

parichay

A
tête-à-tête
with
THSTI Society



thsti society parichay

The Members of THSTI Society answered 11 questions when they met during the 11th Annual Society Meeting this year. This booklet compiles their answers. Here's a personal note for all readers.

The Translational Health Science and Technology Institute is mentored by a distinguished group of scientific and administrative experts with great expertise and years of experience. When THSTI was established as a Society under the Society Act 1860, a team of leading scientists were given the responsibility of mentoring this new institute with the unique mandate of conducting translational research to develop innovative solutions for problems challenging public health in India. In 2018, the first group of Society members passed over the responsibility to a new and vibrant group. The Society is now led by a senior administrator who championed public health during her career as a bureaucrat and leaders of research organizations responsible for ground-breaking research in India.

THSTI Society Parichay was conceived as a communication initiative to get to know the members of our Society up, close and a little personal and let us peek into their inspirational lives. We got them to talk about their careers, the good times, the bad times and times when dealing with difficult people taught them something that stayed with them. Of whether choosing the areas they would lead someday was a conscious choice, or was it a 'one-thing-led-to-another' and 'before-they-knew' story. On what they would advise a scientist or a doctoral student. On what are the strengths (and weaknesses) of this slightly odd institute.

Before you set out to read these next few pages to be inspired and awed, I would like to extend my gratitude to all our featured members, mentors, who were humble and lovely-- setting aside time to answer these questions. This is a handbook I would carry to get answers for challenging times, and I hope you will as well. It made me think that having a good sense of humour might actually be necessary to handle a serious job!

I am thankful to Drs. Nitya Wadhwa, Pallavi Kshetrapal, Susmita Chaudhuri and Amit Kumar Yadav for interviewing the members and for being around during the editing.

I hope you have as much fun reading this as I had while putting it together. Suggestions for next year are welcome!!

SHAILAJA CHANDRA



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

It is difficult to select one mentor as there were several. I can only say that among those under whom I worked, the exposure in the earliest years in service had the deepest impact on me. One of my bosses changed colours like a chameleon - he was strict, punctilious and a no-nonsense disciplinarian in office but full of wit and humour socially. His style of administration influenced me greatly because he instilled the importance of punctuality, attention to detail and utmost care in what you write and speak – because it cannot be undone once signed. This man could get a large organisation to work efficiently by monitoring each officer's performance based on hard data. Making excuses became difficult for all.

I was equally influenced by another boss who was a study in contrast - he was the epitome of politeness, and humility and taught us how to build bridges with the public. He showed us that that was the hallmark of achievement - not the files one disposed of, not the meetings held, nor the plethora of schemes implemented. If the people for whom all this was intended were neither

aware nor benefitting in their own eyes, it was a failure. He taught us how public service was not just a phrase. It needed to be translated into something that bridged the gap with the intended beneficiaries. If the service doesn't reach the public, the foundation of public service is belied. That can only come by reaching out to the people and encouraging criticism which is the only way of filling the gaps between the authorities and the people. Meeting people with an open mind is critical to get first-hand knowledge and make a correction.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

I believe that you have to set an example. When you want something to be done, you must show that you are capable of doing it and sustaining it.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

Yes, I have made several mistakes. One was 'speaking out of turn'. Early in service, I was able to floor everyone in the room with my interjection but as the timing was wrong the outcome backfired. In hindsight, I realised how important it was to look at the general atmosphere and who was chairing the meeting. Without understanding the bigger picture, even a correct response could cause annoyance because as true as it may be it only deflects from something larger and requiring priority attention. No matter how sincere or remarkable one's individual contribution maybe it will register as a failure if one is insensitive to context and timing.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

In my career I recall at least five bosses who were whimsical, biased or just ignored me-the worst punishment of all. The experience taught me nothing is permanent. In the short term, you could be transferred, your work could be taken away from you as a mark of displeasure or you could be treated as persona non grata. But nothing is permanent - it has to pass. Knowing that, helped me overcome difficulties. I once had all my work taken away from me because I refused to follow not just irregular but illegal orders. I could not explain the circumstances to anyone as I knew I was a minor player and my concerns would get no traction. Eight months of such humiliation would ordinarily have broken my morale. But I used office time to read and write on things which were of interest to me. I also plunged into house renovation to take my mind away and achieved quite a lot. In a sense it taught me a life lesson - when God closes one door, he opens another. But it is for an individual to look for that door.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

