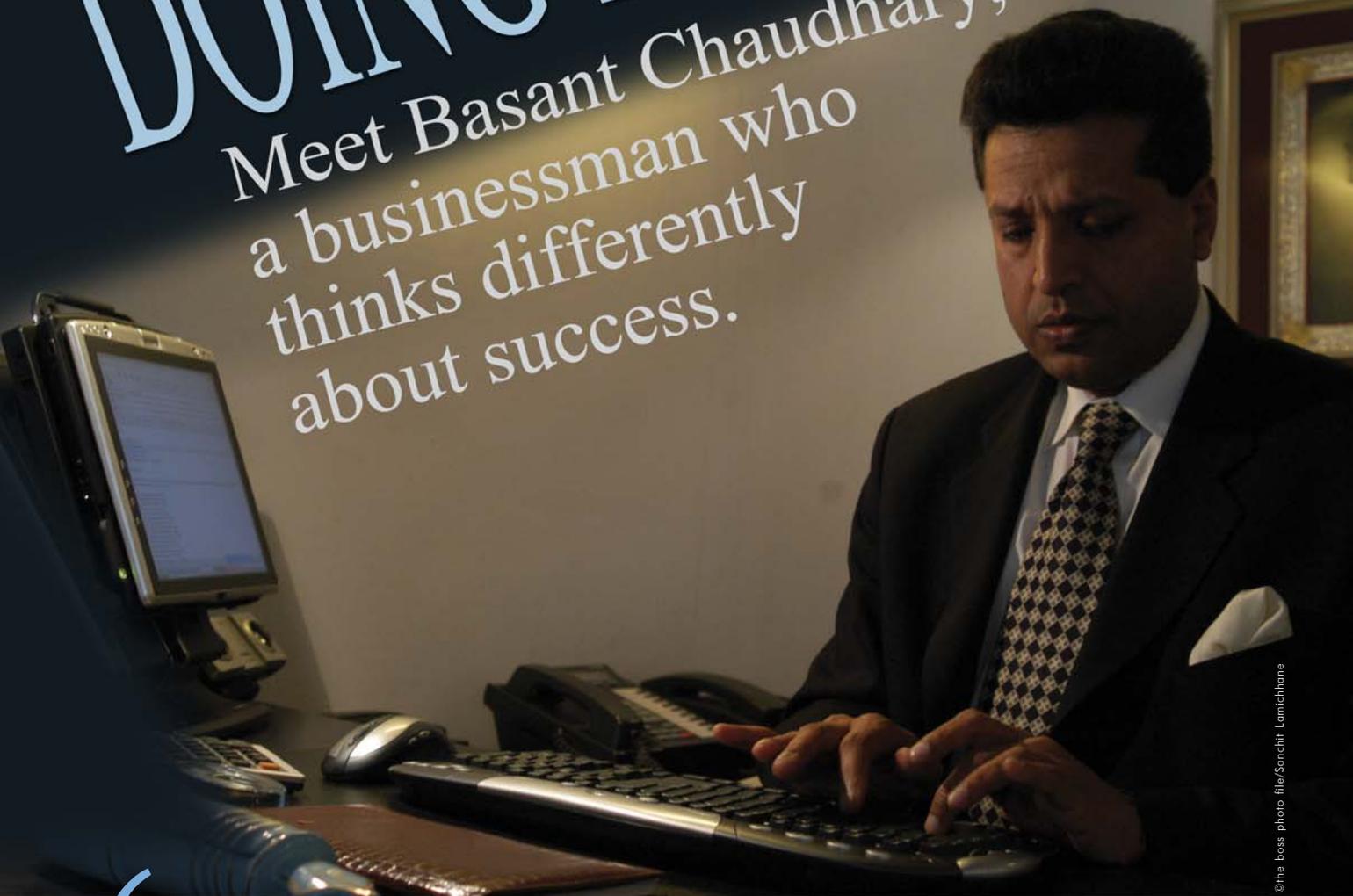


By Pinaki Roy

BASANT CHAUDHARY DOING IT HIS WAY

Meet Basant Chaudhary,
a businessman who
thinks differently
about success.



©the boss photo file/Sanchit Lamichhane

“I am ambitious but differently so. For me, people come first. I cannot progress at someone else’s expense.”

When I met Basant Chaudhary at his cosy and elegantly designed Khichapokhari office he immediately came across as a humble, down to earth and amiable person. This well-attired, stylish and charismatic man of nearly 47 is a scion of the Chaudhary Group, a conglomerate of over 40 businesses and industries. Chaudhary talks proudly of the group, which had very modest beginnings but ranks among the most successful business houses in Nepal. “Most of the companies in our group were started by my father,

Lunkaran Das Chaudhary," he says. "We are a \$150 million corporate today."

