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## To

My Mother Late Snehlata Sinha

## Preface

In a long career in one of India's leading PSU banks, I have always noticed that there are two aspects to a rewarding career which I have been lucky to have had – one is the atmosphere and ambience in the office and the other, and as important, is one's own way of working. Both combine to either create an explosively successful career, or on the other extreme, cancel each other out into no improvement at all, where work becomes a chore.

There have been self-improvement books where American management gurus have advised on how to run yourself as a professional. Similar books exist on how to make a good business environment. But, as a young professional when I read them, all I realized was – these books were not at all applicable to India, and even less so in public sector organizations. It is only an Indian having a long and successful work experience, who can write a book for fellow Indians. The reason is simple – we understand our culture best.

It is this yawning void in literature between western thoughts and Indian reality that I seek to address. The book seeks not to preach, but to guide eager young professionals to get some answers in their day-to-day problems, enabling them to see the larger picture at whichever level in the executive hierarchy they might be in. And it does not stop at that. It is fair enough if we place adequate importance to the workplace and its structure when discussing an individual's performance. So this book also talks of ways that the organization can make a difference through innovative and appropriate HR interventions. Since all the scenarios are built out of my own personal experiences, they can be easily and readily applied to resolving various work problems and situations that are peculiar to our culture and upbringing.

The collection in this book brings out the best of modern Management systems, and the wisdom handed to us from ancient Indian texts. Taken together, you get 'X Factor@ Workplace' in a simple and jargon-free language. While usual self-help books and training programmes focus only on the individual, this book avoids that mistake. It expounds on the fact that it's not just skill-sets that can be gained easily, but rather a transition from just skills to a change in mindset. This new, more focused mind is at peace as it attains satisfaction at the workplace, and is possible only if both the individual and the organization take steps congruently and not in disparate directions. This is perhaps the first book of its kind in India which talks of simple but very effective steps with the idea of putting equal onus on the employee and the company in making an employee comfortable with his work.

This book further seeks to spread knowledge about success, that I have been lucky to experience, and to demystify it. Successful people and organizations often are all about doing things differently, and at times, also doing different things, like I talk about in some of the articles. Having a rewarding career at work is also a prerequisite these days to happiness outside of it. Through the cases in the book, I try to show that

#### PREFACE

success and happiness need not be mutually exclusive, but is a team effort between you and your organization, making life much lighter and fun to live.

RAM KRISHNA SINHA

# Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my bosses, peers and subordinates from whom I have learned lessons in some way or the other, directly or indirectly, in my career. Special thanks to some special people (bosses) I have worked under, for having cast their spell on me by way of some of their sterling attributes – V.H. Ramakrishnan, for his intellectual alacrity and time management skills; R.M. Desai, for his simplicity, matchless wit and sense of humour; S.C. Gupta, for his practicality and speedy decision making capability and Nagesh Pydah, for his warmth and wonderful articulation. To each one of these personalities, I remain indebted.

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RAM KRISHNA SINHA

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# Activity is not Productivity

If you closely watch a manager in his office, you'll find him frantically busy—attending one meeting after another, writing memos or letters, checking and sending e-mails, attending to phone, and the like.

#### **Activity and Productivity**

With no time or energy left for dealing with problems that require reflection, planning or innovation, being immersed in a constant stream of activities does not necessarily result in purposeful action-taking. The reasons are many and varied:

- Even though routine chores are performed dutifully, no initiative is shown to bring about change due to fear of failure or insecurity.
- Even when it is felt that change is required, a distance is kept from the problem. This happens due to feeling of anxiety, uncertainty, anger, frustration or alienation.

• Lack of concentrated attention. A desperate need to do something – anything – is felt. And then this frenzied activity is confused with constructive action. When faced with urgency for change, panic behaviour – trying to run away, shouting at colleagues or juniors – is resorted to.

#### **Blaming Others**

Many managers would attribute their poor performance to the organisational systems and procedures. They feel constrained by outside forces: their bosses, peers, job prescriptions, etc. But these are not always the real causes. Most of their jobs do provide managers scope and freedom to achieve results and bring about change.

What is required is self-motivation, will-power and discipline. Some managers, however, are highly productive. But what separates these ideal ones from others? In their path-breaking work *Bias for Action*, Bruch & Ghoshal, identify the difference as "purposeful action". The authors have discovered that two things distinguish managers, those who take purposeful action at work from the rest, and those who just spin their wheels, energy and focus.

#### **Action Demands Energy**

Without energy, managers are unable to go the extra mile that is often necessary to accomplish non-routine tasks. Some managers fail to take purposeful action simply because they lack energy.

Some get exhausted or burnt out from stress and do not have the inner resources to re-energise themselves. Focus, on the other hand, involves concentrated attention. It is the

#### ACTIVITY IS NOT PRODUCTIVITY

ability to zero in on a goal and see it successfully through to completion.

#### **Focused Managers**

Focused managers are not in a reactive mode. They choose not to respond immediately to every issue that comes their way or get sidetracked from their goals by distractions. Bruch & Ghoshal maintain that though both energy and focus are positive traits, neither in itself is sufficient.

Focus without energy develops into either empty execution or burnout. Energy without focus dissipates into purposeless business or wasteful failure.

Organisations do not benefit from managers, who spend their time making the inevitable happen. They prosper by the purposeful actions of the managers, who make happen what otherwise wouldn't happen.

# He is Thy Boss! Mind it

A study done by Gallup (published in *First Break All The Rules*) that looked at over a million employees, including 80,000 managers found that in most cases, when people left an organisation, it was because of the supervisor or boss.

A survey by Mercer Human Resource Consulting was conducted in Singapore to find out 10 compelling reasons why employees quit their jobs. The reason that came out on top was – Bad Bosses. Bad pay trailed at distant number 10.

In terms of intensity, the boss-subordinate relationship is right up at par with parent-child or husband-wife. The relationship is not just a functional relationship. It is a complex relationship that an employee has to work at.

It is estimated that a large number of people seeking psychiatric help are those who have job-related problems and more of these are centred around the boss. In many such cases,

#### HE IS THY BOSS! MIND IT

the depression is so severe that counselling and psychotherapy is not enough.

What are the big grouses employees have against the bosses? Some of these are:

- The boss does not listen. He is not responsive. Employees do not receive any feedback on their work. No coaching or guidance and hence no clue as to where their careers are going.
- The boss does not give enough time. Unreasonable deadlines are set. He is always busy. Little time for employees.
- The boss keeps changing his stand. It is so difficult to read his mind. His instructions are either contradictory or confusing.
- The boss doesn't involve employees in decision making.
- The boss gets irritated on trifles. Finds faults or unnecessarily makes employees repeat work.
- The boss hesitates to take a decision when the employee comes to him. If the employee goes ahead anyway, he is held responsible if things go wrong. He takes the credit if it goes right.

Employees generally give their bosses great leeway. Levels of respect and tolerance start high, but once they discover his feet of clay, their faith withers away fast.

On the other hand, employees should check whether they are unnecessarily obsessed with their boss. When you have no hobbies and your work rules your life, the boss becomes larger than life.

But how to share an honest and meaningful relationship with your boss? If you and your boss are each other's biggest nightmare, here is some food for thought to evaluate the efficacy of this relationship:

- (a) Are you aware of your boss's expectations from your work?
- (b) Do you try to bridge, rather than accept, a communication gap with your boss?
- (c) Do you welcome and even invite criticism about your work from your boss?
- (d) Are you able to communicate with your boss even when he is under pressure?

If the answers are mostly yes, you are definitely an effective employee and chances are you will make a great boss, as well.

# I, Me and Myself

Though you would like to deny it, the fact remains that what drives your behaviour is instinctive reaction to situations, not intellectual calculations. In most cases, it is your emotions, the sensation that you link to your thoughts, that truly drives you. And when you allow emotions to take control of yourself, it is no surprise that rationality would take a back seat.

In an organisational setup too, such irrational beliefs and ideas are found to be in full play. Some of the common ones are:

- It is utmost necessary to be appreciated and approved of.
- If things do not go (or stay) the way I very much want them to, it would be awful and catastrophic.
- There is invariably one right, precise and perfect solution and it would be terrible if this perfect solution is not found.

 Some people are bad, wicked and should (or must) be punished.

These are some of the irrational ideas, which you must strongly and persistently challenge as well as forcefully propel yourself to act against. But how to dispute these beliefs?

- It is not utmost necessary for you to be praised or approved of by almost everyone, for almost everything you do. Instead you should try to stand on your own feet; keep the approval of others as a desirable, but not necessary outcome. You should continually and mainly strive to do what you really enjoy doing rather than what other people think you ought to do for your career and life. Your self-belief would keep you immune from negative evaluations by others.
- Combat the idea that it is awful, horrible and catastrophic, when things are not going the way you would like them to. When conditions are not the way you would prefer them to be, calmly and determinedly try to change them for the better; and when, for the moment, they cannot be changed, the only thing to do is to quietly accept them (and wait and plan for the time when they finally can be changed).
- Shed the belief that the solution you have in mind is the only one right or perfect. Keep your mind open. A parachute works only when it is open. Narrow and rigid thoughts would limit your options and constrict your vision.
- Get rid of the ideas that certain people are bad, wicked and villainous and that they should be severely blamed or punished for their sins. You should see their wrongdoings objectively without being moralistic.

#### I, ME AND MYSELF

Fully acknowledge the fallibility of others and make due allowances for the possibility of their continuing to make numerous errors and mistakes. When you blame others, you are being judgmental and thereby helping to perpetuate rather than correct their misdeeds. Never confuse an individual with his acts. The people, who act badly, are not necessarily bad people.

Leaders are those individuals, who live by empowering beliefs and teach others to tap their full capabilities by shifting the beliefs that have been limiting them.

# Discuss Weather, not Einstein at Parties

Have you often seen some people in parties and get-togethers mingling smoothly and talking freely with others on any topic under the sun? How do they circulate and mix with such ease even though they may have average looks and are ordinarily dressed? Why are they so warmly welcomed in social circles? Because they have one special quality — conversational ability.

There are some myths people have about how to become a good conversationalist. Check out if you also harbour such myths:

**Myth one:** You have to have something profound, unusual or special to talk about.

**Reality:** A majority of people are more interested in the everyday, mundane happenings of life and the problems of

#### DISCUSS WEATHER, NOT EINSTEIN AT PARTIES

day-to-day living rather than in discussing Einstein's Theory of Relativity, John Nash's Game Theory or Freud's philosophy.

Common topics, such as water crisis, crime wave, the weather, power cuts, rise in prices of commodities are sufficient to hold your listener's interest provided some basic guidelines or conversational principles are followed.

**Myth two:** If you speak loud, people will listen and give more attention.

**Reality:** This belief not only puts people off, but also prompts them to see you as a bull in a china shop. A pleasant smiling face attracts people. Dogmatic, loud talkers, forcing their opinion down other peoples' throats, are given a wide berth.

Myth three: Continuous talking makes you a winner.

**Reality:** Conversation involves at least two or three persons. So it is important to find if other people are equally interested in the topic you are discussing. There may also be other people present, but they may be shy. Try to include them in the conversation by asking them a question or two. Be a good listener, too. You may be a good talker, but it also takes a good listener to make an effective communicator.

**Myth four:** Discussing/complaining about personal problems evoke sympathy and compels others to listen.

**Reality:** This only belittles you in other peoples' eyes. Personal problems should preferably be discussed amongst family members or close friends. So don't compromise on your dignity.

A saying goes "Don't keep telling people about your troubles. Half of them are not interested and the other half are glad you're getting what is coming to you".

**Myth five:** It is important to impress others by resorting to name-dropping, putting on fake accents, etc., or else you'll be left out in the cold.

**Reality:** While some people may appear impressed by such conversation, the majority will laugh and consider you as a snobbish bore. Similarly, it will only irritate others if you put on accents. Avoid getting branded as a show-off.

No one is born a clever or interesting talker. But the secret of conversational charm lies in sincerely trying to adapt yourself to the group you are with, and plunging whole-heartedly into its interests.



## Relax to Produce

At the workplace, employees often feel rundown, tensed up, tired at the end of the day. But all these problems are not due to their being overworked. This could well be due to their attitude and habits. The fact is, you need to know how to relax.

To relax you need not take out time from your work schedule. Further, by relaxing you will be increasing your output. Here are some ways you can replace tension with relaxation.

