

JARGON FREE

MANAGEMENT SIMPLIFIED
THROUGH THE EYES OF LIFE

VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

JARGON FREE MANAGEMENT

An attempt to demystify and simplify
Management through the eyes of
everyday life experiences and moments

A HIGH5 PUBLICATION

High⁵

PUBLISHED BY HIGH⁵ PUBLICATIONS

High⁵ is a HR Consultancy and Soft Skills Training Company based in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Founded in 2005, High5 currently works in 9 countries, and undertakes assignments for Clients such as the World Bank, DFCC Bank, MAS Active, Leo Burnett Solutions, Wataniya Telecom, John Keells Holdings, EXPO Lanka Holdings, Mobitel, CARE Sri Lanka, Phoenix Industries and other leading organizations.

High5 Publications was born with the ethos of bringing original and practical management thinking to light: simplifying it, demystifying it and thus, enabling better understanding of it.

You can follow High⁵'s work by logging on to our blog:

<http://high5consultancy.blogspot.com>

FOR FREE CIRCULATION

SECOND EDITION, 2018

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED © VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

The right of Vidusha Nathavitharana to be identified as the writer of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

EDITED BY JITHENDRI GOMES

COVER DESIGN BY ROSHAN MARTIS

I dedicate this book with love and thanks to 'Archchi'
for fostering my love of literature and writing...

To my parents for their unwavering faith, and to
Roona, my wife, for her unconditional love...

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK...

My parents - for unconditional love and adoration - and for all their support throughout my life.

Mrs. Marjorie De Alwis – my kindergarten teacher who spotted early signs of enthusiasm for the arts and giving me the courage, encouragement and platform to pursue my dreams.

Ms. Crisdoss for teaching me English during my normative years in College and Aunty Uyangoda for teaching English Literature with love and patience.

Roona - for always being by my side - and making sure I completed the Book.

Puj, Sanjay, Fayaz and Ajit Bappi for their contributions and critique

Boyd Mama for proofing the first draft and Carl Muller for his awesome final touches.

Dinali, J and Mr. Jayaranjan for reading the first cut and giving me candid feedback.

Jeremy Muller for putting it all together - and bringing the book to life at long last.

BEFORE YOU PROCEED TO READ...

Before you start reading the set of articles in the book, I thought its best to offer a few thoughts:

- The book is a compilation of articles made into short chapters. Each is a stand-alone, and can be read as is, rather than as part of a continuous and interlinked narration.
- The book is meant to provoke thought, and NOT to espouse a theory. We tried to offer answers to the Management dilemmas that plague you, merely to offer insights and perspectives and leave you to derive your own conclusions.
- When reading the articles, try to look at the 'principles' which would enable you to derive the linkages you require. Never look at extrapolating what is said and then transplanting it to make a solution for your issue. ALWAYS take it in context, and ensure whatever solutions you bring to your organization is acclimatized to suit its culture and nuances. If you have found the book interesting, and would like to look at some direct linkages and insights to help you with the understanding of the application of the principles into Management in a more direct chapter, please log on to highfiveconsultancy.com where we have offered free downloads on each chapter, as well as a summary which has the lesson from life, the principle to be learnt, and ideas for management listed.

Happy reading!

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION **9**

CHANGE MANAGEMENT **11**

What teaching a kid to brush his/her teeth teaches you about Change Management

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT **24**

Your car and your Team

BUILDING A GREAT EMPLOYEE POPULATION **35**

What gardening teaches you about building a great employee population

PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT **44**

What you learn from Health Checks about Proactive Management

EMPLOYEE TRAINING **50**

What we learn from Professional Qualifications we undertake and Training our Employees

RECRUITMENT **61**

Arranged Marriages and lessons in Recruitment

TEAM WORK **73**

Lessons in team work from the Philharmonic Orchestra

LOYALTY **82**

The Alma Mater and lessons in Loyalty

FOLLOWERS **95**

The four biggest lessons your dog teaches you about being a good follower

LEADERSHIP **101**

Parenting and lessons in Leadership

FIVE STAGES IN A CAREER **125**

The five stages of life and the five stages of our career

STRESS MANAGEMENT **148**

A few lessons learnt in learning to play the Violin

SUCCESS **154**

The Six pack – What it teaches you about Success inside the Corporation

SOLVING OTHER'S PROBLEMS **163**

What doctors teach you about your role in Management In solving other's problems

ART OF MANAGEMENT **177**

What cooking teaches you about the Art of Management

PRINCIPLES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 188

What sitting for exams teaches you about the Principles of Performance Management

INFLUENCING 196

The little things kids teach you about influencing your Superiors and Colleagues

NATURE OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT 206

What Nature teaches you about the Nature of Business and Management

INTRODUCTION

I have often wondered why management is such a complicated, rather stressful and at times, downright nasty occupation. Most of the time, when I meet colleagues of mine, or the then students, or participants of a program, I hear a plethora of issues, ranging from issues with the boss, to that of the culture of the business to irritating subordinates. As we talk, it has always dawned on me that much of what they face inside organizations they are faced in real life too – but that they usually and instinctively deal with it within their family or wider society but often fail miserably at their workplace. I have at times wondered whether this is because we look at ‘work’ differently– rather than looking at it as ‘part of life’ – thereby allowing lessons from life in general to transcend to work, and lessons learnt from work to transcend to their homes, culminating in the development of a better ‘person’ as opposed to a great father and a not so great manager or vice-versa.

The series of articles written herein was to try and demystify management – never to oversimplify it. I understand that companies are different to families and that your boss is different to your mother or father, and that subordinates cannot be dealt like they were your children, but the PRINCIPLES seem, by and large to be the same – As such, this is to take an unbiased look at

life, and management, and see if we can make it simple, uncomplicated and easy to grasp. The challenge is to take away preconceived notions about management being a tough job, and merely look at it as if we would of anything in life.

Throughout the book, the articles are merely to provoke thought rather than to espouse a 'theory' or 'model.' I think too many times we who are taught management have tried to put management into a 'box' and define it, making it something it is not – a complicated Pandora problem. We have various theories and concepts, far removed with a load of jargon, making management seem like something distinctively different to anything else we do. I honestly think we will all be wiser for it if this myth is debunked, and that management is viewed with the same commonsense lens with which we view the rest of life.

If you are looking for the latest fad in management, then do yourself a favour and don't read this book. If you are looking for a little bit of inspiration, and a fresh look at management itself, turn the page first promising yourself to keep an open mind...

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

What teaching a kid to brush his/her teeth teaches you about Change Management

I was supposed to have been notorious as a child – and given half a chance I would resort to being a complete ‘vedda’. Specially, when left in Deraniyagala for my holidays, having no parents, and two absolutely doting aunts and both grandparents who adored me, gave the perfect breeding ground to dodge, as far as possible, the ‘tyrannical’ rules imposed by the parents! Ammi used to get livid when she knows I don’t quite follow instructions given when I was dropped there, and one thing in particular that used to get her on the war path was not brushing my teeth, once in the morning and once before I go to bed. The one in the morning I would do on most occasions, but the one at night I would dodge in glee – if nothing else, merely as a sign of rebellion against my mother.

It was only once that I had a cavity much later in life, and had to pull out one of my ‘wisdom’ teeth. I then realized the significance of ‘protecting’ my teeth. Having learnt a very painful lesson, I reflected and realized this is a painful (yet rather pertinent) lesson in change management.

Inside organizations, we as managers try hard to change people, the culture and the processes, all aimed

at ensuring that we are better prepared for the future, and that our organization thrives. But, few change initiatives actually go anywhere – the vast majority of them, are never taken seriously, until, like my tooth rotting a radical overhaul is required.

“NOW BABY, YOU MUST LEARN TO BRUSH YOUR TEETH BY YOURSELF”

I thought of my mother when my wife uttered these words to my daughter. I wondered whether telling her about why it is important to actually make sense. She listened intently, nodding her head vigorously, keen to try out a new thing. But I could not help wondering – does she really understand WHY all this fuss was about? Was it not important to her to know it so that she will understand that it is for her own benefit rather than ours that she is actually doing it?

So, once a week or so had passed and I asked her: “Do you know WHY you brush your teeth twice daily?” “Yes” she answered brightly “because otherwise all my teeth will fall like Aththa’s and I will look like an old archchi” she made a face to show her interpretation of what a really old person looked like. I laughed. Not quite the answer I wanted, but close enough. Roona (my wife) had certainly done her job right! I don’t think I could have quite got her to understand it as simply as that.

The first part of any change program ought to be ‘communicating the need’. I guess the mistake we make

is to assume that what we see as management is the same 'angle' seen by our team members. Just as much as a kid will not quite get the parent's perspective, an employee at a lower level of the hierarchy may not be seduced by the 'bigger picture' you are so passionately describing.

You need to also remember, that ever so often, there are those who, no matter how much we try to explain the 'bigger picture' will not wholly get it. Management then has the decision to make as to whether the person can actually fit into the new scheme of things. It is a crucial decision. You can choose to either 'command' insistently or remove the person. Either way, someone not falling in line can become a detriment to the entire change program.

"DO I HAVE TO?"

There was a wail of a protest. WHY? WHY? WHY? My two-year-old was on the warpath. This new rule of having to brush her teeth was not to her liking. It was too boring. Too hard. The toothbrush was too hard. The toothpaste too 'spicy'. The number of complaints were horrendous. I was losing my cool. How dare she make such a fuss – it was for her own good – damn it!

My wife on the other hand, who was infinitely wise to the ways of kids, stayed totally calm, and took absolutely no notice of her tantrums. No matter what Shaakya (my daughter) said, she smiled, and simply insisted that she brushed her teeth. She calmly stood behind her, and

watched her do it, and until she was happy that it was done right, baby had no chance of getting out of the toilet. No screaming. No shouting. No punishment. Just simple insistence that it was done right. (Now is the time for my way, not yours!)

Whenever change is introduced, resistance is to be expected. That is normal. It is the same everywhere. It is the same for us too. It is extremely normal for a ton of questions and WHYS to be launched. Being patient in handling questions, being insistent on the task but not losing your cool is important in setting the tone for the change program. Simply grinding the axe rarely works – in fact on most occasions, it becomes counterproductive.

SAY AH, SAY EEE, BRUSH YOUR TONGUE

Most ‘habits’ are taught to us when we are very young. Our parents will sit patiently and teach us things – like how to brush our teeth. There is almost a meditative approach to it. A lot of patience. A lot of attention to detail. It is not just getting the kid to brush the teeth that matters – it matters that it is done right. The simplest of techniques – but we understand it is being done for the first time, and as such, we give it a lot of time to be ‘picked up.’

Whenever we bring a new process, a new policy, a new method or system into the business, we need to commit to a series of extensive training sessions to teach people not only the tool itself, but how to actually use it.

Rather than merely training for the sake of training, we as Managers and Leaders need to produce the results we require through it. It can be a painful, and often slow process. But, unless we commit to it, and actually steer it through, chances are that it will be implemented halfway through at best, also half-heartedly which will not yield the maximum you look for.

GOOD GIRL – HERE IS A TOY FOR BRUSHING YOUR TEETH EVERYDAY

Having dutifully brushed our little daughter's teeth for a week, we wanted to ensure we made a small 'celebration' of her success. We bought her a small toy – and told her that it was for brushing her teeth every day. She was happy – but soon enough, she started to make a fuss all over again.

It is important to get a few quick wins – and make a small celebration over it. This is to give everyone the impression that it IS possible to make a change and bring success out of it. Without this little 'motivation' it becomes a drag – and it is of no purpose to wait until the entire change program is over to celebrate. Breaking the full assignment into small pieces and ensuring that small wins are taking place is important to create momentum.

However, be mindful that these little 'wins' being celebrated does NOT equate to change being internalized within the business. You need to keep at it – and keep at it until it is done.

CAN I PLEASE JUST GO TO SLEEP – JUST FOR TONIGHT?

Baby comes to me with imploring eyes.

“Can I please not brush my teeth tonight – just for tonight? I am sleepy. Can I just go to bed?”

I am almost incapable of saying no. It takes every ounce of determination in me to tell her to brush her teeth. It’s such a small thing – shall we just let it go, just this once – is a question that plagues my mind.

“Ok. Just this once”. Though my mouth speaks the words, inside of me I know I made a cardinal mistake. I had made an allowance in her regulative time. I have sanctioned ignoring a doctrine initiated by her mother, and I have overruled it.

My wife smiled – ‘softie’ she said with her eyes.

The next day baby came to me again – “I am sleepy Appachchi...”

“Oh no young lady – you WILL brush your teeth tonight”. Baby knew she had no choice in the matter this time around.

As Managers we tend to say ‘it’s okay’ when it is not – especially when we are in the middle of a change program. A short cut here – ignoring the process there – not following the protocol set on another occasion may all seem like ‘little things’ – and we all can empathize with a person’s need to go home on time, but at the same time artfully circumventing what is required of him/her. What we need to understand in the larger scheme of things is

that when we give our blessings as management to be lax, we set a precedence.

If the proposed change is important to the business, if the new process is to bring about a more uniform work environment, if the new rule is to ensure the organization is safeguarded from a much bigger legal implication, then we, as managers must be big enough to say 'no' when we need to. Saying 'okay' may mean that we avoid an awkward moment – and become more easygoing and popular, but the precedence we create is very dangerous. It sanctifies breaking rules *en masse* – and then it becomes a little too late to act without doing something dramatic.

Setting the tone is important. Until things are solidified and the change is rooted within the business. Exceptions to the rule must not be tolerated. Changing the rule itself (if it is seen to be counterproductive, or if there is a faster, cheaper, easier method) is fine – but once the rule is set, it needs to be followed.

“BUT APPACHCHI – YOU DIDN'T BRUSH YOUR TEETH!”

Kids are amazingly smart. They observe – with the focus of a hawk circling a prey.

I slipped to bed, exhausted after a gruelling day of outdoor adventure training. I took a shower, but conveniently forgot to brush my teeth. My seven-year-old spy lay waiting and no sooner I hit the sack, went on an offensive.

“Appachchi – YOU did not brush your teeth today!”

I had half a mind to tell the ‘brat’ to mind her own business, and that since I was bigger and also her father, I was ‘above the rules’ we made for her, but a queerly tilted head and a probing, questioning look from my wife told me in no uncertain terms that I had better go brush my teeth!

Grudgingly I got up, went and brushed my teeth. When I came up, I kissed baby good night, and told her: “thank you for reminding me to brush my teeth.” She had a devilish grin on her face, but I know she knew that the rules were the same for the father as much as for her.

Most change initiatives need to be led from the front. Most of the time, they fail because we as managers don’t follow the rules ourselves, and make some wise comment about how WE need not do it EXACTLY by the book. Take swiping in, putting a leave form – simple things – but how many of us as managers actually do it absolutely diligently BEFORE we actually ask the team to do so? Most of our subordinates are as hawkish as my seven-year-old – and they will spot us circumventing the rules a mile away. Then it spreads through the grapevine, and we lose credibility – and more dangerously, the change program itself loses credibility. Once this takes root, getting the change done becomes that much more difficult.

“COME – LET’S GO SEE ATHTHA TAKE HIS TEETH OUT”

Baby obviously has my genes (sigh!). Even with diligent watching over, she still had not quite grasped why she needed to brush her teeth. She did it more out of compulsion rather than conviction, and I knew full well that this 'compliance' will only take her that far. It was essential that she takes the initiative for herself to ensure she brushed her teeth every morning and every night because she was convinced that it will bring her long term health benefits in the form of strong, white teeth.

My father was going to take out some of his teeth – and I thought this will be a great experience for Shaakya. So, we took her along, and let her watch what was a truly harrowing experience for her. She watched, mouth agape, as the dentist injected my father's gum with an 'anesthetic' and then proceeded to pull out two of his teeth. It make matters worse, they were 'hooked' inwards much more than a normal person's teeth. This meant the wiry dentist had to almost climb on the chair to gain enough pressure to pull the stubborn tooth out. There was a lot of blood – a lot of effort – and a lot to take in for a three year old!

After the whole episode, my father walked out, carrying baby in his arms, and opened his mouth and showed her the empty 'holes'

"Brush your teeth honey" he said lovingly – "don't be like naughty Aththa."

That did it. She started brushing her teeth without being prompted.

From that day on, there was no need to prompt – and even when she comes and reminds me to brush mine (yes, I honestly abscond sometimes!) she says it with a much different tone – it is to ensure that her Appachchi does not have to take his teeth out. Not to ‘find him wanting.’

Managers and Leaders need to find ways and means of ‘shocking’ the teams into understanding. This can be through case studies to much more graphical illustrations of what can happen if the change is not initiated. It is important that people understand that the change program is done for everyone’s benefit, and not for the whim of a relatively ‘jobless’ manager. If this can be established, the resistance to change almost always vanishes, and the people DO take on a much more positive and proactive approach. The challenge is to find a route to their hearts – not only their minds. An emotional impetus works wonders. Though we may like to think of ourselves as logical beings, most of us (especially us Sri Lankans) are emotional creatures, and as such, ‘feeling’ that we need to change is probably more important than ‘knowing’ we have to.

“MY TOOTH IS SHAKING – BUT I BRUSH MY TEETH EVERYDAY AMMA”

My daughter was concerned. A tooth was shaking. “But I brush my teeth everyday”.

We explained the whole ‘baby teeth’ concept, and how she will get new ones soon enough. We also ‘sold’ her

the story of the tooth fairy, and told her to keep her tooth under her pillow and that she will receive a 'gold coin'. She kept her tooth – and she DID receive her gold coin.

Ever so often, even though we do all the right things, we tend to not get the results we want. Probably for no reason at all – or certainly no fault of the juniors. When it does, we need to be able to explain, console, and most importantly, reinforce the need to keep doing what we are doing. Just because we do all the right things, it does not necessarily mean we get the right results, and when it does happen, we need to urge people to keep doing what they are doing, without getting disheartened, discouraged, and losing hope. We need to establish the fact that they have been doing the right thing, and that in time, they WILL see results.

“YOUR TEETH ARE LOVELY BABY...”

At every opportunity we get, my parents, Rowena's parents, both Rowena and I will pay compliments to the baby about how lovely her teeth look. They are bright white, and in near perfect symmetry. We ignore the imperfections, and focus on the merits. She keeps her promise and brushes her teeth diligently every day, twice a day. We could not ask for anything more. So, we give her the pride of place that is due.

Many of our team members do make the effort to actually bring about the change we demand of them.

