



The main job of any leader is to help make the world a better place. Our journeys also reflect the help that we received along the way. I am indebted to many who helped me, at age 20, to trade the beautiful mountains of Kashmir for the bustling borough of Brooklyn. To name a few: John Birkelund, CEO of Rothschild, Inc. who mentored me to take on the position of Chief Financial Officer when I was 27; and Nathan Ancell, founder of Ethan Allen, who taught me about marketing and manufacturing and who, when I was 40, gave me the responsibility of being President of an iconic American company, Ethan Allen.

Helping others was also the guiding principle in the life of my son, Irfan Kathwari, who left this world 28 years ago at the age of 20. As I write this letter on November 22, 2020 – Irfan’s birthday – I remember how passionate he was about helping those who were less fortunate. We celebrate his birthday and his life by supporting a number of causes.

This year, we have faced almost every imaginable challenge, from a global pandemic to natural disasters. We at Ethan Allen operate a workshop that makes handcrafted furniture in Honduras. Recently, devastating floods severely impacted over 500 associates in our workshop; 150 families lost everything. On November 22, we decided to help them through the Irfan Kathwari Foundation, which was established in memory of our son. We also decided to support both global causes, such as the Kashmir Education Initiative, which provides scholarships to numerous aspiring student leaders in the war-torn region of Kashmir, and local organizations, such as a charity that feeds the homeless in the area where we live.

About 30 years back, Ethan Allen established 10 leadership principles which are even more relevant today. Five of the principles are focused on how our leaders interact with others:

Self-Confidence: Have the self-confidence to empower others to do their best.

Hard Work: Leaders must establish a standard of hard work and practice it consistently.

Accessibility: Be open and supportive and recognize the contributions of others.

Priorities: Clearly differentiate between the big and small ones.

Justice: Make decisions fairly. Justice builds trust, motivation, and teamwork.

As I reflect on my son’s life, I am reminded that to have principles is only the beginning. Principles are only truly relevant when they are put into action.

Irfan went to help in many troubled regions of the world, even though I pleaded with him to come home and focus on his studies. His last reply was, “You do not have to worry about me, Dad. What is happening in the world is important. I am just trying to figure out what I can do to help. It is our job to help people who are less fortunate than us. Unless we do what we can to help others, our lives are meaningless.”

The call to help the people around us, and in other parts of the world, is a call to which every leader must respond. When we help others, we leave a legacy that inspires others to take action, just as my son’s passion continues to inspire me.



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