

Chapter 2

RELEVANCE TO CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS AND PROFESSIONALS AMIDST THE CHALLENGES FACED BY THEM

Difficulties in life: Stumbling blocks or stepping stones?

It is said somewhere in the Mahabharat that, when Kunti, the mother of the Pandavas was granted a wish by God to ask for something, she asked for continuous 'dukh' or sorrow in life. Astonishing, but with good reason. 'Sukh' (happiness) is considered as the prasad (gift) of the lord, but, 'dukh' (sorrow) is the mahaprasad (bonanza) of the Lord. Few of us would subscribe to this theory but a little reflection and thought will possibly make us feel differently. Difficulties make a person stronger. We can progress in life only if we have faced difficulties. Take any life story of any great man anywhere in the world. The greatness always stems from hardships and difficulties. There is a wonderful illustration of this message in the life of a butterfly as explained by Shiv Khera. In a classroom, a teacher was demonstrating, with a live example, how a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. The new born caterpillar was struggling to free itself from the cocoon. The teacher left the pupils to watch this, with instructions not to interfere with the caterpillar's efforts to free itself. One student however felt very sorry for the caterpillar and freed the caterpillar by breaking the cocoon. The caterpillar died within a short time thereafter. The message of the story is clear: nature wanted the caterpillar to struggle so as to make it strong enough to face the world. The struggle to free itself from the cocoon, was an integral part of its survival, its strength and its destiny. The assistance given by the student was in fact the detrimental factor. Life is very much or exactly like that. Our problems, difficulties, impediments and obstacles are nothing but stepping stones to success and not stumbling blocks as one normally treats them.

Let us first take an overview of the SPECTRUM OF Activities of a Chartered Accountant and various challenges faced in life by CAs and professionals in three different stages of their lives; young, middle aged and elders.

A: Issues before young and freshly qualified CA

Professional front

- Selection of work and issues of compromise. If he opts for professional practice, should he get into the mainstream practice and do what most others do, disregarding morals and ethics or should he remain aloof and wait for the right kind of work to come?
- If he does not go into professional practice, should he take up any job that he gets or wait for the right kind of employer or industry, pay package, status and job profile?
- Further studies and specialisation. He wants to do this but cannot afford to study further irrespective of the option he selects, professional practice or a job.
- Competition and crab syndrome, both in professional practice or a job. He is continuously faced with good and bad colleagues, bosses, and an environment is

like a strife and each one wants to reach the top at any cost, even by trampling on others. Life can be very difficult for the really sincere and straightforward CAs or professionals.

Personal front

- How to make two ends meet and live a decent life and when to get married depending upon the progress of his professional practice and earnings.

B: Challenges faced by Middle Aged CAs

Professional front

- Corrupt practices at the next level. Issues of compromise for professional practitioners become more intense. Bowing into clients' demands becomes the most practical option though unprofessional. Now comes a stage where the temptation of money making is strong in the backdrop of a very corrupt environment.
- For those in industry, stagnation in position, unsatisfactory bonuses, increments and salary packages, unsuitable jobs profiles and differences with colleagues and bosses frequently, etc. become common issues.
- Crossing the line in wrongdoings. Those who cannot avoid indulging in corrupt practices, get deeper and deeper into quicksand of impending disaster. Some of them indulge into wrong and illegal practices of falsification, fraud and forgeries and abuse of other kind to meet and preserve a standard of living and demands of their family life. These days instances of CAs being arrested and prosecuted are being heard of more frequently than in the past.
- Ego puncture when a friend, competitor or even a spouse overtakes or does better in professional practice.

Personal front

- Intense pressure from family for money and facilities
- Status pressures or 'living up with the Joneses'
- Ignoring health because of work pressure and consequent medical problems due to poor diet, lack of exercise, poor self-control and discipline over habits and activities
- A common negative trait developed at this stage are pride, ego, tendency to show off in one's community, friends and personal life and exhibiting false pretence of one's capabilities

C: Challenges faced by Senior CAs

All the problems listed above are applicable to elderly CAs and the following are added as age progresses:

Professional front

- Age related factors such as forgetfulness, poor health, onset of chronic diseases like Diabetes, Hypertension, and many others, start hindering the capability to do work, or work well, to travel, to concentrate and advise

- Besides the age related challenges, the seniors face the fear of redundancy because of technological advances. These lead to frustration and dependence and eventually translate into depression. In the 90s and the last ten years the IT revolution affected most senior CAs and professionals as they could not cope with that.

Personal front

- Ill health of family members, deaths in the family, added responsibilities are problems which become more frequent and accentuated
- Dependence in general for household matters, travel, medication, etc. on others increases

The foregoing are challenges and matters which everyone goes through in some form at some time or the other. The Gita and our scriptures provide comforting approaches in such situations and enable those who sincerely read, absorb and adapt to the guidelines given therein. This enables them to have peace of mind and face issues with dignity.

Some of the serious challenges are discussed below.

