

# Beyond the Boardroom

Hobbies, far from being mere distractions, are proving to be powerful tools that shape better leaders  
By Mamta Sharma

For Yashwant Mahadik, President, Global Human Resources at Lupin, a pharmaceutical company, photography is more than a hobby. It is a way of life. What began as a childhood fascination, nurtured by his father's love for cameras, has grown into a practice that influences his leadership in unexpected ways. "My father gifted me my first medium-format RolleiFlex camera, and that sparked something in me," Mahadik recalls. "The shift to digital photography in 2010 reignited my passion, making it a true counterbalance to my corporate career."

From capturing the unpredictable movements of wildlife to studying cityscapes at night, Mahadik's photographic pursuits have deepened his patience, adaptability and ability to see beauty in unexpected places. The patience required to capture the perfect shot has translated into a more thoughtful and measured decision-making approach. "Photography has given me a unique lens through which I view leadership. Where others see obstacles, I see opportunities," he reflects.

The idea resonates with Sandeep Bhammer, founder and managing partner of Green Frontier Capital. For Bhammer, the sitar is more than just an instrument-it's a teacher, a guide, and a quiet force that influences his leadership every day. "The sitar has become my sweet pill-a therapeutic escape. It has taught me that precision and improvisation go hand in hand." Collaboration in music also shaped his approach to team dynamics. In Hindustani classical performances, the sitar, tabla, and other instruments must work in sync, each musician deeply attuned to the others. That understanding proved invaluable during a heated debate over resource allocation. Instead of pushing a singular viewpoint, he encouraged his team to voice their perspectives-much like allowing each instrument to have its moment in a composition. The result? A resolution rooted in trust, respect, and a shared vision.

**Lessons in Handling Pressure** A 2020 study from the National Library of Medicine states how CEOs use their leisure to help respond to the demands of their job. The study looks into ways in which CEOs believe their passionate non-work pursuit supports not only coping with the strain of the top job but also optimal functioning in it. It says, "While most leisure activities can provide some form of recovery experience, serious leisure is ideally positioned in terms of the range and strength of recovery experiences and personal resources it promotes. This powerful cocktail of personal resources built by serious leisure suggests that it can play an important role in buffering the burnout risk associated with high job demands." Shruti Aggarwal, co-founder Stashfin, a financial services platform, has benefited from the same philosophy for her love for boxing. "I started with basic training at a local gym, but over time, boxing became much more than a physical pursuit. It has taught me discipline, focus, and mental fortitude," she says. The discipline inherent in the sport has shaped her leadership in a way that encourages a culture of mutual respect and collaboration.

The idea that weekends are only meant for spending idle hours at home-perhaps even staring at your wife, as L&T Chairman once pointed out-is outdated. Today, leaders are clearly redefining downtime-not as a break from work but as a chance to refuel their creativity, resilience, and problem-solving skills.