

AN ANCHORAGE FOR STRANGERS: THE 8ONE STORY

THE
F.A.I.R.
PROJECT

AN ANCHORAGE FOR STRANGERS:
THE 8ONE STORY

RAMIT SINGH CHIMNI

On behalf of The F.A.I.R. Team

JUNE 2020



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

In partnership with
New Delhi Office

CONTENTS

AN ANCHORAGE FOR STRANGERS: THE 8ONE STORY	1
April 1996 – Vasant Kunj, New Delhi	1
Strangers Helping Strangers	1
THE FOUNDATION OF 8ONE	2
Vision	2
THE FIRST FOUR GOALS: A FRAMEWORK FOR A BETTER WORLD	2
Well-being	3
Gender Equality.....	3
Peace.....	3
Environment	3
THE LAST FOUR GOALS: FORTIFY AND EFFECTUATE	4
Hygiene and Nutrition	4
Education and Employment.....	4
LINEAR, PARALLEL YET INTERCONNECTED	5
Young Legends’ League.....	5
EIGHT GOALS ONE FOUNDATION.....	5

AN ANCHORAGE FOR STRANGERS: THE 8ONE STORY

April 1996 – Vasant Kunj, New Delhi

My co-founder Varun Achreja and I go back to the day when we were both interviewing for a plush new school that had opened up bang in the middle of where both of us stayed. The school was India's first fully air-conditioned public school that had opened up to serve the ultra-rich of India's capital city. Notably, neither of us belonged to the super rich strata, although our parents never made us feel otherwise.

That day, our mothers bonded over the things that mothers bond over, which of course led to the both of us exchanging pleasantries that 10-year olds exchange. Varun went into the Principal's office for his interview before me. When he came out, he instinctively repeated the entire interview and questions to me, someone who he had just met a few minutes back. I went in next, and except for one, I was able to answer all the questions I was asked, correctly and without flinching, or so I remember. What I do remember vividly though, is the question that I got wrong. As that is the question that got both Varun and I admitted into the school.

The Principal acknowledged that Varun made it because of the confidence with which he answered that question and I made it because of the audacity with which I defended an answer given to me by a stranger, despite knowing that the answer, in all probability, was wrong. Which it was.

This story does not bode well with either The F.A.I.R. Project or the principles espoused by our Foundation. However, this story does seem apt to avouch the similarities and differences between Varun and me, which eventually led to the foundation of 8one.

Strangers Helping Strangers

Varun has always been an individual who could connect with people in insanely short amounts of time and become 'friends' almost instantly, to the extent of lending a helping hand in all situations irrespective of whether they had been friends for a day or a decade. This led him to perhaps being the most well-liked individual in the history of our school, where till today, students who were in the first or second grade when we graduated still fondly remember him as "Achi Bhai".

I, on the other hand was much more at ease by myself. However, when it came to supporting anyone, especially, and in fact more so, strangers, I'd always put my neck on the line. This perhaps explains why I became an effective advocate for students' rights throughout our schooling, irrespective of whether I knew who I was defending or not. From then, till the time that we founded 8one, I continued on my path to help strangers, working with farmers and labourers in Uttar Pradesh, almost all of whom I did not know the name or face of. Varun went on to make the North-East of India his home, where almost everyone associated with his endeavours of working with the youth through sport knew him or knew of him, while he, knew everyone.

