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E-ZINE

Magazine of military veterans in the corporate
September 2025, Volume VIII, Issue 08

The ESG Opportunity



Environment

Social



Governance



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MESSAGE

from the
EDITOR



Iqbal Singh

Beyond Duty: Veterans and the Imperative of ESG

Dear Readers,

In the lexicon of modern business and global policy, few acronyms have risen to prominence as rapidly as **ESG**. Standing for **Environmental, Social, and Governance**, it represents a paradigm shift—a move from a singular focus on profit to a broader, more holistic understanding of a company's impact. For too long, ESG was viewed as a peripheral concern, a "nice-to-have" corporate social responsibility initiative. That time has passed. Today, ESG is an imperative, not an option, for any organization committed to sustainable development and long-term viability.

The world is facing unprecedented challenges, from climate change and resource scarcity to social inequality and ethical dilemmas. The solutions to these complex problems require more than just technological innovation; they demand a fundamental change in how we operate, lead, and invest. This is where the principles of ESG become non-negotiable. The market is shifting, with investors, consumers, and regulators increasingly demanding transparency and accountability. What this does is it opens up a new frontier of opportunity for job seekers as well as entrepreneurs. This is the reason we have adopted this as a theme this month.

As the global economy reorients itself around ESG principles, a new sector is emerging, brimming with jobs that require a unique blend of technical expertise, strategic thinking, and a commitment to mission. This "sunrise" industry is creating a plethora of roles in areas such as renewable energy project management, sustainable supply chain logistics, corporate governance and ethics, and climate risk analysis.

For military personnel nearing the end of their service, this convergence of a growing sector and a need for specific skill sets presents a golden opportunity. Veterans possess a unique and valuable skill set: they are natural leaders, adept at strategic planning, and skilled at executing complex operations under pressure. They are trained to assess risk, work collaboratively in diverse teams, and demonstrate an unwavering commitment to a cause larger than themselves. These are precisely the qualities that forward-thinking organizations are now seeking to drive their ESG initiatives.

A New Feature: Veterans' Affairs Dialogues

We are proud to announce a new feature in our magazine: **Veterans' Affairs Dialogues**.

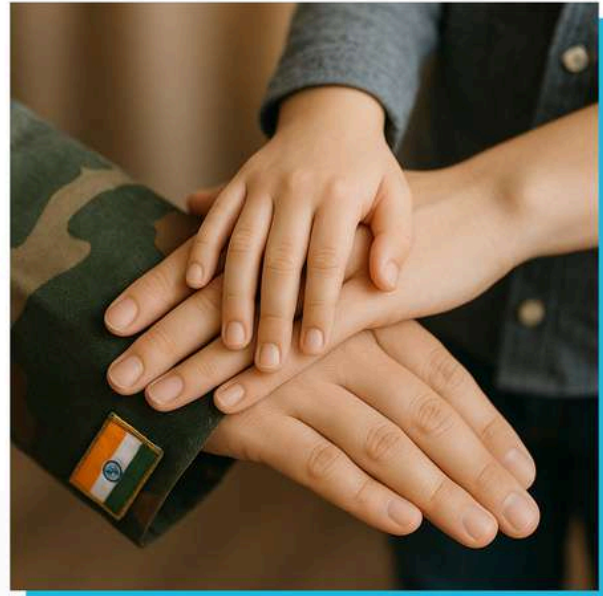
In this monthly series, we will sit down with individuals working tirelessly in the field of veterans' welfare. We will interview leaders from non-profits, government agencies, and the private sector who are dedicated to supporting our veterans. This month we have interviewed the Director Defence Services Welfare, Punjab.

Happy reading!



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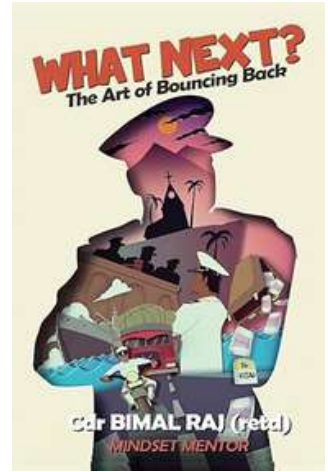
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Theme Section

The ESG Opportunity

ESG – A Massive Sunrise Opportunity

By Iqbal Singh



Understanding the ESG Opportunity is Important to Succeed in the Future

What is ESG?

ESG stands for Environmental, Social, and Governance—a framework for measuring how organizations manage their impact on the planet, people, and how transparently and ethically they are run. ESG goes beyond financial performance to consider non-financial criteria:

- **Environmental:** How a company stewards natural resources, manages pollution and waste, addresses climate change, and minimizes its ecological footprint.
- **Social:** How it treats employees, the community, human rights, diversity, equality, and consumer protection.
- **Governance:** The transparency and fairness of its leadership, board composition, executive pay, audits, and shareholder rights.

How Did ESG Come About?

The roots of ESG date back several decades—and even centuries in ethical investing by religious groups. The movement gained pace in the 1970s with ethical investment funds and environmental activism, but the modern idea crystallized in the early 2000s:

- **Early milestones:** The launch of ethical investment funds (like Pax World Funds in 1971) protested issues such as the Vietnam War. The UN's Brundtland Commission (1987) popularized "sustainable development"—balancing environment, society, and economy.
- **2004 UN Global Compact:** The UN's "Who Cares Wins" report officially coined the term ESG, urging companies and investors to integrate these factors long-term.
- **Mainstream Adoption:** Social movements (anti-apartheid, civil rights), environmental disasters, and regulatory changes forced ESG into the spotlight, making responsible business a global expectation and cornerstone for investors, governments, and consumers.

Why is ESG Significant?

ESG is now central to how businesses and investors define value, risk, and long-term sustainability:

- **Risk Management:** Strong ESG practices help companies navigate risks such as environmental regulations, reputational damage, and social unrest.
- **Investor Attraction:** A majority of investors use ESG criteria to screen potential investments, seeking companies aligned with their values

and promising sustainable returns.

- **Corporate Reputation:** ESG reporting signals transparency, builds brand loyalty, and attracts top talent. Companies with robust ESG scores often enjoy lower capital costs and enhanced access to investment.
- **Societal Benefits:** Beyond profit, ESG encourages organizations to contribute to climate action, social justice, and good governance—essential for sustainable development in today's interconnected world.

In summary: ESG marks a shift from short-term profit to holistic value creation. For military veterans—and indeed for all stakeholders—understanding ESG means recognizing the growing expectation that organizations do good, minimize harm, and operate responsibly for future generations.

Why is ESG Essential ?

ESG is essential because it helps organizations address major environmental, social, and governance challenges, making their operations more sustainable, ethical, and resilient for the long term.

Implementing ESG is needed for several key reasons:

- **Sustainable Development:** ESG enables companies to reduce pollution, promote social justice, and ensure transparent governance, directly contributing to global sustainability goals.
- **Risk Management:** By proactively adopting ESG practices, organizations can identify and mitigate risks such as regulatory fines, reputational damage, and supply chain disruptions.

- **Investor and Consumer Demand:** Investors increasingly prefer companies with strong ESG performance, linking it to lower risk and better long-term financial returns, while consumers are willing to pay more for ethical and sustainable products.
- **Competitive Advantage:** Companies with robust ESG frameworks tend to attract and retain top talent, improve their brand reputation, gain loyalty from stakeholders, and differentiate themselves from competitors.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Governments are tightening regulations around sustainability and ethical business, making ESG necessary to avoid penalties and align with evolving legal standards.
- **Innovation and Efficiency:** Embracing ESG drives companies to improve processes, adopt new technologies, and reduce costs through greater operational efficiency and resource use.

In summary, the need for ESG arises from growing expectations—from regulators, investors, employees, and the public—that organizations should operate responsibly, safeguard the environment, contribute to society, and maintain ethical governance, all of which are now viewed as critical to long-term success.

What Are the Various Sub-domains of ESG?

ESG is a framework for evaluating an organization's performance across three key domains: Environmental, Social, and Governance. Each domain includes a wide range of specific factors that reveal a company's commitment to sustainability and ethical practices

ESG is a framework for evaluating an organization's performance across three key domains: Environmental, Social, and Governance. Each domain includes a wide range of specific factors that reveal a



ESG Professionals at Work

Source: Freepik

company's commitment to sustainability and ethical practices.

Environmental (E) 🌍

This domain focuses on a company's impact on the natural world. It assesses how an organization manages its ecological footprint, risks, and opportunities related to the environment.

- **Climate Change & Emissions:** Measures a company's carbon footprint, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and strategies for climate change mitigation, such as adopting renewable energy sources.
- **Resource Management:** Looks at the efficiency of a company's use of natural resources like water and raw materials, as well as its efforts in waste management, pollution control, and recycling.
- **Biodiversity & Land Use:** Assesses the impact of a company's operations on local ecosystems and its commitment to conservation and preventing deforestation.
- **Carbon Footprint:** Total greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Energy Consumption:** Efficiency and amount of energy used.
- **Renewable Energy Usage:** Adoption of sustainable sources.
- **Waste Management:** Reducing, recycling, and safe disposal.
- **Air, Water & Soil Pollution:** Minimizing environmental contamination.
- **Resource Management:** Sustainable sourcing of materials and water.
- **Heatwave Mitigation:** Strategies against climate-related risks.
- **Biodiversity & Land Use:** Impact on natural habitats and restoration.

- **Circular Economy & Circular Supply Chains:** Maximizing resource lifecycle and minimizing waste.
- **Product & Service Innovation:** Developing environmentally-friendly products.

Social (S) 🧡

This domain examines how a company manages its relationships with its employees, suppliers, customers, and the communities where it operates. It's all about the "people" aspect of business.

- **Labour & Human Rights:** Evaluates working conditions, employee health and safety, fair wages, and a commitment to human rights throughout the company's supply chain.
- **Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI):** Focuses on the company's efforts to foster an inclusive workplace, including diversity in hiring, leadership, and compensation.
- **Customer & Community Relations:** Assesses a company's commitment to product safety, data privacy, and its positive impact on local communities through charitable giving or other engagement.
- **Labour Standards:** Fair wages, safe conditions, and progression opportunities.
- **Human Rights:** Respect and promotion of human rights throughout operations and supply chains.
- **Diversity & Inclusion:** Fostering an equitable workplace for all.
- **Community Engagement:** Supporting local communities and societal development.
- **Workplace Health & Safety:** Ensuring employee safety and well-being.

- **Customer Relationship:** Ethical dealings with clients and product responsibility.
- **Employee Training & Development:** Investing in employee growth.
- **Minorities & Indigenous Peoples:** Protecting the rights of vulnerable groups.
- **Collective Bargaining & Freedom of Association:** Supporting workers' rights to organize.

Governance (G)

This domain pertains to a company's internal systems, controls, and leadership. It ensures transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. It's the "how" behind a company's operations.

- **Corporate Leadership:** Looks at the structure of the board of directors, the independence of its members, and how executive compensation is tied to performance and long-term value creation.
- **Business Ethics:** Assesses a company's policies on anti-bribery, anti-corruption, and political contributions, as well as its overall ethical values.
- **Risk Management & Audits:** Examines the effectiveness of internal controls, financial audits, and how the company manages risks related to ESG factors.
- **Board Structure & Effectiveness:** Composition and functioning of the board.
- **Corporate Ethics:** Code of business conduct and ethical decision-making.
- **Executive Compensation:** Transparent and fair remuneration.
- **Risk Management:** Identifying and managing business risks.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** Dialogue with investors and other stakeholders.

- **Compliance:** Adhering to laws and regulations.
- **Internal Controls & Audits:** Ensuring company integrity.
- **Shareholder Rights:** Fairness and protection for shareholders.

Additional Cross-Cutting Domain

• **Health & Safety:** Sometimes treated as a separate focus domain — establishing standards for a safe and healthy workplace, covering both employees and operations.

Key Employee Roles in ESG

1. **ESG Analyst / Specialist:** ESG Analysts evaluate a company's performance across environmental, social, and governance factors to inform business and investment decisions. They work for investment firms, rating agencies, or within a company's sustainability team.

- **Skills:** Strong analytical and quantitative skills, research proficiency, data analysis, and critical thinking. They must be able to interpret complex data and stay informed on global ESG standards.
- **Qualifications:** A bachelor's or master's degree in finance, economics, environmental science, or business with a focus on sustainability.
- **Certifications:** The CFA Institute Certificate in ESG Investing, SASB FSA Credential (Fundamentals of Sustainability Accounting), and the GARP SCR (Sustainability and Climate Risk) are highly valued.

2. **Sustainability Manager:** A Sustainability Manager is responsible for developing,

implementing, and overseeing a company's overall sustainability strategy. This is a highly strategic role that requires a mix of technical knowledge and management skills.

- **Skills:** Excellent communication and collaboration skills to engage with diverse stakeholders, project management, complex problem-solving, and a deep understanding of sustainability frameworks.
- **Qualifications:** A bachelor's or master's degree in environmental management, sustainable business, or a related field. Professional experience in corporate social responsibility or environmental health and safety is often required.
- **Certifications:** GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) Standards Certified, LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) for those in construction, or ISO 14001 certification.

3. ESG Consultant: ESG Consultants work for consulting firms, advising clients on how to develop and implement their ESG strategies. They help companies identify risks, improve performance, and prepare for evolving regulations and reporting standards.

- **Skills:** Strong analytical, communication, and presentation skills. They must be adaptable and have project management expertise. Knowledge of different industries and their specific ESG challenges is a major plus.
- **Qualifications:** Typically a bachelor's or master's degree in a business, finance, or environmental-related field. Prior experience in consulting or a corporate sustainability role is beneficial.
- **Certifications:** Certifications from

organizations like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) or the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board (SASB) are highly relevant for reporting and strategy roles.

4. Sustainable Finance Professional: This is an emerging role within the financial sector. Sustainable Finance Professionals focus on integrating ESG factors into financial products and services, such as green bonds, impact investing, and sustainable lending.

- **Skills:** A strong understanding of both traditional finance and sustainability principles. They must have financial acumen, risk assessment abilities, and knowledge of sustainable finance frameworks like the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures (TCFD).
- **Qualifications:** A degree in finance, economics, or a related field. Advanced degrees or specializations in sustainable finance are increasingly common.
- **Certifications:** The CFA Institute Certificate in ESG Investing and the Certified ESG Analyst (CESGA) are particularly useful for this career path.

5. ESG Reporting & Communications Specialist: These professionals are the storytellers of ESG. They are responsible for collecting, analyzing, and communicating a company's ESG performance to stakeholders through sustainability reports, annual reports, and other communication channels.

- **Skills:** Excellent written and verbal communication, data analysis, attention to detail, and a deep understanding of ESG reporting frameworks.
- **Qualifications:** A background in

communications, marketing, business, or environmental science.

- **Certifications:** Certifications in major reporting frameworks like GRI and SASB are crucial as they provide the technical knowledge needed to produce compliant and credible reports.



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Common ESG Roles

Role	Description & Main Functions
ESG Analyst	Collects/analyzes ESG data, monitors compliance, reports, supports strategy
ESG Manager/Sustainability Manager	Develops/oversees ESG strategy, coordinates initiatives, sets targets, leads reporting.
ESG Reporting Specialist	Prepares ESG disclosures and sustainability reports for regulators and stakeholders.
ESG Product Manager	Designs products/services with environmental/social benefits.
Carbon Accounting Specialist	Quantifies emissions, analyzes environmental impact, sets reduction goals.
Corporate Governance Executive	Ensures compliance, monitors governance KPIs, manages board processes.
ESG Data Analyst	Processes ESG metrics, translates data into insights, builds scorecards.
Risk Manager (ESG)	Assesses and mitigates ESG-aligned risks (compliance, reputation, climate, etc.).
Community/Social Impact Specialist	Designs/implements programs for local community engagement and social

Chief Sustainability Officer	Leads company-wide sustainability and ESG strategy, reports to executives.
Sustainability Communications Specialist	Manages stakeholder communication.
ESG Change Management Lead	Drives ESG adoption, trains teams, manages change initiatives.

Key Skills for ESG Roles

- Understanding of ESG frameworks (e.g., GRI, SASB, BRSR, SDGs)
- Data analysis (Excel, Power BI); quantitative skills
- Financial analysis and business acumen
- Regulatory compliance knowledge
- Sustainability management and reporting
- Written and verbal communication (stakeholder engagement)
- Project management, teamwork, and collaboration
- Critical thinking, strategic planning, adaptability

Typical Certifications

- GRI Standards Certification (Global Reporting Initiative)
- CSR-P (Centre for Sustainability and Excellence)
- FSA Credential (Sustainability Accounting Standards Board/IFRS Foundation)
- CFA ESG Investing Certificate
- ISO 14001 (Environmental Management)
- ISO 45001 (Occupational Health and Safety)
- ISO 50001 (Energy Management)
- ISO 14064 (Greenhouse Gas Accounting)

Typical Educational Qualifications

- Bachelor's or Master's degree in environmental science, sustainability, business administration, finance, economics, social sciences, or engineering
- Specialized degrees: Sustainability Management, Corporate Governance, Environmental Policy

Other Requirements

- Practical experience through internships, volunteering, or non-profit work in related fields
- Familiarity with ESG regulations, impact assessments (EIA, SIA, LCA)
- Passion for sustainability and ethical business practices

Notes

- Entry and mid-level roles (Analyst, Reporting Specialist) usually need undergraduate degrees, some internship/practical experience, and a basic ESG certification.
- Managerial and strategic roles (ESG Manager, Chief Sustainability Officer) typically require extensive experience, an advanced degree, multiple certifications, and leadership qualities.
- Technical roles (Carbon Accounting, ESG Data Analysts) need a mix of analytical skills, industry-specific certifications, and data science proficiency.

ESG job profiles are dynamic, with a growing need for multidisciplinary talent—blending business, analytics, sustainability, and communication skills.

Entrepreneurial Opportunities in ESG

The ESG space offers numerous entrepreneurial opportunities as businesses and consumers increasingly prioritize sustainability and ethical practices. These ventures often solve problems related to environmental impact, social inequality, or corporate transparency. To succeed, an entrepreneur needs a specific blend of skills, qualifications, and personal attributes.

Here are some key areas with high growth potential for ESG-focused businesses:

- **Environmental Technology (Cleantech)**  : Startups can develop new technologies for renewable energy, energy efficiency, waste management, or water conservation. This includes creating solutions like small-scale solar power systems, smart home energy monitors, or advanced recycling technologies.
- **Sustainable Products & Services**  : This area is focused on the consumer market. Opportunities include businesses that create and sell eco-friendly products (e.g., biodegradable packaging, sustainable fashion, natural cleaning supplies), or provide services like upcycling, composting, and green cleaning.
- **ESG Data & Software Solutions**  : With the increasing demand for ESG reporting, there is a need for technology to simplify the process. Entrepreneurs can create software

platforms that track and analyze company's carbon footprint, manage supply chain ethics, or automate the generation of ESG reports for investors and regulators.

- **Consulting & Advisory Services**  : Many companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), lack the internal expertise to implement ESG strategies. A consultancy can help them with everything from assessing their current impact to developing a long-term sustainability plan and ensuring compliance with regulations.
- **Carbon Accounting & Offsetting:** Offering platforms/tools for tracking, offsetting, and reducing carbon footprints for businesses and individuals.
- **Circular Economy Ventures: Businesses** focusing on recycling, upcycling, waste reduction, and circular supply chains (e.g., biodegradable packaging, reuse platforms).
- **Green Finance & Impact Investing:** Launching funds, fintech platforms, or advisory services for green bonds, ESG investing, or social impact portfolios.
- **Sustainable Product Innovation:** Developing eco-friendly consumer goods—clothing, food, packaging, toys, or technology.
- **ESG Data & Reporting Tech: Building** SaaS solutions for ESG data collection, analytics, assurance, and regulatory reporting.
- **Ethical & Socially Conscious Platforms** : This category includes businesses that foster social good. Examples are creating a platform for fair-trade artisans to sell their goods, a startup that connects skilled volunteers with non-profits, or a sustainable marketplace" that only lists products

vetted for their ESG credentials.

- **Social Enterprise:** Addressing social issues such as education, healthcare, diversity/inclusion, fair trade, or community engagement.
- **Sustainable Construction & Real Estate:** Promoting green buildings, energy-efficient retrofits, and eco-friendly materials.
- **AgriTech & Sustainable Food:** Urban farming, organic food delivery, plant-based alternatives, and regenerative agriculture.
- **Eco-Tourism:** Offering low-environmental-impact travel experiences and sustainability education.

Skills Required to Succeed

To thrive in the ESG entrepreneurial space, a founder needs more than just a good business idea.

- **Deep Subject Matter Expertise:** You need a solid understanding of at least one of the three ESG pillars—environmental science, social policy, or corporate governance. This allows you to identify genuine problems and create credible solutions.
- **Analytical & Data Skills:** The ESG field is data-driven. Entrepreneurs must be able to collect, analyze, and interpret complex data to measure impact and demonstrate value. Proficiency with data analysis tools and an understanding of ESG reporting frameworks (like GRI and SASB) are crucial.
- **Strategic Thinking & Problem-Solving:** You must be able to translate big, abstract challenges like "climate change" or "supply chain transparency" into a viable business

- **model.** This requires the ability to think critically, identify market gaps, and develop innovative solutions.
- **Excellent Communication & Storytelling:** As an ESG entrepreneur, you're not just selling a product; you're selling a mission. You need to clearly articulate your company's purpose and impact to attract investors, customers, and talented employees.
- **Adaptability & Resilience:** The ESG landscape is constantly evolving with new regulations and technologies. Successful entrepreneurs in this space must be adaptable, open to new information, and resilient in the face of challenges.
- **Strong Ethical Foundation:** Authenticity is key. Your personal and professional values must align with your company's mission. A lack of genuine commitment to ESG principles will undermine credibility and make it difficult to build trust with stakeholders.

