

LIFESTYLE FOOD
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THE HINDU

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METROPLUS
WEEKEND

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FUTURE formula

**California-based
CEO, Sam Santhosh
mixes business
with science for
success p8**

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“I plan to take some of the classes on their campus and the rest by video conference from the US. The regular staff needs to be trained in the subject too so that they continue with the course in the future



BIG PLANS Sam Santhosh, CEO, Calsoft, feels businesses in the future will be inextricably linked with science PHOTO: (COVER AND CENTRESPREAD) THULASI KAKKAT

In the BUSINESS of science

CHATLINE Sam Santhosh, CEO of the California-based Calsoft, says entrepreneurs need to be science-savvy in future and tells PREMA MANMADHAN that he has formulated a subject called Science, Technology & Business (STB) for B-Schools

He swears by science and technology and is a die-hard optimist. For life has taught this businessman, age 48, many lessons, that bad days need not necessarily mean doom and good days must be backed by futuristic thinking. That is why the MD and CEO of the California based Calsoft group plans for a future where science and business can jointly erase the ills that plague society.

The very premise on which Sam functions is this: There is no business in future without science and technology playing handmaidens to it. So steeped in this belief is Sam that he has formulated a syllabus for a subject to be taught in B-Schools: It's called Science, Technology & Business (STB) - for the next generation of entrepreneurs. "Yahoo and Google belong to the last decade. I feel this course can kindle interest in would-be entrepreneurs to build science-based businesses." Sam believes developments in genetics, robotics, nanotechnology and neuromedicine will offer solutions to most of the problems facing us today, and pave the way for entrepreneurs to do well in these spheres. This subject has already been included in the syllabus of the MBA course at DC School of Management at Vagamon. "I plan to take some of the classes on their campus and the rest by video conference from the US. The regular staff needs to be trained in the subject so that

they continue with the course in the future if it is well accepted by the students," Sam says. The course concentrates on the major developments in science and technology today and also addresses issues like how to solve the challenges facing humanity, the great business opportunities in the next 10 years, basic necessities of an ecosystem to develop entrepreneurship and how to handle the legal and ethical issues created by these developments.

Initial experiences

And how is Sam Santhosh (Sreedharan Nair Santhosh), a boy from Vilyur, who finished his engineering (mechanical) in Thrissur engineering college (where his father taught) qualified for all these things, you may wonder.

Sam went to IIM Kolkata where he studied Management Information Systems as a subject. Later his experiences at a tile factory that his father's family ran in Pathanamparam were anything but happy. "There were 120 workers and five unions. There were strikes and work stopped with debts mounting. Politicians or the bureaucracy were of no help. I took a loan and started an IT outlet in Kochi. It was one of the first ones in Kerala, in 1987. I got many projects. That's when I saw an ad in *The Hindu*, about an exhibition in Las Vegas in 1991. Well, I took a loan and went for

it, met up people and it resulted in an order from an oil company called Chemoil Corporation."

Sam started a joint venture with Chemoil for offshore software development, called California Software Co. Ltd (Calsoft) in 1992. From there, there was no looking back.

Being in the US with a name like Sreedharan Nair Santhosh was not easy. So, to make it easier for people to call him, he became S (Sam) Santhosh! And now began his BIG yatra into the businessworld and Sam entered the field with proper ammo, in this case, knowledge. He did many short term courses from established universities to equip himself for the journey forward. His first one was a basic course in Biology which he upgraded with the latest subjects, "GNR, Genetics, nanotechnology and robotics, (including artificial intelligence) is the future. I did a course recently at Singularity University too," he says.

Singularity University is on the NASA campus and was co-founded by Ray Kurzweil, a leading thinker and inventor who has been described often as the heir to Thomas Edison, for his original thinking and futuristic vision. The courses offered here are very advanced and are for world leaders and CEOs in a variety of subjects to "stimulate groundbreaking disruptive thinking and solutions aimed at solving the planets pressing challenges." Reading consumes Sam. "If

you don't read you cannot lead," says the man who tried his hand at moderating a TV show last year. It was all about reading. The management students would be told to read certain books and the questions would be based on that. It went up to 18 episodes.

Rationalist

One look into his car and you see that the backseat is teeming with books: Oliver Morton's 'Eating the Sun', 'Cutting for Stone' by Abraham Varghese and 'Out of thin Air' by Peter D. Ward. His concern for the planet and love for science is evident.

To Sam, hard work and science overrule all things irrational. His cherubic smile does not betray the rationalist in him. The closest he can get to religion is perhaps, Buddhism, he feels, which is closest to Nature. There is no façade about the man, or the businessman's PR jargon where the listener's name crops up nineteen to the dozen in the conversation.

Almost two decades in the US and no American accent? I listened desperately for that give-away drawl, but failed to trace it. "No, I don't have one," he says simply, and his mother tongue comes naturally to him. "I am also an Indian passport holder still," he discloses. Living with his daughters Lakshmy, Devi and wife Jayashree in California, his Kerala roots are intact along with his global ties.