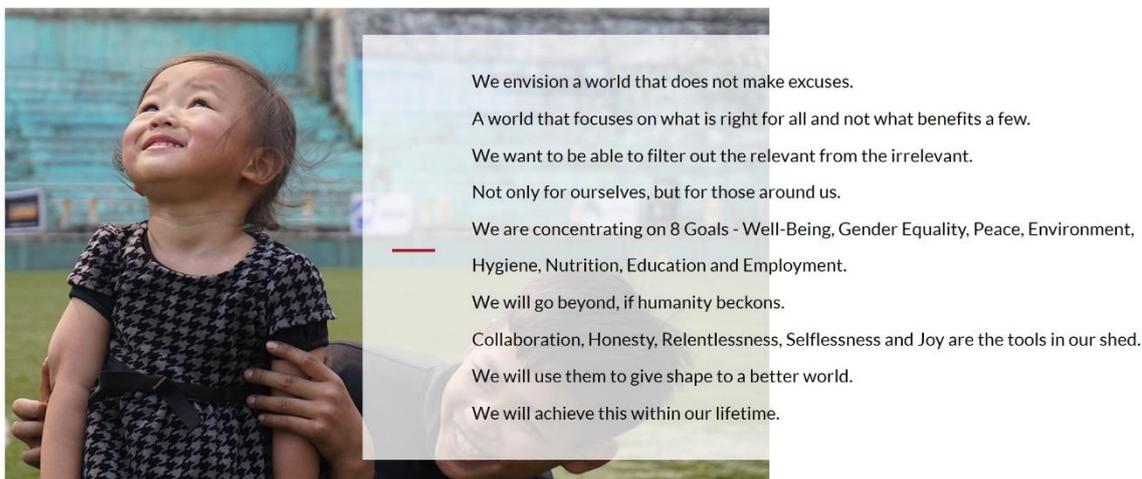
What has always tied us together though, is the inherent desire to lend a helping hand and the responsibility that comes with that desire. We are told that it also perhaps personifies our belief that people, in spite of being apparent opposites, can all contribute to making their lives and the lives of others around them better, as long as their heads are in the right place.

By the time we reached 2017, which is when 8one was founded, both of us had become adequately adept at balancing our requirements to generate funds for our respective businesses, building a team with like-minded people, and being true to our inherent trait of lending a hand where it was needed. By now, Varun had amassed years of understanding the true meaning of community, and I had learnt, in little less than a decade, that the biggest challenge facing society today is truly understanding the meaning of society.

THE FOUNDATION OF 8ONE

Vision

The simplicity of 8one's vision has been captured succinctly and, if you could hear my voice as I am typing this, quite lyrically, in the sentences that we repeat quite often at the Foundation:



While everything in the vision was almost instantaneously recorded, the part of it that took longer was to identify the goals that we wanted to work on to achieve this vision and, needless to say, the name which emerged from identifying these specific 8 goals. The goals and the consequent name were a result of many sleepless nights, debating the aptness of potential goals and how they would tie in to make this world a better and fairer place.

The Long and the Short of the 8 Goals

Our goals are a personification of the recognition that each individual who wants to make this world a better and fairer place has their own unique path that they tread on irrespective of their goal being the same, just like Varun and I, prior to the founding of 8one.

As long as your path does not cause harm, its distinction from someone else's path does not take away from either effort. On the contrary, the fact that different people could have different reasons why they walk towards a destination and the route that they take, is what ensures that more and more people, knowingly or unknowingly, play their part in the destination revealing itself to be real and within reach.

The 8 goals work similarly, with any initiative invariably containing elements of more than one goal and therefore giving individuals different reasons to associate themselves with it.

The short answer as to why we chose these 8 goals is simply that within them, they encompass the building blocks of a stable and content world, while at the same time, catering for evolution at each stage of the journey.

The longer answer is what follows if you are so inclined.

THE FIRST FOUR GOALS: A FRAMEWORK FOR A BETTER WORLD

The 8 goals that we have chosen can be looked at as linear or parallel at the same time, but always with interconnected synergies, irrespective of the way that you choose to look at them.

Let me begin with our first four goals, which are Well-being, Gender Equality, Peace and Environment, and then we will move on to the next four which are Hygiene & Nutrition, and finally Education & Employment.

Well-being

At the outset, it is extremely important to understand and recognise that any initiative that is undertaken from the goodness of one's heart will always be geared towards the achievement of well-being, whether it is at an individual level or for collectives like families, communities, institutions, countries or our planet as a whole.

