

openSAP Invites

Thought Leaders Episode 4: Mastering the Art of Lifelong Learning

Voiceover: Welcome to openSAP Invites: Thought Leaders. Your invitation to learn with us on the go.

Elisabeth: Welcome to a special Thought Leaders episode with Ferose V R, dedicated to the topic of lifelong learning. I'm your host, Elisabeth Riemann. And I'm truly delighted to share this episode with you. While learning is surely a passion that unites us all, we're also united through the challenges it can bring. Learning should definitely be fun. And Ferose explains how we can keep it this way, at any age, and whatever phase of life we're at. And I do hope you'll enjoy this episode just as much as we did recording it. And above all, that it provides you with a new thirst to learn and succeed. Ferose V R is senior vice president, head of SAP Academy for Engineering, and is based in Palo Alto, USA. He was previously head of SAP Globalization Services and then managing director of SAP Labs India. Ferose is chairperson on the board of Specialisterne USA, a not-for-profit foundation, with the goal to create one million jobs for people with autism and similar challenges. He's also founder of the nonprofit India Inclusion Foundation, which is bringing the topic of inclusion to the forefront in India. He's co-authored Gifted, a best-selling award winning book on people with disabilities. Ferose teaches personal leadership at Columbia University, New York, and writes for New Indian Express and Mint. Let's say hello. Hi, Ferose. Welcome to openSAP Invites: Thought Leaders.

Ferose: Thank you so much, Lizzy. It's an absolute pleasure to be here.

Elisabeth: Ferose, I'm so pleased you accepted our invite to talk to us today about mastering the art of lifelong learning, and really chat today about what learning means to you personally. When it comes to my own learning goals, I have to admit that time management often feels like the greatest obstacle. So I look forward to hearing your advice on this later. And I think learning came easiest to me when I was still at school and the core hours of the day were dedicated to focused learning. I have really happy memories of my own school days. So Ferose, today, as the very first question to you, I'd like to ask, where did you go to school? And can you remember your very first day and how you felt?

Ferose: Yeah, I mean, you're making me feel nostalgic, Lizzy. You know, I grew up in India in a state called West Bengal. And my first school was in a small town called Kharagpur. And I remember the first day that I went to school, my mom walked me to school. So the school was probably a few kilometers away, so she walked me to school. And I cried so much that she had to walk me back. So I actually didn't attend first day. I don't have great memories of the first day, but I think the fondest memories that I have of my childhood and learning is that I was surrounded by books. You know, one of the things that I've grown up with, and that's thanks to my parents, is they always told me that the true wealth of a household is measured by the books in the house, not by the money in the bank. And, you know, that's a very profound idea, when you grow up with that concept that knowledge is wealth. So I've been surrounded by books throughout. And like probably all children, I started by reading a lot of comic books. A lot of my comic habits were very local. So, you know, we had something called Amar Chitra Katha, which is a very Indian comic series. So I started reading a lot of that. I must admit, I didn't read Asterix and Tintin and Calvin and Hobbes until I grew up. They were too expensive for me to buy and they were more the international publications. But I grew up in a house surrounded by a lot of books. The first thing that me and my brother used to do is to rush out of the house when the newspaper guy came in, and we used to compete. We literally, you know, divided the newspapers half-half so that we could read at the same time. So reading is something that I grew up with, Lizzy.

Elisabeth: And what are your favorite books, then, from your childhood days? Do you have a book recommendation?

Ferose: You know, I grew up with Reader's Digest, which was a monthly magazine. At one point it was probably the most popular magazine. And it was very unique in the sense that Reader's Digest focused a lot on positive news. Unfortunately, we've now got to a point where, you know, to get people's attention, we amplify the negative news. So I was very fortunate to grow up with Reader's Digest. And I still remember my father subscribing to Reader's Digest since 1964. He's probably one of the longest subscribers of the magazine right now. So I grew up with a lot of Reader's Digest. But in terms of a children's book, other than the comics, I loved, you know, The Famous Five. I don't know if you've read The Famous Five.

Elisabeth: Ah, Enid Blyton.

Ferose: Yes. So The Famous Five was one of the series that I remember reading a lot.

Elisabeth: Excellent. Now, I think it's really special to think about childhood books that we love because I think they really stay with us into adulthood, too.

