

DR. TARUN GUPTA TRIBUTE ISSUE

“ Like those who create legacies, TG – as he was fondly called – was a man you either loved or hated, but never ignored. ”



Editor's Note

This issue of MedicinMan is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Tarun Gupta, TG as he was fondly called. Executive Editor, Salil Kallianpur, dear friend Subrato Banerjee and long-time MedicinMan patron Vivek Hattangadi, pen their tributes to TG.

The regular issue will be released shortly.

Salil Kallianpur

The news broke with dawn today. An era had passed. And it passed as peacefully and privately as he would have probably wanted it to. Tarun Gupta – professor to youngsters, boss and mentor to those slightly older, but ‘Sir’ to almost everyone in the vast Indian pharmaceutical industry, was no more.

As the sun rose higher in the eastern skies, so did the disbelief amongst those who knew him well. They had worked and interacted with him and were leaders and mentors now themselves. They reminisced wistfully of the days when he led and mentored in his inimitable style. The young who had transitioned from being his students to junior and mid-level positions in the industry, spoke with awe of the pearls of wisdom that they received from him. In an era where pharma leaders are few and far between, Dr. Gupta had left behind a humongous footprint.

Like those who create legacies, TG – as he was fondly called – was a man you either loved or hated, but never ignored. His love for simplicity was disarming. He preferred simplicity in life and in work. He often said he was successful because he stuck to basics. That, and his ability to communicate ideas in a simple way.

TG's greatest gift to the pharma world is even after 40-plus years, a ubiquitous tool in pharma selling – the visual aid. He was loved by medical reps for giving them a tool that was simple and helped them communicate effectively with doctors about their medicines. He was hated by product managers who were forced to write detailing stories for those visual aids in less than 40 words, 4 of which were the brand name! No doctor would listen to long winding stories, he would say. Keep it short and simple. Tell the customer what he wants to hear. Wise words indeed!



Along with another stalwart of the 70s – Prof Chitta Mitra – he set up C-MARC, an agency that churned out stellar market intelligence at a time when the only source of information to Head Office was the medical rep.

Another area that TG was ahead of the pack was in recognizing the power of data and competitive intelligence. Along with another stalwart of the 70s – Prof Chitta Mitra – he set up C-MARC, an agency that churned out stellar market intelligence at a time when the only source of information to Head Office was the medical rep. TG was then the head of operations for Glaxo India, and he knew that access to this data moved his team several notches above competition. He fiercely guarded the information, striking an exclusive deal with Prof Mitra. It was only after TG moved to the Americas did his successors allow C-MARC to sell their reports to the rest of the industry. By then, Glaxo had cemented its leadership position in India for several decades to follow. Even today, Glaxo – now GSK – is the only multinational company in the list of top 10 (Abbott is the other due to the Piramal acquisition) and this is in no small measure due to TG's foresight.

TG had his share of weaknesses too which made him human. For instance, despite being such a visionary, he completely missed out the digital wave where multichannel customer engagement and big data (his favorite topics from 4 decades ago) were challenging the long-held pharma commercial model. I met him last at a company event in March where I presented my thoughts on marketing in a digital world. In his characteristic style he walked up to me in the break and said, "I loved your presentation, but you must forgive my ignorance on the subject. I am a Gadhaaram (donkey)," and laughed heartily.

Much to my surprise, I found TG to be most upset when we discussed his greatest legacies – the visual aid and CMARC. From his perch as an academician, he pored through visual aids and marketing plans of different companies searching desperately for insights and intelligent application of data. Sadly, what he saw, pained him immensely.



An era has passed today. The most fitting tribute that the industry can give him is to challenge his legacy. To dissect dispassionately and intelligently what we held as sacred for all these decades.

It pained him that something that was relevant in the 70s was still thought to be so. There were no challenges or improvisations. The industry had made it worse by declaring it indispensable.