They work diligently and hard, day in day out to get that much closer to the ideal situation we envisage. Sadly, we tend to focus on the transgressions and often forget, to say a simple thank you, and a simple pat on the back: a simple recognition of effort and hard work. When all is said and done, it is RESULTS that matter – not effort. I accept this. But, one needs to RECOGNIZE effort (not reward it). Constant vigilance in highlighting those who actually make the effort, and the sacrifice offers almost a silent ‘push’ for others to do the same. Encouragement, and continuous recognition is an important and integral component of the change process.

A FEW AFTERTHOUGHTS

Change must never be demanded for the sake of change. Many times we, even from our children, demand things purely for our convenience – and nothing more. Many kids, as well as team members see through this, and rebel. They see change – (and change afterwards) as a mere effort to pile more work on them, easing work for the superiors. As much as we teach our kids little disciplines that benefit them in their later years, the change we demand from our juniors must be for theirs, as well as the business’s overall benefit, and not with any selfish motives in mind.

It is equally important to know when a change program is not working out – and to acknowledge a wrong decision taken. Persisting adamantly simply because

we as management need to save face is to sorely lack leadership on our part. We all make mistakes. We owe it to the team, the business as well as to ourselves to quit a project undertaken if it is not quite working out. Failing to do so will result both this loss of face, as well as disastrous consequences for the business that could border on chaos!

When change programs go right, the management and team must equally share the credit with more effective praise to the team that brought it all about. When it goes wrong, take the responsibility for it, because it was a management credo from the beginning! This way, we give people the charge, and the credit – the result is that change becomes more welcome (than when we glorify it as our 'leadership' or brilliance).

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Your car and your Team

Owning a car for the time is to me, quite like the first time you get promoted and get your own team to groom, develop, work with and perform with. Amazingly, some of the most fundamental lessons about people management and understanding paradigms about people are strikingly similar to owning a car and learning to understand what it takes to be the owner of one.

Though I fully understand that a vehicle is 'inorganic' and a person is 'organic' I do hope after reading these lines you will be able to see the similes I could not help but ignore.

WHICH CAR?

If you were to purchase a vehicle for yourself, as I did many years afterwards, there is a fundamental question you need to answer – what do you want from it?

Is it merely a vehicle to take you from point A to point B?
Then a little Maruti will suffice...

Is it a status symbol or an extension of your vanity?
Then it HAS to be a Merc or a BMW or a JAG or a Monterro

Is it to drive? Or to be driven in?

To drive – the ultimate driving machine – to be driven, in a Merc...

Is it for your crazy outdoor life?

An X-Trail, a Land Rover, a JEEP

However, one has to remember that no matter what type of vehicle you buy, it needs to be affordable, maintainable and within your budget. Other considerations would include spares, who the agents are, resale value, and of course, whether your wife likes it.

Hiring a team is no different.

PLODDERS

Some hired get the job done – nothing more, nothing less. They are no-frills people, who are in all probability a little rough on the edges, not having too much in the form of intellect or intelligence, not quite promotable, but hugely efficient and effective in getting a basic routine and somewhat mundane job done. Just like a little Maruti which even if you were to modify and jazz up, will always be seen as, and will be, a basic car.

The good news – very little maintenance and upkeep. Very fuel efficient. Perfect to take you from point A to point B. Downside – very little glamour, and

you will never be taken as someone swanky- big if you were seen in one.

'Plodders' as I affectionately call them have just the same strengths and weaknesses. They are efficient work horses. Requiring a little 'maintenance', their aspirations are not too much and they will get the job done. However they lack finesse, charm, charisma and they probably will never get promoted. They are perfect for the job, but not so much in leadership or management material.

When hiring a plodder, you need to be crystal clear about what you are getting. Most of the time we hire one because he/she is 'cheap' but then smack our foreheads over and over again because he/she lacks the 'horsepower' to do anything more. Just like you can never take your Maruti to a rally, you cannot groom your plodder to being your second in command!

STARS

Some cars are meant to be ogled at – admired – and well taken care of. A Mercedes, BMW or a Jaguar are hallmarks of engineering excellence and cannot be quite used as a Maruti. They exuberate elegance, they are a pleasure to drive, they respond to your acceleration like very few other cars do, and they are the pride and joy of the owner.

Yet, they are notoriously expensive to buy, and more importantly to maintain. Spares are expensive, they are

not very fuel efficient, and unless they are well maintained, they become hugely problematic later on.

Some of our recruits are brought in for 'pride and glamour' – they are the stars of the organization, and they have all the skills, competencies and finesse to become the next generation of leaders. They perform brilliantly well, they learn fast, and they instinctively respond to challenges, just as a 'Beamer' will respond to acceleration. They are a class apart.

What distinguishes them from the Average Joes is that they have 'brand presence' and finesse – just as a Toyota will offer you all the creature comforts of a BMW without the tremendous price. The Stars are able to demand much more from an organization because they are 'brands' and have a reputation within the industry or in wider society.

The issue with Stars is that, like the top-end cars, they are expensive to attract and difficult to maintain. They understand their potential, they are demanding, many of them are impatient for further advancement, and in most cases they are difficult to manage. Unless you are able to put in considerable time and effort into ensuring they are motivated and challenged, many of them leave, and worse, they become problems within the organization because they will start to vent their frustrations without being very diplomatic it – just as a fine Jaguar will become a white elephant unless you service it on time!

Do NOT invest in a Star unless there is definitive need, and a definite plan for his/her growth within the business. You should never get cockeyed and lose sight of your own definitions by the glamour a Star naturally has during an interview: One should always revert to the fundamental question 'What do we REALLY need'?

THE AVERAGE JOES

There are, of course, cars that are neither basic, nor exceptional. A Toyota, Nissan, Mazda, etc. or a better marquee but for a much lower price. They perform equally well, and if statistics are anything to go by, they are more reliable.

Many organizations have many average Joes. They perform exceedingly well, are extremely loyal, they function with relatively less noise – they are less demanding – and so, they usually get sidelined. Remember, just like in a car, perception plays a huge role in understanding your team. Unless you really want to make a statement (or you have a ton of money), you will not buy a Mercedes, you will buy a top of the range Toyota which will probably give all that a Merc has without the price tag (or the ego boost). Similarly, unless an organization wants to make a statement, they should look at their average Joes for advancement and growth, rather than bringing in a Star (most probably from outside) to take up a leadership position. In the long run, it may prove to be a safer, with less hassle, and a more efficient option all told.

THE SPECIALIST

Then of course, you have niche vehicles: in all categories. An Alfa Romeo or a Ferrari for speed and looks, a Bentley or Rolls Royce for comfort and status, a Hum V for off road and so on. They are the priciest in their classes, and equally expensive to maintain. They attract a niche, and unless you REALLY can afford it, many who buy them become bankrupt soon and give them off to a paltry sum in the HIT Ads.

Organizations at times, need specialists. These are the niche employees vie to have, but few can really afford it. Notoriously expensive, absurdly demanding, the 'specialist' is not only a niche, but he/she knows it. They have invested seriously in getting the right qualifications, being seen in the right places, personal branding and above all, networking. If you need the specialist to come work for you, you will need to dig deep into your pocket.

However, if your business needs a true one of a kind, then they can offer substantial value. Just as a serious speed enthusiast will get value out of a Ferrari, and the military out of a Hum V – you too will get the niche benefit you require out of your specialist – provided there actually IS a need. Never mistake a temporary need for a long term need. As much as you would hire a limo for your graduation or your wedding, hire a specialist rather than investing in one if your need is not one that will really be of need in the future.

ENGINE CAPACITY AND PERFORMANCE

Each car has a specific engine capacity and a set of performance indicators. No matter what you do, (unless you seriously modify the engine itself) you cannot ask of the car to do better. Ever so often, on the roads you see people making the fundamental mistake of mistaking one's Maruti to a Ferrari, and paying the price for it! One has to understand that different vehicles have been made with a different intent in mind – and there is little point trying to take your four door sedan off road!

Your team is no different. Each member within it has a limit to their capacity. I know, being an HR professional myself, that we like to believe that human potential is infinite – but the reality is that unless you are truly committed and hardworking (and few honestly are) you DO have limits. We may all WANT to be the next Jack Welch, the next Picasso, the next Beethoven or the next Michael Jackson, but one needs to seriously consider what is PRACTICAL and within your scope of skills and competencies. A very humbling notion – but to me, a very realistic one.

When we assign work, we need to be acutely aware of the current levels of competence and skill in an individual. Potential does NOT equate performance. Unless we are definitely clear about an individual's current level of competence and skill, we will make the horrible mistake of giving work which the individual will struggle to perform and on many occasions, make mistakes. Unless you are

willing to take the pains of the mistake made, and the time to take the individual through a learning curve through training, mentoring and coaching you must not offer work which is beyond the person's capacity to perform. Just as we put traction devices on tyres before we take a vehicle in snowing conditions, we should not give work to an individual who has not been prepared for the job at hand.

PAYING HEED TO THE DASHBOARD

Every vehicle has a dashboard. Some, very simple ones that shows fuel, temperature and speed, others more sophisticated that will indicate even the tyre pressure.

Whichever form the dashboard takes, each driver must be aware of the indicators, and ensure action is taken before you hit a serious glitch. Most 'unseasoned' drivers never quite take heed, and end up either with a busted radiator, or driving with their handbrakes on, and most ignoble of all, stopping dead in the middle of the road without fuel. A faulty dash board is a road straight to Vehicle Hell!

In managing your team, one of the most basic prerequisites is a solidly functioning dashboard. You must be at least aware of your team's performance levels (speedometer), morale (fuel gauge), and interpersonal conflicts (temperature gauge). Unless you keep a tab on these, you will not know when you are going to hit a problem, and just like in a car, you WILL run into it if you ignore the dashboard readings.

As a manager it is important that you develop a solid dashboard. Not only to ensure you are on track, but also, if you are sophisticated to indicate when the next service is required, show you where you are through GPRS, enable you to see if the seat belts are on each passenger, indicate the temperature within and outside the vehicle, tell you of tyre pressures and a whole host of information so that you are a fully prepared driver. Similarly, ensuring you are aware of your team's workload and capacities, the team's performance visavi other departments, team's morale, their burnout levels, their levels of congruence, their levels of loyalty, their change-resistant levels, their potential and their idiosyncrasies. All such are essential if you are going to be a truly effective manager.

THE SERVICE – AT THE RIGHT TIME

Every vehicle, from the humble Maruti to the top of the range Porsche requires a service. Yes, you can miss it by a little – but unless you get the service done on time, you can be rest assured you will pay the price with a faulty vehicle that takes much more money to rectify than if you had done the service on time. Some of the more advanced vehicles will simply stop in their tracks unless the service is done.

Your team and your employees are no different. We all need a little motivation (even though we want to recruit self-motivated employees!). We all need a little attention, and above all we all need a little break! Each person, like

each car has its own thresholds – but each has one. Cross it, and what you end up with is a repair that becomes costly. A small trip, timed well can be much easier to handle than trying to jack up salaries because of a mass exodus and ensuing negotiations: a small informal meeting at home is much better than having to bring consultants in to find out how to motivate your team, and then spending a few hundred thousand rupees.

Learn from the car – service on time!

A FEW EXTRAS

We all throw in a few extras to our cars. We fix a CD player, a better sound system, an air freshener, a central locking device, etc. They may be simple things, but they make the entire driving experience a whole lot better. Imagine driving a car that smells pungent, a long haul drive without a stereo or a crackling radio, driving on a rainy day without a good set of wipers!

Your team too will require a few extras. They may not ask for it – just as much as you don't REALLY need to buy an air freshener, but if you think of it and give it to them, then your leadership journey becomes that much more pleasant.

Upgrade their PC, buy a bigger desk, re-carpet the place, give a more comfortable chair, give a diary, buy a small business card wallet – yes, you may not really HAVE to – but if you do it anyway, the returns you get through

loyalty, gratitude and pure joy may well outdo the price you had to pay for it.

TIME TO CHANGE

Sometimes, through no fault of ours, the car starts to give trouble. Maybe it was a manufacturing defect, maybe it was not suitable for our roads and terrain, maybe it was just bad luck. Whatever it maybe, and no matter how emotionally attached you are to it, it is wise to change the car – otherwise you will have so many repairs that the car will be more in the garage than driving you where you want to go!

Your team member are no different. Sometimes, for various reasons, some because of your own undoing, some not of your doing, team members don't perform – and become counterproductive in your own team. Unless you take the hard decision to cut your losses and move on (having tried your very best to rectify the issue) you will end up with a huge 'road block' to you and more importantly to your team's success.

BUILDING A GREAT EMPLOYEE POPULATION

What gardening teaches you about building a great employee population

Gardening can be one of the most rewarding pastimes to undertake. The joy you see in the face of a gardener whose many months of toiling has borne fruit from a rare flower or a simple fruit is a sight to see, and having had a grandma who was a passionate gardener, there were simple, yet very powerful lessons I learnt.

“FETCH THE RAKE SON, LET’S PREPARE THE BEDS...”

I used to be my ‘Archchi’s’ little helper – labouring away happily because I knew the reward is almost always a meal fit for a king which I would savour and relish like a man kept hungry for months! I remember the countless hours we spent simply preparing the flower and vegetable beds. Carefully lined, neatly arranged, and symmetrically aligned they were a sight to see. She was diligent, telling me to ensure they had proper ‘drainage’ too – otherwise rains will simply flood all the plants, spoiling their roots, and eventually rotting them away.

‘Archchi’ would never simply plant her seeds or plants – she would always make sure the ground was prepared –

and prepared well, according to a structured plan and with love, care and devotion only she could give. I would at times, being the lazy little brat I was, do a sloppy job and try to get out of the hard labour, but *Archchi* would insist on doing it right, explaining very patiently that unless the soil was tilled, dressed with compost and other vital ingredients, aired and prepared, with a good drainage system, the plants would have no chance of making it.

The Corporate Culture of an organization is very similar to the bed we prepare for the plants. It is the soil all the employees live and depend on for everything. The corporate culture plays such a vital role in whether the individual has a fighting chance to shine and perform within the organization. No matter how much we like to believe that the person can 'try' to make a difference, the grim reality is that unless the culture supports it, there is actually little that an individual can do within the organization specially if he/ she is a more junior member of the team.

Just as much as we prepare the soil before we plant a seed, we need to ensure the culture and the business is ready for any recruitment or training to be done. Preparing the organization for any change that is going to take place, no matter how small the change may be, is essential if the idea, person or change initiative is to survive and flourish, and become something meaningful. Unless we are serious about setting the right culture, and the right

organizational structure, it is hopeless trying to get young, budding managers and executives to perform. As much as a seed can sometimes survive and grow even if the beds are not prepared, there can be employees who perform anywhere – but it is most likely that many will never have the chance to do anything much!

THE PLANTS MATTER

Once the soil is prepared, you start buying the seeds and the plants you want put into the garden. *Archchi* was very conscious about which plants she put in, and where she bought the plants from. Being thrifty – both because of need, and because it was her nature, she would never pay above market prices for her seeds. She would ensure she got the best – but never at a premium price. If she did not get what she wanted, she never compromised. She got it either from a friend, a student or waited until the prices came down to make her purchase.

She swore that it was all to do with the quality of the plant – there was no point wasting the space allotted in the beds to put in seeds or plants that were of poor quality – each had to be the best.

We, most of the time, compromise on the quality of the people we bring in to our team. Partly because we do not have the time – partly because we do not at a conscious level truly appreciate the term ‘people are our greatest assets.’ Just as much as there is no point planting

a seed of low quality, in a perfectly prepared bed, there is little point bringing a substandard person into a truly professional, well run business. No matter how good the organization is, such individuals will never flourish unless they, like the seed, have the essential prerequisites.

THE COMBINATION OF PLANTS THAT GO IN

Archchi also was meticulous in what she put in and where. There were certain combinations, perfected over time, which she ardently adhered to. I used to query why this was the case, and she would patiently explain that some plants require much more from its soil than others – and having too many of them in the same bed meant that there was not enough nutrition to go around. She also explained that having too many of them meant the soil deteriorated over time, and became barren, and can only be made good again with a lot of attention and effort. As such, she mixed the crops, according to a science I never quite understood – but the principle of which I thought was useful in management.

We need to pay a lot of heed as to who we put where. There is little point putting a whole group of aggressive, talented, brilliant people – and thinking it will all turn out well. The bigger the star – the bigger the attention you need – and the bigger the resources they suck out of the company. Being conscious of this allows organizations to spread their resources in a logical and coherent manner, and ensuring there is enough to go around. Just as much

as there is no point having a brilliant harvest the first time around and barren land afterwards, there is little point in having a brilliant result one year, and a barren organization the next. A conscious decision must be made as to what each employee takes out of the organization and the relative merit they have in order to deserve it. One plant flourishing at the cost of a dozen others never made sense to my grandma: equally, one brilliant performer at the cost of a dozen others makes no sense to me.

TENDER LOVING CARE, AND PATIENCE

The key, my *Archchi* used to always say, almost like she was preaching the gospel – was tender loving care and patience. She would mumble things to her plants, devote a ton of attention to ensure that they were tended right. She would also never rush it – and would wait – patiently, constantly tending her plants, waiting for the first sign of fruit or flowers. On a rare occasion, the plant will not grow - and my *Archchi* would not hesitate to take it out and put a new one in. This was rare though – for her devotion to top quality always paid – and this was one of the reasons why she almost never bought her fruits and veggies. She did not trust the growers not to ‘put poison into it’ – by way of adding chemicals to grow it faster and preserve its appearance. She was a true organic – and swore that there would always be repercussions in ‘messing with the way things are meant to be.’

Whether or not I agree with her on the aspect of ‘messaging with nature’ there was certainly merit in what was said – and just like her plants, we as managers need to pay heed.

We need to give people the time to take root within our organizations so that their performance is to our satisfaction. Demanding performance from the word go is a fad these days, and more often than not, it backfires – and the individual almost never realize their potential. At the same time though, when a person does not perform, even after being given all the resources and opportunity, you need to take him or her out – just like we would a plant that does not grow. Both are important, and knowing when to encourage and be patient, and when to call a spade a spade will only come with experience and a keen understanding of human nature. Unless we commit to it though, we either become a mere hire and fire place where no ‘mercenaries’ would come and work – or a hopelessly inefficient place where nothing happens. Both are bad in the long term.

