

# ForceNetPreneurs

In this series we plan to showcase a few entrepreneur members of Forces Network who have achieved a reasonable degree of success in their business ventures. The aim being to celebrate their success as also to learn from them with a view to motivating more amongst our community to take up entrepreneurship as a full time vocation. Finally – we do need job creators in greater numbers than job seekers.

**BY BIDISHA PANDEY**

**Lt Col Ravi Joshi** passed out from the Indian Military Academy in Dec 1987 and got commissioned into the Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME). He was selected for the prestigious Champagne Scholarship from India and learnt about the different aspects of wine making at France. He is an independent 'Wine and Spirits' writer and consultant. He has travelled to various wine regions of the world on invitations from reputed winemakers and beverage trade bodies, the latest being Japan where he learnt about Sake and launched the Indo-Japanese online community called "Sake Club India" with his Japanese Sommelier partner. Also, he has his own blog Guns 2 Gewurztraminer ([www.guns2gewurztraminer.com](http://www.guns2gewurztraminer.com)), symbolic of his transition from handling guns as a military man to dealing with wine bottles.



**Bidisha: Please tell us something about your career in the Indian Army.**

**Ravi Joshi:** I passed out from the Indian Military Academy in Dec 1987 and got commissioned into the Corps of Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME). Amid my various field and peace tenures in the Army, I qualified as a Mechanical Engineer and later specialised in Information Technology. With particular reference to my IT related tenures, I headed a Software project at the Army Software Development Centre and then worked as the IT Head at the Directorate General Quality Assurance (DGQA) under Department of Defence Production, Ministry of Defence. After serving a satisfying 23 years in the Army, I bid adieu to the uniformed service to pursue my other interests.

**Bidisha: How did you plan your service to entrepreneurship transition? How did you prepare yourself for the same? What were the options that you were considering at the time of retirement?**

**Ravi Joshi:** Given my core competence in IT, I prepared myself for the transition by completing my MBA in IT and Systems from ICAI University and getting myself certified as a Project Management Professional (PMP) from the Project Management Institute (PMI) USA. Quite logically, I had planned to transition into the IT world but destiny had its own plans for me.

## **Bidisha: Why and when did you decide to become a Wine and Spirits writer and consultant?**

**Ravi Joshi:** It was by default and not design that I decided to become a Wine and Spirits professional. I happened to complete two levels of certification in Wine and Spirits offered by the Wine and Spirit Education Trust London during my tenure at Delhi. The aim was purely to structure my knowledge in a field of passion rather than pursuing it as a career. However, I was oblivious of the fact that a global scholarship (only one for India) was applicable to the Level 2 course that I did.

After my tenure in Delhi, I hung my uniform and briefly joined a friend's newly founded IT company as its head of IT Managed Services. However, after executing a major project for this company, I bowed out from the job since I found myself not cut out for the erratic schedules that the job entailed. An attractive job offer from a US based software company promptly followed and I was about to join it, when I got a mail from the WSET that I was being considered for "Champagne Scholarship India" to learn about winemaking in Champagne, France. I went on to win the scholarship against all odds despite being an outsider to the Wine and Spirits or Hospitality trade. The win made me wonder if it was a "nudge" I was receiving from destiny.



There was a major concern though. The IT job offer clashed with the scholarship opportunity and I had to choose one of the two. The decision was difficult but the dilemma was solved by my wife Smita, who allaying all my fears urged me to follow my heart and not to worry too much about the future. I stand indebted to her forever for showing me the right path and always standing by me through thick and thin. If it was not for her, I might have probably listened to my mind chatter. The Champagne trip happened but I did not just return back. I continued my journey in France, travelling to several other wine regions all over the country on my own. During this travel, I worked with different French winemakers in the fields and in respective

wineries. My learning French language to a reasonable extent prior to departure from India helped me a lot during this solo travel. After acquiring hands-on knowledge I started my blog called Guns 2 Gewurztraminer ([www.guns2gewurztraminer.com](http://www.guns2gewurztraminer.com)) and writing for various print publications. The “Writer and Consultant” role fit me well, given my non-hospitality background and a penchant for writing. After my France visit, I got intermittent opportunities to travel to other wine regions of the world and slowly my work started getting recognised.