Ferose: Yes.

Elisabeth: I think often it's something that we like to share with children, with friends' children. And I know one of my favorite novels was Narnia, so The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis.

Ferose: Yes.

Elisabeth: I think today, when I see that book back home on my parents' bookshelf, I still get goosebumps. And I just have very special memories about that book. And I was wondering if you could talk to us a little bit now about some of your most positive learning experiences, both in and out of the classroom environment.

Ferose: You know, what I've seen over the last few years is that learning is a full-body experience. Right. And sometimes we tend to look at it from the lens of, what have we learned in the classroom? What have you learned at work? What have we learned at college? But my realization is that learning is really a full-body experience. You can learn while walking outside, you can learn... A lot of learning happens if you've traveled extensively. So I've been very fortunate to have traveled around the world. And you know what, Lizzy? Something that I found very interesting is now I've been watching a lot of documentaries, and I've realized that because documentaries are real-life incidences, that's another form of learning. So you kind of discover newer ways of learning as you grow. But really, the one that's stuck with me for life has been learning from role models. You know, role models could be your teachers, could be your parents, could be people whom you absolutely admire. There is no substitute to learning by seeing role models in flesh and blood. And that's

something that has stuck with me even in my professional career, that I, you know, when I was heading SAP Labs in India, we started something called a Leadership Talk Series. We have something called a Code to Success at the Academy, and the idea is to get these real role models in flesh and blood in front of the people. And that experience sticks with you for life. I mean, what happens today in a digital world is we have a massive digital overload. So you can watch a hundred TED Talks, but you don't remember anything. Right. But when you've met a person, when you've seen his actions in real life, it kind of sticks with you a lot longer. You know, there's a beautiful saying that when there is a wealth of content, that is a poverty of attention. And so how you get people's attention is by seeing people in flesh and blood. And that has a higher stickiness than anything else. I'm a great believer that media role models, spend time with them, and that is probably going to be the biggest learning.

Elisabeth: Yeah, and it's really good to hear you say as well that this human connection, even in the digital age, it's still so important. So you talked a little bit about the Leadership Talk Series. Where could we find out more details about that?

Ferose: So, you know, many of them are already available on YouTube. I'm happy to send some of the links. The Code to Success series, which we started at the Academy is also available and distributed on our SAP Jam page, so people can go and have a look at it. But again, I think going back to what I said, while there is digital content, that is no substitute to in-person. So, you know, watching it digitally is probably not the same as seeing the person live in action. But almost all of what I'm talking about is available in digital content right now.

Elisabeth: Okay. So we said that in the show notes, then, for this episode. Thank you so much.

Ferose: Absolutely.

Elisabeth: Ferose, and I guess like anything in life, learning can have its ups and downs, even if we have the right role model to motivate us. And so I wanted to ask you, what have been some of the challenges that you've maybe come across and then learned to overcome? And what have those experiences taught you?

Ferose: Yeah, I think my personal realization over the years has been that we all learn differently, and we tend to be biased by our own experiences and our own opinions in life. And the ability to have an open mind and to be able to change your points of view is extremely important. Just to give you an example, you know, when I was probably a lot younger, I used to believe that, you know, you can change people, but only later on I realized that you can only change yourself. There's a, you know, there's a beautiful quote which says that our greatest temptation is to try to change other people instead of ourselves. And so that's a fundamental shift in my own opinion, that I've undergone in the last few years. So the ability to change your points of view, the ability to empathize with the other, is so integral to being on a constant learning journey.

Elisabeth: And do you always manage that kind of reflecting on yourself, the way you are, and think you change yourself? It's wonderful advice. I just wonder how easy it is in practice.

Ferose: It's extremely hard. You know, that's probably the hardest thing to do because as humans, we all have the blind spot. We all want to believe that our points of view are the correct ones. And especially in the digital world that we live in, we tend to follow our friends, follow the same kind of people, be in the same communities. And that can have an effect on the so-called echo chamber. Right. We're hearing the same things, and we have less and less understanding of the other. And unless we make a conscious effort to really see another's point of view, I think we will not make progress. And as you see, we're probably living in one of the most polarized times of our lifetime. And that is because we are unable to see another person's point of view. And I think it takes a high amount of self-awareness, a high amount of humility. I think humility is so important, to say, "Maybe I don't know enough. Maybe the other person is right." And that is something that has to come from deep inside you, that comes from self-awareness.

