

AN INTERVIEW WITH RAJESH SETTY, AUTHOR OF THE NEW BOOK "BEYOND CODE"

UBIQUITY: What audience did you have in mind as you wrote the book?

SETTY: This book mainly targets technology professionals, though a number of people have told me that anybody who is in the professional services business will find it has something to offer. However, all of my examples are aimed mainly at technology professionals caught up in the world of coding. My feeling is that if they want to be truly successful, then, of course they have to be good coding but they also have to do something beyond code to succeed.

UBIQUITY: So the title "Beyond Code" was selected because the book is intended for essentially for information technology professionals?

SETTY: Yes, that exactly the reason. But I should admit to you that this was not the original title of the book -- and I have not told this to anyone. When I was writing the book I was thinking of calling it "The L Revolution" -- and as you can see all of the chapter titles start with an L, such as Learn, Laugh, Look and so forth. But my mentor, Tim Sanders, who is the very well-known author who wrote the book "Love is the Killer App" and many other books, told me: "Dude, my own new book is going to be called 'The L Factor' and it's going to come out earlier than your book. So go and find another name for what you're working on." He told me that while we having lunch.

UBIQUITY: And lunch is an L word.

SETTY: Yes, that's right.

UBIQUITY: What do you consider yourself now? Author, consultant, what?

SETTY: I describe myself by the acronym EAT, and see myself as someone who eats with passion. EAT stands for Entrepreneur, Author and Teacher. I love to build companies, and from those experiences I tend to write books and then use the books to go and teach people. So those are the three areas that I love, and I always want to be known in all of the three areas. The acronym EAT helps me label myself to help others understand who I am.

UBIQUITY: That's interesting. How is the book doing so far?

SETTY: It's doing extremely well, mainly because I had the good fortune of having wonderful people write testimonials for it. For example, Tom Peters wrote the Foreword, and he also happened to identify me as a "Cool Friend" on his own Web site. I've received some phenomenal endorsements and I've been thrilled to get them. Not many Indian people go and write business books, so I've been extremely fortunate to have my book get such a good start.

UBIQUITY: You're not connected with India anymore, are you?

SETTY: I still have a lot of connections – personal and business there in India. I've lived in about five countries: in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, France and of course, now I'm living here in Silicon Valley, in Sunnyvale, California, which is a beautiful place. For a short period I lived in New York, but somehow I could not get away for a long time from Silicon Valley.

UBIQUITY: So what would you say was the urgency of writing the book -- why did you feel the world needed it right now?

SETTY: I have a passion for technology and also a passion for helping people grow. And wherever I have lived I've seen a pattern that kept repeating was that technology people always go after the "hot" skills that will give them the fastest and greatest rewards, and this starts a cycle in which they pursue certain skills, become successful, and then find that those very skills have become a commodity so that those who possess the skills are no longer valued, because there is an oversupply of those skills. So they go after another set of "hot" skills and the journey continues, and they become experts once again.

UBIQUITY: And the problem with that -- ?

SETTY: What they forget is that they won't be able to repeat these cycles (which will last anywhere from three to five years) more than two or three times, because in a period of 10 to 15 years their flexibility will have diminished so much. When they are young, they can do anything and everything, and if the employer asks them if can they can go to New York tomorrow, they'll say "Yes, of course!" and they'll pack up their bags at once and go to New York. But then three to five years later they'll get married, and then after that they'll have kids. Now I'm not saying that's wrong, I'm just pointing out that they can't do their work at the same pace that they did earlier.

UBIQUITY: What happens to them?

SETTY: Ten to fifteen years later they'll feel that they're stuck, because the fact that they can't learn new things as quickly as they used to means that they have to struggle harder and harder to compete with the youngsters. There are thousands of people who are stuck like that today and who feel they have so many things to complain about, such as outsourcing, or the business after-effects of 9/11, the bursting of the dot-com bubble, or other external factors. Yet there's a smaller set of people who instead of complaining about such things are continuing to move forward, and I started observing these people.