#### **Relax Your Breathing**

When you are tense, your breathing is erratic, fast and shallow. Conversely, when you are relaxed, your breathing is also relaxed. Be aware of your breathing rhythm. Take a long breath out. Keep throwing the breath out. Empty your lungs completely. Then let air rush in on its own. Now again breathe out. Do this five times. Do this exercise thrice a day,

right at your desk. You could increase the frequency if you so wish. You should do it especially when you feel tense. You will feel the difference. It is, indeed, a powerful technique.

#### Sit and Walk Comfortably

Always sit in a relaxed posture. Let all your muscles go loose. Avoid sitting on the edge of the chair. A relaxed body relaxes the mind. Walk with a calm and relaxed gait. Walking to the boss's chamber, to the canteen, to the toilet ... anywhere, walk to enjoy a bit of leisure. Don't rush. You can be quick, yet have relaxed and easy walk.

#### **Enjoy Your Tea**

If you closely observe people taking tea or coffee, you'll find them engaged in reading, writing, talking on phone, doing e-mails, making calculations, etc. Drop this habit. Learn to do nothing once in a while. Enjoy your tea. It is a break of just five minutes. Take such a break, especially when you begin to feel overwhelmed. Removing yourself from the immediate problem can prevent a total melt-down.

Leisure time, incidentally, should not be considered a luxury—devoting a part of your life to non-work is a necessity. You owe yourself a balance.

#### Laugh Generously

Maintaining an upbeat mood alleviates the body's stress response; it slows your heart rate and lowers blood pressure. Laugh without any inhibition. Laughter brings tremendous relaxation. If you have forgotten the boon of laughter, make a conscious attempt to laugh. Remember, you need not have

#### RELAX TO PRODUCE

any reason to laugh. Laughter relaxes, but laughter without a reason relaxes more. So, if you really want to improve your work life (or life) learn to laugh.

#### **Use Waiting Time Creatively**

You have to fax a document. You may have to wait. You are going to meet your boss. You may have to wait. You are holding on phone for somebody to come on line. You are waiting. During such periods of waiting, don't fret and fume. Relax your breathing. Remember some pleasant experience. Use such minutes creatively.

# What is your Social Quotient?

Young busy executives fresh out of management schools venture into the corporate world armed with sound professional knowledge. But, sadly, they are found wanting in social skills – etiquette – which forms one of the most important tools for success.

Etiquette is the norm of social behaviour. It evolves from showing consideration for other people's needs, feelings, time and sensibilities. The principles of social and business etiquette serve the same function as traffic signs – they provide us with a common language of behaviour and conduct so that people may meet, talk, dine, drink, travel and do business with ease.

Good manners are not inherited nor do they come naturally to us. They must be learnt and put to practice. As every executive worth the position knows, good manners constitute a necessary complement to good business. Without this trait, he/she would risk jeopardising relationships that are fundamental to business success.

#### WHAT IS YOUR SOCIAL QUOTIENT?

Good manners help oil daily interactions among colleagues. They lay the foundation for good working relationships that are in turn indispensable for coordinating team efforts for achieving organisational goals.

Behavioural studies reveal that many unhappy clients never complain about discourtesy. Many unhappy clients will, almost always, never do business with a company that offends them. Further, the average unhappy client will tell the story to at least ten other people. Just think—what a big price to pay for discourtesy! And what an even bigger price for ignoring it!

Where should elementary courtesy begin? Frankly, this is not a stage play instruction, telling how it should begin, when the curtain goes up, or end when it comes down. Courtesy, etiquette, and manners are the tools you should always carry with you wherever you go.

Good manners leave a good impression, especially so if you are meeting a person for the first time. So, get your act right when you are introduced for the first time. Always rise. Shake hands with a firm grip. It's even better if you offer your hand first. Remember and repeat the name. Look straight into the eyes of the person you are being introduced to. This will show you are paying full attention.

Some other noteworthy check-points are:

- Observe manners while travelling in an elevator. Check your voice level if you need to talk.
- Avoid talking loudly on the phone or otherwise.
- Do return a call.
- Do not interrupt someone when they are talking.
- Dress well. It still makes a major impression despite the dotcom boom, which has encouraged a casual approach to dress.

#### X FACTOR @ WORKPLACE

- Mind your body language—the way you walk and look into people's eyes while talking.
- Do smile. Smile, and the whole world smiles with you: frown and you may live to regret it.
- Respect others' time.

A lot more comes in the purview of business etiquette. One core point about etiquette, however, is actually quite simple – treat people as courteously as we wish to be treated.

God makes man. Manners make a gentleman.



# Frustration Breeds Demotivation

Motivation is one of the important management techniques used to improve behaviour and attitude towards work. This is done with a view to utilise available human resources more efficiently and thus make man-management more effective. Just as the employee has certain wants that the organisation is expected to satisfy, the organisation too expects certain types of behaviour usually termed as "motivation".

It is not difficult to know if an employee is motivated. Some obvious indications are: He wants to come to work and works willingly; at work, he gives his best; he has a sense of belonging and pride in the organisation.

But how do you know if the employee is demotivated? Some signs are: Low output and productivity, increasing absenteeism, non-cooperation, defiant and violent behaviour at or outside the workplace and frustration.

The last sign, i.e., frustration, is the most common manifestation of demotivation. It indeed requires a keen observation to sense it. Poor salary/wage, lack of recognition or reward, communication blocks, bias/prejudices of management, absence of promotional avenues, improper placement or some other unsatisfactory personnel administration are some of the important causes.

Frustration at workplace leads to flight (change of employment, resignation, etc.), internal withdrawal (apathy, alienation, etc.) and aggression. Aggression, in turn, manifests itself by way of resentment, hostility, protests, etc.

It is not uncommon to experience frustration at the workplace—only frequency and degree differs. But it is unfortunate to find people suffer from the delusion that emotions like frustration are entirely out of their control. As such they adopt different ways to deal with it. Some adopt "avoidance" – trying to avoid any situation that could lead to frustration. Another approach generally resorted to is "denial". They try to dissociate from their feelings of frustration while they keep stoking the fire within themselves about these feelings. Some fully indulge in such emotions and intensify them consciously by being combative.

Alas! The above approaches hardly serve any positive purpose.

If you want to make your work life, really work, you must make your emotions work for you. Frustration is one of the occupational hazards. You can't run from it or tune it out. You can't trivialise it nor can you allow it to overpower you.

Take the message of frustration as an existing signal. It means that your brain believes you could be doing better than you currently are. Take it as a positive sign. It means that

#### FRUSTRATION BREEDS DEMOTIVATION

the solution to your problem is within range, but what you're currently doing, isn't working, and you need to change your approach in order to achieve your goal.

Workplace is like a garden. It is up to you how you keep it beautiful, healthy and refreshing. Let us remember what Voltaire said: "We must cultivate our garden".

# Plan your Career

In Alice in Wonderland, Alice inquires from the Cheshire Cat, "where does this road go up to?" The Cat asks, "where do you wish to go to?" Alice replies, "I don't know". The Cat comments, "then it does not matter".

Many people take up career by accident, without any forethought and planning. Such an unplanned career does not take you anywhere. It does not enable you to tap the reserve of talent within you. And this only results in long-term dissatisfaction, stress and misadjustments.

Yet "designing" a career is not easy. It needs planning.

It is advisable to make the traffic signals as your guide and teacher if you do not wish to be dissatisfied and stressful for the rest of your life at your workplace.

#### **RED - STOP**

• Think about your direction

#### PLAN YOUR CAREER

- Decide what you want
- Evaluate what factors in a job you value the most

#### YELLOW - PREPARE

• Bridge the gap between what you have and what you want through appropriate preparations like getting an additional qualification

#### GREEN - GO

- Enjoy the ride through the challenges of future
- Look through the traffic signals at each turn and keep reviewing your choices

You live in an age, in which you are increasingly responsible for the choice and development of your career. Discover your uniqueness. Identify those things that you have found fulfilling in order to help you be clear about future career goals. Then analyse where you are now and where you want to go.

It is important to remember here that your qualifications and experiences are only part of your personal assets. Your behaviour as an individual is more important to others than what you know. People are more interested in what you can do in the future than what you have done in the past. The underlying aspect of you as an individual, that indicates how suited you will be to a particular role, must be defined well. They relate to your behaviour, personality, values and motives as well as to your skills and experiences. Before you make a choice of your career, ponder if you have the following skills/qualities:

#### X FACTOR @ WORKPLACE

(a) Managerial: Leadership, planning and organising,

quality orientation, persuasiveness

(b) Professional: Specialist knowledge, problem solving

and analysis, oral and written com-

munication

(c) Entrepreneurial: Commercial, creativity and innovation,

action orientation, strategic thinking.

(d) Personal: Interpersonal sensitivity, flexibility,

resilience, personal motivation

However, it is not enough to simply acquire your skills – you also need to think about how much you enjoy using them.

Great careers require great efforts to do what you believe is good for you. So conceive and create a well-designed career on time or be ready to settle with anything by default. People, who succeed, do not take up any career by accident. They do it by choice. Someone has rightly said, "Only 5% of people make things happen, 15% watch what is happening and 80% have no idea about what is happening". What about you?

# $\frac{Procrastination - A\,Recipe}{for\,Stagnation}$

Ever marveled at how some people working with the same number of hours we all have seem to get so much done? How do they do it? And in time!

Have you ever wondered at how many ways some people fool themselves in – especially when there is work to be done? Here are some of the classic excuses:

- I am not in a right mood
- There is a lot of time to get it done
- I do not need to do it now
- There are other jobs to do first
- It is too much
- I do not know where and how to begin

Procrastination is like any other habit. But it can be a big drain on your time. It can gradually wear down your resources.

Agreed, all of us procrastinate on occasions. That is normal. Sometimes delay in reaching a decision or beginning a task is a rational choice. It can ultimately lead to a better outcome. But when procrastination becomes a habit, you have to watch out. If you find yourself postponing, rather irrationally, even the smallest or simplest of the tasks, be sure you are heading for the danger zone.

Behavioural health experts have identified six types of procrastinators. Check out if you belong to any of these:

**Dreamer:** You are distracted. Distractions may be mental (you are thinking of your object of desire) or physical (someone is playing the music too loud). So you can't get down to work.

**Worrier:** You fear failure. You may even convince yourself that the failure will result in serious consequences. On the other hand you fear success. You will worry about setting too high standards for yourself in future.

**Perfectionist:** You can't do something which may not be perfect.

**Discomfort dodger:** You feel uncomfortable with beginning any task simply because it represents a change. You put things off to avoid feeling bad.

**Magical thinker:** You hope to be seized by inspiration before you do anything, or you think the problem will simply go away magically.

Interestingly, you often don't even realise you are procrastinating. For instance, when faced with a task, you would rather not do, you substitute it with another that is

#### PROCRASTINATION—A RECIPE FOR STAGNATION

easier or less painful. And when that is done, with another, and so on.

You have kept yourself busy all day; perhaps your entire working hours have been spent doing tasks. But you have still procrastinated because that original task has not been done. You have conveniently escaped into activity.

If not controlled or changed, procrastination can be a lifelong habit having serious consequences. But how to handle the problem?

Most of us avoid large, intimidating tasks, because we tend to see them in their entirety. Break the job in small parts. Take 15 minutes and commit yourself without any distraction. At the end of that period, you may find that you have become involved and may like to continue. The inertia is usually in the beginning.

Tie up something you like doing with a task you dislike. The enjoyable activities can be something as innocuous as making a cup of tea or having a bath or taking a lunch-break.

If you have difficulty beginning a task, Alan Lakein suggests in his book *How to Get Control of Your Time and Life* that you just sit with your eyes open and do nothing for 20 minutes — no reading, talking, watching TV, nothing. Even before the 10 minutes are up, you begin to get very uneasy. The task becomes large and suddenly it is easier to start the task than just sit there. Lakein also suggests that throughout the day you ask yourself what he calls "Lakein's Question"—what is the best use of my time right now? And if what you are currently doing is not the best use of your time, switch to what is.

Another way is what behaviourists call "shaping," i.e., doing something close to the target behaviour. For instance, if you want to finish a report you have been putting off, just begin

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reading what you have previously written without making a commitment to do anything else. Often, just the reading gets you started off, shaping has taken place.