**Bidisha: What were the major challenges you faced in this journey?**

**Ravi Joshi:** The most significant challenge in the initial years was the temptation of well-paying IT job proposals that came intermittently. But thanks to some positive people around me, I got timely reassurances to keep going. The other challenge was of several established players in my new domain reluctant to accept me as one of them. In fact, shimmers of this challenge still exist (laughs). But I guess this phenomenon is faced by any rank outsider to a particular domain. The key is to persevere, keep your passion alive and not to lose sight of your goals.



**Bidisha: What do you think made your venture ‘Colonel Joe’ a success?**

**Ravi Joshi:** To be frank, I still consider “Colonel Joe” as work in progress. That said, the brand has so far been able to achieve what it had set out to be. Our key success differentiator has been preserving our originality by presenting ourselves as a pure-passion founded venture by an ex Army man with a world-class ground experience. This makes us more approachable to our audience vis-à-vis entities classically from the trade.

A guiding principle in establishing our niche has also been to keep our integrity and ethical values to the highest, as the “Colonel” in Colonel Joe demands nothing less. I am happy I have been able to maintain this reputation without compromise.

**Bidisha: Do you have any regrets? Anything that you would have wanted to do differently?**

**Ravi Joshi:** I do not hesitate to say that I have no regrets on my decisions. Of course, we do derive lessons from our endeavours, but that is a quintessential part of growing as a professional. Committing mistakes is as much a part of an endeavour as are the successes.

**Bidisha: What does a normal day look like in the life of an expert sommelier?**

**Ravi Joshi:** “Sommelier” is the French term for a “wine steward” typically in a hospitality scenario and I do not qualify as one. But the term is often used colloquially in reference to connoisseurs whose job revolves around tasting wines or spirits. As a matter of fact, many accomplished people in this field are essentially not Sommeliers. As for my typical day, it usually involves activities like writing for my blog/print publications, participating in wine and spirits tastings, conducting beverage appreciation sessions for trade and consumers, and executing consulting assignments for clients- both Indian and foreign. Not all of it happens on all days and I do have days for myself and my family. In my role as a wine writer, I also get to travel within India and abroad on the invitation of winemakers/ wine bodies.



**Bidisha: What are your plans for the future?**

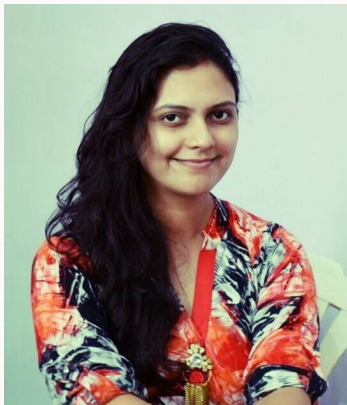
**Ravi Joshi:** The best part about pursuing your passion as profession is that you have endless possibilities that excite you time and again. This year, after I returned from a Sake trip to Japan (luckily before the Covid-19 pandemic surfaced), I launched an Indo-Japanese online community called “Sake Club India” with my Japanese Sommelier partner named Mika Eoka. Even during the lockdown, we’ve been able to stir up a lot of interest about Sake and recently conducted a virtual tasting with participants from India and Japan. In the immediate future, we hope to scale up our

activities many folds. I have also consciously been trying to map my IT and Project Management skills to the beverages world and plan to offer niche digital services in the domain very soon. There are also some other ideas that are presently in their preliminary stages.

**Bidisha: What advice would you like to give to the fellow ForceNet members who wish to take up entrepreneurship in niche areas such as yours?**

**Ravi Joshi:** First of all, one should be clear about what he/she wants. The desire of venturing into a niche domain must be fueled by an underlying passion rather than the novelty of it, or following someone else's example of success. One should also be a reasonable risk taker and be prepared for a long haul, as results usually do not come by early.

Among others, the salaried mindset has to be abandoned for good because "job security" will be the first casualty in this approach. It would be good to have sufficient financial reserves for at least two years to fulfil one's inescapable commitments. Lastly, reinventing oneself for the new roles is important but the fine value system that we imbibe in the Forces should be retained.



***Bidisha Pandey** is a blogger who believes every individual has a story and a lot can be learned from every story. More stories and interviews by her can be read on her blog site [www.sassyweekender.com](http://www.sassyweekender.com)*

**CHASE YOUR PASSION,  
NOT YOUR PENSION.**

**DENIS WAITLEY**