest."

## Scorpio



### The "Silent Exit" Freedom Seeker

Deletes everyone. Posts a cryptic quote.  
**Motto:** "Freedom is disappearing mysteriously."

## Aquarius



### The "Rebel Philosopher" Freedom Seeker

Detaches emotionally. Says "it's a statement."  
**Motto:** "Free thinkers don't match socks."

## Sagittarius



### The "Nomadic" Freedom Seeker

Backpack, airport, no plan. Calls it "growth."  
**Motto:** "If I vanish, it's intentional."

## Pisces



### The "Peaceful Escape" Freedom Seeker

Disappears into books, dreams, and playlists.  
**Motto:** "Reality? I'm on Do Not Disturb."

# FINDING YOUR WHY IN A WORLD OF WHEN'S AND WHATS

FREEDOM

THROUGH

PURPOSE



**PURPOSE IS THE NEW PASSPORT TO PERSONAL LIBERTY**

## The Illusion of “Having It All”

Maya was unstoppable. A rising star in a global consultancy, she worked 70-hour weeks, had just landed a major client, and was already shortlisted for the next leadership program. She thrived on pressure, promotions, and praise.

When people asked why she pushed so hard, she had her answer ready: "Because I love what I do. I want to make an impact. I want to be the best."

But something didn't add up.

She ticked every box, but every win felt strangely fleeting. No matter the promotion, the bonus, or the applause, a voice in her head whispered: "Not yet. Not enough. Keep going."



# The Question That Changed Everything

It all came to a head during a leadership retreat, where an executive coach asked the group a deceptively simple question: "Why do you get up in the morning?"

Maya answered on autopilot: "To build, to grow, to win." The coach nodded, then gently asked: "Who benefits from your success, besides you?" That question landed like a stone in still water.

For the first time, Maya realized she'd spent years chasing excellence without ever pausing to ask what it was for! or who it was serving. We live in a world obsessed with whens and whats: When will I reach the next level? What's the next big opportunity? What more can I achieve?



# Purpose: The Root of Real Progress

Ambition is not the enemy. But when it's disconnected from a deeper purpose, it becomes a treadmill, fast, exhausting, and ultimately directionless. Purpose gives ambition roots. It doesn't slow you down; it gives your effort a destination. When you know your "why," you stop chasing more and start creating meaning. So how do you uncover your "why"? Try this:

- Go beyond the goal:- Ask: What do I hope this success will ultimately give me or others? Recognition? Security? Influence? Why does that matter?
- Track your energy, not just your output:- When do you feel most engaged, not just accomplished? What work makes you forget the clock?
- Shift from self to service:- How does your work or passion improve someone else's life? Who are you helping, inspiring, or lifting?

For Maya, that retreat cracked something open. She realized her true satisfaction came not from the deals she closed but from mentoring women in her team, helping them rise.

# Inflation Cools, but Cost Pressures Remain Persistent

Over time, she redesigned her role, eventually launching an initiative to support emerging female leaders across the industry.

She didn't abandon her ambition, she aligned it.

In a world of relentless whens and whats, your "why" is your anchor.

Purpose is the new passport to personal liberty because it lets you pursue success without losing yourself.

You don't have to stop climbing. Just make sure the mountain matters.

