

Illusion of Knowledge: Life Lessons from 40 years in Business by Nand Kishore Chaudhary

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Nand Kishore Chaudhary is Social Entrepreneur, Chairman & Managing Director at Jaipur Rugs, India. This article about the willingness to learn is based on his wonderful presentation at Forward Virtual, "The Journey of Unlearning".

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Mute the noise and listen to the inner voice.

— Nand Kishore Chaudhary

In my years of experience, I have come across people from the biggest institutions in the world. My industry also allows me the privilege of working with people from the grassroots. Though I have enjoyed both the interactions, my experience with them has been vastly different. In other words, it has been quite a revelation.

When I meet people of knowledge, some of them holding PhDs, some coming straight out of the best business schools, I notice a certain confidence in their stance. A confidence that someone from a humble background or someone without any degrees might not have. However, in most cases, as we start talking, this aura of knowledge dissolves. What captivates my attention is how the formal structures of education have limited their curiosity. On the other hand, I meet people in far-flung villages — full of eagerness, creativity, and innocence.

I often question this difference. And question if knowledge is nothing but an illusion. This has also been one of my biggest life lessons for building my team. Something that I try to avoid while bringing new people to the team is this illusion of knowledge.

What is the illusion of knowledge?

Back to the matter in hand – is knowledge an illusion? Certainly not. **Knowledge is what introduces us to the world outside, and inside. It informs us about the ways of life, at both personal and professional levels.** However, when knowledge becomes a barrier for itself, that's when it creates the illusion of knowledge.

In life, you will always come across people who'll have the answers to all your questions and would still be willing to learn more. At the same time, you will meet people who have already closed the doors to all learning blinded with the notion of knowing it all. This way, while the former possesses knowledge, the latter remains possessed by the illusion of knowledge.

Where does this illusion of knowledge arise from?

In most parts of the world, people are judged by the degrees they have earned. While a college becomes a status symbol, a person working on the field is looked down upon. Jobs on the ground level are considered below dignity and little children are taught to aim for the skyscrapers only. **It is etched in our minds that we haven't achieved anything if we aren't working from a lavish office. We build our egos around the brands we work for and the universities we study at. And this is a big epidemic!**

I started Jaipur Rugs with two looms and eight local artisans. Our artisans are at the heart of everything we do, and it will always be this way. I have learned through the course of years that knowledge is in fact an unending desire to know more and more. I have the great fortune to be surrounded by people of such knowledge — our

rural artisans who might have never been to a university as well as our in-office colleagues who might have been to the best universities of the world. It's this enriching mix of people that makes us unique, makes us human.

The willingness to learn

People often believe that there's only so much they can achieve by being at the grassroots level. I refuse this ideology. And I have many stories to testify to my beliefs. Prem Devi ji, one of our artisans, an uneducated woman from Rajasthan, graced the stage of New York Fashion Week as a speaker. With her years of experience in weaving rugs and managing weavers of her village Aspura, she has attracted more than 300 international clients to the designs coming straight from her village. Even today when I meet her, she stands with the same humility and folded hands. For me, this is above any kind of knowledge.



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I receive hundreds of CVs everyday from professionals holding years of experience in business and fancy degrees. As a leader, I have always been intuitive about bringing people on-board. I move forward with the faith that the skills and knowledge will develop on the way to our mutual success. The only thing that matters at the beginning is curiosity and innocence.

Most of us here at Jaipur Rugs, including myself, started from point zero with no or very little knowledge. The common attribute that we all share is our unending curiosity. **The curiosity to know it all and yet not have the illusion of knowledge. This is what I look for, and not knowledge itself.**

The last forty years in business have been full of learnings. And I must say that the trajectory of my life changed forever by the time I initially spent with our ever-so-curious artisans. Their life lessons, skills, and innocence has set me up on this forever pursuit of knowledge.

About Nand Kishore Chaudhary

Nand Kishore Chaudhary is a globally acclaimed social entrepreneur, is the founder of Jaipur Rugs, one of India's largest manufacturers of hand knotted rugs and is often referred to as 'Gandhi of the Carpet Industry'.



Official Website | LinkedIn

With just two looms and nine artisans in 1978, his journey four decades later stands at Jaipur Rugs becoming a global social enterprise exporting to over 60 countries while providing sustainable livelihood to 40,000 artisans in 600 remote villages across five states in India, out of which 80% of them are women.

Management guru, C.K. Prahalad featured his revolutionary business philosophy in his globally acclaimed book 'The Fortune at the Bottom of the Pyramid'. Mr Chaudhary has also been termed as 'father of modern social enterprises' by Prof. Jagdish N. Sheth from Emory University, USA. Sheth said, "Jaipur Rugs has become a role model, that business can serve society and at the same time ... can be a capitalistic institution".

In 2019, Raj Sisodia featured Jaipur Rugs and NK Chaudhary in his book, 'The Healing Organization' for 'The Power of Innocence'. The book highly celebrated NK Chaudhary's steps towards healing the customers and transforming the society with love.

He has won awards including E&Y Entrepreneur of the Year Award, CNBC TV18 Emerging India Award, Social Impact Award conferred by former president Pranav Mukherjee among others.

As a simple man, he is devoted to the Indian hand-knotted rug industry with an aim to position it rightly in the world and to empower its real owner and creator – the Indian weaver.

Photos: Nand Kishore Chaudhary | © Jaipur Rugs

