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College students get lessons in overcoming difficult situations

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COIMBATORE: Racial discrimination, denial of credit for inventing the email and even allegations of financial impropriety - the Tamil Nadu born Shiva Ayyadurai had seen it all in the US. Speaking to students of GRD Institute of Management in Coimbatore on Monday, he recalled how he overcame these and many other difficult situations.

Ayyadurai, who was the special guest at Face to Face, a series of guest lectures organized by the Institute, had left the students spellbound by the time he finished his motivating speech.

A native of Muhavur, a nondescript village near Rajapalayam in Virudhunagar district, Ayyadurai moved to the US at the age of seven with his parents. "At the age of 14, I had completed all my math courses in school, and had joined a software programming course in New York," said Ayyadurai.

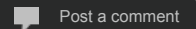
"With the help of one of my professors, I started working for a private firm. There I noticed that my manager's secretary had separate spots earmarked as inbox, outbox and drafts box. I also noticed an address book on the table and a trash can underneath. This is how I conceptualized the email," said Ayyadurai.

It was in 1978 that Ayyadurai wrote the code for email, and in 1980 he obtained copyrights for the code. "I named it email because the operating system only allowed five characters to name the programme. Otherwise I would have named it electromail or something else," Ayyadurai said.

He narrated how he managed to prove that he invented the email years later. It was in 2011, when his mother was suffering from a rare respiratory disorder that he found a box with all the documents to prove that he invented email. "I published the documents on my website, and then people noticed my contribution," he said. But by the time, Ayyadurai had faced racial comments, discrimination and slander, he told the students.

He urged students to be confident. "You need to overcome self-doubt. Only if you are confident you can be innovative. When I said that I invented email at the age of 14, nobody could believe it," he said. India has been a country of innovators, and it is in the hands of the student community to continue the legacy, he added.

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