

DEV DUTT PATTANAIK



Who do I save?
Who do I kill?
What is right?
What are the consequences?

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HOW TO TAKE DECISIONS

THE FIFTH SUTRA OF THE MANAGEMENT SUTRAS

About the Management Sutras

Devdutt Pattanaik is an acclaimed business thinker and strategist. His profound management sutras are derived from his bestselling books on business and management. They show how individuals can realize their potential, create wealth and achieve lasting success by following uniquely Indian principles (based on Hindu, Jain and Buddhist mythology) of goal setting, strategic thinking and decision-making.

A glossary at the back of the book provides explanations for specialized or unfamiliar words and terms used in the narrative.

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Illustrated by the author





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Extracted from *The Success Sutra: An Indian Approach to Wealth*

He who takes a call is a karta

In the epic Ramayan, Sita finds herself in a predicament. She is alone in the middle of the forest. Her husband, Ram, and brother-in-law, Lakshman, are away on a hunt. A line has been drawn around her hut. She has been told very clearly that only within the line do the laws of culture apply; here she is Ram's wife. Outside is nature, where the rules of marriage make no sense; she is just a woman for the taking.

A hermit standing outside the line asks for some food. She invites him in but he refuses explaining that as she is alone it would be inappropriate for him to enter. She stretches her hand over the line and offers him food. This annoys the hermit. He demands she step outside and feed him properly.

Must she or must she not? If she does step out, she brings her family honour by being a good host, but she takes a huge risk as she makes herself vulnerable. If she does not, she protects herself but condemns a hermit to hunger. What matters more: hospitality or security?

Sita steps out.

Had she obeyed her husband without any thought, she would have been the karya-karta, or the obedient follower, and he the karta, or the responsible leader. But the instructions were given to her in a context very different from the one she encountered; there was no hungry hermit then. Now a hungry hermit stood outside the hut; would Ram have allowed a hermit to starve to secure his wife?

Sita chooses to take a call. She is not obliged to, yet she takes the responsibility upon herself. That proactivity transforms her into a karta, a doer, regardless of the fact that her decision did not serve her well. The hermit turns out to be the rakshasa-king, Ravan, who abducts her.

To build a business, we need decision-makers and decision-followers. He who takes decisions is the karta. He who follows decisions is called a karya-karta.



After the interview, Mahmood asks Rajiv, the head of his human resource department, to stay back. They are about to select the Chief Operating Officer for the telecom division of the business. Mahmood is anxious. It is a huge risk, hiring a foreigner with no experience of India. To retain him, they have to assure him a golden parachute: compensation should the company terminate the contract before the stipulated three years. But Hugh, who has been selected, has knowledge the company desperately needs. "Will it work?" Mahmood asks. Rajiv keeps quiet. There are no guarantees. Only time will tell. Ultimately, the boss has to decide. Rajiv will diligently obey. Mahmood is the karta and Rajiv is the karya-karta.

Everyone is a potential karta

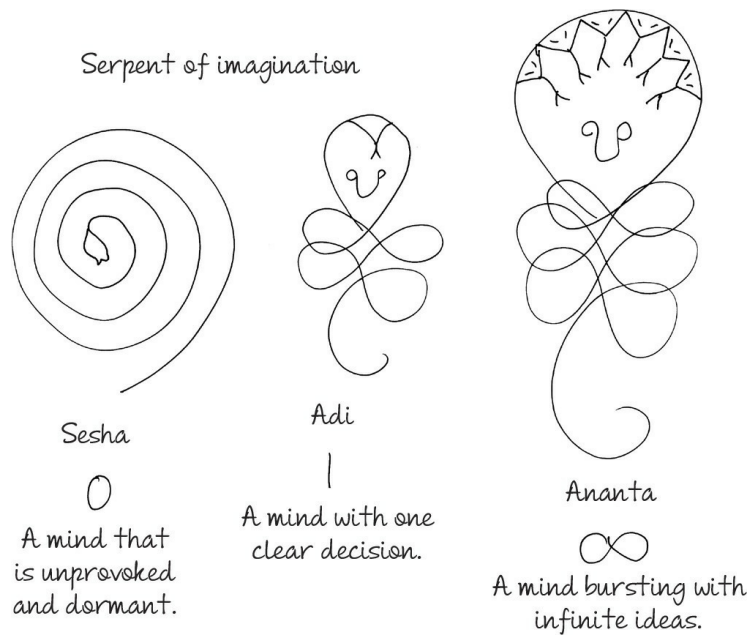
The mind of every human being can be compared to the mythic serpent Adi-Ananta-Sesha whose name translated literally means One-Infinity-Zero. Narayan sleeps in the coils of this serpent. Vishnu sits on it. Sesha, the coiled hoodless state, is like a dormant mind that does not think or take a decision. Ananta, the state with infinite unfurled hoods, is like a mind full of ideas. Adi, the state with a single hood, is like a focused mind, ready to strike; this is the mind of the karta.

Animals take decisions all the time. Only humans have the option not to take decisions. We can outsource decision-making to the karta and stay a karya-karta. We may even choose not to follow the decisions of a karta, like an impudent devata who needs to be cajoled or forced into action. When we choose to help others take decisions, we transform into yajamans. A yajaman is a karta too; but all kartas are not yajamans.

Thus humans have a choice to be proactive like a decision-making karta or a decision-enabling yajaman. We also have a choice to be reactive like a decision-following karya-karta or a reluctant devata.

We can let the serpent of the mind stay coiled or spring out its many hoods. Only we can make it strike.





When the customer walks into the shop and Babulal does not engage with him, it is the Sesha state of slumber when no exchange take place. When the customer makes a request and Babulal reacts immediately; thus does Sesha turn into Adi. Babulal can return to the Sesha state or stir Ananta in the customer by a simple question, “Anything else you wish to buy?” This one question provokes thoughts and ideas in the customer’s mind, infinite ideas are unfurled, and there is a possibility of more business.