The past is gone forever. The future is only a concept. The present is all we ever have to work with. Do it today. Now.



# Making Employees Manager-Friendly

Just as environmentalists advocate products/projects that are eco-friendly, users opt for computers that are user-friendly, customers go for products that are customer-friendly, managers too desire that their employees are, yes, manager-friendly. But how do they keep their staff smiling?

Being liked by employees is, of course, a natural yearning and an important matter for the managers as it contributes not only to their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, but also to the functioning of the organisation they are working in. Yet it is common, but disturbing knowledge, that managers do not find employees that easy to get along with. More often than not, they are found complaining about the uncooperative and unfriendly attitude of the employees.

What should they do to be liked? Here are ten points for making employees manager-friendly.

**Treat employees as people and not as personnel:** Of the various people, that influence the fortunes of organisations, it is the people within – employees – that contribute most to its health, financial or otherwise. An organisation can only be as good as its employees. So, the first truth that managers must accept is that employees are people and not personnel.

Use telescope and not microscope when looking at faults: Some managers feel that if they cannot find faults with, or shortcomings in an employee, he/she will not be awed enough to treat them as "boss". What has to be remembered always is that it takes as much talent to spot another talent. Deflating the egos of people is infinitely easier.

**Empower them:** Empowering employees means providing practical guidance and help, setting examples at work and passing on skills, especially by setting examples of attitudinal strength and courage.

**Keep your shirt on:** Managers must have the quality of imperturbability. It means grace under pressure. It means being unexcitable, steady, unflappable – and even tempered no matter what.

**Listen and mingle:** Managers can achieve more by listening intently than by talking. Let the employee feel that although the manager may not have concurred with him, at least his views have been heard with respect.

**Motivate:** Employees have ego needs and development needs, and they will commit themselves only to the extent they can see ways of satisfying these needs. Basically, people crave for attention and appreciation and if they do not get them by constructive means, they may try to get them by negative and potentially destructive means.

#### MAKING EMPLOYEES MANAGER-FRIENDLY

**Avoid bias:** A common managerial problem is that if you like an employee, anything he does is good. A manager's fondness for an employee clouds his judgment. Conversely, whatever he is not good at is glossed over as not really necessary. This attitude of a manager erodes trust of other employees in him.

**Be modest:** Genuine modesty is an attractive trait. Managers, who brag, show off and are always vaunting their imagined superiority, are rarely popular. However, false modesty should be avoided. The manager, who takes his/her status lightly, enhances his/her dignity and likeability.

**Develop empathy:** Empathy is the ability to look at a given question or situation from the point of view of the other person, respecting the sensitivity of others. It is an excellent tool for influencing people.

**Don't look grouchy:** Managers, who have a pleasant, cheerful and enthusiastic disposition, will attract positive strokes from employees. Cheerfulness is highly contagious and spreads like wildfire. Besides cultivating a sense of humour, managers should also learn to enjoy a joke even if it is at their cost. This diffuses tension at the workplace.

# Urge of Being Busy All the Time

You have no time for your family. You hate holidays and avoid taking leave. You don't like visitors. You do not like to go on vacation because you do not want your work to suffer. You are always engrossed in thoughts about your work.

Work is your addiction. Your emotional involvement in work exceeds rational limits. For you, work is not a means to an end, but an end in itself. You work not for the sake of money, status or success, but for work alone. If there is no work, you create work because you cannot tolerate the void. You cannot switch off even when you are removed from your work environment.

But, you will not admit it. You will constantly justify to your family, to your friends, and to yourself that what you are doing is for the good of all.

#### URGE OF BEING BUSY ALL THE TIME

It has been observed that people, who succumb to the addiction, often lack interpersonal skills. They are not very good at making friends and developing relationships. They are not good conversationalists and lack the ability of expression. So, occupying oneself with work is a kind of escape, an excuse to run away from others. Sometimes, strained relationships at home can lead to this symptom. Work is used as a shield to protect oneself from the unwanted company of family members.

At times, it is an attempt at perception management and peer pressure that keeps people at work long after closing time. It is the belief that the ones, who stay late are the ones who will be getting the promotions, a raise or plum postings.

How to get rid of such an addiction?

Remove mental blocks against leisure: Do not consider leisure time unproductive – it is an investment in health and happiness. During these hours do something that you really like and not something out of habit. Good use of leisure time does not come naturally, but has to be learned. The workaholic must realise that the world is not going to come to an end if he stops working.

Do not insist on doing everything: Delegate and outsource. Keep in mind the jobs only you are responsible for. Focus on them. Give up your obsession with perfection. Believe and trust others. You will stand to benefit. Don't set yourself unrealistic and unattainable goals. It would lead to agony and frustration.

Remember – work is not everything: Learn to relax. Scrutinise your work at times in a detached manner. Contemplate, some brilliant ideas may come up. This will enrich your work life. Develop an interest in the finer aesthetic aspects of life. This

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will add refreshing dimensions to your existence. Enjoy life – you have only one.

You need to achieve a fine balance between your work and everything else that matters to you. After all, you work to live and not live to work.

## Wonders of Little Words

Some of the most significant messages people deliver to one another often come in sets of just three words. When spoken or conveyed, those statements have the power to forge new friendships, deepen old ones and restore relationships that have frozen. The following three-word phrases can enrich every relationship at work and other spheres of our life too.

I'll be there: Being there for another person is the greatest gift we can give to someone. When we are truly present for other people, important things happen to them and to us. We are renewed in love and friendship. We are restored emotionally and spiritually. "Being there" is at the very core of civility.

I miss you: Perhaps more marriages could be salvaged and strengthened if couples simply and sincerely said to each other, "I miss you". This powerful affirmation tells partners they are wanted, needed, desired and loved.

**Maybe you're right:** This phrase is highly effective in diffusing an argument and restoring frayed emotions. The flip side of "maybe you're right" is the humility of admitting "maybe I'm wrong".

I am sorry: Many broken relationships could be restored and healed if people would admit their mistakes and ask for forgiveness. All of us are vulnerable to faults, foibles and failures. A man should never be ashamed to own up, that he has been in the wrong, which is but saying in other words, that he is wiser today than he was yesterday.

I thank you: Gratitude is an exquisite form of courtesy. People who enjoy the companionship of good, close friends are those, who don't take daily courtesies for granted. They are quick to thank their friends for their many expressions of kindness. On the other hand, people, whose circle of friends is severely constricted, often do not have the attitude of gratitude.

**Count on me:** "A friend is one who walks in when others walk out". Loyalty is an essential ingredient for true friendship; it is the emotional glue that bonds people. Those who are rich in their relationships tend to be steady and true friends. When troubles come, a good friend is there, indicating "you can count on me".

**Let me help:** The best of friends see a need and try to fill it. When they spot a hurt they do what they can to heal it. Without being asked, they pitch in and help.

I understand you: People become closer and enjoy each other more if they feel the other person accepts and understands them. Letting others know in so many little ways that you understand them is one of the most powerful tools for healing your relationship.

#### WONDERS OF LITTLE WORDS

**Go for it:** Some of your friends may be non-conformists, have unique projects and unusual hobbies. Support them in pursuing their interests. Rather than urging your dear ones to conform, encourage their uniqueness.

Try these words at your workplace and see the miracle.

# Shape Up or Ship Out

For a typical executive, being unfit begins early in his 20s, when he first begins to smoke, drink and eat junk food. He suddenly stops getting the exercise he got in school. But none of this hurts just yet, because he is protected by youth. In the 30s, stress begins to hit. Work and home responsibilities increase and so does the fat percentage. But he is still not paying for it except with growing feelings of fatigue.

At 40, the scene changes completely: his fat increases, cardiac output falls, and flexibility deteriorates. The time has come to pay the price, and health problems start catching up fast. His quality of life goes down dramatically. He cannot do many things. He cannot sleep well, his body hurts so he cannot go on holidays, much of what he loved to eat is now forbidden. On the other hand, an executive, who has exercised through the years, can go trekking to the mountains at the age of 60 with a heavy backpack. He is also likely to be wiser and happier.

#### SHAPE UP OR SHIP OUT

Studies have shown that people, who remain active as they get older, continue to live energetic and youthful lives. Exercise benefits all five physiological systems in your body: the bones, heart, brain, muscles and senses. Plus, exercise helps pump out acid that causes ulcers. It also acts as the best anti-ageing pill.

The eternal excuse for not doing exercise is well known — you don't have time. You do not have energy. Besides, you do not know how to do it. But there are reassuring facts — even a small amount of exercise can dramatically improve the quality of your life. Further you can sneak exercise into your life in ways that you never thought possible. Check out, for instance, if you have thought about the following:

- Stretching for a minute in bed before getting up. You will begin the day better.
- Walking to your office colleagues instead of picking up the phone.
- Walking up the stairs, walking part of the way home.
- Doubling up activities. Cycling while watching television. Running around with your kids. Long walks reconnect you with nature.
- Investing in a treadmill or an exercycle for the office.

You won't believe just how good exercise can make you feel. It is like the difference between a battered, old car and one with a smooth, well-tuned engine. You will ooze energy, you will look better and – best of all – you will think and work more actively. But if you don't get moving soon, you could be asking for serious trouble. So wake up to workouts.

# Is the Culture of the Country You're Visiting Foreign to You?

The number of globe-trotting managers are now on the increase, thanks to global mergers, alliances, joint ventures, outsourcing, business meetings and seminars. As a result, country briefings for managers on the fly now include things like "cultural appreciation". It is well recognised that managerial competence is not enough—attitudinal and behavioural adaptation matter equally.

It is observed that slip-ups, mistaken identities, mispronouncing names, wrong gestures – several such "oops" are common, when managers are exposed to an alien culture. Such problems arise mainly due to companies' reluctance to make employees, identified for overseas assignments, go

through training programme that teaches them what to do, what to expect and how to go about things in an international setting.

The ability to adapt to the new culture is the key and has to be learnt and acquired. Though many companies acknowledge that cultural training is a strategic tool to achieve business results, very few have set systems and their only back-up is briefing sessions. Managing relationships in large-scale operations in a new and dynamic market situation requires people skills and a global outlook.

Operational skills are taken for granted, but people skills is what separates, the winner from the loser. The most critical aspect is to know the culture of the country in addition to the job. One has to be sensitive to the culture of the country one visits or works in and has to respect and follow that culture. And, the higher one climbs the corporate ladder, the higher are people's expectations of one's ability to appreciate crosscultural nuances and differences.

The area of people skills is vast and could be acquired through knowledge and experience. Yet here are a few basic tips which may prove handy and useful in a foreign land:

- Make sure you do a mental mapping of persons when people present their cards to avoid misidentification.
   Names are to be pronounced correctly with right accent.
- Always dress a level higher than what you are.
   Upholding the image of the organisation is as important as upholding its values.
- Develop the art of conducting business lunches and dinners. It is important to know table manners, how to conduct a conversation over cocktails and dinner,

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what to drink and when. Learn how to raise a toast to a guest.

- Understand carefully the significance of body language and mannerisms of local people to avoid embarrassments.
- Don't say "yes" too often in your effort to please. Remember, saying "yes" means you have to deliver on that promise and when you fail, trouble starts.
- Learn the value of time/punctuality.

If the ultimate goal is growth of business on alien land and clinch business deals, the importance and need for intercultural capability can never be overemphasised.

## Enjoy Making Decisions

Even though making decisions is one of the primary responsibilities of any manager, it is seen that most of the time the managers are too wary of making them. Either, decisions are put off or not taken at all.

When a manager makes a decision, he sets in motion a new cause, effect and direction for the organisation. Studies have shown that most successful managers make decisions rapidly, because they are clear on their objectives and what they want for their organisation. They are also slow to change their decisions. On the other hand, managers who fail, usually make decisions slowly and change their minds quickly, always bouncing back and forth.

