



entrepreneur of the month

Career Launcher has catapulted thousands of students up the ladder of success. And that makes it an impressive success story in itself. **Shinjini Ganguli** met Satya Narayanan R. the man who makes dreams come true

# Shaping Lives

**M**ore than a decade ago, a young Brand Manager quit his cushy job at a pharmaceutical company and decided to pursue his dual passion - Education and Entrepreneurship.

An MBA graduate from the Indian Institute of Management, Bengaluru, Satya Narayanan R. founded Career Launcher, and within a decade made it one of the most well-known education service providers in the country.

Launched in 1995, CL is now present in 130 locations across India, Middle East and the United States. CL ([www.careerlauncher.com](http://www.careerlauncher.com)) provides test-prep education to enable school and college students to gain admission in professional courses. It is also actively involved in the field of mainstream education, chiefly through its growing network of play schools and secondary schools.

#### **Let's begin at the beginning: how did Career Launcher originate?**

CL was born out of my need to explore some things on my own, outside the formal corporate structure.

The idea of bonding with youngsters, mentoring and coaching them towards their life goals is the single most motivating thing for me in my life. Remember, in those days education was not even a 'sector' that we use as a term. I merely plunged into something that I wanted to do, not caring if I were to pay a heavy price for doing it.

#### **What challenges did you face?**

There were infinite challenges. Nonetheless, the journey was exhilarating. Inavailability of funds,

human resource, no set models were all factors. Whether they were challenges or opportunities in disguise will remain a debate forever.

#### **Where do you see Career Launcher in the next 10 years?**

CL Educate has been around for 16 years now. In addition to its size and depth of experience in education, CL Educate ranks very high as an organisation that is on its way to becoming an institution. The core values, the management width and depth, the focus on growth through ethical leadership, anchored entirely in the future are some of the core strengths of CL Educate that I foresee standing it in good stead as the Indian education sector takes the centre stage of the economy.

Ten years from now, CL Educate would be among the most respected and widely diversified education corporates with successful sub-organisations running in K12 (Schools), Vocational, higher education and testprep domains.

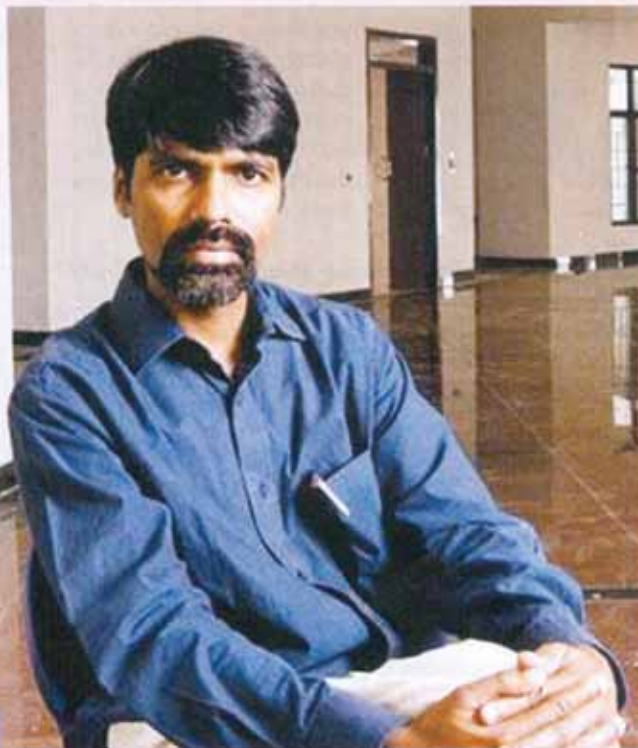
#### **How much did your management degree help in setting up the business?**

To begin with, it gave me the necessary theoretical foundation that is useful for appreciation of business. Secondly, there is a bit of halo around an IIM alumnus, so I did get that benefit of doubt. Beyond these two, it is all about one's ability to imagine and execute.

#### **What is the most difficult thing about being an entrepreneur?**

Entrepreneurship is today's form of a 'karmayogi'. You do 'nishkamakarma' without worrying about the results. In management language, the entrepreneur must be focussed on the process of delivery value to the society and the dividends come back in the form of success.

Entrepreneurship is about perspiration and not one-minute inspiration. There is nothing more difficult than enjoying the effort. One who does, makes it: always



### 3 Tips for aspiring entrepreneurs

**1** Start small and think big. It is never too early or never too late.

**2** Entrepreneurship is always an 'ekla chalo ray' mission, never a group mission among friends or partners. The best is to get started when you think you are ready or you have the passion to go unconditionally

**3** Entrepreneurship is a 42-year marathon. If you do not have the heart and guts to write off the first 1000-days of your life with no perks, no dividends, no money, no time to sleep, please do not even attempt it. If you have, what makes you wait ?!

Not many are endowed with the stamina, resilience, doggedness that entrepreneurship requires.

#### How did you make your customers believe in your brand?

Customers believe in our brand as much as they believe in the person who wears the CL badge in that center or school or college. We are a service industry. Our delivery assurance is reinforced every day. The academic competence, the education delivery (online

or in class), the customer experience, the empathy that we show in solving his/her problem—these are what make the brand believable and trustworthy.

#### What is your strategy against your competitors?

Focus on your customers. They take care of the competition.

#### How did you work out the model for Career Launcher?

I insisted on listening to our instincts and to those of the customer carefully. It is important to be guided by one's insights on where the future is headed, and not allow the past to hold you back. The model making is not a difficult job, but to get on to it and keep going in the face of challenges is the real deal.

#### How did you scale up Career Launcher to the level where it stands today?

I would attribute it to a healthy mix of focus on education and implementing new-era management structures, systems and processes. Too much of one would have ended up creating a skewed organisation.

And, even today I am constantly focussed on the need to do the next thing, so that CL remains a relevant and growing enterprise that reaps the benefits of the next generation of opportunities in India and abroad.