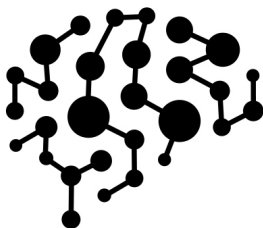


ONE GOLDEN NUGGET



**HOW TO
SURVIVE
AND
THRIVE
VOLUME III**

**JOE FOSTER, FOUNDER OF REEBOK,
RETURNS WITH POWERFUL NEW STORIES OF
RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION, CHANGING THE
WORLD ONE PAGE AT A TIME.**

Joe Foster



ZEESHAN HUSSAIN

Founder and CEO of ET International

Zeeshan and I share the same philosophy: success isn't handed to you; you must chase it. Eight years ago, he built his company from nothing, driven by sheer determination. Like me, he knew that the hardest customers were the ones worth winning. It took Reebok eleven years to break into the US market, but the challenge made it all the more rewarding. Hearing about Zeeshan's dogged pursuit of tough clients, I understood his pride because the real victory isn't just in landing them; it's in the fight to get there.

Born in Pune city, western India, Zeeshan takes pride in the rich diversity that shaped him. With a mother from the north and a father from the south, he grew up immersed in a blend of traditions, languages, and perspectives. His family eventually settled in Bengaluru (formerly known as Bangalore), a vibrant metropolis known as India's IT capital.

Although Zeeshan grew up in a city often referred to as the Silicon Valley of India, technology and software development never captured his interest. His true passion, even as a child, was cooking, and he always dreamed of becoming a chef. However, as he explains, "In India, parents have a very strong influence on what you do or don't do," and his mother had other plans. So, rather than breaking away from family tradition, he followed in the footsteps of his parents and siblings and gained a first-class degree in industrial engineering studies from SMVIT, Bangalore. For Zeeshan, "the learning provided by the university was excellent."



Nevertheless, soon after graduation, he tried his hand at IT, before quickly realising that it wasn't the right fit for him. Walking away wasn't an easy decision, and he certainly didn't want to disappoint his parents. But after an honest conversation, they agreed, on one condition: he had to actively seek a new path. Their support meant everything, just as it had when he was a schoolboy, when he often found himself in trouble with his teachers.

Zeeshan soon secured a research role at the Indian Institute of Science, working on projects for the government and major industries. As part of a team, he co-authored *External Technology Acquisition of SMEs in the Machinery Industry of Bangalore*, a study on the city's shifting reliance on Germany, Japan, and other global players.

The paper highlighted the need for better product quality, productivity, and customer satisfaction, principles Zeeshan has carried into his own manufacturing ventures. For 18 months, he gathered data from 200 industries in Bangalore. Then, Professor Bala Subrahmanya, his collaborator, advised him to step beyond research and gain real industry experience. Taking that advice, Zeeshan joined Kalyani Group, a major steel manufacturer. As a marketing engineer in Hyderabad, he played a key role in developing the energy, oil, and gas metal sector in India.

After a year at Kalyani Group, Zeeshan was encouraged by his close friend, Pradeesh, to move to Dubai. He was lucky that his parents understood and encouraged his desire to seek out an unconventional journey, so, at just twenty-five, he embraced the adventure of working at an energy sector start-up. The role gave him invaluable exposure across multiple facets of the business, giving him a strong foundation in operations, marketing, and management. However, despite the professional advantages, Dubai's high-energy lifestyle brought its own challenges. "I got caught up in the glamour of the place and



**“Live and let live. Respect others’ choices
while focusing on your own life.”**



started spending more than I was earning,” he admits. As a young man surrounded by luxury and excess, he quickly accumulated debts of \$25,000. Looking back, he reflects, “I was trying to lead a life that I had not yet built.” It was a harsh but formative lesson, one that shaped his financial discipline and strategic mindset in the years to come.

The experience instilled in Zeeshan not just a deep understanding of financial management but also a profound sense of empathy. He came to appreciate how easily people can fall into financial distress, often through seemingly small, incremental decisions. More importantly, it reinforced his unwavering work ethic. “I never say no to work,” he states. “If I am paid for ten hours, I will work for fifteen.” That commitment to going above and beyond became a defining principle of his career.

As Zeeshan worked tirelessly to rebuild his finances, he noticed serious cash flow issues within the start-up. But when the impact became personal, a pay cut followed by delayed salary payments, he knew he had to make a change. With the support of his mentor (Rakesh Chopdar, founder of Azad Engineering), he took a leap of faith and founded ET International in 2017, determined to build a business on his own terms. He deeply appreciates Rakesh Chopdar for his unwavering guidance and support, without which none of this would have been possible. He draws immense inspiration from his mentor.

To support himself while building his business, Zeeshan took on a business development role for a German diesel engine company working across the Middle East. It became his financial lifeline as he worked to get his venture off the ground. “I was juggling two roles,” he explains, “but I had to in order to survive. The gas turbine industry moves slowly, registration takes time, and product qualification takes even longer.”

Zeeshan’s company specialises in supplying parts for heavy-duty gas and steam turbines. With a global supply chain and a network of trusted manufacturing partners, he has positioned his firm as a comprehensive, one-stop solution within the industry. Combining his engineering expertise, MBA, and natural leadership with sharp entrepreneurial instincts, he has built a highly successful business that now generates multi-million dollars in turnover.

Zeeshan credits part of his success to Dubai’s business-friendly environment, where the government actively supports entrepreneurship through initiatives like the Golden Visa, which enables foreign professionals to live, work, and study in the UAE.