Elisabeth: That's amazing. And I think we realize then that we're all a work in progress, and we need to be more humble and to look at someone else's perspective.

Ferose: Yes. Yes.

Elisabeth: So Ferose, if I turn our conversation now on to how we learn, how can we exactly master the art of lifelong learning? You've written a really wonderful article in Mint about the art of lifelong learning. And I really enjoyed it. And so I wanted to ask you today, what prompted you to write this article?

Ferose: Very good question. I think, let me go back to the "why" I wrote it, not so much about what I wrote. And, you know, I've been in the learning space for, at least from an organization perspective, in the last one year. And I was trying to understand, how does learning work? And my big realization was that we tend to focus a lot on knowledge, but not on the application of knowledge. And that's the fundamental flaw that I see. So, for example, people go for leadership trainings, right? And leadership is a multi-billion-dollar industry around the world. But really, attending a three-day leadership program doesn't give you any desired outcome unless you have practiced what you've learned. So knowledge by itself is useless unless you applied it, right? And so, that led to a big question about, how do you become a lifelong leader? How do you master it? And mastery is all about practice. And so I said, you know, let's look at the masters and I'm using the word masters as really the ones who have the top of the game, you know, whether it's a Roger Federer or the best tennis player. And you realize that, you know, Roger Federer doesn't just attend tennis classes on YouTube. He just practices 20 hours a day. And that's how you master your backhand and your forehand. And unfortunately, in the corporate world, I found that we don't speak enough about practice. We speak about attending classrooms. And that's... And we put a checkbox against a training that we attended. But really, if you want to be good at something, and it could be good at coding, it could be good at making presentations, it could be good at any aspects, I think we need to put the spotlight more on practice. And I realize the reason we don't talk about practice is incredibly hard. We always want to tell the easy things to people. You know, human beings are wired to understand shortcuts.

Elisabeth: We are.

Ferose: You know, I kind of did a research when I was writing my book, on what is an interesting title of a book. And if you look at the data analytics, the most interesting title or word that you should have in your title is “secret”, because as soon as you put secret, you have a hook to people. People want to know, what is a secret? Right. Because people are all curious to know shortcuts. You know, there are books which say how to become a CEO in five days, how to do an MBA in six days, how to become a salesperson in seven days. And that's because we are all wired to no shortcuts. But in real life, there are no shortcuts. Nobody has become a CEO in five days. Nobody has become a great sales guy in six days. Those things just don't happen. So I realized that we should really speak about the hard things. Mastery is about practice. Mastery is about doing something day in and day out for a very, very long period of time. And that is the one that motivated me to write this article about how to become a master. And if there is one thing I'll ask people to do, there are two very interesting documentaries. One is called Jiro Dreams of Sushi. This is really one of the most famous documentaries about a chef in Tokyo who makes probably the best sushi in the world. And, you know, it's his life journey. And it's very interesting that he's been making the same sushi for 75 years. I think he's probably now 90 years old. And people around the world come and travel to have a sushi. But the key insight here is he became a great expert, a master, by doing it for 75 years. There is no substitute to doing something that you're passionate about over a very long period of time. And success is incidental. For most of them, they just did it because they loved it. And then they became famous. So that's my key insight, that mastery requires practice. And I want people to tell that you become good at something only by doing it over and over again.

Elisabeth: That's really good. And I think, you know, it's as you said before, we really buy into this whole thing about becoming a master at something within a few hours, a few days. And there really is no quick win. Right? That's what you're saying, essentially. We're in it for the long haul. If we want to do something well, we have to put in the hard work. We have to overcome those challenges and stick with it, whatever that might be.

Ferose: Absolutely.

Elisabeth: That's amazing. Very good advice. I'll remember that next time I'm trying to make my sushi as well, I've not developed that skill yet. So if I do take it back to your article, though, on mastering lifelong learning, it was published in Mint. And what I really like here is that you focus on five key steps.

Ferose: Yeah.

Elisabeth: And I think that's really good for picking us all up and making us realize, okay, this is really doable. This is manageable. This is something that we can implement. Can you maybe talk us through those five key steps you identify there?

