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'Power couple' venture into India's corporate world



In his role, Adrian Keillor* meets with CEOs, politicians and ambassadors. He hopes to make a contribution not only to his company's profits but to the economic future of India. But that's not the only reason Adrian and his wife, Nicole,* moved from Tennessee to India. They came to represent Jesus Christ in the corporate marketplace -- and anywhere else God leads them. IMB photo by Paul W. Lee.

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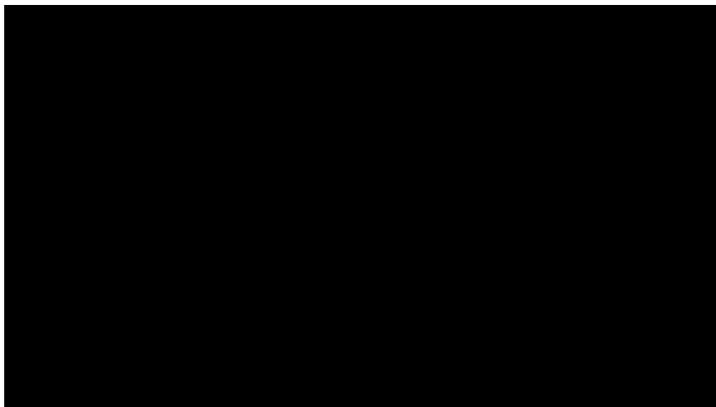
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INDIA (BP) -- Sometimes, where you sit determines how you look at the world.

Adrian Keillor,* understands that better than most. He sits in fancy corporate boardrooms and lowly village huts -- sometimes in the same week.

At the moment, he's sitting in a padded chair behind a big desk in his eighth-floor corner office. It overlooks the sleek business and technology center of one of India's fastest-growing megacities.

On the credenza behind his desk is a book, titled "Becoming an Agile Leader." A souvenir football from the Alabama Crimson Tide's 2011



national championship perches in a glass case on the shelf above. On the wall, four clocks show the time in the United States, India, Brussels and Shanghai. Adrian's company, a multinational manufacturing/sales giant, does business in each of those places -- and every other major global market -- of about \$30 billion annually.

India, a relatively new market for the company, accounts for a fraction of the global operation so far. Adrian's task as president of the Indian subsidiary is to make sure the South Asian piece of the pie grows, along with shareholder value. The livelihood of the more than 5,000 Indians who report to him directly or indirectly depends on it.

Other than that -- no pressure. It's a big job, but he's optimistic.

"I don't think we've fully grasped the potential of India because of all the infrastructure challenges," says Adrian, running a hand through his shock of gray hair. "With just a modest amount of improvement, and the energies of more than 1.2 billion people, India is poised to experience explosive growth."

In his role, Adrian meets with movers and shakers in his city and beyond: CEOs, politicians, ambassadors. He hopes to make a contribution not only to his company's profits but to the economic and social future of India.

But that's not the only reason Adrian and his wife Nicole* moved from Tennessee to India. They came to represent Jesus Christ in the corporate marketplace -- and anywhere else God leads them.

They still shake their heads in disbelief at their rapid transition from the affluent life of a "power couple" in suburban Memphis to frequent forays into some of the poorest areas of India to share the Gospel.

"If somebody had told me a few years ago that we'd be sitting in 115-degree heat in the middle of a drought on a dirt floor in a hut somewhere in India, I would have said, 'That's going to take divine intervention,'" Adrian says.

It did.

All the toys

Adrian and Nicole began dating in college. He was attending the University of Alabama and she went to Auburn University. Their attraction somehow overcame the bitter football rivalry between the two schools. They both transferred to the University of South Alabama, which helped.

"It's amazing we're still together," Nicole jokes about the rivalry. (They observed their 25th wedding anniversary in 2013).

After Adrian completed a master's degree in business administration at the University of North Carolina, he advanced rapidly in the Tennessee-based company he works for today -- eventually becoming a corporate officer and vice president at age 39.

"It was kind of the American dream playing out, progressing up the corporate ladder and doing very well," Adrian says. "Multiple homes, all the toys, all the things one would look at and say, 'They're very successful.' We have two great children, just terrific young men [now 19 and 23]. We recently welcomed a beautiful daughter-in-law into our family. Our health is good. We had a great life by worldly standards. ... But there was always an undercurrent of dissatisfaction."

They were both Christians, but not wholehearted disciples. They joined a dynamic congregation in the greater Memphis area, Collierville First Baptist Church, but held back on full commitment. They knew something was missing. Flying lessons didn't fill the vacuum. Neither did scuba diving lessons, family vacations around the world, sports, nor any number of possessions, even a beautiful weekend lake house.

"We bought the lake house and all the trappings that went with it -- the boat, the jet skis," Nicole recalls. "Yeah, the lake house definitely became an idol. We kind of justified it because it was family time. We were 'making memories.' But it became an all-consuming thing, not just a weekend thing."

Turning point

Looking for yet another family trip or experience they hadn't tried before, they spotted an ad for a missions trip to Guatemala in the church newsletter. They'd never been on a missions trip. Adrian, Nicole and both of their sons went to serve at an orphanage in Guatemala. They scrubbed floors, cleaned toilets, ministered to children -- and loved every minute of it. One night, Adrian had a conversation with Adam, a young man who helped run the orphanage.

"By most every measure, society would say I've achieved the brass ring of success," Adrian told the 22-year-old. "But I can't hold a candle to what you are doing here. It's eternally significant."

