



March 2016

EMPOWERING TIMES



THINKING ALOUD

The Jester in the Pack - Jay



PODIUM

Interview with Vikram Nandwani - Proprietor & Creative Director - Chameleo Design Consulting



WE RECOMMEND

Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World - Adam Grant



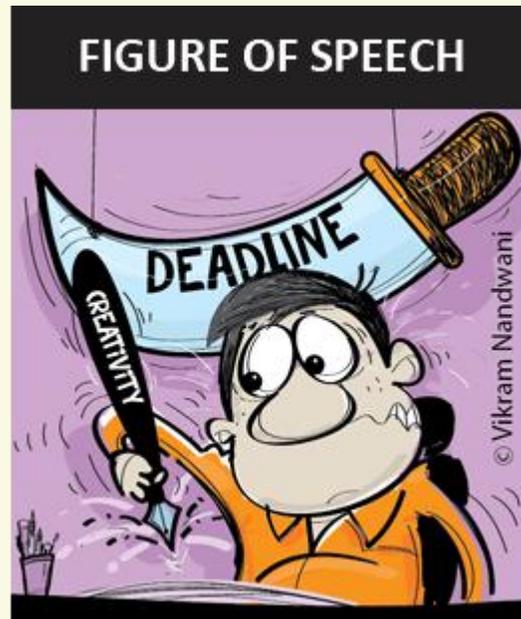
STANDING OVATION

Maher, Pune



Dear Reader,

The famous cartoonist R. K. Laxman needs no introduction. Every morning, his witty common man caricature took a shade of humour in every form - wit, satire, or irony, which highlighted hopes, aspirations and the troubles of the average Indian. Scores of interviews with the late cartoonist highlighted his love for the art, which relentlessly, for the last 50 years made it on the front page of the Times of India. When asked of what inspired him to get ideas everyday, he says that if one had a temperament like his, ideas would just flow!



For years, cartoonists have been visualizing ideas which they convert to cartoons, and which eventually formed a great medium to talk about various subjects in a light-hearted manner. On the upside, this very group of creative minds are entrepreneurial in nature and have the ability to use rejection as a creative catalyst for their unique and innovative ideas. Over the years, this group helped to form strong public opinion (this was evident as in the case of the French cartoon, Charlie Hebdo), and have the ability to spark a movement, from a mere idea. Like any art, it's never a straight line to success. The cartoonists of the day are faced by various challenges - as if writer's cramps and idea blocks weren't enough, they are also faced by fast approaching deadlines!

In this month's issue of ET, we look in to the 'Art of Cartooning'. Here's to the unsung heroes who try to put a smile on our faces!

In **Thinking Aloud**, Jay highlights the fact that over the years, cartoons have had the power to connect various common events and have tickled one's funny bone. He tips his hat to this creative community amid the various risks and concerns they face.

This issue is the 75th issue of ET. While we have featured various subjects over the years, the one constant feature has been our 'verry' own Vikram Nandwani, whose cartoons have made ET special. On this wonderful occasion, we feature Vikram on the **Podium**, as he takes us through his journey of being a first generation entrepreneur from software development to cartooning. His Indophile brand "Verry India" highlights his creativity and love for art and culture. He shares his challenges while he embarks on his ventures and what it takes to be a cartoonist in today's context.

In **We Recommend**, Prasad reviews Adam Grant's book 'Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World'. Grant covers topics such as the need for patience while promulgating an idea, the disadvantage of being the first with a new idea, and points out that success in one area does not guarantee success in another. He also discusses cultivating originality in young people. The book offers some concrete steps for innovators to develop their ideas, and for business leaders to support them.

In **Standing Ovation**, we feature Pune based, Maher, an interfaith NGO, which has provided shelter, care and a ray of hope to destitute women, men and children in and around Pune since 1997. Founded by Sister Lucy Kurien, Maher has additional centers in Ratnagiri, Kerala and Jharkhand.

In **Figures of Speech**, Vikram's cartoon tries to meet his fast approaching deadline!