At this stage, I am a very grey person. Age has made a big difference. As I crossed 70, I somehow acquired a taste for sober colours and my love of bright combinations just faded - rather suddenly. It was a blessing as I donated dozens of lovely bright saris to younger career women and it is lovely to see them – (the saris and the women) leading a new life.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

A recent book I read was “Plucked: Chicken, Antibiotics, and How Big Business Changed the Way the World Eats.” It is a powerful expose on the way chickens are fattened with antibiotics. I was so moved or rather repelled

by what I read that I wrote an OPED titled “One Man’s Meat... “ for the Indian Express.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

Get married later. Have children later. Be independent for as long as you can. Do not think that your first priority is to be a perfect wife, a perfect mother or a perfect daughter. If you have a career (not just a job) you owe it to the organization and to yourself to excel there. That is possible only if you treat your career as your first priority (and invest in stable domestic arrangements to make it work).

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

When you communicate among yourselves, it is entirely your profession and your business. But when you are communicating with a layperson you must learn the art of funnelling your thoughts and communication to make it simple and interesting. Technical jargon, acronyms and assumptions made in conversation with non-scientists put off the listener and generally people tune off. If you can master the art of talking coherently as though to a 12-year old and s/he is able to understand what you say, you are a true master.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

Stay on track. Don’t allow other interests to divert your attention. You have to be in a tunnel until you submit your thesis and defend it.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

The first unique asset that THSTI has is the ability to handle a wide variety of projects connected to providing a solution to public health challenges; second, the Institute and its faculty are well respected which attracts both intramural and extramural funding. Third, unlike the usual sort of organization, THSTI is modern, relevant and capable of operating at several layers – it covers research, applied science and collaboration all at the same time and does not seem clogged with an over-emphasis on maintaining systems and processes as an end in itself.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

It is important to know about emerging problems in demographic terms and to break them down into rural and urban sectors, age cohorts and wealth quintiles. There is no problem in a country like India. Emerging diseases which have not come to India, childhood illnesses, particularly nutrition-related, growing challenges of an aging population, the manifestation of mental health conditions, will all need attention. The treatment and cure can be left to clinicians but a translational Institute like THSTI is uniquely poised to respond to newer prevalence and incidence studies and translate the knowledge into patterns for managing those syndromes - something neither hospitals nor pure research institutions have the time or the mandate to undertake. In terms of the public benefit, this matters the most.

DR. RENU SWARUP



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

The one mentor who has had an impact and from whom I have learnt the basic values and ethics of work is my father. He has been a true mentor and guide and the one key lesson that he taught was “nothing is impossible”. If you work hard, you will achieve success.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

A Leader by definition has to lead by example. A Leader must have a very clear vision and should be able to carry their team with them. It is all about working with teams and making the teams collectively responsible and taking ownership of the larger organizational vision and targets.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

You make mistakes at each point of your career. If you take challenges, you will make mistakes. However each mistake is a learning, which gives you an opportunity to learn. I have, throughout my career, used the opportunity of every mistake to learn how to do better as I move on.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

Each individual has their own characteristics. When you are working as a team member, it is important to give everyone their space and try to identify the strengths and good points of your colleagues and seniors, which can help you to achieve your task. There will be certain points of difference and disagreements which could be related to individual's characteristics. You have to keep the professional and personal matters separate and as a true professional you have to accept working with different personalities.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

Red, because it signifies brightness and vibrancy and it happens to be my favourite colour. Bright colours would always brighten up your day irrespective of the mood or environment.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

The Monk who sold his Ferrari by Robin Sharma. The key message about the book was about the philosophy of life and the challenges which life offers and how to overcome those.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

My note would read as below:

“You have just completed the 1st phase of your life and acquired the basic understanding of life, profession and relationships. You are now moving into a much larger world which will not be as smooth and soft and as protective. You have to now think and remember all the values which you have learnt and put them to practice. This is the start of your professional life and it is important that you build a strong foundation of value and ethics on which you will grow your future career and life”.

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

A scientist is a person who is driven by curiosity and inquisitiveness and thinks rationally. Never be satisfied with ‘no’ for an answer. Keep chasing your dreams; keep chasing the ideas you have. Be ready for failures because those are the stepping stones for your future success.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

For a Ph.D. student I would say never give up - that is the only solution to achieve success. You will have to be patient. You must know that your research should and must have a major impact on the science and research ecosystem in the country and globally.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

THSTI has been set up with a focussed mandate and its strength lies in its interdisciplinary nature with a special focus on translational research. It is important that THSTI continues to work with the focus on delivery of affordable and accessible products to our societal challenges and problems.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

THSTI has to keep pace with the fast-moving technology and in 10 years from now, the institute should be the “go-to” place for translational science, and also the most sought after collaborator globally.

