

Lessons in resilience

The book offers insights into building one's career

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When a book written by one of India's youngest women CEOs in finance lands up on your desk and it is titled *Limitless: The Power of Unlocking your True Potential*, you brace for a laborious read, expecting shades of Anthony Robbins' *Awaken the Giant Within*, Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* and Richard Bach's *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*.

But Radhika Gupta's book is a down-to-earth and easily digestible read. The book doesn't profess to unlock hidden secrets of your brain or advice all women on how to crack the code on work-life balance. Instead, the author, who is the MD and CEO of Edelweiss Mutual Fund, a former hedge fund manager and a McKinsey and Wharton alumna, draws on her personal experiences to offer pragmatic life lessons and insights to build one's career.

A refreshing aspect of this book, compared to usual biographies of corporate honchos, is Gupta's willingness to let us in on the career mis-steps and insecurities she's navigated, to get this far. The book kicks off with an exhortation to young folks to learn to take a 'no' gracefully. Gupta talks about how it was rejections that shaped her — whether it was brutal feedback from her first boss on her lacking emotional maturity or the fact that not even a single candidate turned up for her first set of recruitment interviews at Edelweiss, then a young brand.

She gives a brutally unvarnished account of how her disjointed neck, weight issues and thick Indian accent made her the butt of jokes at school and contributed to a very shy and introverted personality in her initial years. The story of how she overcame these imperfections by embracing them is both moving and inspirational.

Gupta tells newly-minted MBAs that

they shouldn't expect to 'fall in love' with their job or to discover a 'grand passion' for it. She notes that career success for most folk comes from surviving "prolonged periods of hell" at a mundane job. It is the willingness to persist with grunt work and not slick PPTs that hold the key to progress.

Interactions with icons

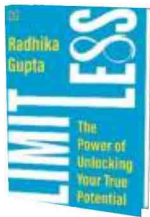
Given her relative youth, the author doesn't rely only on her own experiences to dole out insights. She draws on her interactions with the icons of Indian industry too. So, you get to read the story of the stoic and ever-smiling Anu Aga who had to take over the reins of Thermax and turn it around amid debilitating personal tragedy. Or about how Kalpen Parekh, CEO of DSP Mutual Fund, wasn't shy of attending a course at Flame University to equip himself to lead the investment side of the business.

While the book is engaging and can be read from cover to cover in a couple of sittings, two aspects to it felt somewhat forced. One was its efforts to draw parallels between life lessons and investing lessons.

It was a bit jarring to have the chapter on resilience segueing suddenly from the profound story of Anu Aga, to the importance of continuing one's SIPs in a choppy market. Ditto the analogy between not making your career decisions to win the approval of peers and the difficulty of generating alpha while benchmark-hugging.

As the author has been at pains to take a non-preachy tone, one felt the bombastic chapter headings in the book ('Kick the s**t out of rejection', 'Choose your sky, learn to fly') were too typical of the self-help genre and could have been toned down.

But this is nitpicking. By the time I was down to the last chapter, I was wishing that I could get my 22-year-old son, who's all set for campus placement this year, to read this book before he embarks on his career.



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Author: Radhika Gupta

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