UBIQUITY: And what did you find?

SETTY: I found that there is something different in these people. First, they have a different attitude, but I decided there must be something more; they must have some different standard practices. So I started looking at my notes of the last 10 years, and my observations of successful technology professionals, and in my book I've encapsulated my notes of the last 10 years.

UBIQUITY: Well then, let's go through your book. The subtitle of your book is: "Learn To Distinguish Yourself In Nine Simple Steps." That's an appealing idea, so why don't we run through those nine steps.

SETTY: Excellent.

UBIQUITY: But first, going back to the testimonials you mentioned, it's impressive how many important people have praised your book, not only Tom Peters, but people like Guy Kawasaki and Dan Pink and Tim Sanders and Jerry Rao and a great many others. So congratulations on that.

SETTY: Thank you very much. Writing a book takes a lot of hard work, and then finally, when the book comes out you feel like you have a new child.

UBIQUITY: Okay, well let's get to know this child by going through those L words you mentioned earlier.

SETTY: Certainly. The first chapter is titled "Learn," because the first big trap that people fall into is when they finish education. Oh, they know when they finish their degree that that's not the end of it, but somehow they quickly slack off a little bit and learn only what is immediately required for their job. But there are so many things that people don't see are required and don't even try to learn until they become very, very required -- even painfully required. Also, on the general topic of Learning, one thing I've learned is the necessity of building long-term relationships, and yet nobody says this -- nobody says "Hey, by the way, how is your relationship-building going on?" Long-term relationships are a competitive advantage, and the very fact that, by definition, it takes a long time to build a long-term relationship, is itself a barrier to entry for someone else that is starting late.

Let me pick one or two more things to say about learning. Keeping a personal scorecard is a key skill. If you look at the company, the company always keeps a scorecard. Even so-called lifestyle companies track things like revenue, profit, and those kinds of things. Well, a person is no different: he or she has to have some metrics, some key performance indicators; otherwise the person won't know whether he or she's making progress or not making progress.

And let me pick one more last thing: you have to use the right tools. And if there are two people that are everything the same their intellect level, and everything, the person who uses better tools always wins.

UBIQUITY: Good. Well, let's move to the second step.

SETTY: Yes, the second one is called "Laugh," and I wrote it because I observed that most successful people have no problem laughing at themselves, and they're not overly self-conscious and don't have a problem if they make a fool of themselves.

Think of it this way: is there a guarantee that in the year ahead every decision that you make you will be 100-percent right? Of course not: some of your decisions that we'll be wrong. And how will you react when a decision goes wrong? Some people just can't take it. Even though they know that statistically it's not possible to have all of the decisions right, whenever a decision goes wrong they can't take it, and they start blaming people and blaming circumstances and so on. They have a real problem: when they succeed they don't go and celebrate because the victory seems so small to them, yet when they fail they can't stop beating themselves to death. So either way they lose.

And the second point is that sometimes people over analyze themselves, and spend a lot of time trying to figure out how the other person is thinking about them. But my belief is that nobody really cares, because everybody really is busy with so many things in their own lives, they don't have the time to go and over-analyze for example, how a person is dressed. I mean, they do it, but they don't do it to an extent that they'll spend the next two hours analyzing how you came across; everybody is busy with their own preoccupations. So just being cool and doing their work is what is required. And that's what I write in the "Laugh" chapter.

UBIQUITY: As you've gone around to different organizations, have you typically found them to be happy places? Or have they been unhappy places?

SETTY: You'll have to take my response with a pinch of salt, because I myself am a very happy person and so I'll always look at things from a very happy perspective, and will always say yes, they were happy places.

UBIQUITY: You're a fortunate person. Let's see your third step, in a chapter called "Look."

SETTY: The biggest thing I learned from many of my mentors is that successful people look at things very differently. Four people can look at the same situation, but one of them will look at it very differently from the others. Four people can look at it without being able to see any opportunities, but one person says, "Here is an opportunity!"

