Layman Lessons

from

Simple Tales and Fables

Time Management, Leadership, and Happiness
Tips in a Nutshell

LAYMAN SERIES

FOREWORD

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Stories are a dominant medium to teach and learn. Whenever we tell a story to kids, the last question is always, 'What is the moral of the story?' Most stories teach important lessons and we have been hearing many simple stories since childhood which appear to have no deep moral and just some straightforward values. Or do they?

The stories selected in this book are age old stories which I had heard during my childhood. I took some stories from Aesop's Fables and the others from Panchatantra. Authors of some of these stories are unknown.

The first thing I decided to abide by, even before starting to write a book, was to keep it short. So, this small book delves into such small simple stories and dig out some valuable lessons. This book doesn't follow any sequence. You can start anywhere. These are just thoughts of a simple layman so, there are no life changing secrets here either. However, the tips on time management, leadership, and happiness that I have derived from these stories may help you to rethink about your life path. Hope you find the maiden book in the **Layman Series** interesting.

This is my first book and I will appreciate if you, being a patient reader, excuse my mistakes. I will be happy to hear your suggestions and correct them.

TDK
Chennai
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Disclaimer

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Although the publisher and the author have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at the time of going to press, and while this publication is designed to provide accurate information in regard to the subject matter covered, the publisher and the author assume no responsibility for errors, inaccuracies, omissions, or any other inconsistencies herein and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

All the names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents in this book are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

In this book, I have tried to narrate my observations on the process of life. It is not meant to be a suggestion or advice. The book makes no claim of transforming your life. Every life is unique and no book can teach how to live life happily.

Following the advice/suggestions/observations in this book could completely transform your life. On the other hand, it may not change anything, and you could hurt yourself in the process. Ensure careful consideration before use.

Preface

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There are eighteen stories in this book. The origin of these stories are varied and have been picked up from the following sources:

- *Aesop's Fables or Aesopica*– A bulk of the stories in this book are from this age-old collection of fables credited to Aesop, a slave and storyteller who lived in ancient Greece between 620 and 564 BCE. The stories associated with his name have diverse origins and they descended to modern times through a number of channels have diverse. They continue to be reinterpreted in different verbal registers and in popular as well as artistic media. Although some scholars question whether he was an actual person, the moral-teaching tales credited with his name have withstood the passing of time and remain childhood favourites.
- *Perry's Index*–A widely used index of the *Aesop's Fables,* it was created by Ben Edwin Perry, a professor of classics at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Traditionally, *Aesop's Fables* were arranged alphabetically which is not helpful to the reader, so Perry listed them by language (first Greek then Latin), chronologically by source, and then alphabetically.
- *Panchatantra*– An ancient Indian collection of interrelated animal fables in Sanskrit verse and prose, arranged within a frame story. The earliest surviving work is dated to about 200 BCE, but the fables are

likely much more ancient. The text's author is unknown, but it has been attributed to Vishnu Sharma in some recensions and Vasubhaga in others, both of which may be fictitious pen names. Although the original author's or compiler's name is unknown, an Arabic translation from about 750 AD attributes the *Panchatantra* to a wise man called Bidpai, which translates into Sanskrit as 'court scholar'.

- *Pedarasi Peddama Kathalu* – *Pedarasi Peddama*means 'the poor old aunt'in Telegu and *Kathalu* means 'stories'. In Andhra Pradesh , during our childhood, these stories were very famous. At bedtime, during power cuts or rains, we children used to gather around and some *akka* (elder sister), auntor grandmother used to narrate these stories. Mostly, these were folk tales passed down orally. Some of these stories appeared in text books for primary children. The origin of these are not clearly known but these areassuredly quitee old. In these stories, the *peddama* is generally an old woman staying alone under a tree in the moon or running an inn and serving free food to the travellers. In all her roles, she is a great story teller, telling various moral stories to people around everyday.

Some of the stories in this book like, 'The Seven Fishes and Princes' are of unknown origin. These stories were very popular in our childhood, passed down from generations, and it was always a pleasure to listen to them even for a thousandth time. The purpose of this book is to establish connections between the modern self-help lessons and these seemingly simple, old stories. The book focuses on how simple stories have profound meaning and can be turned into lifestyle tips.