Entrepreneurial opportunities in the ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) space are rapidly expanding, driven by global sustainability trends, investor demand, regulatory changes, and consumer preferences. Here are key business opportunities and the skills needed to succeed:

Additional Notes

- Many opportunities in the ESG space require domain-specific technical knowledge—engineers in renewable energy, data scientists in ESG reporting, product managers in sustainable fashion, etc.
- Credentials like GRI Standards Certification, CFA ESG Investing, ISO

standards, or sustainability management courses add credibility but are not always mandatory.

- Success depends on continuous learning, networking in the impact ecosystem, and a passion for sustainability.

ESG entrepreneurship blends profit with purpose, offering both societal value and strong market potential for those with the right mix of skills and vision.

Opportunities in the ESG Space

The ESG landscape presents significant and growing opportunities in both the global market and, specifically, in India. The shift is driven by increasing investor demand, supportive government policies, and a growing recognition that sustainable practices lead to long-term value creation.



Opportunities Abound in the ESG Space

Global ESG Market Opportunities

The global ESG market is experiencing a massive and sustained growth trajectory. The global ESG assets are projected to reach \$35-50trillion by 2030, making ESG

a mainstream investment priority for institutions worldwide. Around 90% of S&P 500 companies now publish ESG reports, reflecting deep integration of sustainability into business strategies. ESG-related assets under management are projected to reach trillions of dollars in the coming years.

Current and Future Opportunities:

- **Sustainable Finance:** There is a booming market for green bonds, sustainability-linked loans, and other financial instruments that fund eco-friendly projects. Opportunities exist for developing innovative financial products that cater to ESG-focused investors.
- **ESG Data & Reporting Technology:** Companies are struggling to manage and report on their ESG performance. This has created a demand for software solutions that can automate data collection, provide analytics, and ensure compliance with various global reporting standards like the GRI, SASB, and TCFD.
- **Climate Technology (Cleantech):** Significant investments are being made in technologies that address climate change, such as renewable energy generation, battery storage, carbon capture, and energy efficiency solutions for buildings and industry.
- **Consulting & Advisory Services:** As ESG regulations become more complex, companies need expert guidance to navigate the transition. Consulting firms that specialize in ESG strategy, risk assessment, and implementation are in high demand. This is an area where veterans can do well.

- **Circular Economy Solutions:** Opportunities are growing in businesses that focus on waste reduction, recycling, and designing products for durability and reuse. This includes everything from sustainable packaging to new business models for product-as-a-service.
- **Climate Resilience:** This includes (water management, sustainable agriculture, catastrophe insurance)
- **Innovation & Technology:**

Growth in ESG data analytics, reporting platforms, and assurance services due to mandatory disclosures.

Tech-centric companies and startups supporting clean energy, circular economy, and sustainable consumption are rapidly gaining market share

Growth Potential:

- The global ESG investing market is projected to grow significantly, with some studies estimating it will reach over \$46 trillion by 2032. This growth is fuelled by rising awareness, institutional investor mandates, and a general belief that ESG-focused companies are more resilient.
- The integration of AI and machine learning will revolutionize ESG analysis, making it faster and more accurate. This will create new opportunities for tech startups that can leverage these tools.

ESG Opportunities in India

India is rapidly emerging as a key player in the global ESG landscape. The country's commitment to climate goals, coupled with regulatory pushes, is creating a fertile ground for ESG-related opportunities.

Current and Future Opportunities:

- **Green Bonds and Sustainable Finance:** India's commitment to achieving its Net Zero target by 2070 will require an estimated \$8-10 trillion in capital expenditure. This massive need for financing is a huge opportunity for sustainable finance, including the development and issuance of green bonds. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and SEBI (Securities and Exchange Board of India) are actively introducing guidelines to support this.
- **Renewable Energy & EVs:** The government's focus on a "Green India" and "Viksit Bharat" program emphasizes energy transition. There are significant opportunities in renewable energy generation (solar, wind), green hydrogen, and the electric vehicle (EV) sector, including manufacturing, battery technology, and charging infrastructure.
- **ESG Reporting & Advisory:** SEBI has mandated Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) for the top 1000 listed companies. This regulatory push is creating a high demand for ESG consultants and reporting specialists who can help companies with compliance, data collection, and assurance.
- **Green Supply Chains:** As global companies prioritize ESG-compliant suppliers, Indian businesses, particularly SMEs, must improve their ESG credentials to remain competitive. This creates opportunities for companies that provide services to help them build eco-friendly and ethical supply chains.
- **Green Skills & Education:** With the growth of the ESG sector, there is a

skills gap. Opportunities exist for educational institutions and training providers that offer certifications and programs to equip the workforce with "green skills."

Growth Potential:

- ESG assets under management (AUM) in India are projected for substantial growth. Some studies forecast that ESG will constitute approximately 34% of India's domestic AUM by 2051.
- The "China+1" strategy, where global companies diversify their supply chains away from China, presents a significant opportunity for Indian companies with strong ESG practices to attract international business and investment.
- The increasing awareness among India's young population (Millennials and Gen Z) is a major driver. They are more likely to support and invest in companies that demonstrate a commitment to ESG principles.

Summary Table: Key Growth Areas

Region	Opportunities	Growth Potential
Global	Clean energy, ESG consulting, data, climate resilience, circular economy, green finance	\$35-50trillion by 2030; deep investor adoption
India	Renewable energy, EVs, urban sustainability, green hydrogen, water, healthcare, ESG reporting	34% domestic AUM by 2051; 15-20% growth rate; strong policy and investor support

Both globally and in India, ESG offers transformative investment and innovation opportunities. The market is set for sustained, robust growth as sustainability shifts from trend to necessity.

Conclusion

ESG is more than a corporate buzzword; it represents a fundamental and permanent shift in how business is conducted, valued, and regulated. As we've seen, this paradigm shift is creating a wealth of opportunities for individuals and organizations alike. For the aspiring professional, ESG is no longer confined to a single department but is integrated into roles across finance, consulting, and management, offering a chance for a career with both purpose and professional growth. For the entrepreneur, it provides a fertile ground for innovation, allowing them to build ventures that not only generate profit but also solve some of the world's most pressing environmental and social challenges.

Globally, the market for ESG products and services is expanding at an unprecedented rate, driven by a powerful combination of investor demand and increasing regulatory pressure. India, in particular, stands out with its ambitious climate targets and regulatory mandates, presenting

a unique and significant growth story. The opportunities in sustainable finance, renewable energy, and green technology are immense, positioning the country as a leader in the transition to a more sustainable global economy.

Ultimately, embracing ESG is about building a more resilient, equitable, and prosperous future. For those ready to acquire the necessary skills and qualifications, the ESG domain offers a chance to be at the forefront of this transformation. This is not just a passing trend; it is the new standard for business excellence and a powerful catalyst for positive change.



About the Author

Lt Col Iqbal Singh (retd)

Iqbal is the Founder of Forces Network and a second generation army officer. He was commissioned in Dec 1987 into Garhwal Rifles. He had an illustrious army career – he completed his BTech, MTech and DSSC and also tenanted many coveted appointments in the Army. In 2008 he switched to the corporate world and joined the technology industry. He currently works with Google based at New Delhi.

“Sustainability is no longer about doing less harm. It’s about doing more good.”

— Paul Polman

The Business World of Sustainability : Environment, Social and Governance

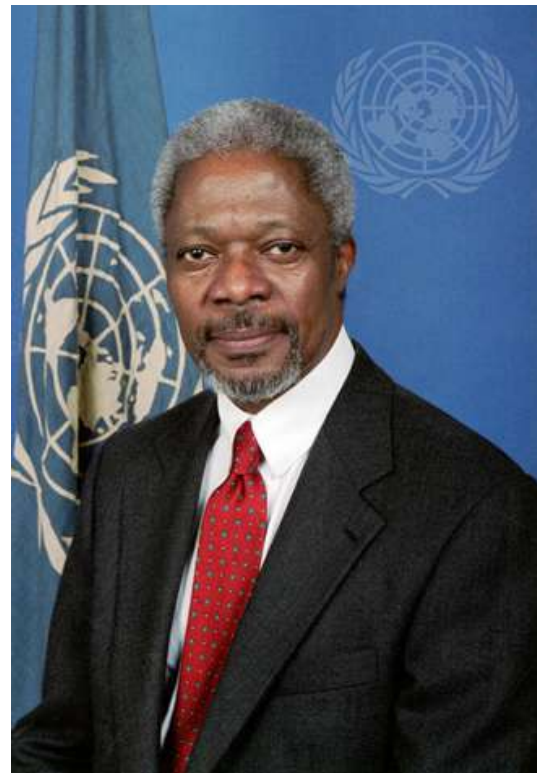
By Brig Krishna Raj

**"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."
- Albert Einstein.**

Introduction

The term ESG was coined by the then UN Secretary Gen Kofi Annan in 2004. The UN Secretary General laid the foundation of ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) Principles; he approached over 50 CEOs of major financial institutions to collectively deliberate the cause of sustainable businesses. In 2011, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) established the minimum expectation for corporate responsibility[i], introducing the concept of human rights due diligence as the means for businesses to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for their adverse human rights impacts in their own operations and throughout their value chains. Sustainability reporting came up in a big way in the decades that followed.

Indian Regulations - Indian Parliament followed up with commensurate legislation - The Company's Act 2013 where ESG was strongly advised and SEBI followed up with mandatory LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations in 2015. As of 2023 BRSR (Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting) is a mainstay of major



Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary General coined the Term ESG

1,000 listed companies in India to respond to 140 questions, divided into 98 essential indicators (mandatory) and 42 leadership indicators (voluntary).

World Business Scene - The “Big Four” is a famously trotted term in business world; all based in London, KPMG, Deloitte, EY- Ernest & Young and PwC - Price Waterhouse Coopers provide Professional

Services Networks. They cover ESG across the World; the big four ESG reporting standards—GRI, SASB, TCFD, and CDP—serve distinct but complementary roles in sustainability reporting. GRI focuses on stakeholder impact, SASB on financial materiality, TCFD on climate-related financial risk, and CDP on environmental performance benchmarking.

Veteran Military Officers’ Options- Senior EHS (Environmental, Health, and Safety) roles often involve strategic leadership and management, encompassing responsibilities like developing and implementing EHS programs, ensuring regulatory compliance, conducting risk assessments, and fostering a strong safety culture. These roles can be found in various settings, including manufacturing, construction, consulting, and corporate leadership positions.

Basic Tenets of ESG



At Work at Awali Hospital, Bahrain

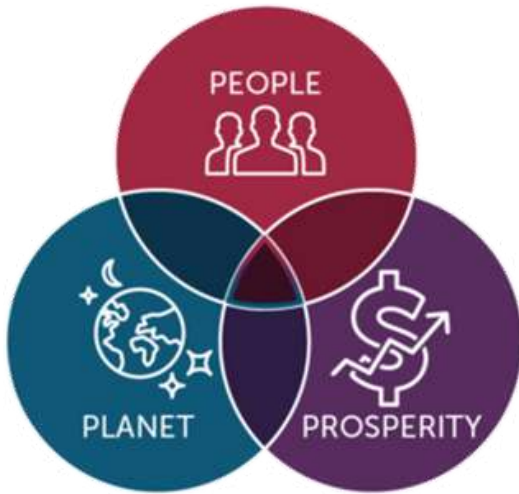
ESG or Environment Social and Governance, a part of Environmental Business concept that has come a long way from 2004 where the report titled "Who Cares Wins", came up; it was a joint initiative of financial institutions at the invitation of the UN. By 2023 the ESG movement has grown way above the CSR initiative of the “United Nations” to a Corporate Phenomenon which as of 2024 is running in the range of US \$ 30 Trillion worth of “Assets under Management”[i]. Those with a keener sense of exploratory intent may delve into the Corporate Giant Black Rock investment profiles based on ESG standards.

Evolution of ESG

In 1962 Rachel Carson brought up the Silent Springs concept where the adverse effects of DDT were made known to all. DDT, the mosquito control program’s mainstay was banned in Developed countries immediately but developing nations followed up much later.

In 1970s one may recall the Sullivan Code which led to great amount of disinvestments by US companies in Apartheid ridden South Africa. Reverend Leon Sullivan was on the board of the US major, the General Motors; and he drew up an investment code to highlight the Apartheid ridden nation.

Later in 1987, the Brundtland Commission - officially the World Commission on Environment and Development, popularized the concept of sustainable development. Their 1987 report, "Our Common Future," defined it as development that meets present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own.



The Triple Bottom Line

This was followed by John Elkington's Triple Bottom Line in 1994; Business was to be carried out with an aim to balance Social, environmental and Economic impacts[i]. Since the introduction of the triple bottom line sustainability assessment accounting, a variety of approaches have been developed to quantify sustainability using the three axes of social, economic and environmental sustainability.

CSR in 2001, European Commission went strongly on the CSR aspects. T[h]e European Commission has previously defined Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in its 2001 Green Paper as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.

2004 – The term ESG was coined by the then UN Secretary Gen Kofi Annan. UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan laid the foundation of ESG (Environment, Social and Governance) Principles. He approached over 50 CEOs of major financial institutions to collectively deliberate the cause of sustainable

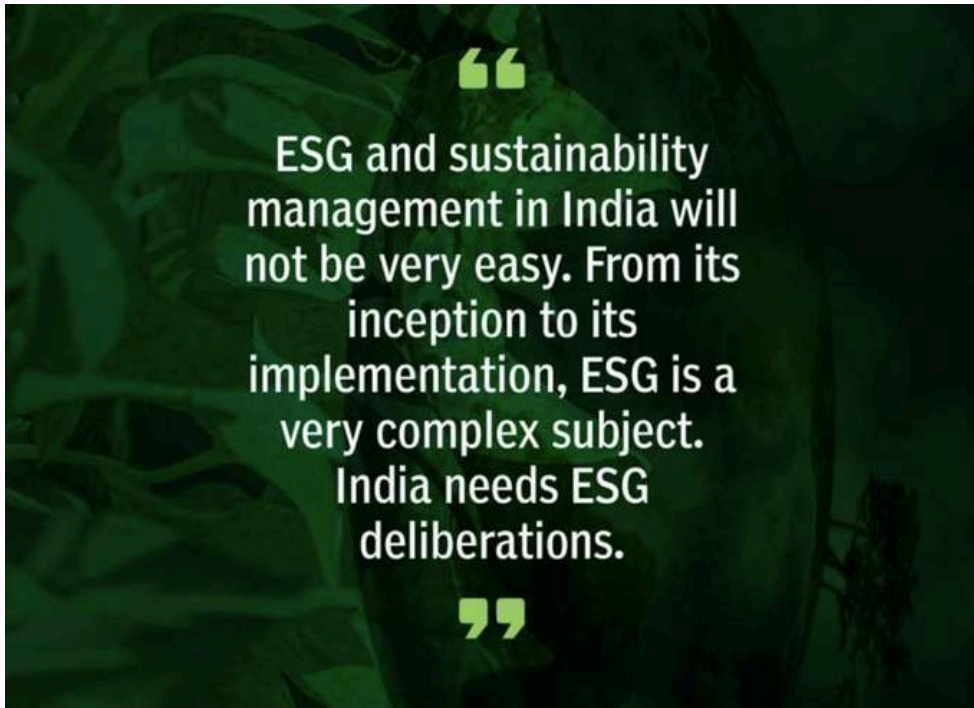
businesses.

In 2011, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) established the minimum expectation for corporate responsibility[i], introducing the concept of human rights due diligence as the means for businesses to identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for their adverse human rights impacts in their own operations and throughout their value chains.

New Terminologies and Legalities

Indian Legislation - ESG principles are embedded in various regulations, including the Companies Act, 2013. Besides, SEBI directives 2015 also focus on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) rules, environmental laws, and labour policies. These legal obligations aim to align Indian businesses with global sustainability standards and attract responsible investment. Below Listed are some mandatory guidelines:-

- Polluting Industries are advised to obtain the ISO 14001 Certification
- Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) reporting has emerged as a crucial aspect of corporate governance, ensuring transparency and sustainability in business operations.
- In India, ESG disclosure has been formalized through the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI)'s Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework, making it mandatory for the top 1000 listed companies by market capitalization from FY 2022-23.
- Important provisions under SEBI's



ESG is Here to Stay Whether we Like it or Not

Source: ESG India Summit

LODR (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015,

ISO 14001 - ISO 14001 is an international standard that specifies requirements for an effective Environmental Management System (EMS). It provides a framework for organizations to manage their environmental responsibilities and improve their environmental performance.

ISO 14064 - ISO 14064 is an internationally recognized standard for quantifying, monitoring, reporting, and verifying greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and removals.

- CER – Corporate Environmental responsibility.
- CTO – Consent to Operate.
- EIA – Environmental Impact Assessment.

Key Disclosures under BRSR - According

to the Journal of Marketing and Social research, the Key Disclosures under BRSR are that BRSR requires companies to report ESG-related information under three broad categories: Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Metrics.

Environmental Metrics

Companies must disclose their impact on the environment and their sustainability initiatives, including:

- **Carbon Footprint:** Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions). The larger the company the Scope moves from 1 to 2 then to 3. The Scope encompasses. Direct, Indirect and tertiary effects of the business from ESG standpoint of Carbon footprint, Green House Gas emissions etc.
- **Energy Efficiency:** Renewable energy adoption, energy-saving initiatives, and total energy consumption.

- **Water Conservation:** Water usage, wastewater management, and conservation strategies.
- **Biodiversity Protection:** Impact on ecological systems and mitigation measures.

Social Metrics

The social component of BRSR focuses on a company's commitment to employee welfare, human rights, and social responsibility, including:

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Workforce composition, gender diversity, and representation of marginalized groups.
- **Labour Rights:** Fair wages, safe working conditions, prevention of child and forced labor.
- **Employee Welfare:** Policies on health, safety, skill development, and employee benefits.
- **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:** Details on CSR activities under the Companies Act, 2013.
- **Community Engagement:** Impact of business activities on local communities and sustainable development contributions.

Governance Metrics

Governance disclosures focus on ethical business practices, corporate integrity, and risk management, including:

- **Board Independence:** Composition of the board, presence of independent directors, and diversity in leadership.
- **Risk Management:** Mechanisms for identifying and mitigating ESG-related risks.
- **Ethics and Anti-Corruption Policies:**

Code of conduct, anti-bribery measures, whistleblower policies.

- **Data Security and Privacy:** Cybersecurity policies and data protection measures.

EHS (Environment, Health & Safety) Roles for Veterans

Specific roles and responsibilities at senior levels can include that of an EHS Manager who, if suitably qualified, leads the overall EHS strategy, develops long-term plans, manages large-scale programs, and ensures compliance with standards. The other role could be that of an EHS Consultant who would provide expert advice to organizations on regulatory compliance, safety audits, and risk mitigation, often specializing in specific industries or regulatory areas. These require specific qualifications.

Another prominent role is that of an EHS Head who is at a higher level and oversees all EHS activities within a specific organization or site, setting strategic direction and ensuring effective implementation of EHS programs.

A senior engineer or EHS specialist focuses on technical aspects of EHS, including hazard identification, risk assessment, incident investigation, and implementation of control measures.

At Directional levels a person of that stature would lead the EHS function within a larger operational structure, ensuring alignment with business goals and objectives. Anyhow the basic qualifications remain a bedrock of the field.

Key Skills and Qualifications for an EHS Role

Strong leadership and management skills: Ability to lead teams, develop strategies, and manage resources effectively.

In-depth knowledge of EHS regulations and best practices: Understanding of relevant laws, standards, and industry guidelines:

Excellent communication and interpersonal skills: Ability to communicate effectively with various stakeholders, including employees, management, and regulatory agencies.

Experience in risk assessment and hazard identification: Ability to identify potential hazards, assess risks, and implement control measures: Proven track record of developing and implementing successful EHS programs:

Demonstrated ability to improve safety performance and promote a positive safety culture.

Advanced degrees or certifications in EHS-related fields: Depending on the specific role, advanced education or certifications may be required or preferred.

The Degrees or Certifications Include:

- **Certified Safety Professional (CSP):** The CSP is a widely recognized certification for safety professionals, demonstrating expertise in hazard prevention, safety program management, and regulatory compliance. The Board of Certified Safety Professionals (BCSP) requires a bachelor's degree, four years of safety



Certified Safety Professional (CSP)

experience, and passing a rigorous exam.

- **Certified Industry Hygienist (CIH):** The CIH certification focuses on the science of anticipating, recognizing, evaluating, and controlling workplace conditions that may cause illness or injury. This certification is offered by the American Board of Industrial Hygiene (ABIH) and requires a combination of education, experience, and passing a comprehensive exam, according to the ABIH
- **Certified Hazardous Material Manager (CHMM) :** The CHMM certification, offered by the Institute of Hazardous Materials Management (IHMM), is for professionals who manage hazardous materials and waste. It requires a bachelor's degree, relevant work experience, and passing an exam.
- **Registered Environment Manager (REM):** The REM certification, offered by the National Registry of Environmental Professionals (NREP), is a broad certification for environmental professionals. It requires a combination

of education, experience, and passing an exam.

- **Qualified Environmental Professional (QEP):** The QEP certification, offered by the Institute of Professional Environmental Practice (IPEP), is another broad certification for environmental professionals.
- **ESG – Executive Diploma in ESG:** This is offered by JNU under IGMPI is a broad-based certification which focuses on the Audits and EIA aspects- It is common knowledge that Environmental Impact assessment is the starting block for any project.
- **IIM Mumbai ESG Program:** Where one learns to drive sustainability in business with IIM Mumbai’s 12-month executive program. A 3-day campus immersion is included; this is available online medium.



IIM, Mumbai Offers a 12 Months Course on Sustainability

Rationale – The Demographic Dividend

When a larger younger age population supports a smaller dependent population

we have what is called “The Demographic Dividend”. For India it is a blessing in disguise. Today India is a leading nation in terms of growth and development; with its younger profile of population it has the potential to outshine Japan and Germany by 2027. The large workforce complementarily increases consumer spending that drives economic growth. Entrepreneurship - Young people are often more adaptable to new technologies and can drive innovation and entrepreneurship, leading to new businesses and industries; ESG is essential clearance issue.