DR. ALKA SHARMA



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who it will be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

I have had the good fortune of working with numerous professionals who have taught me many invaluable lessons. But if I had to pick one person, I would say Dr. M. K. Bhan, Former Secretary, DBT was a true mentor to me. From him, I learnt leadership and the importance of being a team player while providing your team with a congenial environment.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

Allow your team the space to grow confidently and take charge. At the same time, be approachable to them.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

I believe there are no mistakes, just lessons learnt. There have been many instances in my career where I feel I could have handled the situation differently. But now I understand that those moments shaped me into a better individual and I try to constantly imbibe those learnings in my life.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

I don't think there is any professional who hasn't had a difficult boss at some point or the other. But what we need to remember is that your boss may not necessarily be making your life difficult on purpose. Tackling different temperaments at the work place is an important life skill which if mastered pays off dividends.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

Yellow - it always reminds me of sunshine.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

The Harry Potter series - with my kids!

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

That your honesty, discipline and work ethics are your strength. Cherish them.

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

You should think out-of-the-box and always aim to create with the purpose of helping the society at large.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

Whatever you do, do it with clarity of thought.

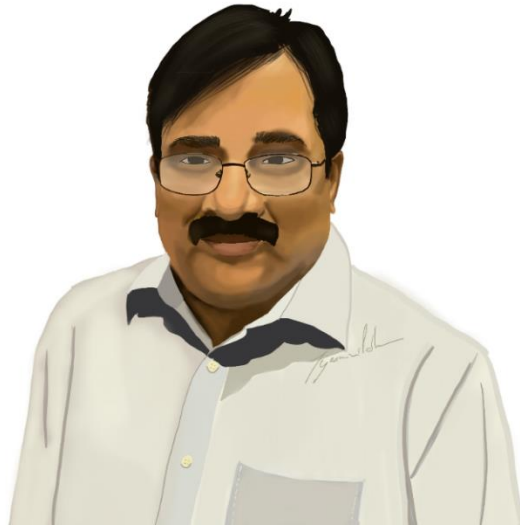
Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

I think THSTI's strength lies in their novel approach to translation oriented research leading to various applications.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

Our children are our strength. I feel THSTI should focus on developing vaccines for new emerging diseases prevalent among the younger population of the country.

DR. AMULYA PANDA



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

It's definitely not one. In life, it is my father. He taught me to do whatever I wanted to do but do my best. 'Whether its cutting grass or clone a protein, do that well', was the message, loud and clear. And in my career, my teachers at each stage.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

A leader should be able to do what he wants others to do.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

I used to be very reactive. Now, I am proactive like a vaccine. And trust me, prevention is better than cure (laughs). I won't change anything that I have done though.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

Bosses are always difficult. What I did was learnt to listen to them and not react.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

Blue. Its infinity.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

Apart from science, I like to read philosophy. The last book I read was Inner Engineering. I read Sadhguru's works. It is about how you react to a situation. Decades back we came to know about genes, then genome and then epigenomics. Now it's all about signalling. In life too, how you react to a situation, decides your life's trajectory. That is my takeaway.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

I come from one of the poorest states of the country. My father was a pharmacist. I was the first person to go to college from my village. I was driven to do the best and I did well. So, that note is going to read – 'Whatever you choose to do, give it your best shot.'

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

Be true to yourself.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

Read, read and read some more.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

The concept is novel and ahead of its time. Doing translational research is a wonderful thought. When in University of California, I used to ask an American colleague what he would do after this degree in chemical engineering and he said he will study medicine. That was only possible in US back then. A chemical engineer planning to study medicine; a medical doctor thinking of studying biology. But, crossing barriers is now happening here in India. Its turbulent but turbulence is needed for tranquillity. Cutting across disciplines and providing a platform to let people do what they want to do is THSTI's USP and its strength. They have the ability to bring together disciplines to solve problems. I will give time to this young institute to grow and can't wait to see what else it can do.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

We have many problems in this country. I'd advise you to choose problems you want to work on. It should only be aligned to your mandate. I'd like THSTI to be the nodal centre for translational research for all DBT institutes.

