

Heidelberg Laureate Forum's interview with Madhu Sudan

by Manjil Saikia - Saturday, September 15, 2018

<https://gonitsora.com/heidelberg-laureate-forums-interview-with-madhu-sudan/>

Heidelberg Laureate Forum (HLF) has recently publicized a series of interviews with mathematicians and computer scientists. Recently, we posted about the [interview with Jeff Dean](#). There are several more extraordinary persons whose interviews are now available online.

Among those extraordinary personalities, Madhu Sudan makes his mark with a benevolence and attentiveness that invites conversation. Madhu Sudan received the Nevanlinna Prize in 2002 for major contributions to several areas of theoretical computer science, though he spent the majority of his interview discussing concrete challenges of mentorship. It is a topic that Sudan holds very dear, saying the process is “almost like raising a child,” and should be tailored specifically to the researchers’ strengths and weaknesses.

Sudan has overcome difficult periods throughout his academic career, developing the tools to work through them and the ability to transfer his knowledge. Confidence shaking questions shadowed his progress, “Am I going to be of any worth, and am I going to be able to find this thing?” However, with help from his PhD advisor, Sudan was able to calibrate his focus and make breakthroughs, which reinforced the value of an invested mentor.

“It’s always important to make sure you get good stimulation from the outside. You keep your mental capacities well-greased and well-oiled so that they’re constantly thinking, thinking about new things,” advised Sudan before concluding with a warning, “But do not take any formulaic advice from other people either.”

To be an effective mentor, one has to put in the time and effort identifying when to reign in and when to step back, using “different length leashes” for each type of personality. Simultaneously, Sudan’s experience over the years has allowed him to develop bits of general wisdom such as, “To me the most important thing is, try to exploit all *your* natural strengths. Do not try to imitate someone else.”

Sudan’s passion is visible throughout the interview and his astute observations are invaluable for both freshman and senior researchers. For a more in-depth look, visit the HLF YouTube channel under the Laureates@HLF17 playlist to see the interview with Madhu Sudan in full. This interview series was recorded, conducted and edited by Tom Geller Productions. Browse the channel for coverage of previous laureate lectures and other material that distill an overview of the HLF experience: <http://www.youtube.com/user/LaureateForum>

The full interview can be seen in the video below:

[YouTube Video](#)

As preparations for the 6th HLF this September 23–28 continue, program updates and a current list of the

participating laureates can be found on the HLF website: https://www.heidelberg-laureate-forum.org/event_2018/

[Press Release]

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