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## Veterans Unpacked | Sudarshan Jain: “Adopt technology very fast and find the time to understanding it as much as possible”

**Note to readers:** How do corporate leaders surf life after hanging up their boots? What do they do next? What are the lessons they learned in their eventful journeys? What advice do they have for the current crop of leaders? Veterans Unpacked is a new series of interviews aimed to offer readers lessons from retired bosses on life outside the corner office.

Sudarshan Jain graduated from St Stephen's College, Delhi, and then the [Indian Institute of Management \(IIM\), Ahmedabad](#), before embarking on what would be a lifetime career in life sciences and healthcare. For the better part of four decades, Jain was in leadership positions at firms that include Johnson & Johnson, [Abbott Healthcare](#) and others. Jain, who lives in



Mumbai, is an avid educationist and remains deeply involved with the pharmaceuticals industry.

### What have you been up to since hanging up your boots?

After Abbott Healthcare there were two areas which I wanted to pursue; one was education and second is the boards within the industry.

So, I joined [Apax Partners](#), which is a private equity fund, as a senior adviser, and I started teaching at IIM Ahmedabad. I started teaching two courses at IIM Ahmedabad; healthcare systems and management of customer value. And private equity was an emerging field when I joined Apax Partners as senior adviser, healthcare.

Then over a period of time, other things happened. I joined Abbott India board as well as [Zandu Chemicals'](#) (ZCL's) board. Zandu was divested by Abbott, it was bought for Rs 8 crore and divested at Rs 2,000 crore, which has been one of the very successful investments there.

Then I have been in the industry over the years. Fellow professionals suggested I join the [Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance \(IPA\) as its secretary general](#), and so I did and I am also the chair of Indian Institute of Healthcare Management Research, Jaipur.

### What keeps you busy now?

So basically, because of the COVID situation at the moment, we have new things to deal with every day. So, IPA takes the majority of time; 80-90% of my time goes to it.

I try to balance other systems, and I have got a very good team working at all the places I am affiliated with. I coordinate with them on a daily basis or maybe alternate days basis to stay on top of things. So, I manage time very well. I go for a run or a brisk walk every day on the way to the temple with my wife. We spend 15 minutes at the temple and walk back home. So, it takes care of both health as well as spiritual aspects of life. Post that, the rest of the day starts as I mentioned earlier.

### Looking back, can you tell us about three interesting events or anything that has stayed with you since?

If I look back at my corporate career, I have always been building businesses and teams, and that has been the exciting part. In 1993 was the first part when we at Boots/Knoll entered into strategic alliances with [Novo Nordisk](#) to build a diabetes care business in India. In those days, the [insulin market](#) was in its infancy and the concept of strategic alliance itself was very new.

The second was joining [Piramal Pharmaceuticals](#). So, I had worked in MNCs over a period of time and the group had been following up with me. I decided to join Piramal and it was interesting because I was joining an Indian company after having worked largely for multinationals and that involved thinking on a different scale and growing business with acceleration.

The third was the actual integration of Piramal's business with Abbott. That itself was another kind of challenge because when you have a global company and an Indian company, how do you integrate the systems, values, cultures and become a part of it? I thought that I knew Abbott very well and it will be very easy, but again how do you integrate the practices, how do you get the businesses, how do you integrate the systems, that was a challenge. So what helped to make it happen was communication, communication, communication and the adoption of global best practices and systems.

You have to think globally. Don't think India is the market. Think globally, whether it is talent, whether it is system, whether it is processes, whether it is product.

### **What do you miss most about the C-Suite?**

So the thing is, when you operate in the corporate organization, you have got a large structure which is there, and basis that you can operate from a position of authority so there is a lot of positional support with you. Now, today in my kind of operation, I have to sign the bill of tea with my office, so that's the fundamental change. Of course, I am OK with it.

### **If you had to relive your corporate career, what would you do differently?**

One of the things that I could've gone much more into was the digital adoption part. So, relatively perhaps, we are slow in adopting digital and technological practices.

And then talent, you should go on building. There should be much more hiring of talent than whatever was being done. So, sometimes you tend to live with what you have instead of thinking much more futuristically. I could have done much more.

### **What are the changes in the corporate world that you see now that are vastly different from your time?**

There is much more integration across organizations. Organizations don't have to operate in silos, which is very important, because now everything is interlinked. So, like, in my time, if you give a forecast and the forecast is not right, then the supply chain will blame sales people that its not right, but in today's world where the environment is changing every day, everyone has to be on the same page and everyone has to be focused on the mission. And, the [COVID](#) situation has forced everyone to get more agility, coordination and integration in the organization.

Second, the need of empathy and to believe people is very important because you know many of your colleagues are suffering from COVID.

And third is how you [operate from home](#) and focus more on outcomes than how many hours you have spent. So, these are some of the changes.

### **Which business leader in the current crop impresses you?**

I have always admired Miles White who created Abbott into a public company, and Elon Musk of Tesla, who has been thinking out of the box and is one of the great business leaders whom I admire.

Among the Indian leaders, I think N. Chandrasekhar of Tata is doing a great job. He has brought great professionalization into the business. In the pharmaceutical industry, I like [Dilip Shanghvi](#) (Sun Pharma Advanced Research chairman and non-executive director).

Also read: [Dilip Shanghvi resigns as MD of SPARC: Here's what you need to know about him](#)

### **How did you plan for life after retirement?**

On the planning part, I did two things when I was in Abbott itself. I had been teaching; I had been participating in lectures and I had been associated with education. So, I did little but then I got connected with IIM Ahmedabad, and education was one of the things which I thought I will spend time on.

Two, I thought I would do some board assignments, so I took a certification program for board directors. I had done it during the last phase of my career at Abbott. So, I thought that 50%, I will get out and rest of the time I will do board assignments, some coaching, guiding, and then education.

I didn't think that I would get involved in so many activities moving forward.

### **Is there anything you would tell your younger self?**

I would tell myself to adopt technology very fast and to find the time to understand it. We as a country also need to move into technology fast, as we are slightly late in adopting technology.

Second: You have to think globally. Don't think India is the market. Think globally, whether it is talent, whether it is system, whether it is processes, whether it is product; think globally and compare yourself with the best of the world.

And always be in learning mode. Continuously, keep on learning and learning and learning. Because the world is changing fast, so you have to be in learning mode: learn, unlearn and relearn.

### **What is your advice for the next cadre of corporate leaders?**

What is very important is humility and to be humble. Understand all your actions. How they impact the last person on the ground, whether it is the customer or the employees. And be conscious of that because sometimes we are more fortunate but keep that in mind. Humility, empathy, compassion are all overriding as compared to intelligence. So, IQ is important but IQ is not going very far unless it is backed with EQ and SQ. Spiritual quotient is also very important.