

Inspiring story of Deepak Vadithala - from a Paper delivery boy to a Lead Data Engineer & QlikView Luminary

[BEGINNER](#)[BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE](#)[INTERVIEW QUESTIONS](#)[INTERVIEWS](#)[STORIES](#)

Introduction

We love heroes. We use them to get our dose of daily inspiration. We look forward to see / hear what they are doing, how they are converting challenges into opportunities and what they are thinking. We pick our heroes based on our experience, preferences, challenges and likings. I am sure you have your own heroes.

Today, we bring you a story of one such hero – [Deepak Vadithala](#). Deepak started his career as a paper boy. He has been a booth guy, a nightwatchman at a computer institute to learn Computers and is a Qlik Luminary today.

My encounter with Deepak

The first time I came across Deepak was when he was running a QlikView course for charity. He asked us if Analytics Vidhya would be able to spread word for his course. Next time I can across him – he was using his Data Science skills for charity work and involving a group of 30 data scientists to solve social problems for underprivileged children.

My curiosity about him grew and I looked up what and why is he up to. And I came across an inspirational story – a story of sheer hard work & perseverance. A story which puts all excuses I hear from people to shame and could inspire an entire generation of data scientists. I am going to share this story with our community today.

About Deepak Vadithala



Deepak is currently working as a Lead Data Engineer / Data Scientist. He was recognised as a Qlik Luminary for the year 2014 and 2017. He co-founded Qlik Dev Group and is an author of www.QlikShare.com. He was also rewarded as the top 20 Global QlikView Community contributor. He is also a certified, Scrum Master (PSM) and is currently, pursuing Masters in Data Science from the University of London.

Kunal: Hi Deepak, thanks for finding out time for this interview. Tell us briefly about yourself.

Deepak: I am born and breed in Hyderabad, India. Currently, I live and work in London. I work as a Lead Data Engineer for Exterior on a TFL project. Also, I am pursuing Masters in Data Science from University of London (Part-time). I am passionate about solving data problems using programming and data analysis. I got awarded as a Qlik Luminary in 2014 and 2017. I have 13+ years' experience in application development, database management and building analytics applications. I am working on two charity projects to raise money for the underprivileged children for their education.

Thank you for interviewing me, and I am excited to share my story with the AV community. You guys are doing a great job with AV.

Kunal: Thanks Deepak! Tell us how did your journey on analytics / data science / visualization start?

Deepak: As Steve Jobs quoted:

"You cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something – your gut, destiny, life, karma, whatever".

I had no idea back then that I will become a developer or work with the data. However, every job I did in the past has either direct or indirect contribution to my journey.

Before, I talk about my journey into analytics world. I had done 13 different non-tech jobs before becoming a data analyst at Dell. It had been a bumpy ride, to say the least, but in every job, I managed to learn some skills which helped me some way or the other. Perseverance is the key factor and helped me all the way. I had intuition when I was doing odd jobs that things will work out at some point. I made sure that I had learnt something new on every job. This approach has never let me down, and it has made all the difference to my life.

My Journey so far

Currently I am working in a Lead Data Engineer in London. I started working when I was 15 years old, and I'm 35 years old now. At times, I used to do two jobs, so there is overlap between years.

Jobs in chronological order

1. Paper delivery boy | Salary: INR 6K per Annum | 1996 – I was delivering newspapers and magazines door-to-door to subscribers across the city.
2. STD/ISD booth boy | Salary: INR 7,200 per Annum | 1996 – I don't think you have STD booths anymore in cities as everyone has a mobile phone now. My job then was to sit in a small room where customers would come to make national and international phone calls and charge them accordingly.
3. Door to door salesman | Salary: INR 12K per Annum | 1997 and 98 – I sold everything from plastic boxes, dictionaries, maps and board games, etc. A lot of walking and rejections. My conversion rates were not high and no doubt I could not do this job for a long time.
4. Tax books salesman | Salary: INR 18K per Annum | 1997 – This was little better than the previous role. I used to sell books to chartered accountants and tax consultants.
5. Helper / Salesman in a wine shop | Salary: INR 22K per Annum | 1998 – I used to promote brands standing in the wine shops. I had a weekly sales target. It is funny looking backwards to deal with the drunkards at times. But I hated it then!
6. Bartender | Salary: 24K INR per Annum | 1998
7. Nightwatchman in Computer Institute | Salary: FREE Computer Course | 1999 – My job was to sleep in the computer institute as a security guard. But open the doors for students who come in early in the

morning for their training lectures.