Conclusion

A vast majority of officers are technically qualified while in the services and many have the opportunity to enhance their repertoire in the fields of their choice. There is a need for a five year plan if one is planning for stepping into the Corporate. The options are aplenty and it’s a blue ocean out there if one has the inclination and the time. The basic leadership and integrity that the military is renowned for come in as a ‘firm base’ for the launch initiative and also acts as a sounding board for performance perfection.

The EHS statutory requirement is ever increasing in a growth-oriented economy such as India. Inevitably the professionals in the field of EHS are not many and the field has its own challenges. As the EHS head he/she is likely to come up with the fine balancing act while serving in a company, while as an Auditor the field is more fulfilling. Let it not be lost on the reader that the first step is often that leads to the next (Auditor) post. The field is challenging and comes with its benefits and

perks of being counted in at the highest corporate levels. At the end of it all, ‘Qualification’ and ‘Certification’ are the keys - No Pain No Gain.

"What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

-Henry David Thoreau

About the Author

Commissioned in 1987 into the Artillery, as a Gunner and then an Aviator he had extensive operational tenures in the Arunachal, Assam, Kashmir Valley, Sikkim and Ladakh including OP MEGHDOOT in the Siachen Glacier. He flew for 1500 hours of operational flying including OP VIJAY. After qualifying DSSC, he had a G1 Stint in filed Div HQ and commanded his Unit in Counter terrorism Operations in Kashmir Valley. After War college Instructor tenure, he subsequently commanded two operational Brigades.

While in service he took up LLB, UGC NET and HR qualifications. In the Corporate sector for past eight years, he has been in Real estate, NGOs, Shipping and Textile zones. He headed the EHS set up at the Port and ESG and Fire safety audits in Textiles sector where he fulfilled the Vice President responsibilities.

He participates in seminars and, writes for the Hyderabad Newspapers on contemporary Geopolitical issues. He is presently undertaking PhD research in the field related to Geopolitics.



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[1] The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

ESG – A NEW MISSION FOR INDIA’S VETERANS

By Col C P Ramchandani (Retd)

“Veterans bring not just a skill-set but a mindset that is inherently aligned with the core pillars of ESG.”

The corporate world today faces a new kind of mission: integrating sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical governance into its very DNA. This complex and critical challenge—known as the ESG imperative—demands leaders with unwavering discipline, a strong sense of integrity, and an unshakable commitment to service. In this new landscape, India's veterans are not just candidates for ESG roles; they are a strategic asset, bringing a proven leadership ethos to a mission that requires it most.

My personal journey from the armed forces to the corporate education sector revealed a surprising truth. After my service, I stepped into leadership roles at institutions like Amity University and SRM University. It was a different battlefield—one where the mission was to shape minds and manage resources without compromising ethics. Over time, I came to see how our core values—discipline, integrity, and accountability—are the very foundation upon which a strong ESG framework is built. Veterans are therefore perfectly poised for careers in this vital new field.

THE ESG IMPERATIVE

Over the past decade, ESG has moved from being a niche concept to a business essential. The term encapsulates the way organizations integrate sustainability into operations, contribute positively to society, and uphold ethical governance. Globally, ESG-driven investments crossed USD 30 trillion in 2022, and in India, ESG mutual funds have grown at over 30% CAGR in the past three years.

The reasons for this shift are compelling:

1. Climate Urgency: India, with 1.4 billion people, is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts such as extreme heat, floods, and erratic monsoons. Sustainable practices are now a necessity.

2. Investor Demands: SEBI mandates the top 1,000 listed companies to produce Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reports (BRSR), making ESG compliance mandatory.

3. Consumer Awareness: Surveys show that over 60% of Indian consumers prefer to buy from brands that are socially and environmentally responsible.

Global Trade Pressure: Export-oriented businesses in India are subject to ESG compliance checks from international buyers.

As Larry Fink, CEO of BlackRock, put it: “Climate risk is investment risk.” ESG is not just about doing good — it is about ensuring long-term business survival and competitiveness.

WHY VETERANS FIT NATURALLY INTO ESG ROLES

Our military service has given us more than tactical skills – it has shaped our worldview.

Environmental (E): We understand resource optimization, whether it’s water in a forward post or fuel in a convoy. Sustainability isn’t theory for us; it’s lived practice.

Social (S): The armed forces thrive on community welfare, camaraderie, and inclusive leadership – essential for driving social impact projects.

Governance (G): Integrity, compliance, and transparent decision-making are part of our DNA.

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES FOR VETERANS IN ESG

The ESG wave in India is creating new professional avenues

1.Sustainability Officers and ESG Managers - Corporates across sectors like energy, manufacturing, FMCG, etc – are hiring leaders who can strategise and implement ESG policies. Veterans’ operational experience and crisis management skills are invaluable here.

Example: Brig Rajiv Sharma (Retd), of the Corps of Engineers, joined Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd as a Sustainability Advisor, bringing his operational expertise in managing remote solar projects and ensuring compliance with environmental norms in challenging terrains.

2.Social Impact & CSR Leadership - Companies are expanding their CSR into long-term social impact programs aligned with ESG. Veterans with people management skills and project execution experience can lead these initiatives.

Example: Flt Lt Meenakshi (Retd), after completing her Management Capsule at IIMA post-retirement, now heads the CSR initiatives of a major IT company, focusing on rural education and women’s empowerment programs that align with ESG’s “Social” pillar.

3.Risk & Compliance Roles - Governance is not just about rules; it’s about creating systems people trust. Veterans’ background in maintaining operational discipline translates directly to compliance and audit functions.

Example: Capt Ashok Menon (Retd), an SSC officer, now works with an infrastructure conglomerate’s compliance division, overseeing ethical procurement and vendor auditing to ensure zero tolerance for corruption.

4.Education and Training in ESG- With my own exposure in higher education, I see a huge scope for veterans to design and deliver ESG-related training programs, mentor young professionals, and even

consult on campus sustainability initiatives.

Example: While at the University, I initiated a training capsule in ESG for students. A decade later, the placement cell now runs ESG-focused executive programs in partnership with leading business schools, training mid-level managers to integrate sustainability into their operations.

SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED TO SUCCEED IN THE ESG SECTOR

The ESG sector is rapidly evolving, driven by global sustainability goals, regulatory shifts, and stakeholder expectations. Veterans entering this space bring invaluable strengths—adaptability, mission focus, and leadership—but to truly thrive, they must complement these traits with targeted upskilling. ESG roles demand a multidisciplinary approach, blending technical knowledge, ethical governance, and strategic communication. Below is a roadmap of essential competencies and certifications that can empower professionals to make meaningful contributions in this dynamic field.

1. ESG Frameworks and Reporting Standards

Understanding ESG frameworks is foundational for aligning corporate strategies with sustainability goals and ensuring transparent reporting. The following resources provide valuable insights:

a. GRI (Global Reporting Initiative) – www.globalreporting.org

SASB (Sustainability Accounting Standards Board) – www.sasb.org

BRSR (Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting) – SEBI Guidelines:

https://www.sebi.gov.in/reports-and-statistics/reports/sep-2021/business-responsibility-and-sustainability-reporting-by-listed-entities_52378.html

2. Environmental Management Knowledge

Environmental stewardship is a core pillar of ESG. Professionals must understand systems and metrics that track environmental performance. For further learning, these resources are recommended:

a) ISO 14001 – Environmental Management Systems:

<https://www.iso.org/iso-14001-environmental-management.html>

b) Carbon accounting and GHG reporting – GHG Protocol:

<https://ghgprotocol.org>

3. Social Impact Skills

Social responsibility involves assessing and improving the societal outcomes of business operations. To build expertise in this area, consider the following resource:

CSR and Social Impact Assessment – Indian Institute of Corporate Affairs CSR Courses: <https://iica.nic.in/innerpage/csr-courses.php>

4. Governance & Compliance Expertise

Strong governance ensures ethical conduct,

risk mitigation, and regulatory compliance. To deepen your understanding, these resources are helpful:

a) ISO 37001 – Anti-Bribery Management Systems:

<https://www.iso.org/iso-37001-anti-bribery-management.html>

b) Risk Management Standards (ISO 31000):

<https://www.iso.org/iso-31000management.html>

5. Project Management Proficiency

ESG initiatives often span departments and geographies, requiring structured execution and agile leadership. To gain project management credentials, explore:

a) PMP Certification – <https://www.pmi.org>

b) PRINCE2 Certification --

<https://www.axelos.com/certifications/prince>

6. Communication & Stakeholder Engagement

Clear, empathetic communication is key to driving ESG adoption and managing diverse stakeholder expectations. To enhance these skills, consider:

Toastmasters International–
<https://www.toastmasters.org>

7. Data Literacy & Technology Skills

Data-driven decision-making is central to ESG strategy, from tracking emissions to visualizing impact metrics. These tools can help build your data fluency:

a) Tableau: <https://www.tableau.com>

b) Power BI: <https://powerbi.microsoft.com>

8. Continuous Learning & Networking

The ESG landscape is dynamic. Staying updated and connected is essential for long-term success. These platforms offer

valuable opportunities:

a) TERI's World Sustainable Development Summit: <https://wsds.teriin.org>

b) CFA Institute's ESG Community: <https://www.cfainstitute.org/en/research/esg-investing>

ENTREPRENEURIAL AVENUES

For those inclined towards building rather than joining, ESG offers fertile ground for innovation, impact, and sustainable growth. Veterans, with their strategic mindset and operational discipline, are uniquely positioned to lead ventures that blend purpose with profitability.

Green Startups:

India's renewable energy sector is on a transformative trajectory, aiming for 500 GW capacity by 2030. This opens doors for ventures in:

- **Solar Solutions:** From rooftop installations to solar micro-grids in under served areas, the demand for decentralized clean energy is rising.
- **Waste-to-Energy Projects:** Converting agricultural, municipal, or industrial waste into usable energy not only reduces landfill pressure but also creates scale-able business models.
- **EV Ecosystem:** Battery swapping stations, EV maintenance hubs, and charging infrastructure are emerging niches with government backing.

Veterans can leverage their logistical expertise and mission-driven approach to build resilient green enterprises that serve both urban and rural markets.

Social Enterprises:

Social impact ventures that align with ESG goals are increasingly attracting

CSR funds and impact investors. Key areas include:

- **Rural Education & Digital Literacy:** EdTech platforms tailored for vernacular audiences or mobile-first learning can bridge deep gaps in access.
- **Healthcare Outreach:** Mobile clinics, tele-medicine services, and preventive care programs in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities offer both impact and scale.
- **Skill Development & Livelihoods:** Training programs in green jobs, digital skills, or artisan crafts can empower communities while fulfilling ESG-linked SDGs.

Veterans bring empathy, leadership, and a service ethos—qualities that resonate deeply in the social enterprise space.

Consulting & Advisory Firms:

As ESG regulations tighten, SMEs and mid-sized firms often struggle with compliance and strategy. This creates a niche for:

- **ESG Audits & Reporting Services:** Helping companies align with frameworks like GRI, BRSR, or SASB.
- **Sustainability Strategy Consulting:** Crafting road maps for carbon neutrality, circular economy adoption, or ethical sourcing.
- **Training & Capacity Building:** Workshops and tool-kits for internal teams to understand and implement ESG principles.

Veterans with cross-functional experience can offer tailored, actionable guidance—especially in sectors like manufacturing, logistics, or defense tech.

Entrepreneurial Avenues:

India's urbanization push is driving demand for eco-conscious development.

Opportunities abound in:

- **Affordable Green Housing:** Using low-carbon materials, energy-efficient designs, and water-saving technologies.
- **Urban Mobility Solutions:** E-bike sharing, smart public transport systems, and pedestrian-friendly urban planning.
- **Eco-Friendly Construction:** LEED-certified buildings, modular construction, and retrofitting for energy efficiency.

Entrepreneurs with a background in operations or engineering can lead the charge in building cities that are both livable and sustainable.

Example: In Maharashtra, a veteran-led startup developed a solar-powered water filtration system for rural schools — reducing disease, cutting energy costs, and creating a replicable ESG model.

In the same spirit, Swajal, a social enterprise founded by Dr. Vibha Tripathi and her son Advait Kumar, has deployed over 500 solar-powered water ATMs across India, including rural parts of Maharashtra. These installations have provided clean drinking water to thousands, reduced plastic waste, and created local employment. While not veteran-led, it is a powerful demonstration of how ESG entrepreneurship can deliver environmental benefits, social upliftment, and sustainable profitability — a model veterans could adapt in their own ventures.

GLOBAL AND INDIAN ESG SUCCESS STORIES – WIN-WIN OUTCOMES

Beyond theory, ESG's impact is proven by the success stories of leading companies worldwide. Across industries and continents, companies that embed sustainability into their core operations are reaping tangible rewards: reduced costs, enhanced brand equity, and stronger stakeholder trust. Here are a few standout examples that demonstrate how ESG can drive both impact and innovation:

Tata Steel India:

- **Impact:** Reduced CO₂ emissions per tonne of crude steel by over 20% in the past decade.
- **Win-Win:** Achieved significant operational cost savings through energy efficiency and process optimization.
- **Why It Matters:** In a traditionally high-emission industry, Tata Steel proves that legacy sectors can lead the sustainability charge without compromising profitability

Infosys:

- **Impact:** Became carbon neutral in 2020—making it the first Indian IT major to do so.
- **Win-Win:** Reduced energy consumption by over 55% per employee and invested heavily in renewable energy and green campuses.
- **Why It Matters:** Infosys shows that digital transformation and environmental stewardship can go hand in hand, setting a benchmark for tech companies globally.

Unilever:

- **Impact:** Its Sustainable Living brands

grew 69% faster than the rest of its portfolio.

- **Win-Win:** ESG-driven innovation led to increased consumer loyalty and market share.
- **Why It Matters:** Unilever demonstrates that purpose-led branding isn't just good ethics—it's smart business.

IKEA:

- **Impact:** Committed €200 million to become climate-positive by 2030.
- **Win-Win:** Cut energy bills across its global supply chain while investing in renewable energy and circular design.
- **Why It Matters:** IKEA's approach shows how long-term ESG investment can future-proof operations and reduce overhead.

The Common Thread

These success stories share a common DNA: proactive leadership, measurable goals, and a belief that sustainability is not a cost center—but a growth engine. They offer a blueprint for veterans and entrepreneurs looking to build ventures that are both mission-driven and market-ready.

THE ROAD AHEAD

India's transition to a greener, more equitable economy is not a spectator sport—it's an all-hands-on-deck mission. Veterans, by virtue of their service, discipline, and commitment, are uniquely equipped to lead this transformation.

Whether in the corporate boardroom, the social sector, or entrepreneurial ventures, we have the opportunity to ensure that ESG principles move from policy documents to real-world impact. This is

not just about compliance—it’s about conscience, community, and continuity.

The battlefield may have changed, but the objective remains the same – to protect, to serve, and to build a better tomorrow. In the ESG movement, I see not just a career opportunity, but a call to duty. A chance to lead with integrity, innovate with purpose, and leave a legacy that future generations will thank us for.

About the Author

Colonel C.P. Ramchandani (Retd) is a highly respected veteran of the Indian Army’s Corps of Engineers, celebrated for his outstanding service and leadership. After an illustrious military career, he transitioned into the corporate education sector, where he held senior positions at renowned institutions including Amity University and SRM University.



A dynamic and engaging motivational speaker, Col Ramchandani conducts online management programs designed for faculty and students at top-tier educational institutes. His sessions blend practical insights with strategic thinking, empowering academic communities to thrive in evolving environments

Fueled by a deep commitment to lifelong learning and a keen interest in emerging trends, he now writes and consults on topics spanning management and military affairs. As a passionate advocate for veteran resettlement, he actively mentors former service members, helping them forge meaningful careers beyond the uniform.

If you are the smartest
person in the room, then
you are in the wrong
room.

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Education a Part of ESG : Why Retired Defence Officers Are the Right Strategic Fit

By Nalini Jain

The language of sustainability has moved decisively beyond boardrooms and trading floors. Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) principles now shape expectations for every institution that touches public life—and few institutions shape society more directly than schools, colleges, and universities. Education providers run complex “mini townships” with residences, transport, utilities, events, and digital infrastructure. They steward young people, manage large campuses, and serve as anchors in their communities. In this context, ESG is not a public-relations accessory; it is a blueprint for credible, future-ready institutions.

Environmental: Shrinking Footprints, Growing Mindsets

Education campuses have a measurable environmental footprint—buildings, laboratories, hostels, canteens, and sports facilities, all drawing energy and generating waste. Green building standards, energy-efficient systems, solar rooftops, water harvesting, and responsible waste management are no longer optional. Just as important is pedagogy: integrating climate literacy, circular economy concepts, and field projects into curricula turns students into multipliers of environmental stewardship. Done well, the environmental pillar does two things at once: it reduces

operational impact and cultivates lifelong habits of resource consciousness.



Michael Job Institutes, Coimbatore

operational impact and cultivates lifelong habits of resource consciousness.

Social: Equity, Safety, and Well-Being

The social pillar aligns most closely with the mission of education: to widen access, protect dignity, and enable human potential. This includes scholarships and inclusive admissions; accessible infrastructure and assistive technologies; robust mental-health services; and policies against harassment and discrimination. Social responsibility also means active community engagement—literacy programs, vocational skilling, and service-learning partnerships with NGOs and local governments. Diversity and inclusion initiatives, such as supporting women in STEM and ensuring reasonable accommodation for differently-abled learners, enrich the campus and prepare

graduates for plural workplaces.

Governance: Ethics in Action

Governance is the architecture that makes values visible. Transparent decision-making, clear lines of accountability, and strong risk management are essential. With technology deeply embedded in teaching and administration, data privacy and cyber-security are core governance duties, not IT footnotes. Boards and management must align policies with institutional values and compliance requirements, from accreditation and safety audits to financial controls and labour norms. Good governance is not just about avoiding scandal; it is about building trust that compounds over time.

Why Defence Officers Fit the ESG Moment

Modern campuses require leaders who combine systems thinking, operational discipline, and people-centric leadership. Retired defence officers bring precisely this blend, honed in high-stakes environments where planning, execution, and ethics are inseparable. Their experience translates into tangible advantages across ESG priorities.

Operational Excellence

Campus operations are a choreography of transport schedules, laboratories, sports, events, vendor management, and emergency readiness. Defence officers are trained to build and run such systems—planning resources, setting standard operating procedures, and monitoring performance with dashboards and checklists. The result is smoother daily functioning, fewer surprises, and faster recovery when disruptions occur.

Compliance and Risk

Educational institutions face a thicket of regulations: affiliations, accreditation cycles, health and fire safety codes, fee and labour rules, and environment and waste norms. Defence officers' multidisciplinary exposure equips them to map requirements, establish documented processes, and conduct scenario planning. They are skilled at risk identification, mitigation, and after-action learning, which strengthens business continuity and institutional memory.

Safety and Security

Parents and stakeholders consistently place safety at the top of their priorities. Physical security, psychological safety, anti-ragging systems, cyber hygiene, and crisis response must be integrated rather than reactive. Defence leaders know how to calibrate access control, design evacuation and shelter-in-place protocols, and conduct drills that build confidence without breeding fear. Their approach—firm, fair, and transparent—supports a culture where students and staff feel both secure and respected.

Infrastructure and Maintenance

Large campuses demand proactive maintenance across buildings, utilities, labs, kitchens, and sports facilities. Defence officers are accustomed to managing diverse assets under resource constraints. They emphasise preventive maintenance, lifecycle costing, vendor performance management, and safety audits—practices that reduce downtime, control costs, and extend asset life. Well-kept infrastructure is also an environmental win, since efficiency upgrades cut energy and water use.

People and Culture

Perhaps the most underrated contribution is cultural. Defence officers model discipline without harshness, resilience without bravado, and leadership without ego. Through assemblies, mentor programs, and outdoor education, they help students internalise punctuality, teamwork, respect for diversity, and service. This aligns with the “S” of ESG—well-being, fairness, and community spirit—as lived campus norms rather than posters on walls.

An Indian View, a Global Logic

Across India, more institutions are appointing retired defence personnel to lead operations, security, and administration. The logic is straightforward: as campuses scale and stakeholder expectations rise, the need for systems-driven, values-anchored leadership grows. Defence officers’ training in logistics, compliance, and crisis management all with a humane approach travels well to education, where the stakes are human development and public trust.

Conclusion: A Strategic, Values-Aligned Choice

ESG in education is the art of aligning institutional operations with societal purpose. Environmental action reduces footprints and teaches stewardship. Social responsibility ensures access, safety, and well-being. Governance converts values into systems that endure. Retired defence officers are unusually well suited to advance this agenda. They bring operational rigor, risk awareness, and ethical leadership that make campuses safer, more inclusive, and more resilient. More than a staffing decision, their integration into educational management is a strategic commitment to integrity and long-term value—one that prepares institutions, and the students they serve, to meet the future with confidence.

About the Author

Maj Nalini Jain, a Veteran has 12+ years of experience in Educational Institutes post 10 years Army service as an Ordnance officer. She has worked in leadership positions across the country for Schools and colleges, both Day Scholar and Residential. With her extensive experience in setting SOPs, Risk Identification and Mitigation, she has improved the safety and security score of Educational Institutes by a very large percentage. An active Rotarian and on board an NGO- Anubhuti Shree Foundation, working for Women Empowerment in states of Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand she helps uplift the economical and health level of women. Presently she is a Joint CEO with Michael Job Institutes, dedicated to provide quality education to girls (only) from Playschool to Phd since last 24 years. Many girls



out of 1600 students in the institute are from underprivileged background and are fully sponsored by various donors. The institute takes pride in having one the best women’s football team for girls in all age categories winning multiple trophies throughout the year.