TAKING OUT THE WEEDS AND WATCHING OUT FOR CREEPY CRAWLIES

Another key aspect to my job as the ‘*kolla*’ who helped her was to ensure all the weeds were taken out, and also to ensure that any creepy-crawlies who ate the plants were sprayed with a homemade concoction that made them go

away. If we did not spot it in time, and a snail got in, you can be rest assured, quite a number of plants will be wiped out overnight, and my grandma would mourn out for her loss, and take out the plants that have been eaten by the creature.

The job of a manager is to be vigilant about the anti-management sentiment and the negativities that can easily demoralize a team, as well as those gossip mongers who feed the grapevine. I do not mean dissent – with cause or reason – and justification – which is required if any organization is to grow, but there ARE those elements within an organization whose negativity can impact hugely. Those who challenge you are fine, those who are merely negative about everything in the organization are of no use whatsoever, and most of the time, these are the very people who will not leave even when told to (even though they complain that the organization is the worst in the world!) It is vital for us to ensure that the carefully tended and developed people factor is not jeopardized by a few miscreants, and this is why they too need to be weeded out of the business before they start causing harm. It is equally important to take out those who have been ‘poisoned’ – because like a plant that has been eaten by a snail, they cannot (most of the time) come back to being ‘normal.’ It sounds brutal, but it honestly needs to be done. Too many times organizations have become hopelessly negative thanks to the inactivity of managers who were not willing

to cut off those who were not in sync with the organization and its direction. Unless we are strong enough to take them out, we will pay for it by way of mass negativity, resistance to change and lowered morale.

Needless to say this does not equate to a witch hunt of those whom you feel threaten the management!

A SMALL HELP FOR THOSE PLANTS WHICH CAN'T STAND BY THEMSELVES

Sometimes, *Archchi* would have a small 'crutch' made of little sticks to hold a plant staining to offer its fruits. Vines were given latitude to grow by way of coir, others by way of a small pole. Not all plants needed it – but some did – and unless it was provided the bountiful harvest would also be lost.

Each of us needs to understand that our team will struggle from time to time. Due to organizational or personal issues, they may be de-motivated, or for some unknown reason, unable to cope. This is when we as managers need to kick in to help. Offering the space and the support required is essential even for the star performers at times. Failing to provide it means that you will never get the stellar performance they are capable of otherwise giving, which is your loss.

PROTECTING THE FRUITS AND FLOWERS

Finally, sometimes after months of patient tending, the plant bears fruit or a bouquet of buds. This indeed is a

joyful time, and true reward for all the effort we put in. *Archchi* would tell me that this is when you needed to be even more vigilant. Between a few ruffians and troops of monkeys that used to frequent us those days, a full harvest can be destroyed in a matter of days. She would keep a vigil – cover the bananas with a gunny bag, light crackers, and resort to rather unorthodox methods to ensure that her harvest was safe – and was not laid waste by those who had nothing to do with the hard work that was put into it.

Many organizations groom talent, only to be poached by others around them – worse so, their competitors. This is because we sometimes rather naively believe that giving training, opportunities, a good salary and a good vehicle is all it takes to build loyalty, and long term commitment. We need to be able to devise novel methods of ensuring employee loyalty – especially with regard to our star performers, and key technical specialists who are critical for the business's success. Ensuring you have long term plans along with intricately linked schemes which cannot be easily replicated is important in ensuring that you protect your key members from being seduced by poachers.

It is the brightest fruit that gets taken out first – it is your best members that will be targeted by the competition. It is prudent to ensure you have long term plans for your key members without simply giving them a salary hike whenever they submit their resignation letters!

PROACTIVE MANAGEMENT

What you learn from Health Checks about Proactive Management

You go to the doctor's only when you are sick. Then, you HAVE to take medicine. Is it not much better to actually get a regular health check and ensure you take preventive action? Though logical, this is rarely the case, but, thankfully, more and more people are trying to take a health check annually, and make sure they are proactively taking steps to ensure their health is in good shape rather than waiting for symptoms of a neglected issue to arise.

Sitting at Apollo waiting to be called in for my health check appointment, I met a few of my then colleagues who had come for the same thing, and I could not help but wonder whether we can learn from this experience as leaders of organizations too.

YOU NEED TO SEE THE LONG-TERM PERSPECTIVE

I guess the crux of the matter is that you need to have a long-term perspective. You will never get a health check if you are the 'off the hip' kind of person who takes life as it comes. Don't get me wrong – there is nothing wrong with it and no matter how many health checks you go to,

there is truth in saying that you will die when you die. Yet, I cannot help but wonder whether you are wiser to be at least warned. You should need to know – and the discipline to be able to make some earthly use of the stats that are given to you.

Organizations too need to develop a need to know of and have a few indicators regarding the health of the organization. Without these, the organization is blind to the ailments that are in hiding and will manifest later with severe magnitude. The key is to understand that ‘all is ok’ on the outside does not equate to the same on the inside. Many times organizations and management take on the attitude of ‘don’t fix it unless it’s broken’ but when they ‘see’ it broken; it may just be a little too late to mend. Waiting, based on nothing but a false sense of optimism or poor information gleaned from a few ‘henchmen’ is the same as convincing yourself that you are healthy by merely doing a blood test!

JUST ONE TEST WILL NOT TELL YOU EVERYTHING

When I was told of the tests I had to undergo I was quite perplexed.

“Do you need to do all of this to find out whether you are basically in good health? How long will it take? A full day? That long? Gosh – seems like a lot isn’t it?”

The doctor who was at the Health Check smiled – and I guessed she had listened to such questions all the time.

“It’s your life” she told me, quite seriously, “Isn’t one day a year a small price to pay for it?”

‘Easy for her to say, I have a lot of work’, I remember thinking to myself. Not to mention the cost.

We go through the same thinking process as managers. Do we really need to fill all this? Do we really need to fill the appraisal forms? Do we really need to spend this money on an employee opinion survey? Do we really need a salary comparison study? Do we really need all this time and effort to tell us whether we are doing fine or not?

We usually take a look at financials like a prayer because this is fundamental. But financials are an output, not an input. It is hugely important to assess how well the organization has done but is it not equally important to find out what contributes towards this? No one indicator is ever good enough. It is important to do enough validations to assess the overall health of the organization, rather than merely looking at one aspect. There have been enough instances organizations have closed down because of employee or community related issues, as much as there are businesses that have gone under because of financial and market issues.

YOU NEED TO GO TO A REPUTED PLACE

When the idea first dawned on me that I too was getting old, and that I need to be a bit more conscious of my

health, I spoke to most of my friends about where they got their tests from. Some had not taken one – some had, and they offered their insights which were invaluable to me. I also gave a quick call to a few ‘doctor’ friends I knew. They gave me advice – on where it is relatively hassle free, other places where it was cheaper, but was much more hassle, and of course, the places where they told me to stay clear of. The tests were simple enough but they cautioned me that if the results were not ‘trustworthy’ then, there was little point in doing the tests.

Too many times we compromise quality for cost. This is fine if it is not too important to you or the organization. There are certainly things that do not require a ‘premium’ price tag – but your set of indicators should never be under such compromise. It is best you do it by yourself – because much of it, if not all of it, can be done by yourself. If you ARE going to call for outside help, make sure you look for credentials, rather than doing it to simply tick the box in the form.

When the results come, you need to know how to read it, and make sense of it

Having got through the myriad tests, I went back in about two weeks, collected all the reports and went to see the doctor with it as prescribed. This was probably the best thing about the health check. She took me through the entire set of reports, describing what was what, and how to make sense of all the medical jargon. She also, more

importantly, told me how to make sure I actually remained healthy, and based on lifestyle and bad habits, offered a series of do's and don'ts.

Most of us actually have much of the information we need – but we never make sense of it. The financials, the employee retention rate, findings from exit interviews, employee perceptions, and their skill matrixes may all be there but rarely do we actually compile it all to make sense to us and to give us indications and trends. We need to collate the information, and interpret the data in order to make sure we make sense of it all, and also to carefully analyze what the information actually tells us. Without this, and ensuring that the entire Management team actually knows about it, the whole exercise will be a waste of time.

IF ADVICE IS GIVEN – TAKE IT!

Finally, after going home, we usually put the file away, and pretend everything will be ok even though the doctor had warned us that the cholesterol or the sugar levels can go higher if we don't exercise and watch our diet. Most of us will not take the advice given seriously until the issue becomes critical. Some, a rare few, actually pay heed, and thereby make the maximum of the entire process.

Managers are notorious for generating reports and doing nothing with the recommendations. The focus is to win some award – or keeping their superiors happy, rather than truly knowing what the whole exercise is about. Too

many times employee opinion surveys are done simply for the fad; too many times market research is done for the same reason. Once the research piece is done, and the recommendations are presented, is it not commonsense to consider implementing at least a few critical ones?

IN RETROSPECT

Doing all the checks in the world will probably not stop you from falling dead when your time is up but it certainly helps avert a lot of issues. One needs to always keep a window for the unexpected, and have the courage to deal with it when it comes – but to go through life with no planning is both suicidal and a negation of the intelligence we human beings have been given.

As Managers we owe it to both the organizations and ourselves to be informed and equipped with business intelligence. Sometimes, no matter what the indicators are, one episode can ruin it all, and for this outside chance we need to always keep room, and be able to deal with it – but doing nothing to actually know how well the business is functioning is a gross negligence of your management duty, as much as not doing a health check is a gross negligence of your own health!

EMPLOYEE TRAINING

What we learn from Professional Qualifications we undertake and Training our Employees

Having been to many presentations to 'pitch' for various leadership and management programs, and often being dumbfounded as to how little we usually study the psychology of 'being trained' I could not help but take a look at how we usually apply ourselves when we sit for a professional qualification, as compared to how we approach training offered by the company.

Traditionally, Training and Development is a culmination from the overall performance appraisal, and organizations usually undertake to give the individual 'personal development targets' or derive a training calendar for 'training needs' identified through heads of departments or through the individuals themselves. We then organize training programs for the individual, either through an internal resource (or more often through an external resource) and conclude the training by offering a feedback form to the individual to fill so as to assess the program's effectiveness. More often than not, if the lunch was really good, and the trainer cracked a few jokes and 'entertained', the feedback comes out quite good.

However, more often than not the same need is identified again when the new appraisal is done.

Don't get me wrong, I am not saying that training does not add value – it certainly does, but it is important to understand that training is a process, and actually is linked to the learning psychology of a person.

Let me elaborate by describing how we approach a professional program (such as CIMA or CIM) that we have undertaken in order to further our careers: and comparing and contrasting it to 'training' we offer through the organization.

WHY DO IT?

The first and most fundamental question to ask ourselves is WHY do it in the first place? We usually undertake a professional qualification because we are crystal clear that it will give us a little edge over the 'competition' at work. We will not commit to serious amounts of money, time and effort if we were to simply do it to 'gain knowledge' (which some do but the vast majority would undertake it to ensure get that next promotion).

The principle to learn is that all of us are selfish and the fundamental question of 'what is in it for me?' needs to be unequivocally answered if training is to be taken seriously, rather than a good excuse to be out of the work place, and also be given a free lunch. Unless training has a direct impact at work, or is linked to further advancement or at

least to some form of performance criteria, it becomes nothing more than a joy ride.

WHAT WE EXPECT FROM TRAINERS

I have been to very, very few lectures which were truly 'exciting.' Most lecturers are rather boring. They crack very few jokes, they are very focussed on the curriculum and usually gives you a ton of work to do by yourself rather than 'spoon feed' you through tutorials, handouts and other help. This is why you are expected to 'read' for a degree. The 'worth' of a lecturer is in his or her ability to get students to 'learn' for themselves, and also in ensuring that they pass their exams. There is a lot of focus on 'making things interesting' – not by providing entertainment but rather by giving different assignments, getting them to think, challenging their paradigms and so on. Young students still love a lecturer even though he may be boring, because they see through the boredom and understand the depth of learning they have. It is in the participation that they derive the most value, not in the 'listening.' Most university lectures are intellectual sparring sessions and both the lecturer and the student are tested. What is wrestled with is NOT the theory, but the 'concept', because many lecturers will vouch that if the 'principle' is understood, all else is relatively simple.

However, a trainer is usually expected to be 'interesting' and what is usually meant is to be 'entertaining.' Don't get me wrong. I hate a boring lecturer and I hate boring

trainers too – but there is a fine line between training and entertaining. Sadly in most cases, what ‘participants’ expect is not knowledge or wisdom or a crack at experience, but to be entertained. This puts most trainers on the spot and many of them resort to ‘putting on a show’ and not focusing on content, and transferable skills.

The principle to learn is to ensure that the curriculum, just as in any professional qualification is set, and the material reviewed before any training is undertaken. Sure, let the participants roll in laughter and be awe-inspired by any of the theatrics – but ensure the fundamental skill gap is filled too – the entertainment factor should and must not be at the cost of content. Setting a curriculum is not a mean task, and must be done with a definitive focus on ensuring that it results in the kind of changes you require to see in the person after training. Without behavioural change, soft skills training will not be of any use.

THE ‘PROCESS’

I wish they conferred a degree or professional qualification by just an exam or viva. The entire process and rigor that goes into a university degree or a professional qualification is what ensures the ‘standard’ is maintained.

Let’s take a look at the process:

- Application process – there are definitive pre-requisites and/or an entrance exam

- › Lectures – most institutes demand a minimum percentage of attendance
- › Assignments – most lecturers off assignments, in order to assess the learning of the student on an on-going basis
- › Exams – almost every degree program and professional qualification has some form of examination held in a formal manner which becomes the most important – or in some cases the only factor for conferring or not conferring the qualification
- › In the case of most professional bodies, there is a period of ‘practicing what you learnt’ before the ‘membership’ is conferred, and
- › If some of the Chartered Institutes are a benchmark to go by, members are expected to, on stipulated time frames, commit to continuous learning, so as to ensure they are current and valid.

Contrast this to the training we mostly do. Almost all the time we do it, and that’s about it. The entire process is not actually taken into account, or looked at. Training is more an ‘event’ rather than a process. The key is to look at effective training within organizations is to go through the same rigour a chartered institute goes through in conferring memberships – the same rigor of the process must be applied to training in order to ensure that it actually adds value.

- Before training is conducted, or any form of development intervention is done, it is important that we inform people of the intentions of the program and actually call in for applications. Just because there is a program it does not mean that everyone who 'feels like it' should go for it. The same way, an institute will demand pre-requisites, the organization too, must decide on the pre-requisites the employee must have in order to apply for the program.
- There should also be some form of selection process for the program. Training programs are investments in people – and not motivational tools – they are to be offered only to those who truly want it, and more importantly, the organization will derive benefit from it. What earthly point is there training people you KNOW do not really add value? One of the fundamental issues I see is that non performers are offered more training than performers – purely because they have more 'gaps'! This I think is the wrong attitude – we must invest more on the people who add value to us, not the "dead wood" who are a burden on us! It is so simple really. Let the "dead wood" be told that because of their non-performance, they have disqualified THEMSELVES. But should they show better and keener attitudes, they will, in time, be chosen for a future program. This should be the motivational attitude that helps the management

to vet the situation. If the “dead wood” shows no response and remains “dead” they are no longer needed, are they?

- When selecting employees for training, it is important to be homogenous as possible. The reason why most professional qualifications require a minimum English competency and IQ level is to ensure that the lecture can be aimed and pitched at a certain level. Similarly, even when training is undertaken, having a motley crew of people in it serves no one any purpose – they must be able to be as homogenous as possible (from an intelligence and intellect perspective).
- Attending training must be made compulsory, and this MUST be so from the senior and middle management for the program. Unless this is the case, and people are offered time off without winging, the participant will never be mentally focussed during training. Unless attendance is assured, training must not be undertaken. Training MUST be followed by some form of assessment to ensure that the objectives of the program were met.
- Knowledge can be asserted through a traditional test
The ability to apply the knowledge can be tested through a case studies
- Actual application at work can be assessed through assignments or work related projects
- Behavior change can be assessed through 360 reviews

Finally, even after assessing and being satisfied that the participant has indeed learnt what he was trained in, you need to commit to continuous upgrades and impetus – so that the learning remains fresh, and relevant in the long-term.

THE ROLE PARENTS PLAY

Parents play a huge role in ensuring that the student actually takes on the course, sticks to it, follows lectures and prepares for the exam. Through a little bit of coercion, a lot of cajoling and reasoning, sometimes arm twisting they some ensure we ARE qualified in the shortest possible time.

Similarly training must get the necessary buy in, push and championing from the management. Simply paying lip service does not quite suffice. Just as mothers may not know exactly what the qualification entails, it is not important for the Senior Management to know EXACTLY what or how the training is going to be done (though it is indeed advisable to be fully in the loop) what matters is that they completely endorse it, and believe it will actually add value. Without this positive energy, training becomes nothing of importance and only a 'nice to have' that becomes a little KPI for some HR Executive who is only concerned about getting people out to attend, and nothing more.

THE PEER FACTOR

The other crucial factor in a decision about whether to take on a professional course or not is the endorsement of a few trusted friends. Many of us ask around before we actually commit ourselves to go for classes on our weekends, ruining our only free time but if a friend we have a lot of respect for endorses a program, chances are we will also enroll.

Peer endorsements are important at work too. If a few peers were to endorse a leadership development or an executive development program, the buy into it will be so much more, and the 'need' is created almost immediately. Sometimes, peer endorsements go a longer way than even superior endorsements, as some of the most sought out are what peers actually think of.

IT'S NEVER ONE SUBJECT

Even though CIMA is the Chartered Institute for Management Accountants and CIM is the Chartered Institute of Marketing they do not teach only that one subject – ever. Neither does a degree in Management have only Management – and one on IT, only IT.

The approach is to take a wider scope and ensure that the narrow focus is kept but offered enough breadth to ensure they can work in a multidisciplinary environment. Without it, no qualification will be relevant – as they do not know how that particular aspect relates to other things.

I believe the same approach should be taken to training also. It is fine to have one day seminars – but ask yourself what YOU REALLY get out of it. To provoke thought, seminars and workshops are fine - but to bring about change in behaviour or to train in a skill such as being able to present better, a one-or two-day program does not really cut the ice. It is a process that must be undertaken with the participant showing demonstrable skill improvements.

It is far more effective to club requirements together as much as possible and devise broader training programs that simply focus on the 'training days' or 'number of programs attended' as an indicator. You are far better having fewer, more focussed programs than a large number of one-off programs.

QUALITY VERSUS QUANTITY

Usually, a student invests in one qualification – and then moves on to further it – a CIMA student will then take on a MBA for example, and rarely an IT qualification.