8. DTP Operator | Salary: INR 30K per Annum | 1999 – Desktop Publishing Operator, I used to work on PageMaker and CorelDraw.
9. Salesman in Greeting Card Shop | Salary: INR 39K per Annum | 2000
10. Greeting Card Designer | Salary: INR 42K per Annum | 2000 – I designed corporate greeting cards as an intern graphic designer.
11. Computer Trainer teaching Graphic Design | Salary: INR 18K per Annum | 2000 – 2001 – I started teaching PageMaker, CorelDraw and Photoshop to students.
12. Graphic Designer for an advertising firm | Salary: INR 80K per Annum | 2002
13. Call Centre Agent | Salary: INR 120K per Annum – I was providing technical support help fix customers fix their desktops.
14. Data Analyst | Salary: INR 270K per Annum | 2004
15. Database Developer | Salary: INR 550K per Annum | 2007
16. Senior Developer | 2008
17. SQL/BI Developer | 2011
18. Senior Data Architect | 2014
19. Lead Data Engineer | 2016

Kunal: Wow! That's inspiring and it would have been damn tough. How did the transition from a Call Centre Agent to a Data Analyst happen?

Deepak: My exposure to analytics started started when I was working in Dell call centre, I met a guy called Ram, and he was working on Excel and SQL Server. I observed that all the managers go to him to get their reports/data. I liked the attention he got and thought he was indispensable. That was it! I had decided to become a Data Analyst, so I can avoid taking calls, and at the same time, I could work on something which is a transferable skill set when I move organisations.

So, I started learning Excel during weekends in the office as I did not have the computer at home back then. I would spend weekends in office practising various Excel formulas, pivot tables and charts. I showed off my skills to my manager, and he encouraged me to prepare internal team reports in Excel. I did that for about six months when my manager informed me there would be an opportunity in Gurgaon Dell office for Data Analyst role. I was excited and worked hard to prepare for the interview. I attended the interview and showed what I had been doing and some sample reports. I was offered the role, and I moved away from Call Centre to Dell IT team.

I did not stop there, I went on acquiring new skills continuously. Learning new things and practising them has become a habit and I had started enjoying the process.

- Self-taught Excel and VBA
- Chose a mentor ([Amit Pandey](#)) to teach me SQL Server. Spent many weeks learning SQL Server SPs, understanding DB internals and the DBA world. Then I wrote the certification and cleared the SQL Server certification.
- Self-taught and used video tutorials to learn C#, SSIS, SSRS, SSAS and QlikView. I was new to OOPS, and I did not understand anything when I started, but I continued to read and watch different materials. I used to go to the local library in London almost every weekend and spent all day (9 am to 6 pm) studying and practising. It was stressful, but again I knew it would all become very useful shortly. Moreover, it did make sense, and I felt a little bit comfortable with OOPS and with data warehousing/BI skills.
- I enjoyed working with QlikView. So, I had spent much time answering questions on Qlik Community and one point I was amongst top 30 Qlik Community contributors. Qlik Community helped me with the opportunity to answer a variety of questions posed by other QlikView developers. I decided to start my blog and wrote around 100+ articles including the video tutorials. I had also started understanding various ETL and data architectures.
- Currently, pursuing a master's degree in Data Science from the University of London (part-time) in the evenings. I am learning R and Python as part my master's degree curriculum.

Kunal: You had no background in analytics and data science. Neither were you from a strong education background. What kind of challenges did you face in reaching here? And what are key decisions in shaping your career?

Deepak: Currently, I am pursuing Masters in Data Science from the University of London as part-time. I study from 6 pm – 9 pm while working full time and I have a one-year-old baby to take care of.

However, I do not have strong academic and engineering background. I did my bachelor's in Journalism and another one in commerce. I had studied while working. So, I had to pursue all my education through distance learning. It was not easy at all as I was doing odd jobs initially. I accepted that learning is a continuous process and it takes the time to master a subject.