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Star of Forces Network

Sqn Ldr Arun Kumar

About the Author



Arun Kumar is the Principal Product Lead at Microsoft, Noida. He began his career in 2008 as a commissioned officer in the Indian Air Force, where he led mission-critical operations and architected secure digital systems. Notably, he was the sole architect of VayuSandesh, an incident reporting product recognized by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 84th Air Force Day in 2016. After transitioning from the military, Arun moved into cybersecurity product development, first at a leading consulting and services firm, creating enterprise cybersecurity solutions. He later served as the Chief Information Security Officer for a full-service international airline. At Microsoft, he continues to drive innovation in security, and also holds a patent in security policy management.

Q Please tell us something about your background prior to joining the Academy and the IAF. Also briefly cover your career in the Indian Air Force.

I am a seasoned strategist, builder, and military veteran operating at the intersection of Cybersecurity and Product Development, with over 15 years of diverse experience spanning the military, cybersecurity and technology sectors.

I was born in New Delhi where I completed my schooling from Saraswati Vidya Mandir, Hari Nagar. Post schooling, I moved to Jaipur for completing my bachelor's in engineering in Information Technology from University of Rajasthan. I also hold a master's in software systems from BITS, Pilani, a PG Diploma in Aeronautical Engineering from VTU, Belgaum. I did my pre-release course

from Management Development Institute, Gurgaon in year 2017-18.

I began my career as a commissioned officer in the Indian Air Force, where I led network and security operations and architected digital systems for critical environments. Notably, I was the sole architect behind VayuSandesh, an incident reporting product for the Air Force, which was recognized by Prime Minister Narendra Modi for Innovation on 84th Air Force Day in 2016. This foundation in disciplined execution, resilience, and systems thinking continues to shape my leadership style in the corporate world. Following my transition from the military, I pivoted into cybersecurity product development—first at a leading consulting and services firm, building cybersecurity solutions for



Arun during his first posting in Assam area

enterprises, then as Chief Information Security Officer for a full-service international airline.

Today, at Microsoft, I lead product strategy at the intersection of data security and protection, compliance, and AI-driven innovation. I also hold a patent for Microsoft on security policy management something which I truly cherish and owe it to Microsoft. [pic below]

Beyond work, I am a passionate mentor, actively supporting veterans transitioning into tech and professionals aspiring to break into product roles. I am a top 1% mentor on Topmate and a master mentor at Masters' Union, and my philosophy of "lifting as you climb" is reflected in my community engagements, thought leadership, and ongoing efforts to bridge the gap between purpose-driven service and high-growth innovation.

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/squadarun/>

Q You were an AE(L) officer. What were the reasons for quitting the IAF ?

Yes, I was an AE (L) officer and fortunate enough to be trained on Air Force Network. Since I joined the Air Force as a short service commissioned officer my term was ending in Jul 2018. During those days, SSC officers (technical) in the Air Force has had the option of continuing for another 04 years before their term finally ends after 14 years of service. I opted for release at the end of the 10-year term to be stable in terms of location, look after my extended family in New Delhi and hitting the corporate force as young as possible.

Q Give us an understanding about your current role and what you are presently engaged in. Also please share in chronological order the roles and companies in your corporate career?

Current Role and Engagement

I am currently serving as a Product Leader at Microsoft, where I lead data security product strategy within the Defender and Purview ecosystem. My primary focus is on addressing the most pressing data protection challenges for customers. I collaborate closely with cross-functional teams — from engineers to sales — to design and deliver secure, scalable solutions in the areas of data loss prevention, insider risk management, and AI-powered data protection.

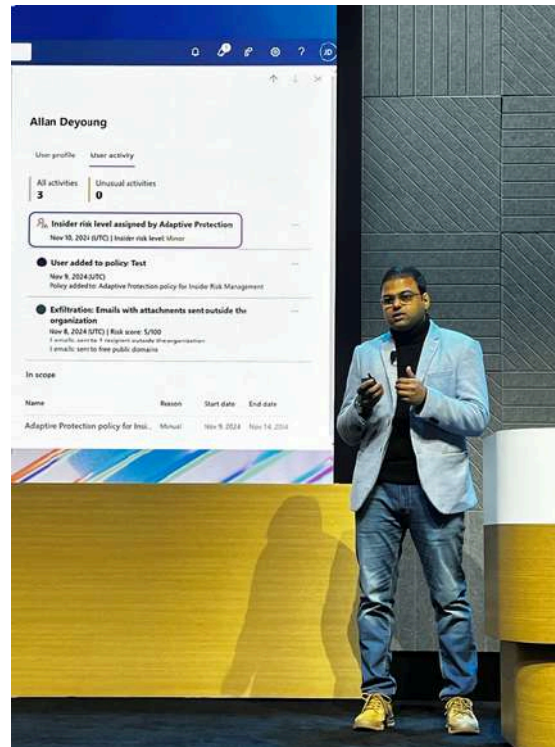
I'm passionate about building secure-by-design products and aligning them with broader business goals and customer needs. My work at Microsoft allows me to impact the future of cybersecurity, particularly within cloud environments, and help businesses secure their most sensitive data.

Chronological Career Path:

1.Principal Product Lead, Microsoft (2021–Present)

2.TATA Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) | Noida, India | 2018 -2021

- Head – Managed Security Services | Apr 2020 - Dec 2021 I was responsible and accountable for leading the managed security services division of TASL. Some of the notable offerings I architected and led were:
- Martial – Threat Intelligence Platform (TIP): Designed and launched a TIP covering feeds from MISP, dark web, and Pastebin etc.
- Managed Security Services - Led a Security Operations Center (SOC) protecting customer and organizational information.



Arun presenting Security copilot at Microsoft Ignite '24 held in Chicago, IL, United States.

Established a threat hunting framework, reducing TTR from 120 mins to 40 mins in 6 months.

- Chief Information Security Officer | Dec 2018 - Mar 2020 I was responsible and accountable for leading the information security program for a full-service airline client of TASL.

Some of the notable initiatives are:

- Architected and implemented PKI infrastructure for Boeing 787 Dreamliner induction, enabling long-haul flights.
- Spearheaded the security review for Wi-Fi-enabled inflight entertainment systems across the fleet.
 - Authored the airline's first GDPR-focused privacy policy in

collaboration with marketing, HR, and legal teams.

3.Squadron Leader, Indian Air Force (2008–2018)

Q How did you prepare yourself for the Military to Corporate transition? Did doing certifications help you ?

Preparing for the Military to Corporate transition was a long-drawn process. The transition required me to adapt my mindset, leverage my skills in new contexts, and build a solid foundation in areas that were crucial for corporate roles, particularly in product management and cybersecurity.

I planned for a master's early in my career. I enrolled for a work-integrated learning program offered by BITS, Pilani in year 2012, this was me during my first posting. Having an MS in Software Systems gave me a strong technical foundation, which was essential for understanding the complex, fast-paced tech world. I was fortunate to be trained in Air Force Network which provided me a good foundation to the world of high-performance computing and cybersecurity. At every posting I showed up a builder mindset and kept solving for complex use cases both in tech and non-tech

However, transitioning from a highly structured and disciplined military environment to a more dynamic and collaborative corporate setting required me to develop additional skills such as stakeholder management, communication, and agile methodologies. I would also attribute it to a lot of unlearning of many non-leadership traits of military for

example- unlearning service writing, leaving behind concepts of seniority, and hierarchy and adapting to a flat structure. This opened perspectives of achieving the same outcome differently.

Certifications were particularly helpful in securing a spot at the interview table. I pursued certifications and obtained the gold standard of certifications which is CISSP, which not only enhanced my knowledge in these areas but also helped me establish credibility in the corporate space. On product management I opted for free certifications to brush up my knowledge and understand concepts like product-led growth, product GTM. A lot depends on what you say in the interview and not what credentials you show in your résumé.

The certifications, combined with my military background in decision-making, leadership, and problem-solving, helped me transition into the corporate world. My ability to think systematically, prioritize effectively, and handle high-pressure situations was key in adapting to roles in corporate.

Q Most veterans do NOT understand the Product Management roles. Can you please explain your role in detail. Share your major responsibilities. Also, run us through a typical day so that we can get a glimpse of what your role encompasses?

Sure, here is the long and short of a product management role from my understanding so far.

As a Product Manager, my role is to drive the strategy, development, and delivery of

of products that solve real-world problems, ensure customer satisfaction, and meet business goals. At Microsoft, I focus on data security products, specifically within the Defender and Purview portfolios, which address critical issues like data loss prevention, threat management, and AI-powered security solutions.

Major Responsibilities:

1.Product Strategy & Roadmap Development: I collaborate with cross-functional teams (engineering, design, sales, data science, etc.) to define the product vision and ensure alignment with business goals. This includes setting clear objectives, timelines, and success metrics for each product release.

2.Customer & Market Insights: I work closely with customers to understand their needs, pain points, and feedback. I also analyse industry trends and competitor products to ensure our offerings stay ahead in the market.

3.Product Lifecycle Management: From concept to launch, I manage the product lifecycle, which includes everything from ideation, defining requirements, prioritizing features, testing, and overseeing the release process.

4.Collaboration & Leadership: I lead cross-functional teams, driving alignment on project goals and milestones. I ensure everyone is on the same page and that we're all working towards a common objective.

5.Data-Driven Decision Making: I constantly analyse user data, telemetry, and performance metrics to make informed decisions, track product success, and drive

iterative improvements post-launch.

A Typical Day as a Product Manager:

1.Morning:

- Start by checking email and messages from cross-functional teams or customers, catching up on urgent issues or feedback.
- Review any product performance metrics or understand deep telemetry reports from the previous day to identify any areas for improvement.
- Meet with my team for a daily stand-up to discuss priorities, roadblocks, and progress on ongoing development.

2.Midday:

- Spend time in product planning sessions, discussing the roadmap with engineering teams and defining the features we need to prioritize for the next release.
- Review design or engineering prototypes to ensure the product vision is being translated well into the product.
- Engage with customers (or sales/GTM leaders) to gather feedback or dive into their pain points through calls or meetings.

3.Afternoon:

- Focus on strategy documents, reviewing competitor products, and preparing for meetings with senior leaders to discuss product vision or OKR updates.
- Attend or prepare for product demos with stakeholders to showcase product features and gather feedback.
- Collaborate with marketing or sales teams to develop go-to-market strategies for new product features

or updates..

4. Evening:

- Wrap up by addressing any urgent issues, reviewing long-term strategic plans, and prepping for the next day's meetings.
- Reflect on feedback, prioritize upcoming tasks, and continue product development discussions.

I also make it a point to talk to at least 01 customer in 02 weeks to know what value I am delivering to them.

In essence, as a Product Manager, I'm the bridge between the customer, the business, and the technical teams. My job is to make sure that we are building the right products that deliver value to the customers, the business, and align with company's long-term strategy.

Q What are the skills required to succeed in a Product Management related role. What upskilling pathway would you suggest for a transitioning veteran ?

To succeed in a Product Management role, especially if you are transitioning from a military background, you will need to acquire a mix of technical, business, and soft skills. Here's a breakdown of the essential skills required for success in this role, followed by a suggested upskilling pathway tailored for a transitioning veteran.

Key Skills for Success in Product Management:

1. Strategic Thinking & Vision

- Ability to define a clear product vision,

identify market opportunities, and align product strategies with company goals.

- Big picture thinking—understanding how your product fits within the broader market and customer ecosystem.

2. Customer-Centric Mindset

- Strong understanding of customer needs and pain points.
- Ability to turn customer feedback into actionable product features.

3. Cross-Functional Collaboration

- Working with engineering, design, marketing, and sales teams to deliver a unified product.
- Ability to manage stakeholders and lead cross-functional teams effectively.

4. Product Lifecycle Management

- From ideation to launch, you must be able to guide a product through all stages of development and execution.
- Experience with Agile methodologies (Scrum, Kanban) to break down product development into manageable tasks.

5. Data-Driven Decision Making

- Ability to analyze product metrics (user behavior, retention rates, feature adoption) and adjust strategies accordingly.
- Familiarity with tools for A/B testing, user analytics, and product performance metrics.

6. Problem-Solving & Decision-Making

- Strong analytical skills to evaluate trade-offs, prioritize features, and make tough decisions.
- Ability to deconstruct complex

- problems and find solutions under pressure, which is often similar to military strategy.

7. Communication & Presentation Skills

- Articulate and effective in presenting ideas, product roadmaps, and results to both technical and non-technical audiences (including executives).
- Writing clear product requirements documents (PRDs) and user stories for development teams.

8. Leadership & Mentorship

- Leading teams of product managers, developers, and designers. Motivating teams, resolving conflicts, and ensuring alignment across all parties.
- Mentorship: As you grow in the role, the ability to mentor and develop junior product managers.

Upskilling Pathway for a Transitioning Veteran:

1. Understand the Product Management Framework:

- Start by familiarizing yourself with the core PM methodologies, like Agile, Scrum, and Kanban. You can begin by exploring free resources online (e.g., Scrum Training Series, Atlassian Agile Coach).
- Take a beginner-level product management course on platforms like Coursera or Udemy. These courses often cover product lifecycle, market research, and Agile practices.

2. Develop Business Acumen:

- If you haven't already, start learning about business metrics, market analysis, and business model frameworks (e.g., SWOT analysis, Porter's Five Forces).

- Reading books like "Inspired" by Marty Cagan or "Lean Product and Lean Analytics" will help you understand how successful PMs think and operate.
- A basic understanding of product marketing and go-to-market strategies will be very helpful.

3. Technical Skills:

- You don't need to be an engineer, but some familiarity with technical concepts can help. Learn about cloud technologies, data structures, and APIs to understand how your product interacts with technology.
- Consider enrolling in a technical product management course or learning basic coding (e.g., HTML, CSS, basic JavaScript) through platforms like Codecademy.

4. Customer-Centric Thinking:

- Gain a deeper understanding of user experience (UX) and how to conduct user interviews or surveys.
- Understand how to define user personas and user journeys to ensure that the products you build are solving real customer pain points.

5. Hands-On Experience:

- Volunteer for internal PM-like projects or shadow PMs in your current or future roles. Start practicing writing product requirements, defining roadmaps, and working with engineering teams to execute those plans.
- You can also work on side projects to get hands-on experience in building and launching products or do product teardowns and write on LinkedIn to

deepen concepts and engage with like-minded professionals.

6. Networking and Mentorship:

- Join PM communities (e.g., Mind the Product, Product Coalition, ProductCamp) to network with other PMs and stay updated on industry trends.
- Find a mentor (maybe someone from the corporate world, or a fellow veteran) who can guide you through your transition and provide insights from their experience.

Recommended Resources:

Books:

- “Inspired” by Marty Cagan | love this one!
- “Lean Product and Lean Analytics” by Ben Yoskovitz
- “Measure What Matters” by John Doerr (OKRs) | my favourite

Courses:

- General Assembly Product Management Bootcamp
- Coursera’s Product Management Specialization (offered by the University of Virginia)
- Udemy’s Product Management Masterclass

Certifications (Optional but valuable):

- Certified Scrum Product Owner (CSPO) | may skip
- Product Management Certificate by Product School

Q If you were to Transition from the military to the corporate today with the benefit of all the insights and wisdom that you have gained in the corporate today what

would you have done differently?

If I were to transition from the military to the corporate world today, with the benefit of all the insights and wisdom I’ve gained in the corporate environment, there are a few things I would approach differently:

1. Focus on Networking Early

- **What I would have done differently:** Early on, I underestimated the power of building a network in the corporate world. I would have started reaching out to mentors, colleagues, and industry professionals more proactively.
- **Why it matters:** In the military, the structure is more hierarchical, and the focus is on mission execution. In the corporate world, networking plays a huge role in growth, knowledge-sharing, and discovering opportunities. Building meaningful relationships early could have helped me learn faster and navigate corporate culture more smoothly.

2. Be More Comfortable with Ambiguity

- **What I would have done differently:** I would have embraced ambiguity sooner. Coming from the military, where procedures and expectations are clear and precise, the corporate world can feel unpredictable and less structured.
- **Why it matters:** I learned that being adaptable and comfortable with uncertainty is key in product management and tech roles. Instead of waiting for all the information, I would have taken more risks and been more comfortable leading without complete clarity, relying on my ability

to learn and adapt quickly.

3. Develop Emotional Intelligence (EQ) Early

- **What I would have done differently:** While leadership and decision-making in the military are often based on authority and mission objectives, in the corporate world, emotional intelligence is critical. I would have invested more in empathy, communication, and understanding how to lead through influence, not just authority.
- **Why it matters:** Effective leadership in the corporate environment often relies on emotional intelligence. Understanding team dynamics, managing conflicts, and communicating with clarity and compassion can help you build better relationships and ensure a more cohesive team.

4. Understand the Importance of Business Acumen

- **What I would have done differently:** While I had a strong technical and leadership background, I would have placed more emphasis on developing business acumen earlier on. Specifically, understanding profit margins, cost structures, and customer needs is as critical as understanding the tech itself.
- **Why it matters:** In the corporate world, especially in product management, it's essential to make decisions that are aligned with business goals. Knowing how to balance technical feasibility with market demands and profitability is a game-changer.

5. Learn to Fail Fast & Pivot

- **What I would have done differently:**

I would have learned to embrace failure as a learning opportunity much sooner. In the military, failure often comes with high stakes and consequences. In the corporate world, failure is more common, and failing fast and iterating is part of the process and encouraged.

- **Why it matters:** Whether it's a product launch or a new initiative, not every plan will succeed, and that's okay. The ability to learn from setbacks, pivot, and iterate is invaluable in the fast-paced, dynamic corporate world.

6. Leverage the Power of Data-Driven Decision-Making

- **What I would have done differently:** I would have integrated data into my decision-making process much sooner. In the military, intuition and experience are often highly valued in decision-making. In the corporate world, particularly in tech and product management, data-driven insights are critical to making informed, actionable decisions.
- **Why it matters:** In product management, understanding customer behavior, product metrics, and performance analytics is crucial for optimizing the user experience and achieving business goals. I would have adopted tools and techniques to better analyze and interpret data from day one.

7. Invest in Continuous Learning

- **What I would have done differently:** I would have made upskilling and personal development a more intentional, regular habit. The corporate world evolves rapidly, and staying updated on trends,

technologies, and methodologies (like Agile, Lean, and Scrum) is crucial for success.

- **Why it matters:** The need for constant learning and growth is a key component of thriving in the corporate world. With the pace of change in the tech industry, being proactive about certifications, courses, and staying current would have helped me get ahead faster.

With the insights I've gained from the corporate world, I would focus on building relationships earlier, embracing ambiguity, sharpening business acumen, and being more data-driven in my approach. The transition would be smoother with a mindset of continuous learning and flexibility. It's not just about adapting to corporate culture; it's about leveraging your military strengths and adjusting them to thrive in an environment that values collaboration, innovation, and strategic thinking.

Q Any important lessons you learnt while switching jobs and companies in your corporate career? What about the art of graceful exit? Any advice for transitioning military personnel on this front?

Though I haven't switched many jobs but here are some of the lessons I learnt:

1. Understand the Company Culture Early

- **Lesson:** Each company has its own culture, and it's important to assess whether your values align with the organization. Culture isn't just about the perks or the office environment; it's about how decisions are made, how teams collaborate, and what the

company truly values.

- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** In the military, there's a clear chain of command and structured environment. Corporate environments can be more fluid and decentralized, so it's key to understand the informal hierarchies and expectations within the organization. Pay attention to values like innovation, risk-taking, and decision-making styles.

2. Learn to Adapt Quickly, But Stay True to Yourself

- **Lesson:** Every job switch involves learning new systems, processes, and people. However, it's important to quickly adapt while also staying authentic to your strengths and core values.
- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** Military experience offers strong leadership, discipline, and decision-making skills. While you'll need to adjust to corporate dynamics, don't lose sight of the values you bring to the table, such as resilience and focus. These can be your greatest asset when transitioning.

3. Networking Is Key — Build Relationships

- **Lesson:** Switching companies often involves starting from scratch in terms of relationships. However, effective networking can help ease that transition and accelerate learning curves. This includes internal networking (building relationships within the company) and external networking (connecting with peers in your industry).

Corporate adjustment: In most corporate environments, collaboration and autonomy are highly valued. While respect for leadership is important, you should be open to peer input, and decisions are often made

- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** You've been trained in a highly collaborative environment. Translate that into the corporate world by forming strong bonds with your new team members, leaders, and mentors. Don't hesitate to ask questions, learn from others, and seek guidance. It's crucial to get to know both people in formal roles and informal influencers within the company.

4. Be Prepared to Manage Change and Expectations

- **Lesson:** Moving to a new role or company often comes with an adjustment in how expectations are set and how performance is measured. The more flexible and open you are to different ways of working, the smoother your transition will be.
- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** Military careers are goal-oriented, but expectations in the corporate world can sometimes be less direct or constantly evolving. Be proactive in clarifying expectations, communicating your progress, and seeking feedback. Corporate roles often prioritize output and adaptability over rigid processes, so learn to manage ambiguity.

5. Know When It's Time to Move On

- **Lesson:** Not all job switches are planned — sometimes you'll realize that the role, culture, or even the industry you're in isn't a fit. The key is

recognizing early signs and acting decisively.

Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel: Much like in the military, where there's a structured evaluation of performance and roles, in the corporate world, you need to evaluate your fit with the company or the role. Ask yourself: Do I feel challenged? Am I contributing to the company's goals? Am I growing professionally? If the answers are no, it might be time to explore other opportunities.

The Art of a Graceful Exit:

Leaving a company the right way is crucial for maintaining relationships and reputation. Here's how to exit gracefully:

1. Give Ample Notice

- **Lesson:** Always provide enough notice (as per company policy) to allow for a smooth transition. This allows your manager to plan for a replacement or handover.
- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** In the military, you likely had a formal process for transitioning out of a unit. In the corporate world, it's equally important to respect formal notice periods and provide a clear handover plan. Your transition should reflect your professionalism and respect for your colleagues.