This is because of two reasons:

- 1.** Time – unless you are a full time student
- 2.** Money – unless you really have cash to burn

For the same two reasons, organizations must also view training as a progressive thing. We must look at what we expect from our employees in the future, and then

start training them towards this objective in a progressive manner. This will allow you to make maximum out of the limited resources you have – and ensure that each training program that is done actually leads to something more – and just as much as you collect credits, you can collect the required credits for your advancement or future training applications.

THE ALUMNI

Most professional bodies and universities have alumni's that become both a formal and informal group to share knowledge, update each other on new approaches to the subject matter, and also a social network to help both within and outside a professional setting.

It is important to ensure that we go about creating 'alumni' around the programs we run. Imagine having an alumni of 'leaders' 'speakers' etc., which can work just as a professional body in ensuring their subject matter is propagated and kept current and valid.

RECRUITMENT

Arranged Marriages and lessons in Recruitment

I know arranged marriages are not the norm in today's more liberal and westernized Sri Lanka, but nevertheless, arranged marriages still play an integral role in our society – and seemingly in other parts of the world too. Though unfashionable, an arranged marriage goes through a complex and well defined set of steps which has some amazingly good parallels to recruitment. Though one can argue that arranged marriages fail as much as marriages based on a love relationship, once analyzed, one has to accept (even grudgingly) that the process that an arranged marriage goes through is designed to eliminate some of the aspects of marriage we usually disregard and overlook.

I am sure this will rouse many emotions – my attempt is not to argue for or against arranged marriages (for I myself got married the other romantic way) but simply to offer insights on how we probably could conduct our selection and recruitment a little better, and draw on a time-tested practice that obviously has many parallels to the recruitment process.

- The first major aspect of an arranged marriage is that the parents take on the responsibility of finding a

suitable partner on behalf of their child. It is a huge undertaking, for if they get it wrong, they will be held responsible, especially by their own child, for a failed marriage. As such, the burden of responsibility is huge. Unlike us, who fall in love and take on the ownership for ourselves for possible failures, in an arranged marriage, roles are reversed, and when, as in some cases it happens, things go wrong, parents will have a heartache for life, knowing they were the ones who got their child into the mess he/she is in.

In most cases, the approach to recruitment is that of 'getting someone for the vacancy - fast.' Yes, there is responsibility and ownership, but we generally dilute this responsibility and in most cases when it goes wrong and the wrong candidate is brought in we try to either hide it or make do with the person anyway, without taking the full responsibility for a failed recruitment.

- Secondly an arranged marriage is almost always proposed through a 'known party' or the '*Kapuwa*' – or the match-maker. The credibility of the party proposing is one of the first things that are considered even for the process of screening the person/proposal. If the person who makes the proposal is not considered to be a person of standing or of values, then the proposal is disregarded.

In recruitment too, along with the advertisements, we have 'brokers' (head hunters, recruitment agencies etc.)

however, though we happily take their recommendations seriously (who has a vested interest in getting someone into the organization - usually a month's salary) we rarely give the same credence to a fellow employee recommending someone. In fact, on many occasions, we actively discourage it. I am not advocating people pressuring the recruitment decision – I am merely asking why we cannot have our employees (at least the ones who fully know and live the values of the organization and who perform accordingly) actively 'introduce' people to the organization.

- In arranging a marriage, the 'screening process' that is undertaken is very regimental – and many aspects are covered before the prospective person is seen. This process usually involves many people, and is done over a period of time.
 1. The matching of horoscopes – this in order to ensure that the stars are in favour of the union. Though many will scoff at this as old-fashioned and an un-exact science, there are others who swear by it. Be that as it may, if the horoscopes do not match, parents will not take the proposal any further.
 2. Social Standing – in the past, caste was part of this equation. Today there is more about social status. If the prospective candidate is not of equal

or slightly better standing, it will not be deemed appropriate.

3. 'Breeding' - the lineage of the person is also sifted through. As much as money and social standing the person should come from good 'stock.' Coming from an 'undesirable background' will never be compensated for by money or position of power.
4. Assets – if it is a girl a 'dowry', if it is a boy, his job, whether he has his own house, or car, etc., what other property he holds, are checked at the initial screening process.

All this may seem utterly unfair to most – and certainly not 'politically correct' in today's more liberal, diversity-centric, equal-opportunity focussed and equity-based society, but one has to understand that from the Royals to most of the more 'elite' families such as the Kennedy's to the Gandhi's still practice the same scrutiny when one of their family members is betrothed. If we take emotion out of the equation and look at it objectively, none of these are actually impractical considerations – and aimed at ensuring that marriage is 'practical' and that the newly-married couple has all the prerequisites to have a stable, content and lasting marriage. Even we who get married for love need to give credence to the fact that love alone is not enough to make a happy marriage: there are many other factors such as the compatibility of our ideas, our

ability to live a basic comfortable life (at least), and our ability to off our children basic creature comforts and so on. I am not saying that being poor is an impediment to marriage – I certainly know enough people below the poverty line who lead very happy married lives, but one has to agree that it makes it easier for a newly rather than having to worry about every little thing. So, even if you are getting married for love, it is important to consider factors which are important in a marriage – rather than in a love affair – as we would all agree that ‘courting’ and ‘being married’ are two whole different ball games.

The organization’s application-sifting process has amazingly similar approaches to that of matching the horoscopes and applications, and a standard application form will ask for aspects such as educational background, professional qualifications, previous experience etc., all of which are important – but ultimately what you will want to know about a potential employee is two-fold – can he deliver results? Will he be able to fit in? Depending on the organization and its culture these two factors will be of varying weightings. Based on experience and where they have previously worked one can at least assume you can find out whether he or she can perform, or doing the job required favourably, but how do we assess the ‘fit’ to the organization at the application stage? Most of the time we do not, and leave it for the interviewing stage. However, if we were to ask each candidate to take a personality test

we can have an inkling of an idea – just like if we match horoscopes. Even though it is an un-exact science, it can at least give us indications well before we ever see the person. Also, understanding whether he/she has his/her own car, house, comes from his/her own home or whether boarded etc., can give us indications of the motivation behind the application. Just as much as we can ‘fall in love’ for the money factor, most applications are down to the salary factor rather than coming in because they truly want or love the job – and then we try to find answers as to why they are not motivated!

Where the initial screening process is done, the proposed groom will visit the prospective bride. The first meeting is a rather serious affair, and subject to much decorum and tradition. Being the first time the two parties meet (it’s usually the potential husband who goes to meet the future better-half) it is important for both to have the right first impressions. Sometimes the two sets of parents meet before the children are introduced to each other. Even though it is always done with decorum, the talking is straight. They discuss the pre-requisites, the conditions, and the expectations candidly with no pretensions – especially since we, as a culture do not want to have a situation where the other party would lose face. Yet, since it is their child’s future that is under question, they become open, straight-talking – and there is absolutely no backing out of what is deemed wanting.

The two children are also offered the opportunity to meet and allowed some 'time alone.' Though it seems very awkward to someone who is not accustomed to such customs, the children too, knowing that their lifetime is under scrutiny based on this decision, become very serious about what they want – and make it abundantly clear. While the 'elders' discuss matters of 'strategic importance' each child looks at whether the person before him/her will meet his/her idea of a lasting partnership and be the husband/wife of their future.

After the meeting, this usually includes lunch and a cup of tea, the man's party leaves, and both parties start making notes. Did their son or daughter like the person? Did they match up to the expectations they had in mind?

Taking such a scenario into an organization, that first interview, likewise, is an opportunity for each party to be completely candid about the expectations they have. Sadly, we usually become rather defensive at the interview – and it is usually the 'company' that asks all the questions – and we don't seem to quite get the fact that it is equally important for the candidate to feel he/she gets what he/she wants out of the job – otherwise even though we can pat ourselves on the back for 'getting the right guy' for the job it may well turn out that he feels he is in the wrong place. So, let us change the interview into a discussion where we talk of each other's aspirations and desires, our dreams and hopes, each other's perfect situation – so that

there are little misunderstandings or ill feelings later. We tend to oversell ourselves – both the organization and the candidate do a good ‘pitch’ though failing to understand that getting the job (just like getting married) is only one part of the equation – and that it matters more that the aftermath is to your liking.

We CAN get divorced – as much as we can quit a job – but in both instances the hassle factor, if nothing else, along with the emotional distress it causes should possibly encourage both individuals as well as organizations to take the interview process far more seriously than is now done.

➤ Back to the arranged proposal: If the initial visit goes well, a decision is made by the respective parents (mostly after consultation with the children) as to whether they will consider marriage. This decision is usually laid down at a second meeting (if it is a go ahead). The second meeting is far more casual and relaxed than the first – and is usually at the prospective husband’s home. The parents formally offer their acceptance and the proposal is made, and agree to go ahead with the marriage. Dates are usually fixed tentatively, along with preliminary plans for all things relating to the marriage, homecoming, with whom the new couple will live with *etc.* Almost nothing is left to chance, and there are a lot of arrangements to be made, and a date fixed for a next meeting to proceed with details. The second interview is when we usually make the

call on who we have in view and when and we usually get the person to come in for the job. However, it is always best to have a more open, one-one-on after the individual has been offered the job. With formalities, pleasantries and pretences done, it is important that the candidate and the person to whom he/ she will be reporting to have a no-holds-barred conversation about the task at hand and the modalities of how things will be. It is important to make draft plans for the future before the candidate joins the business – so that even if they grow jittery and feel it all out of their ability, they can be graciously told they are not required, rather than coming in for the job and then leaving in a month or two.

- Until the recent past, the “arranged couple” are allowed a ‘courtship period’ where they were allowed to meet each other (mostly at home, and occasionally at a mutually agreed location.) Most of the time the final marriage plans were made only if this courtship period went well, and to the liking of the child concern. If he/she had reservations, the confirmation made during the second parents’ meeting is cancelled with mutual discussion and respect.

This courtship period also included a visit to the chief incumbent of the local temple – where he offered the couple advice based on the Dhamma about the duties and responsibilities of a husband and wife, about the role

of parenting and even seemingly taboo subjects such as the role of sex in marriage. This 'training' was considered important in order to ensure that the children understood the severity of the responsibility they are about to undertake – and also to equip them with the prerequisite mind-set.

The courtship also includes visits to shrines and places of historical and cultural importance as one family – so both families collectively go on the trip. These trips are an attempt to ensure that the families get along with each other, as much as allowing the two children to get to know each other. Conventional wisdom would hold that you do not merely marry the other – but that you become part of the wider family. This in many ways is a broader understanding that no matter how well the two individuals get along, there is a potential for issues if the two families don't see eye to eye.

In like manner, even though a person may join a department or section, he or she will become an integral part of the wider organization. Just as much as it is important to have the candidate fit the job and department he or she is brought to, it is wise to ensure that the wider organization too embraces him or her. Otherwise, there are bound to be issues. Some organizations get the candidate to come in informally for some company events before the candidate comes to work, and even go as far as getting a pulse on how he or she fits in the settings. No matter

how small the job, getting the right person is vital for the overall success of the organization.

- If all goes well, the date for the marriage ceremony and the 'homecoming' are set. During this time, almost all details of the first few steps as husband and wife are discussed and agreed upon.

It is a period of bustling activity. Both parties have norms that have been set – and each party will ensure that such norms and traditions are maintained. Not only is the marriage ceremony and related ceremonies discussed in detail and planned for, the intricate details of the young couple's future is also discussed and planned for. It is usually customary for the bride to bring with her everything that would be required for a new home – not so much the furniture (which certainly was the case with the affluent, but for those of lesser standing the house could not hold more than two to three pieces of furniture anyway) etc. – but the little things such as needle and thread, bed sheets and pillow cases, coconut scraper etc., – the essentials to begin a new life with. All this is done to ensure that the young couple's first few months are hassle free, and taken care of – because they understood that such a start with no worries, greater togetherness and peace in the marriage goes a long way.

Likewise, consider what plans we make for a new employee. On countless occasions, we miss out on little things, such as a security pass – a place for his/her vehicle –

a work station – an e-mail account – the business cards – the stationary he/she may require – an e-mail to the business about him/her: they may all seem like little things – but on the first day of work, it can be horrible if these things were not to be there for the candidate – just as much as waking up as husband and wife in their own home for the first time and realizing you don't have a kettle to boil water in – or toothpaste to brush teeth with. Little irritations are usually more difficult to deal with than massive disasters - and a few such irritations usually causes more damage than any one big issue!

- The marriage when it finally happens, is a well-orchestrated affair. The two families with all the invited relatives are introduced to each other, the family circle thus widening.

The wedding is merely an event – and though it is done with all pomp and pageantry that one can afford, most of the older generations understand full well that no matter how great the ceremony, what matters ultimately is life as a married person – filled with contentment, pride and of course, a mutual love that will grow.

Similarly 'getting the person' is only half the battle for the organization. As with marriage, what matters equally is that the person gels into the organization, grows with it, performs, lives the values and stays within its fold.

TEAM WORK

Lessons in team work from the Philharmonic Orchestra

I remember going to see the Symphony Orchestra perform with my 'Ammi' and 'Appachchi' and being awed by it all. I was always into music, and loved the classical masters, and above all – I loved watching an orchestra perform. I could never quite understand how one man in the middle with a stick in his hand, could bring this entire group together to make such awesome music by simply waving his hand. No shouting, no instructions – only a simple wave of the hand and they responded – I was, and always will, be awed!

But how is it possible? In all seriousness, how IS it possible? To me, this is the epitome of team work – and many are the lessons to learn.

EVERYONE PLAYS ACCORDING TO THE SAME SHEET OF MUSIC

One of the first things you note about playing as part of an orchestra is that the 'score' is the same for everyone. You know your part, but you have to know the full score in order to know when you need to kick in. One beat out of place, and you have ruined it for everyone else. Sometimes all

you play is one tiny seemingly insignificant part but in the grand scheme of things, it is both important and essential. You practice, over and over again, only to come alive at that one little moment, but you know, as much as everyone else, that it is important. Just because you have a small part it does not make you any less important – nor do you practice any less – because in another scenario, roles may reverse, and you may be the one playing the main part. Knowing the full score is critical – knowing where you come in is critical – ensuring you do your part is critical.

In most of our organizations, we seem to lose track of the overall 'score' or purpose and our role in it. We almost never share in the full scope, believing that it is not important. But if we are to truly bring a team together, each section, and each person in it needs to understand the overall direction, pace and purpose of the business and their role in delivering it. As much as a score is written for a piece of music, a truly detailed corporate plan is essential – not to be merely bound as a book and shared only amongst the seniors, but to be disseminated to all within the business.

Equally important is that each person no matter how small a part he or she plays in the wider scheme of things is made to feel important – and IS important. If we focus only on the 'glamour' teams and functions, we will invariably fail because in order for any department or section to function, the help and input of others are

essential. Knowing your role, and what your input is in the greater role of the business is of critical importance and the pride you have in playing that role well is the key to ensuring the key notes of the others – and together the business moves forward.

EVERYONE IS A PROFESSIONAL

You cannot come into the philharmonic orchestra by being average. Everyone who is taken in is one of the best in their chosen instrument and they are professionals. They will commit the time and energy required to practice, perfect their craft and ensure their best is given to the overall performance. It is rare to find a person who will not be so committed and the individual requesting to join is an indication of the willingness to do what it takes to ensure he/she becomes an integral part of the orchestra. This commitment and professionalism is a gift placed in the hands of the man who conducts the orchestra.

What we sorely lack in most organizations is professionalism. We expect a lot from the organization but are not willing to commit to what it takes to ensure the job is done – and done well. The fault lies in us not being careful to discern the professionals from the non-professionals. In recruiting for a team, we need to ensure we pick only the best and nothing less, no matter what the pressures. It is when we bring professionals together who are like-minded and complimentary in their skill that

we can truly have synergy. Otherwise, we will always have to throw considerable time, effort and resources simply to get them to orchestrate.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Practice is a quintessential part of ensuring an orchestra sounds good. Over and over again they will practice, into the wee hours of the morning at times, until they get it just right. It is physically, mentally and emotionally demanding but a good conductor will not let you go until he is satisfied you have done it just right, and the piece was perfect. No matter how good the players are you will NEVER be part of the concert or one concerto without adequate practice. Apart from everyday practices, you will always have one or two dress rehearsals as well, with all the lights, stage props and everything else that goes into making the concert. It is this rigour that enables a flawless delivery when it matters the most – in front of a live audience.

We rarely practice anything in a work-setting. We simply 'get on with it.' Ensuring we commit enough time to practice our craft is important because skill means nothing unless perfected over time, and even the tiniest task can be done either in an average manner or to perfection, and there is always a huge difference between the two. Being able to find ways to mimic actual work, and enabling team members to work together without the risk of the actual job (just like a dress rehearsal) enables them to ensure

that at work, when it matters, they can, and will perform as a team. It is essential that organizations devise training, mentoring and fun activities built around this principle allowing them to 'mimic' good behaviour which they will learn and assimilate, and then take in to the organization. Simply running outdoor-or workshop-style training alone will not deliver this, it needs to be woven into the overall scheme of things in a meaningful manner and the links to actual work being able to be deciphered. Otherwise, it is of no use.

THE FOCUS IS IN PERFECTING YOUR CRAFT, NOT IN OUT BEATING ANOTHER'S

The biggest difference I see between sport and music is the inward looking aspect. When you play an instrument, you always try to better yourself – NOT beat someone else. This is a truly important lesson to learn. No matter what instrument you play, you will try and perfect your craft, and bring a unique flavour to it all your own, which makes you unique. Trying to be better than someone else is almost never the intention or the focus. YOU are the focus and it is necessary that you even OUTBEAT YOURSELF! Your entire focus is to make your playing that much better.

In our organizations we pay too much heed to competing with someone else, rather than devoting time and energy to perfecting our craft. We compare ourselves to others rather than critically looking at how we can

improve. Yes, there is certainly merit from learning from what others do well, and in fact, when required even copying them, but the focus should be to better ourselves, not to outsmart or beat someone else, which, in the overall scheme of things, is hugely counterproductive. If each individual commits to self-improvement, then it is only a matter of time for the entire organization to improve.

DO YOUR PART, WITHOUT WORRYING ABOUT OTHERS' FAULTS

In the orchestra, you rarely pick on others' faults. When a mistake is done, it is done all over again, and it can be painful to the others but it is required, and no one grumbles. What you focus on is your part not that of others – that's for the conductor to worry about. You playing well is what is required of you and it is NOT dependant on others playing theirs.

