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Leading Inside and Out

An interview with Faisal Hoque, serial entrepreneur and author of Everything Connects

One conversation with Faisal Hoque and you understand why his new book is powerful — and difficult to categorize.

The serial entrepreneur and self-described “devoted student of life, entrepreneurship and humanity” draws on his own journey, current knowledge and timeless practices in the just-released [*Everything Connects: How to Transform and Lead in the Age of Creativity, Innovation and Sustainability*](#).

The book (written with *Fast Company* contributing writer Drake Baer) is both practical and philosophical, and the two are not at odds, Hoque argues. In fact, both are essential for effective leadership. Value creation — the underpinning of organizational success — is “a continuous conversation between inside and outside. As individuals and organizations, we need to devotedly cultivate resources in ourselves.”

With a background in software development, Hoque worked at Pitney-Bowes and Dun and Bradstreet before starting his first company. He also worked for GE. His current venture is SHADOKA, a portfolio of several companies aimed to help companies and individuals lead sustainable growth. Hoque regularly reflects on business, leadership and life as a contributor to *Fast Company* and *The Huffington Post*.

Below, an edited version of our conversation.

CCL: You’ve written several books; how is this one different?

Hoque: *Everything Connects* is tied to my experience. I wrote it as art, rather than in the style of a classic management book. It’s backed up by research and intellectually grounded, but I hope it will connect with people, with their heart and soul.

CCL: *Everything Connects* weaves together current knowledge in areas of business, leadership, personal development, and neuroscience, as well as lessons from philosophy and history. Why this approach?

Hoque: These subjects have been studied and taught and talked about in silos. Rather than reinventing something, my attempt was to figure out how we connect these dots. And, as I grow older, I gravitate towards older, philosophical things. Why should we just learn and understand based on current thinking? Why not go back a couple hundred years and learn and connect to what is going on today?

CCL: Your book is written in three parts, or three steps. Give us an overview.

Each month the Premium subscribers of *Leading Effectively* have access to an interview with a thought leader, author or expert. Through these interviews, we offer different perspectives on topics related to leadership. Featured in the February 2014 issue was author Faisal Hoque.



Hoque: To begin, I make the assumption that we all have leadership potential, and we all have the potential to succeed. Second, I assume that measure of success should be uniquely defined by you — not by comparison to others. So, the book is written for people with aspiration, and that aspiration is defined by them.

To define that aspiration, first you need to understand who you are — that is Part One. How do you figure out who you are, and how do you grasp that aspiration? There's no formula; it's your own journey.

Now that you've defined who you are and you know what you want to do, you have to go out there and "rally" people behind you. That could be within your organization, a global audience, or a new venture. Part Two is about how you do this. How do you connect with others and organize around your authentic self?

Part Three is how to create value. Is the value in a new invention? A new dish? A new business? And then how do you make the value sustainable so that it lives beyond you?

As a whole, the book is about the interconnection between inside and outside, and how we devote ourselves to this work.

CCL: In your personal journey, how did you experience "everything connects" — was it a gradual thing or flash of insight? How did this formulate for you?

Hoque: I would not say it was a flash of insight! It has definitely been a gradual process.

I almost have to go back through my entire career history, what I did and what I learned. I'm originally from Bangladesh; I came to the U.S. when I was 17 years old and had a pretty shaky start. But I survived, went to college, and worked for several major companies before I started my first company, a B2B software firm. And we did extremely well. I ended up raising ungodly amounts of money from venture capitalists.

By age 26 or 27, I'd seen the crazy obnoxious leadership and management styles. I was also — to be honest — an arrogant, obnoxious know-it-all myself.

Within a couple years, the VCs took over the company, fired me as CEO, and ran the firm into the ground. I've started several other companies since then; I began writing about management, efficiency and innovation.

I delved into Eastern philosophy, and it completely changed my outlook. I am able to look inside and ask, what is it that makes me happy? Is the stuff that I'm doing really making me happy? More and more, I like doing authentic stuff, whether it makes money, or not. I focus on people impact — rather than financial impact — and money becomes a by-product of that.

So, I've been going through these transitions and have been asking big questions. Why are you doing all this work anyway? How do you become a leader? How do your personal values affect the organization?

CCL: What's been most surprising to you as you've worked on the book and started to speak and write and publicize it?

Hoque: One thing is how hungry people are for inspiration. Every single one of us needs it; without inspiration, nothing moves; but I've been surprised by how consistently people look for it.