



Session	Building Responsible Leadership
Speakers	Kapila Jaykumar, Bezwada Wilson

<p>Kapila</p>	<p>Hi Welcome to the Community Business India Conference, I'm Kapila Jaykumar, Program Manager at Community Business, where our mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to have a positive impact on people and communities. Track 1 of the Conference is focused on Responsible Business in India, exploring why it is critical to long-term business success and examining the pivotal role we all play in driving positive change. Amongst the most important aspects of responsible business is the imperative to build responsible leadership.</p> <p>Today, we are pleased to bring you a leader and influencer who has dedicated his life to impacting positive change. Mr. Bezwada Wilson is an Indian activist and one of the founders and National Conveners of the Safai Karmachari Andolan (SKA), an Indian human rights organisation that has been campaigning for the eradication of manual scavenging. Bezwada's work has been recognised by the Ashoka Foundation, which elected him as an Ashoka Senior Fellow for human rights. In 2016, Bezwada was honoured with the Ramon Magsaysay Award. Bezwada has also been a speaker at TEDx and spoke on The Right to Human Dignity. Bezwada has also been featured on the popular TV show, Satyamev Jayate, speaking about Untouchability. We invite the fascinating Mr. Bezwada Wilson to speak to us about the importance of building responsible leadership and his own journey in influencing and empowering others with his vision, taking action, and leading by example. Mr. Wilson, thank you so much for being with us today.</p> <p>Before we start, could you please share a bit about your personal background and experience with Safai Karmachari Andolan?</p>
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Bezwada	<p>Thank you so much and it is in a great opportunity to talk to you all and as a Safai Karmachari Andolan, we always like to speak to many people and spread across the globe about the heinous crime which is happening on the humanity in the country- that is the actually the manual scavenging. We are not actually working or anything, we can't say that it is a work, we just involve or engage our self to the whatever the reality we are facing or seeing in front of us.</p> <p>Actually carrying, clearing, or disposing human excreta from the dry latrines and disposing to the kind of an outskirts and all and the dumping yards is happening across the country in many places. When we started our work, the society everybody they felt that this is the only way we can handle the human excreta, and the community also felt that this is the only opportunity or the job we are able to available and government also felt what else we can do. We can give some kind of a better wage or some kind of a safety gear and more than that we cannot do. There the whole society got stagnated. There the youngsters from the community who has undergone the discrimination of the untouchability from the school from the childhood like me, we were branded like the people of the son of the scavenger in the school, so that pain has made and triggered one incident one day and it has become like a Andolan as on today. And it has gone place to place so we don't have such a record to say that how many are there. Approximately, I can say that the volunteers across the country as on today, we have the 6,300. By the time I am talking, maybe 2, 3, 4 people may be joining.</p> <p>So, this is in a movement which is a platform which has a created by the community people for everybody to respond. It is not only for the Safai Karmcharis to respond, Safai Karmachari community people to respond.</p>
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Kapila	<p>Thank you. As you know, today we are looking to explore why it is so important that organisations build responsible leadership in order to support their CSR strategies.</p> <p>So, my first question to you would be - In your opinion, what does it mean to be a responsible leader and what common characteristics do responsible leaders display?</p>
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Bezwada	<p>See one thing I always believe that leadership develops within the people or individuals when you respond to the realities. In front of you something happens. When some accident happens, the way we take an initiation to respond to that, that is an instant leadership, so that we can't train somebody how to respond. So actually, the human beings the leadership also is in a kind of a quality that is there with us that we have to nurture.</p> <p>We are working with the groups. We are working with the team. So, when we work with the teams and when we work with the groups it is a just you have to listen to many and everybody is carrying their own dream. It is not just one dream and all. Like in India, we have the 130 crores of the dreams together. So how a leader can actually knit all the dreams together and make it as a one dream and what are the things that are the I feel always. And we do think that one person leading a everything like everything to see that I will do everything, that can't be the responsible leaders. The leadership which we are talking about is actually we are thinking about the collective leadership and it is a everybody participating in the planning, in implementation and in the failures and in the achievement. So together we share the leadership, it is a shared leadership. We have to share actually the quality of the leadership also. So, this is the way we made the Safai Karmachari Andolan to reach to this stage.</p> <p>We learn out of our response. So how do you respond to the realities in front of you there exactly the leadership automatically develops.</p> <p>The leader should bring back everybody to the same goal and same vision every day. That consistency is the most important. And when we are doing something you cannot expect the result the next moment and next day and next year. Sometimes because the social issues when we are dealing and it is in the past 4,000 years the issues are remain so you cannot think that you will be so mighty to immediately</p>
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resolve everything so we must have a patience to actually see the results. And another thing is when you are starting you must be thinking something else, when you are moving ahead you will be understanding in different way. So, when it is a changing the scenario, the leadership also must change according to the situation. It can't be the just the when you started we were there like this so I want to give the same kind of – no- you have to see that where the vacuum is there so you have to fill the vacuum. So once the vacuum is filled then the others will occupy that space you don't need to be again be there on their head or the shoulders and think that the I can only give the leadership, no it is absolutely not. The leaders also must learn every day from the team because actually the team build by the team only not the leader. So, the team actually make more lesson to learn the actual the leader so leader thereby learn something and again go back. And there is no competition. I never had the competition just like that. So, there is an always there should be a kind of a very harmonious competition but there should be not a kind of a one person doing the work the same work I don't need to do some other work I have. So always in Safai Karmachari Andolan we tried our best not to compete. If somebody is doing in one district some work we are immediately we will vacate that district where there is a nobody there we will move there. So, we don't mind to take the risk of moving from one where got the knowledge so we feel that this is a we got some knowledge some information about some place so we feel comfortable there. So, we have to prepare ourselves to leave the comfort zones when it is required and move to the other place where the leadership is required. See our ultimate goal is not to have the comfort zone and feel happy. Our actual ultimate goal is to reach out to the people where they have not received the social justice for in our case.