Ferose: Yeah. So as I said, mastery is a long process. But the way to make difficult things easy is to break it down into doable things, so it doesn't overwhelm anybody. And the idea was to say that anybody can become a master. But there are five steps that I've identified. The first is to have an infinite sense of curiosity. Right. Which means you're working towards improving maybe 0.1% every day. Right. So if you, again, going

back to the example of making a sushi, you can say, how difficult can it be? Right. Why would somebody make a sushi for 75 years? Because every day he walks up and says, I can do it better than the previous day. Right. So the first step is really to have that infinite sense of curiosity, that you can do the same thing better, and you will always find something interesting to do the next time. So the first step is curiosity. The second is really to use your workplace as your playground. And the reason I say this is because all of us who are in the professional world spend at least eight to 10 hours doing our job. So basically, if you make your workplace as your playground, you are investing that much amount of time. Right. Malcolm Gladwell said that you can become good at something by spending 10,000 hours. But for mastering, you have to spend 20,000 hours. And there's a difference. And you can know something in 20 hours. But knowing is not the same as understanding it deeply or becoming a master. So the so the second step is, if you really want to do something, where do you get those eight to 10 hours? The way to get your eight to 10 hours is to make that your job. Then you get your eight to 10 hours. So make your workplace really the playground of your learning. The third is really performance, which means there are some elements of that particular job that you have to categorize as performance, because that is high stakes. Right. For example, when I am in my job, you know, when I have to present to a board member, that becomes my performance. That's like going on stage. And there are, you know, a thousand people watching you. So you identify that particular element and really try to practice it and become good at it. Right. So really being able to break your task and identifying what is that one area which has high stakes where you need to really perform at your best. So that's kind of your third step. The fourth is, you know I spoke about it, is really practice. So how do I do a presentation well, or how do I present to a board member? You do it 10 times. You do it 20 times. You do it in front of a mirror. You do it in front of a team. And you kind of prepare the various scenarios. So practice is extremely important. But the last one is extremely important, and that is to be able to reflect and evolve. And that requires a huge amount of humility. You know, when I do a talk, I ask my core team members, who are my biggest critics – actually, my biggest critic is my wife. But apart from her, I make sure that I surround myself with critics who are able to point out the mistakes that I made. So every time I do a talk or a session, my team rates me. They say, “Ferose today you are a five out of 10”, “Today you are four out of ten”, or maybe if I do a great job, then they say, “You are a seven out of 10”. The ability to take feedback, the ability to reflect, is the only way that you will evolve. And you know, and so these are basically the five steps starting from being infinitely curious to using your workplace for learning, to really identifying what is that performance that matters the most, practicing and then, of course, reflection and evolving. So that's kind of the five steps, Lizzy.

Elisabeth: That's really helpful. And I know I really like all the steps, but out of all of them, I think that reflect and evolve is just incredible. And I think, I guess that's really the most challenging one as well. It's quite uncomfortable to go there and ask for direct feedback, but I think that's a really, really important part of the setup. And mastering something, as you say, too. Amazing. Ferose, you're really well traveled and you're globally connected too. You grew up in India. You've lived and worked in Germany, and now you live and work in the States. Do you think, from your own experience, that some cultures and some environments are maybe more conducive to learning than others? What do you think there?

Ferose: I think more than the cultures, it is our surroundings that decide your learning curve, your learning journey. As I said, all of us are born with an infinite resource of curiosity. If you look at a child, you know, we learn a lot of things on our own. Our maximum learning happens probably in the first seven or eight years of our life. And that learning is purely by observation. It's not because you've gone to a school. It's because you are observing the surroundings and you have a great sense of curiosity. Unfortunately, what I've seen is that, you know, our education system kind of narrows down our curiosity levels. And, you know, if you look at our

education system, it's probably 100 years old. And we were all trained to fit into the factory system where everybody is given the same information. Everybody is supposed to come out of the factory system with specific skills to do specific jobs. So in some senses, you've kind of lost the ability to question things, right? We're all in such a massive rush of consuming things that we stop and we've forgotten that we have to question things. So, you know, some cultures encourage questioning. You know, in some cultures, if your teacher says something, that's the rule of the law. Right. You can't question it. But I think cultures which encourage constant questioning allow people to flourish a lot more. And forget about what happens in schools, I think we as parents have our own responsibility to provide a certain environment to our own children, where they are allowed to ask any question, and we kind of take them on a path of being a lifelong learner.