As always, we value your opinion, so do let us know how you liked this issue. To visit our previous issues you can visit the Resources section on the website or simply **Click Here**. You can also follow us on **Facebook, Twitter, Linked In & Google+** - where you can join our community to continue the dialogue with us!

THINKING ALOUD

The Jester In The Pack - Jay

What appears online and in 2,000 newspapers worldwide in 65 countries and 25 languages and brings a smile on a businessman's face?

The answer may surprise you, if you did not know that the Dilbert is arguably the businessman's favourite cartoon. Yes, there are many who turn to the world of Dilbert for relief, and perhaps, inspiration to make sense of the confusing & convoluted events of the business day. And, what is fairly common today is to see a Dilbert or Glasbergen cartoon at the start of a powerpoint presentation.

So, what is it about cartoons that make many of us turn to it the moment we see our daily newspaper? Children grow up with cartoons, both on television & print, and the images in it are firmly imprinted in their minds. So strong is the imagery at times that for the semi-educated this becomes their world-view. Adults too enjoy cartoons for multiple reasons. A common belief is that cartoons take us to the 'other world' (rather like a movie) where there is safety for us and we can laugh at our own foolishness, or even take potshots at the world of management populated with the

'pointy-haired' bosses.

However, the cartoonists' tribe has faced many risks all over the world. In particular, political cartoonists are the favourite targets of those who feel slighted. Be it Europe (Charlie Hebdo & the Danish cartoonists are cases in point), or South East Asia (Malaysia & Singapore, for instance), cartoonists have been under fire. Indian cartoonists too have been at the receiving end of those without a funny bone, waiting to take umbrage over every imagined slight. The assault has been physical as well as legal (charges of sedition leading to severe imprisonment has been the standard threat instigated by politicians who have felt insulted by cartoons). Fortunately, business cartoonists face no threats. Case in point: Scott Adams has sailed high on the Dilbert wave!

Is cartooning a difficult profession? Any cartoonist - and not just those tasked with delivering a daily piece - will tell you that coming up with the cartoon that suits the occasion is not an easy assignment. The agony increases with the deadline approaching, and after all the editor's sensibilities are not easy to cater too! The creative juices have to flow just at the right time, and the message has to be appropriate to the subject and the discerning audience.

Indeed, it takes a special breed of persons who can connect various common-place events (be it office, society or the political world) and give it just the right twist to bring a laugh or smile to our face & sometimes provide an insight like no other. For now, let us revel in the creativity that fuels a cartoonist's pen, and may their tribe increase.

[back to top ^](#)

PODIUM

**Interview with Vikram Nandwani - Proprietor &
Creative Director of Chameleo Design Consulting**



Mr. Vikram Nandwani

Vikram Nandwani's journey has been just as interesting as his creations. As a child he drew his inspiration from the creations of Walt Disney and Calvin & Hobbes, among others. He is armed with an Engineering and an MBA degree from Pune University and has over 12 years of IT experience in the corporate world. Leaving the corporate world, Vikram is a cartoonist and currently runs an illustration studio called Verry India (<http://www.verryindia.com/>) which specialises in creating fun, quirky products, inspired by everything that is fun about India. They also work with corporates and publications for custom book illustrations, cartoon strips for magazines, murals for offices and collaterals for marketing communications.

Vikram is also working on a social impact project called Virsa, Punjabi for cultural roots, where he is collaborating with traditional weavers to create contemporary products, help provide respectable livelihood to the weavers and in a small way contribute to revival of artforms which are on the verge of extinction.

ET: Can you elucidate your journey from Software Development to cartooning and where you draw your inspiration from to impart value through art & your creations?