DR. APURVA SARIN



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

I had the opportunity to work with many talented scientists who have had very significant influences in my professional career. But, if I had to pick one, it would be Professor Veronica Rodrigues. She was a geneticist and worked with *Drosophila* at TIFR. Our fields were obviously very different but, what I learnt from her was a commitment to invest in building capabilities within the country. So, the time and attention that she gave me when I was a new faculty, and others, left an abiding impression in my mind about giving back to the system that has essentially nurtured your ambitions. This has been the most valuable lesson to me as an investigator.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

Transparency. Being transparent, and being inclusive. I think if there is a decision that impacts the community of students or post docs, an effort should be made to engage with them and to bring awareness that such a matter is under discussion. They may not be able to change the decision, but they certainly may and are able to contribute to it. That's one example of being inclusive. I think it's important when tough decisions are to be taken, to involve people concerned in the decision-making process.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

After my PhD, I stayed back and continued to work on a sort of a semi-independent position. May be that is something I would not recommend doing today. The world moves so much faster, and can do so many more things. Maybe that wasn't a *mistake* at that time but today it would not be prudent. Why would I call it a mistake now? Because now, there is an extraordinary pressure on people getting to fast-track careers. I am not a great proponent of it but realistically, there's great emphasis on starting things early, getting on the road you want to take, *faster*. So, that's why I think that perhaps that was not the most practical decision.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

Fortunately, no. I trained with men who were forward looking and liberal, but one encounters difficulties in other ways. I think difficulties are more now. When one is running an institute or even if you are running your own lab, you are dealing with a variety of people, and a variety

of personalities. And more than a one-on-one dealing with a difficult boss, which I must say I was fortunate to not have had to negotiate, if I was in a situation where there was difficulty, I'd have definitely spoken out and followed whatever tracks institutions had to negotiate and deal with the issue. To add to that, in the campus that I am in, the institution that I am in, there is an awareness that you would have to have a forum for people to come in and to be able to speak about this.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

Huh...interesting. Nothing I would be black or white. I like them most. And if I may, I would not be in a crayon set [chuckles].

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

'Who we are and how we got here' by David Reich. And I started it because I read a fabulous review about it. There is a curiosity about the evolution of the human race and learning from ancient DNA.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

To have the courage of conviction. To not be fearful of failure. I think it would be the same note I would give myself today to move forward.

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

If you are in science and you enjoy it, you stay true to yourself. Follow your gut, but be strategic because I think it's important to be aware of what is truly current. One may be truly passionate about something, which nobody else

is interested in and one should weigh that very carefully. One should not let the society take your decisions but one should also assess if we are doing something out of a sense of ego, as opposed to truly important. But I think it is important to follow your heart as a scientist, very important.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

I'd say do your PhD in something that you really want to learn about. Do not look upon your PhD, only as your period of training. That said, I'd like to remind the PhD student that, while important, you are not going to be defined only by your PhD. You should not look upon your PhD as the first and last opportunity to do something meaningful for the rest of your life.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

This is an answer that is going to be a little biased, since I am more familiar with the programs that have a clinical translational orientation. At InStem too we are trying to set up similar efforts. There is an important role for discovery-based science, but what we lack in our country today is centralized resources of material that are organized and properly archived, annotated and maintained. And I think this is what has held back our country in making a contribution globally. So, I am mostly excited about these large-scale studies that involve cohorts. But the effort to garner information, to put it together, to have clinicians and biologists working together, I think that seems like the possibility of THSTI that most excites me.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

Oh! I would really like biologists or a team of biologists to come and look at the marvellous new material being generated in the preterm and the long-term cohorts that have been generated. I think there are so many questions that one can ask related to development. And also, for cell biologists and physiologists it is a treasure trove. It would be fabulous to see some biology emerge from there and I think there will be new biology there. I think the questions will just come bursting out.

DR. ASHALATHA RADHAKRISHNAN



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

If you ask me to name one mentor, it will be my schoolteacher. I know not many people have that answer. She is still around. She taught me from the 7th to 10th standard and was my class teacher. She taught us history, civics, geography and economics. While, she was concerned about her students' well-being, when it came to teaching, she was strict. This had a long-lasting impression on me. Her daughter was my batch mate but she was never treated any differently than we were. I have tried to imbibe her punctuality, depth of knowledge, command over language and diction. Also, she used to perfectly drape cotton sarees (smiles).

