

**The Accidental Scholar: SAGE 2014, Sage Response; Pro edition (20 October 2014)**  
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The '*Accidental Scholar*' is a book that reflects on the challenges and rewards of an academic life by narrating the life journey of a marketing professor, Jagdish N Sheth. It echoes the excitements and anxieties faced by every academic who undertakes a journey of personal research as a lone traveller and who aims to be recognised as a specialist in one very niche topic. Every chapter of the fourteen chapters in the book outlines a different facet of academic life and provides lessons for management of each to its audience. The book recounts how a young man who wanted to become an entrepreneur became an academic and pushed the boundaries of existing knowledge with several scholarly contributions to the discipline of marketing. Flexibility is highlighted as an important trait for academics who aim to contribute through publications because the expectation of getting published is very low. Therefore, a recommendation this book makes to scholars looking for opportunities is that they should treat themselves as brands and also try to develop flexibility so that they can follow opportunities into producing multi-disciplinary outputs through networking. Reading this book will be a very pleasant route down memory lane for established scholars and will also be of interest to struggling, budding and future academics.

As academic success is not a function of either hard work or good luck alone. To become a specialist, like a director of a laboratory, the author's advice is that professors need to aspire to the qualities of an entrepreneur. This book highlights 'family', 'mentorship' and 'institutions' as important pillars that build the career of every individual as either an entrepreneur or an academic. Incidents described in the book explain why Prof. Sheth chose to become an academic instead of an entrepreneur and how he was able to successfully manoeuvre his entrepreneurial philosophy towards intellectual thinking. Steering an entrepreneurial mind-set that focuses on activities of life from commercial considerations, such as profitability and resources, towards a noble profession that concentrates on the building of a discipline and is considered responsible for helping to develop a fair, efficient and just society is a very big challenge. A contribution this book makes to the discipline of business and management is by synthesising these two very different aspects of the life of Prof. Sheth. An important lesson that can be learnt from this book is that entrepreneurship and scholarliness, when combined with networking, have the capability to create success stories.

The success of an 'entrepreneur' or an 'academic' is strongly rooted in the support received from family. Encouragement received from family motivates an individual to look for a mentor and the mentoring capabilities of the person an individual works for during their early career days is crucial to success. This book explains that good mentorship is not so much about providing opportunities but more about changing mind-sets and providing the guidance and training required and about identifying goals and maintaining a focus on those goals. In very simple terms, this book explains how the person who nurtures raw talent, trains and provides support contributes to the positioning of an entrepreneur in industry and an academic in academia. A good academic mentor trains mentees to peep into seemingly very

simple looking situations in a way that they are able to identify invisible complexity and use their creativity to resolve the identified complexity with the limited resources available.

Another important point made by this book is that inspiration stems from diversity. An increasing number of people from diverse regions of the world are trying to find a mentor who can guide them without consideration of geographical boundaries. This trend can be discerned in the increase in the number of international applications received by universities. Individuals who are able to break their emotional barriers and come out of their comfort zone to achieve in the end are passionate and motivated individuals. Training that is rigorous and relevant when supported with passion and motivation from a mentor and encouragement from family enables an individual to achieve success. The description of mentoring provided to Prof. Sheth by Prof. John A Howard reminded me of my mentor Prof. T C Melewar and will remind readers also of their mentors. The experience of academics in a new environment reflects on academia as a profession that brings people from different parts of the world together and requires new entrants to be resilient and flexible in their approach. When people are reticent at the beginning of their careers due to cultural norms or fears it restricts their ability to follow their passion by stopping them from making life changing decisions.