Most of the time, we are horribly mistaken in making the excuse of saying that we could not do our part because someone else did not do theirs. It is certainly true that our jobs are interconnected, and that someone's failing will result in our failure to meet a target but is this really an excuse and is it good enough? Sometimes, we blame things on our bosses, the motivation levels, the culture and everything else, except asking ourselves, did WE do our best? If we all commit to do our part – done well – flawlessly – then much of what we find fault with as an orchestral organization will roll over and perish!

EVEN THE SOLOISTS NEED TO PLAY AS A PART OF THE WHOLE

There are, on enough occasions, soloists who rise up, and play a part of the piece. This is wonderful to watch – and they are usually the *crème da la crème* of the players in the orchestra. What is humbling to note is that once his/her performance is done, he/she will sit, just like everyone else, and become part of the wider group again.

We sometimes focus way too much on being a star within a team. Yes, there are always moments when we need to come in and take on a leadership role within a team, but that does not equate to you being venerated forever, and that you are outside the norms of the organizations. Even in sports, 'stars' tend to get preferential treatment, and in our organizations 'seniors' tend to be outside the everyday norms which apply to all others. This is truly a huge impediment to the overall team work and just like a soloist, we need to understand that our moment to shine requires us to shine, but then, like everyone else, we too need to contribute towards the overall purpose, and do every day work like everyone else. Having the attitude that 'everyday 'menial' work is beyond me' purely because you are a 'star' in brief phases of the work is certainly not the best attitude to take in a team setting!

THE CONDUCTOR'S ROLE

The role of the conductor in an orchestra is an interesting one. Unlike a leader in a sport, a conductor relies more on

the players to do their part – and rather than instructing individuals, he/she brings out the additional ‘mood’ and ‘sentiment’ and ‘feeling’. The conductor is clearly in charge – and will conduct the orchestra – but his job is not to bark out orders, but guide the entire team towards the end objective of a beautiful recital. The conductor does not micro-manage, only offers direction and guidance leaving the individuals to do what they do best – play their music.

The role of a leader within the modern business setting especially an organization that is moving towards a team-concept requires managers to be leaders, much like the conductor. If they micro- manage, then their team members will simply wait for instructions to be spelt out rather than learning what they have to do and getting on with it. The manager needs to take a hands-off approach, ensure they guide and instruct in order to ensure cohesion as a team and set the tone and pace. Just as much as a conductor will stop the playing whenever he/she feels that it had not gone just right, the managers too need to ensure they offer feedback and criticisms whenever they see or feel that something is amiss – but just as much as an conductor will never play and show how to, you need to allow the person to figure out ‘how.’

No matter how well you play, it is the audience that decides whether or not to give you a standing ovation. Finally, when all is said and done, what matters is what the audience thinks. No matter how well you think you have

performed, the final verdict comes from the audience – not from anyone else.

The final test of team work is the results you have to show to the shareholders and other stakeholders. Nothing else matters. There is little point having a great team that does not perform, neither is there any point in having the results at the cost of an absolute drain on the people that are working in it (because it is only a matter of time until they will leave!) Both are important – and essentially a great team is one that achieves results together, just like a good orchestra will perform to perfection together, resulting in thunderous applause and a standing ovation.

LOYALTY

The Alma Mater and lessons in Loyalty

The small security hut: bags checked: I walk in. What greets me is a perfectly-swept, tarred road which leads me to the neatly manicured quadrangle surrounded by the Gothic buildings, the chapel and the belfry in the farther corner. The 'lavos' by the side, crumbling down. I breathe deeply: I am in College. I am a Thomian.

Fifteen years have passed since I left the hallowed portals of the 'school by the sea' but even now, when I walk into it with my seven-year-old daughter clutching my hand, I smile with an inner satisfaction of knowing I am Thomian, and I proudly show off to her the places where I sat, the little etched name on a desk, the name on the board of the prefects room and of course – the tuck shop, where I never failed to buy a '*maalu paang*' from. I am a Thomian – always will be one.

I have often wondered how College instilled such loyalty in us. How is it that after fifteen years of leaving College I will still smile when I see the blue and black flags waving from a van full of Thomians shouting '*Royal parippu*' during the big match? How is it that even during a recession I will somehow sign a cheque for a smartly clad young man who comes asking me for a souvenir

sponsorship? How is it that I still feel the pain when we lose a big match? Why am I so emotionally bound to College, and not so to any place I have worked for?

For all those who seek answers to the elusive issue of employee loyalty, College is a good starting point.

A few lessons I think we can borrow from the Alma Mater.

YOU A THOMIAN FIRST – A SRI LANKAN SECOND.

I remember coming to College for the first time. I am a 'half breed' (technically – never feel like one!) and came into Lower 4 (grade 5) after an entrance exam. I remember an apprehension about it all – and having come from a 'lesser school' was more trepidation.

I remember one of the first 'chats' I had with one of the prefects: he was truly kind and generous, and told me 'don't worry, you are a Thomian now.' It did not matter where you came from, what race, creed or religion you belonged to, what your social standing was, what your parents did for a living or anything else. Once you enter the gate, you are a Thomian – end of story. For a school that is often being called one full of 'snobs' this was certainly a revelation. I was accepted – completely and honestly – as one of them. From then on there was no turning back. I was a Thomian first – everything else second – and this is the way I remain.

Organizations do not put enough focus and attention on that first day – and that first week – and that first year.

We do not focus enough on the formal and the informal induction we receive, and the message we send out to our fresh employees. We almost never give them the pride of being in our organization, or the feeling of being special. We do not expect them to lay their hearts on the line; we are only worried about getting them on the job they are supposed to be doing.

We never got a day of 'lax' as new-comers to the school. We had assembly, classes, PTA and all the everyday workings, but there was a definite focus on us 'new-comers' from both the teachers and the prefects – they ensured we were 'assimilated', and they did not do it according to a structured calendar or a listing. Yet, they did it – amazingly effectively. Of course, there was a small 'rag' (nothing of the sordid sort that happens in a campus, but of perfectly gentlemanly standing), there was an informal guardian (yes, it did help to have an older cousin in College to watch over me), there was a class teacher who made sure we were given a small introduction to the little intricacies of the school – the set of documents that were meticulously prepared and given to the parents – the 'College History' book which made you glow with pride about the rich heritage we were also becoming part of – all this and more enabled us to truly blend with the name S. Thomas' and all it stood for.

Compare this to the treatment we offer a new employee. A half hearted 'induction' done for three hours

by the HR department just does not cut as an inculturation program. A treat from the first salary does not cut as a 'rag', A small 'hello' from the boss does not cut as an introduction. They are all great as individual 'ticks in the box' – but unless woven together into something much more cohesive it will be simply just a 'tick in the box' and nothing more: you can discount loyalty you will build!

RULES, RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIDE

As with any organization, College too had its rules. There were the definite ones that were written down but more importantly there were the unwritten norms and conventions that were as important as the rules. The rules, norms and conventions were passed down from generation to generation – and yes, they altered with time – but one thing remained a constant – the pride!

Pride was important – and it was instilled in us through a myriad of things. The impressive history, the beautifully maintained building and campus premises, the flag flying high in the middle of the quadrangle, the luminous old boys, accolades we won through numerous extracurricular activities: and above all, the sense of belonging we felt and knew was genuine. No one would dare rub that pride the wrong way – or they would feel our wrath – even now.

Along with the pride came the responsibility of ensuring that pride in the institution was safeguarded. Yes, we were boys, and got up to all the mischief in the world – some of

the daring escapades if known to our parents would certainly send shivers down their spines even now! Yet, through it all, even when we broke the hallowed laws (and we most certainly did) we felt the responsibility of ensuring that 'College' was not tarnished. A goody-two shoes can certainly argue that this was the wrong line of thinking – and I would heartily agree, but the point I want to drive in is that we did not mind being reprimanded at school, but we did not want anyone outside it to say that 'this is what Thomians' do.' The name of the College was sacrosanct – and anyone who degraded it certainly got the butt end of all of our indignation.

The choice was simple – either fit in – or be weeded out through ostracism and pure shame. Is this group-think? Absolutely not. We had a diversity of opinion and good old-fashioned banter and arguments, but NEVER at the cost of the sanctity of our Alma Mater being in disrepute!

Compare this to the ultra-focus on rules and non-focus on the pride factor or responsibility of a modern organization. We are all groomed to obey rules, follow the 'herd', get the job done, and get back home. Nothing more. Without a deep sense of responsibility and pride bestowed upon a new employee through the impeccable behaviour of the 'seniors' who can be role models, no employee deviance is given.

HISTORY, STORIES AND LEGENDS

One of the first books we were given was the 'College History' - a thick book with a very small font, packed with

all the glorious details of the rich and colourful history of College. I remember reading it in awe – carefully reading the little things that made College great, and the rich tradition that I was becoming part of. I remember seeing pictures of DS and Dudley Senanayake, SWRD Bandaranaike and many other prominent figures on the wall of the College Hall. Whatever you may think of the political figures, one has to admit that they were in the least, great historical figures – and to a young boy entering the hall, knowing that you are following in their footsteps is a great feeling.

We somehow never seem to celebrate organisational heroes. We never make legends out of those who gave their sweat and blood towards the company. We, of at all, find fault with everyone who was there before us. Think about what message we send out within the ranks. ‘The previous bosses were hopeless, that is why we are in this mess’ is the underlying ethos – as contrasted to ‘these are the people whom you need to emulate.’

Stories play a huge role in the propagation of culture within an organization. Daring exploits – snatching victory from the jaws of defeat make excellent stories to whip up that spirit organizations seem to systematically kill within an employee population. We heard many such stories in College, and they were immortal stories. The nine-run match, the Second World War and the use of college as military barracks, the ‘scooting’ that were planned so meticulously by the boarders, the centenary match, etc.,

are all stories we all talk about even now when we meet. From one generation of Thomians to another we pass on absolute facts, and nostalgic tall stories that are only half-truth but it does not matter – what matters is that the same feeling of pride and joy is passed down from one to the other – and for a few lucky ones, father to son.

rites, rituals and traditions

There were many rites, rituals and traditions that bonded all Thomians. The Big Match is certainly the biggest 'known' tradition and that is a good place to start. The tiniest tot, to the toothless great grandfather comes alive in a euphoria and camaraderie which is absolutely unmatched. We take leave, come from abroad, get out of our sick bed, and defy our doctors – all to savour one more Big Match.

But apart from the obvious, there were many other less 'outwardly manifested' yet equally (if not more important) rituals and traditions.

Being a prefect was one of them. What happens as the 'rag' when we are appointed a College Prefect (or a Coll Cop as it was known to us Thomians) is a closely guarded secret – no 'non- prefect' – whether Thomian or otherwise will ever know the truth. All that is needed to be said is that it is painful. However, we all go through it – and once done – we join probably the most elite group of College students.

The old boys' day, the carols, funerals in the chapel, the sports meet, the Shakespeare competition, the cycle parade, the regatta, the rugby match, the Sinhala Day, the English Day, the debates, the College Magazine, the assembly, the 'current affairs classes' were all part of College life. Each of these events offered an opportunity for different abilities to come alive – and for each of us to have an opportunity to showcase our talents and more importantly, bind with one another. If there were only lectures, such deep friendships and loyalties could never have been forged.

Compare this to work. When you are promoted it's just another Company outings are a 'must come affair' or a drudgery. 'Play and fun' are words shunned. Apart from the person sitting opposite and beside you, you may hardly know anyone else in the organization so, is it a surprise that there is no team work and a lack of loyalty?

HIERARCHY AND INFORMAL AUTHORITY

College had an obvious formal hierarchy structure. The Warden, Sub Warden, Head Masters, teachers, staff made up the formal authority. The prefects and the class monitors, though 'formal' as a group were not offered formal authority ever – but gained it through an informal set of traditions which remained intact for generations. For example, the Warden would tap on the Prefects' Room Door before entering – something he did not have to do,

or was labelled a rule or norm, but an age-old tradition he honoured.

Both the formal and the informal groups came together beautifully in order to ensure that the 'discipline' was maintained. It was never perfect – prefects DID get out of hand ever so often – there WERE little misunderstandings and issues. Students DID complain about the heavy-handed attitude some college prefects and house prefects took – but all in all, one had to admit that it came together and because of it – WE WERE rather well known to be a 'disciplined' school where 'men' were bred.

In most of our organizations we rely solely on the formal authority offered through the titles such as manager, assistant manager in order to get things done. Informal authority is almost unheard of and certainly never sanctified by Management - on the contrary it is shunned and discouraged.

We have also never quite defined what the role of each level of hierarchy is. The Job Description certainly is clear – but what of the aspects of leadership and management that cannot be quite put into paper – such as maintaining discipline, ensuring that behaviour was regulated, keeping the traditions alive, etc. One never sees overtures to such aspects in a job description.

Furthermore, in College there was a house structure, and within this too there was a hierarchy. There were clubs and associations where there was a hierarchy stemming

from the Master in Charge to the office bearer. There was an Old Boys' Association and a Board of Governors which kept the management of the College in check. Yes, there are always issues but none of the magnitude of what we have in the corporate sector, and even when there are issues, more often than not it is solved without washing dirty linen in public!

All the associations, clubs, sports activities, etc., offered students the opportunity to dabble in leadership positions BEFORE they actually got into the positions of authority as a House or College Prefect. This again is in stark difference to positions through promotion within an organization where and left to his or her own devices to perform in the new position. Grooming of a head prefect starts probably in the 'middle school' (grade 5 to 7) rather than during O/Ls. Students that show a flair for organizational and leadership skills are identified through the myriad of activities surrounding the College, and also through academic excellence. We have never had a Head Prefect who was ONLY an academic – or ONLY a sportsman – they were always a good combination of both. This grooming exercise is so lacking in modern organizations and once again employee deviation takes place – and loyalty ebbs. The whole effort is to ensure that the new appointee succeeds in his position rather than fails, a far cry from what we see in our companies.

'WORK' AND 'PLAY' AND THE OPPORTUNITY TO SHINE

'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' was something College lived by. 'Bookworms' were shunned, not that we did not have our share of truly exceptionally bright kids but no matter how bright they were in their studies they were almost forced to try their hand in at least ONE other extracurricular activity. I cannot honestly recall anyone in my batch who did not do SOMETHING apart from their studies. This made us well rounded, better prepared and far more enterprising, and it was a load of FUN too!

What it also did was that we were each offered an opportunity to do something we were GOOD at and shine. We all may not have been brilliant academics or budding sportsmen but we had countless opportunities to do SOMETHING and be good at it. We had over 50 clubs and associations and 12 different sports: there was room for everyone. This enables each of us to build self-confidence, gain leadership exposure by being office bearers, captains or vice captains or editors, and also develop an identity of our very own.

The balance between work and 'play' cannot be over emphasized and is sorely lacking in modern society. Many of us go to work, come back home, and the only social life we have is a Friday night booze-up with a few friends. Sad isn't it? Organizations can and must do a lot more to engage employees not because we OWE it to them,

but because through a myriad of social activities we bring them all together, and also because it is a cornerstone of the loyalty that gets built around it.

LOVE

One of the least talked about facets is the part love plays in all this. We were LOVED by our teachers and our friends. There was a wide social network to help us through. I remember very fondly how I got rather average grades for my English and how I was tutored after school by our English teacher – free of charge mind you! This love shone through always and no matter how many canings we got, no matter how many shellings were given to us, in front of our parents on parent-teacher days, no matter how many detentions we got, we always knew we were loved. Sure, there were a few that genuinely hated us, but there were many, many more who compensated for it through an abundance of love.

Ask yourself who loves you at work. The boss is insecure, and sees you as a threat. Your peers vie for the same promotion. Your subordinates don't trust you. You are alone. Is it any wonder we feel disoriented?

WARDEN MAY BE BAD – BUT COLLEGE IS GOOD

We never questioned the sanctity of the College – and it was certainly on a different sphere from the administration that ran it.

There were many opinions about our Warden – some loved him – some hated him – some were non-committal – but they ALL loved College!

A simple thing really but imagine its impact. On the contrary we love or hate our organization because of the boss we work for. It is not an exaggeration to claim that many of us leave the companies we work for because we cannot get along with the boss but ask yourself, do we leave the boss or do we leave the organization? For many of us it means the same thing. Not so at College. You may hate your teacher, the class you are in, some of the prefects – but we NEVER stop loving College.

Such is the bond that is built – and the final testament to loyalty.

FOLLOWERS

The four biggest lessons your dog teaches you about being a good follower

We live in an age where leadership is discussed extensively, and all are actively encouraged to be leaders. No self-respecting individual will ever say they want to be a follower these days, they all want to be leaders and that is great, but the danger in all this is that many forget that following is also a necessity, and in fact all of us, are both leaders and followers at the same time. No matter who we are or what we do, we lead, but we also follow. Consider a Manager who leads his or her team, but has to report to a CEO or a more Senior Manager about how he and his team fare. Most of us in daily life, forget that learning to follow is as important as learning to lead.

What we espouse we want from our juniors is very different to what we really want from them. Though it may be ludicrous to say that your pet canine is similar to your junior team member, I could not help wonder whether we do not, in all seriousness, expect the same qualities from him/her as we would from the four legged friend we have at home.

Once again, I reiterate, I am NOT comparing a dog to a junior member – merely trying to use the canine example to talk about what we can learn about the following...

1. COME, GO, SIT, ROLLOVER

One of the first things we do our pet dog is to teach him the basic commands, which we expect to be followed at all times, without exception.

‘Come, Go, Sit, Roll over.’

Most dogs will obey at least the majority of the time. You have an obstinate one like my Cocker Spaniel Skippy, then you will start raising your voice with the hope that a higher volume will get a better result.

Generally, we expect our team members to follow without hesitation. We expect them to see us as the manager and leader, and simply follow instructions, at least during their formative years. Not that we do not encourage dialogue and opinion, but when we DO take a call, and pass it down the line, we expect it to be followed – without exception.

The issue is that, like Skippy, most of us think of ourselves too ‘big’ to take an order (or request, if you want to be politically correct.) We will, at least amongst us, debate the boss’s decision, analyze it to no end, counter-strategize etc. but not quite get the job done. Talk is cheap – and actions always speak louder than words – I think, I for one, as a superior expect my team members to complete the task given to them unequivocally or tell me that they cannot do it. Don’t get me wrong, I am not the smartest cookie in the jar, nor am I always right – but by Jove, if you undertake to do it, you need to do it. Otherwise what IS the point?

