

## Is the American Dream Still Alive?

By Bob Miglani

It's not an easy question to answer, especially in our current times full of uncertainty in our work and in our lives. We read the news, go to work, run a business or meet friends and all we hear about is the challenging nature of life these days. And it feels as though the American dream is a distant memory of a past that we are trying so hard to grasp onto.

When my family moved from India to America in 1979, we had nothing more than a handful of clothes in an old suitcase and about \$75. When I would ask my dad why he brought us here, he always answered, "for a better opportunity of course!"

And those first several years, even though we had very little, we felt hopeful. My parents found employment and while it was hard work, it did put food on the table and allowed us to pitch in for the rent for the tiny apartment we shared with another family.

Over the years as I grew up, mowing lawns, delivering newspapers in the suburbs of small towns in New Jersey, I thought there was this formula for success and happiness in America.

I thought that only if I got a good education, treated people right, worked harder than anyone else that I would be fine. And for a while that formula seemed to work as our effort allowed us to save enough money to buy a Dairy Queen franchise of our own, which we ran and my parents continue to run today for the last 23 years.

Running a quintessential piece of Americana, a Dairy Queen store wasn't all sunshine and rainbow sprinkles. It was hard but it gave us a path of possibilities as well as that tuition for college that my sisters and I desperately needed.

As I grew up and moved into a corporate career, I took the same formula for success and applied it to my work. Some years were better than others but I grew in my career and felt happy in my life.

But then things changed, especially since 2008. With constant change at work, the complex nature of careers, unpredictability of jobs and the speed of life, everything became overwhelming. And I found myself stuck, trying to figure out what happened to the American dream we came searching for not too long ago.

I couldn't let go of the notion that I did all I was supposed to do but how come I can't keep up.

Somewhere along the way, I felt as though I was let down by that 'formula' for life. 'Work hard and do everything right' wasn't working for me. I felt constantly stressed and worried about being able to save enough for my kids' education, provide for my family and care for my older parents.

What happened to the American dream?

My pattern of overthinking was interrupted by a chance trip to show a friend all that is India. It was there, in the capital of chaos that I rediscovered how to move forward in uncertain and complicated times. It was there which led me to rediscover my faith in human potential, which brought my family to America in the first place.

I came to the full realization that there is no formula for life. And a perfect job, a house, a business or a spouse is an illusion of our mind trying to bring order to a life that has none.

Whether in India or America, life is not a linear proposition but one full of ups, downs and every way in between. I hadn't gotten here in a straight line and I wasn't going to move forward in a straight line.

There are no guarantees in America, only better chances.

I recognize that while the American dream for some may have lost its luster, it still remains vibrant within me. It is because it is in America that we have choices, chances and possibilities that my family didn't have in India.

Sure, gaps in incomes, health, jobs and the like exist in America, as they do in most countries. And each of us can play a role in addressing those in our own unique way. But the essence of the American dream is not a destination. We were never promised a big house and a fancy car. Only an opportunity to pursue possibilities, just as my father had stated so many years ago.

And while it helps to have a fair and just system, affordable education and supporting infrastructure and the rest, pursuing those possibilities is not necessarily up to someone else, it's up to us.

I realized that pursuing life's opportunities is dependent more on me and what actions I take than many of those external factors. It helps if things are always fair. But the reality is that no system is perfect and life isn't fair. But we can't wait for that perfect system because it may never appear. All we can do is to see an opportunity to learn, contribute and serve and get busy doing.

I believe the American dream is alive in each of us who wish to move forward and make a contribution to the place we work and to those we love. It is what we make of it. Realizing the imperfections of life was through a rediscovery of the land of my birth and getting a chance to serve and pursue opportunities are found in the land I now call home.