A karta who allows and enables others to take a call is a yajaman

One day, the sage Narad asks Vishnu, with a bit of hesitation, “Why do you insist that the image of Garud be placed before you in your temples? Why not me? Am I not your greatest devotee?”

Before Vishnu can reply a crash is heard outside the main gate of Vaikuntha. “What was that?” asks Vishnu. Garud, Vishnu’s eagle and vehicle, who usually investigates such events, is nowhere to be seen. “I have sent Garud on an errand. Can you find out what happened, Narad?” asks Vishnu. Eager to please Vishnu, Narad runs out to investigate. “A milkmaid tripped and fell,” he says when he returns.

“What was her name?” asks Vishnu. Narad runs out, speaks to the maid and returns with the answer, “Sharda.”

“Where was she going?” asks Vishnu. Narad runs out once again, speaks to the maid and returns with the answer, “She was on her way to the market.”

“What caused her to trip?” asks Vishnu. “Why did you not ask this question the last time I went?” mumbles Narad irritably. He then runs out, speaks to the maid once again. “She was startled by a serpent that crossed her path,” he says on his return. “Anything else?” he asks.

“Are all her pots broken?” asks Vishnu. “I don’t know,” snaps Narad. “Find out,” insists Vishnu. “Why?” asks Narad. “Find out, Narad. Maybe I would like to buy some milk,” says Vishnu patiently. With great reluctance, Narad steps out of Vaikuntha and meets the milkmaid. He returns looking rather pleased, “She broke one pot. But there is another one intact. And she is willing to sell the milk but at double price.”

“So how much should I pay her?” asks Vishnu. “Oh, I forgot to ask. I am so sorry,” says Narad running out once again. “Do not bother. Let me send someone else,” says Vishnu.

Just then, Garud flies in. He has no idea of what has transpired between Vishnu and Narad. Vishnu tells Garud, “I heard a crashing sound outside the main gate. Can you find out what happened?” As Garud leaves, Vishnu whispers, “Let us see how he fares.”

Garud returns and says, “It is a milkmaid called Sharda. She was on her

way to the market. On the way, a snake crossed her path. Startled she fell down and broke one of the two pots of milk she was carrying. Now she wonders how she will make enough money to pay for the broken pot and the spilt milk. I suggested she sell the milk to you. After all, you are married to Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth.”

“And the price of the milk?” asks Vishnu. Pat comes Garud’s reply, “Four copper coins. One actually but I think she hopes to make a handsome profit when dealing with God.” Vishnu starts to laugh. Garud always anticipates situations and takes calls accordingly without checking with his boss or master. In that micro-context, he behaves as karta.

Vishnu’s eye caught Narad’s and Narad understood in that instant why Garud’s statue, and not his was always placed before the image of Vishnu in Vishnu temples.

Despite being given the freedom to take decisions, Narad chooses to stay karyakarta, follow decisions rather than take them, as he is too afraid of the consequences. Garud, on the other hand, anticipates the needs of Vishnu, decides to enquire voluntarily and is thus a karta. Vishnu who allows Garud to be a karta is a yajaman.

Arindam realizes the value of Meena as a team member over Ralph. Both are good workers. But when Arindam has to go for a meeting with Meena, she gives him a file with all relevant details about the client so that he can prepare well. Ralph will do no such thing. When Arindam points this out, Ralph says, “Is that the process? Do you want me to do that? I will do that, no problem.” Arindam realizes that Ralph is no Garud.

A yajaman has the power to take and give life

The sage Vishwamitra storms into the kingdom of Ayodhya and demands that the crown prince Ram accompany him to the forest and defend his hermitage from rakshasas. King Dashrath offers his army instead, as he feels Ram is too young, but Vishwamitra insists on taking Ram. With great reluctance, Dashrath lets Ram go.

In the forest, Vishwamitra points to Tataka, the female leader of the rakshasas, and asks that she be killed. When Ram hesitates because he has been taught never to raise his hand against a woman, Vishwamitra argues that a criminal has no gender. Ram accordingly raises his bow and shoots Tataka dead.

Later, Vishwamitra shows Ram a stone that was once Ahalya, the wife of Gautama, cursed to become so after her husband caught her in an intimate embrace with Indra. Vishwamitra asks Ram to step on the stone and liberate the adulteress. When Ram hesitates because he has been taught the rules of marriage should always be respected, Vishwamitra argues that forgiveness is as much a part of marriage as fidelity. Ram accordingly places his feet on the stone and sets Ahalya free from her curse.

Ram, well-versed in theory, is thus given practical lessons about being a yajaman: he will be asked to take life as well as give life. At times, he will be expected to be ruthless. At other times, he will be expected to be kind.

In business, the yajaman has the power to give a person a livelihood, grant him a promotion, sideline him or even fire him. These decisions have a huge impact on the lives of the devatas who depend on the business.



One day, Jake is asked by his boss to fire an incompetent employee. While the reasons are justified, Jake finds it the toughest thing to do. He has several nights of anxiety before he can actually do it. Then, a few weeks later, Jake is asked to mentor a junior employee who has been rejected by the head of another department. This is even tougher as the junior employee is rude and lazy and impossible to work with. Jake struggles and finally succeeds in getting work done through the junior employee. Jake does not realize it but his boss is being a Vishwamitra mentoring a future king.

The size of the contribution does not matter

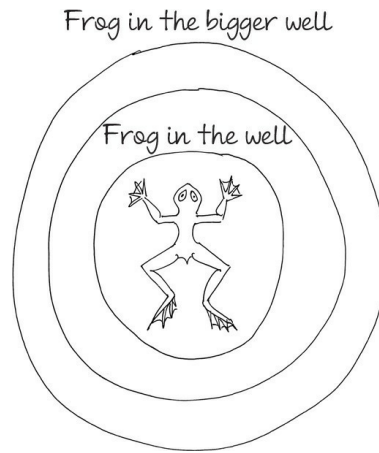
To rescue Sita, Ram raises an army of animals and gets them to build a bridge across the sea to the island-kingdom of Lanka where Sita is being held captive by the rakshasa-king Ravan.

