

Imran Anwar
Forever New Visions, Forever New Horizons
by Monica Davis



A man who made a lasting mark on two continents, Imran is living proof that success comes to those who envision a goal and unswervingly aim for it. You don't have to be born in America to become a success in America. He explains that "living the American dream doesn't necessarily mean you live an 'easy' life all the time. You have more choices in life and you can buy more on credit, but – you also accumulate more debt," he jokes.

He believes that usually he knows he is on the right track when people oppose what he is attempting to accomplish. "If you're going to do anything meaningful in life you will find opposition."

"People are afraid to be visionaries or pioneers. Only if you're willing to fail bravely - and publicly - will you succeed incredibly," says Imran.

Imran, through hard work, ingenuity and compassion, changed the lives of thousands in Pakistan by introducing Internet email and later by establishing branded credit cards to improve that country's economic standing. His creativity in bringing about change to this underdeveloped nation was masterful.

Working only with the technical help of a neighbor, and his personal funds, Pakistan was put on the global Internet map without any help or involvement of the government or phone monopoly. He single-handedly started the financial ball rolling to develop a middle-class in his former homeland, by convincing big credit card brands to do business there – a country they had written off for "sovereign risk" in the mid-1990's.

At age six, Imran had to make an important decision that would chart the course of his life. His father, a civil engineer, often worked in remote locations where schools did not exist. Imran was given the choice of remaining with his family and foregoing an education. Imran chose to leave and live with his late grandmother in Karachi to pursue an education.

At the age of 17, Imran started his first company, "IMRAN", which, he says with a chuckle, "sounds pretty egotistical - until I tell you, it stands for *Information & Media Resources, Affiliations & Networks*." He gave his company that long-winded name using words that were not very commonly used, especially because in the late 70's people did not know that information technology, networks and new media would become the rage in less than twenty years.

He went on to the Engineering University in Lahore, and became Chief Organizer of Pakistan's largest independent Students' Union. This role led to his leading a protest against the Martial Law government of General Zia. During this protest, Imran was grabbed by six baton-wielding policemen, beaten, and at two o' clock in the morning he was sentenced to prison by a Military Court. He was released a few days later.

Even the experience of being a political prisoner under a reviled dictator, where he was put in the same cells as death row prisoners in Pakistan's notorious Kot Lakhpat prison, was "a positive learning experience". The experience has remained his strength to this day.

In 1987 he visited New York. He immediately knew that he would return to America again. In 1989 he returned -- on a full scholarship -- to attend Columbia University's Graduate School of Business for an MBA.



Getting funding for his ideas and projects had been challenging in the past, because many of his projects were intended to help create social change. These days, however, things are different. There is funding available to people with a strong track record. People like Imran.

He says the best part of having done a few great projects is that people will now come to him with funding offers to get involved in one of several new Web 2.0 projects he is working on. His previous experiences as CEO, senior management and consultant have played a huge part in helping to locate at risk children, the creation of smartcards and opening up areas of technology and markets that previously didn't exist in Pakistan.

When I asked Imran who inspired him most in his life and had the greatest impact, I sensed he was holding back tears as he praised his mother for her love, words of wisdom and the confidence she instilled in him. She taught him not to focus on people saying "why 'it' can't be done," but "how can 'it' be done."

Imran believes life is what you make of it. "Success is being able to know what you want to achieve in life, setting up tasks and milestones, achieving goals in your lifetime and being able to look back on your life at the end and say, 'I achieved what I wanted to achieve.'"

The seeds that he planted have reaped beautiful buds of success and in the process, many others have also benefited.