

A STORY THAT OFTEN RATTLES about in the recesses of the attic that houses my brain is a tale that I'd read in my childhood. I'd come across it in *Amar Chitra Katha*, once upon a time a staple reading material for children in every Indian household.

Hira was a milkmaid who lived in the foothills of the Raigad fort during the

Desperate, Hira began to look around for other ways to get out of the fort. After a lengthy walkabout she came across an opening in the wall through which she could slip out. In pitch darkness she exited Raigad. She carefully inched her way down the steep mountainside and made her way safely home.

The next morning, when she tried to enter through the gates again with her can of milk as usual, the guards were immediately suspicious. They took her to the emperor. Shivaji could not

But I've subconsciously retained it for so long for a different reason.

The fact that Hira could blithely accomplish a tough and difficult goal because she had not grasped the full extent of it, seemed to me the moot point of the story. Amateurs and idealists have an advantage that seasoned experts do not – the ability to jump headlong into action without worrying too much about the factors working against them.

At the launch of her book, *A Veloc-*



Leap before you think

reign of Chatrapati Shivaji. She would come into the capital city to sell milk during the day and leave in the evening to return home to her ailing and elderly mother-in-law and infant son. Guards were under strict instructions to shut the gates of the impregnable fort at 6 p.m. every evening.

One day Hira was running late and made it to the gate just as it was being pulled shut. She entreated and pleaded, but the guards would not budge. All her cries that her baby would go hungry without her, fell on deaf ears. They told her she had to remain within the city walls that night and could only return home when the gates opened in the morning.

believe that a milkmaid had breached the impregnable fort. He asked her to show him how she did it. She took him to the place where the wall had an opening, but balked at repeating her gravity-defying stance of the previous night. The steep mountainside loomed threateningly before her in the broad daylight. The actions that she had not questioned in the darkness of the night seemed impossible to accomplish in clear daylight.

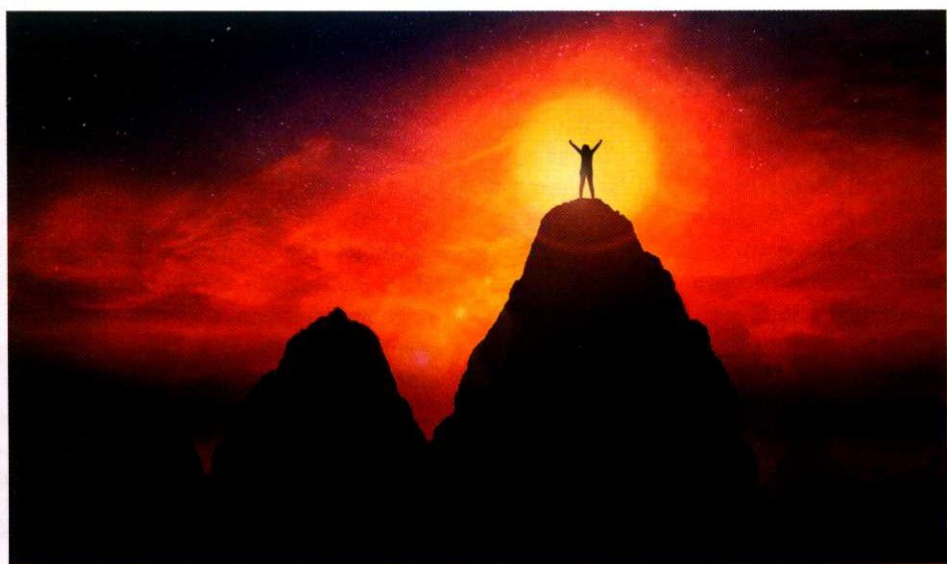
Shivaji was of course, grateful to her for pointing out a vulnerability in his defence system and erected a tower, the Hira Kani Buruj, in her honour. The moral of this story is often celebrated as the strength and devotion of a mother.

ity of Being, polymath Maria Popova said, "I think if anyone had told us that it would take eight years (to finish the book), I don't know if we would have done it. But blessed is the naivete of the idealistic beginner."

That's not to advocate impulsive action and hasty decision making. However, good leaders know when to strategise and when to implement, when to think long term versus when to focus only on surviving the next month or quarter, leaving the management of the future for another day.

The part of us that's making the plan has little to do with the part that's implementing it. One is sitting comfortably in a chair, reading risk reports, referring

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to charts and making contingencies for every foreseeable or unforeseeable emergency. The latter is in the thick of action, fielding obstacles, formulating quick-fix solutions when presented with problems in real time and being so absorbed in surviving the task at hand that there's little time to spend on thoughts of navigating the long term or in figuring out the end destination.

The long and hard years that senior leaders spend serving in underling positions should ideally help train them for judging when definitive action, and not prolonged contemplation, is required. It should sensitise them to the underlying context and nuance of the moment that less experienced individuals would not be able to detect provided they

have inculcated within themselves a reflective mindset, an ability to be mentally agile and to have flexible viewpoints.

The more senior you get, the more comfortable becomes the zone of strategising and weighing multiple and endless options rather than doing something. The accompanying inertia feeds off the fear of failure and vice versa. But we must remember that taking actions is also a strategy. Action entails making mistakes but it also means learning from them. Jumping into execution also results in pushing through mental blocks that stall momentum. Sometimes it's also about working with limited information but still rushing headlong down a mountain the way Hira did – because the goal is all important. **BW**

The author is President, Jagran Group