Vultures survey the location. Bears serve as the architects. Monkeys work on implementing the construction, carrying huge boulders and throwing them into the sea. The work is tedious. The monkeys are jumping and screeching everywhere to ensure everything is being done efficiently and effectively. Suddenly, there appears amongst them a tiny squirrel carrying a pebble.

This little creature also wants to contribute to the bridge-building exercise. The monkeys who see him laugh. One even shoves the squirrel aside considering him an over-enthusiastic nuisance.

But when Ram glances at the squirrel, he is overwhelmed with gratitude. He thanks the tiny creature for his immense contribution. He brushes his fingers over the squirrel's back to comfort him, giving rise to the stripes that can be seen even today, a sign of Ram's acknowledgement of his contribution.

In terms of proportion, the squirrel's contribution to the bridge is insignificant. But it is the squirrel's 100 per cent. The squirrel is under no obligation to help Ram, but he does, proactively, responsibly, expecting nothing in return. Ram values the squirrel not for his percentage of contribution to the overall project but because he recognizes a yajaman. A squirrel today, can be a Ram tomorrow.



Proportions or matra play a key role in Indian philosophy. The scale of a problem has nothing to do with the potential of the decision-maker. A kupa-manduka, or frog in a well, and a chakravarti, or emperor of the world, are no different from each other, except in terms of scale. Both their visions are limited by the frontier of the land they live in. In case of the frog, it is the wall of the well. In case of the king, it is the borders of his kingdom. Both can be, in their respective contexts, generous or prejudiced. To expand scale, both have to rise.

Whenever Mr. Lal goes to his factory, he makes sure he speaks to people at all levels, from workers to supervisors to managers to accountants to security people. He is not interested in finding out who did the job well or who did not. That, he feels, is the job of managers. He is only interested in identifying people in the factory who take proactive steps to solve a problem. He consciously seeks decision-makers, like the executive who prepared a report on waste management without being asked to, or the supervisor who voluntarily motivated his team to clean the toilets when the housekeeping staff went on strike. For Mr. Lal these 'squirrels' who take responsibility are talents to be nurtured.

All calls are subjective

The *Kathasaritsagar* tells the story of a sorcerer who requests Vikramaditya, king of Ujjain, to fetch him a vetal or ghost that hangs upside down like a bat from a tree standing in the middle of a crematorium. “Make sure you do not talk to the vetal; if you speak, he will slip away from your grasp,” warns the sorcerer.

Vikramaditya enters the crematorium, finds the tree, and the vetal hanging upside down from its branches. He catches the ghost, pulls it down and begins to make his way back to the city when the ghost starts chatting with him, telling him all kinds of things, annoying him, yelling into his ears, cursing him, praising him, anything to make him speak but Vikramaditya refuses to succumb to these tricks.

Finally, the vetal tells Vikramaditya a story (a case study?), and at the end of it asks the king a question. “If you answer this question, then you are indeed Vikramaditya, a king, a yajaman who thinks and takes decisions. But if you stay quiet, and simply follow orders, you are no Vikramaditya. You are a pretender, a mere karya-karta, who simply follows orders.”

Vikramaditya cannot bear being called a pretender or a karya-karta. So he speaks and answers the question with a brilliant answer. The vetal gasps in admiration.

However, almost immediately after that the wily ghost slips away, cackling without pause and goes back to hanging upside down from the tree in the crematorium.

The next night, Vikramaditya walks back to the tree and once again pulls the vetal down. The vetal tells him another story with a question at the end. Once again the vetal tells the king, “If you are indeed the wise Vikramaditya, as you claim to be, you should be able to judge this case. So answer my question. And if you choose to stay silent, I am free to assume I have been caught by a commoner, a pretender, a mimic!” Once again the proud king gives the answer to which the vetal gasps in admiration. And once again he slips away with a cackle.

This happens twenty-four times. The twenty-fifth time, a tired and exasperated Vikramaditya sighs in relief. He has succeeded.

“Have you really?” asks the vetal. “How do you know the answers you gave the previous times were right? All answers are right or wrong only in hindsight. You made decisions because you thought they were right. The answer would have been subjective this time, too. Only now, you are not sure of the answer, you hesitate, and so remain silent. This silence will cost you dear. You will succeed in taking me to the sorcerer who will use his magic to make me his genie and do his bidding. His first order for me will be to kill you. So you see, Vikramaditya, as long as you were karta, taking calls, you were doing yourself a favour. As soon as you stop making your own decisions, stop being a karta, you are at the mercy of others and you are sure to end up dead.”

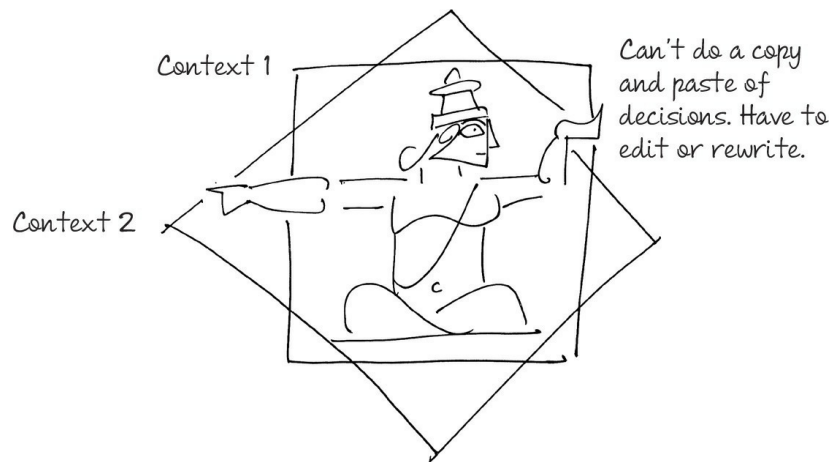
Everyone looks at the karta for a decision despite data being unreliable, the future being uncertain, and outcomes that are unpredictable. Not everyone can do it. He who is able to make decisions independently is the karta. He who allows others to do so is the yajaman.