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Dedicated To
My Wife Aruna And My Brother Abhishek

1. The Seven Fishes and Princes

Once upon a time, there was a king who had seven sons. One day, the seven princes went out riding on seven horses. They did some fishing and each of the princes caught one fish and laid them out on the ground to dry. However, all but one fish dried. Now, the seven princes got worried. They wanted to know why that one fish didn't dry.
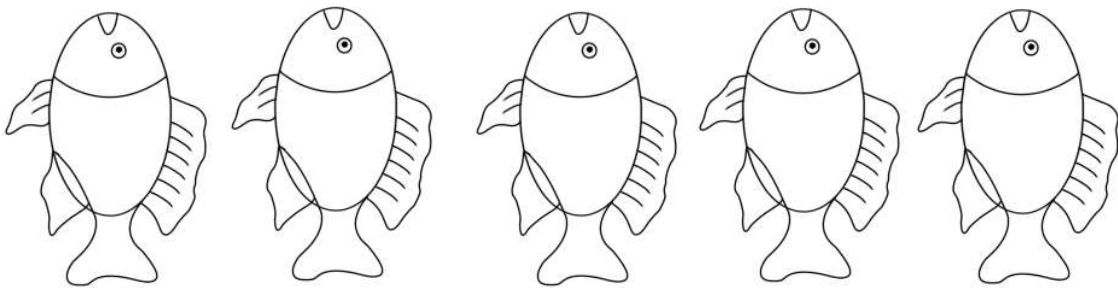
So, they asked the fish itself. 'Fish, why did you not dry?'

The fish replied, 'Dear princes, there is grass on the ground so I could not dry.'

The princes then asked the grass, 'Grass, why are you still on the ground?'

The grass replied, 'The cow did not eat me.'

The princes then went to the cow. 'Cow, why did you not eat the grass?'

The cow replied, 'The farmer did not feed me the grass.'

The princes then asked the farmer, 'Farmer, why did you not feed grass to the cow?'

The farmer replied, 'Because my mother did not feed me today.'

The princes then went and asked the farmer's mother, 'Mother, why did you not feed your son the farmer?'

The mother replied, 'My little baby was crying, so I didn't get to feed the farmer.'

The princes then asked the little baby, 'Why were you crying?'

The baby replied, 'The ant bit me.'

The princes found the ant and asked, 'Ant, why did you bite the baby?'

The ant replied, 'If the baby sticks her finger in my home, will I not bite her?'

The princes jumped in joy on hearing that as they agreed the ant was correct. So, they took their horses and rode back to their fort and lived happily. There ends the story.

This *was* the first story which I had heard in my childhood. Even today, if I have to tell a story to kids, this is the first one that strikes my mind. At first, this simple story seemed without any morals. It looked like it did not have anything to teach but as I narrated this story time and again, I could see something to learn. This is the story that

influenced me to start this book. What are the learnings that can be drawn from this seemingly simple story.

Layman Lessons

a. Delving deep into the problem to find a solution and the required inquisitiveness

One should dive deep into things to know why the problem occurred. Just skimming the surface of the problem wouldn't give solutions and can only give temporary solace at the maximum. Here the princes could have ignored why only one fish didn't dry or they would have stopped asking questions in the first or second step. Instead, they went on and were satisfied only after finding the actual cause of the problem of the fish not drying. Their inquisitive nature helped them to reach a plausible cause.

They did not refrain or back away from asking anyone in the process whether it was grass, animal, or even a baby. In terms of leadership skills, this shows that as a manager or supervisor, one shouldn't mind probing even the lowest in the hierarchy about a problem. A leader should consider everyone's suggestions. Many times, the problems which puzzle big minds are solved innovatively by the minds of freshers or amateurs.

For want of a nail the shoe is lost; for want of a shoe the horse is lost; for want of a horse the rider is lost.

I also recently read the above proverb and seems to be correlating well with the current story. The above proverb and the story highlights how ignoring small tell-

tale signs can result in major mishaps. The coming events cast their shadows before them. My experience says it pays to be extra cautious than being too casual.

b. Address parts of the problem directly, don't go by presumptions

Of course, one cannot ask a dead fish why it didn't dry! Instead, what I intend to demonstrate is that if one is part of the problem, then they also are a part of the solution. It is better to ask or address directly the person who is creating or causing the problem rather than going through indirect channels or presuming the response before asking. Direct questions can solve conflicts either in office or in personal relations more swiftly and easily. Direct communication helps in avoiding misunderstandings. In this story, the first thing that the princes did was to ask the fish in question directly, 'What is the problem? 'Thus, they could finally find the source rather than pondering and presuming on their own.

c. The 80/20 rule

Out of the seven, only one fish didn't dry. So, 85% succeeded and 15% failed. The story and maximum of the princes' efforts were focused on the failed 15%. It reminds me of the famous 80/20 rule.

Also known as the **Pareto Principle**, it states that for many outcomes, roughly 80% of consequences come from 20% of causes (the 'vital few'). Other names for this principle are the 80/20 rule, the law of the vital few, or the

principle of factor sparsity. When applied at a personal level, this rule suggests that 20 percent of your activities will account for 80 percent of your results. The Pareto Principle is a concept that suggests two out of ten items, on any general to-do list, will turn out to be worth more than the other eight items put together. The sad fact is that most people procrastinate on the top 10 or 20 percent of items that are the most valuable and important, the 'vital few,' and instead busy themselves with the least important 80 percent, the 'trivial many,' that contribute very little to their success.[1]

The Pareto principle seems to be a universal natural phenomenon. If one sees the wealth distribution, the vital few contribute the major portion of wealth. The principle also could be seen as applying to taxation. In the US, the top 20% of earners paid roughly 80–90% of federal income taxes in 2000 and 2006, and again in 2018.

