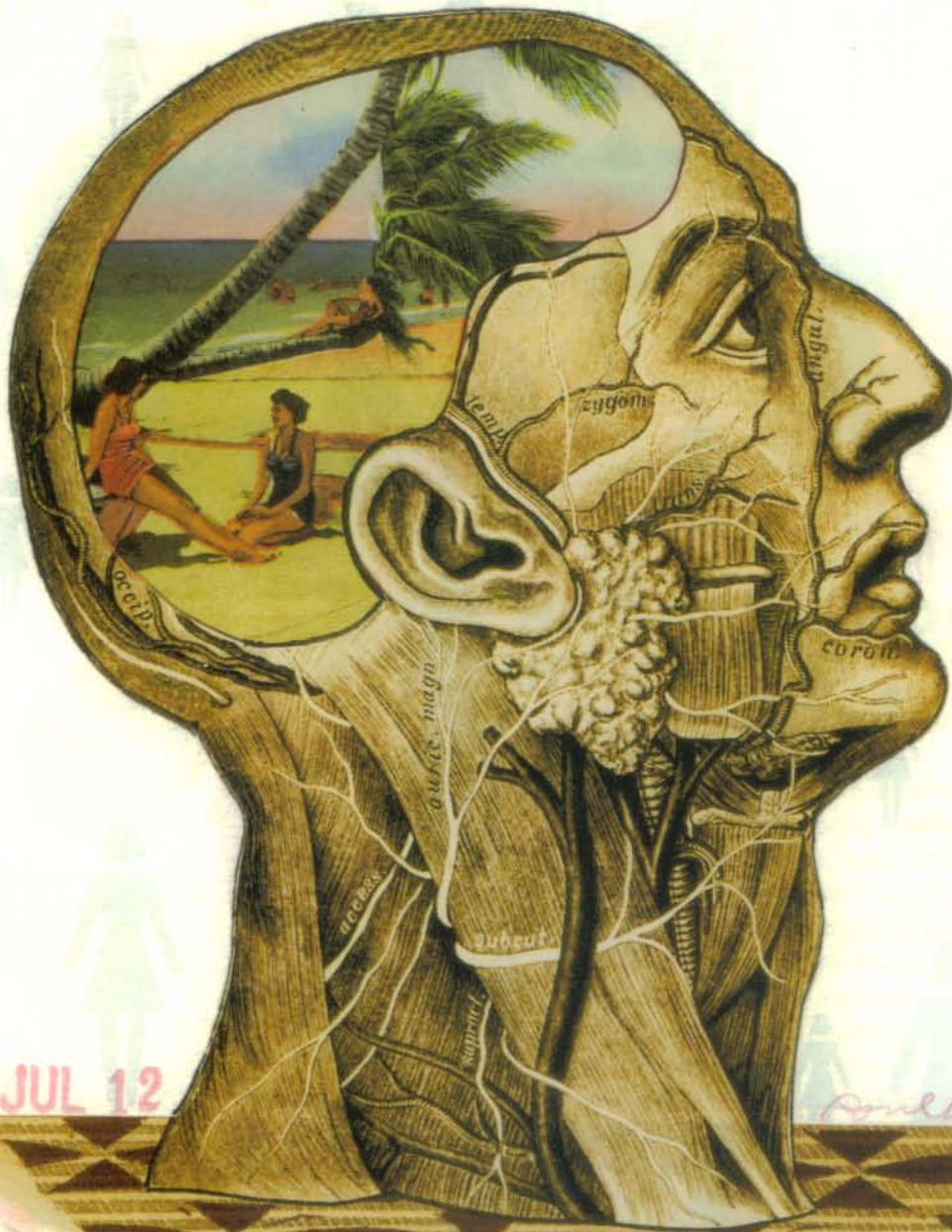


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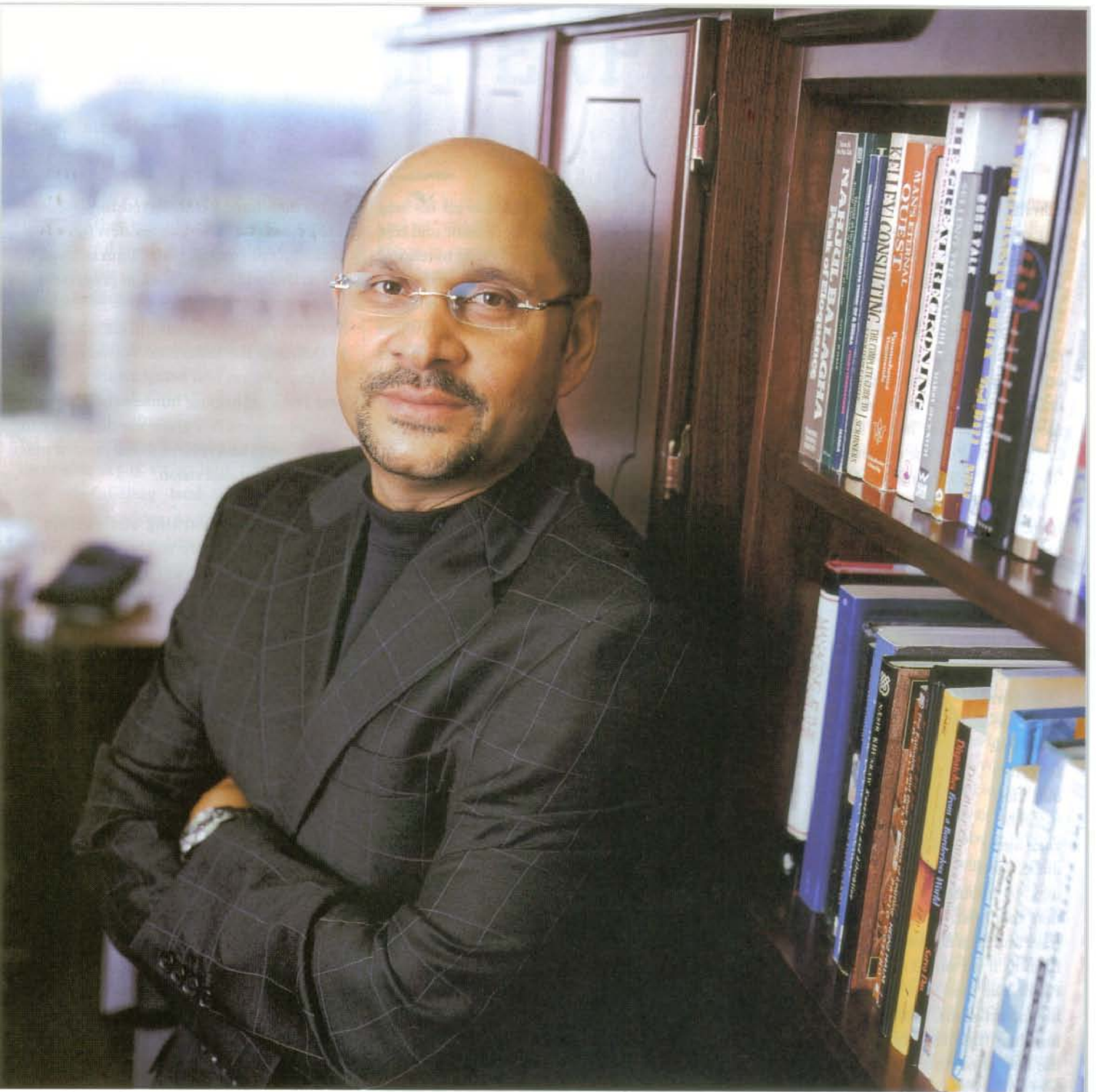
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day dream (dā/drēm'), 1. dreamy thought about pleasant things. 2. think dreamily about pleasant things. 3. pleasant plan or fancy, unlikely to come true.



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DO THE RIGHT THING NOW

By Sheila Reesor

THINK **BIG** LATER

WHENEVER AMBITIOUS STUDENTS approach Nizar J. Somji, he smiles. By age 17 they have it all planned. First, they'll complete an Engineering degree, then work for a couple of years before going to Harvard Business School for an MBA, then do a Ph.D. and run a four million dollar business. Somji asks, "What do you think I was thinking when I started?" They reply, "You planned to create a multi-million dollar company." "Far from it," he responds. "I started with ten guys having fun, doing consulting work, not thinking big."

Today, Somji is the founder, CEO, and past-president of *Matrikon Inc.*, an Edmonton-based world-class provider of web-based products and optimization services to leaders in everything from oil and gas, petrochemicals, cement, utilities, pulp and paper, automotives and heavy equipment, to discrete manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, and food and beverage processing. For over 15 years, their information technology solutions have helped manufacturers to operate more efficiently and profitably. With 525 team members, clients around the world and offices in Europe, Australia, the Middle East and across North America, Matrikon helps corporations to help themselves.