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

To move ahead as a team, everyone should feel an equally important member of it. That's one thing I am very careful about. Every person, even a driver who drives you to your office should be made to feel significant.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

I went abroad, and wanted to settle down and study there. I moved to Australia and decided to do a PhD. Soon after, I started looking for opportunities. But down the line I missed my family, my mom and I lost my father during that period. Leaving my family back in India, cost me and I decided to come back. I lost 3 or 4 years there. I think it is a good idea to get yourself trained by going abroad intermittently and come back and contribute to your country. I would not do anything differently though and it was learning.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

I did have a boss who was arrogant and when I realized that, I drifted away. At times they do not understand your subordinate has to be treated with equal respect.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

I will be white. Everything else is unmatched. Its serene and gels into everything.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

... Jeffrey Archer?

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

Take care of your parents and grandparents.

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

You are a physician scientist. My advice to you will be 'bench to bedside' should be your goal. Do what will reach the people.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

Stay focused on the questions you are pursuing.

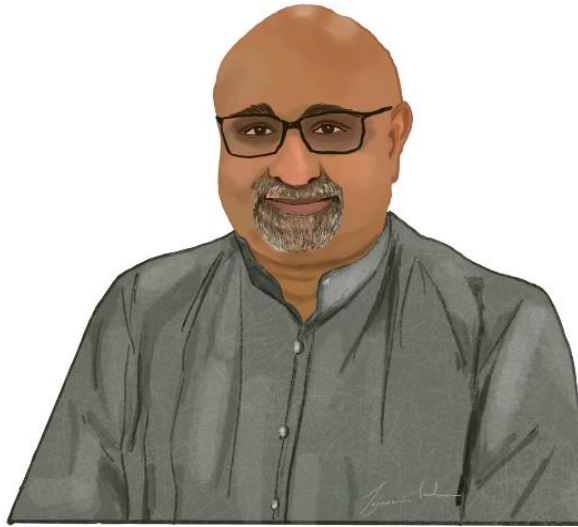
Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

I think it's the blend of clinical research and basic research.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

Dementia, since I am a neurologist. Alzheimer's disease. We do not have good biomarkers for the disease and is an area that could be explored. This part in the recording was not clear. You mentioned you were reading a book in the flight. Can you please write the name of the book and what was the take home message for you?

DR. M. RADHAKRISHNA PILLAI



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

I have had the privilege of having many excellent mentors. If I were to name one, it would be my former boss and former teacher, Prof. M. Krishnan Nair, former Director of the Regional Cancer Centre in Trivandrum who I had the fortune to work with for 15 years. What I learnt from him is to give your younger colleagues and younger students the freedom to think and make decisions of their own. I could take decisions of my own and unless it was horribly wrong (chuckles) he would never come in the way. He would, in fact, encourage you to implement your decisions, whether it was for patient care or it was for management. That is when I started being confident about doing things on my own.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

Do what you think is right and stand by your decision if you are right. If you are wrong, say you are sorry and change it.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

That would be a little bit of over confidence, feeling that what I did was right when I was not. Leadership is not about you being right all the time. It's about accepting when the other person is right irrespective of whether he is senior or junior and I learnt it the hard way many times. If given a second chance, I would be much more careful about how I deal with people, hear what they have to say and be a little accommodative. When you are in a leadership position for a long time, at times you take things for granted and I think you should never do that.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

I have been quite fortunate for not ever having a difficult boss. At times you might not agree with your boss's decision, but taking a difficult decision is his job and I understand that now.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

I have this fascination for red colour and it's not because I am a communist! I find it to be very bold. All my work benches, cupboards and shelves in my labs are red. And many people laugh at it but I think it looks great. Everybody smiles when I show them a new plan of the lab, and they say, 'Oh, it's going to be red!'.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

The last book that I read completely was *The Emperor of All Maladies*. Being a cancer biologist, I really enjoyed

The book. I purchase two books every time I travel and to complete them is my retirement plan. I enjoy reading fiction, management, everything.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

Go for it, yaa! You have to live your passion. It's not just science, its adventure. If you are putting away your passion, you are sacrificing a very important part of your life. I'd like my 20-year old self to not stop playing sports, a mistake that I did. [I used to open for my college cricket team, I played Under-19. But at some point, of time you fall under parental pressure, then you regret it for the rest of your life.]