Elisabeth: So it really starts in childhood and with being encouraged to ask those all-important questions, both in the classroom and in the home environment too. So that's really good. And Ferose, when it comes to education, it's a different experience for all of us. I think there's really not one size that fits all.

Ferose: Yeah.

Elisabeth: So how do you suggest that we could encourage young learners who aren't motivated at school for whatever reason, or learners who want to learn but don't have access to that school environment and education? What do you suggest there?

Ferose: You know, I think we are probably making an assumption here by saying that the young generation is probably not motivated to learn. I think it's the other way around. They just learn differently. Right. You know, I learn very differently. The young generation, which is much more digital native, learns very differently. But I think everybody is just wired to learn. So I don't see a problem there at all. But it's the medium that we should be careful about. A lot of consumption today happens in short forms, in Twitter and social media. And we have to be very careful with social media. I think, like every medium, excess of anything is bad. Right. So we have to be careful that our children and the teens are not overly dependent on social media. I can go to the extent of saying that social media is like the new tobacco. Right. So we have to be careful in how much we consume through social media. I think the biggest challenge with social media is that our attention spans have dramatically reduced. You know, there is research which shows that the average attention span is today less than seven seconds, which means that we are consuming in very short bites of content, and attention is incredibly important. Mastery requires you to be attentive for a very long period of time. So let's ensure that the current generation doesn't lose the art of focus, doesn't lose the art of, you know, reading something for a long period of time. And so that's what we should be careful about, because if they are entirely dependent on short spurts of information, then we are responsible for not having given them the experience of getting deep into something. I think, you know, the biggest challenge right now is to go into something with deep understanding. I think that's what is missing today. And the way to do it is, you know, the physical books have not lost their charm at all. You know, people have written the obituary of a book many times. And I can tell you the book has its place. It will remain continuing to have its place. Give children physical books to read because, number one, there is no diversion. You know, there are no ads popping up in a physical book. People have to stay with the book for a long period of time. So I think those are very simple techniques to allow people to focus and have longer attention spans.

Elisabeth: That's really good. And as a book lover myself, I just love hearing you say that the book is really here to stay. Because I think it really deserves to have that place in each of our homes. And I think there are so many special qualities about holding a book in your hands, going to a library. And I used to love those pop-up books and things you can get for children where it's really interactive. And I would really like to see that we all get back to our love of books. That would be a very positive development, I think, for society overall. So I also want to ask you about learning for inclusion in our society, and how maybe opening the door to learning opportunities to those with disabilities, those for whom learning is maybe a bit of a struggle. How important is that, and how can we all make that easy, that our society is much more inclusive one?

Ferose: Yeah, I think I'll first define the word "inclusion" because it's a very, very broad topic. And, you know, I've spent a lot of my time focusing on disability because of my personal situation at home. But I think inclusion is not just about disability. Inclusion is about everything. It could be gender. It could be race. But if I have to simplify the definition of inclusion at the lowest common denominator, I would say inclusion is building a world where nobody is left behind. Right. That, for me, is inclusion. So irrespective of your financial means, irrespective of which part of the world you are born in, irrespective of your disability, irrespective of your race, I think everybody can learn and everybody should learn. And the reason is pretty simple. We live in a knowledge economy. The only thing that matters is the knowledge. And it is our moral obligation to provide everybody with the opportunity to learn. And so we have to start making two fundamental assumptions, Lizzy, and this is what I tell educators around the world. The first thing is, look at a learner as somebody who can learn, but at his own pace. And so you don't have to decide the pace. A lot of times, the educators decide the pace, "You have to learn this and finish so many grades." But no, let the learner learn at their own pace. And second, assume that everybody can reach the destination. You know, we today live in a world where it's a rat race. You know, you decide who comes first, who has the highest grade. Honestly, in your lifelong journey, and when you look back, you'll realize your grades in kindergarten didn't really mean much, or for that matter, in your college, they really had no correlation to long-term success. In fact, there is a beautiful study done by Angela Duckworth. She wrote a book called Grit, and she did a study amongst these schoolchildren. And she said, let me try to predict who's going to be the most successful in my classroom. So assuming you have, say, 40 children and you say, let me predict 20 years from now, who would be the most successful? Of course, when I use the word "success", you know, you have to define what success is. But let's assume success from an external point of view. And she figured out that it has nothing to do with your school grades. It has nothing to do with your financial means. It has nothing to do with your background. And the only characteristic that has the highest probability of success is grit. Grit is nothing but your passion to do something, and your perseverance, which means, have you done it long enough?