Adam replied to the older man, "Well, Mr. Keillor, it's not too late."

"I've remembered those words ever since," Adrian says. "This kid was far wiser than I was. We've been on two other missions trips to Guatemala since then, but more importantly, we've tried to put ourselves in a place where we say, 'Here am I, God. What would you have me do?'"

They finally realized what was missing in their lives: a vital and growing relationship with Jesus Himself, not just church membership. Starving for a deeper encounter with the living God, Adrian took a MasterLife discipleship course with Chuck Herring, senior pastor at Collierville First Baptist (and now a close friend). Nicole also began to study the Bible in depth, particularly the Book of Daniel. Their immersion in the Word of God began to transform them.

So when the invitation came from Adrian's company to take over the India portfolio for a few years, the Keillors were ready. Not ready for India, of course, but ready to say yes to God.

"I'm not going to lie; it was definitely scary," Nicole says. "I don't do change easily. Sometimes it's not fun being obedient to God."

India

The lake house sold in two months. The Keillors sold their main house and most of the rest of their stuff, too, since their younger son was headed to college. The company provided a large, comfortable home in India for their time there, but nothing prepares Americans for the sensory onslaught of India's sights, sounds, tastes and smells. Nicole "kind of shut down" for the first month or so, she admits. But she slowly began to emerge, explore the city and introduce herself to Indians and other Western expats. After more than a year, her stomach is still learning to cope with spicy Indian cuisine.

Adrian has immersed himself in the challenges of doing business in India. He's a methodical, results-oriented American executive. That approach works well in America. It works in India, too -- up to a point.

"It takes a tremendous amount of patience here," he explains. "It takes longer. You can be successful, you can be driven, but you have to temper that 'get it done quickly' approach or you drive yourself crazy. It also forces you to your knees a lot more. It forces you to pray."

As a company president and a Christian, he must tread lightly as he relates to a diverse, overwhelmingly Indian work team that includes many Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs as well as Christians. But he has plenty of opportunities to communicate biblical principles.

Hari, a Christian employee and now executive assistant to the president, remembers when Adrian pulled a Bible out of his briefcase during his first team meeting with colleagues. He used the story of the Good Samaritan as an illustration of treating others the way you want to be treated.

"That was amazing," Hari says. "I've worked with some other large corporations, and I have never seen anyone do that."

With Adrian's encouragement, Hari has become a trendsetter in the office. His insistence on working and relating to others with integrity, even when pressured to cut corners, has become known among the company's staff, vendors and customers.

"I want to do it the right way even if somebody is not watching, because there is Someone watching me above," Hari says.

On weekends, Adrian leads a MasterLife discipleship group for young Indian professionals. Nicole also hopes to begin a Bible study for Indian friends and other expats.

EMBRACE

And what about those visits to sweltering villages?

While the Keillors were beginning to experience their spiritual transformation in Tennessee, Collierville First Baptist was beginning to explore what it means to "embrace" a people group that has no contact with the Gospel. Pastor Chuck Herring heard IMB President Tom Elliff's challenge to Southern Baptist churches to take personal responsibility for the world's more than 3,000 unengaged, unreached people groups. Moved, Herring brought the challenge back to First Baptist. But which people group and where? They began to pray and seek.

"There's a lot to choose from, so we looked at basically three questions," says Sam Nichols, missions pastor at the church. "Where do we have contacts with Christian workers? That included South Asia. What people groups are being brought here to Collierville? There's a large Indian population because of several of the companies in the Memphis area related to information technology. Third, where is lostness? IMB uses a map with the color red to show where unengaged peoples are, and South Asia bleeds red because there are so many unengaged peoples there."

They focused in on the Lingayat people of India, which number as many as 20 million. A vision trip led them to a 2.2 million-member subset of the Lingayat living in a state neighboring the one where the Keillors live. Coincidence? They don't think so.

The church sends teams several times a year to work with local Christian partners reaching out to Lingayat villages. Adrian and Nicole take a train from their city to connect with volunteer teams -- and often go on their own to share Christ. First Baptist's strategic goal: To train and equip local believers to make disciples and plant churches among the Lingayat. The Keillors have become a vital part of a strategy that has seen hundreds of Lingayat come to faith in Christ despite often-strong social and spiritual opposition.

"Adrian's on the front line," says a Christian worker based in South Asia. "He's sitting like an Indian in their homes. He's sharing the Gospel. He's led more people to Christ personally than I have. Nicole is right there in the thick of it, too. Here's a guy who's got more responsibilities than the average dude working overseas. He's the CEO of a company and he's got time -- he takes time -- to go with his wife to do ministry. They're doing it effectively and they're loving it."

Bottom line: You don't have to be a missionary to make a significant impact for Christ living overseas. In some places, you might make an even greater impact as a business professional.

It all depends on where you choose to sit.

Learn more about being a marketplace professional for Christ at marketplaceadvance.com.

Interested in "embracing" an unengaged, unreached people group that needs the Gospel? Visit call2embrace.org.

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*Name changed. Erich Bridges is IMB's global correspondent. Get Baptist Press headlines and breaking news on Twitter ([@BaptistPress](https://twitter.com/BaptistPress)), Facebook ([Facebook.com/BaptistPress](https://www.facebook.com/BaptistPress)) and in your email (baptistpress.com/SubscribeBP.asp).

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