VN: I was never into software development, but yes, I worked with IT organizations in the process consulting and quality management roles for over 13 years before deciding to start cartooning full time. I had been thinking of drawing full time for a long time. My earlier attempt in 2009 bombed; I was broke in less than 6 months and had to find myself a job again. In 2013, I went back to it, but with some bit of planning this time. It has been three years since I started Verry India, an illustration studio, where we do cartoons and illustrations inspired from everything that is Indian. We are celebrating our third birthday on 1st April (a very auspicious day to start) and we are a team of 9 illustrators now. We have worked with the like of Volkswagen India, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Zensar, Penguin, Extentia, across domains and industries. Apart from this, we have worked on a number of social initiatives - we do art workshops for children who cannot afford art education, children with special needs, we illustrate municipal schools walls, among many other initiatives. We are currently collaborating with traditional artisans like handloom weavers, terracotta potters, stone sculpturs, fountain pen makers and the likes, to help bring back traditional artforms on the verge of extinction and to help provide sustainable livelihood to the artisans. Art is all about spreading happiness and that has been our inspiration. It has been a 'verry' happy journey so far.

ET: In your opinion, what are the issues that Cartoonists have to contend with to be taken as a serious artist and commentator of the times?

VN: I don't think there is any issue of that sort...cartoonists don't mind if their art is not thought of as serious art or fine art for that matter. For us, cartoons are our medium of expression and so long as we are enjoying our work, we are fine. But having said that, all artists face issues like lack of visibility and more so for cartoonists as there are very limited forums and infrastructure available in the country to promote our art.

ET: An infinite imagination, a paper, a pencil and practice, was what an illustrator decades needed back. What are the indispensables in today's context?

VN: It is a digital world now and the illustrator also has to adapt to the new world of digital art. Also compressed timelines, wider array of work requiring contextual understanding make cartooning a very serious business. The ability to research your subjects and the knowledge of illustration softwares are extremely important nowadays.

ET: As a first generation entrepreneur, what are the challenges you face in your line of business?

VN: The biggest challenge is to sustain. It has been extremely difficult to keep the creativity going and ensuring that we do not turn ourselves into a factory, even when the margins are low. Another challenge is to fund our products business as both - prototyping as well as production - are capital intensive and we have been going slightly slow in this area as we are totally self-funded.

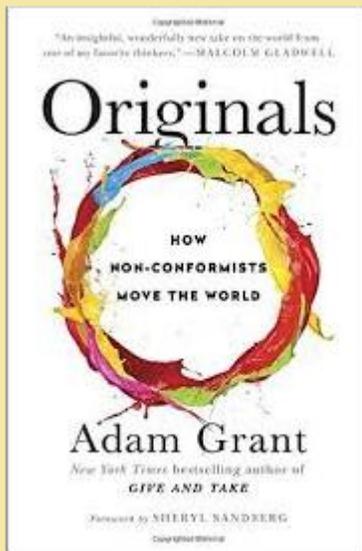
ET: What are the various products under your Indophile venture "Verry India" and what are your future plans for the business?

VN: We make quirky products like t-shirts, mugs, bar accessories and stationery. This 26th January, we launched our Virsa range of products which are completely handmade with zero carbon footprint using traditional methods. We have started with khaadi stoles and bags and will be launching products using dokra casting, terracotta, canework shortly. While other design studios are concentrating on manufacturing in China, we have opted for this route because of its social as well as environmental benefits. Virsa is a totally self funded initiative and we are currently prototyping our products in collaboration with artisans in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa. The response has been very good and one of our projects has been selected for crowdfunding recently.

[back to top ^](#)

WE RECOMMEND

Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World - Adam Grant



Adam Grant, Professor at Wharton has written an extremely original book. His earlier foray and his first book, 'Give and Take' was a New York Times best seller translated into twenty-seven languages. In this book, Adam explores how innovators see the world differently and bring others into their success and through many interesting examples, overturns some myths and presents some counter intuitive insights. For example, the assumption that non-conformist innovators are all bold, young risk-takers, churning out one fantastic idea after another. In fact, they are often cautious late adopters. Their masterworks emerge - often unrecognised by their authors - because of the sheer quantity of average work they produce along the way. They "procrastinate

strategically...testing and refining different possibilities" before making breakthroughs.

He describes how Dean Kamen, the brilliant inventor who has so many commercially successful inventions under his belt, failed miserably with the Segway. He also describes how his strong supporters, Steve Jobs as well as other investors with a strong nose for great ideas were so 'off the mark' with the Segway. Steve was in fact prepared to work for free to help bring Segway to the market. 'Segway was proclaimed to be a box office hit even before it was viewed by audiences'. Grant points out that success in one area does not guarantee success in another, and hubris often blinds perspective.