1. Unethical or corrupt business practices and issues of compromise

Let us take the case of a fresh chartered accountant who is struggling to come to terms with life and realities of practicing in today's corrupt environment. He is pressurised by the environment and his peers to be 'practical'. He can possibly earn money by being a part of the corrupt system, instead of fighting it. Initially he does this reluctantly, but in the process, does make money, but this is the first step towards a questionable future. The corrupt practice will be rationalised in some way with several convenient reasons: 'Inevitable, or, everyone does it, or, you cannot succeed without compromising and so on'. It becomes a habit and weakens his conscience. He will become rusty in his academics and professional skills and consequently he will not be able to use it when he needs it the most similar to the case of Karna (who was given a curse by his teacher, for falsifying his clan). He will stagnate intellectually and be known as a 'fixer' or a handyman, and will rarely be consulted for professional expertise and competence. Such professionals also acquire ill repute.

For example CAs may be asked by clients to get 'expense bills' to evade tax. This is illegal and immoral, but does happen all the time. Or they may be asked to overlook certain expenses to show a better profit in the accounts and financial statements offered for audit. They may even be asked to represent to third parties such as investors, income tax authorities wrongful status of business, etc. Chartered accountant who refuse to help with this 'holier than thou' attitude will be swiftly replaced by someone more amenable and flexible. This is one of the greatest challenges for every professional.

What is to be done then? In Chapter 3 this is dealt with at length and a possible solution is also suggested. However the solution given is specific to that case study, but what the Gita attempts to do is to get the reader to develop the confidence that a solution is possible. As long as a person has the determination to stay put on the path of righteousness, rest assured that the Lord will provide invisible forces within the person not only to survive but to emerge successful. Prahlad, Draupadi, Sita are all legendary examples of such grit and determination, but all had to face severe and extremely difficult situations. They had faith in God and He protected them against unbelievable odds. Somewhere in The Bible also it is said that if

all doors seem to close from all sides, have confidence in the Lord and He will open some window for you somewhere. The Lord is certain to help you. The author subscribes to this theory and advocates it emphatically from personal experience.

The real test of human existence is to live these experiences in a manner which brings us closer to God and the path of self-realisation. Vedic scriptures or for that matter all revelations in texts of any religion provide the tools and techniques for just that. However, we find these difficult to practice or dull and mundane. The intention of this write up is to provide analysis of simple messages from scriptures and facilitate their implementation in everyday life in a practical way to lead a better meaningful and useful existence.

2. Competition and the ‘crab syndrome’

Competition in a profession, sport, or promotion, or in an election, are everyday events and realities faced time and again. In all these situations unfortunately one always looks and focuses on the negative traits of the other. Sometimes in professional practice there are situations where one CA steals clients of another CA by offering to do work for lower fees or false promises of better service. This can happen even between friends.

3. Marriage, business or professional partnerships

Marriages are partnerships in life and when there is a professional or business relationship involved between husband and wife, the challenges are several times greater. Difficulties on either the home front or the business front get easily translated into worries and sorrow which activate negative emotions such as anger, hatred and jealousy. There was a couple where both the husband and wife were chartered accountants. They were doing reasonably well. While both specialised in different areas they often helped each other in assignments. It so happened that in one particular assignment the husband asked his wife to take over because he was occupied in another assignment where he had to travel quite a bit. The wife did a good job, and the client liked her work. When the husband was free at a later date and went back to continue service to that client, the client brushed him aside stating that the wife was more competent and wanted her to continue working with him. This came as a shock and shook him up quite a bit and the ego emerged. This case study has been described in detail in Chapter 3.

In such situations our scriptures provide solace and strength to find solutions. They help us in viewing the situation with an objective mind and facilitate accepting the truth boldly. They also guide us and facilitate in concentrating and directing our efforts appropriately and meaningfully. After reading these scriptures it becomes much easier to accept that the other person can be better or to admit the fact that a colleague or a classmate has done better. Amongst such situations the most difficult is to be able to live down the fact that the wife has bettered the husband. But once the realisation is there, life is wonderful and the ability to deal with problems is enhanced phenomenally. What really this study does is cultivate the habit of facing truth and calling a spade a spade, appreciating good work done by anyone instantly, and working hard at whatever one is good at. All these are catalysts in the process of accepting truth in all situations.

4. Generating income, particularly for the younger CAs

Generating income is the most serious challenge for every honest, straightforward and decent person. In the world today, there is no dearth of opportunities for earning money, but most of them involve wrong, illegal, dishonest, unlawful, or unethical practices. Therefore generating professional income the honest way is where the real challenge lies. A freshly qualified chartered accountant is always at cross roads. One easily falls prey to temptations of making quick, fast and easy money. Creating false files for evasion of tax, or generating fictitious bills, hawalas or entries or money laundering are temptations very difficult to resist for a person who has the need for money and enjoys good quality of life. Most CAs are forced into generating income the wrong way and those who don't find themselves forlorn and dismayed because honest work is not easy to come by. Our scriptures help such people in developing patience, and creating an ability to strengthen and sharpen the mind to find solutions. As said before, a sincere believer in our scriptures will most certainly find a way to meet this challenge.

In life there is a correct way and an incorrect way for doing anything. For example, to open any item packed in a plastic wrapper, there is a correct and easy way to open it or we can open it forcefully which is the incorrect way. One can use brute force and attempt to tear the plastic which may, in all probability, result in breaking that item. If one can patiently examine the packing, it would be child's play to find out how to smoothly unwrap and open the packing. We have to look for instructions. Life is exactly like that; every problem can be addressed with anger and brute force of the mind or with patience and understanding. The right choice is clear.

