



FOCUS ON PROCESS; OUTCOMES WILL FOLLOW

Vijay Nallawalla is from Mumbai. Vijay is the Founder of Bipolar India, an online community that is growing steadily. He says he has a mind of a 14-year-old with the body of a 60-year-old trying to keep pace. Vijay's online community has over 750 members. He hopes to open an office soon.



Vijay is a commerce graduate. After many years in service, he decided to take up something he loved. He started writing. His blog was successful. But more importantly, it was the seed for his book

"A Bipolar's Journey." [Partridge: 2015]. His writings also led to the formation of Bipolar India.

Vijay feels his affliction had roots in his childhood, both Nature and nurture. From the natural side, genetics played a role. On the nurture side, his parents separated when he was five.

His early memories with his dad are not pleasant. He recollects instances of abuse. Besides, seeing his mother go through terrible times affected him deeply. As a result, Vijay felt his approach to life was angry and bitter.

Life's challenges then began to manifest as health issues. At age 13, he had his first asthma attack. Initially, it was minor, but the seizures kept ballooning until they became life-threatening.

"My approach to life was negative," he says. On the other hand, his sister, who had gone through similar circumstances, chose to roll with the punches. "My sister owned up to her responsibility. In contrast, I felt and chose to be like a victim. I used my distress as a reason to shirk responsibility."

Of his school days, Vijay says. "I was an introvert to the extent of shyness. Eccentric. Lost in my thoughts. Not mingling." Besides, he was bullied by his schoolmates. Vijay told his family; his asthma did not permit commuting to avoid the bullying. As a result, Vijay studied from home. Nonetheless, he cleared his boards.

But that was the start of a depressive phase. Of course, it was not severe compared to later, but Vijay guesses that age 14 was the first time he had trouble.

He experienced neurosis as strange things, a disconnection from reality, and felt paranoid delusions. He had not heard of such things then. Looking back, he acknowledges, the commoner had zero exposure and learning on such manifestations.

Of course, the family, too, did not understand. Instead, they ascribed his behaviour to adolescence and the resultant hormonal changes. So, the basic problem got hijacked by their attempt to fix 'growing pains' instead.

"I was a very poor communicator of my problems. For anyone to attempt assistance,

it should be described first. Otherwise, people can only take wild guesses."

During his first year in degree courses, he had severe episodes. However, he kept it concealed. Paranoia did not disrupt Life as one would normally assume. He kept to himself his perceptions of people laughing at him and that of their being judgemental. He now sees it as an issue of imagination and not fact.

Then came a phase of change. In college, Vijay started opening up. He made friends and displayed greater confidence. All of this was without medicine, without psychotherapy. Vijay calls this phase a period of "Forced self-help." He feels perhaps his focus was because of fear of defeat. On graduation, Vijay joined an uncle's enterprise.

Something snapped when Vijay was into his fourth or fifth year helping his uncle. He was 24 years old and hit with depression and neurosis. This time, it was obvious to others that something was wrong. However, it was seen as incompetence or lack of interest. In addition, his asthma was getting worse, though Vijay suspects it was psychosomatic.

Vijay braved his moods and launched his own business, Frontline Communication. When Vijay switched careers, his sister joined to support him. She was very observant, sharp, and well-informed.

The neurosis and delusional thoughts began affecting Vijay's functionality. Vijay was 38 when things took a drastic turn. First, he had frequent bouts of anger, often bordering on rage. Then, he started making questionable decisions and incurring unjustified

expenses. His sister was the first to notice.

Vijay started having differences with his sister, both personal and business. His reaction was to ridicule her. Vijay also became grandiose. He felt others were common and could not see his genius. Vijay took on an aura of arrogance.

For example, he bought a redundant vehicle with a bank loan. Grandiosity and recklessness were his attributes. For instance, he was an extremely rash driver. In retrospect, Vijay feels there were so many missed red flags on his illness.

During this time, Vijay consulted a General Physician for the crying spells he had begun to experience. Unfortunately, the GP prescribed some anti-depression medicines without mood-stabilizing drugs. But this led to full-blown mania. However, this improper prescription proved a blessing in disguise. At last, the mental issue surfaced noticeably.

His sister was the one who suggested that he see a psychologist. But Vijay felt the problem was with others. Vijay felt flawless. She somehow persuaded him to see a professional.