Apart from reflecting on the personal life of Prof. Sheth as a highly successful, well-established and respected academic who loves to theorise and shape the academic debate with theories like *Theory of Buyer Behaviour* and *Rule of Three*, this book '*Accidental Scholar*', also provides a very good summary of the work pursued and published by Prof. Sheth and his co-authors. His description of extensive problem solving (EPS), limited problem solving (LPS) and routine responsive behaviour (RRB) as the three main stages of learning in the Howard-Sheth Theory (1969) reflect a shift of paradigm for building competitiveness from consumer behaviour to industrial marketing. This theory of learning was reinforced by Prof. Sheth's application of Hull's model of stimulus-organism-response theory to industrial marketing in order to understand the behaviours of industrial buyers. The Howard-Sheth theory was different from other thinking because of its focus on processes and their target population was organisations or large corporations. It is important for a theory to be measurable before it is considered to be useful by a larger audience. Simultaneously, the micro-behavioural perspective adopted by scholars is very different as they consider firms to be either margin driven niche firms such as specialist firms or scale driven large firms such as generalist firms. These differences are addressed in another book published by Prof. Sheth with Prof. Sisodia, '*The Rule of Three*', which discusses trends in the evolution of competitive markets and explains that the probability of the emergence of competitive markets can be predicted. It reviews the collective behaviour of companies in a scale driven competitive market and argues that only the three strongest large firms can survive and that the other medium and small sized firms either merge into these large firms or they die their own death. These three large firms generally control 70% of market share but margin driven niche firms also tend to grow. Like large generalist firms and small specialist firms, academics should have a clear view of the future, and they should also push themselves forward by leaving their past behind and making an impact by identifying new goals for themselves.

The roles of institutions, universities, family and religion are recognised in the book as important in making ordinary people extraordinary. The book recommends that academics should identify institutions that will help them become extraordinary through making an impact. A university system provides opportunities of creating impact for academics through participation and collegiality in managing the institute by wearing an administrator's hat while continuing to wear a researcher's hat. The practice of management techniques learnt, and taught, help academics in fulfilling their responsibilities when they are wearing the administrative hat and the creation of new specialised knowledge allows the development of new courses when they wear the hat of a researcher. At the same time, this profession requires academics to serve different committees such as ethics committees, research committees or promotion committees. Another facet of the career of a scholar is to create inter and intra-university collaborations for joint publications. They are also expected to engage themselves with corporations for identifying applications of their own research and requirements for courses to nurture the employability of students. All these activities contribute to the reputation of a scholar within a university system.

A focus on creating good impacts for the population at large through thought provoking books develops the reputation of a scholar in the outside world. Furthermore, using examples of books like '*The Wealth of Nations*' by Adam Smith, *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell and *Motivation and Personality* by Abraham Maslow, the authors of this book explain how depth, purpose and fervour together can change commerce and influence culture in a way that leads to greater good, develops confidence in a scholar and, ultimately, creates an impact. Some of research projects conducted by Prof Sheth in India in very diverse contexts integrated issues related to social development, societal change and remote penetration through distribution. Various consultancy projects created occasions for writing books and writing for both an academic audience and industry. The authors feel that one big research idea or project should be used for the basis of a book at the appropriate time, because timing is important.

Another lesson this book provides for academic researchers is that though you go through various stages of loneliness while trying to get your work published, and face emotional challenges in getting recognition, it is important to consistently follow your dreams by believing in yourself and having faith in your instincts. Dreaming is like theorizing for authors; it requires confidence. While, the tug of war between conceptual and empirical work is quite evident in the academic literature and is confirmed by this book, the authors consider theory to be the mightier and the importance of logic in comparison to evidence is considered to be stronger by them as logic comes from experience and experience provides confidence. The argument is based on the premise that numbers can lie and evidence can be twisted because power lies in mathematics that is driven by logic. Hence, academics have to think like entrepreneurs and be flexible in their approach while theorizing. Therefore, any individual who chooses to be an academic possesses entrepreneurial qualities.

Another key contribution this book makes is to explain why the best way to learn is to teach. The institutionalisation of research in the form of a research centre at a university should be based on the expertise of academics. Academic expertise that initiates the integration of

different specialisations into the curriculum can attract new PhD students interested in research in areas around the focus of the research centre. Mentoring students at the research centre reflects the intention of academics to contribute to society and enhances their reputation and relationship between academics and the wider world. Research centres improve the reputation of the university and generate ideas that will push its members forward.

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