The investors are chasing Deepak. He built an online coaching class of engineering students that was bought by a large educational portal for a phenomenal amount. Now the investors expect Deepak to repeat this success. Deepak is filled with self-doubt. He is not sure what it was about the website he built that made it so valuable in the eyes of the buyers. Was it just luck? Since he does not know what made him successful, how can he repeat the success? There was nothing objective about his creation. Must he follow his gut instincts again? But the investors will not allow him to do so; their auditors will keep asking him for explanations and reasons, assuming his calls are rational. And the media, which celebrated the sale, is watching his every move continuously. He is a victim of success. How he wishes he never became an entrepreneur. How he wishes he could roll back the clock, be a simple engineer working in a factory, diligently doing what the boss tells him to do.

All decisions are contextual

Amongst the twenty-five stories that the vetal told Vikramaditya, this is one: a king killed a merchant and laid claim to all his property. The merchant's widow fled the kingdom swearing revenge. She seduced a priest and was impregnated by him. She abandoned the son thus born at the door of a childless king who adopted the foundling and raised him as his own. "Who is the father of this child: the merchant who was married to his mother, the priest who made his mother pregnant or the king who adopted him?"

Vikramaditya replies with the caveat that the answer would depend on the culture to which the king belongs. In some cultures only biological fathers matter, in some, legal fathers matter and in others, foster fathers matter more. There is no objective answer in matters related to humans.



In the Mahabharat, Pandu is called the father of the Pandavs even though he is not their biological father. The law of the land states that a man is the father of his wife's children. The Pandavs demand a share of Pandu's kingdom on the basis of this law. Is this law the right law? At Kurukshetra, the Pandavs kill Bhishma, the man who raised them as a foster father would, because he fights on the opposing side. Is that ethical? In the Ramayan, Ram is celebrated for being faithful to one wife, yet in the Mahabharat, men have many wives and the Pandavs even share a common wife. What is appropriate conduct?

Laws by their very nature are arbitrary and depend on context. What one community considers fair, another may not consider to be fair. What is considered fair by one generation is not considered fair by the next. Rules always change in times of war and in times of peace, as they do in times of fortune and misfortune.

Thus, no decision is right or wrong. Decisions can be beneficial or harmful, in the short-term or long-term, to oneself or to others. Essentially, every decision has a consequence, no matter which rule is upheld and which one is ignored. This law of consequence is known as karma.

Mr. Gupta has to choose a successor. Should it be his eldest son who is not very shrewd? Should it be the second son who is smart but not interested in the business? Must it be his daughter, who feels gender should not be a criterion, but who fails to realize she is not really that smart? Should it be his brilliant son-in-law, who does not belong to the community, which will annoy a lot of shareholders? Must the decision be based on emotion, equality, fairness, loyalty, or the growth of the business and shareholder value? Each and every answer will have opponents. Must he simply divide the business before he dies for the sake of peace or let his two sons and daughter fight it out in court after his death? There is no right answer, he realizes. Traditionally, in the community, the eldest son inherited everything. That was convenient but often disastrous. Mr. Gupta does not want to impress the community; he wants his legacy to outlive him. He also wants all his children to be happy. His desires impact the decision as much as the context.

Not everyone can handle the burden of uncertainty

One day, Bhartrihari receives a jewel from a traveller who is visiting his kingdom. “Only a king such as you is worthy of possessing it,” says the traveller.

That night, the king gives the jewel to his beloved queen because he feels she is more worthy of it.

The next day, to his great surprise, he finds the same jewel in a basket full of dung being carried by the lady who cleans the stables.

On being questioned, the cleaning lady says it has been given to her by her lover, the man who grooms the royal horses. When the groom is accused of theft, he reveals it is a gift from a nymph who visits him every night in the stables. The king decides to investigate.

The following night, Bhartrihari hides in the stables and realizes that the ‘nymph’ is none other than his beloved queen! Blinded by love, he does not see that his wife loves another man and she does not see that the man she finds attractive cares for another woman.

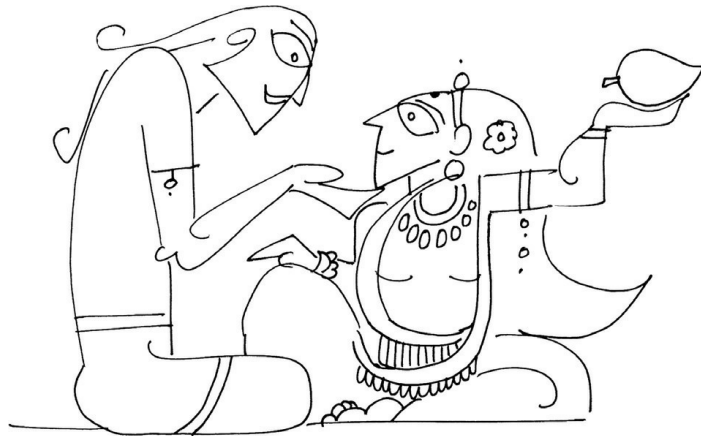
After this incident, the king is unable to take any decisions. He doubts everything he sees. Uncertainty paralyzes him. He trusts no one. In despair, he decides to become a hermit and give up his throne to his younger brother, Vikramaditya.

Bhartrihari has to confront the horror of human existence. We can never know everything and we can never be sure. All information is incomplete, and all readings distorted by personal prejudice. And yet we have to take decisions all the time and hope the results favour us. Bhartrihari feels powerless. He is unable to conduct the yagna and passes on the reins of his kingdom to his younger brother, Vikramaditya.

While everyone has the potential of being a karta or a yajaman, not everyone is willing to take decisions and be responsible for the outcome. We would rather be devata (reactive) than yajaman (proactive).

