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## Principal , Dr. Shobana Vasudevan's interview

# Knowledge

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### Reading room

Getting Past No: Negotiating in Difficult Situations by William Ury

We all want to get to yes, but what happens when the other person keeps saying no? How can you negotiate successfully with a stubborn boss, an irate customer, or a deceitful co-worker? In this book, William Ury offers a strategy for turning adversaries into negotiating partners. Readers will learn how to stay in control under pressure; defuse anger and hostility; find out what the other side really wants; convert dirty tricks, use power to bring the other side back to the table and reach agreements that satisfies both sides' needs. The book will enable readers to deal with tough times, tough people, and tough negotiations.

## “I will make the difference!”

Students should feel that, and be natural in their behaviour in college, **Dr. Shobana Vasudevan**, Principal – R.A. Podar College, Matunga, tells Shraddha Kamdar among many more things

She is lively and agile, and sitting outside her office for a few minutes can give one an idea on how active she is, not only with her work, but also with her movements in welcoming her guests, and seeing them off. Being a teacher and principal for years has given her the motherly instinct – that her staff members come seeking blessings from her, and her looking after her students like her own children. She knows how to put a smile on the face of a person leaving her office after finishing the work – with a handy box of chocolate or candy, which she hands out to them. A mix of warmth and care, Dr. Shobana Vasudevan, Principal – R.A. Podar College, Matunga, is every bit the principal a student can hope for – being a friend, philosopher and guide. She is very clear – that at this stage with her kind of experience, the time is hers to give, and therefore she never misses an opportunity where she can enable, empower or even help students by offering them her time.

When I ask her what the students expect from college life, when they are fresh out of school, she is thoughtful, and says that it is definite that they walk in with a lot of expectations. “It is difficult to define their expectations, but my perception is that they think that they have achieved a certain kind of freedom. The freedom to do what they want in their own way. The problem is with the proper definition of freedom and independence,” says the dynamic leader. Dr. Shobana also feels that students don't want any parental interference also, once they come to college. “It appears that they want to get out of that feeling.”

According to Dr. Shobana, this feeling of independence or freedom is going to be demonstrated by the way they approach the college activities, right from the classroom behaviour to the choices of the subjects, to the exams and the evaluation done, there is a process of learning. “The students expect that now, things will be on their side, as in their opinions will be factored in which decisions are being made,” she says. Basically, she feels that the students want to be respected and the word ‘independence’ sums up the feeling quite well.

I take the opportunity to ask her what she thinks are the teachers' expectations from the students. “Teachers on the other hand want the students to be ‘highly’ disciplined, attentive and respectful. Often they feel that students should understand the concepts in the first attempt. I feel that sometimes, these expectations are too



Dr. Shobana Vasudevan

high” she offers her opinion. She also distinguishes between the expectations of the students from the English medium schools and those who are from the vernacular mediums. “The expectations from the students of these two groups are different. Students from other mediums of instruction may want bit more personal attention, as far as academics is concerned. Unfortunately, teachers will treat the students as a homogenous group since they have all cleared the admission criteria like passing class 10 and securing the sufficient percentage to be admitted to that particular college.

Sometimes, I feel this is inappropriate since academically, the needs of these two groups of students may be different.

Moving on, I ask Dr. Shobana what she thinks the students should do proactively so as to make the most of their years in college. “Students should behave naturally that's my foremost concern. I mean by nature they have a certain curiosity, which needs to be satisfied. They are growing and doing things in their own way, which is essential. The problem comes in with imitation and concerns about projecting a certain image. They either compare themselves

to others, or say ‘what will others think of me?’ That should not happen.”

She adds that at this stage, along with parental pressure, students also experience a lot of peer pressure. This is magnified when a degree college is attached to a junior college, since a first year junior college student (class 11) will look up to the third year students (graduating batch) and will instantaneously want to be like them. In fact, there are several years between the two students which cannot melt away.

Another of her concerns is that the idea of students running for marks is killing their curiosity.

She feels that the students themselves are responsible for the stress, since they fail to realise that the water settles at their level, and no amount of external pressure will help. “They will secure the marks they deserve even if they come to college and attend lectures, they really don't need to run to coaching classes from pillar to post” She quotes the father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, saying that “The world has enough for everyone's need, but not enough for everyone's greed.” She says that the students should feel that “I will make the difference.” Sadly, their age is such, that they succumb to the pressure.

In fact, Dr. Shobana says that over the years she has come to realise that the coaching classes are not adding on much to the students, and the parents have realised that, but they are still using these classes as a ‘glorified babysitting’ option! I laugh and ask her what she means by that. “When I meet the parents, they say that they have no idea how to deal with their children at home, so it is better to enrol them for classes so at least they are engaged in some activity!”

She goes a step further, and says that parents are willing to pay huge sums of money for personality development classes for their children, but the skills can be picked up by merely attending college, through activities, attending classes, and generally being aware. You want to learn communication, participate in a debate, or even just attend one. Sit through a class of a teacher who you think is boring, and develop your listening skills. She offers many such examples, and says that there is no reason for students to go outside college to develop these skills. The problem, however, she thinks is that there is a general feeling that quality is equated to price nowadays. With junior college students paying an average of Rs. 400 per year as fees (girls study for free), students don't value it as much, and there is no incentive to come to college.

“I want the children to be children, and not think too much into the future. They think so far but make only short-term decisions. It is such a paradox. Like they take up five or six courses at one time, thinking they will be set in the future, but they lose their happiness, enjoyment and peace of mind in the process. Secondly, their gadgets have led them to stay in a virtual world. The personal touch is fast diminishing, and that needs to be addressed. At the end of the day, you need people, you need family and values, for which you have to work,” is her parting message for our student readers.