

# The Nostradamus Man



**MUKUL  
DEVA**

**Earth AD (After Disease) is going to be different from Earth BC (Before Corona) writes well known fiction writer, management expert and mentor MUKUL DEVA as he outlines how leaders and companies can flourish during Coronavirus and adapt for the better.**

As the pandemic tightens its grip there has been a quantum jump in the number of people seeking help through coaching, mentoring and counseling. As you sit through session after session a couple of things become clear:

1. Everyone seems to be overwhelmed trying to do lots of new things, and juggle with a dozen different, usually conflicting priorities. Yet most believe they are not achieving much. Some have even lost sight of the value they believe they brought to the table earlier.
2. There is a lot of confusion, uncertainty, insecurity and even fear in the air. People, especially many senior leaders are unsure of what they should do. Some, for fear of getting it wrong, are waiting for things to become clearer. A few are even waiting for the pandemic to end and things to get back to 'normal.'

Neither of these feelings are illogical. We can see where they are coming from. However, will either of them help us get past these trying times? Possible, but highly improbable.

Then what can we do to regain our balance and demonstrate the right attitude, resilience and confidence? Different people are trying different things with varying results. However, there are three things that we can all do quite easily, which are likely to pay rich dividends.

Firstly, **Accept the mental discomfort.** A peek into the past will reveal that human beings are anything if not resilient. We have survived many Extinction Threatening Events; the Justinian Plague, the Black Death, the Great Plagues of

Italy, London and then Marseille, the Spanish flu and two world wars, to name a few. This is certainly not humanity's first rodeo and unlikely to be our last.

However, let us also understand that most of us alive today, especially in developed societies, have never experienced such a direct, frontal and brutal attack on the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs; food, water, shelter, security, safety, health and employment. This is disconcerting at best and terrifying at the worst, especially for those who live paycheck to paycheck. And you might be shocked to learn how many people fall in that category. Just to give you an idea -about 78% of American workers and 75% of British workers. For India, the statistics are absolutely horrifying - 30% of the Indian population (about 280 MILLION people) struggle below the poverty line. Look at the plight of millions of migrant workers struggling to reach home and the mindboggling scale of the tragedy needs no elaboration. If not alleviated it is only a question of time before hunger-driven desperation reaches boiling point and results in a complete breakdown.

Even the (economically) middle and upper classes, with usually sufficient fiscal means to ride out the storm for a far longer period of time, have been made acutely and uncomfortably aware of their mortality, and the fragility of the ecosystem.

**That is why, it is normal to feel rattled.** It shows you are normal, and not in denial or socially distant from reality.

It is also certain that Covid-19 is not going away in a hurry; getting past this crisis is going to be a marathon, not a sprint. So, accept the discomfort and be clear that you will need to muster all the resilience at your command. Above

all, be patient and kind... to yourself and others.

Secondly, **Attain and Retain Balance.** Most people, in times of crisis seek refuge in activity; they will do anything that offers some semblance of 'normalcy.' However, it is imperative that we resist the urge to dive into mindless activities. Enrichment, upskilling, re-skilling... everything is important, but balance is the most fundamental need. And one of the most fundamental ways to regain and retain your balance is routine. Ask any combat veteran; they will tell you that having a routine (and sticking to it) can keep you sane. That is why, to avoid getting overwhelmed, ensure that everything you invest your time and energy on is a conscious, deliberate choice.

Regain and hold your balance by **adopting a DAILY P.I.E.S. routine;** one that address all four of your fundamental needs; Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Spiritual. Please specifically ensure that R&R is catered for; Fun must be an integral part of life. I am sure you would like your life to be as exciting as a thriller, not a (useful, but bland and boring) self-help book.

Another simple thing that we can do towards this is to start working towards a more minimalist lifestyle. Shifting our focus from 'wants' to 'needs' will not only reduce the economic pressure on us, it will also help create a more ecologically sustainable future for everyone.

Thirdly, **Activate the RIGHT A-R-C;** which is the **right attitude, resilience and confidence.** Take another peek into the past and you will realise that most successful people are those that demonstrate the right attitude, resilience and courage; they flourish no matter what life throws at them.

Remember, that if you (or your company) are waiting for things to settle down and get back to 'normal', then it is going to be a pretty long wait. Like every Extinction Threatening Event, Covid-19 also will re-shape our lives permanently. Life AC (After Covid) is going to be substantially different from Life BC (Before Covid). Every such crisis changes the way we think, behave and inter-relate. Everything will change: the way we learn, consume goods and services; even our outlook of life and death.