Madhukar, head of marketing, recommends that Arshiya be made the head of corporate communications. Soon after her promotion, Arshiya

begins to behave very differently. She becomes more arrogant and imperious. She is no longer as gentle or as kind. Madhukar realizes that as long as Arshiya reported to him, she behaved very nicely. Now that she reports directly to the managing director, she is not obliged to be nice. Madhukar realizes that the data on the basis of which he made the recommendation was false. He decides to never again recommend anyone for a job or promotion. Ergo, he will never be a yajaman again.



Does she really love me?

Does she pretend to love me?

Does she love her idea of me?

Does he love what I have?

Every decision has a consequence

In the Ramayan, Dashrath shoots an arrow in the direction of a sound that he believes to be the sound of deer drinking water. It turns out to be the sound of water being collected in a pot. The arrow fatally injures the young man who was fetching the water. The young man is Shravan. His old and blind parents do not see this event as an accident. They see it as murder. They curse Dashrath to, like them, die of heartbreak following separation from his son.

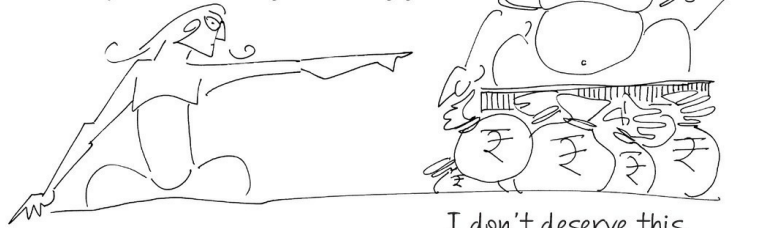
In the Mahabharat, Pandu shoots an arrow at a deer, not realizing that it is copulating with a doe, and that it is, in fact, no deer but a sage called Kindama who has taken the form of a deer, along with his wife, in order to mate in the open air. Kindama curses Pandu that should he touch a woman and try to have sex with her, he will die instantly. As a result, Pandu cannot father children. He feels he is unfit to be king as he will never father an heir. So he renounces the throne and stays in the jungle, choosing to be a hermit, a decision that takes everyone in the palace by surprise.

The notion of karma is unique to Indian thought. No action exists in isolation. Every decision impacts the ecosystem. Karma is often mistaken for the adage, “As you sow, so shall you reap.” The assumption then is that if we sow good deeds, we will reap good rewards. But who decides what action is good or bad? The desire to qualify an action, and its consequence, as good or bad, right or wrong, is a peculiarly human trait. Nature does not do so.

Action impacts the self, the people around and the environment at large. Every person is impacted at three levels: the physical level, the mental level and the social level. Thus, a tiny ripple can result in a storm, and the ripple-causer needs to take responsibility for it.

An arrow that has been released from the bow is a metaphor for a decision that cannot be withdrawn. It has consequences that a yajaman has to face. There is no escape. This is a heavy burden to bear.

Because you became rich, I appear poor. Because you succeeded, I am now expected to succeed too. You make me feel inadequate. I hate you. I envy you.



I don't deserve this.
I just wanted to be rich.

For years, they manufactured automobile parts. But when Ritwik decides they should open service centres for luxury cars, the whole family opposes him. “Do it with your own money!” his brother says. So Ritwik uses his own money and investments. If he succeeds, the profits are his alone. He will prove once and for all that he is smarter than the rest of his family. If he fails, he will have to face the double humiliation of being a business failure and being told by his family, “We told you so.” If Ritwik chooses to listen to his family, he will have to spend the rest of his life wondering about all the things that could have happened if only he had had the guts to take a risk. There is no escape from consequences.

Decisions are good or bad only in hindsight

Garud, the eagle, is enjoying the song of a sparrow atop Mount Kailas when he observes Yama, the god of death, also looking at the bird. But Yama is frowning. Maybe he does not like the song. Fearing for the welfare of the little bird, Garud, with compassion in his heart, decides to take the bird away from Yama's line of sight.

Garud takes the bird in the palm of his hand and flies to a forest far away, beyond the seven mountains and seven rivers. There, he leaves the sparrow on a tree full of succulent fruits. When he returns to Mount Kailas, he finds Yama smiling. Yama explains, "My account books are balanced. I saw a sparrow here singing a song. It was supposed to die today but not here. It was supposed to die in a forest far beyond the seven mountains and seven rivers, eaten by a python that lives under a tree full of succulent fruits. This has happened, thanks to you, Garud."

Garud realizes in hindsight that what he thought was an act of kindness turned out to be an act of cruelty for the sparrow.

When strategies are made it is in the hope that they will minimize surprises. Huge amounts of time are taken to ensure the data and the analysis is right so that the results are predictable. As organizations grow larger, the cost of mistakes is higher, and so much more time and energy is taken while taking decisions. And yet, despite all precautions, things can and do go wrong, often because assumptions are incorrect. A yajaman needs to take this in his stride.

A yajaman needs to be defined not by the outcome, achievement, goal or performance, but by his ability to take decisions proactively and responsibly.

It seemed like the right thing to do at the time: leaving the job and starting out on his own. Parul thought that the clients would love to have the same work done at a lower cost by a freelance consultant. But when she started visiting clients she realized there were more freelance consultants than she had anticipated. The competition was fierce. So she started offering outsourcing services. And suddenly, she found

herself much in demand and the owner of a thriving business. Her husband said that resigning from the consulting firm was the best thing she had done. But Parul knows that she left to be a consultant and had never dreamed she would become an entrepreneur. This was not a future she had planned or anyone had predicted. She is not sure if what has happened is good or bad.



Decisions are often rationalized in hindsight

In the battlefield of Kurukshetra, when Bhishma sees Shikhandi standing on Krishna's chariot, he lowers his bow. Taking advantage of this, Arjun who is standing behind Shikhandi lets loose a volley of arrows that pins Bhishma to the ground. Even though the great general of the Kaurav army cannot be killed, Arjun has managed to incapacitate him, increasing the chances of Pandav victory.