A successful person has to look for associations. It can be as simple as when a technology person is working on a project. He can look and think: What can I associate this project with? Where is the repeatability? What can I reuse? Those kinds of questions. Silicon Valley entrepreneurs will typically associate stuff that's very different from what other people can imagine.

Let me take an example. I have a friend called Steve, a serial entrepreneur, and he was fascinated with the Netflix business model, so he asked himself where he could apply the metrics business model to? Well, he started a company that basically applied the Netflix business model to luxury handbags for women. With his service "Bag Borrow or Steal", a woman can rent up to five luxury handbags for a monthly fee. I mean the whole business model was thought through,

and all he had to do was to find another area where the same business model will look like. So he didn't have to think a lot except to associate what was all ready existing into a new investment.

UBIQUITY: Can you think of other issues that are important here?

SETTY: Another one is that the way to make sure that we associate very well is to keep what I call a relationship journal. People have journals for lots of things, but for me relationships are very, very important, and should be recorded in a journal. It can be simple, as you don't need software; you just need a book where you write down things that are important to people important to you. And you just keep writing everything down one page per person. Because I have a relationship journal, I know what is important to them. Will a connection to this new person to one or more of my other contacts help? I may not gain anything personally but I can be a catalyst to make good things happen to people I know.

UBIQUITY: Then on to the next chapter: "Leave a Lasting Impression."

SETTY: The reason I wrote that chapter is because, especially in the technology world, people work on multiple projects work with multiple clients. And they work with multiple people. I like to ask this question: do you remember any of your teachers from your childhood? And people say yes, and then they offer one or two names. So I say, well, can you remember all of your teachers? But they have a hard time: there are very few of them who remember all of the teachers. There are only one or two teachers who made a lasting impression in their lives. The same kind of thing happens with technology as well -- because there is so much commoditization that happens. If you go and ask a CIO, "Can you name one or two consultants who made a big difference," the CIO will happy to answer that question, because there are usually only one or two consultants who just blew them away with the way they conducted their business, and attitude and just the fact that they cared so much about the work, and they just got things done. But lasting impressions don't come easy; you have to work hard to leave a lasting impression.

UBIQUITY: Okay, good. We've worked our way to the L word, the real L word, the Love word. The next chapter is "Love."

SETTY: Yes. A moment ago you asked the question about whether organizations are happy places or unhappy places? My feeling is that

organizations are just organizations, and that each person in an organization has to decide whether he will make it happy or make it unhappy. If people don't love their jobs, every small thing that happens here and there becomes a problem. But if they turn it around and start loving the job, then they will start looking for reasons to love the job.

I have done this exercise multiple times in multiple companies. It's called "I love my job" exercise. We get people in a group and in five to 10 minutes they write why they should love their job. And you'd be amazed at how many reasons collectively they will come up why they should love their job, or the company, or the place of work or anything. So that's what I tell people, first they have to love the job. And then once they decide they love the job, then they'll start finding *reasons* to love their job.

I also tell people to find a mentor, because I'm big on people having mentors. A mentor is a person who will help you ask the right questions. And when you have trouble loving your job and you have a very good mentor, the mentor will start asking questions about you, about the job, about work, and will help you put things in perspective.

UBIQUITY: Let's think about the territory you cover in these five first chapters -- "Learn," "Laugh," "Look," "Leave a Lasting Impression," and "Love." They're in a larger section called "The Inner Game." Why is it called that?

SETTY: In the Inner Game, people are able to control more things and they can do it alone -- for example, when they love a job that's an individual thing. Whereas the next four -- "Leverage," "Likeability," "Listen" and "Lead" -- are part of the Outer Game, which for me is like a contact sport, because basically they have to play against the external world. "Game" may be the wrong word, but for me life is a game and it has rules.

UBIQUITY: Okay, the first one is Leverage.