Here are a few stories about my journey till now:

The story of Job Number # 7: Joining as a Night Watchmen / Security Guard for computer institute.

During my initial journey I wanted to learn computers, but I couldn't afford to pay for the training institutes neither I had a computer at home. I thought I should find a way to learn computers. I directly approached computer institutes in Hyderabad with my resume asking for any roles. A lot of them said no, but one of them said – they need someone to sleep in the institute in the night times as security guard and also to open the doors early in the mornings for students.

I was embarrassed and felt uncomfortable being a security guard. But I thought who cares, no one is watching me, and at the same time, I will get access to the computers all night. And they kindly agreed for me to sit in whatever training classes I was interested in learning. I saw this as a tremendous opportunity while it is uncomfortable then. I decided to try it anyway, and I'm so glad I did that.

I tried learning C language but it didn't make sense at that time as I didn't have math or CS foundation and I couldn't follow the lectures. I decided to take design classes – Photoshop, Illustrator and Coreldraw. As they were interesting and I always loved the design. So, I took the classes and practised almost every night for 2–4 hrs. Within a couple of months, I did pick up decent skills.

After six months as a night watchmen or security guard. I got a job as a DTP operator paying me more than bartender job. And I continued to improve my skills on other design packages then.

Looking back, this was a good decision as I moved into computer based jobs instead of odd jobs.

Story of Job Number # 13: Coming to the UK with Dell Exit Compensation

While I was working as a Data Analyst role in Delhi. Dell made structural changes to operations team (I was part of Operations team as Data Analyst). And management asked me to take a manager role in the call centre business in Hyderabad or Bangalore (then). My gut feeling was I need to have independent skills and not Dell specific skills. So, I wasn't too interested in the managerial position. Most of my colleagues took that opportunity except two of us. We were asked to leave Dell as they don't have any Data Analysis roles in India. I was offered compensation of 7 months' salary as worked for 3.5 years.

It was a hard and emotional decision as I enjoyed my time working at Dell and made loads of friends. I took a holiday for two weeks and went looking for a job to assess the market outside. There were no phone calls nor interviews and my two weeks ended quickly. But a friend suggested me to try HSMP (UK Visa). I thought I don't stand a chance as I didn't see myself Highly Skilled then. But I thought I should try or else I will end up regretting not trying. So I took the compensation and applied for HSMP. And thankfully all worked in my favour. I got the visa, and I was left with £700 to come to the UK. I was told there were no jobs in the UK. And it was 2008 beginning and recession started. I decided to come anyway thinking I can work in supermarkets as I had done all sorts of jobs in the past. Again, I got interview call within a week, and Survey Solutions hired me within two weeks of landing in London.

Story: Almost redundant

In 2009, I was working as a developer however my knowledge was very limited. My company then made a decision to make me redundant because of recession. They kindly gave a month's notice and asked me to search for a job. I thought I had experience and skills to survive. However, the market was not great, and I had applied for at least 300 jobs. I had gathered hundreds of email address and sent blanket emails to potential employers. Most of them never replied, and some responded saying they will get back to me in the future. Finally, I found a job in a small village in Cambridge, and they offered me less than my actual salary then. Luckily, on the last day of the notice period my employer changed his mind and asked me to stay with them as they realised my work and how it would affect them. I decided to stick with the same employer and continued working for them for another 18 months.

That situation hit me hard and made me realised that I could not be complacent and I need to acquire new skills continuously. I started going to the library over the weekend and spent almost all my weekend studying and preparing for certifications. I did this for two years, and this made a big difference regarding skills. Since then, I chose the job I wanted rather than I was forced to take up a job.

Kunal: I see you are also a Qlik Luminary – tell us about that journey.

Deepak: I accidentally discovered QlikView. I was asked to attend an interview for a Database developer and DBA role. Moreover, the employer wanted someone with QlikView skills too. I had to clue what was QlikView!

I started by installing the desktop edition and instantly loved the associative engine. I decided to learn and spend time preparing for the interview. I was honest and told my prospective employer that I am super keen to learn. They believed in me offered a role to work on both databases and QlikView.