The numbers 80 and 20 are not sacrosanct. The empirical law which seems to be inherent in the creation says that the vital few causes the bulk of the consequences or effects. There can be 99/1, 64/4, 80/1 laws as explained below.

The 99/1 law is where 1 % causes 99% consequences. For instance, in Internet culture, the 1% rule is a general rule of thumb pertaining to participation in an internet community, stating that only 1% of the users of a website

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[1] The 80 20 Rule Explained
https://www.briantracy.com/blog/personal-success/how-to-use-the-80-20-rule-pareto-principle/(Accessed on 1 Dec. 2022)

actively create new content, while the other 99% of the participants only lurk. It is just to say that there are vital few which contribute to the bulk of the results. Numbers are just indicators.

It follows that one also has 80% of that top 80% of effects coming from 20% of that top 20% of causes, and so on. Eighty percent of 80% is 64%; 20% of 20% is 4%, so this implies a '64/4' law; and similarly, can imply a '51.2/0.8' law.

Similarly, for the bottom 80% of causes and bottom 20% of effects, the bottom 80% of the bottom 80% only cause 20% of the remaining 20%. This is broadly in line with the world population or wealth table, where the bottom 60% of the people own 5.5% of the wealth, approximating to a 64/4 connection.

As per the global wealth report by Credit Suisse[2], 'We estimate that the bottom 50% of adults in the global wealth distribution together accounted for less than 1% of total global wealth at the end of 2020. In contrast, the richest decile (top 10% of adults) owns 82% of global wealth and the top percentile alone has nearly half (45%) of all household assets.'

The table below has been made based on this Credit Suisse report.

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[2] The Credit Suisse Group AG, 2021

Wealth Range	Wealth	Global Share (%)	Adult Population
Over $1M	$191.6 trillion	45.8%	Held by 1.1%
$100k-$1M	$163.9 trillion	39.1%	Held by 11.1%
$10k-$100k	$57.3 trillion	13.7%	Held by 32.8%
Less than $10k	$5.5 trillion	1.3%	Held by 55.0%
Total	**$418.3 trillion**	**100.0%**	**Held by 100.0%**

- Roughly half of the world's net wealth belongs to the top 1% (51.2/0.8 law).

- The top 10% of adults hold 82%, while the bottom 90% hold the remaining 18% of the world's total wealth (80/20 law).

- The top 13.2% of adults hold 85% of the wealth. (Similar to our fish story of 85/15.)

- The top 30% of adults hold 97% of the total wealth (80/20 law).

- The bottom 55% of the world adult population together hold 1.3 % of wealth (again 55/1 law).

So, apparently only 1% of the population becomes rich and famous. It seems an intrinsic natural phenomenon.

All the above data have a set of assumptions. Maybe the inequalities are easing out with the spread of education and technology. However, if you just ignore the numbers, it only says that the 'vital few' contribute the major chunk. If we can identify the vital few in our life and focus on them, life would be better.

Here are a few more examples of how the 80/20 is engrained in creation.

● If you see the solar system, only our earth has life i.e., 12.5% or one planet out of eight has all or 100% of life.

● 99% of the four billion species that have evolved on earth are now gone i.e., only 1% of the species are now left[3] (99/1 law).

● Roughly, 71% of earth is water and the rest 29% of it is land (70/30).

● Interestingly, as per the 2009 European Commission's Joint Research Centre map published in the World Bank's World Development report[4], 95% of the world's population lives on 10% of the land.

[3] Barnosky, A et al, Has the Earth's Sixth Mass Extinction Already Arrived? *Nature* 471, 51-57, (2011)
[4] World Development Report 2009: *Reshaping Economic Geography*

● The world's seven most populated countries constitute roughly 50% of the population occupying roughly 20% of the land (50/20 rule).

● In the English language, there are roughly more than a million total words (some say half a million words). Out of these, roughly 170,000 words (17 % to 34%) are in current use, and out of these in turn 20,000-30,000 words are used in day to day use (12%).

As with every other life changing path, the 80/20 rule also has another side to it. The 80/20 is not about being efficient. In our urge to be more efficient and while choosing the correct tasks giving more returns, we can become restless and unhappy. To apply the 80/20 law to our personal life, we have to delve deep and understand life better. If we feel that talking to our children, life partner or other family members is a waste of time, what do you think will ultimately happen? Your relationships will get strained and soon you will realise that you are becoming more and more unhappy.

