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Our future is like a blank canvas that invites our masterstrokes of imagination.

Problems remain problems until such time that we decide to solve them. It is our decision to solve a particular set of problems that turns them into a challenge. Most managers seek recognition and reward for what they have accomplished. And this is only natural. However, is it not the challenges they set out to overcome in the first place that truly merit our admiration?

There is no dearth of problems at work and in society. Our stature in business and in life is directly proportionate to the challenges we choose to overcome. If it wasn't for Goliath, who would know of David today?

We need truly massive challenges to contribute value and grow ourselves and our business. This reminds me of a poignant message in a Mercedes ad which I recently saw in a business magazine: "Press your foot firmly on the throat of mediocrity!" What is very evident is that managers generally settle for dealing with small issues rather than tackling the difficult ones. This could either be due to their lack of capacity or them being risk averse or a bit of both.

Back in 2005, Imaad Rizvi embarked on a journey to become a driver for A1 Team Pakistan, so that one day, he could join the ranks of Adam Khan and others to lend further strength to our country's first ever venture into the world stage of motorsports. At the time, Pakistan secured 10th position overall in round one of the inaugural **A1 Grand Prix** race held at Brands Hatch. This was the first World Cup in the history of motorsports. Hats off to Arif Husain, the then chairman of A1 Team Pakistan and also to our key national sponsors that included Warid, PIA, PSO, GEO et al. They did a great service in bringing Pakistan to the centre stage of one of the most admired sports in the world.

What I learned from Imaad was that a millisecond determined the difference between a good and a great driver. And attaining this level of precision was an arduous journey. As a case in point, Pakistan was in 4th position in the early laps at Brands Hatch. A minor delay of a few seconds in the pit-stop pushed us back to 13th position.

At first Imaad had described his training as stressful. However, later, with the passage of only a few months of races in places like Silverstone, UK and at the Bahrain International Circuit, he found the rigor involved, therapeutic and calming. He now relishes the prospect of taking on bigger challenges. This has become his passion. His new found confidence gained from his stint in the world of motorsports is serving

him well today ♦ almost seven years later, in his career at United Way ♦ the largest NGO in Canada.

The very thought of climbing great heights, and that too, effortlessly is counterintuitive. ♦ Imagine going for the proverbial big leap in your own context. As a manager, achieving significant results in increasingly tough times is crucial for you. This could be in terms of increased sales, bigger production targets, improving quality of products or services, raising capital, restructuring or devising new strategies for growth. Such endeavors can cause immense stress.

Embracing meaningful challenges need not be a traumatic experience! It ♦s fun, when you love what you do and actually enjoy the process without, of course, wanting to prove anything to anyone. Performing in challenging circumstances is a source of energy and immense motivation for the young and the not so young!

There are a number of inspiring examples of leaders who have achieved what seemed impossible, without necessarily, losing sleep over it. Of course, in the beginning, even contemplating a daring strategy can be scary. Quite a few heads of companies in the fast-growing telecoms, pharmaceutical and energy sectors will bear me out.

Daring to accomplish hair-raising goals is seen and felt more as a romantic notion, rather than a practical proposition. "Too much is at stake", "what if this audacious plan backfires," "Better to be safe than sorry". Such sentiments come out of our innate desire to feel secure in the world of the 'known'. Whereas, our work involves dabbling with the future - the great imponderable that is mysterious and frightening.

Our job as managers and leaders has a lot to do with setting direction and aligning human capacity to implement demanding strategies within tight policy, time and budgetary constraints. We fail miserably when we lack decisiveness by failing to make the infinite choices available to us. Creative and innovative thinking are needed in all those who lead their organizations through uncharted territories.

Taking control of a situation, leading from the front and displaying courage with integrity, in complex situations, can be extremely stressful and scary for many - but this need not be, if we realize that our fears stem from our paradigms - the rules by which we interpret reality.

The real challenge is not outside of us ♦ it is within us! We can change the way we see our world and hence change our reality. By doing so, climbing the Everest can be more like scrolling in the park!

Of the two main functions in our brain - memory and imagination, sadly many of us are trapped by 'memory' - the 'known' ♦ - a place where our beliefs also reside. Some of these beliefs can be debilitating, while others empower. We need keep the beliefs that serve our

purpose, and dump the rest, while using our faculty of imagination to the full.

Our future is like a blank canvas that invites our masterstrokes of imagination. When we view problems as stepping stones to professional and personal greatness, they become a whole new ball game!
