

# Stacking them up

VR Ferose has had a lifelong affair...with books

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JAGADEESH NV

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Patience and perseverance maketh a good book collector, says 37-year-old VR Ferose, Bengaluru-based managing director of SAP Labs India, adding, “The last thing a collector does is bargain.” He has, however, had to strike a deal with his wife: “I buy one book, give one away.” It’s the only way they can make space for yet another book in their home, which already has almost 3,000 tomes (besides the 200 in his office), and he has managed to read only half of them. An avid reader since childhood, what started with comics

and *Reader’s Digest* has now grown to be a non-stop passion for Ferose.

At any given time, he is now reading five or six books — in his car, during flights and, he admits, even in office. He turned collector after reading an article by historian and columnist Ramachandra Guha back in the ’90s. The subject? ‘50 great books on cricket’. The bibliophile in Ferose was stoked and he resolved to own them all. He doggedly chased that 50 over ten years, scouring bookstores and interacting with countless collectors in London, Melbourne, Sydney and Bengaluru. His search was completed in 2008

when a friend gifted him the 50th book.

Grand hobbies have a way of sticking around and the end of that journey turned into the start of another. Soon after, Ferose began collecting books on Delhi, giving in to his fascination for history. Along the way, he turned to rare autographed books, particularly those by Nobel laureates.

Over the years, his rare book collection not only grew in size and variety, but also into a treasure, with many of them in a bank locker. Ferose’s signed collection includes Jawaharlal Nehru’s *The Discovery of India*, Charlie Chaplin’s *My Autobiography*, Edmund Hillary’s *Ascent to the Top*, RK Narayan’s *The Mahabharata*, and books by Nobel prize winners

such as Amartya Sen, Mikhail Gorbachev, Nelson Mandela, Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama.

Thanks to Ferose, SAP Labs organises two book reading sessions with authors every month. Around 50 writers visited the SAP Lab office in 2011 and Ferose is now planning on writing a book on them. “Books are a great stress buster,” he says, “and the knowledge helps me become a better professional.”

On a recent trip to Stanford University for an executive leadership programme, Ferose was delighted to find that three of his professors were Nobel laureates — getting

copies of their books was not too difficult!

Sometimes, though, books find him. An aged bookshop owner in Bengaluru gave Ferose a signed copy of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* because he wanted “to find a good home for the book”. J Krishnamurthy’s signed copy of *At the Feet of the Master* took a decade to come to him.

“A gentle madness,” says Ferose, borrowing the title of Nicholas Basbanes’ non-fiction work of the same name to describe his love for books. In fact, Basbanes’ book tops the list of his upcoming collection — books about books. ☺



**Bibliophilism:** Practice of collecting books

**3,000:** Number of books VR Ferose owns, including a signed autobiography of Charlie Chaplin

**15:** Number of rare books stored in his bank locker

**Three Things** by WB Yeats (1929): Oldest book he owns

**Maria Brothers, Shimla:** Favourite book shop

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## GETTING A GRIP

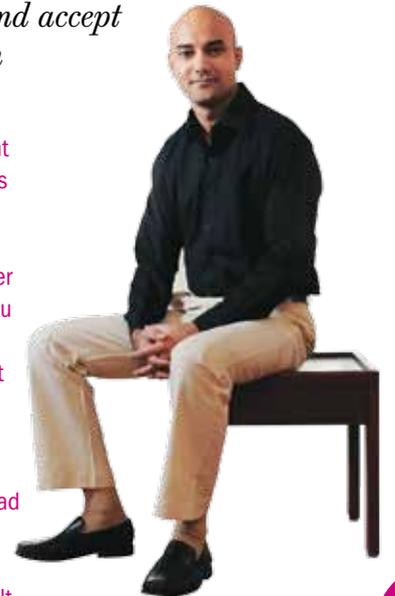
*Answers present themselves when we observe and accept a difficult situation*

Often, life will present dilemmas, problems that cannot be resolved with logic or numbers or any of the other concrete measures that you might usually turn to. In these situations, I find that answers usually present themselves when we can truly observe and accept the difficult situation instead of railing against it, or suppressing the problem. The key to resolving difficult situations is to ensure that you are not so caught up in the situation that you feel confused and powerless. To cut through the thicket of confusion, I recommend an approach based in mindfulness — witnessing rather than reacting.

So, when you find yourself ‘stuck’, try these four steps:

**Stop:** Stop thinking about the problem. Stop thinking of solutions. Don’t run away. No ‘I should have done this’ or ‘I could have done that’. Stop thinking about the circumstances that led to the situation. Look at the situation as an observer would.

**Observe:** See what is. Look at a situation — not to analyse but to understand, to witness, to observe. This is often the most difficult step of the SOAR (Stop, Observe, Accept, Repeat) technique



and it is essential that you practice it. In this step, you become mindfully aware of the situation — you are able to see the situation without minimising it or blowing it out of proportion.

**Accept:** As the great Reinhold Neibuhr said, “Accept what you can change and what you cannot, and have the wisdom to know the difference.” Acceptance releases the mental and creative energies needed to resolve a problem.

**Transform:** This is the easy part. Transformation — either of yourself or of the situation, but often both. It will occur as a consequence of steps 1, 2 and 3. Once you calm your anxieties, once you are able to see without fear, you will find solutions to the problem.

So there you have it. SOAR as necessary.

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