Kapila	Thank you. This brings me to the next question. When you began your work, you were quite young, how did you groom yourself to become the leader you are today? What is your leadership style?
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Bezwada	<p>See I don't consider me as a leader yet but I only one thing is I work more with my emotions and the passion and I listen to the people because I know very clear, including my mentor, S.R. Sankaran, one retired IAS Officer who worked tirelessly for the development of the Dalits, Adivasis and with the Government and outside the Government. He never told me that he is my mentor. Even I never mentioned he is my mentor. Recently in the Hindu Newspaper, somebody has written that S.R. Sankaran has mentored Wilson to grow like this. Then I realised that must be there. So, the thing is the leader actually should not feel that I am mentoring somebody or anything. For me the people are the leaders who are all there. They made me to this level actually. They tell every day and I listen to them every day and they are the best person to actually fill the gaps. So, they know what is the problem. I don't know the problem. They know the problem, but how they look the problem, how I look the problem must be the same. It can't be the two different ways. So, I try to look through the lens of the people exactly to see that problem. I don't look from my own knowledge what I achieved what I got. I don't believe on my own knowledge. I believe on actually the organic knowledge of the people who are facing the problem. So, they gave exact clear picture to me that this is what my problem. Solutions they will say but they are unable to do that because they are powerless and power accumulated in one place is the actually is the problem in the whole leadership. Even within the leadership, within the state, within the companies, within the corporations the power always it is a kind of a design which we are promoting unconsciously to accumulate in one place and we want to get that position and thereby you think that you become the power. But actually, the powerless how much you are that is the greatest leadership you are. You become the powerful, which means you made everybody is the powerless. So, we work on that. The powerless community make them as powerful and go to them to the district collector commissioner. Ask their rights. Fight for them. They do everything we will be just walking along with</p>
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them as like a shadow. So thereby I am their shadow. Actually, you are figuring out the shadow as the leadership but it's the actually the leaders who are leading the movement. Because this is also design as such, the Safai Karmachari Andolan, there is a national convener. So, you ask the national convener to speak but actually there are the women who left the scavenging in spite of the all the hurdles without any rehabilitation. They are the true leaders. They made me to sit here talk to you all today. Their courage is actually spirit that made me every day. I feel that I don't feel that I don't have a food; I don't feel that I have no clothes, because without anything they are ready to come and fight against the injustice. There is inequality fighting against injustice. It is clearly telling these women to me every day. I can say that am humble. It is not humble, it is my submission the women lakhs and lakhs they built the leadership and they say that, we have no time so you take this, and they have given me this opportunity.

