

Excerpts from the
Address by Azim Premji, Founder-Wipro,
at IIT Delhi's Convocation Ceremony
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The funny thing about life is that you realize the value of something only when it begins to leave you. As my hair turned from black, to salt and pepper and finally salt without the pepper, I have begun to realize the enthusiasm and excitement of youth. At the same time, I have begun to truly appreciate some of the lessons I have learnt along the way. As you embark on your careers, I would like to share them with you. I am hoping that you will find them as useful as I have. The world you are entering is in many ways very different now from what it was when I began my career. It was the late sixties and India still depended on other countries for something as basic as food. We aroused sympathy, not admiration whenever we went overseas. Recently, someone told me, that when visitors came to India then, they came to see what they could do for India. Now, they come to see what India can do for them. As a hopeful Indian, I look at our country as one which is rich in ethnic and cultural diversity and one that has an effective, secular democracy which will help us build an enduring society.

Lesson 1:

Take charge

This was the first thought that came to me, when over four decades ago, I stepped into Wipro factory at Amalner. I was 21 and had spent the last few years in Stanford University Engineering School at California. Many people advised me to take up a nice, cushy job rather than face the challenges of running a hydrogenated oil business. Looking back, I am glad I decided to take charge instead. Essentially, leadership begins from within. It is a small voice that tells you where to go when you feel lost. If you believe in that voice, you believe in yourself. When it comes to choosing your careers, you have to take charge of your own destiny.

Lesson 2:

Earn your happiness

The second lesson I have learnt is that a rupee earned is of far more value than five found. In fact, what is gifted or inherited follows the old rule of come easy, go easy. I guess we only know the value of what we have if we have struggled to earn it.

Lesson 3:

Nothing succeeds like failure

The third lesson I have learnt is no one bats a hundred every time. Life has many challenges. You win some and lose some. You must enjoy winning. But do not let it go to the head. The moment it does, you are already on your way to failure. And if you do encounter failure along the way, treat it as an equally natural phenomenon. The important thing is, when you lose, do not lose the lesson.

Lesson 4:

Nothing fails like success

The fourth lesson I have learnt is the importance of humility. There is a thin line of difference between confidence and arrogance. Confident people are always open to learn. A recent survey of executives in Europe showed that the single most important quality needed for leadership success was the willingness to learn from any situation. Arrogance on the other hand stops learning. It comes with a feeling that one knows all that needs to be known and has done all that needs to be done.

Lesson 5:

There has to be a better way

Partly as a corollary to what I have just said, we must remember that no matter how well we do something there has to be a better way! Excellence is not a destination but a journey. Creativity and innovation sometimes need inspiration from other disciplines. It is probably not a chance that Einstein's interest in music was as much as his interest in Physics. Bertrand Russell was as much a mathematician as a philosopher. Excellence and creativity go hand in hand.

Lesson 6:

Respond, not react

There is a world of difference between the two and in terms of success and failure. The difference is that the mind comes in between responding and reacting. When we respond, we evaluate with a calm mind and do whatever is most appropriate. We are in control of our actions. When we react, we are still doing what the other person wants us to do.

Lesson 7:

Remain physically active

It is easy to take health for granted when you are young. I have found that exercise not only improves the quality of time but also reduces the time you need for sleep. The truth is that stress will only increase in a global world. You must have your own mechanism to deal with it.

Lesson 8:

Never compromise on your core values

Mahatma Gandhiji often said that you must open the windows of your mind, but you must not be swept off your feet by the breeze. One must define what you stand for. This is not difficult. But values lie, not in the words used to describe them, as much as in the simple acts. And that is the hard part. Like someone said, "I could not hear what you said because what you did was coming out far too loud".

Lesson 9:

Play to win

Playing to win brings out the best in us and in our teams. It brings out the desire to stretch, to achieve that which seems beyond our grasp. However, it is not about winning at any cost. It is not about winning every time. It is not about winning at the expense of others. It is about innovating all the time. It is a continuous endeavour to do better than last time.

Lesson 10:

Give back to society

All of us have a collective social responsibility towards doing our bit to address them. Of all the challenges, the key to me is education. We have a paradoxical situation, where on the one hand

we have jobs chasing scarce talent and on the other, rampant unemployment and poverty. The only way to bridge these two ends of the pole is by providing quality education that is accessible

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by all.