



Western MBA students embrace Eastern philosophy

One might expect the spiritual teachings of Indian-born, Srikumar S. Rao, PhD to be heard echoing around the walls of a Buddhist monastery or spiritual retreat. However, his teachings - predominantly embracing the Buddhist principles - have proved remarkably effective in teaching MBA students at the world's top business schools, including London Business School.

Dr Rao is the author of international bestseller, *Are You Ready to Succeed: Unconventional Strategies for Achieving Personal Mastery in Business and Life* - a book based on his course *Creativity and Personal Mastery* designed for business students. In this, Dr Rao artfully coaxes his students out of a "me-centred" existence and into an "other-centred" one. He focuses on the results-oriented nature of our society - highlighting what is wrong with it, and what to do about it. As well as the extensive course reading list - everything from business books to texts on quantum physics and Zen Buddhism (described by Dr Rao as "a lifelong resource" for students) - they undertake a series of exercises and address "questions which are very important but which are not even acknowledged, much less addressed, in a business school," says Dr Rao. To remedy this, he presents his students with the tools - including self awareness, gratitude and meditation - to effect fundamental life changes.

Be in no doubt, Dr Rao has an impressive CV himself: his undergraduate training was in Physics at Delhi University; he received his PhD in Marketing from the Graduate School of Business, Columbia University; he has an MPhil (Master in Philosophy) in Marketing from the same school; and an MBA (Master of Business Administration) from the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad. He now serves as an adjunct professor at London Business School and a visiting professor at the Haas School of Business at the University of California Berkeley. His work has been featured across all major business media and he has consulted with RCA, Reuters, Citicorp and dozens of other blue-chip companies. It is Dr Rao's in-depth knowledge of the corporate world that frees him to credibly integrate significant life lessons into his teachings coupled with a refreshing "tell it as it is" approach.

"At business schools, the vast majority of students don't have a clue what they really want to do," explains Dr Rao matter-of-factly. "They're in business school for a number of reasons - the most important one is economic security; they want to go out and make a ton of money, they want to be in a prestigious company. However, many are also wary of the long hours and intensely competitive environment typical of post-MBA employers such as investment banks. My basic thesis is that work hours are getting longer and longer and more gruelling. But if you don't get up in the morning with your blood singing at the thought of what you do, if you're not really into your life, then you're wasting your life. And life is short."

This is the only business course that has earned itself its own alumni association. "At its heart, this is a case of Eastern philosophy leading Western MBAs along the path to self-improvement and corporate enlightenment, with a kinder and more productive working world as the ultimate goal." It is not surprising that the course is proving life-changing for many - as the reams of testimonials on Dr Rao's personal website, www.AreYouReadyToSucceed.com, attest to. Holistic teaching approaches, such as Dr Rao's, are something that many hope that standard education, globally, will urgently start to embrace. For now, it has at least been allowed to enhance the teachings of some of the planet's next business elite, which seems like a great place to start.