An era has passed today. The most fitting tribute that the industry can give him is to challenge his legacy. To dissect dispassionately and intelligently what we held as sacred for all these decades. To herald in a new era. Let us pay our tributes to one of the greats by doing what he always did – tearing apart the old and heralding in the new. As they say, “the King is dead, long live the King.” **M**



Salil Kallianpur is Partner and Co-Founder at The Digital Transformation Lab. He is a pharma veteran having worked with industry leaders like Novartis, Pfizer and GSK.

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"Even if your strategy is sound and the execution is sound, the chances of success are just good."



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Our mission is to collectively improve the pharma sales and marketing ecosystem - leading to better relationships with doctors and better outcomes for patients.

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“ “ People who started their careers in the days when he was still in executive roles, know how big a star he was. I always in awe of Dr. Tarun Gupta. ” ”



Subroto Banerjee

I never thought that I would write a tribute to Dr. Tarun Gupta's life and legacy so early. TG was a doyen and a father-figure not just of Indian Pharma, but of the global pharmaceuticals industry. His contribution to the Indian pharmaceuticals industry is much known and highly respected. His innovations (should they be called inventions?) with marketing strategies, practices of execution excellence and brilliant business management methods have paved the way for Indian Pharma achieving what it has achieved today. His ideas about market research and data-based prescription analysis gave birth to syndicated studies on which Indian Pharma relies on today. People who started their careers in the days when he was still in executive roles, know how big a star he was. I always in awe of Dr. Tarun Gupta.

It was a morning in the summer of 2013, that I visited Dr. Gupta in his office in NMIMS, Mumbai to discuss effective training programs for our field managers. I was meeting an icon and my hero for the first time. Obviously, I was a bit nervous. I remember how he treated me like an equal and offered support in achieving what we wanted to. I will never forget him taking the empty tea cup from my hands and putting it away. He was a star and only stars can afford to be so humble.



TG was frequently addressed as “Father of pharma industry” by many of us, and his quick reply revealed his sense of humor, “Who is the mother?” I will miss those witty conversations.

Dr. Gupta went out of the way to support us. He accompanied me to meet the Vice Chancellor and explained to the VC, the necessity for such talent development programs and later designed the entire program from scratch, never allowing anyone to procrastinate on its execution. He completely owned the program, and I am sure this came out of his involvement in developing people.

The execution of the programs was always spearheaded by TG and he never failed to attend all the sessions himself. He chided me when I asked him to rest for a couple of hours.

I shall always remember his sense of humour and his unwavering belief to walk the talk

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Dr. Tarun Gupta has personally guided me through many professional situations and I will always remain grateful and proud to have come close to such a great human being.

I wish you a great journey from here Sir, and pray God be with your soul, always.

Adieu, Sir. We will miss you. **M**

Subroto Banerjee is the former President of Strides Shasun India



Vivek Hattangadi

More than anything else, my Guru, Prof. Tarun Gupta was known for his excellence in Strategy Execution.

Once during my interaction with him in 1990, I said to him: "Sir, Glaxo is in the top position because of its excellence in strategy execution, isn't it?"

His reply revealed his humility, "Not really, Vivek. I think it was just 30% and could have been much better."

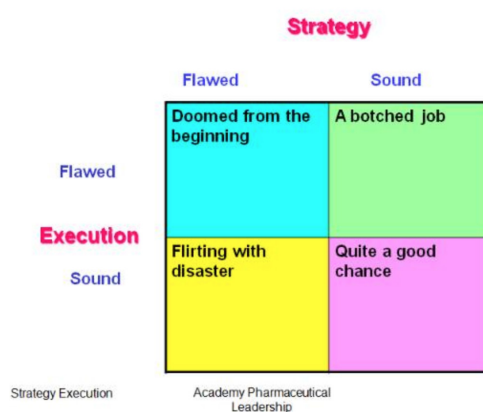
He discussed the strategy execution quadrant with me and it is etched into my memory. He concluded describing the quadrant with the message:

"Even if your strategy is sound and the execution is sound, the chances of success are just good."

I gave a quizzical look and asked him: "Why only just good?"

His reply: "If the competitor's strategy execution is better, their chances of success are far better!"

What a great lesson I learned from him. **M**



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