Anthony Robbins in his book Awaken the Giant Within has offered some quick keys to help us harness the power of decision:

- (a) Decision-making is a kind of act in itself. You have truly made a decision when action flows from it. It becomes a cause set in motion. So never leave the scene of a decision without first taking a specific action towards its realisation.
- (b) The more decisions you make, the better you are going to become at making them. Muscles get stronger with use, and so it is with your decision making muscles. Unleash your power right now by making some decisions you have been putting off. It will create unbelievable energy and excitement.
- (c) You should learn something from your decisions. Ask yourself "what is good about this?" "What can I learn from this?" Failure may be a blessing in disguise if you use it to make better decisions in the future.
- (d) Enjoy making decisions. You must know that in any moment, a decision you make, can change the course of things.
- (e) Prove to yourself that you have decided now. Make one or two decisions that you have been putting off: one easy decision and one that is a bit more difficult. Show yourself what you can do. Take the first action towards fulfilling it – and stick to it! By doing this you will be developing a muscle that will give you the will to change the course of things.

It is important to remember that leadership at its core is not just about making decisions, but also about taking absolute and full responsibility for them and their consequences, irrespective of the way things work out.

Talking about decision-making, Nobel laureate Herbert Simon said that there is no such thing as the "perfectly rational

#### ENJOY MAKING DECISIONS

decision" since such a concept hinges on the assumption that the decision maker knows all possible alternatives, the utility of each alternative and has a logical order of preference among them. Since this is not quite the way things work in the real world, the leader must realise that no matter how much thought is devoted to a decision, someone will have the leisure and the inclination to dissect it at a later point and explain how things could have been done better. So it makes sense to bite the bullet, take an honest decision and move ahead with it, since deadlines are an integral part of today's global workplace. General Patton's view that "a good plan today is better that a perfect plan tomorrow" holds as true in today's corporate battlegrounds as it did on the killing fields of World War II.

# Don't be a Technogeek

Technology has become an integral part of the lives of business executives. It is not an option anymore but a must as the world is going digital and wire-free. Innovation is the lifeblood of success and technology is the powerhouse, keeping them connected at the speed of light. Some of the ways the modern technology is rendering its immense contribution in and around the workplace are:

#### **Time Management**

Modern gadgets and high-end technology have played a crucial role in time management. Laptops, mini-iPods, smart-phones, blackberries allow executives to access and respond to clients and colleagues on real-time basis. Not only during work hours but even in traffic jams, executives conduct meetings and do a lot of coordination work on their fancy gadgets.

#### **Productivity Enhancement**

Technology is significantly improving business agility. It literally provides information one needs at one's fingertips. It enables the executives to multitask and carry out any task rapidly, correctly and on time. This obviously enhances output of the executive dramatically.

#### Widens Mental Horizon

Modern electronic systems like internet and e-mail have revolutionised life by melting hierarchies and making information and communication free. They are windows to the world opening new vistas. All these thoughts and realisations have the immense power and potential to change the world. They by themselves, are a part of widening the mental horizon. It allows one to think big and to take on greater challenges.

At the same time, technology can also be a bane if you do not handle it with wisdom. There are real dangers of being a gizmo-freak. Some of them are:

- Gizmos and the Net have the power to suck you into the borderless cyberspace, alienating you from human touch. Added to that is the danger of becoming too accessible.
- Hi-tech gizmos affect relationships. If you get sucked into the gizmo vortex, it can completely overwhelm and rule your life by invading your privacy and create undue stress.
- Too much dependence on technology affects social, aesthetic and spiritual side of your personality. The human and nature interface diminishes. You miss out on the marvels of nature and mankind.

But then it is in your own hands to keep the side-effects at bay. Technology is controllable. If you know your entry and exit points, you can never be sucked into it. Choice is yours.

For example, in the midst of a busy gizmo-filled day, no one stops you from taking a break, watch the sea, look out of the window, smile at the world, live life nicely. Time, like air, is free; how we use it determines the value we add to it at work or with family.

Let technology make your life easier, more efficient and more structured. Let it free up time and your mind for other things that enrich life.

## Perform but Conform

He is a super achiever. He maximises business. His long-term career goal is to be in a senior leadership role. He wants to be away from day-to-day mundane jobs. His focus is growth in business. He is popular among customers. They want to take him to dinner for he is amusing, entertaining and interesting. He is a wonderful guy. But his behaviour with his colleagues is just the opposite. He is perceived as a guy who thinks he knows more about business or industry. His colleagues feel that he puts on airs. He thus creates a hostile environment around him. He is also found breaking laid-down rules and procedures. Far from managing the boss, he doesn't even take time off to communicate with the boss. He rather delights in interacting with clients.

In their book *Now Discover Your Strengths*, Buckingham and Clifton present an interesting explanation for their findings on the subject. Employees, who rate high with their managers, have personalities that are very different from those who rate

high with customers. They score high on harmony and steer clear of conflict. They are also very responsible, which ensures they are always on time and keep to deadlines. On the other hand, those, who rate high with customers, score on a wholly different set of strengths. They are optimistic problem-solvers with proclivity for learning, but as they are also highly driven and commanding individuals, others find them difficult to work with.

Many organisations often face such dilemma – employees hugely popular with customers yet not getting along with their bosses, super performers bringing in business yet are arrogant and rude to colleagues. What does an organisation do with an employee who is great for business but doesn't fit its culture or values. How to deal with such employees and their aspirations?

There are some, who do not agree with the formula that would favour individuals with high customer ratings. An organisation invests in an employee more than a customer does, they argue. An employee interacts day in and day out with his boss and peers. A customer's contact with an employee, on the other hand, is sporadic and issue-specific. If people who break norms and procedures are rewarded, it will affect the culture of the organisation. Others however maintain that more weightage should be given to customer feedback. Other things like conforming to rules and procedures and being a good corporate citizen should take a back seat. Thus dilemma still persists. Both the versions have some merit. How to strike a balance?

Put in place a system of appraisal process, where individuals should be evaluated by not only supervisors, colleagues and subordinates, but also customers (360-degree performance). So long as performance management system in an organisation

#### PERFORM BUT CONFORM

stands divorced from customer feedback and customer satisfaction measures, aspirations of such super achievers would remain unfulfilled. Objectives set under the appraisal system should not remain unaligned to the needs of the market and insensitive to the customers.

Put high performing employees through "sensitivity training" so that they would learn to get along better. This would help such employees to conform to organisational culture and values to get to the top.

Employees are source of competitive advantage for an organisation. Creating an environment, which fosters teamwork and utilises employees' abilities to the fullest on one hand and respects individuality even with some aberrations on the other, is indeed a challenge.

# Speak to Peak

"I am a 38 year-old man with a speaking problem. A colleague and I recently organised a workshop, at which he was to make the opening remarks and introduce the main facilitator. My colleague got late and it dawned on me that I had to do it. I am a shy man but until that day, I had never thought that it was a big issue. The thought of making that address filled me with terror. To calm my nerves, I drank a glass of water and felt better, but what followed was a disaster".

These disturbing experiences were of a reader of a magazine, who sought help from the counsellor associated with the magazine.

Speaking in public is one of the four primal fears that haunt man's psyche. The other three are darkness, snakes and being caught without one's clothes on.

The very thought of standing up in front of strangers or a group of one's peers and trying to hold their attention by saying a few words scares people. It makes them jittery. Priming the mind thus becomes critical for any successful verbal presentation.

Public speaking is a talent not everyone is born with. But it can be learned. You can also master the basic techniques for making an audience sit up and listen.

#### **Prepare Well**

Organise your material into what you're going to say and what you're not. Once you've organised what you're going to say, all you've to do is pick out key words and phrases and note them on a piece of paper in nice big capital letters. Put in the subheading and all relevant figures. It is a blunder to mug up the whole piece by heart.

Try to get yourself taped and see how you sound. Ask an honest, caring friend or an angry spouse to do the needful. This would help you to be spontaneous. Study the profile of the audience. Age, linguistic preferences, educational qualification are important inputs and would decide your choice of language and narrative technique. If you want to use charts or slides or diagrams make sure you have the necessary equipment ready and tested. Contingency planning is important. Keep cue cards ready.

#### **Overcome Stage Fright**

All speakers, professional or otherwise, experience "butterflies in their stomach" before taking to the stage. What distinguishes them is their ability to handle that feeling productively. Take several deep breaths, holding each one for as long as possible and exhaling slowly. Another remedy for nerves is to forget

that it is you who is about to speak. Pretend it is someone else – a speaker you admire.

#### **Have a Positive Mental Frame**

A good speaker is comfortable with himself and the audience; he would never imagine that the audience bears negative biases against him. Audiences warm up to amiable, happy-looking speakers. Begin with a smile. It switches on your audience, arouses their interest and wins their goodwill.

#### Watch Your Body Language

When you are speaking, don't take too rigid a stance. Let your weight rest squarely on your feet without leaning to either side. Leave one hand free for gesture, which however should not go too far. Maintain eye contact. Let your eyes sweep your audience like a beam of light, so that you appear to be looking in turn briefly but directly at all present. Miss nobody, even those beside you.

#### **Keep It Simple and Clear**

Do not try to confound people with elegant phrases. Avoid technicalities. Always enunciate clearly with lips, tongue and teeth so that your audience hears every word. Learn when to pause. On the other hand, don't get too informal. Don't keep saying, "you know", "I mean". Confine your speech to three/four main points. You would definitely like your audience to remember what you said.

#### Be Ready for Audience Interface

Listen to and watch the audience. If they seem to be getting restive, (yawns, slouched posture, etc.) hurry up a little. If they are obviously bored and inattentive, try a few shock tactics like a joke. Anticipate questions and prepare answers. Be prepared for rebuttals and disagreements. Thank a listener who supplies you with a new factual point.

# Enhance the Value of the Brand Called YOU

In ancient Athens, there were training courses for everything. A young friend of Socrates had trained to become a general in the Athenian army. When Socrates asked him about the course, the friend replied that he was taught logistics, marching and man management. "Were you taught strategy", Socrates asked, to which the friend replied, "No". Socrates told him to go back and learn strategy and planning or ask for his money back. Because the study of planning, tactics and strategy is the key to any generalship.

Socrates' advice is valid even at the workplace. You need to use strategies to find out right role for yourself in the corporate world. You need to plan for a satisfying and motivating career. Here are some smart and proven strategies:

(a) Take charge of your career in the same way you take charge of a project or work, a commitment to your

#### ENHANCE THE VALUE OF THE BRAND CALLED YOU

- child, or your financial situation. Understanding your strengths, boosts your confidence and encourages you to explore career options based on your talents. Don't expect others to notice your talent or strengths and care for your aspirations and goals.
- (b) Solicit help from mentors and friends, who know you well for your personal grooming. These people could lend you considerable insight about your talents and abilities. They can serve as a mirror, allowing you to see your own strengths reflected in their view of you.
- (c) Try asking your well-wishers for their perception of your strengths: What should you do more of? Less of? What qualities do they most admire in you? What habits they dislike in you?
- (d) Assemble individuals, who know your strengths and potential, believe in you and are willing to offer their insights, connection and support to help you develop your plan of action.
- (e) Ask them about the opportunities and your future roles. Such inputs will be of immense benefit to you. Opportunities come through extended network of relationships. There are innumerable roles people can and will play in your development process. You are limited only by your reluctance to ask them for assistance.
- (f) It is not wise to focus only on your limitations. Excellence is rarely achieved by minimising errors. It is more likely to be achieved by maximising strengths. There is a corresponding positive cycle associated with your use of strengths. Your resulting success motivates and emboldens you, builds your confidence and provides

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a hedge against future disappointments. It is the brand YOU. YOU have to be the architect of your brand image.

# Change Your Perception About Change

If you ask a group of people, "Are you afraid of change?" the answer from most of them would probably be "NO". Now, if you ask "Do you think other people are afraid of change?" the reply would definitely be "YES".

We all deny that we are afraid of change. Sometimes we are not even aware that we are afraid. In fact, people want things to stay the same and think change will be bad for them. As change disturbs their comfort zone, change is resisted. Further, they do not know how to deal with change.

In his profound work *Who Moved My Cheese*, Dr. Spencer Johnson deals with the subject of change. It is an amusing and enlightening story of four characters, who live in a maze and look for cheese to nourish them and make them happy.

"Cheese" here is a metaphor for what one wants to have in life – whether it is a good job, a loving relationship, money or a possession, health or spiritual peace of mind. And the maze is where one looks for what one wants – the organisation one works in, or the family or community one lives in.

The insights brought out by Dr. Johnson through the story are unique. The key lessons are worth noting:

### **Anticipate Change**

Be watchful. Take notice of the small changes taking place around you. If you fail to monitor, a change can freeze you with shock. Noticing small changes early, helps you to adapt to the bigger changes that are to come.