Sounds a bit weird but I read most of the manual as there were no books or courses on QlikView apart from Qlik's official training course, which was too expensive. Also, I started answering questions on Qlik community to exposure to a variety of problems. It was like eat-sleep-Qlik-repeat for 18 months. At one point, I was amongst top 30 contributors to Qlik community. Then I thought I should share my knowledge

with other developer and started www.QlikShare.com blog. I had recorded almost 100 video tutorials and 250+ quiz questions.

Jason and Matt (co-founders) of QlikDevGroup asked me to join them to start the QlikDevGroup. I liked the idea, and we have begun the QlikDevGroup (www.QlikDevGroup.com).

Thankfully, Qlik recognised all my work and awarded me Qlik Luminary in 2014 and 2017.

Kunal: Coming to the fascinating work you are doing – how did it start – Teaching / Doing Data Science for charity?

Deepak: I wanted to support underprivileged children and empower them with education. There are many poor children who cannot afford education. I thought I should pay back somehow and provide support. I realised that running a marathon may not work in my case (I do not have that kind of fitness levels!).

I got an idea – Learn while empowering someone to learn.

Project # 1:

I thought I could create a course which can help students learn QlikView and other things while their money will be contributed to the charity. I am thankful to my friend – Shilpan Patel who also kindly agreed to collaborate with me to create QlikView Server course. Together – we had created the course and published on Udemy. There are 503 students so far, and the course is rated 4.5 out of 5. This course is the most comprehensive QlikView Server and Publisher course available.

Project # 2:

I am currently working on building a pricing app for the charities to increase their revenue. This project is open sourced. I see an opportunity where Charities could generate more revenue. Charities sell most of the donated goods for less because they have pricing constraints because of time, skills and accessibility of the data and they settle down to sell stuff for less, and their pricing is not on par with eBay.

We could solve this problem using data. So, we are building an analytical app which helps charities price better. The project is called DtP – “Discover the Potential”. Again, I am thankful to all the contributors who are helping me to build this platform. This project is self-funded and open source project, and we are taking data feeds from eBay. We process them on AWS. Enrich the data and process the data to provide search functionality. We are planning to use MongoDB, Python and Jhipster for the web app.

Contact me if you are interested to know more about these projects.

Kunal: What is the force which drives you? What would you want to achieve and change in next few years?

Deepak: Honestly, I feel like a celebrity when you ask that question (laughs!). But I’m definitely not.

I enjoy the learning process, and I do not feel stressed when I am studying or learning new skills. I like the process. Also, the ability to deal with uncertainties and staying composed helped me a lot. I am sure I will continue to learn as long as I can. And I have accepted the fact that nothing can be attained overnight. It will be a slow process, but surely every job helped me to learn something new. I am thankful to have wife and family who support and encourage me to learn.

I want to focus on Data Science applications in investment banking/ finance domain. After masters, I am planning to pursue FRM Part 1. Also, I am working on statistical skills. Also, I want to participate in Kaggle

competitions. At the same time, I am interested in open source projects to help charities. I am sure there are loads of problems we could solve using data more effectively.

Kunal: This kind of impact would feel very empowering – tell us some stories of people/life you have changed?

Deepak: I do not think I have changed anyone's life yet. However, I am sure I had encouraged all my friends and colleagues to learn and acquire new skills. I would be happy if I can become a good mentor and help change someone's life in the future.

Kunal: Anything else you want to say to AV community?

Deepak: Are you looking to learn QlikView? Please check my courses. I am giving 100 discount coupons exclusively for AV readers. And I would love to hear your suggestions, thoughts or feedback. You can connect me on LinkedIn and Twitter. I'm sharing my blog and course links with you below.

[Blog](#).

Course Links:

[QlikView Server and Publisher](#)

[QlikView Mastering Set Analysis](#)

Kunal: Thanks Deepak, your story is truly inspiring & motivating. We are glad to interview you and I'm sure many people out there will take away tremendous learning. All the best with your charity work and do let us know, if we can be of any help.

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[Kunal Jain](#)

Kunal is a post graduate from IIT Bombay in Aerospace Engineering. He has spent more than 10 years in field of Data Science. His work experience ranges from mature markets like UK to a developing market like India. During this period he has lead teams of various sizes and has worked on various tools like SAS, SPSS, Qlikview, R, Python and Matlab.