Vijay was rambling continuously throughout the one-and-a-half hours it took to reach the therapist. Within two minutes of meeting



him, the psychologist declared Vijay needed a psychiatrist. Vijay's sister was ready already! She rushed him to the psychiatrist. Vijay was turning 40 that year.

Daylight dawned when Vijay was diagnosed to have Manic Depressive illness. He cannot say if it were due to relief or stress, but Vijay collapsed on the psychiatrist's desk. He was immediately admitted to a hospital to kick-start the treatment. That's when Vijay came to understand he had mental health issues.

Once it was realized the issue was a matter of the mind, Vijay's family was very understanding. They were non-judgemental and empathetic. But, Vijay says, "Ostracization happens to many... even blood relatives can treat the person differently."

Vijay figures he had an untreated condition from age 14 to 40. The illness progressed slowly but surely during this time. Bringing it back to stability was, therefore, a challenge. Lack of early intervention necessitated ten years of treatment, besides Vijay's effort.

Vijay feels he explored the Mind-Body-Soul connection when asked what other things besides chemistry he would attribute to his recovery. Solutions were based on this holistic approach. Yoga and pranayam, which he had started for asthma, were now modified to apply to the mental issue. Besides, daily exercise and a customized diet helped.

"My struggle with asthma and overcoming it despite being twice in ICU led me to believe that if I can come out of that, I can step out of this." He developed a solid determination to stick it through the mental illness.

Vijay applies a thumb-rule which goes by the acronym: ABCD

ABCD stands for Acceptance, Belief, Cooperation, and Discipline.

He realized he first needed 'Acceptance' at multiple layers. First, a person needs to accept the illness and all the baggage one has gathered because of it. Consequently, he was able to moderate his over-ambitious goals. "I proactively limit myself to the achievable," shares Vijay.

The next involves retraining yourself to overcome the issue. It consists of developing a staunch 'Belief' that one can overcome.

He also feels we should 'Cooperate' with caregivers through timely communication. Cooperation is key, especially when there is no support group. "How I wish I had one," Vijay reminisces.

Finally, one needs the 'discipline' to constantly chip away at the distress while accepting that progress may be slow.

He says his goals are to be physically healthy, financially sufficient, fulfilled in his relationships, and have calmness in mind. "I will not settle for anything less," he declares.

We all know the oft-quoted theme of moving from a victim to a survivor. But Vijay feels we need to go further. We must become warriors and not mere survivors.



On asked about matrimony, Vijay shares some advice. Vijay was 41, and Khyati was 39 when they married. He says, "This possibly meant that our mindsets and ways were well moulded by then, and adapting to a relationship's demands took quite a lot of personal effort." Knowing a man has bipolar disorder before marriage and actually living with him is a completely different ball game.

"Perhaps, I couldn't gauge the issues she was going through. I saw it as an utter lack of empathy/understanding (then)... To hand it to her, she's contributed to my life in so many ways... I cherish our relationship."

Vijay elaborates on marriage with a person with mental health issues: "It is imprudent to advise on marriage because each person is unique, and circumstances vary vastly. But here are the basics:

- 1) Disclosure is an absolute must when heading into marriage. A marriage cannot begin with a lie.
- 2) During the courting period, Psychoeducation about mental illness is a great idea
- 3) Having an understanding and patient partner helps. Tiding over the troughs and biding our time helps last it out

He says what helped strengthen the marriage was putting himself in his wife's shoes. "I asserted to Khyati that we would celebrate our Silver anniversary and it would be a happy relationship. As it turns out, we are in our 20th year now!"

In conclusion, Vijay says he transformed from being bitter and cynical to being thankful and cooperative. "Life has taught me humans are incredible. Just trust the resources we have within us," he calls out to

his cohorts.

When asked what factors to consider when seeking psychiatric help besides prescriptions, he advises that the doctor must deserve trust, communicate well, and spend adequate time.

He lauds the role of peer-support networks. Besides recovery, they also help in growth. It is heartening to see one is not alone. So often, someone is struggling far more. These interactions put things into proper perspective. Importantly, our ability to help others inspires self-growth.

He advises others on the journey to have patience and persevere. It is often a long road...

Vijay concludes, "Focus on the process, and outcomes will follow."

Story: Vijay Nallawala

Script: Ganesh Rajan

For additional information please contact
**Eklavya Foundation For Mental Health,
Pune.**

Our website: <https://www.eklavyamh.org/>

Contact No: **+91 9096827953**