## Adapt to Change Quickly

People sulk when change takes place. They rant and rave at the "injustice" done to them. Depression sets in. They start cursing their destiny. After all, change came so suddenly. All this, however, does not help. Prudence lies in quickly adapting to the change. The quicker you do it, the sooner you would be comfortable with and even enjoying the new change. If you do not change, you can become extinct.

#### **Enjoy Change**

Imagine yourself enjoying the change, even before it meets you. Look for the challenges and adventure contained in a change. Feel and enjoy the thrill. Keep your mind open. Shed old beliefs and move beyond your fear. This will lead you to a new world full of opportunities.

## Be Ready to Change Quickly, Again and Again

Continue to keep pace with change. Life would keep on presenting new changes. Be prepared to deal with them with confidence and zeal. See advantages of changing and help bring about change. Don't be possessive about the way things are done around. Be flexible – ever ready to change.

Change is the only constant thing. Yet living in situations with changes occurring all the time at work or in life can be stressful, unless we have a new way of looking at change.

# Finding Happiness at Work

For many of us, the basic source of unhappiness at the workplace is the belief that work is a burden, that work is born out of necessity and not choice, and that without work we will be supremely happy.

These are a bundle of misconceptions. Else you would not find depression, even among those who have retired from work with all the money they need to satisfy their material wants.

Let us appreciate that we all are programmed both by our genes and social expectations to be productive. Already in the first year of life, infants show pleasure in acting on their environment. A heightened engagement with one's work, the full absorption in this activity, is an important aspect of happiness.

Labour may be a burden as it is imposed on us, but work definitely is not. Work is privilege. Work requires our

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competence, expertise, prudence. Work benefits society at large.

There are few things in life as enjoyable as work, as rewarding as concentrating on a difficult task, using all our skills. The best kind of work is worship or meditation in quite a literal sense, arousing the emotions of curiosity and wonder. These highly enjoyable moments occur more often in work than in leisure time. Social psychologists David G. Myers of Hope College, Michigan, offers these steps to happiness. Try them to infuse happiness at work.

- Realise that enduring happiness doesn't come from positions, status or wealth. Wealth is like health, its absence breeds misery, but having it doesn't guarantee happiness.
- Take control of your time. It helps to set goals and break them into daily aims. We underestimate how much we can accomplish in a year, one day at a time.
- Act happy. Put up a happy face. Talk as if you feel optimistic. Going through the motions can trigger the emotions. If you scowl, the whole world seems to scowl back.
- Seek work and leisure that engage your skills. Happy are the people, who are absorbed in tasks that challenge them without overwhelming them.
- Give your body the sleep it wants. Happy people live active and vigorous lives, yet reserve time for sleep and solitude.
- Give priority to close relationships. Intimate friendships with those who care deeply about you can help you weather difficult times.

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- Focus beyond the self. Reach out to those in need. Happiness increases helpfulness (those who feel good do good). But doing good also makes one feel good.
- Keep a gratitude journal. Those, who reflect on some positive aspects of their lives (health, friends, family, accomplishments), experience heightened well-being.
- Nurture your spiritual self. For many people, faith provides a reason to focus beyond self and a sense of hope and purpose.

# Your Destiny is in Your Hands

Be it in life or career, lots of people know what to do, but few people actually do what they know. Thus, knowing is not sufficient or of any real value as long as you do not take action. For this, you need to strategise.

In order to keep your commitment, you need to plan for achieving results. If you set a high standard, and you can get yourself to believe you can achieve it, then you certainly can figure out the plan of action. You will definitely find a way. This will help you to raise your standards by discovering what they currently are, and realising what you want them to be.

In his book Awaken the Giant Within, Anthony Robbins talks about strategies of how to take control of your mental, emotional, physical and financial destiny. He maintains that in order to create lasting improvements, you need to have mastery over five areas of life. These are:

#### **Emotional Mastery**

We suffer from the delusion, that emotions are entirely out of our control, that they are just something that spontaneously occur, in reaction to the events of our lives. Often we dread emotions as if they were viruses that zero in on us and attack when we are vulnerable. The fact is that we are the source of all our emotions; we are the ones who create them.

We can feel any way we choose at any moment in time. We can control our emotions. First, identify what you are really feeling. Secondly, acknowledge and appreciate your emotion, knowing they support you. Thirdly, get curious about the message this emotion is offering you. Lastly, get certain you can handle this not only today, but in the future as well.

## **Physical Mastery**

In order to take on the challenges of everyday life, you need to wake up every morning feeling energised and powerful; you need to have sound physical health in order to enjoy the things you painstakingly earn and possess. So, it is very important to take control of your physical health, so that you not only look good, but also feel good and know that you are in control of your life in a body that radiates vitality.

### **Relationship Mastery**

Relationship is a great resource as it opens the doors to every resource that you need. Nobody wants to learn, grow and become successful and happy, all by themselves. Through relationship mastery, you will learn how to connect with people at the deepest level and be rewarded with something we all want to experience – a sense of contribution, of knowing that we have made a difference in other peoples' lives.

## **Financial Mastery**

We all deserve financial well-being, but we must have a workable gameplan to ensure that. We all experience financial pressure on an ongoing basis, and we fantasise that having more money would relieve that pressure. Yet this is a delusion. The fact is the more money you have the more pressure you are likely to feel. The key is not mere pursuit of wealth but changing your beliefs and attitudes about it, so you see it as a means for contribution, not the end.

#### **Time Mastery**

Managing time, we all know, is crucial. But mastering time would involve actually taking time and manipulating it so that it becomes your ally rather than your enemy.

# Update and Upgrade Yourself

A survey by Princeton University shows a person's success depends 85 per cent on attitude and only 15 per cent on ability. Attitude beats ability hands down when it comes to parameters that determine your success. But attitude towards what? There may be many factors. What is important is that attitude should be healthy and positive. Attitudes directly impact your career progression, especially the attitude towards learning.

Decades ago, organisations employed people and looked after their training and career growth. They provided pensions and benefits for a comfortable retirement. Times have changed. The responsibility for career management seems to have shifted from the organisation to the employee.

New trends seem to have emerged. Managers are no longer sure about sticking to their professions as before, and in a decade's time, there will be even fewer permanent jobs.

Employees with performance skills, but not adequately qualified professionally are facing acceptance issues at the workplace.

#### UPDATE AND UPGRADE YOURSELF

Performance alone is not enough and there is a strong need to equip oneself for a wider gamut of opportunities.

#### **New Techniques**

Management is an evolving field, and everyday a new technique is being tried out. So, it is very important for you to update yourself. You need to constantly look at re-skilling because it is a mirror image or counter-check of whether learning through experience was adequate. When portfolios are widening, conceptual grinding is required. It also gives greater job mobility and access to positions that offer enhanced job satisfaction.

In today's business environment, you are a misfit if your skills and competence are not current or do not match the demands of the workplace. Even if your organisation does not reimburse training costs, you should invest your own money to update your skills.

Re-education and re-skilling enhance your career opportunities. Re-education is about completing your formal college, university education, experiencing the hard realities of the practical corporate world for two to three years and then re-learning to be able to correctly understand, analyse and implement a second set of values to work culture.

At work, you could be running on a treadmill, where you remain at the same place – unless you jump forward and equip yourself with multi-dimensional skills and multiple career opportunities. So become a live-wire, and be hell-bent on upgrading yourself, so that you are not left behind amongst your peer groups and also in career growth.

# React Less, Respond More

At office front, you grapple with a formidable enemy called stress. You often find yourself jittery, angry, unduly anxious, getting frequent spells of headache, insomnia, physical and mental fatigue and ready to scream your head off at the drop of a hat.

If this is true, you have to identify who is causing you this extra load of stress – your boss, colleague, friend, spouse, child, or neighbour? If you have, and are trying to bring about a behavioural or attitudinal change in them, forget it. Your efforts may be futile or frustrating. What will bring quicker and lasting results is a modification in your own behavioural pattern.

It is not easy for anybody to recognise that they have an urgent need to change their behavior. And at times, it needs a terrifying ordeal to motivate some people to take the time and effort to re-evaluate their personality and modify their

#### REACT LESS, RESPOND MORE

behaviour. An important change that is required is the "quality of our response".

Most of the time we "react" to a situation rather than "respond". There is a radical and qualitative difference between these two attitudinal patterns. Response, as opposed to reaction, reflects a positive state of your mind and largely distances or insulates you from falling victim to stressful traps of the symptoms described earlier.

On evolving a strategy to cope with stress, noted philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan once commented that while we may have no control over events, we certainly do have control over how we respond to events.

It would be enlightening, enriching and useful to go through some of the suggestions Sarah Ban Breathnach offers in *Simple Abundance* to develop a positive frame of mind and avoid stressful traps:

- Begin and end the day with prayer, meditation and reflection.
- Keep it simple.
- Don't overschedule.
- Strive for realistic deadlines.
- Never make a promise you can't keep.
- Allow an extra half hour for everything you do.
- Create quiet surroundings at home and at work.
- Always carry something interesting to read.
- Breathe deeply and often.
- Move walk, dance, run, find a sport, enjoy.
- Set aside one day a week for rest and renewal.
- Laugh more often.

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- Stop trying to please everybody.
- Start pleasing yourself.
- Stay away from negative people.
- Don't be afraid of your passion.
- Approach problems as challenges.
- Set achievable goals.
- Surrender expectation.
- For every "yes", there needs to be a "no".
- Don't worry be happy.
- Remember, happiness is a living emotion.

# Beating Boredom through Self-Renewal

Ask a busy executive if he is bored. Chances are you get a reply, "How can I be bored when I am busy?"

But it is a fact that most people out there in the world of work are more stale than they know and more bored than they would care to admit.

Boredom is a hidden ailment of modern-day office. People in responsible positions and in comfortable circumstances seem to run out of steam in mid-career. They lose their bearings along the way and lapse into patterns of boredom and resentment.

Among the reasons for boredom are tougher problems of life, wounded confidence or self-esteem, suppressed or hidden resentments and grievances.

Such people though immersed in work, feel secretly defeated. They are bitter, cynical and dispirited. They just go through the motions. They don't know what it is they are running for. It is high time they renewed themselves. But is that an easy proposition?

What are the serious impediments in self-renewal?

- Fixed attitudes and habits. Complacency, rigidity, remaining imprisoned in comfortable habits/opinions are real dangers. A French writer once said, "there are people whose clocks stop at a certain point in their lives".
- Clinging to ghosts of the past memory of earlier failures, accumulated grievances and resentments.
   You keep embracing them even though they have long outlived their cause.
- Stopping to learn after getting a job believing that learning is only for young people.
- Continuously chasing targets. You want to believe, that
  there is a point at which you can feel, that you have
  arrived. You want a scoring system that tells you when
  you have piled up enough points to declare yourself
  successful.

We all want to be interesting, but key thing is to "be interested". You must cultivate a sense of curiosity, discover new things, risk failure and reach out. Your spirit will get a lift from your strong motivation.

John F. Gardner, a celebrated writer, cited a particularly interesting true example of renewal. Here it goes.

The man in question was 53-year old. Most of his adult life had been a losing struggle against debt and misfortune. In military service he received a battlefield injury that denied him the use of his left arm. And he was seized and held in captivity for five years.

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Later, he held two government jobs, succeeding at neither. At 53 he was in prison – and not for the first time. There, in prison, he decided to write a book, driven by heaven knows what motive – boredom, hope of gain, emotional release, or perhaps even creative impulse. The book turned out to be one of the greatest ever written, a book that has enthralled the world for more than 350 years – the prisoner was Cervantes; the book *Don Quixote*.

# Spirituality at Workplace

Most of us do not consider our work a personal form of worship. Work is worldly. It is born out of necessity. Worship is withdrawing from the world to honour the spirit. In this backdrop, can we bring spirituality to the workplace?

Spirituality is not so much a matter of where one is, but what thoughts one entertains. Going to the church per se is no more spiritual than going to the disco. If divine thoughts come to your mind in the disco, it is as good as being in a church. Similarly, even at a workplace, one may not see work just as a routine activity, a mere purpose for earning money for sustenance of self and family, but as an opportunity to attain higher cause beyond self and family – for organisation, society, nation. Such a person may be doing the same work, but he conceives a higher ideal, a broader perspective.

