

Cool head, sweet talk & hard work: DSK's mantra to success

Founder of DSK Developers Deepak Sakharam Kulkarni talks about his humble background, heydays as a journalist and how to connect with customers; tells why language is not important, passion is



DS Kulkarni interacting with DNA's staff members on Monday. He was the Guest Editor as part of the newspaper's fifth anniversary celebrations —Pratham Gokhale DNA

DNA Correspondent

"Be honest and keep your hands on the customer's hearts, not pockets," advised founder of DSK Developers Deepak Sakharam Kulkarni when asked about the secret of success in business. After failing in nearly 60-odd businesses, DSK as he is popularly known, never lost hope. "If youngsters want to succeed in business, first thing is not to lose hope. Also, keep a cool head, be a sweet talker and never shy away from hard work," said DSK, who visited DNA's Pune office as the Guest Editor on Monday as part of the newspaper's fifth anniversary celebrations.

said he learned many businesses by helping his classmates in their fathers' business. "I used to help my friends sell chana at stalls, drop milk and newspapers, wash dishes at tea stalls, etc. This taught me more about business than any MBA would. I earned Rs5 or 6 which was substantial since my father's salary was Rs30. I still remember that I would sell far more chanas than other sellers as customers were attracted to how cleanly and well dressed I was as others were shabbily dressed. This taught me the importance of dressing well and presenting yourself well if you wish to get customers," he said.

Growing up years

Hailing from a humble background, he

Connection with newspapers



Kulkarni going through the newspaper —Pratham Gokhale DNA

Kulkarni said he had a long connection with newspapers as he used to distribute them in his schooldays. Later, during his

college days, he even started his own newspaper 'Dainik Bombabomb'. He said, "My idol in journalism was Acharya Atr

whose speeches I used to love to listen to. Distributing newspapers taught me the importance of punctuality. I used to distribute newspapers from 5.30 am. One day, I came an hour late and my boss slapped and sacked me. That day, I decided that I would go into business at any cost and not do a job."

Language is not an issue

Kulkarni said his lack of fluency in English had never been a handicap for him. He said, "I may not be able to speak English well, but today, I have collaborations in the USA, Korea, Japan and China. A few years ago in New Jersey, I had to convince an old Chinese woman whose son was planning to buy a bungalow we had constructed. She did not understand English, so I started to talk to her in Marathi and then used body language and gestures to show her the house. My honesty and mere positive outlook compelled her to buy it. That's why language is not important, passion is," he said.

Knowing your customer

"Our office is not unnecessarily ostentatious as I want my middle-class customers to feel comfortable there. I know a very grand office may make them feel out of place. Our office phone has Marathi bhavgeet. When it is on hold, the music is played and we know our customers will like it. At the same time, we have English and Hindi songs playing at our DSK showrooms because our customers are young and will prefer them. It's important to understand pulse of the matter," he said.

Political aspirations

Kulkarni said he wished to contest the Lok Sabha elections from Pune and had a blueprint ready for the city's development. He said that he wished to get a ticket from the national parties, but was willing to consider the others too. "I am planning to resign on March 31 to prepare to fight the upcoming election. I want to represent Pune as this city means everything to me," he said. For DSK, entering politics will give him the platform to raise issues close to him.

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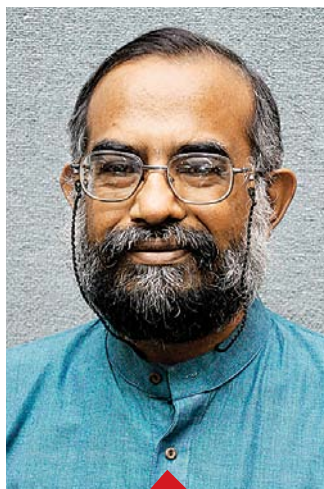
YOUNG LEADERS OF PUNE WHO ARE MAKING WAVES

CITY'S EXPLOSIVE DEVELOPMENT DANGEROUS

With the vigour of a zealot for the environment, Ashish Kothari stands for true grit. A founder member of Kalpvriksha, he tells us why we need an all-inclusive approach to development

In the past 15 years that I have been in Pune, I have seen rapid changes in the city. Back in the day, it was a quiet city, almost free from pollution. However, its growth has also rendered it polluted and exploited. There are some important issues to be considered in this context.

The first problem is of transportation. We all face the issue of traffic congestion. Public transport is not satisfactory. Instead of bicycles and public transport, the policy has wrongly encouraged other vehicles. It not only augments pollution but also adds to the confusion in traffic management. I ride on my bicycle from home for 15-kilometers to reach the office every day. But I feel insecure doing so because of the extremely irregular traffic.



ASHISH KOTHARI
ENVIRONMENTALIST AND CO-FOUNDER, KALPVRIKSHA

People drive ruthlessly in Pune. As one breathes heavily while riding a bicycle, one easily becomes a victim to pollution. And yet I say that cycling is a good alternative and should be encouraged. However, I regret that cyclists are generally neglected in the management of traffic.