Adam addresses the question - what does it take to be an original and how truly original people actually behave? Grant systematically debunks so many myths that on hindsight seem to be embedded in our collective psyche. For example, the perception that innovators are blazing in their willingness to throw everything away in pursuit of their vision. That is not true at all. There is a fascinating story of Warby Parker, the online spectacle ordering company. The founders did everything that we imagine successful entrepreneurs would not do. They hung on to their day jobs till the last minute, procrastinated while building their website, were filled with self-doubt, were terrified of failing and did everything they could do to mitigate risks, so much so that

Adam refused to invest in the company when offered a chance; a decision which he bitterly regretted.

As Grant puts it so succinctly: "...the inner experiences are not any different from our own. They feel the same fear, the same doubt, as the rest of us. What sets them apart is that they take action anyway. They know in their hearts that failing would yield less regret than failing to try." Grant (a former junior Olympic springboard diver and magician) also illustrates the importance of having artistic avocations that invariably spur innovation in other areas. Galileo's skills as an artist allowed him to discern mountains on the moon, whereas many of his scientific colleagues seeing the same exact images saw no such lunar features.

There is a fascinating chapter on Groupthink and what it takes to foster a culture that sustains originality. He talks about Polaroid and Edward Land the only inventor after Edison to have so many path breaking inventions to his name. Polaroid failed because it failed to promote dissent. Research has proved that a surfeit of cohesiveness is not the reason that organisations succumb to Groupthink. Instead, a commitment to promote dissent is the vital element that separates a strong culture from a cult. Such a commitment is central to the way Ray Dalio runs Bridgewater, the hedge fund group that Grant has studied. Despite his admiration for Bridgewater's demanding principles based approach, Grant disagrees with Dalio who will not test his intuitions with experiments.

Grant shares around 30 practical actions for individuals to champion new ideas, for leaders to build cultures that welcome dissent and for parents and teachers to help children become comfortable taking a creative or moral stand against status quo. This book will only add to Grant's growing reputation as an original thinker and writer.

[back to top ^](#)

STANDING OVATION

Maher, Pune



Founded by Sister Lucy Kurien in 1997, Maher is an interfaith NGO in Pune with centres in Ranchi, Ratnagiri and Ernakulam. The objective of the organisation is to provide shelter and support to destitute adults and children. In 2015, Sister Lucy, was awarded the Nari Shakti National Award on 08 March, 2015 at Rashtrapathi Bhavan, by the President of India.

Maher's activities are grouped into different projects - the three main projects include:

Mamtadham - Under this project, Maher runs homes for destitute women. Maher imparts courses in different handicrafts in order to make them self-dependent. Many women are later employed by Maher to help in various projects.

Kishoredham - This is a project for Maher's orphans and children from broken homes. In each home there are 20-25 children and two house mothers. The children are sent to school where the NGO conducts dance, sports and musical activities.

Vatsalyadham - A home for mentally challenged women, Maher conducts various activities from listening to music, playing simple games to medical therapy. The NGO walks the extra mile to find out the address of these patients and if it is found to be safe, patients are re-united with their families.

For more information about Maher, please visit <http://www.maherashram.org>

For its outstanding work, Maher deserves a Standing Ovation!

[back to top ^](#)



Rupesh Balsara goes underwater to capture a picture of a Clownfish (Anemonefish) in the Andaman Coral Reef. This fish has a symbiotic relationship with sea anemones (water-dwelling, predatory animals).

Empowered Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd.

<http://www.empoweredindia.com>

101, Lords Manor, 49, Sahaney Sujan Park, Lullanagar, Pune – 411040, Maharashtra, India

[FEEDBACK](#) [ARCHIVES](#) [UNSUBSCRIBE](#)

©The ELS Lotus logo is trademark of Empowered Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd.
©2016 Copyright Empowered Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd. (ELS). For private circulation to clients and well-wishers of ELS. While ELS endeavors to ensure accuracy of information, we do not accept any responsibility for any loss or damage to any person resulting from it.