Marianne Williamson, a celebrated spiritual coach, believes that the workplace is "but a front for a temple, a healing place where people can be lifted above the insanity of a frightened

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world". Once, when she was working as a cocktail waitress — years before she answered her calling to become a spiritual guide and writer — she realised that people only thought they were going to a bar for a drink. Really the bar was a church in disguise and she could minister to people with warmth, conversation, and compassion. "No matter what we do, we can make it our ministry" she writes in her illuminating *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles.* "No matter what form our job or activity takes, the content is the same as everyone else's; we are here to muster to human hearts."

Even as working as a waitress, Marianne conceived of a higher ideal, of rendering warmth and compassion to her clients. This thought is nothing but establishing spirituality at workplace. Working for the higher cause does not mean one has to leave whatever one is doing and take up social or charity work. It is just infusing "different" thoughts to the workplace.

In *Simple Abundance*, Ms. Breathnach writes, "It is easier to imagine that our work could be our worship if we could perceive the sacred in how we spend at least eight hours of the day. Perhaps the secret to coming to this awareness, no matter what our present circumstances, is to discover the work we would love to do. But until we do, we need to learn to love the work we are presently doing".

# Don't Look for People, but Right People

Volumes have been written on the importance of human resource. The people are the most important resource is in fact an old adage. But the success stories of great companies have revealed that people are not your most important asset. The right people are.

In his path-breaking work, *Good to Great*, the author Jim Collins says that the executives, who ignited the transformations from Good to Great, did not first figure out where to drive the bus and then get people to take it there. They **first** got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and **then** figured out where to drive it.

The successful leaders understand three simple truths:

(a) If you start with "who" rather than "what", you can more easily adapt to a changing world. If people join the bus

- primarily because of where it is going, what happens if you get ten miles down the road and you need to change direction? You've got a problem.
- (b) If you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely goes away. The right people don't need to be tightly managed or fired up; they will be self-motivated by the inner drive to produce the best results and to be part of creating something great.
- (c) If you have the wrong people, it doesn't matter whether you discover the right direction; you **still** won't have a great company. Great vision without great people is irrelevant.

The main point, the author stresses, is not just about assembling the right team – that's nothing new. The main point is to **first** get the right people on the bus **before** you figure out where to drive it. Further, in determining "the right people" the great companies placed greater weight on character attributes than on specific educational background, practical skills, specialised knowledge or work experience. Not that specific knowledge or skills are unimportant, but they believed dimensions like character, work ethic, basic intelligence, dedication to fulfilling commitments and values are more important.

The ultimate throttle on growth for any great company is not markets, or technology, or competition or products. It is one thing, above all others, the ability to get and keep enough of the right people. And to get the right people, you may need to pay higher compensations as right people do not come cheap. It is not how you compensate your executives, it is which executives you have to compensate in the first place. The purpose of a compensation system should not be to get

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the right **behaviours** from the wrong people, but to get the right **people** on the bus in the first place, and to keep them there.

# Interruptions Eating Away Productivity

All organisations would love to see a constant flow of productivity with minimal waste of time. As time is a precious resource, and productivity the bottom line, uninterrupted work flow is an ideal and the most desirable situation at a workplace.

A new survey by Basex, an information technology research firm however reveals some startling facts. Workplace interruptions cost America USD 588 billion a year. A team led by Gloria Mark and Victor Gouzolez of the University of California at Irvine came out with the following disturbing findings:

- (i) All interruptions taken together at workplace consume 2.1 hours a day or 28 per cent of the workday.
- (ii) Estimating an average salary of 21 dollars an hour for "Knowledge Workers" (those who perform tasks

- involving information), in monetary terms, these interruptions cost US economy a whopping USD 588 billion a year.
- (iii) The time lost in terms of productivity included not only unimportant interruptions and distractions but also recovery time associated with getting back on the task.
- (iv) Employees devoted an average of just 11 minutes to a project before the ping of an e-mail, the ring of the phone or a knock on the cubicle pulling them in another direction.
- (v) Once they were interrupted, it took on an average 25 minutes to return to the original task, if they managed to do so at all that day.

The findings, which were based on study of 1000 office workers, spotted the following five biggest causes of interruptions in descending order:

- (a) A colleague stopping by;
- (b) Worker being called away from the desk (or leaving voluntarily);
- (c) Arrival of a new e-mail;
- (d) Worker doing another task on the computer; and
- (e) Phone calls.

Psychologists, who are studying the phenomenon, believe that in the recent times the web-based activity and the compulsive use of cell-phones are the major factors for such "attention-deficit disorder" – as they term the symptom. Over the past decade, psychiatrist Edward Hallowell has in fact seen a ten-fold rise in the number of patients with symptoms that closely resemble those of attention-deficit disorder, but of work-induced variety. Some psychologists call the increasing

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addiction of web-based activity "online compulsive disorder", some other term it "screen sucking".

There is some comforting news too. In the next generation systems, which Microsoft and its competitors too are pursuing, interruptions are designed to be less intrusive. In such systems nothing flashes, pops up or makes noise and moreover, the alerts appear on the periphery of a screen that is larger than today's standards so that workers stay connected to their main task.

# Let Employees Speak Up

Amongst the many behavioural factors that come in the way of excellence in an organisation is the yes-manship. You say "yes" when you want to say "no". You agree to a viewpoint when you know you should disagree. You commit, yet you know you can't honour your commitment. You accept work when you know you can't cope with it. Why do you succumb like this? Why do you yield? Whatever has happened to your voice of dissent?

Reasons vary and here are some:

- Pure sycophancy: You feel yes-manship is desirable. This bolsters the ego of the boss and the technique is tried and tested. It has given immense benefit to you in your career progression in the past and you can't afford to abandon it now.
- Fear and insecurity: Disagreement will antagonise the boss. He will become irritated, angry, resentful, furious or even get enraged and may make your life

miserable. Why create tension, disturb peace and risk your career?

- Inadequacy and incompetence: Even when boss is not a problem, you yield as you don't know the job. Instead of asking for time to understand the job, you find a short-term escape route by saying "yes".
- Lack of confidence and indecisiveness: You feel shaky and indecisive, because you don't know the pros and cons of an issue. You are not sure what stand you should take.

Let us understand this. When you say one thing while you mean another, you unconsciously are sowing a culture of mutual distrust. When you say "yes" to ideas, which you have no intensions of implementing, you indirectly are contributing to a culture of double standard. When you commit yourself to do something with no intention of fulfilling it, you are eroding the value of service. So think before saying "yes". You have a responsibility on your shoulder.

It is important and crucial for bosses of organisations to take disagreements and dissent in a positive way. Dissent is a part of healthy work ethic. They should appreciate that if two people agree on everything, one of them is unnecessary. There is no harmony when everybody sings the same note.

The first casualty of a dissentless office culture is innovation and creativity. When a business is driven by the ordinariness of the tried and tested, innovation sits patiently in a corner. And an organisation, where open-mindedness is not preferred, ideas are not given a chance and dissent is at a discount, is bound to move in only one direction – the path of decay.

Dissent is the voice of ascent and progress. Dissent reflects democratic values in an organisation but it must be with a

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sense of responsibility, imagination, honesty and confidence that things could be improved, and with a will to implement the ideas borne out of dissent.

Dissent should not degenerate into hostility, a weapon to settle personal scores or to engage in a showdown duel, but should be used as a powerful tool and instrument to nurture the culture of innovation, creativity, dynamism and progress.

# Relevance of Emotional Intelligence

Great organisations are made up of people who, above all, have high emotional intelligence. The relevance of emotional intelligence in business is immense – in conflict resolution, customer service, productivity, goal setting and in leadership.

It is critical for a leader not to be limited purely to his cognitive abilities and logic, but also to be aware of his feelings. When top management values feelings and attitudes, so will people down the line. Emotions are contagious; if leaders feel optimistic, confident, creative and compassionate, the employees will tend to feel the same. The direction of emotional flow is always top-down.

There is pressure of accountability for delivering results, pressure to deliver numbers and pressure to deliver on commitments. Market pressures and competition pressures are increasing. Under the circumstances, it is tempting to defer soft issues like communication, transparency and open collaboration, and slip back into silos of command and control.

The challenge is not to give in to this temptation but to work on these, every day and every hour, even when there are inevitable setbacks and everyone tells that emotional intelligence is unworkable.

Top leadership must continue to send strong positive messages on what good, open, collective and collaborative leadership is all about.

Dr. Daniel Goleman, the *guru* of emotional intelligence, believes that how you deal with your feelings at the workplace could well determine your future – as a leader and as an individual. Goleman contends that a leader's behaviour and actions drive the emotional climate within the organisation. By controlling and calibrating his emotions with those of others, a leader can create a positive work culture, with happier and more productive employees.

In the modern organisations, people with "petty tyrant" old style of leaderships have little chance of success. When employees have a boss who doesn't really care about them, who yells at them and is abusive, they are not going to help him out. They are going to do just enough to keep their job, doing nothing extra for him.

When people are highly distressed, when they are anxious or overwhelmed, the emotional centres of their brain, cripple their thinking centres. They can't take in information well, or process it deeply, or respond flexibly and adaptively. Performance is bound to suffer.

#### RELEVANCE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

A good leader, according to Goleman, is able to tune in to the mood in a room or in a group, and also act in such a way that he moves the mood in a positive direction. In other words, the moods and emotions of the leader resonate with those of the people around him. Dissonant leaders create an emotionally toxic environment with stressed-out employees and consequently poor performers.

# Combat the Disease of Complacency

Most of the successful, high-octane companies do not ask themselves, "How well are we doing?" or "How can we do well?" or "How well do we have to perform in order to meet the competition?" Instead, they ask this critical question "How can we do better tomorrow than we did today?" They institutionalise this question as a way of life—a habit of mind and action. For them, there is no ultimate finish time. Visionary companies attain their extraordinary position, not so much because of superior insight or special "secrets" of success, but largely because of the simple fact that they are so terribly demanding of themselves.

This fact we learn from the fascinating work *Built to Last* by Collins and Porras. They examined eighteen exceptional and long-lasting companies in order to discover the roots of sustained corporate greatness. In a visionary company, the

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findings reveal that disciplined way of life is ingrained into the fabric of the organisation. Furthermore, the companies apply the concept of self-improvement in a much broader sense than just process improvement. It means long-term investments for the future; it means investment in the development of employees and adoption of new ideas and technologies.

Comfort is not the objective in such a company. As a matter of fact, powerful mechanisms are installed to create discomfort – to obliterate complacency – and thereby stimulate change and improvement before the external world demands it. They understand that contentment leads to complacency, which inevitably leads to decline.

Collins and Porras narrate a parable of the black belt to underscore the point.

A martial artist kneels before the master sensei in a ceremony to receive a hard-earned black belt. After years of relentless training, the student has finally reached the pinnacle of achievement in the discipline. "Before granting the belt, you must pass one more test", says the sensei.

"I am ready", responds the student, expecting perhaps one final round of sparring.

"You must answer the essential question: What is the true meaning of the black belt?"

"The end of my journey", says the student, "A well-deserved reward for all my hard work".

The sensei waits for more. Clearly, he is not satisfied. Finally, the sensei speaks "You are not yet ready for the black belt. Return in one year".

A year later, the student kneels again in front of the sensei.

"What is the true meaning of the black belt", asks the sensei.

"A symbol of distinction and the highest achievement in our art", says the student.

The sensei says nothing for many minutes, waiting. Clearly, he is not satisfied. Finally, he speaks "You are still not ready for the black belt. Return in one year".

A year later, the student kneels once again in front of the sensei. And again the sensei asks: "What is the true meaning of the black belt?"

"The black belt represents the beginning—the start of a never-ending journey of discipline, work and the pursuit of an ever-higher standard", says the student.

"Yes. You are now ready to receive the black belt and begin your work".

# Develop Discomfort to Dislodge Others

The discipline of self-improvement separates an extraordinary organisation from the ordinary. Such an organisation sees an adversity as an opportunity to grow. They do everything possible to make the organisation stronger tomorrow, than it is today.

But the problem is how to remain self-disciplined once an organisation has attained success or become number one in its field. How can a company keep alive that fire that burns from within that impels people to keep pushing, to never be satisfied and to always search for improvement?