The Kauravs protest: the rules were breached, Shikhandi was a woman and no woman is allowed on the battlefield.

The Pandavs insist Shikhandi is a man: he was born with a female body but later in life, due to the intervention of a yaksha called Sthuna, had obtained male genitalia. Does that make Shikhandi a man or a woman? Is Bhishma wrong to assume Shikhandi is a woman? Is Arjun right to assume Shikhandi is a man? Since the outcome benefits the Pandavs, we can say Arjun's call is right, but the answer is anything but objective.

At the time of action, our decision is based on a set of assumptions. The assumptions may be wrong. Leaders have to constantly deal with uncertainty, give hope to the people even when nothing is clear. Decisions become good or bad in hindsight. We would like to believe that a decision is rational. More often than not, decisions are rationalized.

Often in business we take decisions based on how we interpret the situation, not being sure of whether the call we have taken will work or not. When it works, we are often taken by surprise. But the world at large demands an explanation. We are expected to prove that our decisions were strategic, not simply a fluke. To say that a certain victory was a fluke makes us nervous. Corporations reject this. Once the numbers come, the manager has to spend hours creating a story rationalizing his action so that everything looks as if it were part of a pre-conceived plan.



As the head of research and development, Dr. Sulabha prepares various types of snacks that the company then promotes in the market. Some succeed, some do not. Some become very successful. Each time the management asks Dr. Sulabha to give reasons why she feels a particular snack will be very successful and why they should invest in that product's development. She feels there is no one, except maybe a fortune-teller, who could actually give the right answer, but she is compelled to come up with satisfactory logic to comfort the management and ensure she gets funds, and keeps her job. At conferences she is often called to speak about her successful creations and the audience loves it when she tells them how she observed customer behaviour and strategized a product that eventually became a winner. The lectures would not be a hit if she were thanking providence or intuition for her best-selling snacks.

If the decision is bad, the yajaman alone is responsible

A sage once asks a thief, “Why are you stealing?”

The thief replies, “I am poor. I need to feed my family. There is no other employment. I am desperate.”

“Will your family bear the burden of your crime?”

“Of course, they will.” Suddenly, not so sure of his own response, the thief decides to check. He asks his wife and son if they would bear the burden of his crimes and they reply, “Why? It is your duty to feed us. How you feed us is your problem not ours.”

The thief feels shattered and alone. The sage then tells the thief, who is Valmiki, the story of Ram, as told in the Ramayan and compares and contrasts it with the story of the Pandavs from the Mahabharat.

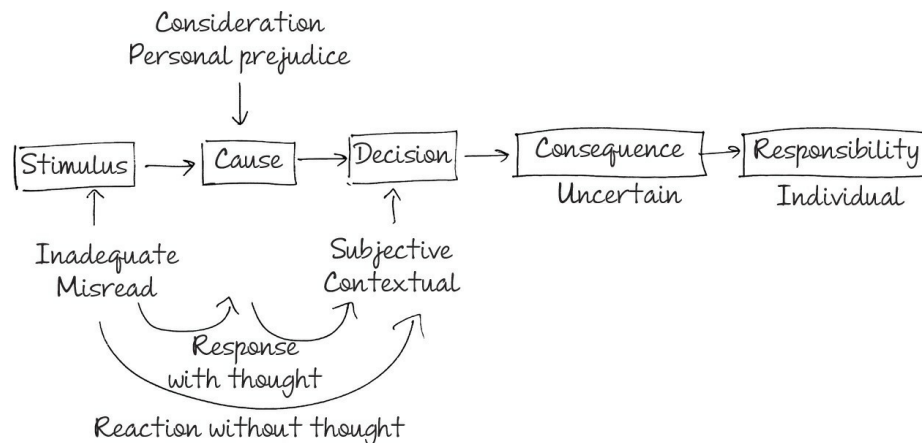
Ram is exiled from Ayodhya for no fault of his, following the palace intrigues of his stepmother Kaikeyi. In the Mahabharat, the five Pandav brothers are exiled because they gamble away their kingdom, Indraprastha. In the Ramayan, Ram’s exile lasts fourteen years. In the Mahabharat, it is an exile of thirteen years. In the Ramayan, there is no guarantee that at the end of the exile, Ram will be crowned king. In the Mahabharat, however, the Kauravs promise to return the Pandav lands on completion of the latter’s exile.

While it is his father’s request that he go to the forest, it is ultimately Ram’s decision whether to obey his father or not. He decides to obey. He is no karya-karta to his father. He is a yajaman. He is never shown complaining or blaming Kaikeyi but is rather visualized as being stoic and calm throughout. In contrast, the Pandavs blame the Kauravs and their uncle Shakuni and are visualized as angry and miserable, even though they agree to the terms of their exile. They are compelled to obey the rules. Yudhishtir cannot bear the burden of being a yajaman, and agrees to play a game of dice, which costs him his kingdom, while his brothers assume the role of reluctant karya-kartas.

For Ram, Kaikeyi is no villain; he is no victim and certainly not a hero. A hero is provoked into action. A yajaman needs no provocation to act. Provocation makes action a reaction, turns a yajaman into a devata and a

karta into a karya-karta. A yajaman takes his own decision. Ram has chosen to accept his exile. He could have defied the wishes of his father, and taken control of the throne, but he chose to obey. He takes ownership of his exile. The Pandavs constantly see their exile as an unfair punishment, a burden they are forced to bear. Perhaps that is why Ram (and not the Pandavs) is enshrined in temples.

A yajaman is one who does not blame anyone for any situation. He knows that his fortune and misfortune are dependent on many forces. Besides his knowledge, skills, experience and his power of anticipation, a lot depends on the talent of people around him—the market conditions and regulatory environment. He simply takes charge of whatever situation he is in, focusing on what he can do, never letting the anxiety of failure pull him back, or the confidence of success make him smug.



