

*If you only have a minute:* Rooted and Unwavering is all about connecting deeply with ourselves, others and our service in the world. How would we act, then, if we knew other people were looking up to us and drawing on our stories to shape their future?

## Playfully Rewriting Our Stories

By Esther Groves and Hylke Faber

*"...anything you do, you have to enjoy it, there has to be some fun. If not, change the job, or you're not looking hard enough for the fun. I'm just trying to be here and have fun with people who matter." - - - ---  
- Pradeep U.N.*

Pradeep U.N. is serious about play and fun.

As Mary Poppins taught her young charges, "Just a spoon full of sugar helps the medicine go down...," Pradeep initiates serious play that inspires people to connect with themselves and each other at a deeper level. "Your future is somebody else's past," he points out. "You are not alone. Somebody has done this before..."

Pradeep's propensity for play becomes apparent in his game, **Stories and Wisdom**, a digital culture transformation platform that enables leaders to engage their teams and customers in courageous conversations and share the stories that have shaped them. The game starts with people telling their stories - almost like around a campfire or in a bar - using a prompt.

"We need to talk to each other and listen to each other but we don't have a construct for this," he says. "Your past is somebody else's future. And that means you'll probably live your present with a lot more thoughtfulness because you know every step you're taking somebody else is going to follow it. Integrity is important, because...somebody's looking up to you."

Pradeep's stories make it clear how he grew to appreciate the power of storytelling and fun. As a teenager, he left his family home in South India on a full ride scholarship to pursue his undergraduate degree in Singapore where he did not speak the language or, for that matter, recognize the food. "...what you consider breakfast does not even exist here. You take for granted that food is sustenance, it helps you think...and suddenly you don't have breakfast like you used to and lunch looks very different. It smells very different. You start questioning some basics." Pradeep began to realize that his experience back home had gotten him accustomed to a certain narrative. Now in Singapore, his old story no longer worked. To thrive, he had to invent a new one.

Unlike life in his home community where he was part of the majority and his "superpowers" and leadership abilities were recognized, Singapore was a place where he was in the minority, an outsider. Early on, despite attempts by his cohort to discourage him, he ran for a student leadership position – and lost. It was potentially a shrinking moment. He realized he could either try harder and continue

doing what he had always done - and fail - or pivot and expand into a new story of himself. He chose to expand his story— to try something new - and see what would happen.

Before to Singapore he didn't have a last name, "So," he says, "my last name became U.N...vote for the U.N. And I didn't even show up to the debates. I didn't put any images because...using that leads to bias and an outcome I didn't want. But something of neutrality leads with intrigue and intrigue will not hurt me. So it was my hypothesis, it can't get worse. Let's see what happens. And I got the outcome I wanted and it stayed." Pradeep UN became student president because he reinvented his story.

What stories that you are telling yourself do you no longer need? What would an expanded story of you look like? Enjoy the game of creating your own story.