If you are involved in building and managing a company, Collins and Porras, urge you in *Built to Last* to consider the following questions:

- (a) What "mechanisms of discontent" can you create that would obliterate complacency and bring about change and improvement from within, yet are consistent with your core ideology?
- (b) What are you doing to invest for the future? Are you doing it today? Does your company adopt innovative new methods and technologies before the rest of the industry?
- (c) How do you respond to downturns? Does your company continue to build for the long-term, even during the difficult times?
- (d) Do people in your company understand that comfort is not the objective that life in a visionary company is not supposed to be easy?

There may be various ways to generate mechanisms of discomfort. One way that Proctor & Gamble (P&G) found, and which has been beautifully expounded by the authors, was indeed ingenuous.

P&G, having risen to prominence in the early twentieth century, became worried that this prominence might cause the company to become fat, happy and complacent. What to do? Richard Deupree, the then P&G President, pondered over the subject. He could have gone around giving passionate speeches about the importance of remaining disciplined. He could have written memos and pamphlets about the dangers of complacency. He could have met personally with managers throughout the company to impress upon them the inherent value of change and self-improvement, but Deupree knew that the company needed something more than just good intentions to improve for the future. He wanted something with teeth in it, something that would continually impel progress from within. P&G already had the best people, the best products,

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the best marketing muscle. So, why not put the best of P&G against the best of P&G? If the market place doesn't provide enough competition, why not create a system of internal competition that makes it virtually impossible for any brand to rest on its laurels.

Implemented in the early 1930s, the competing brand management structure became a powerful mechanism at P&G for stimulating change and improvement from within. The structure proved so effective that it was eventually emulated in one form or another by virtually every American consumer products company.

The point the authors have made, is not that a successful company should necessarily create internal competition in order to keep itself vibrant. The key point is that it should have some sort of discomfort mechanisms in place to combat the disease of complacency – a disease that inevitably begins to infect all successful organisations.

# Sycophants and the Boss

We regard a job at the top as a position of status, prestige and power. Yes, it is. But at the same time, it is a seat of responsibility, contribution and challenges.

The position of a top manager or boss is a lonely one. As he moves up the ladder, he has many people around him. But the people in whom he can confide, from whom he can take advice or with whom he can discuss problems become fewer and fewer. The people he interacts with or who surround him want to tell him what they think he would like to hear. This means the information he gets may be very much doctored. Again, many people approaching him have their viewpoints and their axes to grind. That also causes distortion. This indicates that the boss very rarely knows what is happening around him.

The perceived power of the boss poses another delicate problem – the problem of sycophants. Every organisation has this problem and there is, in fact, a lot of anger against this

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breed. There is a strong feeling that sycophants get unfair advantage through their crafty and shrewd acts and that they pass distorted information to the top.

Yet, sycophants thrive because of certain mutual need on both sides. For the boss, the sycophants serve two important purposes. First, they bolster his ego. The boss is told he is the best, he is matchless and that future of the organisation would be bleak without him. This boosts his self-confidence and selfworth. Secondly, the sycophants fulfill the need for providing information to the boss. They provide such information which is not easily available through normal channel. This at times is useful and important for the boss.

On the other hand, sycophants get advantage through such "bonding". First, they get a certain stature in the organisation by being seen as the boss's special men. Secondly, they occasionally get concessions like meaty assignments, desirable postings, official foreign tours, etc.

Within limits, concessions extracted by the sycophants are not likely to cause a great deal of damage. But beyond a certain point, they could pose serious dangers for the boss as well as the organisation. When the relationship between the boss and the subordinate is too personal, it clouds the judgement of the boss. It can encourage bad politics and get to be very demotivating for the rest of the organisation. A feeling is also created that the system is not fair and objective in its evaluation of the employees. This is dysfunctional.

How to deal with the situation?

Bosses must find time to meet all kinds of people and listen to them by moving around. It should be ensured that employees are able to approach their boss without any special effort. Bosses should also attend various professional and

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industry functions in order to gain feedback from outsiders. However while listening, the boss must make it clear that he will never short circuit the decision-making process and ignore or neglect the normal organisational channel.

It is not unnatural for the bosses to often want some form of personal loyalty. But they must guard against this personal loyalty gaining precedence over professional loyalty. After all, they should be seen as role models.

# Work-Life Balance

In accomplishing the goals of any organisation, the manager is not working alone. He is working as a member of a team, the other members of the team being his employees. As manager of this team, he is responsible for its efficiency and effectiveness. Such management involves creating conditions and motivations for employees to work effectively and with satisfaction.

In order to infuse job-satisfaction amongst employees a manager needs to understand the dynamics of human behaviour and have some insights into questions such as the following:

- What are some of the significant things people look for in their jobs?
- How can one understand the motives or needs of a particular employee?

- How could work be designed or human interactions be monitored to provide maximum satisfaction to people and their needs?
- How can a climate be created where the maximum utilisation of human talents is possible?
- How can the employees be helped to perform to their maximum?
- How to get the commitment of employees?

With an increasing number of employees eager to find a greater work-life balance, it is important for a manager to find ways to keep the employees happy and satisfied.

First, managers must remember that employees are not mere nine-to-five robots. All employees have lives, interests, friends, and family outside the office and most are constantly struggling to balance increasingly hectic schedules. While companies can't sacrifice unduly to the demand and whims of a single individual, making concessions at times, wherever possible can pay huge dividends in the long run.

Second, the greatest source of employee pride and satisfaction is the feeling of accomplishment at the workplace. Such a sense of achievement comes from having and exercising responsibility. Managers therefore should provide employees with responsibility and then let them use it. By doing this, they would also be showing that they trust their employees.

Third, managers should make it a point to show their employees how much they respect and value them. Let the employees not feel that they are being used as punching bags or viewed as adversaries and not as loyal partners in progress. When such care is not taken, employees seem ready to jump ship at the first opportunity. By showing respect, managers, in fact, can win enhanced dedication and productivity.

#### **WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Fourth, most employees have aspirations to grow in their career over time. Managers should see that a genuine growth path is established for all their employees and not just for senior officials. This would avoid disillusionment particularly amongst talented employees. An employee's goals should be aligned with the company's vision.

Fifth, it is crucial to assess and evaluate the worth of employees judiciously. Managers should ensure that loyalty, honesty and hard work are celebrated and not the designs and antics of "hi-fliers" and "whiz kids". The focus should be more on strengths rather than weaknesses.

Lastly, there should be a work culture where the employees can perceive work as fun. Such a work ethic may shun rules and leverage child-ego state in the employees.

# Dealing with New Recruits

Organisations spend large sums of money on advertisements for recruitment. But after recruitment what happens? New employees are left to grope their way in the dark – at the mercy of ill-equipped, non-qualified and mostly prejudiced old supervisors and managers. The net result is that a good number of new recruits leave within months since they find the organisation climate hostile, employment conditions inadequate and irksome and senior supervisors and managers inimical to growth of talent. All this happens mainly because no proper induction process is in place in such organisations.

Induction initiates new recruits into the team that makes up the workforce, introducing them to the organisation and explaining their role within it. This is crucial because impressions gained by new employees during this period can influence their perception of the organisation for years to come. Good induction procedures help employees to fit quickly into a new and supposedly uncomfortable environment.

#### DEALING WITH NEW RECRUITS

The first weeks or months involve extensive and difficult problems of personal adjustment. The whole situation – with deadlines, new supervisors and managers and sometimes hostile group behaviour – is likely to be a difficult one. The supervisor should help the recruit in every way possible. The recruit should feel free to approach the supervisor for guidance at any time. A new recruit needs to know where to go for help if he has a problem with money, health or feels unsafe or unwelcome, is bullied or harassed or has a complaint.

An effective induction process should make the recruit feel he belongs. It socialises him into new working methods, norms and interpersonal relations. New jobs are associated with new and unfamiliar travel and work routines, new relationships and possibly a change of home and thus might create high levels of anxiety.

New recruits can easily feel bewildered and unwanted by the existing staff and much sympathy is needed during this potentially disturbing experience.

A new recruit may have difficulties in absorbing large amounts of information in one go. These should, therefore, be staggered. The recruit should be told about his duties and responsibilities, training, promotion opportunities and so on.

Newcomers join an organisation with a dream. They wish to do a good job, to be accepted by their colleagues and generally to be helpful in an organisation. They want to make a mark. They crave to succeed. It is a bounden duty of an organisation to help them achieve these objectives.

# Motivating Employees to Boost Productivity

Productivity of an organisation depends upon the people who work there. Given the same inputs, people can produce more if they work more. But how do you make people work more or better? It is an issue that requires an understanding of what motivates people to work.

Productivity of an employee some argue, depends on job satisfaction, and productivity of organisations can be raised by improving the job satisfaction. Unfortunately, the relationship between job satisfaction and productivity is not that simple. It is possible to have highly satisfied employees not giving their best to an organisation. This happens when they are not highly motivated to work. Absence of dissatisfaction or presence of job satisfaction does not mean presence of work motivation.

#### MOTIVATING EMPLOYEES TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY

Both work motivation and job satisfaction are dimensions that influence the productivity of any employee.

Studies have shown that adequate salary, good working conditions, job-security, physical facilities, good human relations and the quality of supervision all contribute to the job satisfaction of employees. There are other set of factors like recognition of work done, status, opportunity for growth, nature of work, responsibility and challenge of the task which play an important role in creating a motivation to work.

The first set of factors that prevent job dissatisfaction has been called "Hygienes". The second set of factors is called "motivators". Both sets need to be considered in order to improve employee productivity. While "Hygiene" factors are essential for people to work, "motivators" play an important role in helping people to work more and better.

But how to create conducive conditions that enable them to put forth their best? Here are some dimensions on which managers can work.

- Create conditions where employees' energies are not dissipated in meeting their basic needs like salaries, housing, job-security, etc.
- Create a climate for interdependent work rather than dependency. An effective manager encourages people to work independently or in a team interdependently. He does not interfere unless it becomes necessary. He trusts workers and gives them freedom to plan out their own strategies.
- Create a climate of approach and problem-solving rather than avoidance avoiding a problem is escapism. Approaching a problem with confidence and working

out ways to overcome it with the help of others is a hallmark of an effective manager. Satisfaction is derived from the struggle itself even if the outcomes are not always positive.

- Create a competitive climate through recognition of good work. Rewards may not always be in financial terms. Even a word of appreciation has great motivating value. Many managers limit their appreciation to Annual Performance Reports, but there are many other possible ways. Praising before other employees, giving increased responsibilities are some of the mechanisms.
- Create a productive climate using through personal example. Employees are constantly looking to their boss to set an example. They tend to imitate him and his style may percolate down the hierarchy. If he is authoritarian and non-trusting, his next-level staff may attempt to be like him too, ultimately creating a climate of distrust and suspicion in the organisation.

# Watch Out for Stress among Employees

He was a promising banker, who had started climbing the ladder of success very early in his career. He would meet all budgetary targets – be it of deposits, advances or profits. He worked for long hours and without much rest. He felt all along that he could handle his frenzied, fast-track work life effortlessly, and refused to accept that it would ever harm him. He boasted to his friends that he was a strong person and that he was stress free.

Alas, he was proved wrong. He soon started running out of breath and motivation. His bosses did not notice what was happening to him. They only noticed his performance slackening. Work became a pain for him and the workplace hell. He was served with "show-cause" notices by the management. He began to hit the bottle more frequently and it was no longer for the bank's sake, it was to keep himself alive . . . .

Stress and anxiety are attendant evils of success. And successful people are often left to battle their demons alone. Some are lucky to survive while others burn out.

An individual's inability to cope with job content, organisational demand, peer pressure and his own aspirations are some of the main reasons for stress at the workplace.

A pathologically stressful career with incidences of chronic diseases such as diabetes and cardio-vascular problems is a matter of huge concern not only for an individual but for an organisation too. While, in order to manage stress, an individual can bring about changes in himself through time-tested measures, like exercise, diet control, relaxation, entertainment, etc., how can an organisation contribute effectively to prevent occupational stress amongst its employees? *American Psychologist* has provided some practical and useful suggestions for organisations to follow:

- Monitor workload: Ensure that the workload is in line with employees' capabilities and resources.
- Design the job well: Design the job to provide meaning, stimulation and opportunities for employees to use their skills.
- Ensure job clarity: Clearly define roles and responsibilities of employees.
- Increase participation: Give opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs.
- Reduce uncertainties: Improve communication, reduce uncertainty about career development and future employment prospects.
- Provide scope for interfacing with employees: insure opportunities for social interaction amongst employees.
   Put in place thoughtful and flexible working hours.