2. Prepare a Clear Handover

- **Lesson:** Provide clear documentation and a handover plan for the person taking over your responsibilities. This includes ongoing tasks, important contacts, and project statuses.
- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** Just like in the military, where communication and handovers

were critical, provide the same level of clarity and detail in your exit strategy. Create detailed reports, share ongoing project updates, and offer to assist with the transition even after you leave, if necessary.

3. Stay Positive and Professional

- **Lesson:** Even if you are leaving because of dissatisfaction or personal reasons, always maintain a positive and professional attitude. Avoid burning bridges, as you never know when you might encounter the same people again.
- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** The military values honor and integrity, and these values should extend to your corporate exit as well. Be mindful of how you speak about your experience, and try to leave on a note of appreciation for the opportunity and your colleagues, even if it wasn't a perfect fit.

4. Maintain Relationships After Leaving

- **Lesson:** Stay connected with your colleagues, managers, and mentors after you leave. LinkedIn, emails, or casual catch-ups are great ways to maintain your professional network.
- **Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel:** Just as you've maintained lifelong connections with fellow service members, make an effort to stay in touch with people you worked with in the corporate world. Networking is ongoing, and your network will continue to be a valuable resource as you move through your career.

Advice for Transitioning Military Personnel on This Front:

- **Embrace Change:** The corporate world will feel different from the military, but adaptability and resilience — two key

military traits — will help you thrive. It's about leveraging your leadership skills and applying them in different contexts.

- **Take Initiative to Learn:** Transitioning veterans should actively seek opportunities to learn — whether it's through formal education (like certifications) or by simply asking questions and learning from others.
- **Be Transparent About Your Transition:** Don't hesitate to explain your background to others and show how your military experience gives you a unique perspective. People in the corporate world will appreciate the problem-solving, discipline, and leadership you bring from the military.

In conclusion, transitioning from military service to corporate life is challenging but rewarding. Focus on building strong networks, learning continuously, and maintaining professionalism — both during your exit and when moving into new opportunities.

Q How important is it to understand your own passion and expertise and then to work towards upskilling in that domain so as to have a better innings in the corporate? What are your views on this? How does one identify one's passion?

Understanding your passion and expertise is extremely important when transitioning to or advancing in the corporate world. Here's why and how it shapes your path:

1. Aligning With Your Strengths

- Knowing your core passion and skills ensures you're working in a domain that excites and motivates you, which leads to greater satisfaction, productivity, and success.

- If you're working in an area that aligns with what you truly care about, you'll be more committed and willing to go the extra mile, which is essential for career growth.

2.Long-Term Career Satisfaction

- If you're passionate about what you do, you'll have more resilience during challenging times and a better ability to navigate obstacles. Passion helps you stay driven during setbacks, which are inevitable in any career.
- It also prevents burnout and ensures longevity in your role. If you're continuously learning in a field that excites you, you'll find it easier to stay engaged and enjoy the journey.

3.Gaining Deep Expertise

- Passion combined with expertise can make you an authority in your field. In the corporate world, deep expertise in a particular area often sets you apart and can lead to leadership roles and higher earning potential.
- When you work in an area you're passionate about, you naturally seek to improve, learn, and innovate more, leading to stronger contributions and recognition.

4.More Effective Upskilling

- When you're passionate about a subject, upskilling becomes enjoyable, not a chore. The process of acquiring new knowledge or enhancing your skill set feels more like an exciting challenge rather than an obligation.
- Upskilling will help you build a competitive advantage, staying ahead of industry trends, and continuously evolving as a professional.

How to Identify Your Passion:

1.Self-Reflection

- Start by reflecting on what excites you. What tasks or projects have made you lose track of time because you were so immersed? What topics do you enjoy discussing or reading about in your free time?
- Ask yourself: What would I be doing if money weren't an issue? This question can provide valuable insight into your deeper passions.

2.Explore Different Domains

- Don't be afraid to explore different roles, industries, and areas. Sometimes, the act of exploration helps you discover what you love. For instance, early in my career, I explored various aspects of tech and cybersecurity before realizing my passion for building secure products.
- Engage in side projects, attend industry events, or volunteer for roles in different fields to help you identify where your true interests lie.

3.Look for Patterns in Your Experiences

- Look at past roles, assignments, or projects. Do certain themes emerge? Are there common aspects of your previous roles or successes that you can now identify as the core element that excites you?
- Take note of your energy levels during different tasks. When do you feel most engaged, focused, and energetic?

4.Try New Things and Stay Open

- Passion often isn't something that's immediately obvious — it requires experimentation. Give yourself permission to try new roles or skills

without the fear of failure.

- Passion isn't always static — it evolves. Sometimes, trying something new may reignite an old interest or open a new door you never expected.

What's the Upskilling Path to Follow After Identifying Your Passion?

1. Set Clear Goals

- Once you've identified your passion, break it down into specific skills or knowledge you need to acquire. For example, if your passion is cybersecurity, start by focusing on network security, then progress to ethical hacking and threat analysis.
- Look at people who are successful in that domain, and map out the skills and qualifications they have that helped them get there.

2. Invest in Relevant Learning

- Pursue relevant courses, certifications, workshops, and conferences. With platforms like Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, and Udemy, there are countless opportunities to upskill and stay updated in your field.
- Stay committed to continuous learning and self-development, as the corporate landscape evolves rapidly, and staying on top of trends is crucial.

3. Seek Mentorship

- Surround yourself with mentors who are already successful in the domain you're passionate about. Their experience and insights will help you avoid common mistakes and accelerate your growth.
- Ask for guidance on how they navigated their careers and what skills they believe are essential in the field

you want to pursue.

4. Apply Your Skills in Real-World Settings

- Theory alone won't make you a master. Apply what you learn by taking on projects or side gigs that allow you to experiment with new skills.
- Collaborate with like-minded individuals in the industry to learn from their approaches and perspectives.

5. Track Your Progress and Adjust

- Regularly assess your growth and adjust your approach as needed. Passion should lead to sustained motivation, so if you find that you're no longer excited by your learning path, it may be time to pivot or explore a different aspect of your passion.

Q You have had a good in the corporate. To be successful what typical traits from the military must be give up and what must we imbibe?

Transitioning from the military to the corporate world is a shift in mindset, culture, and expectations. While many of the traits you developed in the military will serve you well in the corporate environment, there are also certain traits that might need adjustment. Let me take a stab at it.

Traits to Give Up (or Adjust) for Corporate Success

1. Overemphasis on Hierarchy and Command

- **Military trait:** In the military, there is a clear, structured hierarchy, and orders

are often given top-down through consensus rather than strict command. Focus more on leading by influence, rather than authority.

2. Rigid Structure and Routines

- **Military trait:** Military routines are highly structured, with little room for deviation from prescribed schedules or processes.
- **Corporate adjustment:** While discipline is essential in the corporate world, it's equally important to embrace flexibility and adapt to changing business needs. Corporate work often requires rapid adaptation to new conditions and priorities, which may not always align with the rigid structures of military life.

3. Top-Down Decision Making

- **Military trait:** Decisions in the military are typically made by superiors and executed without debate.
- **Corporate adjustment:** The corporate world is often more democratic and collaborative. You'll need to be comfortable with feedback loops, working in cross-functional teams, and navigating ambiguity. Decision-making tends to involve a lot more negotiation, compromise, and data-driven analysis.

4. Overreliance on Formal Protocols

- **Military trait:** Protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) are central in the military, and every task is typically done according to a strict set of rules.
- **Corporate adjustment:** In the corporate world, innovation and creative problem-solving often require stepping outside of established protocols. While guidelines and processes are still

important, there's more room for disruption and experimentation.

5. Risk Aversion (Sometimes)

- **Military trait:** In the military, risk-taking is calculated, and safety and security are often prioritized.
- **Corporate adjustment:** The corporate world, especially in tech and product management, thrives on innovation and calculated risks. You'll need to get comfortable with taking risks to test new ideas, fail fast, and pivot quickly to succeed in a dynamic, fast-paced environment.

Traits to Imbibe for Corporate Success

1. Adaptability and Agility

- **Why it's important:** The corporate world is constantly evolving. While military training teaches you to follow a set path, corporate roles often require you to be flexible and pivot quickly based on new information or shifting priorities. Being comfortable with change and ambiguity is key.
- **How to imbibe it:** Take a mindset of continuous learning and adaptability. Embrace agile practices in both work processes and decision-making, and be willing to experiment.

2. Collaborative Leadership and Teamwork

- **Why it's important:** In the corporate world, success is often about working with diverse teams, aligning multiple stakeholders, and leading by influence, not just authority. Collaboration is essential to driving results and achieving shared goals.
- **How to imbibe it:** Transition from being an order-giver to a collaborative leader. Develop strong emotional

intelligence (EQ) and focus on fostering trust, communication, and relationships with your team members.

3. Creative Problem-Solving

- **Why it's important:** Unlike the military, where established protocols dictate action, corporate environments require creative and innovative thinking to solve new and complex problems.
- **How to imbibe it:** Embrace a growth mindset, focusing on solution-oriented thinking. When faced with challenges, brainstorm creative solutions, look at them from different angles, and test assumptions. Empower your team to contribute innovative ideas.

4. Emotional Intelligence (EQ)

- **Why it's important:** The military teaches you to stay focused on the mission, but in the corporate world, understanding and managing emotions—both yours and others'—is vital for building relationships, managing conflicts, and leading teams effectively.
- **How to imbibe it:** Develop strong active listening skills, empathy, and the ability to give and receive feedback constructively. Recognize that emotions play a significant role in decision-making and team dynamics.

5. Data-Driven Decision Making

- **Why it's important:** In the military, decisions are often made based on experience or protocols, whereas, in the corporate world, decisions are increasingly data-driven. Being able to leverage data to guide your decisions is crucial, especially in roles like product management, marketing, or sales.

- **How to imbibe it:** Build your analytical skills and become comfortable using data to support your decisions. Use tools and metrics to evaluate product performance, customer feedback, and business outcomes.

6. Risk Management with Innovation

- **Why it's important:** While the military may prioritize safety, the corporate world, especially in startups or product management, thrives on taking calculated risks to innovate and disrupt.
- **How to imbibe it:** Adopt an approach of “fail fast”, experimenting with new ideas or product features and iterating based on feedback. Learn to mitigate risks while taking action, and be prepared for short-term failures on the road to long-term success.

Q What message would you like to give to transitioning military officers who wish to make a career in cyber security? What are the various roles that they can target and what certifications and skills are required in each of these?

Cybersecurity is a dynamic, challenging, and rewarding field, and your military background equips you with a unique set of skills that will make you stand out in the industry. Your expertise in strategic thinking, problem-solving under pressure, and leading mission-critical operations directly translates into the core competencies needed in cybersecurity. The skills you developed in the military, such as attention to detail, discipline, and the ability to adapt to evolving threats, are invaluable in this ever-changing industry.

As you transition into cybersecurity, focus on leveraging your military experience while acquiring industry-specific skills. Start by identifying the role within cybersecurity that best suits your interests and previous experience. The key to success is continuous learning and building a strong foundation in technical proficiency, security protocols, and risk management. Certifications are essential to gain credibility in this field and will serve as stepping stones to help you grow.

Steps to Start Your Cybersecurity Career:

1.Leverage Transferable Military Skills:

- Your military background in operations, security, leadership, and risk management gives you a strong foundation in cybersecurity.
- Discipline, attention to detail, and the ability to respond quickly under pressure are critical skills in cybersecurity.

2.Focus on Certifications and Upskilling:

- Certifications are essential to demonstrate your knowledge and commitment to cybersecurity. Start with foundational certifications like CompTIA Security+ and work up to more specialized ones, such as CISSP or CEH.
- Explore online platforms like Cybrary, Udemy, and LinkedIn Learning to build foundational knowledge and practice skills.

3.Start with Entry-Level Roles:

- Roles like Security Analyst or SOC Analyst can provide a good starting point. These positions allow you to understand threat detection, incident response, and security monitoring.

- Don't hesitate to volunteer or take internships to gain hands-on experience in a corporate environment.

4.Leverage Military Networks and Mentorship:

- Seek mentors who have made similar transitions from military to cybersecurity. Their advice and guidance can help you navigate this change.
- Participate in military veteran cybersecurity programs or groups, which can provide networking opportunities and specific support for veterans.

5.Stay Current with Industry Trends:

- Cybersecurity is a fast-evolving field. Stay updated on new threats, security technologies, and best practices by following industry blogs, participating in webinars, and engaging with cybersecurity communities.

6.Build Soft Skills:

- In addition to technical expertise, focus on building soft skills like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. These will help you communicate complex issues to non-technical stakeholders and work effectively in a team.

The cybersecurity field offers incredible opportunities for veterans, especially those with a military background. Leadership skills, discipline, and risk management experience are all directly applicable and in high demand. Certifications and hands-on experience will be key to getting started and excelling in this domain. By identifying the role that excites you and

continuously upskilling, you'll be well on your way to a successful cybersecurity career. I have done an exclusive webinar with Prabh Nair on my journey here

Q. Tell us about your family including your parents. How did they shape your value system. Also share the role played by your family including spouse in your successful Transition?

I come from a family that has always placed a strong emphasis on discipline, integrity, and service. My parents, particularly, have played a pivotal role in shaping my values and approach to life. Growing up, they instilled in me a deep sense of responsibility and a strong work ethic.

My father, who served the Delhi Transport Corporation for 30+ years, taught me the importance of being consistent in what you do and why things happen for a reason, while my mother showed me the value of compassion, humility, and always supporting the people around you.

Together, they helped me understand that success isn't just about achieving personal goals but also about positively impacting those you work with. These values were further reinforced in the military, where I learned the true meaning of service before self, accountability, and resilience.

When it came to my transition to the corporate world, my family, particularly my spouse, played a critical role. Transitioning from the military to corporate life was challenging, but my spouse was a pillar of support throughout this process. She encouraged me to take calculated risks and explore new career avenues. I was able to

explore for the initial 6 months since she was gainfully employed with BSNL as a Deputy Manager (Finance) in New Delhi.

Since she comes from the Air Force family, she was assuring and aligned on the big decisions—whether it was moving cities, adjusting work-life balance, or setting long-term goals. Her emotional support and practical guidance in navigating the complexities of a new role and environment were indispensable.

She kept me grounded and reminded me of my purpose.

I'm grateful for my family's contributions to my journey and the role they continue to play in my growth



Arun with wife Bhawana Singh. Circa Jul 2018

Q What are your future plans post-retirement from the corporate career ?

Post-retirement from my corporate career, I envision myself continuing to contribute in meaningful ways, but outside the traditional office environment. Over the years, I've come to appreciate the importance of giving back to the community, and I'd like to focus on mentoring, coaching, and providing guidance to veterans transitioning into civilian careers, especially those entering the fields of cybersecurity and product management. Having made that transition myself, I understand the challenges involved, and I want to use my experience to help others navigate their own paths.

Furthermore, I'm deeply passionate about data security, and I'd love to engage in advisory roles for startups or organizations looking to build secure, sustainable systems. With my experience in cybersecurity and product management, I could assist early-stage companies in shaping their security strategy and product roadmaps.

In terms of personal development, I also want to dedicate more time to family, ensuring that I stay connected with loved ones and continue to support my spouse in their journey. My family's support has been instrumental throughout my career, and I want to make sure I give back in ways that matter most to them.



Arun at the Brooklyn bridge in New York. Circa April 2025



Arun at the Microsoft HQ in Redmond, WA, United States in front of the iconic Microsoft logo during April 2025 business trip.

ForceNetPreneur

Col Sujan Mohanty



Col Sujan Mohanty was commissioned into 64 Assault Engineers, a specialist Regiment of Bengal Sappers, Corps of Engineers in June, 1991. Over 22 years of distinguished military service, he had multiple Regimental appointments in combat engineering role, Senior Instructor at College of Military Engineering, Pune, instrumental in raising a Rashtriya Rifles Battalion and spearheaded in building multiple infrastructures in strategic locations of Leh, Ladakh and Secunderabad, being part of MES. Post his PMR, as a lead manager he successfully strategized, developed and implemented operations and facility management services for large corporate houses namely - ADANI and Café Coffee Day Group. As a Director and Partner in OP&HS Infra, a Consultancy Firm; he worked in the Urban & Rural Infrastructure and Utility services. He is the Founder of Orchids n More, an Agri based Firm located in Bhubaneswar and passionately leading his Agri business along with his wife, Monalisa.

Q Please tell us something about your background prior to joining the Army. Did you have anything to do with agriculture?

At the outset, Thanks a lot to give me/us an opportunity to share our journey of life from an Engineer to Army Officer to Agri Entrepreneur. I am writing ‘us’ because Monalisa, my wife has been a constant support, motivator and partner in my life, be it the Army life, corporate life or now leading a Farmer’s life.

I was born and brought up in Bhubaneswar, the capital of Odisha and never had an exposure to the village life. Subsequently, I did my graduation in Civil Engineering from Bangalore University and graduated as a B.E. Civil in the year 1989. After my graduation, I was working as a Trainee Engineer in PWD of Government of Odisha for a very brief period, approximately nine odd months. I was in a way, more inclined

to join Armed Forces. This might be because of the childhood motivation from my grandfather, who was a Superintendent of Police post-independence. I had virtually Zero knowledge or Zero exposure to Agriculture.

Q How was your army career? Take us through some of your tenures, the highs and the lows. What is it that you learnt from the Army that helped you in your civilian career?

I am a proud Bengal Sapper, who got commissioned to 64 Assault Engineers in June, 1991. During my YOs’ training, my Coursemates (including yours truly) got physically entangled with a group of goons in Pune, and in the bargain, I got stabbed, underwent two surgeries at Command Hospital, Pune and got a Sick Leave of 42 days. I came back to my home town and during the Sick Leave I suddenly decided



After Antim Pag, in pursuit of our passion and devotion for our country (2 Lt Mohanty in the extreme left)

to get married and managed to get married to Monalisa just 10 days before the last date of my Sick Leave. Getting injured and missing my YO's Course was the 'Low', which I had never expected so early in my Army career. Converting my Sick Leave into marriage come Honeymoon on Leave was the 'High' I experienced as a youngster and realised everything is possible in Love and War. I never looked back after that.

Couple of years in my parent Regiment, and I was the first officer from my Regiment, who got posted to Rashtriya Rifles. We were part of the initial raising and we raised our RR Battalion and got into the thick of operations in J&K.

Subsequently, I had two more Regimental tenures and had a works tenure as a Garrison Engineer in the high altitudes of Ladakh extending the Engineer support across both the Passes (Khardungla and Changla) from Siachen Base camp to Tangtse. I was a Senior Instructor in College of Military Engineering, the same place where I had my 'Low and High'. After that I was Commander Works Engineer, Secunderabad providing MES support to more than 100 Major



Standing on the bed of Rowing Channel at CME, Pune and briefing about its progress Proud to be part of the Team creating this magnificent asset.

and Minor Units. Finally, I took my PMR (Premature Retirement) when I was Additional Chief Engineer, Udhampur Zone.

Learning points from Army are in fact countless, which helped me in my civil career. Every day was a day of learning. To name a few:

- The mind & body at every stage was getting tuned to anticipating contingencies, perceiving uncertainties, setting a goal, taking your team along to achieve this goal with the resources available.
- My tenure in the Rashtriya Rifles: Starting the Company Commander's office underneath a tree, consolidating inspite of lack of resources, accepting and being accepted by the unfamiliar faces, finally converting those unfamiliar faces into ever willing buddies and leading them in Counter Insurgency operations was probably one of the greatest lessons learnt, which helped me tremendously in the civvy street.
- Equipment heavy Specialist Regiment of mine taught me the values of

·values of sticking to the maintenance schedule for a prolonged productive life, inventory management (Non availability of a small gear shaft can make your equipment defunct at the most crucial juncture of operation), innovative use of the equipment to stretch its capability to the maximum extent possible and finally the tuning & synchronisation between the man and the machine to achieve the impossible. A motivated man with a sound physical and mental state under the able Leadership can do wonders.

- The works tenure taught me the importance of Quality, Time, Commitment and interaction with various stakeholders. I still remember the day when our Team was doing the finishing touch and plastering work in the severe winter in Ladakh in the middle of the night by switching on the vehicles head light and switching on the Kero heaters. Timely completion of the work was of paramount importance.

Q You were a regular officer and yet you decided to quit the army? Share with us the motivation behind that?

Yes, I was a permanent commissioned officer in Indian Army and it was / is always a matter of pride for me and my family that God had given me the opportunity to serve my country being part of the Army. Whatever, we are today, is because of our Army life. I had never considered Army as a career; it was my passion to serve the country.

The decision to take a 'Premature Retirement (PMR)' came into my mind in

2010 – 11, when I was less than 45 years of age and at the peak of my ability to perform well. I just wanted to see the other side of the world and be a part of the growth story in the corporate world. I considered 22 years of my Army life as a fairly long time, to jump the fence and experience the civvy street. This decision had nothing to do with few terms what we hear nowadays like; disgruntlement, discontentment, work life balance etc. etc.

Q You decided to get into Orchid farming. That's not a typical path of an army officer's post military career. What was the motivation to do that ?

Orchids farming came much later in my post military career. Couple of months before my PMR date, I got connected to Café Coffee Day Group and after a series of discussions, they gave me the opportunity to join Global Village, an IT SEZ in Bangalore (Part of the same group) as Head of Facilities and I accepted the job role and joined them precisely 10 days after my retirement. You can say, I availed my journey and joining time post-retirement too.

Nine months down the lane, I got an offer to join Adani Group with a much larger role. I spearheaded two of their companies as Head of Operations of Shantigram Utility Services Private Limited and Belvedere Golf and Country Club Private Limited. At Ahmedabad. Here, I got the opportunity to understand the business nuances, profitability and viability of a business model, interacting with Government bodies, getting their permissions and compliances, creating an organization matrix after generating



Early morning during Covid, establishing our first set of Bee boxes



Doing it together, Monalisa with the workers

a work breakdown structure (WBS), building up a Team from the scratch, creating SOPs, creating Service Level agreement (SLAs) and closing the Facility Management contract with one of the MNCs. Finally operationalising Shantigram, a 620 Acres of premium township at Ahmedabad in terms of technical operation (including electrical services, water supply, sewerage disposal, elevators, swimming pools and firefighting) and soft services like Security and House Keeping.