Starting out, Somji simply wanted to earn a living without working for someone else. After leaving home in Tanzania to complete his undergraduate degree in England, he came to Canada. He completed a Masters in Engineering in controls and automation at the University of Alberta, and worked for *DOW Chemicals*. Upon graduating, he moved to *NOVA Chemicals*, just east of Red Deer, but quickly grew bored. He wanted to consult, to do different jobs with a lot of different companies. So in 1988, he did just that.

The rest is history? Not quite. When Somji left *Nova*, he was confident – until his first contract was cancelled. For the first time in his life, he had four weeks off, during which he faced a number of stresses. He had just \$7,000, his wife worked part-time, and they had two children, aged two and four. It was an "interesting challenge." Several stable job offers did come up but, with his wife's support, he stood firm. He remained committed to his objective. Soon his courage and perseverance paid off. Contracts began rolling in and he started to build.

Things really took off when he won a contract with *IBM* in Houston, requiring him to put everything in storage, pack up the kids and move to Texas for nine months. The risk paid off, and the contract gave him the foundation he needed. They decided to settle in Edmonton. Soon there were 18 on staff and the rest is history.

After taking a bold leap – carrying the pressures of an uncertain future with two young mouths to feed, and slowly building – Somji has gained some wisdom. When asked what he would pass along, without hesitation he says, "The biggest problem today is easy access to debt. Debt is the worst thing to have. What makes you desperate is not that you have no food on the table. What makes you desperate is debt." He warns people not to allow their lifestyle to get too far ahead.

Somji credits his father for much of his success – his work ethic, his sense of commitment and drive, and his grounded approach to everything. There were no other mentors. Somji accumulated knowledge with each contract and learned from his mistakes. Over time he started reading more. Books served to simplify and validate his ideas.

Somji still loves to learn, and he thrives on the energy of the people and perpetual wash and spin at *Matrikon*. To strategize and battle challenges, that's his spice of life. "I've not had a day where I felt I did not want to go to work," he says. "I like to be stretched." With relish, he tells of a young man who said, "At *Matrikon*, I'm always in some state of discomfort. There is never a steady state of comfort!" Somji replied, "That steady state of comfort comes when you die! Life has got to evolve and change. If it doesn't change, you're dead."

Movement, change, courage, commitment, and learning are all discernible elements of Somji's vocabulary and behaviour. After *Matrikon* was honoured this year with a "Cool Companies" award, Somji's most important qualities for success were quoted as:

Having courage and commitment, never limiting yourself, determining your business style early, being progressive over time, starting with a technical degree, allowing entrepreneurial people to be entrepreneurial, and having fun.

Another he now adds is patience. "Young people today expect success to be immediate. The reality is that success is never immediate." He encourages everyone to look at things more pragmatically, to have a higher purpose and stick to it. "In my young days, I wanted things to happen today. I had to learn to be patient."

He then compares two of the wealthiest people in the world: Bill Gates and Warren Buffett. The former built something that created wealth, the latter became known for identifying investment companies that return a huge result. As Somji sees it, many people now believe in the Warren Buffett model, which makes it seem easy to invest in stocks, have them multiply and make you rich. The problem comes when people apply that to building a company. It doesn't work like that. "When you're building a company, you're building a career. You actually have to work, and you have to be patient. You are not going to make millions the first day."

Beyond promoting patience, Somji's key role today is to motivate, inspire, and be decisive. "When decisions need to be made, I need to make them quickly and effectively. If I'm doing these things, the company is growing." Aware that one wrong move affects the livelihood of over 500 people, he focuses instead on creating the environment and opportunity they

need in order to do more than they ever thought they could.

"What makes me proud is to see people develop, grow and achieve beyond their wildest expectations. I find a lot of comfort in that." Many who started with Somji now run significant parts of the business exceptionally well. "You can be ambitious for yourself, and that can result in a lot of personal success. Being ambitious for others, however, and helping them to achieve a certain level of success, brings you satisfaction and happiness."

For more information, visit www.matrikon.com

Sheila Reesor is a freelance writer and story editor. With a B.A. in Journalism/Film, a Master of Fine Arts in Film/Screenwriting, and extensive emergency first aid training, Sheila's work encompasses feature articles, technical & health writing, screenplays, short films, and she is currently completing her first book. All of her work is fueled by a fascination with the human struggle to grow through adversity, overcome, and succeed. She can be reached at sreesora@rogers.com