2. WAGGLE, WAGGLE

One of the things you always appreciate about a dog is that he will wag his tail no matter how tough you have been to him a few minutes ago. It is a wonderful thing to have such loyalty, and we love our dogs that much more for it.

Loyalty probably is the number one thing a superior looks for in his or her junior (if they are honest to you about it.) Saying yes does not amount to loyalty, nor does sucking up to the boss. Loyalty is ensuring that you are always on the lookout for what is best for your boss even if it costs you your job. A junior who offers loyalty, unquestioning and deep loyalty, will almost always receive affection and loyalty back.

Loyalty is a must for most managers, not because they are egotistical maniacs but because if you are able to take loyalty for granted from your team members, you do not have to always look over your shoulder when you take a call. Knowing you have a team who backs you up 100% – even when they do not agree with you, is a wonderful feeling to any leader.

On the contrary, not knowing if you have a loyal team member is like having a temperamental dog at home. One is always cautious and guarded, not knowing when he will bite. The joy of having a dog is never quite there if we question its loyalty to us – similarly, having to look over

your shoulder as a leader, not knowing who will turn Judas, is one of the most horrible belittling feelings a leader has to contend with.

3. WOOF, WOOF

Probably one of the things we always expect our dog to do is to warn us of danger. Most dogs have an instinctive feeling that crosses over them when they sense danger, and start a low, almost inaudible growl, which if the danger persists, or becomes closer, turns into a ferocious bark. If you have had dogs all your life, you will learn to trust their instincts and be guarded. Most of learn to understand the different types of barks our dog has, and we certainly can tell by their bark whether the person who opened the gate is a friend or a stranger.

One of the things we must learn to do as subordinates is to warn our managers of impending danger. Once loyalty and trust is established, most managers will pay heed. Warning of danger is very different to carrying tales or resorting to gossip. Gossip helps no manager – and they should be wise not to encourage it either – but true intelligence of what is happening in the market place or within the organization becomes hugely important in manoeuvring the politics within and outside the organization.

If we have team members who have their ear to the ground, feed us with intelligence and also instinctively keep

a look out for impending dangers, our jobs as managers become that much easier.

4. NOSKIPPY-NOT NOW

Dogs instinctively know when their masters are in a bad mood. They always come and jump on you to say hello, but at those times when you really are not in the mood for it, they know to simply curl up by your feet and wait patiently.

Even leaders are human beings – wrought with emotions and emotional needs. Most of us want our bosses to be super heroes or larger than life figures – which is both unfair and unrealistic. Leaders, no matter how much character they have within them, are also fallible and vulnerable at some point in their lives.

Great followers know when to push their bosses and when not to. They develop a sixth sense to know when the boss is in a bad mood or in some emotional distress. They do not expect their bosses to work according to their time lines or needs, but instinctively adjust to that of the boss. It is a huge sense of relief to know that your team respects your space and does not demand things that you may consider unrealistic.

A FINAL WORD

Getting the job done, loyalty, looking out on your behalf, and giving you space when needed. Now tell me; wouldn't

we all love to have team members who offer these qualities to us? All leaders will be blessed if at least a few of their juniors give them these four basic, yet truly important things and each of us, instinctively want it as leaders.

But remember, to gain such devotion and loyalty, we need to ensure that we do our part as leaders. Just as much as an abusive master will almost always be ruthlessly bitten by their dogs, egocentric and abusive leaders need to watch out – for it is only a matter of time until their juniors take them to task and bite back!

LEADERSHIP

Parenting and lessons in Leadership

There she was – screaming – howling – right smack in the middle of the aisle at Keells Super. “I want a Kinderjoy” she wailed – and boy, did she wail!

“I will buy it for you later darling” she tried to say “now come with amma” – but oh no! The kid wanted the Kinderjoy – and she will have nothing to do with the mother’s cajoling.

She screamed louder, she stomped her little feet and made a defiant stand. “I want it: I want it NOW”. She now clutched the rack and refused to budge.

The mother, who by now was at her wits end valiantly tried to console her with all the charms she knew, but the naughty five year old won the battle – the mother gave in and bought her a Kinderjoy. With a jubilant smile on her face she sat on a little stool, and opened her Kinderjoy, and started eating it then and there.

My daughter, watching this whole episode in absolute awe tugged at my sleeve. “I want a Kinderjoy too”.

Sounds familiar? Being in the habit of thinking of things over a quiet beer, I sat that evening (it being a Friday night) and pondered through the episode and played it over and over again in my mind, and I thought to myself – gosh! This is exactly what happens at work too!

'HONEY – SHALL WE HAVE A BABY?'

The decision to have a kid (unless of course it 'just happened') is a rather serious one and many of us start talking of kids way before we even get married. It is a discussion we have with joy, a lot of love, and also in all seriousness, as we certainly understand, even at a young age, that becoming a parent is by no means a simple thing. Even though the full magnitude of the issue can be comprehended only after the 'bundle of joy' comes along, we, having seen our parents go through their motions with us, understand that parenting, above all, is a responsibility.

It has always amazed me that a woman with a fine career ahead of her, gorgeous and in the full of her youth, would want to become a mother – sacrificing her career, her looks, her youth and take on the responsibility of being a mother. I remember my wife beaming – telling me that she was pregnant – beaming, grinning, laughing, running around, kissing me, giving a call to her parents, and mine – and I remember wondering to myself, WHY is she so happy? Not that I was not – but I guess a man will never understand what it is like exactly, but, going through nine months of crazy hormonal reactions, a growing tummy, morning sickness, scans, all seemed a true test of love and wanting.

Parenting is a responsibility we take on for life. No matter who our kids grow up to be, no matter how their

relationship with us unfolds, no matter how much a trouble or inconvenience they may be in our own lives, they will always be our kids – and we will love them for it. A leadership position – no matter what title you take on – is also the same. No matter what we do, after we transcend from an executive position to a management position, we will (in all probability) remain in management all our work life, and the responsibility we carry, though different to parenting, is nonetheless, for life. We ARE responsible for our team, and its performance.

However, the sad thing is that we usually do not WANT the responsibility that comes with being a manager but rather, want the title purely because we want a car, or an increase, or because of the glory that comes along with being a manager. It is rare to find a young man or woman who wants to be a manager because he or she has a burning desire to make changes for the better, and because they really want to ensure that their team becomes true champions. The motive behind wanting a leadership position is more often than not, extremely selfish and therein lies the first problem – because leadership is essentially a selfish thing – not a position or title and just like a parent. If we were to draw this parallel, leaders at all levels will be better for it.

The motives of a leader is immediately felt by his or her team, just as much as we feel the love (or the lack of it) of our parents. If the team senses that the leader is

interested in his or her benefit, and cares little about the team and their aspirations, then a leader's ability to inspire willing following is immediately diminished, as much as a child would grow up to be detached about his or her parents.

Before anything else, we as parents establish unconditional love and we will never let them feel they are not wanted – an invaluable lesson in how we should approach our teams at work too.

'KE SERA, SERA – WHATEVER WILL BE, WILL BE'

Sitting outside the labour room there were a myriad thoughts that went through my mind. I wondered if she was alright – if the operation went according to plan – if the baby and the mother will be fine. Once the ordeal was over, and I held her for the first time, along with the joy I felt, I instinctively started making plans for her!

All parents have visions for their children. It is an instinctive thing. Some of us become a little overbearing at times, and completely instill the living daylights in our children because we start living our dreams through them but some of us, the wiser and more patient of us, will guide, coach and mentor our kids into becoming all they possibly can be and more.

No matter whether you are the most protective and orthodox, or the more liberal, all parents will have their vision of how their children should grow up but it is in our

approach to it that we will either make them our friends or our most vociferous opponents.

I remember asking my '*ammi*' what I should be and I remember her telling me 'the best you can be – and most importantly, a good human being, like your '*Archchi*', Roy '*Seeya*' and '*Appachchi*' – of course, I was rather annoyed back then, and I remember prodding her for a more definitive answer because I wanted to know what she expected of me. She never let out what she had in mind (I STILL have not found out!) and let me believe that it was something I had to figure out for myself. I asked *appachchi*' the same question and his was far more direct – 'be a good man' – that was it! I instinctively knew what he meant by it because he lived by a strict code of ethics which he never broke even when being thus was detrimental to him. The biggest accolade for him was to see his son following in the same footsteps. I was still not happy because I have seen my parents sitting with some of my cousins, along with my aunts and uncles and taking my cousins through career options and weighing options with them. I asked them why they would not do the same for me and they simply said "because you will not listen!" As such, they were vague with me and let me search it out for myself.

Looking back, I realize that I was a rather tough kid to bring up, full of wild ideas, pointed opinions, a mind of my own and a fiery spirit which was ready to challenge any paradigm that came out from them – the true rebel.

So, wisely, they let me lurch in the dark and figure things out for myself and not give something I will argue against. There were able to 'let it be' rather than fight it – fight against me.

'KE SERA, SERA, WHATEVER WILL BE, WILL BE'

This lesson was one that got truly ingrained in my mind, for I thought about it for many years. Once I started working, and began my journey in management, I had many juniors who had the same attitude I had as a young man growing up. When they would challenge and oppose things the management would offer as advice and direction - I remember the lesson my parents taught in not giving me exacts – let it be.

Sometimes we try too hard to impose our will and outlook on others – it is far wiser to let people find wisdom and truth for and in themselves. Some things can never be taught, they must be experienced and discovered and leadership is in being able to show the way and not be perturbed by the confrontations to it offered by anyone else. Like parents, we in management sometimes impose, rather than allowing our juniors to explore, we make their career the way we see fit, rather than aligning it to their vision for the future, and in doing so, just as we would alienate our own children from us, we alienate them from our leadership.

'THIS IS ALL YOUR FAULT'

Baby opened the fridge and took out a chocolate.

It was 3.00 p.m. She knew that chocolates were to be eaten only after meal – nothing more.

She looks at me – “*Ammi* told me to take it” she tells me without even being asked anything – reading the question in my mind through telepathic intuition that only kids can have.

“This is all your fault – if she has bad teeth – it is all your fault!”

“Yep – if she turns out bad – it’s my fault – if she turns out good, it’s because of your “strategic parenting” my wife smiled and retorted and it hit the spot. I apologized.

Many a time, we have a little banter or a huge argument in front of our kids. It is generally over something to do with them, especially with regards to difference in opinion in how they ought to be raised. Most kids read into this and the crafty ones know how to divide and conquer and take this difference of opinion as an advantage they can happily use according to their whims and fancies.

As parents we represent absolute authority to our kids, as much as managers represent absolute authority in an organisational setting. Seeing two ‘bosses’ have a ‘go at each other’ is something that has the same attraction as watching WWF! We watch intently to see who will come out the victor, and silently clap if our boss gets the upper

hand. However, the message we send out in all this, as we do in a family setting, is to send a clear signal that we are not united in our approach. Just as in our family, at work, many use this to their advantage, and also instinctively seize a license to do the same.

I am not for a moment advocating agreement for the sake of agreement – that is more detrimental than anything else, but differences of opinion must be settled in private not as a public spectacle. Showing mutual respect to each other in leadership positions, and if one must argue, doing so respectfully, is a quintessential part of good leadership.

'SHUT UP AND LISTEN TO WHAT I AM SAYING'

I was always rather weak in mathematics. My mother on the other-hand was a wiz at it.

But no matter how much she tried, I never could quite get it and I would stop her a countless times and ask question after question.

Exasperated she would throw her hands up in the air “just shut up and listen to me first – maybe then you will get it.”

By this time my ego is dented, and I will make some excuse and wriggle out.

Later on, my father used to have a go at trying to teach me. His approach was quite different. He will ask me how I understood things – never got flustered with questions. He never lost his cool – not did he expect me to ‘get it’ –

he just taught me – over and over again until I did get it and I could not leave the desk, no matter how late it was until he was happy that I knew the theorem.

My mother used to poke fun at it and tell him that he never lost his cool because he was equally bad at mathematics in school – and partly that was true.

Many of us in leadership positions, expect our subordinates to ‘get it’ – and truly lose our cool when they ‘don’t get it.’ We, at least in our minds, degrade them, blame the HR department for wrong recruitment, and make a myriad of excuses about why they are not ‘up to it’ without realizing that it is our inadequacy and not theirs.

If we want something done, and give up on it if a subordinate does not do it according to our expected levels of standards or quality, we usually give it to someone else, and make a mental note not to because we overload the good employee and allow a person who maybe not putting in his or her best to get out of it Scot free. The challenge is not to ‘let him handle such work again’ but to get him to run through it again, correct his mistaken approaches and do what is expected of him – after all this is the crux of leadership isn’t it?

Losing our cool no matter what the justification is a clear sign of our weakness. It accomplishes nothing but allowing our child or in the case of our teams, a team member, know ‘what buttons’ to push in us in order to destabilize us – a very dangerous thing.

I have never seen my father mad and the fear of the unknown makes me keep it that way. 'Barking dogs don't bite' my father used to always say. I did not want to see how bad he could bite.

Remember, it is not about how much you shout it is about the resolve and no nonsense approach you take to leadership that will truly distinguish you from the rest. Shouting and throwing your weight around will only make you a bully, and the team may do things out of fear, but after a while that fear peters out – just as you run out of fear of a nagging mother. Knowing that you will not tolerate it, and instilling a fear of not knowing how you will react IF you were to TRYING to make someone scared of you.

'TIME TO SLEEP BY YOURSELF'

"She is seven, she should sleep by herself." A man needs his sleep – and this brat kicks me in her sleep, I was doing my best to get her to vacate my bed and sleep by herself.

My wife was non-committal. Being a mother, she has no problems with her sleeping right smack between the both of us and she tolerates the kicking. Then came the punch line.

"You slept with your parents until you were eleven!" I was dented and I had no counter. But I still persisted, this time I took the battle to my seven year old.

“But I will see bad dreams. Monsters will come. Why?” There were a million questions – and a billion excuses. I knew I had to change tactics.

“If you sleep by yourself I will read you a story every night.”

That did it and my wife grinned. She opened her mouth to tell me something but chose not to and resorted into an impish, sly, all knowing grin.

After reading the book and kissing her good night, I came back to bed victorious. Finally, a good night's sleep and my wife to myself!

“Don't scold her if she comes to us in the middle of the night. These things take time – be patient okay?” She smiled. I, however, was cockily confident that I had done the trick.

My wife proved wiser one more time! We as parents, all through a kids' transition to adolescence and then adulthood, try to mould our children to be independent and do things by themselves. I cannot help but see the parallel to a manager's attempt to 'delegate' and ensure their employees are 'empowered' and are 'taking ownership'.

However, the road to empowerment is a bumpy ride, and requires a ton of patience – patience that we as parents are not willing to give at times. Without this 'breathing space' many children never get the works much better. Children learn based on how they experience things and if

we know how to give them a positive experience, and then reinforce that behaviour, we can get a child to do almost anything – so can we to a young executive.

The key is to understand the psyche of the child – and to work with this end in mind.

I was a completely different child to my parents. My mother tried hard to understand why I behaved the way I did – and finally cracked it when I was about 18. She was a doting mother – but a tough and demanding one at the same time. The only issue is that she had a way of demanding things that instinctively gave me some mild annoyance. Being a free thinker I demanded explanations which *Ammi* was not willing to give most of the time – and this, to me, was a clear indication that her request did not have merit. My father never bothered with how things were done – as long as it was done, the ‘how’ was left to me – even as a child. This was right up my alley, because to tell me how was to question my intelligence – something I had a natural aversion to.

My daughter is a polar opposite. She likes to be told things in detail and given the process by which she needs to attack the problem. Left to her own devices she loses focus and does not enjoy being told to ‘figure it out.’ I made the same mistake my mother made with my daughter – simply because I thought she will be like me. It is not until my mother and wife told me that she was more like them than me, that I got the hang of how to teach her – and it worked like a charm.

We have the same types at work, the proverbial type A and type B personalities. We make the horrible mistake of wanting them to be like us and not altering our approach to suit them, and trying to ensure that the end objective is achieved.

'JUST BECAUSE YOUR BROTHER GOT A NEW PAIR OF SHOES YOU DON'T HAVE TO GET ONE TOO!'

I remember the countless fights I used to have with my mother as to why she had to buy me a new computer or a new pair of jeans or a rather expensive 'trainer' because one of my friends or cousins had just got one.

My mother would almost never yield – partly because she did not have the money and partly because she never subscribed to the notion that you need to have it because 'others' had it. It is indeed a valuable lesson many parents teach their children – that we need to focus on what WE want – rather than comparing notes with what others have and thereby wanting it for no other reason but because they have it. It is a lesson, if learnt well, actually makes life so much better for us when we become adults and certainly helps get rid of completely ego-based buying behaviour which leads a countless so many into debt.

Many organizations go through the same motions. One organization buys a set of new cars for their managers, and almost immediately will make comparisons, both by the employees as well as the management/owners – and

chances are, they will follow suit, purely to ensure their 'reputation' is maintained and sometimes at the cost of an extra burden and at huge financial detriment to the organization. The notion of being able to 'afford it' and also truly 'wanting it' (for the right reasons of course) is something that is not considered important any more. Yet, old fashioned though it may sound, the concept of 'earning first and spending later' seems a far wiser choice than what leads you down a slippery slope of debt and interest payments!

The principle is this: Figure out what YOU want – not make yourself dependant on what others want or have. A seemingly simple statement which, as with all simple statements, is rather difficult to practice.

'APPACHCHI – I THINK WE NEED TO BUY BABY A SET OF ENCYCLOPEDIAS'

I remember my mother and father buying me two sets of encyclopedias. My mother, very early on identified the need for me to be introduced to books – and she made it a habit to ensure that I built a small library of my own from the time I could read and write.

They discussed buying the set of books for some time – and what was truly heartbreaking is that they pulled out their entire life savings of the time to buy it for me. Coming from very middle class backgrounds, and both working in the public sector at the time, neither had the kind of money

that was required to buy encyclopedias. But they did not bat an eyelid when buying it – because they were utterly convinced that my need was far greater than any they had – and nothing was going to compromise my future.

On countless occasions my mother has gone without food – did not buy the sari she so wanted to have and wore her shoes until she could wear them no more. All this she did silently, reverently, with no hesitation whatsoever. It was a simple choice – my future over her comfort. I came first at all times.

The word sacrifice is very different to ‘sharing’ or ‘giving.’ It is a word that to me, describes the ultimate point of reference of love and commitment. If you are willing to sacrifice whatever you hold important towards the comfort, joy or wellbeing of another – this becomes the ultimate gesture of love. It is also, in my opinion a quintessential aspect of leadership.