Elisabeth: So really, grit and perseverance. And that's one of the distinguishing factors that lead to success.

Ferose: Only grit, because grit is defined as passion plus perseverance, which means that, are you doing something that you're passionate enough about? And are you doing it for a very long period of time? So, which means that if you say my passion is writing, have you done writing for 20 years? If you say your passion is, you know, running, have you done running for 20 years? If you say your passion is coding, have you done coding for 20 years? So the only measure of success scientifically proven is just one characteristic, and that is grit. But we teach our children for everything except grit. We are all talking about short-term success. You know, how do you ace your exam? You know, but the only characteristic that matters is, you know, are you following your passions for a very long period of time? And here, duration is very important

because, you know, you will go through your ups and downs, you will face failures. But the ability to come back again and do it over and over again is what makes you successful.

Elisabeth: And hearing you talk like that, and retrospectively as well about school and the importance – or lack of importance, I guess, in some cases – of grades when it comes to personal success, knowing what you know today, would you like to go back to school, and would you behave differently as a student? Would you ask more questions? What would you do differently, if anything?

Ferose: So my, you know, my friend Nipun Mehta, I'd ask this question to a lot of people, but I think one of the most profound answers that I have received, and I've tried to apply that in my life, is that, what would you do differently, you know, if you were in your younger self? And the answer is, when I was young, I thought success, was dependent on hard work, success was dependent on commitment, dedication. So we put a lot of effort, I would say 90% of success was dependent on effort that you put in, and 10% on building relationships. And now, actually, I realized as I'm growing up, it's the exact opposite, that actually 90% is the relationships you build. Only 10% is effort. And the reason I'm saying that is effort is a given. You don't differentiate on effort anymore. You know, all my friends are probably as hardworking as I am. They're probably much smarter than I am. But the thing that I believe that I've done reasonably better is that I've invested in building long-term relationships. And that's the only thing that really is going to differentiate you from the others. So while effort is important, investing in relationships is more important.

Elisabeth: And I guess it's like you said at the beginning as well, it's the investing in relationships. It's that human connection, regardless of whether it's digital learning or whatever.

Ferose: Yes.

Elisabeth: And I guess it's just so important that bringing people back together, motivating one another, and being supportive, that everyone has different skills. Everyone has something else that they bring to society. And being really accepting and inclusive in that respect. Ferose, if I can talk again about your writing, another one you wrote, "permanence is an illusion", and I really love this. And I found it so thought provoking. So I was wondering, do you have advice to us when we think we've arrived? We've got our dream job. We're living where we always dreamed of living. We don't need to continue to learn. We don't need to continue to work on ourselves. How do we stop falling into that trap? What do you recommend we do?

Ferose: I think there are maybe two or three insights I'd like to share. One is, you know, the idea of permanence is a Buddhist philosophy. Right. They say that everything around us is impermanent. Our lives are impermanent, our relationships are impermanent, our bank balances are impermanent. The world we live in is impermanent. Unfortunately, human beings crave permanence it's the exact opposite. We want to have a fixed house. You know, the reason why everybody buys a house is because you want to have something that is permanent. Right. We want to have a fixed job. It's so much so that it becomes an integral part of our narrative. I remember I was doing an interview and the person, the interviewee, said, "Ferose, I am looking for a permanent job." And I told him, there is nothing called a permanent job. Right. Because we have divided the world into permanent employees and contract employees. And we think that jobs are permanent.

By the way, nothing is permanent. And so that motivated me to write that as soon as you start aligning with permanence, you're going to get disappointed. And it's an illusion because your jobs may go away. If you've seen in COVID cases that all our perfectly thought through plans have come to nothing. Right. We've built plans to go on vacations and travel around the world. So I've realized that people who deeply understand the meaning of impermanence end up being happier because they are able to navigate the complex world that we live in. So that's one point about permanence. The second thing is that I believe that success is massively overrated. Right. And the reason I say this is because success is all about accumulation. Success is all about yourself. It's about your next promotion. It is about your next job. It's about your next house. So it's a very, very tiring process. And when it comes to success, we often shift our goalpost. Right. So you say, okay, first I want to earn a million. When you earn a million, you say, I want to earn two million. When you have your two-bedroom house, then you say, I want to have a three-bedroom house.