However, due to some family compulsion I had to return back to Bhubaneswar. Again, I started speaking to my folks back home seeking their advice and support in exploring opportunities not for a job role but setting up / collaborating in a business. As a coincidence and I may say grace of God, one of my very close friends, Bibhas My Engineering Roommate) gave me an offer to join his Engineering Consultancy

Firm and I joined the OP&HS Infra as a Director and Partner in Nov, 2016. For the next three and half years our team successfully completed the designs and DPRs for various mega water supply and sanitation projects in different parts of Odisha.

During this period, in the year 2017, a dream of starting something on our own started brewing in our (Self and Monalisa's) mind. We started exploring various avenues like creating an NGO, starting something on solid waste disposal, getting into the hospitality sector etc. Farming was never there in our mind. It was nothing but a miracle, which happened to us one fine day when having a cup of tea with my friend Bibhas and his family. During our conversation, Aunty (Bibhas's mother) just mentioned about the future use of her farm land in the outskirts of Bhubaneswar, which was lying vacant for the last few years. Hearing this,

my extempore spontaneous response was,” Aunty, if you permit, we will do farming there in your farm land”. And her lightning response was, “Go ahead, but let me know what you intend to do there”. I just gave her a blank look and said, I will revert. Again, the research started - interaction with the experts, academia, horticulturists, fellow farmers and internet research. Shortlisted and homed on to few options now: Organic vegetables farming, Hydroponics or Floriculture (Orchids, Roses or marigold). We started visiting various Farm houses in Odisha. North East, Goa, Baramati in Maharashtra. Slowly, the option of orchids cultivation took its precedence over others and became the Priority-I approach. The influencing factors, which got us associated with orchids are:

- It is one of the ten most beautiful and expensive flowers in the world.
- It has a high shelf / vase life.
- Conducive coastal climate and high humidity.
- Emerging market demand and increasing popularity of the flower amongst the local population.

Thus started our Love story with orchids and I could revert back to Aunty with a clarity of what we would like to do in our farming life and took a part of her land on lease.

Q Tell us more about Orchids n More . What exactly does it do ? What are the various products of Orchids n More ? How much land area do you have under cultivation? What is the model like do you own all the land that you grow upon?



Tag Line: Dream big, do bigger...

Orchids n More is a Partnership Firm, which came into existence in 2018 with self and Monalisa as the Founding members. We started growing exotic orchids (25,000 plants) in a temperature-controlled environment of a Poly house, the first of its kind in the state of Odisha. In spite of challenges like devastation of our Poly House during cyclone Fani, intermittent nuisance created by wild elephants and lockdowns during Covid; we continued our journey in the field of Agriculture. In September 2023, another similar unit of orchids has been added to the kitty. Presently 50,000 orchids plants are being grown under protected cultivation scheme. In this small venture of ours, we are grateful to the Govt. of Odisha for providing us a subsidy of more than Rs. 50 Lacs..

In addition to growing orchids, we have started a scientifically managed Apiary for Bee Keeping by establishing 25 Bee boxes in the month of May, 2020, which has now grown to 60 Bee boxes with approximately 12 Lac Bees. This bee keeping has a positive impact on the crop production in the nearby agricultural land, the crop yield has increased by 15 to 20% due to cross pollination.

A vermi compost unit was set up in June,

2020 and as on date, the production from Vermicompost unit is approximately 3 Tons per year

We also take initiatives in tree plantation, trying to contribute in bringing down the carbon footprint on the earth. We collaborated with War Veteran Officers' Association for Tree plantation in our Farmhouse on 10th Aug, 2025.

Few of our Products:

- Cut flowers (Dendrobium Orchids, Purple and White)
- Dendrobium Orchid Plants
- Exotic orchid bouquets and flower arrangements being delivered at the door steps of retail customers and Corporate Houses in Bhubaneswar using our Zero pollution electric vehicle.
- Vermi compost
- Raw honey and Bee Colonies of species, Apis cerana indica from an apiary of 60 Bee Boxes
- 2500 x Foliage Plants (Kamini, Song of India, Dracaena Victoria and Golden Bottle brush)
- Experimenting and producing organic turmeric and ginger.

We have 1.2 Acres of land under orchids cultivation under Naturally Ventilated Polyhouse (protected cultivation). Balance 05 Acres of land encompasses the mango orchard, apiary, vermicompost unit and growth of organic vegetables on an experimental basis.

We do not own a single Square inch of land, it is all leased land and part of land under use due to the blessings and large hearted gestures of Aunty (Bibhas's mother).



Houses named after PVC Award Winners – Open Air class under the canopy of trees

Q Orchids n More is also into training services as well as Consultancy services? What were the drivers to get into Training & Consultancy? Run us through your training programs.

Training is a part and parcel of Army life from the Day one. Continuous practice and consistent honing of knowledge and skills development differentiate a professional from an amateur. Majority of the educated population is clueless about the simple steps to be followed in the field of agriculture. And the people pursuing their career in agriculture; be them the students or progressive farmers; they do not get any hands-on experience on standard industry practices and lack the exposure to the latest technology. People have the money; they are inclined to get into active agriculture practices but do not know how to proceed.

Getting involved in serious agriculture and understanding the need of the environment, we decided to share our knowledge and failures with the people who are eager to listen and learn from each other's success or failure. Slowly, the message started spreading through word of mouth.

Various Agriculture Universities started approaching us for exposure visits and to conduct structured training capsules for their students. We organise internship training for 7 to 14 days duration. In addition to standard Agriculture training, we also conduct few Army exposure training for the agriculture students including organising story telling by the students about Param Veer Chakra award winners, both living and posthumous. We create a platform in which the students get hands on experience on how to stitch nets, how to prepare soil mix for potted plants, how to lay mushroom beds, how to plant the orchid plants and how to take care of an apiary.

A proper training syllabus and lesson plan is made and the students go through a structured training cycle. So far, approximately 1200 B.Sc. Agriculture students from three Universities of Odisha have been trained at the Farm house. In March, 2025, I was given the designation of Professor of Practice by the Government University, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology (OUAT), where I delivered a series of lectures to PhD and PG students at OUAT.

In addition, we used to conduct exposure visits to the progressive farmers from across the state.

Q In India Agriculture is wrongly perceived as a low-tech activity. However, factually it may require a lot of technology – what is your view on that? Please substantiate your claims with some facts / anecdotes as well.

This perception of Agriculture, being considered as a low-tech activity is

changing for sure. We have integrated technology in our farming venture by adopting multi-level irrigation system (Micro sprinklers, Fogging and Misting system) for efficient watering, timer-based air circulation fans, interactive smart CC TV, mobile operated pumping system, which can be switched on/off from any part of the country and solar fencing system all around the Poly house to save the valuable orchids and the structures from wild elephants.

For application of fertiliser in the Poly house, we use the HTP Pump with more than 150 meters pressure pipe, so that a man does not have to carry 25 Ltrs tank on the backpack, which is extremely tiring and time consuming. For foliage plants in the open, we use the drip lines for precise irrigation saving water and with additional fixtures like the Venturi, we do measure fertiliser application.

We use the sensor system in our water reservoir so that the water pump gets switched on and switched off automatically when the water level touches the minimum level and when the reservoir is almost full.

When, we constructed our second Poly House, we bought a simple petrol driven earth auger, thereby with just 10 labour days we could do the digging of 2000 Holes, whereas for the same task for our 1st Poly House, we had used almost 150 labour days.

I would like to narrate another innovation we carried out, which is very close to my heart. During the construction of our 1st Poly House, we had procured the concrete

poles from the market. Later, realised the quality was not up to mark. Being a Civil Engineer, I decided, we will make our own concrete poles (2000 in number, for which we used the earth auger as mentioned above.) Reconnaissance and research started, went to few plants where they were manufacturing those poles. Finally, we got an iron plate, a local vibrating motor, discarded Maruti car springs from local garage, made few moulds for casting the poles, made few small poles using the poly film damaged during Fani cyclone. And we were ready with our own manufacturing unit. The concrete poles cast in situ at our farm house are strong like iron due to desired quality control and adequate curing. No handling charges, saved almost 50% of the cost, which we had incurred in our first project.

After the concrete poles were cast, poly house made, now what? How to make use of the casting machine? Should we dispose them off at a low cost? All of a sudden, an idea occurred, can we convert this machine to a vermicompost sieving machine? And we made the horizontal plate inclined, used the wire mesh and it started working perfectly, thus saving a lot of manpower in the process.

Coming to the digital world, use of myBillBook app has made our life much simpler in terms of raising the invoices, accounting, expense monitoring, and inventory tracking. Except the Operations Manager, who is a retired JCO from Corps of Signals, rest of the men working in our Farmhouse are maximum Class X qualified. It was a pleasure to make them use a simple Google sheet for keeping an eye on stock level of the fertiliser, micro nutrients and

insecticides (Almost 25 different varieties) held in store. They simply feed the quantity consumed and quantity procured in the respective cells and I get the figures whenever I need to see.

After seven years of experience in orchids farming, we realised there is a product called weed mat, which when spread on the ground will not allow any weed to grow. It is a common phenomenon, due to best practices being followed with irrigated water falling on the ground spruced up with fertiliser, the weed grows extensively on the ground leading to lots of problems and disease to orchids. We used to spend almost 10K every month to control this weed menace manually. We procured weed mat couple of months back and now the Poly house is almost weed free.

To summarise, technology need not be of rocket science level and prohibitively expensive. Knowledge of what technology is available in the environment, mental mobility, simple applications on ground, and most important, understanding the value for money if we use it, makes our life less dependent on the ever-scarce manpower and overall cost reduction.

Q In India after the Green Revolution there hasn't been much innovation in the agriculture space. Are we not due for a revolution in agriculture now? What is your view?

I agree and disagree with the above statement.

Agriculture 3.0, also known as precision agriculture or smart farming, using digital technologies to monitor and optimize

farming processes for increased efficiency and sustainability have started taking shape in our country.

Use of Drones for mass scale fertiliser application in vast agriculture land, use of drones equipped with AI algorithms to monitor crop health, detect irrigation inefficiencies, and identify weed-infested areas.

Use of a combination of IoT and AI-powered smart irrigation system automating the irrigation schedules to deliver water only where and when needed is happening at places.

But, application of these state-of-the-art technology and innovations are restricted to very few in the profession. The same is still a far-fetched dream for a common farmer in our country. Ignorance, lack of exposure and skill sets, non-availability and extremely high cost are few factors, which need to be overcome for the masses to be benefited. Government has a major role to play in this by capacity building and more and more educated people need to take plunge into agriculture, understand the process and then revolutionise the process.

Q Is there a mindset shift required while moving from being an employee to a Business Owner/ Consultant? Can you share the details?

This purely depends on the work culture and organisation ethos of a company, where an individual is employed. Certain companies give enough independence and flexibility to an employee to think and act as a business owner. But, others, may not be so liberal and an employee has to work within a tight framework and SOP driven

environment.

As a business owner, you live your dream, you live your passion. Starting from the conceptualisation of an idea, structuring of the business model, assessing the viability, understanding the risk assessment, building up your team and working towards achieving your own goal, everything is your responsibility as a business owner. During setting up your course and midway course correction, you cannot sulk away from your overall responsibility and accountability. Hindrances will be there, road blocks will be there, but you need to have your perseverance and stick to your goal. In the midway, a business owner generally cannot leave his own business but an employee is always at his liberty and enjoys the freedom to leave his job and join a greener pasture.

Q How important is it to understand your own passion and expertise and then decide to venture in that space? What are your views on this? How does one identify one's passion?

Here, we are discussing about understanding our own passion and taking a plunge into it after our retirement from the Armed Forces, when we are in a fairly matured age bracket, have our own liking and disliking. Passion is a realistic dream, which gives you a kick, and which you would love to do. We had taken days together to understand what would give us the maximum satisfaction and sense of fulfilment in our life and here I am speaking about the common passion of self and my wife.

I have interlinked the word 'realistic' with passion, else it becomes day-dreaming. If



Passion identified, taken a plunge and relishing the beauty

I say that I have a passion to sing like a pop star, without any expertise or any iota of understanding of the basics of music, it may be termed as my hallucination or day-dreaming. So, identifying one's passion has to be realistic, may be one possesses the expertise or skill sets to fit into that role or one has the confidence and capability to build that expertise.

Q What message would you like to give to transitioning military officers who wish to make a career in the agriculture/ Agri - Tech ? What are the opportunities that they can explore ?

Simple, unlearn and learn. Improve your skill sets in specific fields, one cannot be a jack of all trades, and neither the industry wants that kind of person.

Take time in transitioning and do not take a whimsical decision. Once you are out of the Armed forces, you are out in the wilderness. Understand your passion,

develop yourself by doing professional courses, assess the ROI on the course you are planning to do. Have a focus when you select your course or passion. And once you have selected passion in which, you are going to work, have the perseverance. There will be ups and downs. We have to overcome the challenges and move ahead.

Coming specific to Agriculture, there are many diversified fields one can get into. Hard core farming, cash crops, floriculture, hydroponics, aquaponics, moringa cultivation, dragon fruits, apiary, dairy farm, fishery, pearls culture, converting Agri waste to ethanol, creating market platform, become an aggregator or exporter and there are so many. Identify your passion, see how you grow your expertise, check its financial viability and then move on. For doing this, you need to read, interact with experts, speak to the farmers, visit and see the process in your own eyes; and most important, whatever you are learning or understanding, please

document it with the names of the people, their contact details and what lessons you have learnt.

Q Tell us about your family including your parents. Your spouse is your business partner. Please explain her role and contributions in growing Orchids n More.

I am the youngest in my family. My father was Electrical Superintending Engineer and my mother was a homemaker, also, working in the social sector teaching the under privileged children. I had a happy childhood with my loving parents and four siblings. My wife, Monalisa is the eldest in her family and her father was Electrical Chief Engineer in the Government. She is B.Sc. Physics (Hons) and M.A, M.Phil in Industrial Relation and Personnel Management (IRPM) from Utkal University. She was working in Kothari Pioneer Mutual funds and likewise, she never had any experience in Agriculture. We have one daughter, who is a Chemical Engineer and did her MBA from SIMS. She is now a campus recruiter working with Deloitte USI and happily married to her Engineering classmate, Prathit Sharma and presently settled in Delhi.

After retiring from Army, starting your business, it is like a jewel in the crown if one's life partner becomes one's business partner. From the word go, Monalisa was there in conceptualising in which field we should take a plunge, visiting various farms, developing the business model and actively involved in all decision-making process. She takes care of the marketing, sales and monitoring of accounts, I handle the operations and brand value creation. Both of us are driving our business together, and what better way to start a day, when we discuss day to day activities and strategize our dream project over our cup of morning tea!

Q What are your future plan for Orchids n More ?

The vision is to grow orchids in multiple acres collaborating with Government, fellow entrepreneurs and the farmers and export them, generating employment for more and more people and double the income of a farmer as being envisaged by the top leadership in the country.

As far as the Honey Bee projects are concerned, it would be our endeavour to make it a success by adopting Hub and spoke model at Panchayat levels collaborating with the Ex-servicemen, who are settled in their villages and are without any job. They are hundreds and thousands of them in our state in the prime of their youth, retired from service, under financial constraints, but no worthwhile income. Instead of doing a Security Guard job, away from their family, if we can hold their hands and they become entrepreneurs, in their own capacity, it would be welcome change for all.

The concept and vision of our small Agri firm, Orchids n More is based on the motto – “Dream big, do bigger”



My family, my world...





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Author of the Month

Cdr Bimal Raj



Cdr Bimal Raj (Retd), Writefluencer award-winning author, served 17 years in the Indian Navy before moving from engineering to coaching and training. An Internationally Certified, multi-award-winning Executive Power Coach, he holds multiple certifications from the Blair Singer Training Academy and T. Harv Eker. He hosts the global podcast Awkward Talks, heard in over 55 countries, discussing important yet rarely spoken topics. While he coaches high-performance teams, CEOs, and business owners worldwide, he is also a passionate parenting coach with extensive experience working with parents. At his core, Bimal is a devoted son, brother, husband, father, pet-dad, and friend.

Q Please tell us a little introduction about yourself. Your early childhood, schooling and subsequent Naval career. What made you quit the Indian Navy?

I was born in a humble middle-class family in Kerala, the youngest of three children. My elder sisters were like second mothers to me. My father worked in the Kerala Road Transport

Corporation, and my mother was a schoolteacher. Education was sacred in our home, and my parents ensured I studied in the best schools they could afford.

The dream of joining the armed forces began in 9th grade, inspired by a teacher who had served in the Air Force. His pride and passion for the uniform lit a fire in me.



With my best friend and my schoolteacher who was my inspiration to join the Armed Forces

While preparing for the NDA, my father showed me an ad for the Naval Engineering Course. I cleared the SSB, but my eyesight kept me from becoming a pilot. I chose the Indian Navy and it became one of the best decisions of my life.

The Navy shaped me, tested me, and taught me lessons for a lifetime. A serious road accident put me in a permanent low



Navy Days

medical category and limited my growth. Around the same time, my wife’s business needed my support. Leaving the uniform I loved was one of the hardest decisions I’ve made, but it allowed me to stand beside her and build something that impacts lives every day.

Q How did you get into writing? Is writing is a mission for you or a passion or a hobby or a release?

Well, I guess the writer in me has always been there. The seeds were sown by my mother. She was also the librarian in her school, and every week, she would bring home books that opened doors to new worlds for me. I fell in love with reading. The different worlds and all the amazing narratives that were written in the books came alive for me. I could not just read the words. I was always part of the world that was created by the authors, and I loved being part of it. I wrote poems, kept diaries, and poured my thoughts into words long before I knew the value of it. Back then, I never thought I’d write a book. But looking back, I realized that every book

I read, every page I wrote, was preparing me to become an author many decades down the line.

Q Many congratulations on having published your book in 2023 “What Next: The Art of Bouncing Back“. The book is an insightful memoir that delves into personal growth and resilience. The book chronicles your journey through life's trials and tribulations, emphasizing the importance of perseverance and self-improvement. What was your motivation to write this book?



Book Cover Page

My personal development journey began in 2005, while I was still in the Navy. That’s when I had a life-changing realization — I can be more than who I think I can be. It opened my eyes to

possibilities I had never imagined. In those years, I was on a constant search to become a better version of myself. Somewhere along the way, the dream of becoming a published author took root. I wanted to write a book that could inspire others to believe in their own potential.

But life had other plans. For more than a decade, the dream stayed in the background as I fought personal and professional battles. Then came the COVID lockdown — the world slowed down, and I finally had the time and space to reflect. That's when I decided to write.

My friend Uma had been telling me for years, "You should write a book. There's an author in you." Between my own desire to share my life lessons and Uma's persistent encouragement (a very polite word for "Nagging"), I finally began.

Page by page, I poured my journey of falling, learning, and rising again into words. And that's how *What Next: The Art of Bouncing Back* was born. Out of my firm belief that sharing my truth might just help someone else navigate their own storms.

Q The book is a candid sharing of some of your life's lowest and toughest moments. Was it easy sharing all of it publicly? What made you write them in a bare-all style?

To be honest, it wasn't easy. But if I wanted this book to truly help people, I knew I couldn't hide behind a filtered version of my life. I had to be brutally honest — about the mess, the fear, the mistakes, and the

times I felt completely lost. It was never about showing how strong or successful I was. In fact, I wanted the opposite. I wanted the readers to see how much I struggled, how many times I stumbled in the dark searching for answers, especially in my toughest times. Because that's real life. We all get blindsided by challenges that knock us down and leave us disoriented. And in those moments, it's okay to not have it all figured out.

I wanted people to know that you are not weak in feeling that way. You're human. We all are.

By telling my story in a bare-all way, I hoped readers would see themselves in my journey and think, "If he went through that and found a way forward, maybe I can too."

That's why I didn't hold back. Because healing doesn't happen when we pretend. It happens when we're vulnerable enough to tell the truth about our scars, not just our victories. And if my honesty can make even one person feel inspired to take action and "Bounce Back" ... then it was worth every word.

Q What is the abiding message of your book?

The abiding message of *What Next: The Art of Bouncing Back* is simple — resilience isn't about being strong all the time. It's about falling hard and still finding the courage to rise. It's about asking yourself, even in your lowest moments, "What next?" and then taking that next small step, no matter how uncertain the path ahead feels.

In this book, I've shared my life as it truly happened — the highs, the lows, and the moments I felt completely lost. I haven't written to prove my strength, but to be honest about my doubts, fears, and pain, and how I found my way forward. That honesty is what I believe readers will connect with.

We can't control the storms that life throws at us, but we can choose our response. We can decide our story won't end in the middle of a struggle. We can stand up, rebuild, and keep moving — even if the steps are small and shaky. That's the "What Next" mindset — turning challenges into the very foundation of your strength and growth.

Q You decided to become a Trainer and a Parenting Coach in your career. What made you pursue these professions with so much passion ?

Becoming a Trainer and Coach wasn't a sudden decision. It came from my own struggles and my desire to make a real difference in people's lives. Life showed me, sometimes painfully, that the right guidance

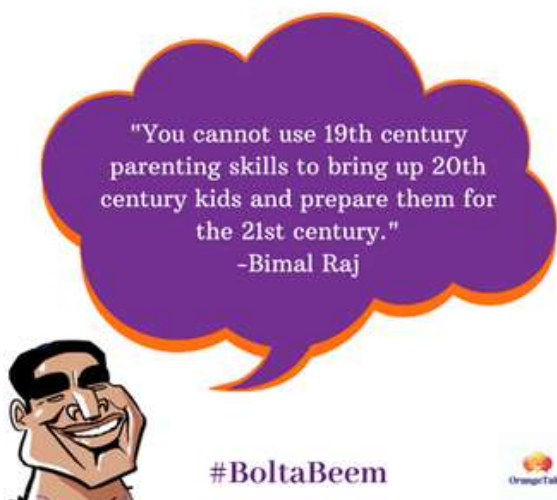
at the right time can change everything. I was lucky to have mentors who believed in me and helped me see strengths I didn't even know I had. I wanted to be that person for others. Someone who could guide, support, and empower them to overcome their challenges.

