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BOOK REVIEW

“Live as if you were to die tomorrow, Learn as if you were to live forever.” – Mahatma Gandhi

The book is an autobiography of late Prof. Randy Pausch of Carnegie Mellon University and has been published by Hodder and Stoughton Ltd. The chapters of the book are named in order to be able to convey message on their own. The key message of this highly inspirational autobiography is to keep “we cannot change the cards we are dealt, just how we play the hand.” Prof. Randy Pausch was an unconventional educator with a specialization in human computer interaction and design at the Carnegie Mellon University. He had been awarded at various levels for his remarkable contributions to academia and the students’ welfare and development. Prof. Pausch had been detected with terminal cancer of the pancreas and hence he intends to share with the world what life had taught him before he finally sleeps. The book targets at readers of all age groups. The interactive style of narration and simplicity make the book more reader friendly.

The introduction of the book touches upon the health issues Pausch faces in his last few days of life and also the idea behind authoring a book. Inspired by many, he always planned of giving a last lecture sometime in his life and he finally gets to deliver one at the college where he had spent many years of his life educating youngsters and making them ready to live a happy life. Apparently the book can be broadly divided into two parts; one, the last lecture delivered at the University and the other, the learning from life.

The video of Pausch’s last lecture was among the most viewed on YouTube and the same comprises the first part of the book. The introduction also gives a short and
snappy idea of what he talked to the audience and how he tried to share his ideologies of life which took him many years to form.

The opening chapter titled *The Last Lecture* starts with a description about what a last lecture means and why Pausch intends to deliver one. It throws light upon his personal life, before and after being detected with cancer. It might be relatively difficult for the reader to differentiate between the two stages of author’s life, as he practically keeps on doing the same thing which he used to before being handed over a timer. Pausch talks about the epidemic caused by cancer and also how he has taken up a fight with it.

He recapitulates a few incidences from his childhood which have shaped him in life and emphasises on the imperative of achieving childhood dreams. He believes that it is in our childhood when we best know what we want to be and in due course of life these dreams get suppressed. He firmly believes that an uncompromising pursuit of the childhood dreams can lead one to excellence in every walk of life.

Illustrations from the personal life and the meaningful one liner which are used to address the constructive and critical techniques towards a better living make the book interesting. Some of them are “if you can find an opening, you probably can find a way through it”; “don’t repair something if it is working well” and “brick walls are there for a reason. They give us a chance to show how badly we want something.”

A child has commendable imagination. And Pausch as a child always dreamt about being ‘in zero gravity’, ‘a Disney imagineer’, ‘playing in the NFL’ and much more. A list of all his childhood dreams makes the cover page of the second chapter *Really Achieving Your Childhood Dreams* of the book. Pausch once again emphasises on the significance of those dreams and the need to achieve them. The readers are rendered ample evidences of how the author managed to achieve every single of his childhood dreams.

According to the author, there is an enormous amount of learning happening before and after the pursuit of achieving the dreams. He talks highly of his trainer and the qualities that any leader or teacher must inculcate in order to equip his students better for the imminent life situations. It is in this chapter he mentions “your critics are often the ones telling you that they still love and care about you, and want to make you better.” Therefore understanding and appreciating the constructive criticism is extremely important for improving the self.

Adventures are sources of humungous learning. The third chapter “Adventures...and the Lessons Learned” depicts the necessity for choosing the unconventional way of doing things. The instance of allowing his nephew and niece spoil the seats of his only priced possessions, the Volkswagen convertible and encouraging them not be guilty best describes his atypical approach to learning and life. The extra care that we intend to take of things in the race of accumulating our possessions, according to Pausch often leads to a failure in establishing human connections. The author also emphasizes that the children should feel free with their parents and hence can confide in them on their dreams and aspirations.

Sometimes helping others realize their dreams may make you as happy as achieve your own. The fourth chapter *enabling the dreams of others*, while reverberating this idea, brings in various instances where the author has helped others realizing their
Effective time management is another point of discussion in this chapter. The unproductive activities which we do on a daily basis can be avoided so as to save time. Learning that his illness was terminal and he had few days left to finish all his tasks, the author prepares a full plan of each and every day of his life to an extent that each minute of his days have been allotted some work.

*It’s About How to Live Your Life*, the fifth chapter beautifully portrays how he has tried to live his life and what worked for him. The instances elucidated bring in how successfully he could actualize his dreams. Dreaming big, being earnest and surrendering on things which might present others with bigger happiness than what one would achieve by not giving up are some of the tips that he likes to offer to the readers. It also motivates us to look for best in everybody, not to complain but to work harder and to treat the disease and not the symptom.

‘Sitting together’, helps us to understand a person, establish amicable relationship with him and solve the issues more effectively. And this is one of the most inevitable skills that one, especially a manager should develop.

*The final remarks*, as the title points out are the last chapter of the book. He shares his plans for his family after he leaves. The reason for authoring this book, in his own words is, “If I were a painter, I would have painted. But, I am a lecturer, so I lectured.”

Pausch says, “It’s not about how to achieve your dreams. It’s about how to lead your life.” Recollecting Saint Kabeer’s words, “when a child is born it cries and everyone smiles.” One must aim for the same; when one leaves the world, he should be happy about the deeds in his life and others should have tears in his memory. Not many certainly can make it happen. But indeed, Prof. Randy Pausch has been one among those rare births.

He changed many lives when he was alive and through his *Last Lecture*, he still continues to inspire many to bring in positive change in their lives. There is a lot which one could learn from this book. As he reverberates, horn the attitude of *keep fighting and be optimistic*.

Hence the question that reechoes is are we spending our time on the right things? “Because time is all you have”, reminds Prof. Pausch.

**Author Profile:**
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