The 80/20 law, in my understanding, is to identify those tasks which are neither life enhancing nor add any value to us or people surrounding us and eliminate them. In this way, we can have more time to spend on life enhancing tasks and on tasks which can enhance the life of others. In the professional arena also, we can identify the tasks which we are really good at (and do them) and delegate the others. It always pays to identify the time guzzlers in our life, tasks which eat maximum of our time and energy, leaving little time for the most important ones. We have to tame these time guzzlers. The foremost thing

we should understand is that we can't blame others for wasting our time. We have to own our time.

I suggest reading the book, *The 80/20 Principle* by Richard Koch for better insights on this principle.

d. Sometimes solutions lie outside the arena you are searching in

In the story, the princes listened to everyone – be it a fish, insect, or a kid. Sometimes the greatest suggestions come from unexpected quarters. This reminds me of the story related to the world's first outdoor glass lift. The story goes like this:

Once the crown jewel of downtown San Diego, the El Cortez Hotel was facing a problem with its single elevator. They wanted to install one more elevator. The discussions were all done and they decided to close the hotel for a few months, make holes in the ceilings, and thereby build the elevator. When the final discussions were going on among the engineers in the hotel regarding the plans to execute the work, the hotel janitor overheard them.

He approached them and asked, 'Are you going to close down the hotel to build the elevator?'

The engineers nodded derisively.

The janitor said, 'Why, that will result in loss of revenue to the management and impact the livelihood of people like me.'

The engineers asked, 'Do you have any alternate suggestion?'

The janitor wondered for a few seconds and said, 'Why don't you build the elevator outside the hotel and connect it?'

Even though the engineers initially discarded the idea, gradually they felt that it did make sense. Thus, the world's first outside glass elevator was added in the early 1950s to the El Cortez Hotel. Hailed as the first such elevator in the world, its design was later followed by the Fairmont in San Francisco and the Ilikai in Waikiki, Hawaii. The El Cortez elevator provided astonishing views of the city.

So, listen to all the people and in line with one of the three principles of natural justice stress on *audi alteram partem*. The maxim means 'hear the other side 'or 'hear both sides'. In other words, the authority hearing the matter must be afforded hearing to the party who is likely to be affected by its decision.

e. Problems can be caused by silly or small things

The princes couldn't have imagined that a small ant biting a little baby would cause one of their fish to not dry. As the world is a complex web of things, sometimes it is really difficult to understand the cause-effect relation.

For instance, your boss might have had a scuffle with his wife in the morning and due to that, he would have vented on you in the meeting. Or your subordinate might have been facing serious financial trouble, resulting in his underperformance that ended up affecting your team badly.

I am not saying that we are here to solve everyone's problems. The point is that someone's sudden reaction or unusual behaviour could have serious reasons. It is always good to take a step back, observe, and ask for the reasons when things settle down. The suggestion is to put yourself in another person's shoes, and think from their perspective. Empathy is a key to being a good leader. Poor performers should be reprimanded, but it should only be after knowing the reasons.

f. Lessen the ego

The princes displayed no ego related to their royal positions and mingled with all. That is the reason they could find the actual cause. If they had fired the cow or the farmer, for giving reasons that seemed like shifting the blame, they couldn't have found the actual cause. Ego creates a lot of hurdles in the development of an organization. Note that maintaining distance is different from ego.

In an organisation or in relationships, people should be encouraged to express their views freely. Only then can problems be solved effectively. Of course, there will always be someone who complains about everything, they need to be tackled smoothly or with tact. Excess ego creates barriers and false fears which furthermore infringe the free flow of information and will ultimately lead to a collapsing vortex. Let me narrate a small story to explain how we get blinded by the ego.

Once two goats were leaping playfully on the rocky steeps of a mountain valley when they chanced to meet each on the either sides of a deep chasm through which poured a mighty mountain torrent. The trunk of a fallen tree formed the only means of crossing the chasm, and on this, not even two squirrels could have passed each other in safety. The narrow path would have made the bravest tremble but not our goats. However, their pride would not permit either to stand aside for the other.

One goat set his foot on the log. The other did likewise. In the middle, they met horn to horn. Neither would give way, and so they both fell, to be swept away by the roaring torrent below.

g. Delegate tasks with caution

The princes took upon themselves to find out the reason behind the problem. They understood that it was a task better performed by them. They could have delegated the task to their assistants to find out the reason. Had they done it, the assistants would have returned in the first or second step.

Delegation of work is an important time management tool and we should use it liberally. However, we should delegate only those tasks which we need not do ourselves and are better performed by others. A delegation is a tool wherein we can use our time effectively in tasks which we can best handle and give away the tasks which can be performed with skill by others.