Parenting became personal for me even before I was married. While lying on a hospital bed, I saw the lifelong impact of both good and poor parenting. I promised myself that no matter what I achieved in life, I would build a relationship with my child where we could talk about anything with complete trust. I studied, learnt, and practiced not only give love, but also the tools to help my child grow into a confident, kind human being.

I never planned to teach parenting, but I realized many parents wanted that same deep connection with their children and didn't know where to begin. That's when I decided to share what I knew.

Training and coaching are not just jobs for me. They are my way of giving back. To pass on the lessons life and the Navy taught me: resilience, empathy, discipline, and the belief that no matter where you start, you can grow into the best version of yourself. I truly know in the core of my being that this is not just my work. It is my calling.

Q You now have so much experience training and coaching people. While it is a clear that the power of a positive mindset is a differentiating factor for those who are successful. Why is it that some people lack this power of a positive mindset?



A positive mindset isn't something you're born with forever — it's like a muscle, and life's setbacks can weaken it until you stop believing you can rise again. But it can be rebuilt by choosing to control your thoughts, focusing on solutions instead of problems, and taking small daily actions like reading uplifting books, surrounding yourself with positive people, and asking "What next?" instead of "Why me?" I've seen people go from completely broken to unstoppable once they made that shift — and that's the power of mindset.

Q8. Your writing style is a standout feature—conversational, light-hearted, and occasionally humorous. How did you manage to do that while delivering such a serious life lessons?

My writing came straight from the heart. I didn't want to follow templates or attend book-writing workshops. I wanted my book to carry my true voice, emotions, and thoughts. Life's toughest times shaped me and even taught me to smile through challenges, something I got from my father's sense of humour. I added lightness to the book so readers wouldn't just feel sorry for me but walk away inspired. The truth is that even in life's storms, there are moments that can make you smile.

Q What is your writing or the creative process? Do you make a list of points then create a draft and then refine it or do you have long sittings to pen the book? Do you also use AI- Artificial Intelligence tool in assist mode to write?

My writing journey began with no plan or

template. My friend, Uma, suggested I start with one life-changing incident and that's what I did. Then I wrote about another, and another, each in separate documents. Only later did we stitch them together and add the What Next Method so readers could apply it in their own lives. In 2021, AI tools like ChatGPT weren't around in India, so every word was written the old-fashioned way – sit down and write! An editor refined it, but the soul and the content of the book is 100% human.

Q Writing can require a lot of discipline and routine. Is there a specific routine you follow while writing a book?

I love writing in complete peace. I had just finished reading "The 5 AM Club" by Robin Sharma, and my wife Pallavi had also told me about the beauty of Brahma-Muhurta — the magical pre-dawn hours for clarity and growth. I decided to write then. I'd wake at 3:30 am, meditate, write my goals, and start typing by 4, working till 7:30 or 8 while the world slept. The silence was perfect except for my two cats, who'd sit on my desk, with that classic feline expression — the one that says, "You? Writing a book? That's cute." At times they



would stroll over my keyboard and watch me like unpaid editors silently judging every word.

Q Tell us about your family. What has been the role of your spouse in your post Navy career? How do they handle your absence when you are busy writing, reading and researching your books?

My family is my anchor, and at the heart of it is my wife, Pallavi — my biggest strength, my constant motivation, and my greatest blessing. She has stood by me in my best days and my worst storms. Even in my lowest moments, she always saw me as someone bigger and stronger than I saw myself, and because she believed in me so much, I began to believe in myself too.

Pallavi is highly accomplished. First as a celebrity emcee and now as a passionate coach and trainer. Her belief in me has made me a better man, a more grounded human being, and a more powerful coach. Many of my post-Navy successes wouldn't have been possible without her. She's not just part of my journey — she's the reason my journey has been possible at all.



With Family

Our daughter, Giaa-Marie, is everything we ever dreamed of as parents and more. She's kind, empathetic, fair, and wise beyond her age. Her intelligence shows not just in her skills but in how she understands life and people.

All my years of learning about parenting have been worth it because of the bond I share with her. We talk about everything and share our dreams and challenges. She trusts me with her heart, and I trust her with mine.

Giaa brings a joy and meaning to my life that nothing else can. She makes me want to be a better man, not because she asks for it, but because her love inspires it. My greatest success will never be the stage I stand on or the books I write. It will be the kind of father I am to her.



With Daughter Giaa-Marie

Q You have been an Indian Naval officer, an engineer, a Trainer, an entrepreneur and an author. Which one of these is the real Bimal and why?

The real Bimal is the sum of all my roles. The Navy shaped me from boy to man, teaching discipline, courage, and resilience. After my accident, I moved to Logistics, where, in the IT wing I helped create Integrated Pay Accounting and Disbursement System (IPADS) in 2005 and designed the Genform Management System for every Naval unit. Both are still running today. These were massive projects that taught me leadership, problem-solving, and persistence.

As a trainer and coach, I've learnt from some of the best minds worldwide. Every role has added a layer to who I am. Every challenge has made me stronger and more empathetic. I believe it's because of this wide and varied journey that I can connect with people, understand their struggles, and help them find their own way forward.



Q What are your future plans regarding writing?

I'd love to write another book — one that helps people face challenges and come out stronger. I won't force it; when the time is right and the Universe calls for it, the words will flow. Until then, I'll keep living, learning, and gathering the wisdom that will one day fill its pages.

Q How can our readers keen to pick up a copy of your book do so ?

<https://amzn.to/3UW4Yj6>

My Website - <https://bimalraj.com/>

Q Any advice to fellow veterans who wish to become professional authors ?

My mentor Blair Singer says, "If you have wisdom that can help others and don't share it, you're being selfish."

As veterans, our experiences hold lessons the world needs. Write with honesty, vulnerability, and courage. Don't try to impress, try to connect. Share your victories, doubts, mistakes, and fears, because truth, not perfection, touches hearts.

Don't wait for the perfect time; start with one story that's burning to be told. One page will lead to another, and soon you'll have a book that's uniquely yours.

Always remember that you're not just writing a book; you're leaving a legacy that will speak for you long after you're gone.

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Veterans' Affairs Dialogues



Brig Bhupinder Singh Dhillon, Director, DSW, Punjab

Brig Bhupinder Singh Dhillon (Retd) is a second generation officer who has served the nation for 35 years. He has held important staff, command and instructional appointments during his service. He has considerable operational and administrative experience in multifarious roles during his military career. The officer after superannuation, joined Punjab Govt. on 23 Feb 2023 as Director Defence Services Welfare, Punjab. The Department is primarily responsible for welfare and rehabilitation of ex-servicemen (ESM) and their dependents.

Q Please tell us something about your background prior to joining the Army.

Ans. I have done my initial schooling up to class IV from the Govt. Primary School from my village Faizgarh, Tehsil Nabha. My further schooling up to class XI was from Punjab Public School (PPS), Nabha, one of the most prestigious schools of Punjab. I had qualified for National Defence Academy (NDA) in 1983 and joined the premier Institution in Jan 1984 in the 71st NDA Course and passed out in Dec 1986. I passed out of Indian Military

Academy (IMA) on 19 Dec 1987 and was granted commission into SIKH LIGHT INFANTRY Regiment.

Q How was your army career? Take us through some of your tenures, the highs and the lows. What is it that you learnt from the Army that helped you in your civilian career?

I had a professionally rewarding 35 years career (19 Dec 1987 to 31 Dec 2022) in the Indian Army. I possess a rich operational experience and have the distinction of serving in challenging operational



NDA 71/ H Sqn (Second from left sitting)

environments of OP MEGHDOOT (Siachen Glacier), OP PAWAN (Sri Lanka), OP RAKSHAK (Counter Insurgency operations in J&K), High Altitude Areas of Leh Ladakh and Line of Control. I have been Instructor in Commando Wing, Special Frontier Force Academy and SIKH Light Infantry Regimental Centre. I have done important staff appointments in Assam Rifles, Corps HQs, Comd HQs and Army HQs. I have distinction of commanding an Infantry Battalion in Deserts & High Altitude Area and an Infantry Brigade in Punjab. My career in the Army has been personally and professionally satisfying. Army service has been learning curve and the noble profession has taught me the leadership responsibilities, man-management and welfare aspects of the troops. I think our core competencies and challenging varied assignments and duties make us well adapted for any second career in the civil stream.

Q You superannuated from military services and joined as Director Defence Services

Welfare Punjab and Secretary Rajya Sainik Board. What was the motivation to join this role? You may also paste their organization tree.

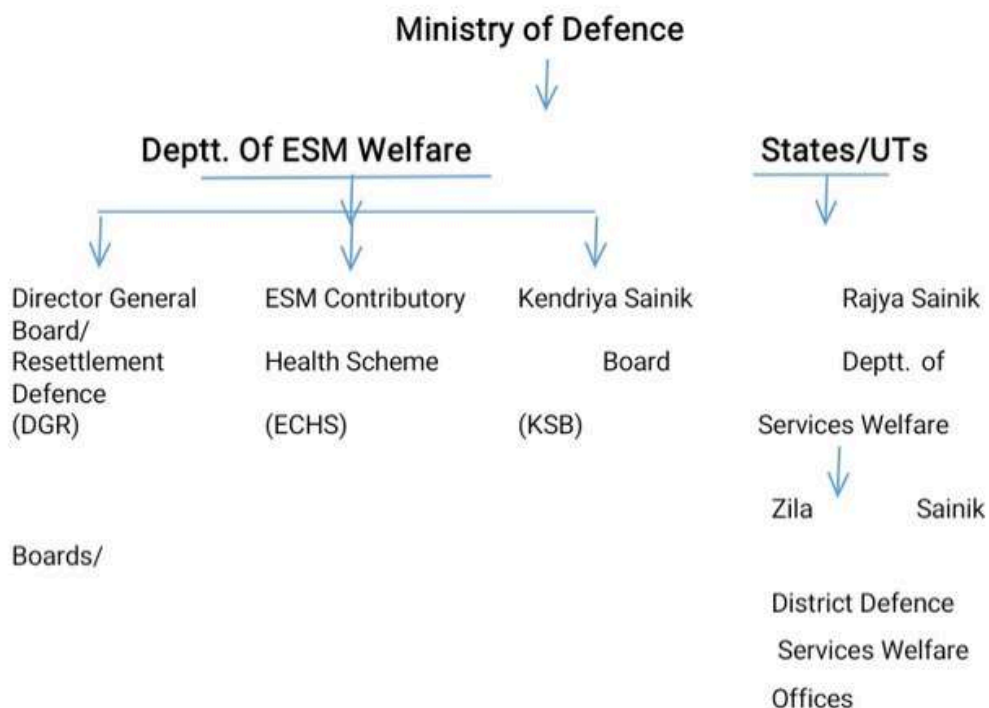
As a Brigadier, I retired at the age of 56 years. I strongly felt that it was too early to retire from active life. A golden opportunity came when the post of Director Defence Services Welfare, Punjab got advertised. I applied for the same in Sep 2022. After a rigorous selection procedure, I was lucky to get selected for the same. Let me share with you that while in uniform we are not fully aware of the challenges being faced by our soldiers after retirement. ESM are the dual responsibility of the Centre and the State. Centre provides them with pensionary benefits, ECHS and CSD facilities. A soldier retires at an early age of around 35-40 years and it's the duty of the State to ensure that they settle down well. All States have their welfare and rehabilitation schemes for the ESM and their dependents.

ESM are a vibrant community who take pride for services rendered to the Nation and always look forward to contribute to Nation building. There are around 35 lakh ESM (including widows) in the country and approximately 60,000 join annually on retirement. Deptt. of ESM Welfare, Ministry of Defence (MOD), Government of India implements various govt. provisions and schemes through Kendriya Sainik Board (KSB). Sainik Board organizations have been in existence since World War-I for the welfare of soldiers. They have been renamed/rechristened from time to time. Presently KSB is the Apex body which functions under the Deptt of Ex-servicemen Welfare of the Ministry of Defence and formulates policies for Resettlement and Welfare of ESM.

Organization Chart. The organizational inter-relationship between the various deptts of the Centre, State and District level are as under:-

Q Tell us about the Department of Defence Services Welfare Punjab and the Rajya Sainik Board? What are their mandates and what are the typical activities performed by these bodies ?

Department of Defence Services Welfare has been established for the welfare of Ex-servicemen of Punjab and their dependents and serving soldiers in the Indian Army. Before 1984, this department was functioning under the respective Deputy Commissioners at District level in which one officer was appointed as the Secretary Zila Sainik Board. In 1984 after reorganisation of the department, it was named as Defence Services Welfare Department, Punjab. The main office was established as Directorate of Defence Services Welfare, Punjab, Chandigarh and District offices were established in various districts. The main objective of the Department is welfare and rehabilitation of ESM, their dependents and serving soldiers by running various welfare





Brig Bhupinder with the CM of Punjab, Mr Bhagwant Mann

schemes of Kendriya Sainik Board and Punjab Government. Every year about 6000 soldiers belonging to the State of Punjab retire. Efforts are being made by the Department for their early rehabilitation. About 3.50 lakh ESM and 75000 widows belonging to the state of Punjab depend on this Department for all aspects pertaining to their welfare and rehabilitation. The State Govt. has also constituted a Rajya Sainik Board to resolve the problems of the ESM and to formulate new schemes for their welfare. Hon'ble Governor of Punjab is the President of Rajya Sainik Board.

Q What are the top two or three strategic priorities your department is currently focused on to improve the lives of veterans?

The primary objective of the Deptt. is welfare and rehabilitation of ESM and their dependents. The ESM, widows and

Veer Naris need recognition for their services and sacrifices for the nation. Punjab has been the sword arm of the country and is land of sacrifices. We share an active border and the Armed Forces have its presence in almost all the districts of Punjab. The State Govt. is committed to the welfare of the ESM and I am very happy to inform that Punjab Govt. schemes are one of the best in the country. Our welfare schemes and grants are for Gallantry & Distinguished Awardees, Non pensioners, World War Veterans & families, disabled soldiers and families of Defence personnel killed in Action. The monetary benefits are revised regularly. Our aim is to bridge the gap between the ESM and the civil administration and facilitate resolution of their issues with civil administration and Records/PCDA Allahabad/Service HQs.

Q For service members transitioning back to civilian life, the period can be fraught with challenges. What resources and support are you offering to help with this transition, specifically regarding employment, and educational/upskilling opportunities.

I have mentioned earlier, our dept's main responsibility is rehabilitation and resettlement of ESM and their dependents. We are running educational courses like BCA, MCA, Post Graduate Diploma Course in Computers, Stenography and Punjab Typing. There are 13% reservation for ESM and their dependents for all government. jobs in Punjab Govt. In fact serving soldiers can apply for jobs during last one year of their service so that by the time they retire, the next job is in the pipeline.

Q How does your department actively solicit feedback from veterans and Veteran Service Organizations and what is the process for using that feedback to make tangible changes to policies and services?

As mentioned earlier, Punjab has a large number of Ex-servicemen, widows and Veer Naris in the State. Our endeavour is to stay connected with them always. We have offices in all the 23 Districts of Punjab. The Department website (<https://dsw.punjab.gov.in>) is fully functional which provides all relevant details about the Deptt. In addition, there is a grievances portal of Punjab Govt. where any person can put up his grievance which is resolved in a time bound manner. We also meet and honour our veterans and families on occasions like Kargil Day, Vijay

Diwas, Veterans Day, Republic Day and Independence Day. Special Camps are organised for Veterans to upload their life certificates on SPARSH for pension related issues. There are large number of ESM organisations registered in the State. Certain valuable suggestions are received from them and incorporated for betterment of the welfare

schemes. Every quarter there is a Zila Sainik Board meeting conducted at the District level which is chaired by the Deputy commissioner for resolving issues of ESM. Sangat Darshans are conducted by our Hon'ble Minister in charge to meet and interact with the ESM fraternity. ESM rallies are also conducted for outreach programmes.

Q The government bodies cannot do this work alone. How do you work with Veteran organizations, community organizations, and private sector partners to augment the services and support available to veterans?

Veterans Welfare is a joint effort where the Armed Forces, State Govt. and NGOs play a major role. Generally all districts of Punjab have presence of Army/Air Force/NCC Units. Veteran Sahayata Kendrya (VSKs) have been established by the Army in all military stations. There is a close coordination between Armed Forces and State for resolving problems of the ex-servicemen community.

Q On a personal note, can you share a specific story or a moment from your time in this role that made you feel proud of the work being done and reinforced your

commitment to serving veterans?

Our department is committed for welfare of the veterans and meet their aspirations holistically. Every issue of an ESM when resolved is a moment of satisfaction for us. As per State policy, a govt. Job and an ex-gratia of one crore is given to the dependent of the soldier who is Killed in Action (Battle Causality). Every year around 12-15 soldiers of the State make the supreme sacrifice for the Nation. It is a moment of pride and a lot gratitude when we meet these families and honour them. I must apprise you that Punjab has highest number of Veer Naris in the Country amongst all States.

Q If you could achieve one major milestone for veterans in the next year that would have a lasting, positive impact, what would that be and how would you measure its success?

Besides adding new welfare schemes and enhancing existing monetary benefits, we are in the process of digitizing the data of all Ex-servicemen and widows. It will further enhance our outreach with the veterans. It will ensure that our services are delivered at the earliest. We have also reached out to all three service HQs to provide us data of soldiers who are retiring in next 12 months. It will help us to reach out to them in advance and guide them on the job opportunities so that they prepare accordingly.

Q What message would you like to give to transitioning military officers who wish to make a career in the government bodies related to veterans' welfare and affairs.

I would say that there is no other noble duty than to look after our own veterans. State Govts. have a separate Deptt. for ex-servicemen. In addition there are ex-servicemen Corporation like PESCO (Punjab Ex-servicemen Corporation) which also employ ESM. Punjab has got two Preparatory Academies which train students (both girls & boys) to join Armed Forces. It is a very respectable job and duty where one gets immense satisfaction in resolving the problems of our veterans.

Q Don't you think that it is time veterans' welfare and affairs to be reimaged and it needs a paradigm shift as the times have changed from when these bodies were founded.

Our constant effort is to change and align our policies as per the evolving times. There is definite need to have better synergy with Armed Forces/Central Govt. There is also a need to have uniform schemes by all States. Regular meetings are held under the aegis of KSB. Civil Military Liaison Conferences at state level deliberate at length all issues for betterment of our services for veterans.

Q Tell us about your family. You may also share the support rendered by your family in your professional growth.

My wife is a home maker and we are blessed with two daughters. They have been a great support for me during my service and now in my present appointment.



The Brig with his Better-Half

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the sea, drink the wild air.”
—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

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Moment In Time

We have started with a Photography section “**Moment in Time**” to provide an outlet for creative side of our esteemed members. The rules for submission are as under:-

1. Forces Network members, spouses and their wards can submit images for publication.
2. No Nudity or Porn.
3. No mention of Mil establishments or unit identity or tac numbers or tail numbers.
4. It's a photography section so no images of various get togethers and social functions will be published.
5. The longer side of image should be 2048 pixels.
6. Maximum 5 images will be published every month. The images must be submitted by 20th of every month.
7. Mention your Instagram ID.
8. **While submitting the following details be submitted along with the suitable Title:-**
 - a. Aperture
 - b. Shutter speed
 - c. ISO
 - d. Camera used
 - e. Lens
 - f. Focal length.
 - g. In case of a mobile click, the same may please be mentioned.

All Photos may please be sent to forcesnetworkz@gmail.com by 20th of every month.



Nature's Grand Stand -By Col J Sharma



A Walk into the Sunset By Col J Sharma



Valley of Clouds By Col J Sharma



Cultural Moorings By Col J Sharma



Just Joy... By Col J Sharma



The young King of the Mao Naga's with his body guard . Please note how proudly he wears a necklace with a human skull .

~ By Col Ranjit Singh



***With the village council over which he presides .
Pudunamei village is where he resides being one of the
highest inhabited village in Manipur bordering Nagaland .
~By Col Ranjit Singh***

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NOEL LAND

***Dedicated Section for the Star
Author of Forces Network***

LT
COL



NOEL
ELLIS

We welcome Col Noel to the folds of
the Forces Network .
We have decided to devote a Section
to his writing every month in the
ForceNet E-Zine .

Taking Advantage

By Lt Col Noel Ellis

I was reminded of the old story of two cats fighting over a slice of bread and a monkey whom they requested to mediate over the dispute. I won't reiterate that story. However, today I witnessed two situations exactly like that.

Little girls were playing "Ghar-Ghar" in the front lawn. Arrangements for a birthday party were in full swing. They were busy selecting dresses, arranging the venue, sorting out their guest list, finalising the menu, writing invitation cards etc. However, there was a dispute on the timing

of the party.

Just then three boys, two of them on their bicycles and one without, wanted to join the girls in the party. The girls refused to allow them in. The eldest one with a cycle was the classmate of one of the girls and tried to persuade her on the 'classmate net'. The girls didn't budge.

All their conversations and discussions could be heard loud and clear. I was witnessing all this from my rooftop, where I was waiting to photograph birds in flight.



The Toy House of the Girls

While the two boys tried to park their cycles in the middle of the road, the elder one accidentally knocked off the younger boy's cycle and it fell on the road. All hell broke loose. "Tune meri cycle ko kaise touch kiya. I will tell Papa. You broke my cycle". A fist fight started. One slapped the other and vice versa. I could understand the sentiments about the most dear possession.