SETTY: Correct. I'm very big on leverage, mainly because if we don't have the right leverage it is very hard to scale -- in other words, if you're trying to do everything on your own, then it's very hard to scale, because there are only 24 hours a day, and there is only one person -- you. Whenever you want to get something done, the first question that comes into your mind is how can I get this done, but here is the problem: when you pose that question to yourself -- how

can I get this done? -- there is an implicit thinking that you have to be the actor to get this done. So I want to turn it around and say, "*What is the right configuration of all of the available resources for me to accomplish this in the most optimum fashion?*" Now immediately if you try to answer this, you will look for *all* resources (and you are one of those resources, of course, but you will also look for resources outside of yourself to get something outside). That's almost like a paradigm shift for people, because many times people want to get things done by themselves -- they feel that they're the best people to do it think it's too hard to go and explain it to someone else. And they can't predict how well the other people will do, and they trust only themselves. But if they do it by themselves, scalability becomes a real issue, because they can pursue goals but not very big goals, not very big dreams -- because you need a lot of help if you want to achieve some big dreams. So in this chapter, called "Leverage," I explain where people can start looking for resources and help to form a configuration to achieve their dreams.

UBIQUITY: The next step is "Likeability."

SETTY: Yes; you know, people who are very successful technologically almost think of likeability as an entitlement -- people should like them because they are so smart. But I have observed time and again that likeability is not an entitlement, it's something you have to work for. It does not come automatically, and just because somebody so smart we don't start liking them. If they're very smart but have a rotten attitude they're definitely not likeable, and in fact might be fired because they become such an irritant to the organization. So in my book I discuss how to check your likeability factor, and how to increase it, and what you should do so that you double your likeability factor in the next year. In a nutshell, it's all about what a person does when he or she meets another person? What is the impression that Fred makes on Jack? And at the end of the conversation what does Jack feel about himself after Fred leaves the interaction. That's the big thing. It's not about how brilliant Fred was, it's about what did he make Jack feel about himself. Did he lift him up? Or did he bring him down? What's the feeling that Jack got out of the interaction? And it may not even be a face-to-face interaction, it can be e-mail, it can be anything. *Whenever you interact with another person, what do you leave behind?*

UBIQUITY: We'll move to the next chapter, which is called "Listen."

SETTY: I don't think anyone doubts that listening is very, very important, but actually only a very small percentage of people can really practice careful listening, because it's just so hard to do. The reason is that listening is an activity that can be done with very limited brain work, and there is so much brain power left waiting; there's no way I can talk as fast as you can process what I'm saying. So listening is very hard work, because it requires so much discipline and concentration. So what should someone do to listen well? First, they should know what are the right questions to ask in a conversation -- that's the first thing because if they don't know how to ask the right questions, there is a tendency to fill the silence by saying just anything. So in the process, the person starts thinking about what will I say rather than that if they start thinking what will I ask next? Because when you're trying to say something there is a lot of self-consciousness. You want to be right, you want to make a good impression. There are lots of things going on that will take away some of your time from listening.

Second point relates to your attitude in a conversation. If you go in with the curiosity of a child, the inquisitiveness of a student into a conversation, listening becomes easy.

UBIQUITY: Let's move on to the final chapter -- and the final step -- called "Lead."

SETTY: I'll give just two things to take away, because there are so many books on leadership. The first one is to be ready to fill in the blank -- and every organization will have some blanks, some gaps, where somewhere there is something is going wrong or someplace where you need to step up; if you are always on the lookout for those blanks, not to complain but to fill them, that itself is the first step towards leadership. And the second one is that everyone in his or her life will get several leadership moments, though these leadership moments won't come packaged as leadership moments. But he or she will have to be ready for this moment, because it's there to be recognized and grabbed and held on to. But because such moments do not come as clearly labeled packages, it's so easy to miss them. So always be ready for them and seize on them when you have the chance. Doing that will distinguish you from the crowd and make you into a recognized leader.

UBIQUITY: Rajesh, that's a good place to end the interview. You've left a very good impression, and you have a high degree of likeability.

Best of luck to you, and congratulations on having written a very nice book.

SETTY: Thank you so much.

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