Therefore, to understand what Well-being really means becomes crucial in creating a scale of conscience through which all other initiatives can be measured, and decisions be taken. Of course, the individual is at the centre of any discussion around Well-being and therefore, those who do not understand what it means for themselves can rarely play their part in achieving it for others.

Gender Equality

Once we understand Well-being for ourselves, and for the collectives that we are a part of, it starts to become clear that in our world today not all humans are treated equal. If we are to proceed with the rest of our goals, as well as any initiative that seeks to do well for our world, it is crucial to recognise this inequality, and thereafter, ensure that our efforts pay heed to this reality.

For us, it was important to identify the core of the very thought of inequality. We put our minds to try and understand where the feeling of treating one as unequal emanates from. Eventually, we arrived at gender being the one distinction that leads to discrimination across all sections of the society, transcending geographical, political, cultural and communal boundaries. Inequalities based on race, religion, economic conditions, caste, region, ideologies, all exist, but none of them exist across the globe, without exception and in the omnipresent manner that gender discrimination does.

Tackling gender inequality also provides for a global opportunity to teach lessons of equality to individuals, and train their mind in a manner where any form of discrimination can then be combatted using the same mindset changes used towards creating gender neutrality. At the end of the day, inequality magnifies differences, differences give rise to conflict and conflict is the antithesis of a peaceful existence.

Peace

The understanding of a peaceful existence as one of the consequences of equality, led us down the path of trying to understand what peace really means. In common parlance, and unfortunately, as part of one of the most widely reported realities of our world, peace is mostly used as the antonym of war.

This attribution overshadows what is already otherwise a highly neglected aim of human existence, to live in harmony with each other, both with the animate and the inanimate, and therefore to live peacefully. Our aim under this goal is to try and reclaim the meaning of peace and realign our understanding of how it can be achieved.

Environment

Once we have understood the art of being well, achieved the mindset that shuns discrimination and promotes equality, and have reinterpreted Peace for ourselves and those around us, it became important for us to address the animate and the inanimate that we spoke of in the previous paragraph in more detail and with equal focus.

Our world, and the environment thereof, is more than merely a collection of resources made available to us to serve our exponentially growing needs, an understanding which for centuries has eluded humanity. In 2020, it is unfortunate that we still have not understood the fact that the resources provided to us are finite and the lack of cohesion with which we interact with our environment is not sustainable.

For something that provides us with the building blocks of life, the disdain with which we treat our environment is a direct consequence of the mindset that develops in us due to the lack of Well-being, Equality and Peace in our lives.

THE LAST FOUR GOALS: FORTIFY AND EFFECTUATE

The first four goals provide a framework for all of us towards achieving a better and fairer world and help to mark out objective identifiers of what such a world should look like.

The next four goals provide a more concerted approach towards, first, preparing ourselves for affecting the requisite change through Hygiene and Nutrition, and thereafter, to share our learnings and consequent skill sets towards the same end through Education and Employment.

Hygiene and Nutrition

When an individual embarks upon a journey that is difficult and strenuous, the biggest casualty thereof is invariably their attention to themselves and what otherwise would be their habitual actions. Consequently, we end up weakening ourselves both directly and indirectly at a time where we need ourselves to be at our strongest.

While for many, the choice of living a hygienic and nutritious life is non-existent because our world today is not one which has our first four goals as its pillars, for others who are more fortunate, the previous paragraph usually holds true.

On one hand, Hygiene stands to protect us from material harm from the external environment, and on the other, Nutrition reinforces the strength of our physical and mental immunity. Together, they are personal goals that focus on our interactions with the external world and through it, ensure balance between the external world and our internal anatomy.

As a collective, our actions towards leading a hygienic life directly impacts the ability of others around us to do so as well, while our understanding of Nutrition also impacts how we view it for others.

