



TEXT JUKKA VISKARI | PHOTOS MATTI SNELLMAN

SCENIC ROUTE TO LEADERSHIP

Award winning professor, global leadership consultant, coaching guru and author.

Sudhanshu Palsule advocates transformation, not change. →

India

at the end of 1970s. **Sudhanshu Palsule** goes to a talk given by **Jiddu Krishnamurti**. “He taught me to understand the power of awareness and the beauty of a still mind,” says Palsule, who never forgets his walk with the renowned Indian philosopher. “Every few minutes he would stop and show me something I had not noticed . . . be it a bird, or a flower. Now I am 48, and it has been a thirty year journey with him.”

Cambridge in 2007. Palsule, casually dressed in a Helsinki School of Economics polo shirt and khaki trousers, greets me with a firm handshake and a broad smile. We meet at his large, terraced family home in Cambridge, England. Palsule is back from

a coaching assignment in Romania. “I spent a whole day just observing the client. I went to all her meetings and sat silently in the corner. I observed her interactions.”

Palsule made the business manager, who he calls an “incredibly capable leader,” aware of how she sometimes took over conversations and overwhelmed her team. “The secret is to know just how much to use one’s power. Leadership requires a double perspective: watching the world through our eyes and watching ourselves through others.”

Without feedback we simply don’t learn who we are. “The art of leadership lies in conversation, not only in making the right strategic decisions. Ironically, so many people are not aware of themselves and how they interact with others,” says the coaching guru.

Palsule has an impressive array of clients, including the United Nations, Hewlett-Packard, Nokia, IKEA, Pepsico, Virgin, and Avon Corporation. He works with Pertec Consulting Ltd, which is run by a leading Finnish consultant **Pentti Sydänmaanlakka**, with a company called Trans-4-m, and as an independent educator.

In June, Palsule, who has taught for four years at HSE Executive Education, won the tenth annual Thirst for Knowledge award, presented by HSE EE. Students from Europe and Singapore elected Palsule as their best teacher. Palsule also works as a professor at the Duke University Business School’s Global Learning Network and as an associate faculty member at the University of Buckingham. He is now excited about his new teaching job at the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad.

EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE

The first entry in Palsule’s resume is a Master’s in Science degree in quantum physics from the Bombay University. “When I went deeper into quantum physics, I got more and more interested in how human beings think, change and learn. At the same time, I was interested in spiritual leadership, ecology and



PUTTING IN PERSPECTIVE

When do you feel successful?

I got recently an email from an Australian student of mine. He memorized a key message from my program: “Power is either created or lost depending on how you choose to think, feel and respond to the world,” and put it on the fridge in his office. He said it was starting to impact his behavior, making him much happier in his relationship at work and at home. To me that is worth a million dollars.

Where do you find support?

When times are difficult, I try to consciously stop what I am doing and watch my thoughts, emotions and behavior. A walk in the woods helps to put things into perspective. Or sometimes I spend time with a child or a parent. Very often the troublesome things become insignificant when you look at the big canvas.

How do you keep cool?

I am mostly cool. We lose our cool when we lose our perspective—like when someone is overtaken by a car, and starts chasing that person. You do that because your brain gets flooded with emotions, you go into a state of unconsciousness. If you are aware of everything happening around you and yourself, you don’t lose your self-awareness; this is a key aspect of leadership.

What is the best way to re-load batteries for work?

Breathe well. Smile a lot more. Take an interest in your “self” and the people around you. I don’t watch television, except for films that I am interested in, and I ignore things feeding on negativity.





psychology. My work today is the coming together of all that.”

Palsule has been constantly on the move following teaching stints in quantum physics and the philosophy of science at his alma mater.

“I wanted to learn as much as possible from different parts of the world, and not to care about the money. That is what youth is all about,” Palsule laughs.

Today Palsule works a lot on cross-cultural leadership. Observing aboriginal culture rekindled his interest in the diversity of ways of thinking. “I am trying to get leaders to truly understand the world from the point of view of another culture.”

Currently Palsule has four new books on the go. A coincidence or not, the best known of his books is *Managing in Four Worlds* (Blackwell, 1997). The book, co-authored with **Ronnie Lessem**, argues that the world has four different centers: North, South, East and West, and each part needs the others to be complete. “True globalization is being rooted in one’s own ‘soil’ but continually adapting to the winds from other parts.” The sequel is due in early 2008.

CONSULTANT PALSULE

Palsule lists why leadership needs to be transformed: the changing expectations and attitudes of this generation and the next . . . virtualization, globalization and the environmental degradation of the world. Many companies are stuck with an outdated perception of the globe and their employees. “Young people want their jobs to be meaningful, with emotional and social returns. They want to have a well being contract and a development contract—not just to put in 100 hour weeks.”

A tough part of his job is meeting people working in oppressive, soul-destroying organizations. “Do I tell them they have to get out? Or do I continue to work with the company, my client? There is no right answer,” says Palsule.

Palsule often tells leaders of big corporations to slow down when they rush things in the hopes of getting more done. “If you are agitated, you speed up the passage of time. A team with calm meetings achieves much more in the end.”

Many leaders are struggling to adapt to the rapidly increasing complex speed at which information flows. “Habits of thinking hinder us. The biggest barrier is in here,” Palsule points to his head. “Part of my job

PALSULE OFTEN TELLS LEADERS TO SLOW DOWN WHEN THEY RUSH THINGS IN THE HOPES OF GETTING MORE DONE.

is to make people aware of habits, such as the inability to have constructive conversations, and help to overcome them. Many expect leadership to be a magic pill they can digest, but it is a life-long journey.”

Palsule is not just running workshops. “I end up discussing strategy with companies that I know better.”

He rates Avon, a Fortune 500 company for women, among his biggest successes. “We have established mutual trust over the last six years. I know the business and most members of the executive board very well. I am now seen as a member of the family.

“Although they, like any business, want to maximize profits, they never lose their values. If people care for each other, no matter how difficult it gets, things get all right,” Palsule praises.

Avon CEO **Andrea Jung** exemplifies a great leader: “She is able to truly lead from who she is as a person rather than from her position.”

IN PERSON

How does Palsule manage his workload? “I don’t have any difference between work and life. Everything is just one big flow; other people might say it is one big mess,



but I get paid for what I enjoy doing.”

He cooks for friends, goes on nature walks and does yoga to meditate and

relax. “But what I really enjoy is interesting conversations with people.”

He met his wife Saumya Balsari, a novelist, over twenty years ago in Bombay. The author and coaching guru says he learns a lot from their two daughters, Sarica, 11 and Sanna 17. “Every relationship is like a mirror in which you see yourself . . . if you are self-aware. I cannot be a guru in my house, and that is good.”

Their elder daughter goes to university this year. After ten years based in Cambridge, the self-confessed city person is gearing up for a new adventure. “We love traveling and are wondering where to go next.” •



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Palsule’s current work centers on how to create deep transformation in individuals, organizations and societies through a shift in leadership consciousness. His leadership work focuses on leaders developing their “self-ware” (their resources for powerful leadership), and their five agencies of leadership: conversations, emotions, thoughts, actions and presence. He has written *Managing in Four Worlds* (Blackwell, 1997) and *The Emerging Ecology of Organizations* (Routledge, 1999) with Ronnie Lessem. New books due 2007/2008: *Self Leadership; The Practice of Transformation; Being, Becoming Knowing and Doing* (New Africa Books).

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