Enormous amount of construction has devoured all open spaces in the city. Only hills are protected because of the activists. However, trees along the roads are fast disappearing. Water pollution is another problem. The twin rivers of Pune, Mula and Mutha, have remained polluted despite repeated announcements to clean them. Pune is lucky to have the rivers but their condition is pathetic, people shirk from the rivers as if they are untouchables.

Ecologically it is wrong to build a road along the river. But it is built mainly for the convenience of private vehicles. Moreover, the planning of the city's development today is done keeping the affluent class

in mind. There are no alternatives given to the poor to elevate their standard of living. They continue to live in the slums.

All are anomalies that we have to put up with. However, there is something positive happening too. Look at the protection given to the hills. There are groups of people who love walking and cycling. They try to protect the environment. Their pressures would certainly increase in the future.

Finally, however, we will have to take the right decisions in making our policies for the city. We will have to fix our priorities looking into the financial limitations. I hope sense will prevail in our planning. Water harvesting has to be made compulsory for every construction.

Bicycles and public transport system have to be encouraged. Solar energy should be used in every household; it will minimise the use of electricity. If we become self reliant in this regard, the city life will become more healthy.

AWARENESS NEEDS TO LEAD TO ACTION

Vaibhav Dugar is a mobile encyclopaedia of everything to do with farming. A conversation with him is dotted with statistics and facts



VAIBHAV DUGAR
CO-FOUNDER, EKTITI.ORG, AND ORGANIC FARMING EXPERT

I came to Pune 10-years back. Since then, I have been seeing rivers in the city getting dirty, with their water turning a shade darker as each year passed. I would like to draw your attention to the three elements of nature — earth, air, water — for these require adequate understanding of what is not right and what needs to be done.

Until now, the media in the city have been perseveringly creating awareness on the situation of the environment. But the impactful change can take place when both the administrators and citizens join hands to see a cleaner future.

What the world witnessed as air pollution in Beijing, is a wake-up call for each one of us as we too are unknowingly headed that way. What can prevent this is taking adequate measures to get eco-friendly transport systems, improving public transport, have laws and measures for industries that pollute etc.

Our waters have to be given se-

rious thought too. Last year witnessed a rare phenomenon — water cuts and shortage. This was never heard of earlier, and with the kind of development we are seeing, this will be of concern. Making rain water harvesting easily reachable and affordable for citizens can be a solution for this.

There is nothing more painful for a city than to see its rivers turn into nullahs. Case in point, the Mula and Mutha rivers. Only strict adherence to pollution control by the authorities and industries can change the state of our rivers.

The last few years have witnessed a considerable number of people choosing organic and natural food. This is helping us create a sustainable eco-system and a harmonious environment. This is going to escalate a lot more, as citizens are now opting for at least one product in their kitchen that is either organic or natural, like amla juice, honey, green tea, aloe vera juice, etc. They are only a step away from choosing their second product.



KETAKI PIMPALKHARE
ARTIST AND BIKER

FREE-FOR-ALL ART GALLERY: NEED OF THE HOUR

An artist, a biker, a mother and a restaurateur, she is much like an installation artwork, which has many facets. Having defined her style in abstract realism, Ketaki is one of the few artists from Pune, who has courage to digress from the beaten path of landscapes and still life. She shares her vision with DNA

A lot is happening in the Pune art circuit. And with the latest introduction of the Pune Biennale, visual arts have found a place on the cultural map of the city. For years Pune has encouraged classical music and theatre, but has lacked a fulfilling visual arts experience. That small galleries have begun to pop-up here and there is very heartening. Many restaurants are showing paintings on their walls as an added feature which not only decorates their interiors but makes the dining experience eclectic. Now there are discussions on

art and its content and people are becoming more aware of different genres — like abstract, modern or realistic, just to name a few.

The future of the visual arts in Pune seems very optimistic to me, mainly because of the rapidly changing attitude of people. There is so much art out in the open because of the Pune Biennale, where the general public can interact with art, making them aware of sculpture, installation, photography, film and street art. The reactions which I have noticed, particularly from children and sen-

ior citizens, are overwhelming. People stop, take photographs, comment, appreciate or criticise; that itself is generating a lot of interest and awareness. I also think it is very good for the youth as they will have more and more avenues to express themselves and communicate their thoughts to the public as well as the authorities.

The people of Pune need to be sensitised more toward the arts and this can happen if there is a massive and free-for-all, easily accessible art gallery. It should have an access for the disabled too and offer good fa-

cilities for artists to show their work. I also hope to see some major changes in the curriculum in art colleges. I think it is very important to fuel the imagination of young minds and not restrict them to age-old methods of drudgery. Nowadays, with the help of technology, it can be made very interesting and exciting.

I have been very fortunate as I have had tremendous support from my family and patrons. I hope I won't ever have to face any problems in my field here at Pune where I truly enjoy working.