Yet, looking back, his entrepreneurial spirit was evident long before he set foot in Dubai. As a child, he acted as a middleman for students looking to buy bikes for their university commute, earning a commission on each sale. In hindsight, it was a glimpse into his future — building a career in the turbine industry by applying the same principles of connecting suppliers with customers and creating value through smart business dealings. He also vividly recalls sitting on the terrace with his sister, Sana,



**“Forge your own path. Opportunities aren’t
always given; create them yourself.”**

dreaming of their future success: beautiful homes, cars, and world travels. For Zeeshan, those childhood conversations weren't just wishful thinking, but manifesting his future reality.

This drive may have had roots in his family history. Inspired by stories of their grandfather's success in business, Zeeshan now takes immense pride whenever someone draws comparisons between them. Though he was a mischievous child who was often in trouble at school, usually for skipping class to play sports, he now considers making his parents proud one of his greatest achievements. He admits that part of his drive came from a desire to prove people wrong, especially those who doubted him. Never one to blindly follow rules, he reflects, "I wasn't a rule follower, but I was a smart kid."

However, for Zeeshan, success isn't just about financial gains; it's also about growth, learning, and meaningful connections. In 2021, four years after founding his own company, he took on a new challenge — pursuing an MBA at the London Business School. It wasn't just about refining his business acumen but about broadening his worldview. "I wanted that diverse experience of meeting people beyond the engineering sector, to expand my perspective," he explains. The decision wasn't just an investment in his career but in himself, reinforcing his belief that success is as much about knowledge and relationships as it is about numbers.



This approach has shaped Zeeshan’s core philosophy in business. Drawing from his own experiences, he has developed a set of leadership principles rooted in an “ownership mindset.” As he explains, “Whatever you do, you have to take full ownership of your processes.” He champions a high-reward system where individuals reap the benefits of their contributions but also stresses the importance of empathy in the workplace.

Zeeshan thrives on innovation and encourages the same mindset within his team. He fosters an environment where experimentation is valued, setting clear targets while allowing employees the freedom to explore different approaches. By broadening their perspectives, he not only drives innovation but also supports personal and professional growth, creating a workplace where ambition and adaptability go hand in hand.

Zeeshan applies the same high standards to himself, with one overarching goal — to close a sale, no matter how tough the deal. He recalls a defining moment, two years into his venture, when he first approached a US client to sell parts. The response was blunt: “The Middle East is a seller’s market for us, not a buyer’s market. Don’t call





**“Know when to let go. Knowing
when to persist and when to step
back is key to wisdom.”**



again.” But Zeeshan wasn’t deterred. He refined his approach, built his company’s reputation, and persisted. Two years later, that same client now generates \$1 million dollars in business for his company, a testament to his resilience and strategic thinking. “I shifted his thought process and gave him a price point,” he says proudly. It was proof that in business, persistence isn’t just valuable; it’s essential.

While securing large clients is a major milestone, Zeeshan values every customer, regardless of size. “I don’t look at value as big or small,” he explains. He recalls a client who initially tested his services with a modest \$128 fee on small orders. Rather than dismissing the opportunity, Zeeshan focused on delivering quality and building trust. Over time, that same client grew into a \$500k revenue stream. For Zeeshan, business isn’t just about strategy; it’s about intuition, persistence, and playing the long game. He understands that lasting relationships are built on consistency, reliability, and a commitment to adding value at every stage.

ET International isn’t just a supplier, it’s also a manufacturer. Zeeshan explains, “Because I have a strong network of manufacturers, I get the drawings from the client and can produce the parts in different phases. I buy the raw material, have it machined in one place, coated in another, bring it back to Dubai for packaging, and then ship it to the client.” This streamlined process allows him to maintain quality control while optimising costs and efficiency.

As the world moves towards sustainable energy, Zeeshan has noticed a clear shift, “Everyone wants to have a mixed portfolio.” He sees the global energy transition as a driving force for new opportunities, with industries adapting to balance traditional and renewable sources. Recognising the potential in this evolving landscape, he remains focused on identifying and capitalising on the trends that will shape the future of his business.

Zeeshan has developed a structured approach to managing his time and well-being. He follows a focused work technique — twenty-five minutes of deep work with no distractions, followed by a ten-minute break. He also keeps his to-do list manageable, ensuring tasks don’t pile up and aiming to complete as much as possible each day.

A lifelong sports enthusiast, he plays badminton and tennis regularly and hits the gym — not just for fitness, but as a way to relieve stress. While he’s not one for long holidays, he values short breaks to reset. With India just a three-hour flight away, he often visits his parents for a few days to “disconnect” and recharge.

Zeeshan also has a deep interest in the psychology of human interactions and strongly believes in the power of small, consistent actions to create meaningful change. As a Muslim, he makes a conscious effort to pray whenever possible, even if just for five or ten minutes a day. For him, prayer is more than a religious practice; it’s a grounding ritual that fosters mindfulness and supports his mental well-being.

In business, Zeeshan draws inspiration from Yvon Chouinard, the visionary founder of Patagonia. Chouinard built a billion-dollar brand but, at 83, made an extraordinary decision, donating the entire company to a charitable trust dedicated to fighting climate change. For Zeeshan, this act of purpose-driven leadership is a powerful example of how business can create a lasting impact far beyond profit. Finally, he is deeply grateful to his parents, mentor, brother (Salman), sister (Sana), and friends, particularly Aditya and Amit, for their support throughout his entrepreneurial journey.



“Success needs grit. Hard work and persistence are key to achieving goals.”



“Relationships drive growth. Strong connections are fundamental to personal and professional success.”



HOW TO
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AND
THRIVE







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