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Youth are my constituency. I see in the bright faces of young women and men the promise of the tomorrow's India. You will soon graduate, and enter a world of exciting possibilities. All youth are waiting to finish education, get a job, be happy every after. Sorry. You may not like this, but it will not happen.

The working world has always been dynamic. But when my generation launched our careers, the pace of change was slower; we had some time to get used to it.

Gradualism was the credo of the day. Not so today. While change is a constant, the nature of change itself is changing. It is happening at a far more rapid pace than before, obsolescence is faster, and there are so many overlapping transformations.

Let me begin with what is foremost in our minds today- the Covid-19 crisis. The world of work is being profoundly affected by the global pandemic. Not only is the health of millions of people at risk; also at stake are their long-term livelihoods and wellbeing. Over the past months the pandemic has presented unique challenges to all types and levels of learning, working, living and livelihoods.

First, the nature of the organization. The brick-and-mortar building is on its way out. In the scramble to shut down, every organization had to embrace a mobile and virtual way of working. We have all had to get used to

the technology which enables us to work anywhere, anytime. My daughter is a corporate lawyer. She has been working from home for over two weeks. So have many others, not just software engineers, but doctors practicing tele-medicine, teachers conducting online classes, and so on. These were not professions that were traditionally virtual in their functioning or in our imagination. But now Covid-19 has propelled information technology to the forefront. The companies who had already embraced a dispersed structure or at least a degree of agile working have a significant head start over more traditional players, who will experience all the pitfalls of the shift to remote without enjoying the benefits. Having migrated from our offices, business leaders are now raising questions about the expensive workplaces which now stand locked and silent. A networked dispersed organization, not a vertical one, is the organization of the future.

Second, the nature of employment itself. A loose networked organization brings with it not just changes in our way of working. It will bring changes in the nature of tenures as well. Even traditional employers like governments who give permanent tenures are employing less and less. All of us will face job insecurity and uncertainty in the future. All of us will be freelancers. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Just think of a doctor consulting in different hospitals. He dispenses his specialized skill in different institutions, and is remunerated by all of them separately. This mode of working will be emulated by most professionals. Imagine, you can work on what you love, from where you are comfortable, and when it is convenient to schedule it. You are your own person, not bound by the rules and protocols of a HR manager. This spells true liberation for a competent professional.

This brings me to my third point, the Nature of the Professional. Our liberation comes at a price. In a very real sense, an organization is no longer a building or an address; it is the people who work for it, or more precisely, the skills that they bring to the table. What are these skills?

First, Versatility. The days of the Generalist and the Specialist debate are obsolete. Professionals of the future have to be Versatilists. Who is Versatilist? A Versatilist is someone who is a specialist in a particular discipline, while at the same time is able to change to another role with the same ease. Versatilists apply depth of skill to a progressively widening scope of situations and experiences, gaining new competencies, building relationships, and assuming new roles. Versatilists are capable of not only of constantly adapting but also of

constantly learning and growing. This mental agility and adaptability is the first skill you will need.

Let me give you an example. I am a public policy specialist. My academic education as well as experience in the Indian Administrative Service has given me a degree of expertise in public administration. The other day, I initiated training on Covid-19 management for National Social Service volunteers in my capacity as Head of NSS Karnataka. How did I do this? I am not a medical professional. I did two things: First, I learnt enough to understand the basics of what I was doing. Second, I sought the help of virologists and epidemiologists who are specialists had specific expertise in this domain. With this networking and shared expertise, we have given training to 3000 NSS officers and 15000 NSS volunteers so far. They in turn have reached out and are educating the community.

So a versatalist needs to be able to change, grow and evolve and learn. To prepare for a career of freelancing, skilling and continuous education are the only way. This is the really tricky part. But learning has become easier than ever. You are not dependent on standup teachers and dusty libraries as we were. MOOCs, documentaries, YouTube videos and journal articles are all available to you at the click of a button. What you need is a little discernment to choose the right sources for your information. And the daring to move out of your intellectual comfort zone.

Second, the Versatelist has to be able to network so as to draw upon the skills of others as well. The day when managers interact with managers, engineers with engineers, and doctors with doctors are over. Lone

rangers belong to the Wild West; you and I need to understand and practise groupthink and group-operate in tomorrow's world.

My third point on skills are a precaution. Recently a senior bureaucrat exhorted his younger colleagues to be active on the field, not just on social media. This brings me to the importance of Presence. In an increasingly tech-driven world, it is quite possible to be a whatsapp warrior or a media made-up celebrity with just a photo and some clever lines. But to be a true professional, you need to be there, do your job, and be authentic. We are familiar with corporate social responsibility. You will need to practise Personal Social Responsibility, your own Individual Social Responsibility. We are facing an increasingly unequal world, while simultaneously needing to meet and work together for a common future. What do I mean by Personal Social Responsibility?

Here too, the days of the social worker who gave up worldly success for an ascetic life of service is not necessary. Choose a domain which interests you, or which you have expertise in, and offer this to better the lives of those who need it most, who are nearest to you. Let your neighbourhood, your old school or college, be your arena. You like to teach? Coach students on your spare time. Do you love music but your IT job offers no scope to the musician in you? Well, sing in a hospital to cheer up the patients. Practise this personal social responsibility throughout your life as a parallel career which does not pay you, but where *you pay back to society*. You can be part of the world and still better it. You will then be a true Karmayogi, as the Bhagwad Gita called it.

Welcome to tomorrow, and wish you the very best of luck!

**Short note on author.*

Practitioner, scholar, policymaker, author and mother, Kalpana Gopalan's 32-year work experience in the Indian Administrative Service and public policy research spans urban and rural development, land management, infrastructure and public private partnerships. Kalpana holds a Masters and Doctorate from the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore and was Visiting Fellow in McGill, Concordia, Salerno, Syracuse & Sussex Universities. Dr. Kalpana is recipient of the Mother Theresa Women Empowerment Award for "outstanding contribution to excellence in leadership", the International Human Rights Award under the Women of Courage category. She was recognized as a "Great Warrior of Humanity" by the International Human Rights Advisory Council for her "outstanding performance, commitment, contribution and dedication towards the humanitarian services and best practices on Covid-19 prevention"; and was appreciated by UNICEF and the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences for support in Covid-19 response. She is a LinkedIn Wonder Woman and Inspirational Leader. She lives in Bangalore and presents and publishes globally. Views are personal, and meant for academic and intellectual discussion only.