But there is more to Chaudhary than successful businesses like Pashupati Biscuits and Mahalaxmi Maida Mills. He has followed his heart too, trying his hand at publishing when younger and now operating the Norvic-Escorts Health Care and Research Centre. Chaudhary is also deeply involved in social causes to help the underprivileged section of the society. Among the works closest to his heart is the Pashupati Area Development Trust: he has served as the Member Secretary of its governing council for the last three-and-a-half years. He exudes confidence when he describes the planned three-phase, 10-year development of the Pashupati Area that is intended to establish Pashupatinath as a major destination for religious tourists from around the world.

Norvic Hospital

Norvic is, Chaudhary says, "my dream child, my baby." His personal investment in the project, financially and in time and energy, is obvious as he speaks, but everything he says is about other people: his father, whose commitment to service inspired him; Dr Trehan from the Escorts clinic in Delhi, who encouraged him to build a medical centre; Dr Kasliwal, "all the credit goes to him"; Norvic Executive Director Dr Bharat Rawal; and Dr Devkota.

Chaudhary was interested in medicine even as a teenager, but realised early that he was not cut out to be a doctor. His dream, he says, "has always been to develop a medical centre where my countrymen could get top care at affordable prices." When he could, he did.

He is clearly not in the hospital business for the money. He points out that his is the only medical centre run by the corporate sector in Nepal because the return is low. He admits that Norvic has yet to break even, since the rates are deliberately kept reasonable and investment is high. "We don't ever want to compromise on quality," he says emphatically, and he points to continuing multi-million rupee investments in updated technology.

Starting young

Chaudhary started his career early, joining the family business straight from school. At that time Arun Emporium, the family owned department store located in Khichapokhari, attracted many Indian



tourists due to the wide range of imported goods in the store. He reminisces, saying, "I was barely 17 at that time and started as a counter salesman at the showroom." Coming from a conservative Marwari family, interacting with the visiting Indian tourists was a great experience for young Chaudhary. The lifestyle of the affluent Indians enchanted him. Like any other young businessman starting out, money was his driving force, but Chaudhary soon decided that there was more to life than money.

When asked about his father's expectations of him, he replies on a philosophical note. "I do feel that I did not fulfil the ambitions that my father had for me. But I believe he is not all that disappointed with me either." Coming from a business family, Chaudhary was faced with high expectations for his role as one of the heirs to the family business. This was not always easy: "The enormous load of expectations, at times, led me to wish that I was not part of such a big empire" he says.



Managing successful businesses requires a great amount of time and commitment, both of which Chaudhary admits he needs to work on. It is often his employees who urge him further, and in return he repeatedly mentions and praises his them. He says that people are the most prized possession of an organisation and they need to be treated respectfully and acknowledged for their performance. It has been a tradition with the Chaudharys that the employees work for the owner: he wants to establish a modern culture where the employees work for the organisation instead.

Chaudhary appreciates people who have the courage to walk up to him and tell him when he is wrong. He acknowledges this straight forwardness, and says that it is very easy to be a 'yes' person but requires immense courage to stand up for one's beliefs.

Challenges ahead

Norvic is clearly a medical success: more than 30,000 outpatients have been treated, and the hospital admits about 1,000 in-patients each year, treating them with world-class technology and techniques, including heart bypasses and complex neurosurgery. But Chaudhary is adamant that it is not a charity. "Until the hospital makes substantial revenue, it can't grow." Reaching profitability is Chaudhary's main challenge now.

In the same breath, though, he says that his other goal is to persuade the medical community of Nepal that Norvic is their facility, "a national property." He says Norvic is "complementary to, not in competition with, the medical community. I'm not a doctor and not a competitor. I'm a catalyst, an interface only."

Chaudhary is deeply optimistic about business and the nation. "If you are honest and have a positive outlook, God helps you," he says. "I have experienced that in my life. I feel it."

Besides Business

Chaudhary was only 21 when he got married to Meena, his wife of more than 25 years now. Meena was one of the regular visitors to Arun Emporium; destiny intervened to transform their association into a lifelong relationship. Chaudhary and Meena are today proud parents of their only child Megha. A songwriter since 1991, he has recently cut an album with his lyrics sung by Deepak Kharel. With his many versatile facets, Basant Chaudhary is doing it his way.

A businessman with a difference

In time the Chaudhary business was divided among the three brothers, Binod, Basant and Arun. The arrangement allows for a common interest in each company, but the business operations are individually managed. No matter how lucrative a business is, the brothers make it a point not to get into competition with each other. In fact, where possible, they try to complement each other's business interests.

Chaudhary is proud of the phenomenal

growth of his brothers' businesses over the years. Binod had to takeover the reigns of the business from his father at a very young age, and Chaudhary's pride is clearly evident when he says, "Binod was instrumental in the growth of the group and where it stands today."

He deliberates over a question about his style. "I am ambitious but differently so. For me people come first. I cannot progress at someone else's expense. I trust in God and I know that he will look out for me," he replies.