All the great religious leaders advocated ‘servant leadership’ – and it is sad that we hold in higher esteem leaders who go completely contrary to this tradition. If a leader is willing to sacrifice his creature comforts to ensure that his team is taken care of, then, and only then does a good leader transcend to being great!

‘NOW, BE GOOD OKAY? – NO FIGHTING’

I used to be notoriously naughty, and as all boys, have got into countless ‘fisticuffs’ growing up.

'Now, be good okay – no fighting' is a phrase I have heard so many times over that I had grown immune to it. But recently when I would leave baby with her cousins I would utter the exact same words, and I wondered – was she getting immune to it too – and completely disregarding me?

The need to 'keep the peace' and 'get along' is something we try and teach our children from a very early stage. We instinctively want them to be good, gentle and kind. Loving, tolerant and fair. We want them to embrace a gentlemanly or lady-like countenance and uphold decorum.

We lay the foundation for behaviour at a very early stage. With siblings first – then with cousins – then at school – then in wider society. We give constant feedback to our kids about 'right' and 'wrong' behaviour. We correct them – not on a weekly or monthly basis, but as and when we see how they behave. This constant 'pressure' as well as positive reinforcement allows a child to assimilate the behaviour that society deems correct.

Sadly we don't seem to do the same when we are managers. We allow in fact, at times blatantly disregard, incorrect behaviour of our team members. We do not tell them they are late, we don't tell them to be more co-operative, we don't tell them to pay more attention to detail: all because we are either too unconcerned, or because we do not want to have an 'unpleasant conversation.' This disregard and non-committal attitude offers our team

members justification of their behaviour (as they think it is okay) and also for those outside the periphery who see it to alter our leadership attributes: both of which are hugely detrimental to us, and our team. Ensuring we teach our team appropriate behaviour, whilst demanding results is one of the most important roles we play as a leader.

We do not teach our kids to be ‘pushovers’ – rather we teach them to be ‘bigger than that’ – not to tolerate for the sake of tolerating, irrespective of how others may act. A noble and devoutly ethical standpoint which grooms us to embrace the inequities of the world with a temperament that allows us to remain strong, remain positive and remain true to ourselves. This strength of character is what defines us in our adulthood. Similarly, groomed to be ‘right’ irrespective of the ‘wrongs’ of others is something that we need to teach our team members, both through advice as well as by the virtue of example. Well learnt, this becomes one of the biggest lessons in leadership they carry forward, and which they will practice when they eventually become leaders themselves.

‘HONEY – BABY IS NOT STUDYING – I AM SCARED THAT SHE WILL FAIL HER EXAMS’

I remember my daughter having difficulty (as much as I did) in getting the theorems of math. Additions and subtractions are easily grasped by many—but for my daughter, as much as it was for me when I was a young

student, it did not come easy. My wife was worried – and once baby had gone to sleep, she poured her heart out about her worries that baby was not ‘catching up.’ She wanted help and she turned to me for strength. I was not the best at Math but I was confident I could manage grade 2 math. So began nearly eight weeks of concerted effort to teach my daughter the basics of addition and subtraction. We started with making it fun through marbles and sticks – then we moved to doing it through numbers. After a week or so of working with her every day we made headway. She was beaming when she got it right and knowing that she was making progress, tried harder. She came out with over 85 marks (a remarkable improvement from the under 70 she got earlier on.) Now that she has got the hang of things, she drives herself, and studies by herself with a little supervision; she has now got the confidence to know she can, rather than convincing herself that it was impossible.

Most parents play an active role in a child’s development – both in their studies and their extracurricular activities. We sit with our kids, look over their homework, teach them the best way we know, send them for extra classes, and reward them when they do well – all with the singular aim of ensuring that their future is better than ours. It is not the money we throw into it that brings results but the time, effort and focus we offer, and willingness to ensure we sit with them through the entire process.

I cannot help but wonder about the parallel to training and development within organizations. Many times we make the responsibility of 'training' to be that of the HR Department or a hired soft skills trainer like myself. This is the same as sending a kid for tuition if they are weak in a subject. True, it can help, but it can never substitute the focus and attention a parent pays to his or her child's development and a manager can never pass on the entire responsibility to a HR Department or a trainer. No matter how much of training an individual receives, if the manager does not take an interest in the new learning, encourage the team member to use it, and at times, even test it for themselves, team members never truly focuses on her studies. Yes, there are exceptions, and there are enough kids who will study by themselves, irrespective of whether their parents show an interest or not but the vast majority needs coaching, encouragement and guidance of parents, along with the tutoring from a teacher.

We also show children what we deem important by the things we focus on. If we focus on their studies, then we show them that it is important, if we show interest in their sports, then we show them that sports are important and so on. No different in leadership where we show our team members what is important by focusing on elements within the business. Some of us focus on delivering results, some of us on the effort they put in, some of us in behaviour, but it is a few who put equal emphasis on all elements

of organisational life. Just as much as a child becomes an all-rounder and a well moulded individual through the continuous efforts of parents, what we become as employees can largely be contributed to what our leaders pay attention to, and focus on.

'AMMI, APPACHCHI, THIS IS ROWENA – MY GIRLFRIEND'

It was with pride that I brought her home. Dressed in a sari, Rowena looked stunning – and I sat her down next to me and introduced her to my parents.

"Ammi, Appachchi, this is Rowena – my girlfriend".

After brief pleasantries, my mother went to make her a cup of tea. They talked about a lot of things, just chatted: no probing questions, no awkwardness. There was a sense of acceptance almost immediately.

After she had lunch she left, and after dropping her home I came back, opening the door with 'well...?'

My parents smiled: 'so what?'

'So what do you think?'

"That doesn't really matter does it? What matters more is what YOU think. We know you will hound us over this – so, yes, we do like her very much, and you both seem so happy together. That is what matters most of all."

There were no questions about her parents, what she does (no need to ask as they knew she worked with

me) what plans we had made or anything like that. They were happy for me, and knowing full well that it was a personal decision, they supported me completely. This was a huge thing – as a nod of approval was important to me emotionally (though I would have done what I wanted either way.)

I remember my father and I having a beer at the Lion's pub a few days later. We chatted, about women, marriage, little lessons in life, my childhood, my aspirations. Just the two of us – man to man. It meant a lot for me to be thus recognized – as a man – not as a child. I will always respect my father and I will always be a little fearful of him too – but this day marked a new chapter in our relationship. My father doesn't talk much – but whenever I am in an absolute crisis I instinctively go to him – and his mere presence offers me solace. My mother gives me love, and intellectual conversation – my father offers me total confidence. He has a certain way of ensuring that I believe in myself, not by words, or advice, but by merely being there.

We as managers too need to understand that our 'juniors' will not always be juniors. They too will grow up, learn new skills, and sometimes, become better than us. Just as a parent 'lets go' of authority and 'hold' on the children as they grow up, we need to 'let go' of our 'juniors' as they grow up within the organization. The issue is that we generally tend to be either completely dictatorial, or completely liberal with our team members irrespective of

their growth and maturity curve. Just as much as we 'let go' little by little, based on their age and how fast they mature, the same principle must be adopted in leadership where we need to gauge our team members for their relative levels of competency and maturity to do the job. Each will be different - the important thing is to let go when they are ready, rather than become like an overprotecting parent. There is little point in treating a 25 year old son as a 5 year old, taking you by the hand in everything – neither is it pertinent to 'spoon feed' a young, talented executive when he has shown clear capability.

The final test of leadership is to acknowledge that some of our team members will outgrow our capacity to lead them. They are so good that they have obviously a bigger need of better mentoring and coaching that will allow them to become exceptional. We need to identify such talent and humble ourselves into ensuring they leave us, and pursue their future. Many a time young executives get stunted because they already have a manager on top of them, and we, like selfish parents (who do not want to let go of their offspring and thereby cripple them for life) give them all kinds of excuses as to what they need to improve on and why they will not 'survive' elsewhere. All we do is stunt brilliance and their futures. Like a wise parent would tell their kids to go and roam free, and soar high (even though they came from very humble backgrounds) so too should we as leaders let go of our stellar juniors

to become better (in all aspects) than we are. This to me is the ultimate testimony to a great leader – and a great parent.

'DO YOU KNOW WHETHER IT IS A GIRL OR A BOY?'

When I told my parents that my wife was pregnant for the second time, they asked me the same question they asked the first time “do you want a boy or a girl?”

Not to sound sexist, I have always wanted a son – and I, without having to be diplomatic with those closest to me, said almost instantly “What do you think – a boy!”

My mother showed righteous indignation. Always the politically correct she mused ‘all that matters is that the baby is healthy.’ My father putting down the newspaper quipped “I want a grandson!”

My mother quickly silenced my father – and instinctively looked at my wife. “I want a son too” she said.

My daughter, as I am sure all grandchildren are, loves to spend time with my parents and my wife’s parents. Both who are away from Colombo, dote on them, and she is free as a lark whenever she goes to them. I was no different. I used to love spending time in Deraniyagala with my grandparents from my father’s side, and in Colombo with my mother’s mother. They taught me different things – but above all, I did not have to conform to the draconian (from my perspective – not my parents – who considered themselves liberal) laws imposed by my parents.

Now, I always pick a fight with my parents “why aren’t you finding fault with her the way you found fault with me?”

My parents smile ‘that’s being a grandparent, baby – that’s the way it is.’

Grandparents make up a huge part of a child’s emotional development. Not having direct responsibility, they are freer to love, overlook mistakes, ignore bad behaviour and spoil you rotten. The combination of parents and grandparents is a potent one: one that allows a child to focus on things that matter during term time, and go hay wire in the grandparents’ love and tolerance during holidays – a combination that can never be replicated with anyone else.

It is sad that we do not have ‘grandparents’ at work – who can tell us a few important stories, share experiences, show the way, without being ‘responsible.’ I have often wondered whether the ‘older’ generation should take on this role for the new comers – being the ones to teach without imposition and direct responsibility.

Imagine your parent’s attributes in our bosses – and our grandparents’ approach through a board of directors or senior team (who are parents to their immediate managers but grandparents to the more junior ones.) I know, it may sound way too simple and even hopelessly un-management like – but I honestly think we will be better for it.

FIVE STAGES IN A CAREER

The five stages of Life and the five stages of our career

We all, no matter who we are, go through five stages of life (unless you are unfortunate to die prematurely.) None of us know when death will hit us – but we all assume we will live up to old age before we are finally taken to the other world. If we understand that we all have a limited time on the planet, and if we are conscious of it, we do make a concerted effort to live certain stages of it in some form of order and structure. Each of us have a version of life and living we aspire to and believe in, but no matter how we want to spend our time here on earth time the great leveller, makes us all do certain things at certain times. No different at work.

CHILDHOOD AND DEPENDENCE

Childhood is one of complete dependence. We need our parent's protection the most, and we all, for the first three years or so, are completely dependent on them for all of our needs, as well as for our protection. None can survive the first few years without some form of parental protection.

Childhood is also a time characterized by being completely carefree. Everything is taken care of for us, and though, even as a child, there are simple expectations to be met, these are nothing compared to the responsibilities we will take on later in life. Childhood is there to be protected, given basics of life, and be hand-held through almost everything a person will do later in life by themselves.

If we are to go by the theories of psychology, nearly 60% of a child's personality is developed by the time he or she is five, a further 30% by the time they are 12 or so, and only 10% throughout the rest of their life. Scary! Whatever the exact number may be, it is a proven fact that much of a person's personal characteristics are built when they are relatively young, and as such, parents must take on the duty to ensure they are instilled with the right values and the attributes that will help their children up the ladder of success, and be decent human beings.

I believe the same is true of our career – when we first start our careers either at 18 straight after school, or a few years later after graduation, we truly depend on our first boss, and the organization. We know little or nothing of the corporate life, and rely on the organization and our superior to show us the way, teach us the ropes and, more than anything else show us how to be the managers we ought to be in the future.

Take a look at most of us as superiors and you will see in them a bit of the characteristics of the first boss we had.

Instinctively, we learn from them, and assimilate behaviour and as such, those of us who become managers, leaders and colleagues in organisational teams or endeavours are largely because of those who guided and moulded us in the formative years of our careers. It is because of this reason that we should think far more strategically about the first few years of a young management trainee's or executive's life than we callously do not take into account.

AS ORGANIZATIONS:

- › The induction that we offer an employee is very similar to a child being told how to use the potty, how to eat without spilling or how to tell the first few words. Induction programs are usually considered 'presentations' or 'events' or at best 'a series of presentations' rather than a process by which we show young persons what lies ahead of them. Sadly, unlike a child, many new recruits do not really want to listen either, but if you have spoken to young graduates who join as management trainees, you are bound to see a wonder and an excitement in them that you would see in a child. This excitement we usually kill within a few days just as much as we tend to become 'more serious' when we grow up, but a few fortunate ones retain a certain sense of that childhood spirit within them, making them far more easy to live with and love, and also far more interesting and lively as individuals.

They also usually become more creative, and far less jaded in how they view life. Similarly we need to ensure that new recruits are not completely warped by what they see and experience, because once that certain something is destroyed, employees become very warped later on in their careers. Those who really pay the price are the ones who have to work for them. If you had a boss who felt that work was fun and that he had a really good time in his normative years, he is more likely to ensure you have a experiences, he is sure to tell you something like 'the world is not fair, learn to deal with it' – which is indeed the truth, but certainly not motivating or inspiring.

The induction program MUST be a process, and it is important to ensure that the inductees truly are taught the basics. Many organizations merely 'throw them in the deep end' and as you would expect many die prematurely. Giving lessons in swimming before you are thrown into the deep end somehow makes more sense to me.

- Confirmation must be offered to new employees, especially to those who are starting out in their careers, more on whether they live the values and are willing to learn rather than whether they perform. Six months is just not enough to assess whether a fresh graduate can perform the task, but it is certainly enough time to assess the attitude and willingness to learn. If they have the wrong attitude, and are not willing to learn,

no matter how good a job they may do early on, they will become a huge road block later on in their careers, as they have not grasped the basics of the organization or its values, which they will then spread to their teams.

- The most amount of training and development should be done in the normative years, rather than later. Just as much as a child's personality is made when he/she is 5, but manifests itself much later on, a young manager's personality is built within the first few years of his/her career. As much, management trainees must be invested with all the resources you can possibly throw at them during the first two years of their careers, rather than when they become managers – because by that time unlearning the bad habits or behaviour they would have assimilated and accumulated early on is a far more difficult task than what people believe in. Try and see how difficult it is to inculcate things like leadership, people skills, communication skills etc. through training for mid-level managers, and ask yourself why that is and you will understand the importance of the first few years of a new employee's career.
- If you are to bring in an employee into the middle tiers of the organization, look closely at details about the organizations they have served, and their previous bosses, it will tell you most of what you would want to know about their behaviour within your organization.

- › Just as much as induction and training, remember that most of us learn by observation and leadership. As such, ensuring you have the right 'boss' is probably more important than anything else for a new recruit. Especially for Management Trainees (with a definitive plan for future promotion) it is absolutely essential that they are given role models to learn from or they will show all the wrong behaviour that you do not want to see in them. It is, more often than not, the 'mentors' fault than the management trainees.

AS INDIVIDUALS:

- › As much as the organization, we too must make the effort to ensure that our 'childhood' in our organization is pleasant and all it should be. There ARE difficult kids as there are difficult employees, but most are generally average, and willing to listen. We MUST be prepared to learn, rather than being a pompous know-it-all no matter how qualified we may be. We need to humble ourselves in knowing that as much as we may have ideas and knowledge, we do NOT know anything in practice when we turn up to work for the first time. It is wise and indeed sensible, to seek out a person who can teach you all they know either your own superior or simply a colleague who has been there before you. Commit yourself to go within the organization and have the

curiosity and eagerness of a child. Learn and assimilate, as much as you can in the shortest possible time, it will make all the difference later on in your career.

- Don't criticize everything. Most young Management Trainees and Executives make the horrible mistake of criticizing everything they see around them – most of the time with no malice attached to it but irrespective of the reason why – don't criticize – period. It sends out all the wrong signals about to you to your superiors.
- Learn to adapt. As much as we adapt as young toddlers to our parents and our surroundings, learn to get used to working in the organization rather than looking for the ideal situation. If you actually look at devoid yourself of emotion and you will see a ton of faults in your parents, your living conditions and your surroundings. But just as you adjust to a bad smell or an abusive parent (though always ensuring you will do everything to make it better) get used to the imperfections of the organization, but make a commitment to make it better eventually.

TEENS AND EXPERIMENTATION

Our teens and late teens are characterized by the physical changes that take place in them. We boys start having a stubble and start shaving for the first time, our sisters attain puberty and are treated more as

'women' rather than just girls, and the whole phase is that of confusion as well as experimentation. One need not elaborate on the various forms of experimentation we subject ourselves to – let it be enough to say that many of us would have done at least one thing that our parents would have been taken aback by (if they knew!) We also start pushing the boundaries of the level of freedom we are given. This is why we have the most amount of arguments and disagreements with our parents as teens rather than in any other stage. We WANT to be an adult, even though our parents know full well that 'you are not ready' but explaining this is not always easy. We usually become very vociferous, demanding and argumentative and see our parents as the big, ugly, vile 'monster' that is keeping us from having the happiness that we have all the right to have. Some take this rebellion a little too far and run away from home or worse still, take to drugs or horribly bad behaviour that lands them in jail.

Just as in life, we have our teens in our careers too. Usually about 5 years in, we form strong opinions, get our first (if you are a stellar performer a few) promotion, and we start experimenting with our ideas, as well as start demanding for more and more authority. Just like in life, this stage of our career is characterized with the paranoia that our bosses are 'out to get us' and they are jealous of you and are looking at giving you a hard time (true in some cases – but in most cases, they actually mean well.)

Some get so frustrated that they prematurely exit the organization and worse still some actually become such restless employees that they find it impossible to work in any organization for more than a few years.

It is also the time we develop our 'cliques' and start building a set of colleagues we 'hang out' with. Just like friends, colleagues can either help you become better than what you are, or bring you down to their levels of competence, even incompetence, and as such, choosing your colleagues, as much as your friends will make a huge difference in your career.