In 2010, we declared that we are going to eradicate the manual scavenging in the whole country. We kept the countdown and we started counting the days and the 3, 4 years continuously day and night, almost like 20 hours or 18 is the less hours we worked every day and we worked every day across the country, all the team members. But on the December 31st, we are clearly noticed that still the scavenging is there in the country and we have not achieved a much. So, we came and we said to everybody, first we apologised the community that we are unable to achieve this and the failures reasons we said that we will declare very soon. Within March, we declared that why we have not achieved, what are the lacunas, why the failure as happened, and everything we explained to them. Then we explained about the actual the failures to the team, and the team the morale and their strength and everything that always it goes down definitely. But we made them very understand and very clearly, we gathered the courage said very clearly, fighting



against injustice itself is the victory. There is no victory as such you have to expect, because you are fighting against the mighty. Injustice how it happens with the majority? With the mighty only always they do - so we made that is a very clear, fighting against the injustice itself is in a victory, so we are there in the battlefield. Once you are going away from the battlefield, you can think that you lost. When you are still there in the battlefield, battle is going beyond our timeline, but the battle still continues. So, with that courage we regained again our energies and we told and everybody and that whatever they can clear. In some states, they cleared the manual scavenging. We went there and we made all of them to come and we said that you have achieved this. That is not mean that you will sit here and celebrate that. You have to move to the other places where the leadership is not there. So, we ask the team to reposition themselves, replace their comfort zone to move other places. And when the achievement comes, we share everything, when the sorrow comes, we gather everybody together, when somebody hospitalises also, it is like a community, it is like a family. It is not like an organisation actually. We do have money, people will share. We don't have the money, we never had the problem because they do contribute. That all most of them are from the community but we do get the donations, we do get the contributions from them. They give their own whatever is there to the organisation. So, we have made this as a one community, one family, one goal, one vision, one target you know. And success also it is not one person. That is always I do want to say very openly and if I feel that I achieved then it is definitely I have lost my whole life.

So, I must understand very clearly, very openly, not humble or anything, it is a fact, that it is an achievement of the women whoever involved and led courageously, tirelessly.



Kapila	Thank you, Thank you so much. I'm going to shift gears a bit. I understand you've worked extensively with the Government. As a leader, how did you use the power of influence and become successful in convincing the Government to focus on manual scavengers and consider that as a priority?
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Bezwada	<p>See one thing very clear, Government is, at least they declare that they are for the people and they will say that it is for the people, by the people, to the people, like that. At least they will say. So, whatever their words, we take back and we go to them and we will tell them very clearly, you are doing this not for my sake, it is for actually your duty. So, we make them to actually to bring back their responsibilities. We go to the collector and the district magistrate and we intimate him or her stating that you have a power. The problem here in the country is the most of the officers, they do feel at certain point of a time they are the powerless and there is a power is with the somebody else. We do go to the politicians including the many ministers including the rashtrapati, the President of India, they also including the speaker of the Lok Sabha and they told very openly that, I am not having the powers to do this. I am a helpless like. But we do explain to them that you are the powerful person. So actually, what we are doing it is not we are receiving something, we are actually bringing a kind of a spirit of the ground levels to the administration to the people who are ruling for the Board, very clearly making them to understand they are the powerful. Collector when we go to the village, when we go to the village, the Safai Karmacharis, when there is a dominant caste person comes, we everybody must get up. If you don't get up they are started beating us. When the same dominant person comes to the Collector office, Collector won't get up. Collector will be sitting. So, the women who is seeing that always recognise that Collector has more power than this dominant person. So that is the way, so we intimate to the Collector that you call this dominant caste person by name but whereas we cannot in the village. So that gives a kind of a courage to the Collector to act.</p> <p>So, the Collector has the power, Minister has the power, the citizen has the power, voter has the power. That is the peoples' power we make to understand. And we do convince the Government always. We go and we convince them. We tell them that you are here to implement that government</p>
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schemes, you are here to actually implement the act or the law of the country, so we make them to understand. So, my submission here is, fighting against the untouchability, fighting against the discrimination, fighting against the patriarchy, fighting against the caste is not just with the one community or the group, it is the for the wider society to understand, wider society to kind of inculcate a kind of a habit that they are that their responsibility is to implement this. So, we make others responsible. How irresponsible those people, our responsible leaders, they go and make these people as a responsible person. Thereby the companies or the particularly the ministries, departments, and they work very effectively. So, they make the law. So, once we started thinking that the law is not proactive to help the poor, Manual Scavenging Eradication Act. 2010 we have written the Prime Minister, 2011 we had the Ministers meeting, 2012 they said that we will amend the Act, so which means, the Safai Karmacharis can also come to the Parliament and make the law the way they want. But only thing is they have to put their consistent effort and they must feel that, we are powerless, we are pleading somebody, no! This is in a country, this is the society, this is the state where each and every citizen has the equal power as the President of India has. So that kind of a feeling of equality, we are all equal, that leadership must give it to others, that we are all equal, and the team members also must feel that we are all equal. So that kind of a balance we have to make. That is the actual, I can say, the success of Safai Karmachari Andolan.