So? Should you try to figure out what the NEW NORMAL will look like? You could try. Though I am not sure how much good that will do. And the dustbin of history is overflowing with those who tried. The emerging reality, like every reality will be a shifting sand of possibilities with only one certainty; the pace of disruption is likely to be compounded.

So, instead of hunkering down to ride out the storm, or playing Nostradamus, focus on **cutting out the noise and activating the Right ARC.** There is a lot you can do to enable that, however to my mind, five simple things

that most of us can act on without too much stress are:

**Ignore negative posts and negative people** on all platforms, especially social media on which all of us spend so much time ever since #WFH and #SAH started. And, if I may say so, please ignore all the 'productivity' hacks being thrown at you about what you should be doing. These are not wrong, but they add pressure on us at a time when more pressure is the last thing we need. Also, they try to measure productivity using yardsticks that do not seem to be relevant in the prevalent (and emerging) scenario.

**Increase communication and connection** with family, friends, colleagues, team members, clients; everyone in our lives. This will help maintain a sense of connection and build individual, organizational and societal resilience. Remem-

ber, no man is an island. Social distancing does not mean emotional distancing; in fact, it requires that we do everything possible to reduce emotional distancing.

**Identify what you need to change in your product or service** to ensure it retains relevance. There are bound to be some changes to the product or service itself. And quite a few to the way it is going to be delivered to and consumed by your clients. And both of these will continue to evolve as the crisis unfolds, so ensure you keep a continuous eye on this.

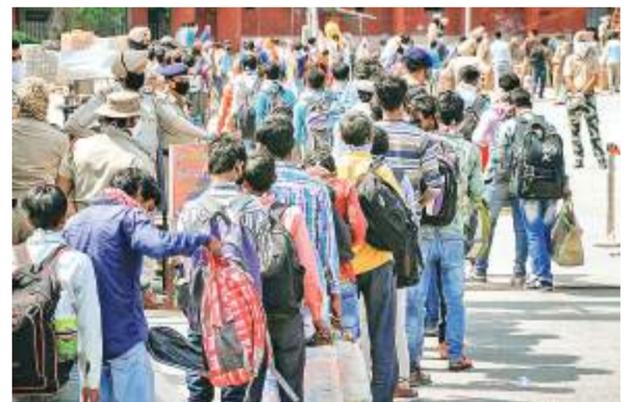
**Invest in training yourself and your team members.** Never forget that when things spin out of control we do NOT rise to our higher selves, we usually drop to our level of training. That is why there is no bad time for training, and this is probably the best for it, for yourself and your team members. Use shorter, more frequent training sessions to keep people continually engaged and supported. This will also ensure that emerging needs are met; and there will be plenty of needs that emerge as the Post-Covid reality continues to re-shape itself.

**Inculcate the habit of taking decisions with minimal information.** And be prepared that they are unlikely to be 100% right. Avoid the temptation

to delay them by using decision making templates of the BC-era. You will now need to balance risk with the need to stay in motion so that you are evolving in tandem with the new normal. All you need is confidence in your team and yourself - that you all will be able to adapt and course-correct as the situation evolves.

These simple things will ensure you are purpose-driven and set yourself up to flourish, through the crisis and beyond it. And, very importantly, they will help you to regularly take stock of the situation and adapt so that you evolve with it, as well as help your near and dear ones do so.

Having said that, it is also critical that we all be clear about one simple fact of life - no matter how good you are or well you do these and other such things, do



bear in mind that there will be days when you will feel overwhelmed. **At such times reach out and ask for help.** Everyone needs it from time to time. **Asking for help is a sign of strength,** not weakness, and doing so in time is wise ... remember, a stitch in time saves nine.

We must also acknowledge the good thing about every crisis - they are excellent reality checks; they remind us of our mortality. Never forget that prince or pauper, minister or migrant worker, yogi or bhogi, chairman or chaiwala, all of us are merely transients on Planet Life. We do not know how much time we have on our clocks, but we do know that it is finite. That is why it is best if **we take our responsibilities seriously, not ourselves.** When the time comes to punch out, **all we will leave behind are memories; why not do our best to ensure they are pleasant.**

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