#### WATCH OUT FOR STRESS AMONG EMPLOYEES

Establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.

Employees however do require a little amount of stress, as it is an effective motivator. But beyond a certain level, it affects their health and sense of well-being. They lose contact with their inner selves. The work they do is no longer interesting to them and they stop learning. They become mechanical in their approach towards work.

Organisations can allow this to happen at their own peril. A poor quality human asset can never uplift an organisation.



# Annual Performance Review

Throughout the world, a single management tool, which has the greatest impact on the career of an employee, is the Annual Performance Review (APR). Appraisal reports are one of the best instruments for motivating employees. They should, as such, be prepared objectively. Yet there are very few in the corporate world who do not criticise performance appraisals.

In any random survey of an organisation, most employees, no matter what their level, would be found to have lost faith in the performance appraisals, which they regard as unfair, arbitrary and unscientific. This is so because objectivity is often lacking. The same employee, for example, can be judged by two different appraisers, operating in a short span of time, as being average and outstanding. APRs at best are considered a necessary evil.

What are the basic pitfalls an appraiser should guard against?

#### ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW

The first is the "halo effect". Appraisers at times pick on one or two qualities of the subordinate and rate him high. Similarly, they may dislike one or two qualities of the subordinate and rate him lower on all other dimensions because of this dislike. For example, the appraiser may be impressed with etiquettes and manners of the subordinate. Because of this, he rates him higher not only in "conduct" parameter but also in other attributes included in the appraisal report.

The second pitfall is "liking for similarities". If you are an MBA, you rate higher subordinates having a similar qualification. If you have studied from a particular institute, you will rate a subordinate higher if he also has studied from the same institute. This bias extends to caste, creed, religion and state as well.

The third is "recent incident" syndrome. Here the appraiser takes into reckoning only incidents, activities and performance of immediate past while appraising subordinates. Impressive performance shown during the fag end of the review year can elicit an outstanding grade.

Progressive organisations, with sound human resource development policies, realise that such biases can play havoc with the sensitivities of employees with a proven calibre. True, in managerial life, bias cannot be eliminated completely but it certainly should be checked. The system must give an appearance of being free from bias which emanates from highly subjective and personalised considerations. At stake is the credibility of the system which can only thrive on transparency and fair play.

The performance appraisal system has to be consistent with the organisational objectives, while also taking into account the aspirations of the individual. It must promote performance rather than inhibit attainment.

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To overestimate a person is a crime, but to underestimate him is a sin. Discrimination on any basis is unlawful. Appraisers may commit a crime, but ought not a sin.

# Care! Knowledge Has an Expiry Date

Success of knowledge-based companies in information technology, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology has demonstrated how important concepts of innovation, creativity, empowerment and knowledge creation could be. These concepts play an important role in determining not only the success, but also the survival of an organisation. Inability to adapt to the fast and frequent changes is bound to result in irrelevance and obsolescence.

The big question then is "how" to transform the organisation into a learning organisation, so that required changes are initiated and assimilated with ease, speed and effectiveness.

Learning in the organisation takes place through the people since machines and buildings cannot learn. But the sum of individual learning is not equal to the organisational learning. If people in different places in the organisation do not think about the organisation as a whole, but only from the point of view of their position or department, the learning cannot be effective. Hence there is a need for art of seeing the whole picture – i.e. "system thinking". It is only through system thinking that we can understand the complexity of emerging patterns within and outside the organisation.

Peter Senge, author of the celebrated work *Fifth Discipline* argues that individual and collective learning is essential for success. He observes that even if people change, organisations may not. Organisations can change only by collective effort. Therefore, team learning and the art of "thinking together" must be mastered. Team learning is vital because team is the fundamental learning unit in the organisation. Team learning is facilitated and enhanced if shared vision is created in the organisation. Shared vision generates genuine commitment rather than just compliance.

On the path of learning curve, organisation should begin with capability building, which in turn begins with a "learning agenda" — a list of concepts and conditions that will put managers in a position to win in their respective roles. This is more than basic management training: it is tied to the skills and abilities that are critical to competitive success across their business units. Then comes use of the learning agenda to resolve top priorities. To achieve tangible performance impact, learning must be applied to tangible issues. This essentially means "learning by doing".

Lastly, learning must be reinforced through integrated training and exercise. Managers must revisit different experiences in a condensed time frame so that they can master the skills necessary to solve future problems themselves.

The great training programme in the world is trial and error. To advance, you have to pay the price. Paying the price

#### CARE! KNOWLEDGE HAS AN EXPIRY DATE

means learning and learning all the time, zeroing in on your weaknesses, trying to correct them and capitalising on your strengths.

Like medicine, knowledge today has an expiry date. Knowledge needs to be constantly updated and learning has to be continuously refreshed if new challenges are to be dealt with effectively. Let us remember a learning organisation is the only economically sustainable organisation.

# The Barriers to Good, Effective Decision-Making

Any systematic approach to decision-making starts with a proper definition of the problem. A problem well defined is a problem half-solved. A proper definition helps you to search the relevant place for promising alternatives.

It is not difficult to generate a reasonable number of good alternatives. What are required are some degree of thought, contemplation and study. However, it is seen that in the early stages of decision-making process, a lot of perceptual biases interfere with problem analysis or identification of possible solutions.

It would be interesting to find, how some barriers can impede managerial effectiveness in arriving at the most suitable decision.

#### THE BARRIERS TO GOOD, EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

- (a) The tendency to evaluate before one investigates. Early evaluation precludes enquiry into a fuller understanding of the situation.
- (b) The tendency to equate new and old experiences. This often causes managers to look for what is similar rather than what is unique in a new problem.
- (c) The tendency to use available solutions, rather than consider new ones.
- (d) The tendency to deal with problems at face value, rather than ask questions that might illuminate reasons behind the more obvious aspects of the problems.
- (e) The tendency to direct decisions towards a single goal. Most problems involve multiple goals that must be handled simultaneously.
- (f) The tendency to confuse symptoms and problems.
- (g) The tendency to overlook unsolvable problems and instead concentrate on simpler concerns.
- (h) The tendency to respond automatically or to act before thinking.

Such tendencies often lead managers to act in haste before the facts are known and often before the actual underlying problem is recognised or understood.

There are many ways managers, who are leaders of decision making group, can overcome such barriers. Some of the time tested ways worth recommending are:

- Managers should encourage each member to be a critical evaluator of various proposals;
- Managers should refrain from stating their own position and instead encourage open enquiry and impartial probing of a wide range of alternatives;

- The organisations can give same problem to two different independent groups and compare the resulting solution;
- After deciding on a preliminary consensus on the first choice for a course of action, a second meeting should be scheduled during which members should express their residual doubts and rethink the entire issue prior to finalising the decision and initiating action.

It is of utmost importance that managers are aware of the tendencies which are in the nature of biases so that the likelihood of falling victim to the problem is minimised. Recognising the problem represents half the battle in the effort to make more effective decisions in organisational settings.

# People-Driven Strategies for Change and Growth

There is an increasing realisation in corporate world that business strategies which ignore the aspirations and inputs of the young, run the risk of failure. So, they are relying more on the youth for strategic inputs in decision making and finalising fresh initiatives. They are involving young managers and executives in formulating corporate strategies, and in ensuring that they play an important role in decision making.

Now, young teams of executives are in the forefront of changes. They independently formulate solutions and business plans on broad-ranging strategic issues, then present them to the senior management, which in turn, picks and chooses the best ideas. The new kids who come into the organisation attend with a different set of skills that the senior management finds worth learning.

Catalysing change in corporate cultures by managing people and talent better seems to be the new success recipe for growing organisations on the corporate landscape. Better people management is being recognised as the key to sustained success.

Organisations are coming out of the era when the dictat ran down from the top and the boss's words were carved out in stone. In place of fear and distrust of management policies, a culture of inclusiveness and openness is gradually creeping in.

There is a growing understanding that it is people-driven strategies that sow the seeds of consistent growth. Feedback is taken from people across the board-subordinates, superiors and clients. Others are using theory of constraints to initiate systematic thinking of perspective building. This takes the form of each employee suggesting the parameters for his own motivation and evaluation in consultation with his superiors and co-workers.

A special style, character and way of doing things give form to corporate culture. This culture decides how effective the organisation is in the market place. Achieving cultural change is now the key preoccupation of top management and for this purpose change managers and culture interventionist are being engaged. These people put in place a wide range of systems and templates which handle issues from employee attrition rates to the business perception.

One of the great benefits of information technology in the workplace is to allow employees to make more choices. That in turn has called for different managerial techniques: not so much command-and-control as coordinate-and-cultivate. Organisations have learnt to run loose hierarchies, in which

#### PEOPLE-DRIVEN STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE AND GROWTH

much of the decision-making power is pushed down the organisation.

# Aesthetics at Workplace

Organisations today are increasingly waking up to the necessity of having creatively designed workplaces. There is clearly a conceptual shift. Offices are now being seen "individual workplaces" and not simply "places of work".

It is now well acknowledged that a creatively designed workspace goes a long way in enhancing creativity and productivity amongst the employees. Just as an organisation makes a positive difference to productivity, workspace designed with aesthetic touch acts as a catalyst for creative ideas. The decor contributes in energising the workplace.

The trend of a  $24 \times 7$  work culture or prolonged working hours has literally changed the way we shape our workspace today. While on the one hand workspaces are shrinking in size, technological inputs and a concern for environmentally sensitive design have led to transforming them into sleeker, compact, multifunctional office system, thus increasing work efficiency. In today's scenario, where people spend most of

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their waking hours in office, it is essential that they have an environment, which is not only stimulating but also provides them with comfort that they can relate to.

Some major aspects of an aesthetically designed workstation are:

**Ergonomics:** Imaginative space planning, sleek cabins, modular chairs, using a lot of glass to give a lighter feel generates a feel-good factor and helps avoid stress. Constant change or innovation keeps the mind ticking. A collage of workstation, equipped with gadgetry to perform multiple tasks tends to banish boredom.

**Colour:** A good looking office certainly makes people want to work. Colours influence our moods. It is seen that light colours renew energy. Shades of white or subtle colours evoke feelings of confidence and stability whereas bright or vibrant colours make a space more dramatic.

**Acoustics:** Sound has vibrations which directly impact our mind. Planning for keeping noise, both external and internal, down to minimum is therefore important. Provision of acoustic-treated paneling and ceiling, air-tight doors and sound-insulated partitions within the workspace are some of the ways to minimise sound level. Soft music creates a harmonious environment.

**Lighting:** The brighter the office, the higher the efficiency. Lack of proper or uniformly distributed lighting could cause boredom and drowsiness. Different types of luminaires with reflectors or glare-free fixtures, blend of spotlights and fluorescents, natural light and artificial light are a few aspects which need to be given attention.

**Air quality:** An ill-ventilated air-conditioned office can disturb the comfort levels of people within, thus affecting their

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productivity. Periodic air change to remove odours and other polluting emissions with provision of natural ventilation apart from the artificial one is crucial.

Workspaces today aspire to foster the commitment, the individuality and the work ethic that organisations expect their employees to have. No wonder aesthetics in designing of workspaces help achieve the same.

# About the Author

R.K. Sinha joined Bank of India as a direct recruit officer in 1982 on completing his post-graduation in physics with distinction. After initially serving in Bihar, he moved to Delhi where he worked through different key roles before being posted abroad, at Nairobi, Kenya.

During his tenure (2000-04) there, he wrote a weekly column on Management in *The Nation*, the most reputed daily in Kenya, and also the entire East African



region. Lately, he also wrote a fortnightly column "Mission Possible" in *Hindustan Times*, which motivated young readers to dream big and strive for excellence.

Mr. Sinha has continued to set high standards at work as well, and it has been well recognised. He has also worked closely with McKinsey & Co. on change management as part of his bank's mega reorganisational initiative. As Deputy General Manager today, after three decades of distinguished career, he continues to explore new frontiers. He believes that workplaces are like a *havan kund* and if one offers one's untiring and honest efforts – *aahuti* – with sincerity and passion, then one is bound to get handsomely rewarded and so will the organisation one is working for.

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