Kapila	<p>Wonderful, wonderful. Thank you. It is interesting to see how you, as a leader, were effective in promoting a social cause that is important to you and being effective in securing the support of other persons and organisations, including the government. I would now like to talk to you about the impact that Responsible Leadership has on organisations. Let us take a moment to explore how and why companies are investing in building responsible leaders and why it benefits them to do so.</p> <p>Can you speak about your engagement with the Corporate sector and your partnership with them? For example, what is the primary reason that Corporates invite you to speak and how have they shown commitment to engaging with leaders and inspiring them to get involved and be responsible?</p>
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Bezwada	<p>Corporates has one good thing which I noticed always is, they are open to listen to others, they call many people to listen. Not just me, they open to listen. Unfortunately, in the State and the Government, we don't have that kind of even an openness to listen. And here in the Corporate, another thing is, they are willing to take some kind of a different model of leadership. So, it is not just one kind of a leadership, it is a different kind of leaders, because the leaders emerge out of the need. When there is a requirement, automatically leadership, because human beings we are all actually we are all good. I don't believe there are the some bad some good or something, but circumstances making all of us to be a more selfish, more competitive, more having a word called a jealous or envy or different words. But the thing is basically we are all good. When we are all good, definitely the leadership emerges out of the actually bloom like with the situation. It is just comes. So, the Corporate what they are trying to do I think is, they want to bring people like the movement leaders, the people who are struggling in the difficult situations, where there is no leadership but where somebody has made kind of a remarkable achievements, such people to bring in. So, I think that bridging between the out-of-the-box like the knowledge and you know that, you see the Corporate people can buy the 'n' number of the books and you can go to the internet and read whatever it is. But still they want to know, that out of all these things, there is a knowledge. That I must appreciate. So, you recognise very clear, there is a knowledge out of the so-called whatever is written and kept already. So that knowledge is the most important organic knowledge that we are bringing that organic intellectuality we are bringing back to the any companies. And that is actually, that is like an instrument, so how to use the instrument is your wish, for your company, that I cannot decide. But the thing is that there are many things to learn each other. And there is a big gap between the rich and poor in the country and the society which pains a lot for all of us, for every time, including the malnutrition, and many many other things. So, in such way</p>
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	<p>actually, the Corporate leadership must understand and listen to the people and understand the pain and the tears and the gap how it is day by day increasing. So, we together, so we have to put our efforts to bridge the gap between the rich and poor, between the all forms of the discrimination, between any kind of a discriminations, so we have to at most, our aim should be, create a society where there is no discrimination. Discrimination-free. And everybody feels comfortable, everybody feel that I do have my liberty, equality fraternity and I can live happily like. And the Corporate must pay back, because you got good wealth, you got a good comfort, you got a happiness also more. But there is a lacking of all these things by many number of the population. So as Ambedkar said, pay back to the society. That is the most important. So, you try to actually look back and do whatever is possible within your framework. I'm not saying that you have to come out and say all this. Within your framework, you give some time. First, I request you give some time, listen to the people, then you understand what is the requirement. Don't listen to me. You listen to the situations, you experience the situation, put yourself into the situation, you learn something, thereby you can design your own. So you have to make your own way.</p> <p>Thank you.</p>
Kapila	<p>Thank you, thank you. I'd now like to talk about how you have empowered others to become responsible leaders. At your organisation, you would have trained others to become leaders who could take programs and projects forward.</p> <p>How did you find the right people and train them to become leaders and visionaries in the organisation?</p>