Taking advantage of the situation, the third boy who was on foot made the fallen bike stand upright. As the fight between the other two intensified, he ran away with that bike to a distance, mounted it and zoomed off for a chukker. The boy whose bike it was did not know what to do. To continue to fight with the boy who knocked his cycle or to run and catch his other friend who took advantage of the situation and took a joy ride round the park.



The Drongos In a Fist Fight

This boy started howling and crying loudly. The elder one took his bike and scooted. The situation eased out when the other boy returned with the cycle. There would have been another fight and anticipating that, the other boy just jumped off the bike and let it fall hard on the road in the same momentum and ran away. This teary eyed boy could do nothing. He rode back home sobbing.

The girls continued playing without paying attention to what was happening as if nothing had happened. It was party time after all.

Then there was commotion on a bare branched tree. Two Drongos were in a kind of fight. For what, I was not sure but surely the atmosphere amongst them was not congenial from their gestures. Just then a third Drongo came to intervene. Two of them attacked it and the third Drongo went and perched itself a little away.

While these guys were fighting my attention was drawn to a bird which was sitting on a branch below the Drongos. She slyly flew and came to the place where these Drongos were nesting. I knew it, as I had photographed them a couple of days earlier on that tree.

The Drongos were daggers drawn and my friend "Mr Shikra" took advantage of the situation. He located their nest. It waited for a while to see if there was a reaction from the Papa and Mama Drongo. Then quietly, it entered the tree. I could make out what he would have done to the contents of the nest.

Drongos must have realised that while they were fighting, their nest was under attack. The other birds had raised an alarm, but their fight was more important, it seems. By the time they returned and chased Mr Shikra away, I assumed that the damage had been done. I could not see it clearly, but the chase of the Drongos and the Shikra said it all.

My only wish is that hopefully at least one egg or chick would be safe in the nest. Will my wish come true? I wonder!!!!!!!

JAI HIND

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About the Author

Lt Col Noel Ellis (retd) is an ex-NDA officer from 66th NDA course. He was commissioned in June 1985 into the Mechanised Infantry. Col Noel is a very vibrant writer. His articles relate to his deep experiences which he had as an Army officer. During his service he has interacted with numerous types of people, be it his colleagues, his seniors or his subordinates and each of his articles portrays that how vivid human nature is and how different their reactions to situations are. He is heavily into reading and leaves no opportunities to pen down his opinion about what is going on in the country. You can read his [Blog](#) here



**THE SHEEP WILL SPEND ITS
ENTIRE LIFE FEARING THE
WOLF, ONLY TO BE EATEN BY
THE SHEPHERD.**

African Proverb

Knowledge Bytes

Lessons of Leadership – Part 2

By Varun Dhand

In Bad Books Vs In Good Books

Human race, values and life has evolved over a period of time. Human life revolves around various types of emotions like happiness, sad, empathy, selfishness, anger and fear etc. These emotions/nature and background of person forms the foundations of human behaviour and ultimately shapes the personality. Personality of an individual sketches its leadership traits. These traits run into the veins of the individual and organisation which he/she is leading. Leadership effects the psychology of people working with the leader. Leaders of terrorist organisations use this leadership principle to brainwash terrorists to bring annihilation and loss to human lives. Whereas, on the other hand, the same principle can inspire scientists as leaders to carry out Pokhran nuclear blasts for deterrence. Leadership plays with mind; creates ideology and is deep rooted in the system.

Being in a leaders' bad books and good books goes parallelly in the leadership circles. It is like two sides of same coin. Bad books is defined as where a person is reflected in bad light/ not performing in the eyes of their superiors/ boss/ management. There are various reasons which lead a person to fall in the category of bad books. Persons with indifferent attitude to those who work with ethics join this chronicle.

Category 1 Indifferent Attitude: This is the situation where a person doesn't want to do work/ doesn't want to take initiative in his work. This class doesn't upgrade/update themselves in life and live a life of stupor.

Category 2 Ethical Behaviour: They are the other extreme people who are high on ethics and don't budge against anyone if any misdeed is in the picture. They don't allow any pressure to act on them but rather impose pressure on the opposition. They go by the book/ instructions promulgated.

Being in leaders' good books is defined as where a person is in a good light/ high performance/ has best rated Annual Confidential Report (ACR). From candour to cajolment, these type of people falls into this category.

Category 1 Candour: Persons with high performance (sincere, skilful, problem solver) characteristics remains in limelight for their work and contribution. Their work inspires many and others remains envy and even try to pull them down.

Category 2 Cajolment: Persons with buttering abilities and good for nothing often fall into good books. This breed does not know how to plan or execute work but knows only to impress using their flattery



Two Extremes

skills. They fake behaviour as per situation and go to any limit to defame others to score their brownie points.

Now the question arises why the concept of good and bad books exist? People working in an organisation are judged for their behaviour and performance. This judgement is reflected in the bosses' thinking and appraisal reports. These bosses' judgements and prejudice are the source of good and bad books. This is the worst form of leadership where partiality, injustice and exploitation openly prevail.

Senior leadership must get alerted if any colleague tries to soft-soap or try do any favours. There are various ways to oblige your boss/senior by tangible and non-tangible means. In tangible means, one obliges by money/precious gifts where as in non-tangible where one takes sexual favours/ personal transfers/ life-saving act thereby making indebteding the person concerned.

Leadership always guides and shows ray of hope to the masses. But if there are issues with the leadership itself, then who will do the course correction? Initiatives have to be taken from top management where a policy

of zero tolerance towards unethical and corrupt behaviour must be introduced. All these initiatives must be logged in to the system so that there must be transparency and accountability. Training must be imparted to the employees on differentiating ethical conduct and malpractices. There must be policy of enforcement for those who does not toe the line. Human Resource (HR) must be independent and should set an example because they have a bigger responsibility of making employees comply with the policies. So, they themselves have to come clean of what they preach to others. Whistle blowers in the system must be protected and rewarded. I know this is wishful thinking in respect to Indian systems (in generic sense) but something needs to be changed on ground to change the scenario. A ray of hope is seen as many of the above-mentioned points are implemented at many work places and radical changes are brought in.

I have my own personal experiences where if any inequity arises and I highlighted it, then I was stored in their bad books permanently. In such a case, the person will be targeted and scrutinised for every act.

. Actions can be expected in black and white so as to harass the individual. For e.g. If a person is working as per his normal capacity with discipline, then the person is questioned what extra he/she is doing? But the same person going out of way and doing their duty, he/she will get questioned that why he/she is going out of way. The arm-twisting is done in both ways and toxic atmosphere is created till the person resigns.

The person in this situation must fight and keep his/ her options open for change because the world is against that person. Individuals must generate evidence in the form of official mails/approvals in order to safe guard themselves for emergency.



Good vs Evil

The only simple solution to conclude Bad Vs Good Books discussion is that the superiors must carefully see/ listen/ sniff actions of their colleagues and don't get carried away. They must demand evidence/ explanation to the scenario presented to them and pronounce impartial verdict. It will keep the individual/seniors and everyone in the company in good health. In present times, bliss is a niche commodity as we all have complicated relations in life. So, let's try to keep things simple and not confound. Concluding this article with quote of Shri Rabindranath Tagore.

“It is very simple to be happy, but it very difficult to be simple!”

About the Author

Lt Cdr Varun Kumar Dhand retd from Indian Navy with 11 years of service in Executive cadre. He had left Indian Navy in 2018. Presently, he is working as Deputy Manager (Security) in State Bank of India, Mumbai. He is passionate of reading books, running marathons, writing book reviews, write and debate on different topics of national importance. Readers can share their feedback of the article at dhand1984@gmail.com





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Book Review

The Silent Thread

By Deepak Thawani

Have you ever read a book that felt like it was speaking directly to a part of you, the part that you've long buried under layers of "what will people say?" or "parents know best"? That's exactly what *The Silent Thread* did to me. It didn't just tell a story—it held up a mirror. And what I saw wasn't just

Arjun's pain, but echoes of people I've known, and even parts of myself I don't always admit to. This debut novel by Deepak Thawani is a quiet explosion. It doesn't scream for attention. It gently wraps around you, tugging at threads you didn't even know were frayed. And by the time you're done, you're not quite the same.

Arjun is the kind of son every Indian parent dreams of—obedient, dutiful, respectful. But behind closed doors, away from his parents' gaze, he's someone else entirely: carefree, light-hearted, almost unrecognizable from the boy they think they know.

After graduation, he reluctantly steps into the family business, believing it to be an act of love and duty. But soon, the cracks begin to show—revealing a deeper, darker undercurrent of control masked as care, and love that comes with strings attached. Enter Jaanvi, a spirited artist with a heart full of compassion, who helps Arjun see that what he's endured isn't "normal," but a legacy of generational trauma.

What follows is not just a story of breaking



free—but of healing, rediscovery, and the power of choosing yourself.

One of the first things that stood out to me was how accessible the language is. You don't need a dictionary by your side. But don't let the simplicity fool you—each sentence carries a quiet emotional weight. Thawani doesn't rely on flowery prose. Instead, he writes with honesty and intent, and that's what makes the emotions feel so real. He doesn't rush. He doesn't dramatize unnecessarily. The silences speak. The pauses hurt. And that restraint is what makes the emotional punches land harder.

Arjun feels like someone you've met before—maybe in your circle, maybe in your own home, or maybe in the mirror. His internal conflict, his tug-of-war between love and self-worth, is deeply relatable. Jaanvi, on the other hand, isn't just the love interest. She's symbolic of clarity, of compassion without conditions. She's that one person in your life who tells you, "You don't have to live like this"—and means it.

Even the parents aren't painted in black and white. They're complex, the way real people are. Their actions are problematic, but they're also a product of their own upbringing. This nuance makes the story feel authentic. The story unfolds gently. There are no sudden jolts or gimmicky twists. But the steady pace works in its favour—it mirrors the slow, often painful process of waking up to your reality. The build-up to Arjun's emotional breaking point is done thoughtfully, making the payoff feel earned and believable.

If you've ever struggled with boundaries in Indian families—or questioned if obedience always equals love—this book will cut deep. It explores narcissistic parenting, emotional manipulation, generational trauma, and the silent sacrifices children are often expected to make. But what I loved most was that it didn't just dwell on the pain. It offered hope. It showed that cycles can be broken, and that love, when unconditional, can be healing.

I didn't expect to tear up. But I did. Several times. Especially towards the end—which I won't spoil—but it left me raw. Not shattered, but soft. Like I had just walked through someone else's truth and come out changed.

What truly stands out in *The Silent Thread* is its deeply relatable characters, especially Arjun, whose journey feels like a mirror to so many lives lived quietly under the weight of expectations. The book tackles complex themes like emotional abuse, generational trauma, and societal norms with remarkable sensitivity, never resorting to blame but instead offering a nuanced exploration. And despite its emotional depth, it maintains a hopeful tone throughout—never leaving the reader bitter, but gently reminding us that healing, self-discovery, and change are not only possible but necessary.

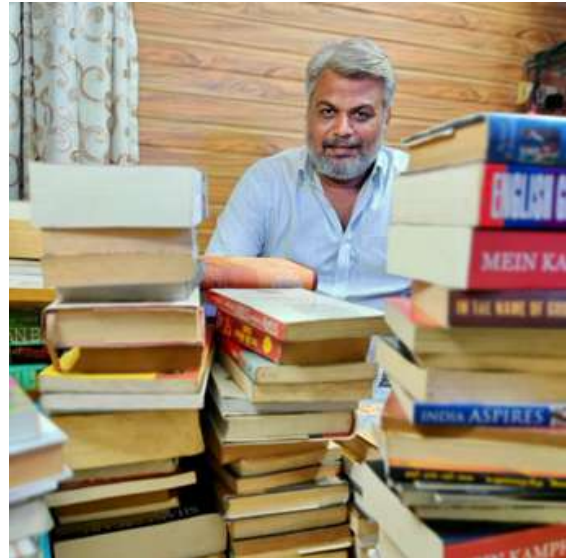
There were a few moments where I wished the story had dug a little deeper, especially in Arjun's interactions with his parents post-revelation. Some arcs could've had more closure. But honestly, the emotional depth elsewhere more than made up for it. As someone who has often seen friends silently suffocate under the weight of "good upbringing," this book was a release. It reminded me that obedience without respect is just fear. That "duty" shouldn't come at the cost of your dreams. And that choosing yourself is not betrayal—it's survival.

The Silent Thread isn't just a story—it's a quiet revolution. A nudge to look inward. A whisper that says, "You're allowed to choose peace." If you've ever felt unseen in your own family, this book will see you.

Highly recommended for readers who enjoy emotionally intelligent fiction, introspective storytelling, and stories that heal while they hurt. I'm excited to see what Deepak Thawani writes next—because this debut is more than promising. It's powerful.

About the Reviewer

Sameer Gudhate is a poet, author, and proud book lover whose passion for words led him to achieve a world record: reviewing 365 books in 365 days. His writings, filled with heart and insight, have found a place in national and international journals, newspapers, and anthologies. A basketball enthusiast and a hands-on dad, Sameer is on a mission to spark his daughter's love for reading. Whether he's penning poetry or simply connecting with fellow bookworms, Sameer brings warmth, authenticity, and a deep love for storytelling to everything he does. He can be contacted on 9820270247/samgudhate@gmail.com



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—ERNEST HEMINGWAY



Member Achievement

From Financial Bankruptcy to Financial Strength: The Journey of Reinvention

By Colonel Harbinder Singh

Member Achievement is a feature where we share success stories/ achievements of our members at a national/ an international level. The aim of this feature is to celebrate the success of our members as also to encourage. Motivate and inspire many others. We in the Forces Network community believe that there are amazing stories of veterans that remain untold, and the world deserves to know them. This is a humble attempt in that direction.



My Army Career

In the Army, I quickly distinguished myself. By 1999, as the commander of a mid-sized EME workshop in Jaipur, I was already challenging conventional methods. I proactively automated maintenance processes even before such initiatives became official—delivering efficiency gains and cost savings. More notably, I introduced junior leadership development programmes, empowering JCOs to take initiative within well-defined guidelines. This collaborative management style stood in stark contrast to traditional command-and-control models and earned him the respect of his men.

A Pivotal Posting: DRDO

In 2006, I was sent on deputation to the DRDO Headquarters in New Delhi which marked a turning point in my life. As a Joint Director at the Centre for Technology Extension and Cooperation (CTEC), I managed and executed Limited Series Production (LSP) orders for NBC (Nuclear, Biological, Chemical) protection and detection technologies. My focus on indigenisation and efficient project delivery—long before “Make in India” became a national policy—resulted in the timely execution of complex projects, two of which were showcased at the Republic Day Parade.

Beyond execution, I also played a prominent role in international defence exhibitions and technology cooperation, laying the groundwork for global partnerships.

The Leap of Faith: PMR and Transition
After the DRDO tenure, I found myself increasingly limited by the Army's structure. In March 2011, I took Premature Retirement (PMR)—a bold decision not of withdrawal, but of strategic transformation. “I wasn't just stepping away from a structured life, but was stepping purposefully into the unknown.”

The transition was meticulously planned over a period of 18 months. I upskilled and adapted to corporate expectations, and within just 11 days of retirement, I joined a company in Ahmedabad. However, the role exposed deep operational inefficiencies, leading to my exit by June 2011. Adding to the challenge, my family—still in Delhi—was in the middle of a move, and with government accommodation deadlines looming, life demanded rapid recalibration.

August 2011 brought new hope—a role in Business Development in Dubai. I moved to Dubai in September 2011, determined to avoid the pitfalls of my previous job. Dubai proved fruitful, I earned well, saved diligently, and gained invaluable international experience. In September 2014, after a rewarding stint in Dubai's corporate sector, I decided to turn into an entrepreneur. I partnered with a friend to launch a business in the UAE. But by November end, betrayal struck. A partner, aided by a local contact, exploited legal loopholes and took over the venture. Facing significant legal and financial risks,

I had no choice but to return to India by the end of the year 2014.

By 1 January 2015, life had hit rock bottom:

- Just ₹1.4 lakhs in the bank
- Dubai savings and retirement funds were wiped out
- ₹30,000 monthly EMI for housing loan
- Two children still in education career
- Minimal pension
- No job

But what followed was not surrender. It was resurgence.



Resurgence Not Surrender

The Bounce Back

Determined to rise again, I began seeking overseas opportunities as by this time I was well versed with overseas assignments and its remuneration. I also knew that an Indian salary would NOT be good enough to recover my financial losses quickly. I started scouting the African market for suitable and financially rewarding roles. In early 2015, I landed a role with one of Africa's largest companies in Nigeria. Over the next two years, I had rebuilt my finances, supported my family, and regained professional momentum.

In 2017, I returned to India to join a logistics firm in Hyderabad focused on the industrial railway sector. My impact was immediate. Within a year, I was promoted to COO, a role traditionally reserved for retired senior railway officials. I proved that domain expertise and innovation can co-exist, regardless of background.

Rebuilding Life and Wealth

Stability returned, and I turned my focus to family and financial independence. My daughter completed her MBA from abroad; son graduated in BCom (Hons) from Christ University and enrolled in the CFA program and secured a strong corporate placement.

Financial planning was evident and I began investing in equities—starting with ₹5 lakhs in 2019 and another ₹35 lakhs in 2020. Through research, diligence, and disciplined planning, the corpus grew to ₹3 crores by 2024. My family home in Gurgaon was paid off, and another property was added to the portfolio.



My Happy Family

Third Innings

In January 2021, I joined Novartis in Hyderabad, where I worked until 2023. During this time, the seeds of “Third Innings” began to take root—a new chapter of impact, learning, and legacy. I dedicated over a year to mastering equity investing and trading, with the goal of launching my next professional avatar by late 2025.

Giving Back and Looking Forward

Today, I work closely with my brother in Surat, lending strategic direction to their logistics business. I mentor SMEs, helping improve operational efficiency and build sustainable systems.

At 60, I am retired, but not tired and far from done.

Retirement is not an end—it’s a transformation. “Now it’s about building a legacy—through mentorship, strategic guidance, and giving back to the ecosystem that shaped me.”

Lessons Learned

- Plan your transitions as thoroughly as you plan your military operations.
- Reinvention is possible at any stage, but it demands humility, learning, and perseverance.
- Setbacks are inevitable—but they are never final.
- Resilience, not rank, defines your leadership.

A Word of Gratitude

Forces Network, is a community-driven initiative supporting veterans. In 2016,

I also envisioned a platform built around the philosophy: “Any Body Can Tech (ABCT)”—emphasizing continuous learning, mentorship, and digital readiness for all.

Much of my journey was supported by Forces Network, and particularly by Col Iqbal Singh, whose leadership and vision have enabled many veterans to transition, transform, and thrive in civilian life.

About the Author

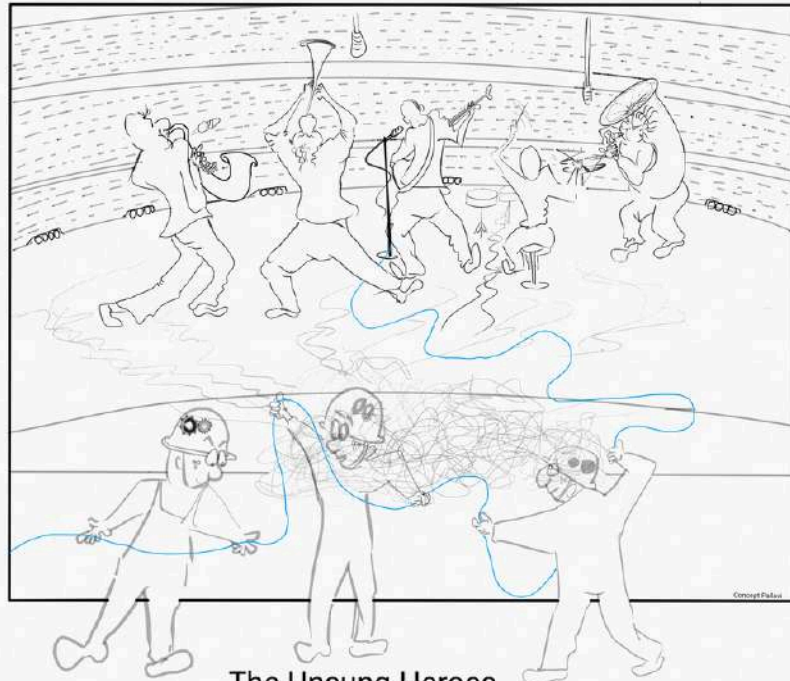
Colonel Harbinder Singh was commissioned into the Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME) of the Indian Army with seniority as June 1987. He is a Mechanical Engineer specializing in Aviation Technology and Project Management. Over the decades, his journey has spanned battlefields, laboratories, boardrooms, and entrepreneurial ventures. It is a story of leadership, resilience, reinvention, and legacy-building. Raised in a disciplined environment, Harbinder Singh’s early years shaped a character built on structure, service, and responsibility. With a natural curiosity for systems and mechanics, he pursued Mechanical Engineering from Punjab University—laying the foundation for his career in the armed forces and beyond.



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difficulty lies opportunity.”**

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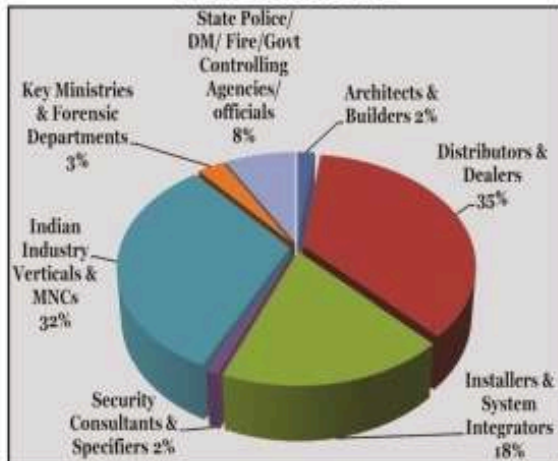
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