Upon the completion of their course in college, there is placement week. Jaideep gets two offers: one from an investment banking firm in New York and one from a leading trading firm in India. Jaideep chooses the job in New York, but the moment he lands there, news of recession fills Wall Street. Companies are forced to shut down or downsize. Jaideep finds himself without a job. As he flies back to Mumbai, he is angry and anxious. But he keeps reminding himself: it was his decision; no one forced him into the choice he made. He realizes that being a yajaman is tough.

If the decision is good, the yajaman is the beneficiary

There is a king called Indradyumna, who after death goes to paradise to enjoy the rewards of his good deeds on earth. But, one day, he is told by the gods to leave paradise. He can come back only if he finds at least one person on earth who recounts his great deeds.

When Indradyumna reaches earth, he realizes that centuries have passed since his reign. The trees are different, the people are different, even his kingdom looks different. The city and temple he built no longer stand. No one remembers him. He visits the oldest man on earth, and goes to the oldest bird, but neither of them recall him. Finally, he goes to the tortoise, who is older than the oldest man and the oldest bird and the tortoise says he remembers Indradyumna because his grandfather had told him that a king called Indradyumna built the lake he was born in. Indradyumna, however, does not remember ever building a lake.

The tortoise explains, “You distributed many cows in charity during your lifetime, hoping to win a place in paradise, which you did. As the cows left the royal cowshed, they kicked up so much dust they created a depression which collected water and turned into a lake, becoming the home of many birds and fishes, worms and, finally, the home of my grandfather.”

Indradyumna is pleased to hear what the tortoise has to say. So are the gods who welcome Indradyumna back to paradise. As Indradyumna rises to heaven, the irony does not escape him: he is remembered on earth for a lake that was unconsciously created, and not for the cows that were consciously given. He benefits not from his decisions but from the unknown consequences of his decisions.

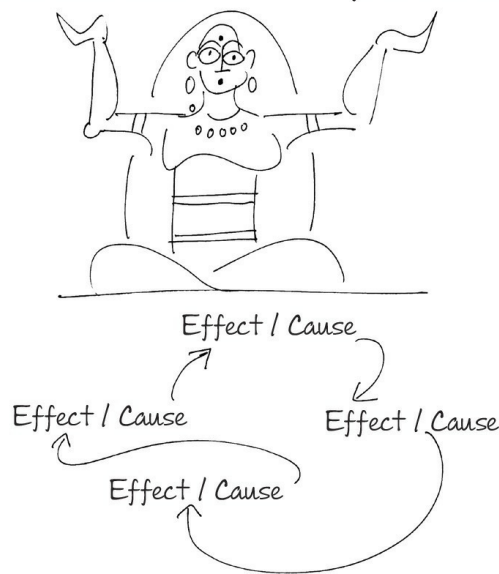
Making decisions is not all gloom. It also yields positive results, sometimes even unexpected windfalls. Just as the yajaman is responsible for negative consequences, he has a right over positive consequences. It is this hope of unexpected positive consequences that often drives a yajaman.

Harish-saheb’s factory provided a livelihood to Suresh who was able to give a decent education to his two sons, one of whom went on to

become a doctor. Suresh was always grateful to Harish-saheb because before the factory was set up in the small town where he lived, he had been unemployed for over a year. When his son builds a hospital, Suresh insists that it be named after that ‘giver of cows’—Harish-saheb. The Harish Nursing Home that serves the local community is, in this allegory, Indradyumna’s lake. Harish-saheb’s factory is long gone, replaced by a shopping mall.

Karma means destiny; my
past choices inform my
current circumstance.

Karma means action; my current
choice of action informs my
future circumstance.



Glossary

With new words are created new worlds, as they are vehicles of new ideas. They enable the process of expanding the mind. The words and terms explained below are common to the sutras in my sutra series.

	Business context	Conventional context
agni	that which is used to tame and control nature	fire god
Amravati	the ideal goal where all needs are met without effort	Indra's paradise
ankush	a tool used for pushing people to do their job, and pulling them back	elephant goad
Arjun	one who argues too much, shooting counter questions like arrows when questioned	the third Pandav who is a skilled archer
asura	one who feels his entitlement has been denied, resulting in rage and ambition	eternal enemies of the devas
avasarpini	pessimistic gaze	waning period of an era
avatar	role adapted to the context for the benefit of the Other	descent of Vishnu
bali	what is destroyed in the process of creation	sacrifice
bhagavan	a being who is not hungry but pays attention to others' hunger	a being who is never hungry but feeds others

	Business context	Conventional context
bhaya	insecurities	fear
Bhim	one who wants to act rather than think	the second Pandav who is very strong
bhog	that which satisfies hunger	consumption
Bhoj	a leader who balances creativity with accountability	a legendary king
Brahma	subject of the subjective truth	the creator
brahmanda	imagined reality	subjective world
chakravarti	the king who controls his kingdom with rules	emperor of the world
Chandra	one who is very moody and has favourites	the moon god
Chaturbhuj	the one who multitasks	another name for Vishnu indicating he has four arms
Chintamani	that which satisfies every wish	wish-fulfilling jewel of paradise
Daksha	one who is obsessed with rules	the patron of the yagna
darshan	observing the subject of subjective reality	gaze
deva	he who sees what comes to him as entitlement	Brahma's sons who live in luxury above the sky
devata	he who responds to the transaction initiated by the yajaman	the deity being invoked
Draupadi	one who has to deal with multiple bosses and subordinates	the common wife of the five Pandavs
drishti	observing objective reality	vision
Durga	power that grants security and authority	goddess of war
dushama	bust	negative period