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

Please have your goals clearly worked out because in science you don't have time to think, 'I will start doing this tomorrow or day after'. You won't realize you are slipping. It's about persistence, thinking out-of-the-box. It's a little bit of work every day. Plan your day ahead in a journal.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

You need to have a clear understanding of why you are here. If you have to do a PhD, you have to plan. Please treat your supervisor as your mentor and your guardian. You will have fights with them and take it as something you have with your parents.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

I was involved in the initial conceptualization of THSTI. This is my 15th year as the Director of one of the DBT institutes. In those multiple meetings with Dr. Bhan, we all wanted THSTI to be the institute that applies science to meet the needs of the society. But I have said this in 2005 and again now in 2019, a translational research institute requires a hospital to function as a clinical research centre and it cannot function without that. I hope that happens soon. The kind of science, research and leadership they have is doing very well.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

I hope it will continue the tremendous work that it is doing in maternal & child health and on infectious diseases. Build better infrastructure over the years. In 10 years, THSTI should be able to be at a position to shape the health care policy of India.

DR. UDAY KUMAR YARAGATTI



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

Prof. Victor Prince Sundar Singh, my PhD guide in IIT Mumbai. He used to talk less and work more. As a PhD student you tend to have a lot of ideas. His advice was to start something and bring it to the final stage and to not be distracted by too many ideas.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

If you want anything to be done, do it yourself first. Others will follow. I consider this as a duty.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

I don't think I have made mistakes. I converted mistakes into winning goals.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

I had a senior professor. He had a blue-eyed boy and used to snub me and pick on me. I managed to prove to him that I was right when I did the right thing. I used to work more to not let him find faults with him.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

Yellow. Its lovely. I have always liked it.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

Rishi Bharadwaj's *Vaimanik Shastra*. It's a four-volume book and haven't been able to read all of it though.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

Try everything and have no regrets. I sketched, did *Bharatnatyam* and climbed coconut trees. So, yes, go ahead and live the life you want to.

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

Please help the society in figuring out how to eat healthy and drink clean water. Tell them what is good for them.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

Have a research problem figured out before you set out to work. There will be hurdles, often unforeseen, but endure them. You have to work to make your destiny.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

Reaching out to society is important and having it in the mandate of the institute is what makes THSTI strong.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

The current generation will be grown up in 10 years. Give them a healthy and longer life by making small changes in the lives they are leading now. Tell them why they should come back to the nature. Tell them why traditional knowledge systems are important.

PROF. GAGANDEEP KANG



If you had to name one mentor of yours, who will it be? Tell us one lesson that he/she taught you that you implemented in your life?

Two mentors — Mary Estes in the rotavirus laboratory, Jayaprakash Muliyil as an epidemiologist. Mary taught me that deep science is nothing to be scared of, with application you can understand anything. JP taught me that the scientist's role is to question. If results are negative in a well-done study, especially when it is contrary to what you expected, that is fine. Both of these are critical to good translational research.

What is the one leadership rule that you live by?

A leader's role is to support the team and build them to be successful.

Tell us about one mistake you made early in your career. What did you learn from it? Given a second chance, what will you do differently?

As a medical student, I managed my attendance very carefully, but once I attended a class and for some reason my attendance was not recorded. I then accepted the advice of my classmates who were in the same boat and asked a faculty member for backdated sick leave. It made me very uncomfortable. I got found out anyway but the discomfort taught me not to do anything that made me unable to live with my actions.

Have you ever had a difficult boss? If yes, how did you manage the situation?

Yes, truly difficult — not just unsupportive, but denigrating. I did not manage the situation. I had no choice but to accept it. I did use my experience to decide that I did not want to be like that when I became a leader. I also think it did me good — handling difficult situations makes you stronger.

In a crayon set, what colour will you be and why?

Green — I tend to doodle plants and flowers.

What is the last book you read? What do you remember about it?

Flights by Olga Tokarczuk. It is a series of vignettes, some connected and some not. There are no resolutions; it makes you think.

What will the note to your 20-year-old self, read?

Be brave and believe in yourself. You are better than people say you are.

I am a scientist. What is the one advice you would give me?

Aim to address important problems and collaborate with the best to do that.

I am a PhD student. What is the one advice you would give me?

Read and question — it is important that you know everything about your field and how science got there.

Where do you think the strengths of THSTI lie?

In multidisciplinary and commitment to work together within and outside the institution to address important problems for India.

What is the one new problem you would want THSTI to work on 10 years from now?

Two new but linked areas—nutrition and aging.