Bezwada	<p>See it is a collective vision, it is just not a one person's vision. So, when the people join in the organisation normally we will have the orientation. But in Safai Karmachari Andolan we don't have any orientation. We will ask them to be there with us. After a week, we will call them back and we will ask them what they have found, what they want to know. If they have understood everything, we will not even talk to them, we will start asking what are their interested areas. We never give that we have this we have this like. But there is some professionals like finance people, some kind of other things, there we do go for the professionals. In other way, there are the civil servants who completed and joined in IAS (Indian Administrative Service), and with the passion with this movement by seeing, they resigned and joined. One person from the banking sector from the America, he came and I want to work. One person from Water and Sanitation, worked in the top levels, they said I want to come and work. I said that in Safai Karmachari Andolan, we don't work, we only just come and join. Then what to do, that you will understand and you will do. So, they agree and they come. And there is no that we empower others or anything. Once they expose themselves to the social reality, all human beings definitely they will bring the finer qualities out. Not by leading somebody or anything. But we have to create a atmosphere and we sometimes we have to nurture, that kind of atmosphere. Sometimes you have to put even in the incubation because otherwise it is a difficult to build leadership. And responsible leaders will emerge out of the demands.</p>
Kapila	<p>Thank you. Lastly, I'd like to ask if you have any last words of advice. As you know, Corporate Social Responsibility and Diversity & Inclusion programs are growing in India.</p> <p>So, what should companies keep in mind when they are building leaders to manage and drive these programs?</p>



Bezwada	<p>There is in a Corporate Social Responsibility as seen it is in a part of now the whole the Government and everybody is talking about. And there is a law also stating very clearly the Corporate Social Responsibility so much percentage in your profit or something. But I want to bring to your notice, moreover that, that individuals who are involved in any Corporate, how are you involved yourself in the social transformation? How are you involving yourself? How much you are giving your time? How much you can give your energy? So that each individual must understand. It is not just a Corporate they are doing, I am a part of that I am contributing. Indirect contributions are not sufficient now. You have to directly involve. There is scope for that and you have to stretch yourself. You may be working from the Monday to Thursday, you get so tired, I have no doubt on that, but after Friday, if you start working with the people, you will energise much more and you will relax more than that. So that kind of a stretch you have to start. You start with the half an hour, you move to the one hour if it is required, if it is not required you don't give even half an hour. If it is required, you develop your own passion, how much you can stretch. Thereby actually everybody feels happy around you. Otherwise you feel that you walk, you work, you travel, somebody will knock your car and you drop a coin, and you feel happy, and you feel very guilt that a small girl is taking alms here. But all this situation to change, you have to stretch, each individual. Individual level whatever you realise that makes even you and your company also happier. It is individuals, if we become the responsible, then the responsible collective leadership emerges. That can be the good corporate. I can say that can be the good corporate which we are all dreaming for that.</p>
Kapila	<p>Thank you, Mr. Wilson. I think your words are truly inspiring and motivating for organisations that are looking to continue building responsible leadership and drive responsible business practices. Thank you again for your time and your insights.</p>
Bezwada	<p>Thank you so much.</p>



Community Business is a not-for-profit organisation whose mission is to lead, inspire and support businesses to improve their positive impact on people and communities.