	Business context	Conventional context
Ganesha	one who can easily wear many hats and so communicate between many departments	the elephant-headed god who removes obstacles
Gangu-teli	the one doing a monotonous job	legendary oil presser
garud-drishti	strategy, wide vision, long-term thinking	bird's-eye view
Gauri	organization based on rules	the domesticated form of the Goddess Kali
Goloka	sustainable happy business	paradise of cows
Gobar-ka-Ganesh	he who does what he is told to do with no view of his own	legendary dumb character
grama-devata	the manager who adapts principles of the centre to the realities of the periphery	village god
Halahal	the negative output of any action	poison that comes with nectar
Hanuman	he who obeys unconditionally and without question	the monkey who serves Ram and is worshipped in his own right
Indra	he who wants high return on investment always	king of devas
ishta-devata	one who grants us personal favours	personal god
Kailas	where there is no hunger	abode of Shiva
Kali	marketplace with no regulatory control	the wild form of the Goddess Gauri
Kalpataru	that which satisfies every wish	wish-fulfilling tree
Kama	right-brain activity, creativity, which does not like structure	god of desire

	Business context	Conventional context
Kamadhenu	that which satisfies every wish	wish-fulfilling cow
karma	consequences of actions	the cycle of cause and consequence
karta	the one who gives the directive	a leader
karya-karta	the one who follows the directive	a follower
Kauravs	those who stubbornly refuse to learn	the hundred brothers led by Duryodhan who oppose the five Pandavs
Krishna	he who breaks rules to help others grow on their terms	cowherd avatar of Vishnu
Kubera	the one who hoards	king of yakshas
kula-devata	one who grants us departmental favours	the family god
Lakshmi	wealth	goddess of wealth
Mitti-ka-Madhav	he who does what he is told to do with no view of his own	folk character
Nakul	one who looks pretty but delivers nothing	the fourth Pandav who is very handsome
Narad	he who makes people insecure by comparing and contrasting	trouble-making sage
Narayan	human potential	God
Narayani	resources	Goddess
nirguna	not measurable	intangible
Pandavs	students who have made mistakes but are open to learning	the five protagonists of the epic Mahabharat
parashu	analysis	axe
Parashuram	leader who punishes rule-breakers sternly	the warrior-sage form of Vishnu

	Business context	Conventional context
pasha	synthesis	string
prakriti	material world	nature
pralay	end of an organization or a market	the end of the world when everything dissolves into the sea
purush	imagination	humanity
Radha	leader who lets talent go without begrudging them	the milkmaid who is the beloved of Krishna
rakshasa	one who takes things by force	demon who grabs
Ram	he who follows the rules at any cost to help others grow on their terms	the royal form of Vishnu
rana-bhoomi	competitive environment	warzone
ranga-boomi	joyful environment where everybody grows	playground
Ravan	he who breaks the rule for his growth at the cost of others	king of rakshasas
rishi	one who has more insight than others	seer who can see what others do not see
saguna	measurable	tangible
Sahadev	one who only speaks when spoken to even though he knows solutions to problems	the youngest Pandav who was very wise and never spoke unless spoken to
sanskriti	culture	society
Saraswati	human imagination	goddess of knowledge
sarpa-drishti	tactic, narrow-vision, short-term thinking	snake vision
sattra	an organization with many processes	a complex set of multiple yagnas
Shakti	inborn strength, capacity and capability	goddess of power

	Business context	Conventional context
Shankar	he who is content and sensitive to others	another name of Shiva
Sharda	knowledge of purusha	goddess of wisdom
Shekchilli	dreamer with no accountability	folk character who dreams
Shiva	he who is independent but withdrawn from the world	God who destroys
shruti	personal ideas that cannot be shared	inner voice that is heard but cannot be spoken or transmitted
smriti	public ideas that are exchanged	outer voice that is spoken or transmitted but not necessarily heard
sthula-sharira	how we appear physically to others	the physical body
Surya	one who is radiant and attracts all attention	the sun god
sushama	boom	positive period
svaha	input	this of me I offer
Swarga	Indra's paradise	another name for Amravati
tapasya	introspection, contemplation, analysis	the practice of churning tapa (mental fire)
tathastu	output	so be it
utasarpini	optimistic gaze	upwards movement of time
Vaikuntha	workplace where everything comes together without conflict	Vishnu's abode in the middle of the ocean of milk
Vaman	he who grows big and thus makes the Other feel small and insignificant	dwarf avatar of Vishnu
vasudev	one who is action driven	the hero who is a man of action who seeks wealth

	Business context	Conventional context
vetal	facilitator who asks questions that provoke thought, but does not know the answer	the teacher who never goes to the student and who provokes discomforting reflections
Vikramaditya	the student who goes to the teacher	a legendary king
Vishnu	he who grows on his terms by enabling others to grow on their terms at their pace	God who preserves
yagna	the process of exchange	Vedic fire ritual
yajaman	the one who initiates the offer of exchange	patron
yaksha	one who hoards	Brahma's son who hoards
Yama	left-brain activity that is highly structured	god of death
yoga	outgrowing hunger	alignment
Yudhishtir	upright but naïve leader	the eldest Pandav

About the Author

Devdutt Pattanaik is a renowned author, mythologist and leadership consultant. He has written over thirty bestselling books, published several hundred articles and given numerous talks and presentations on Indian mythology, culture, business and management. He was formerly the Chief Belief Officer of the Future Group.

He is currently a much sought-after speaker, leadership coach, management adviser and consultant on diversity and culture. To know more about him please visit www.devdutt.com

Extracted from *The Success Sutra: An Indian Approach to Wealth*

Most human beings hunger after riches and success. There are any number of management books which provide theories and techniques on how to become rich and successful. All of them advise us to chase Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, in order to make her our own. But the Indian approach to prosperity and fulfilment warns against the relentless pursuit of the goddess, writes noted thinker and mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik, as it will result in conflict. Rather, we have to give in order to get, we have to satisfy the hunger of others in order to satisfy our own. If we learn and practise this fundamental truth, Lakshmi will enter our homes and our lives.

Derived from his acclaimed bestseller *Business Sutra*, this book is filled with lessons and insights into management, business and the creation of wealth and success.