Education and Employment

With our final two goals, we seek to yet again re-imagine the way the world currently looks at them. education today is considered to be the pre-requisite for employment and therefore, conversely, employment becomes the end objective of education. Similarly, employment is viewed as a means to fulfill our material needs, where the word 'needs' has been convoluted to include a lot more than what it 'needs' to.

For us, Education is beyond the qualifications that one requires to be eligible for a job. It is a much larger construct which encompasses both the assimilation of knowledge, as well as its dissemination. It is relevant for all of our goals till now, to ensure that they are better understood by all of us, better researched and better explained to those around us, both young and old.

Employment is not merely a means to earn tradable currency, it is any action that is undertaken in furtherance of our responsibilities towards ourselves and the collectives that we are a part of. It is the 'what we do' and 'how we do it' of keeping our world well, equal, peaceful in an all-encompassing manner while at the same time ensuring the Hygiene and Nutrition that allows us to do what we have to.

Together, both Education and Employment take the first six goals and put them in action in order to ensure that there is structure and focus towards their achievement.

Thus, simply stated, the goals of Education and Employment are choosing to, learning to, and continuing to contribute to making the world a better place.

LINEAR, PARALLEL YET INTERCONNECTED

Having spent a majority of this piece of writing on penning down the reasons why our goals appear in the order that they do, and spending acres of space on trying to bring out the logical order in which they are placed, it is my duty to quell any misconceptions that I may have been the cause of creating.

These goals cannot be pigeonholed in any one manner and will always bear different meaning to different people. So while some may consider them to be linear, others may recognise the individual importance of each and every one of them along with the various connotations that are attached to them, well beyond what I have written about in this piece.

At 8one, we recognise all of these various lenses through which they can be looked at and welcome them with the underlying understanding that all of them are interconnected in myriads of ways, many of which are yet to be explored by us.

Perhaps a bird's eye view of the very first venture that we undertook with 8one will help in showcasing how beautifully interwoven the goals are, and how they manifest.

Young Legends' League

Varun's time in the North-East gave us the opportunity to expand his work with the youth and create the Young Legends' League (YLL) which went on to become India's first structured, season long football league for 6-13-year olds.

Admittedly, it is a recognition that we are not proud of. We would have hoped that there would have already been many more of such leagues operational across the country, especially given the tremendous potential they hold for impacting our society.

What appeared to many to be a sporting program geared primarily towards Well-being has served a much larger purpose for us, as well as the people of Champhai, Mizoram and Bishnupur, Manipur. The YLL is a mixed gender league where girls not only play with the boys, but also compete for individual honours, as well as team pride, together with them. It allows us to work towards all of our goals through employing coordinators, promoting healthy eating, hygienic living, life lessons, the importance of clean surroundings, as well as keeping the children away from substance abuse. Of course, the impact of playing sport on their physical and mental health is also an added benefit, even though to others, it may seem to be the primary one.

EIGHT GOALS ONE FOUNDATION

We were over the moon when the Registrar of Companies approved our name, Eight Goals One Foundation, as it is more than just our legal name. It also embodies the essence of the Foundation where although we have 8 distinct goals, all of them come together to lay a singular foundation, upon which we can build a better and fairer world.

For us, these goals, the approach we use for them, and their scope, will be ever evolving. This is what allows everyone who is a part of 8one today to be motivated towards each and every initiative that we undertake by finding our own meaning behind them.

Everyone at 8one has this thought process internalised. We truly believe that there is no hierarchy between these goals and therefore, there is no hierarchy in the type of work that we undertake, and there is definitely no hierarchy amongst those of us who are associated with 8one. No initiative is too small and all initiatives serve a purpose. For us, deciding upon what initiative we undertake next is simply a question of whether that initiative will help in any way whatsoever, or not.

At 8one, I believe Varun and I, with the help of all those around us, have been able to recreate an organisation-size version of our time at school – strangers, who respect each other's approach

despite their differences and use their ability to help people, simply because they want to, and they can.