Elisabeth: So true.

Ferose: And so the problem is, if you define success with yourself and your materialistic needs, it's never going to be achieved. And it's going to be incredibly tiring. Right. You will burn out. You know, you've become a VP, then you want to become an SVP, then you want to become a CEO, then you want to become the best CEO. And that's a never-ending game. But if you turn that around and you say, I would rather focus on significance – and significance is about others. Significance is about making others happy, others successful. And the interesting thing about significance is it's extremely regenerative. It doesn't tire you. You want to do more, because when you see others happy, you feel happy. When you give something to others, you feel like giving more. It doesn't tire you. So, you know, the two insights that I have are, don't focus on permanence and don't focus too much on success. Focus on significance and success and everything else is incidental.

Elisabeth: They're great tips for really staying on our own learning journey, sticking with it, and really finding something that we're passionate about, that we have that grit for, and really just rolling through the ups and the downs with it, and really just sticking with something. That's incredible. That's so motivating to hear you talk about how to master lifelong learning.

Ferose: Thank you.

Elisabeth: Ferose. I've really enjoyed our conversation so much and I can think of a multitude of questions that I'd still like to ask on so many different topics. Is there a question maybe that I've missed, something that you would still like to talk about that we haven't mentioned yet today?

Ferose: You know, I think you started with that question, Lizzy, how do you find the time to do so many things? And this is probably the most frequently asked question. They say, how do I find time to learn? Right. And I think that's the first mistake – that if you have to find separate time to learn, you are never on the learning journey. You know, learning has to be an integrated process. You know, while I'm doing this interview with you, I'm as well learning something new all the time. Right. So I don't see this as a separate journey. And so you don't have to spend extra time to learn. It should be an integrated process. I think

learning has to become like muscle memory. Right? You do it day in and day out. It has to become like breathing. You know, you don't say, "Let me find time to breathe today." It doesn't happen that often. But the question is, how do you make it a muscle memory? And muscle memory is to practice.

So, you know, very simple tips – read for 30 minutes in a day. Right. Meet somebody interesting, you know, do things that you have never done before. And I think those are some ways in which you can make learning a lifelong process. And more importantly, share. The more you share, the more you become better at it. I think if you have seen, learning should not be seen as consumption, learning should be seen as contribution. It's not about what you learn. It's what you give back. So if you learn something, share it with others and you'll become better and better at it.

Elisabeth: Beautiful, beautiful words to wrap up. We'd like to end this episode, to ask you, which three key learnings should we remember after listening to this episode? What should we take away from today's conversation with you?

Ferose: I think the first thing is that you should do what you're passionate about. But more importantly, do it for a very long period of time. You know, the key index here is time. How long have you done it? Because that's the only way you can master any form of art. So that's the first important message. The second is that learning has to be a humbling process. It is a humbling process because you will realize the more you learn, the more you figure out how little you know. And the question is, how do you become humble? And you know, John Hennessy who wrote this book called *Leading Matters*, and he tried to put the top 10 characteristics of leaders. John Hennessy was the dean of Stanford, was the chairman of Google. And of all the 10 characteristics, he put humility as the most important characteristic. Which again correlates to learning – the most humble people also know how little they know. Right. So humility is an integral part of becoming a lifelong learner. And the last thing I say is that – and this has nothing to do with learning, but the real fundamental truth of life – is to accept what you cannot change, but change what you cannot accept.

Elisabeth: Amazing. Thank you so much for sharing that with us, and also for the many different insights that you've provided today. It's been an utter delight to talk to you. Thank you so much for spending this time with us on openSAP Invites.

Ferose: Thank you so much, Lizzy. All the best. And I look forward to our continuous conversation.

Elisabeth: Absolutely. Until next time. Thank you. Bye.

Ferose: Bye, take care.

Elisabeth: You've been listening to openSAP Invites: Thought Leaders with V R Ferose. Don't miss your next invite. [Subscribe now](#)

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