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Man who walks the talk

By Francis Dass

Sachidhanandam Sellasamy calls himself a corporate trainer and consultant but FRANCIS DASS says it's more accurate to call him the man with the ideas.

SACHIDHANANDAM Sellasamy is the best advertisement for what he does best, which is teach people how to generate creative ideas and implement them effectively.

During his visit home to Malaysia from New Zealand in December last year, Sachi, as he prefers to be called, found out that the National Science Centre was going to host the Nobel Prize Centennial Exhibition in the capital.

He promptly found ways to contribute towards enhancing the overall effect of the exhibition.

If others can only see an exhibition - a large space dedicated to showcasing Nobel Prize-related material from March 20 till June 27 - in the announcement of the Nobel Prize Centennial Exhibition, Sachi saw the myriad ways in which he could play a proactive role in this "monumental event" in the annals of the local science and technology establishment.

"We must constantly 'move' to break the pattern of logical thinking (when such thinking becomes constricting)," he says, pointing to the left-brain-right-brain dichotomy where the right brain is used for creative thinking and the left brain for logical thinking.

To illustrate his point, he calls to attention how the simple fact of an apple falling off a tree enabled Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) to unleash a train of thought that led to the articulation of the dynamics of gravity.

So, Sachi held discussions with the National Science Centre, and his proposal of conducting four seminars on Edward de Bono's creative thinking ideas was accepted.

The seminars focused on de Bono's famed Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking propositions.

"(During the seminars), we also identified past and present Nobel Laureates who had contributed to brain research and thinking skills in particular," he says.

At the recently-concluded seminars, one of the highlights was the screening of extracts of the film A Beautiful Mind (2001).

"The film shows how gifted mathematician John Nash (played by Russell Crowe) went on to win the Nobel Prize in spite of a mental problem.

"The aim was to show how Nash uses both logical and creative thinking - in particular, how a chance event provided him with the idea that he pursued - to win the Nobel Prize.

"One needs a prepared mind to see an opportunity or idea through a chance event," said Sachi, explaining his methods to help unleash creative juices.

Recalling that Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad had announced a few years ago that he hoped to see a Malaysian Nobel Prize laureate in the future, the ball was set rolling for his second project in conjunction with the exhibition.

Acting on this bit of information, Sachi immediately set out to write a booklet for children - Win The Nobel Prize: The Malaysian Challenge - to inspire youngsters to become future Malaysian Nobel laureates.

"I hope that the book reaches out to as many young people as possible so that the Malaysian challenge (to win a Nobel Prize) can become a reality,"

he says.

Sachi, 53, is a corporate trainer and consultant with a keen interest in creativity.

A man who believes in always charting one's own path in life (and who can best be described as one of those restless and curious souls amongst us), Sachi's career path seems a natural progression of any distinguished creative thinker.

After graduating from University of Malaya in 1975 with a degree in economics (majoring in public administration), he joined the civil service.

He first worked as assistant director in the Socio Economic Research Unit in the Prime Minister's Department (1975-1977).

This was followed by a stint as principal assistant secretary in the External Affairs Department of the Ministry of Education (1978-1982).

He was then director of Labour Market Information Service in the Ministry of Human Resources (1982-1985) and senior project co-ordinator with the National Institute of Public Administration (Intan) under the Programme for Advanced Management and Executive Development (1985-2001).

Since 2001, he has been a consultant and director of Innovation and Creativity Skills Training Sdn Bhd.

A great believer in the power of education, he did his master's degree in 1984 at the London School of Economics in the field of industrial relations and personnel management.

Currently, he is pursuing his PhD in New Zealand in management innovation at the Waikato University.

Sachi, who has always been interested in ideas and their implementation, is also a certified trainer of Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats and Lateral Thinking methodology.

"I came across de Bono's ideas in 1996 when I read about him. He touched on how the mind works and how one can escape from predictable patterns (of thinking)," Sachi explains.

Interestingly, Sachi is a great believer in periodically uprooting oneself - geographically as well as in one's career.

"One of the outcomes of creativity is there will be some form of change and movement - in strategy, processes, products or services. I believe that movement when pursued intentionally, be it physical or mental, also aids in creativity.

"Mental movements can be achieved by learning new activities and establishing new patterns.

"For instance, I was in Intan for 15 years. During that time, I specifically sought out new jobs and requested for transfer to several departments.

"I learned about research, organisation management, manpower planning, leadership, strategic management, creativity and innovation. I also sought out and obtained consultancy assignments, both locally and internationally.

"I pursued movement even in my place of residence. I moved house every five to six years - sometimes just 10 kilometres away. This is a sure way of getting rid of unwanted baggage. Just look at all the things we collect!

"The minor inconvenience of moving is overcome by the excitement, satisfaction and financial reward.

"Such planned movement means we are continuously looking for opportunities and new ideas," explains Sachi.

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