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NEXT STEP

WORKING WITH THE HUMAN MIND

In conversation with clinical psychologist Tarun Kanti Gayen

One of the founding members of drug-rehab centre CREA, Tarun Kanti Gayen has been serving as its Chief Executive since its inception in 1999. After getting his Master's in Psychology from the University of Dhaka, he started his professional career as a Drug Counselor. Besides his administrative role, Mr. Gayen does regular clinical work with drug users and clients with diverse mental health problems. In 2010, he earned an MS and M. Phil. in Clinical Psychology, and is currently an adjunct faculty to the Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Dhaka. He is also the acting General Secretary of Bangladesh Clinical Psychology Society (BCPS).

Did you grow up wanting to be a psychologist? Why psychology? Was there a moment in your life when you knew that was what you wanted to do, or did it just sort of happen?

No, not from the very beginning, at least not during my school days. Throughout my college years I dreamt of studying astrophysics. I was then an avid reader of science fiction and popular books on astronomy, physics, etc. And certainly at that period of my life, I was highly influenced by two persons at least – my eldest brother, now a scientist and Professor of Physics at an American university, and one of my teachers at Rangamati Govt. College, Prof. Hari Narayan Dutta, a passionate mathematician. However, later on in my college years at least two incidents might have triggered me to choose my career path in psychology. One was coming across a book written in Bangla on Freudian psychology, which had completely mesmerised me. The other was also a book, named Introduction to Psychology. It had big illustrations and vignettes that attracted me extremely to the discipline, and I decided to pursue the subject at the University of Dhaka.

I think it's a common misconception, but we tend to use the terms psychologist and psychiatrist synonymously. What's the difference?

A psychiatrist is first and foremost a medical doctor. She/he goes through higher training in psychiatry, the discipline which approaches mental health problems with medicines. On the other hand, a psychologist is someone who has had her/his education and higher training in psychology, the discipline which studies and intervenes in the cognition, emotion and behaviour of human beings with the aim of enhancing their efficacy or repair impairments. Psychologists do not prescribe medicine.

Please discuss your motivation and inspiration for creating CREA.



I started my career as a counsellor at a drug rehabilitation centre around 1990-91. I believe I enjoyed the job a lot and became quite popular among my clients. During my work I observed how much a drug user and his/her family suffers. I clearly found that the treatment approach that was being used at the facility could have been made more scientific and evidence-based. So, later on to serve the drug users better, three of my colleagues and I took an initiative to start CREA.

What is clinical psychology? How would you describe the field to someone who doesn't understand it?

A dictionary definition of clinical psychology is somewhat like this: the branch of psychology concerned with the assessment and treatment of mental illness and disability.

How do you distract yourself from stress? Music? Hobbies? What works best for you?

Exercise, meditation, reading books and certainly music work best for me.

What influenced you to take up teaching, especially since you are already running a successful organisation and are involved in psychological associations?

I took it up out of my own interest. To tell you frankly, it is teaching through which you can learn your discipline thoroughly. Because when you stand in front of your students you cannot do it half-prepared. Teaching is helping me become theoretically thorough in Clinical Psychology. Besides, I have another hidden drive – to influence young minds to become inquisitive and thoughtful about human sufferings.

What research work have you been involved in?

So far my research experience has revolved around complex behaviours of the drug users and their relapse issues. I have also done research on issues like burn-out problems of psychology professionals, mental health and coping style of the doctors working at Burn Unit at DMCH, experience and coping with first menstrual cycle among teenage girls, etc. My current interest is in understanding the fragility of the human 'self.'

What's the most challenging issue you face in your profession?

To create quality service within peoples' purchasing capacity.

What do you think should be the top three personality traits for being a successful Chief Executive?

Not to bypass but face problems squarely; to gain the trust of your employees; and to study and keep up with the changing world.

INTERVIEWED BY: AMIYA HALDER

WATER COOLER CHRONICLES

FRIDAY CHILLIN'

There's advice on the internet for absolutely every single thing you can think of. You've probably also been in the shoes of an advisor more than once in your life (as hard as it is to believe someone would actually take advice from a train wreck such as yourself.) Truth be told, we love giving advice and/or reading about it, but a lot of the time, we hardly ever apply it to ourselves (unless you're one of those YouTube gurus who are pretty, smart, rich, successful, talented, and basically have it all figured out.) So for the rest 99 percent, we can only hope that one or two things out of the endless lists of advice on Buzzfeed, Entrepreneur, and of course Next Step, stick with us. Rants aside, here's what I like to do best to on the first day of the weekend to turn off my brain that's been on autopilot all week.

To cool down

Sleep in, and have a late brunch (preferably at that chic new bakery-bistro in Banani that comes with a smoking zone and Wi-Fi, and makes you feel all grown-up and fashionable.) Do your brain a favour after a week of excess (i.e., days of junk food at the office canteen), and pick the tomato and cabbage salad over the white-bread grilled cheese, the nuts and dark chocolate bar



over the plain milk chocolate, or the pan-fried salmon over the medium-rare sirloin – none of those gray matter-killers for you!

Take a long hot bath, take off the two-week old chipped stained nail polish, bring out the clay facial mask, do some hot oil therapy with at least three different kinds of oil, and moisturise all over until you feel like a two-month old baby. And yes, this one's for the ladies and the germs: get rid of that prepubescent stubble forming on your upper lip, it's doing you no favours.

Buy yourself that new book you've been meaning to get to – in addition to being absolutely mind-blowing it probably smells like wet grass and vanilla and everything nice; or those adorable black pumps you just gotta have – no one can spoil you better than yourself. Get back to friends and relations, at least the ones that matter – you'd be surprised how good it can actually feel to just sit down and gossip about your common frenemies. Get your significant other to give you a back-rub, and maybe, just maybe return the favour. If you don't have one, get one of the multiple small children running around the house to totter all over your back. Free massage, ah!

Saturday is not an extension of Friday

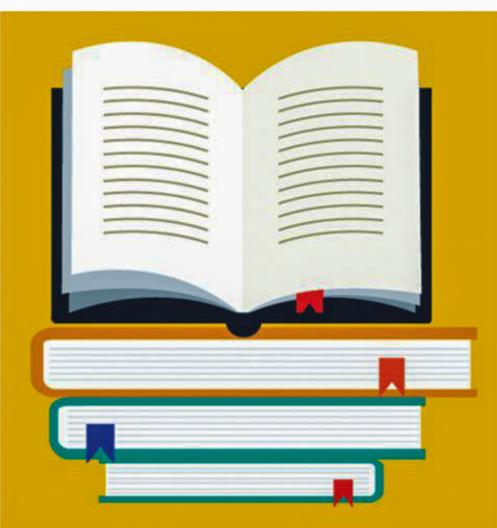
While we've all been told sleep is the best medicine in every other self-help column we've ever read, it's best to not take it to heart. How much are you supposed to sleep? What if you slow down and can't get back into your groove on Saturday, and then wake up late for work on Sunday? Personally, sleep has been a great adversary of mine – toying with my sense of duty and everything it means to be an adult. As the proverbial saying goes, you snooze you lose. So this Friday, pamper yourself with a few extra hours, but come Saturday you better have some sort of a game plan figured out. Remember, Saturday is Sunday Funday for folks on this side of the globe. You already got your beauty sleep and late brunch yesterday. Don't miss out on the one entire other day you get all to yourself before you have to say goodbye to the things you love and make way for that enormous pile of virtual documents you have to work through.

So next week we'll talk about revving up and making the most out of Saturday, because frankly there's not enough column space (and we like to take things slow.) You should also have a few ideas by now about how exactly you'd like to unwind today. It's time to love that overworked body of yours that surprisingly hasn't blown a fuse. Yet.

AMIYA HALDER

Heads up for the budding shrink

Where to go, what to study, and what to look forward to



GETTING YOUR BACHELOR'S

Public universities offer Psychology as a major nowadays in Bangladesh. Out of these, the programs at the University of Dhaka and Jagannath University particularly stand out. However, many major private universities are lagging behind. This does make it difficult for a lot of students to get into quality courses in the country. However, if you've set your sights on applying outside, then colleges in the States, the UK, Canada and Australia are all feasible options after you've weighed out where exactly you'd like to study, how much you're willing to spend on your undergraduate program, and completing standard testing such as IELTS or SATs. If you do plan on working outside Bangladesh or pursuing your Master's elsewhere, it is important to also complete research work or an internship to back up your undergraduate education. If you wish to study outside after your Bachelor's make sure to once again pursue the relevant testing, i.e., IELTS or GED according to the nation you're applying to.

AMIYA HALDER

MASTER'S AND BEYOND

Students in the Bachelor's program can complete their Master's in Clinical, Counselling, Educational or Organisational psychology tracks. These subjects are now available at the University of Dhaka and Jagannath University. Students can alternatively do their Master's in Psychology as well (no subfield) and then pursue their higher studies abroad in any of the subfields of psychology. If you were finishing your Master's in Psychology in 2015, your next step would be to get enrolled in any program in these tracks at home or abroad.



ANNUAL SALARIES WORLDWIDE

According to Tarun Kanti Gayen, clinical psychologist and Chief Executive of CREA, Bangladesh has been advancing in psychological research and intervention. With new positions in organisational/industrial psychology with the growth of corporate culture, and wider awareness of mental illnesses, the demand for psychologists in Bangladesh is greater than ever. While counselling, for example for drug abusers, has been a heard-of career track for a couple of decades now, educational psychology is making its big break in recent years. Let's look at the highest paying salaries for psychologists worldwide.