AS ORGANIZATIONS:

- › As much as we as parents tolerate a rebellious teen, learn to develop patience towards the employee who is just attaining puberty. Most don't mean bad and most grow out of it eventually and become very settled. Give them the chance to voice their ideas, and be patient.
- › As much as we are patient, we will never tolerate nonsense from our kids, no matter what hormonal craziness is taking place in their bodies. We will not let them go beyond a certain point of acceptance, and will not hesitate to 'put them in their place' when required. Given too much freedom, most young teens run the risk of being led astray and if too much disciplining is done you may alienate yourself. It's a

fine line. At work, never think twice about tolerating nonsense. If you tolerate it, you will send a clear signal to all others that you see it as ok. Don't. But don't overdo the discipline factor too.

- Start introducing the young executive to a wider field. Offer them assignments under the tutelage of a mentor, get them to work cross functionally and overall, get them to feel that they are being taken seriously. Most teenagers hate to be treated like a child and most executives hate to be treated like an inferior being.
- Keep a watchful eye – increase the level of supervision without making it obvious. It is easy for a young executive who is going through this phase not to see too clearly or think too far ahead. Instant gratification becomes a norm and many will join an organization for very short term benefits – as much as we fall in love (or so we think but our parents know it's just an infatuation) with a girl whom we may now not even consider a friend.
- Guide their decisions, and at times, allow them to make mistakes rather than shield them from it. If you start trying to shield them you will become no better than an overprotective parent. Let them make the mistake, then take them through the learning. NEVER try to tell them 'I told you so'.

AS INDIVIDUALS:

- › Understand that your superiors, just like your parents, have gone through this phase before you. It may not seem possible, but they too had the same process as you do and it is only after passing such phases that they have come to where they are now. It is indeed prudent not to make the same mistakes they did. So, listening a little bit may actually serve you well.
- › Don't be naïve to think that everyone who agrees with you and tell you that you are right actually has your best interest at heart. As much as friends will happily tell you that your parents are 'crazy' and make you an alcoholic later on in life, colleagues may happily get you to defect, only to serve self-interests rather than your best interests. A little bit of experience will tell you that it takes more courage and love to disagree than to agree.
- › Develop a keen understanding of the changes you are going through – it is the key to your transcending it. If you don't quite get a grip of yourself, you will find yourself becoming some you never wanted to be within an organization – a loose cannon!

YOUTH AND TAKING THE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS INDEPENDENCE

Youth is probably the time you feel most alive. With the fiery rebellion of teens behind you, you are aware

of who you really are, and also about what you want to accomplish. Most of us have rather clear indications about our future by the time we turn 21 or so – we may not know this completely but we certainly have clear indications of what we think we want of life.

It is also the time when we start making definitive plans for ourselves as a complete person. We are offered the freedom, both by law and by our parents to go about making decisions of importance and most of us will find our respective partners during this stage in our lives. We would also, in all probability, get married and have children during this stage.

The prime of youth is a wonderful thing. We are physically at our very best. We are usually not worried about anything and supremely confident at this stage too. It is also the time when we start our careers, start buying our first car and house. All told, it is probably the best times of our lives.

Guided well, and if we are sensible, youth becomes the highlight of our lives and one of the times we will talk about the most.

At work, youth is when we first become Managers. This is the first time we feel we are 'somebody' within the organization, and given the liberty to make decisions of importance. The first-time manager is a beautiful time, you get a decent raise, you get a company- maintained car or a vehicle allowance (on most occasions) you are given a few privileges and you are in the prime of your life too.

More often than not, your personal youth and your professional youth fall into the same age bracket which makes it even more potent.

AS ORGANIZATIONS:

- If you have had the individual throughout his career, this becomes a great opportunity to fulfill an individual's ego needs. It also becomes a great time to showcase true performers within the organization and make role models of them allowing the organization to prove to the rest of the staff that they have a potential "gem" with a great career ahead of him/her.
- It is a time when there must be a definitive focus to introduce them to strong role models as well. Each manager needs a person they aspire to be in the future and they must be offered such role models – even if they are not the person they report to.
- Performance must become the biggest factor at this point in time. Having a team for the first time, as well as having the most junior levels reporting through to them, there must be a definitive focus to ensure they live the values as well.
- It is a time to let go to a large extent. Don't make the mistake of treating them like management trainees (because if you are promoted from within, you tend to see them in the light of who they were when they

joined, rather than the person they have grown to be) which can be the biggest put-off for them.

- It is important that you allow the opportunities that young managers crave for. It is important that they feed their ego without being silly about it. If a young manager is not offered the time to settle in and take pride in his accomplishment, it becomes an emotional void and their egos are never satisfied. They need to be guided through this phase without being hand held, with maturity and confidence. It is those who never quite grow up from this phase that become managers who tend to believe that the world revolves around them, and that the business cannot do without them, it's all YOU nothing more – and such managers never become anything more than what they are now.

AS INDIVIDUALS:

- Enjoy being a manager – do not get overwhelmed by it. It is a lovely feeling to know you have arrived and that all the hard work you diligently put in has been recognized by the Management and that from this day forth you too become a part of the machinery that steers the organization.
- Don't gloat. Put it behind you fast. Remember, you are a manager AND a leader and you are demanded to perform. Pat yourself on the back, but never sit back

and think of yourself as a star. Having an underdog mentality is always more beneficial than that of a star. Make sure your success does not become your greatest failure.

- Learn to focus on the team. From now on, it will never be your ability that matters but that of your team. You can manage your individual task well, which is probably why you got promoted (very few get promoted because of true leadership qualities displayed as a young executive) but it will mean nothing as a manager. You can never do all the work your team does and if you think of yourself as more important than your team, it is only a matter of time until you fail. Focus on the team – if they succeed, so do you – almost automatically.
- The most important lesson to learn is that though you have ‘arrived’ you yet have much to learn, and that in all probability, those who join your team as Management Trainees and Executives are brighter, smarter and more qualified than you. Ensuring you commit to continuous learning and ensuring you upgrade yourself all the time is the only way you will become someone they look up to. If you lose this respect, your management journey will be marred by difficulties and poor performance, as well as constant people-related issues.

- › Learn to expect less and less from the organization. You are a manager now and you are expected to be the one who steers, so you can never make the excuse 'I didn't know.' It is your business to know, and if you don't ask, you are on your own now – align yourself to the overall Vision and start working towards it, and steering your entire team towards it. There is little need for instruction. You must develop almost a sixth sense of what the business needs from you, and then just get on with it. Yes, it also means putting your neck on the line (and ever so often getting a chopper across it).

MIDDLE AGE AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Middle age offers an amazing maturity to a person. Having been through the roller-coaster ride of teenage and youth, most in their middle ages 'settle down.' The bachelor becomes a father; the independent single woman becomes a mother. We, both because of our experiences and our age, become far more conscious of interdependence and will become less prone to confrontation, and more focused on conciliatory overtures. We start to talk less, think more: to act less, and analyze more before we take a decision, to not jump into a fight or argument, but as much as possible avoid it.

As a young man, I have often thought of middle age as taking away the edge – and becoming 'safe' and I used

to be instinctively dissatisfied with the safe approach. Youth sees the middle aged as 'not having what it takes' to take a call and stand by it, in the simplest of terms – a coward. As a young manager, we certainly saw most of our superiors as scared – scared to commit – scared to take a stand – and we felt sure we will never get there when we get older. The reality is that most of us will naturally become the very people we never wanted to become.

The thing is that when we hit middle age, we have a lot more responsibility than we ever had before. We are married, and have growing-up children. We recklessly took loans and 'lived it up' during our youth, and now we are saddled with the financial burdens of such. Loans need to be paid back and the expenses of the children, their education and their needs mount. Having not quite worried about the health factor, most of us have some form of ailment and this too saps our finances. Our bodies never quite respond the same way. We become very much aware of the longer term, than the short term orientation of youth. All this makes us think much more before we act something that takes over us instinctively, and from our life, we bring this learning to work.

At work, the middle-aged manager or general manager should become intimately aware that he no longer is the rebel, but have slowly become the bastion of a previous generation. When we move into General Management we understand fully well that our departmental success

is interdependent on many other departments as well as external parties, and as such, all that needs to be brought into the equation at some point. Having a narrow and blinkered approach and trying to build a personal serfdom built around your ego is not going to do you or the organization any favours.

AS ORGANIZATIONS:

- You must become acutely aware of what your managers are becoming, and ensure that they are still relevant, focussed and organizational-centric. It is very easy for middle management who have spent considerable time within the organization to become counter-productive, and get immune to the issues within the business. This is dangerous, as they become change-resistant and stop the forward motion of the organization.
- At the same time, remember that such people, between them, probably have the bulk of the composite knowledge of your business – and as such will hold much power and influence. The key is to ensure that the General Management Positions are removed from operational activity and become much more involved in the strategic alignment of the business. Most of the time, having done operations for so long, General Management tends to impose on the functional managers how ‘they used to do it’

which is one of the biggest reasons why innovation and creativity is stunted.

- › For the second time of an individual's career, the organization must truly invest in development, as General Management is distinctively different from operational management. General Managers are true General Managers and not Managers who have a General Manager title, they truly become impediments to the organization, and generally manage nothing except their own little kingdoms and egos. Organizations must consciously focus on this factor and offer the kind of training and coaching that allows a good functional manager to let go of the kingdom they have built, work better cross-functionally and above all, start identifying and grooming successors.

AS INDIVIDUALS:

- › Be utterly conscious of where you are heading. NEVER become too emotionally attached to your title, your corner office or the overtures of others – many in the other tiers WILL suck up to you and if they do, then it is a clear indication that you really have lost the plot.
- › Commit to honing and perfecting your skills, and above all, becoming more removed from every day operations. You have an entire structure to support

you give them the knowledge and wisdom required to do it. Remember you are NOT the functional boss anymore, let him do that job. Also, remember to define your job distinctively. Most General Managers in actual fact manage nothing except build a little kingdom for themselves – never fall into this trap. Look at your section as an heirloom that you are keeping for your son or daughter, it is not yours, you are only keeping it safe until they come of age and you pass it on to them.

- Start focusing on the next generation of leaders. Get to know them, and know them well. Try and ensure you understand the next generation, and talk their language. There is little point in trying to compare them to you and your generation and concluding that they have 'lost it' – they WILL take over your spot at some time, so, for the sake of the organization, you need to understand them and work around their idiosyncrasies.
- Elevate yourself from being egocentric to being organization-centric, if you do not make this transition, your final years become a truly horrible period, rather than being one of the best in your career.

OLD AGE AND DEPENDENCE ONCE AGAIN

Old age can be viewed either as 'a really sad time when you really have nothing to look forward to except

death' or 'the next youth – where devoid of everyday responsibilities, you can get to do the things you always wanted to and did not get the chance to'. The choice is ours. Based on this choice you have two types of old people. The first are crotchety and truly depressing, to themselves and to others. They complain about everything especially about 'the people we have today' and constantly criticize with passion. They do very little except stay at home and watch TV and even in watching TV, they criticize that they 'don't make programs like they used to'. You have one of these at home, you truly become miserable yourself. Then there is the polar opposite. The old folks who take exercise each day, go someplace interesting, take on an engaging hobby, and 'chill': they are truly wonderful to be with, and loads of fun to learn from. Having lived an eventful life, they have tons of stories to tell, and they have all the time in the world to devote to you. If you have one of these at home, then you truly are blessed.

Old age at work is no different. Everyone knows you only have a few years more for retirement, and tend to pay less attention to you. You can either decide to curl up and die or you can decide to make this the most fruitful and rewarding time of your career.

AS ORGANIZATIONS:

- › Make use of the knowledge and wisdom of the 'senior citizens.' Sadly many organizations do not do this, and

consciously ignore the opportunity for the seniors to share their knowledge, experience and learning with the next generation of leaders.

- Coach them for retirement. Retirement can be quite daunting. Having worked arduously for nearly 35 years, to have nothing to do can be quite a difficult thing to contend with, and rather than focussing on how they can be productive, it can be common for many of this age to worry endlessly about what they will do next.
- Offer coaching and mentoring assignments. Being with young people tends to liven up others. If the Management Trainees and young executives are coached and mentored by the most senior members of the organization, it will work much better than them being coached by their immediate managers who may honestly not have the time nor the maturity to do a good enough job.

AS INDIVIDUALS:

- Learn to let go. Your time is done so go away gracefully. Don't try to be anyone special, just understand that your time is over and that it is now someone else's.
- Do not dull your mind. Actively seek the next generation, proactively engage in their development and grooming. In developing others,

especially those who are much younger than you, you will develop yourself.

- Try not to make comparisons between yourself and the others who are next in line. They are different – true, but that does not mean they are less competent or effective. If they are, then you have only yourself to blame, because you have not groomed them well enough to fill your shoes.
- If you can retire, and no one calls you for anything except to say hello and check up on you, then you have done a sterling job.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

A few lessons learnt in learning to play the Violin

My 'ammi' was quite keen I learnt to play an instrument.

My '*appachchi*' was a self-taught musician of considerable talent and could play almost all the eastern instruments, purely by ear. The tabla, the various forms of traditional drums, the violin, the harmonium, the flute and an assortment of other instruments still adorn my '*appachchi's*' room. My '*ammi*' loved music, and I am sure my '*appachchi*' being able to play a myriad of instruments, had something to do with them getting together (along with his impeccable looks I am sure!) Wanting her son to emulate the illustrious father, she convinced me that I should play the violin (why the violin out of all instruments I really did not know!)

So, there I was, all of seven years old, going to Mrs. Audrey De Souza for violin lessons, with my mother fantasizing that I will one day play alongside the prodigal Ananda Daabare!

BUT WHY DON'T YOU LIKE IT?

The first few lessons were alright. But coming home and practicing scales over and over again on four strings is not

what I had in mind when I joined in to play an instrument. After about six lessons, I told my mother that this was not going to work out. I was not enjoying it. It was a drudgery. No matter how much I practiced Mrs. Souza (whom I was petrified of!) would not give me anything except scales to play. So, on and on I played scales, making all the dogs around the house howl in protest, adding to my insults!

I wanted to quit – and my mother wailed – but WHY don't you like it. I did not want to break her heart, so I just let it go, and agreed to stick it through for a few more lessons. My mother smiled. Yes, the next Ananda Daabare!

Most of us take on a job for the sake of taking on a job. Is it any wonder why we want someone else to actually motivate us? In a very short period of time, everything about the business becomes a 'pain', and especially that awful boss who keeps demanding more and more from you. Why does he do that? Doesn't he get it that this job really sucks? Why should he care about anything, he has a car and everything – what does HE care?

The truth of the matter is that we have only ourselves to blame if we take a job that does not inspire us. Just as much as I hated going for violin classes, many hate the jobs they are in but either because they are too scared to make a shift, or because they want to keep someone else happy (like I wanted to keep my mother happy) they stick on and become a problem for everyone else, and actually start developing 'organisational stress' (for

which they are later sent to training programs with the hope that the trainer can actually help them get over their stress!)

Quite in contrast to me, there was Professor JB Dissanayaka's daughter Madhu. She not only had the talent for it, but she actually LOVED it. Unlike me, she never complained and actually looked forward to her classes, and practiced WILLINGLY, yearning to get better and better at her craft.

So, the moral of the story – if you don't like your job, quit. Don't blame it all on something else and call it stress afterwards!

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, AND PRACTICE.

Mrs. De Souza was a perfectionist. A small note out of place and she would give me a scowl – and oh boy – if looks could kill I would have been cinders! I called it her 'Medusa look.' She ordered my parents to ensure I practice at least 45 minutes a day – EVERY DAY! My parents, being the good souls they were, made sure I did, much to my utter annoyance. Stress began to build.

Most of those who are passionate about their jobs are perfectionists. They demand the same from their subordinates and colleagues. They become a 'pain' for those who thrive on claiming mediocrity is enough. Sadly what everyone else doesn't quite get is that they have a right to demand perfection. Why shouldn't they?

They were some of the best in their respective fields, and you have come to them to be their protégé. The least you can do is to make sure you follow instructions and give it your very best.

Sadly, when we take on something we don't quite fully want to engage in, we never push ourselves to be better. So, we do the bare minimum, and happily claim that it should be enough. Bigger demands on our performance adds to the 'stress.'

WELL DONE DARLING – YOU GOT A DISTINCTION

My mother's constant nagging, and the fear of the 'Medusa look' (and her scathing criticisms, and being called all types of four legged creatures!) made me practice and practice hard. All the hard work resulted in me getting a distinction for my grade 3 exams. They were all jubilant. I remember Aunty Souza telling my mother 'your son has talent, it's just that he never applies himself' (a common criticism that came my way from everyone at the time!) My mother took this as a great indication of what I could become if only I practiced and the dream was still very much alive for me being the next Ananda Daabare. I must admit I too felt very good. I told myself that it was not that bad after all, and that I should actually work hard, and that I may actually get somewhere with it.

Sometimes, when we do apply ourselves (either out of fear, or having been compelled to do so) we can

surprise ourselves about what we can actually achieve. No matter how much we hate something, when a good result come out of it, it is common to feel a surge of motivation. Imagine getting a promotion, or a handsome bonus. No matter what you felt before, you tend to tell yourself – hey – this is not bad after all. All the bad things seem to be forgotten.

Sadly this ‘motivation’ is very short-lived. It never lasts too long. A short time afterwards, the old issues – the fundamental issues resurface, and you feel demoralized.

It is rather important to understand that this momentary ‘motivation’ can never quite make you perform better in the longer term. Unless you really love your job, and get a ‘kick’ out of it, there is very little that can motivate you.

AFTERMATH AND MUSINGS

I dropped out – much to the dismay of my mother. Her dreams of seeing me play at the Philharmonic were dashed. I used to blame my teacher’s ‘attitude’ and ‘teaching method’ for my untimely exit. For a long time I actually thought that it was her fault! This I greatly regret now.

We tend to blame a lot of people and aspects within an organization for our lack of motivation. We blame our bosses, the culture, the lack of budgets, the peers we work with, anyone and everything seems to be a stress factor which never seems to quite go away.

Later in life, I took on basketball. I was never any good at it and in fact played only four times for the entire under-15 season. My grades came down because practices were from 2.30 - 6.30 p.m. and when I came home I was too dead beat to do anything else. My mother did everything possible to keep me out but I would have none of it. I went for practices, played barefoot on the tar coat because my parents could not afford shoes at the rate it was getting wasted, committed to practice my free throws and three pointers like a prayer – and even on Saturday and Sunday, went to play with other like-minded team mates. NO ONE needed to inspire or motivate me, it all came from within. There was no stress, even when I slipped to being the 12th in class. I was happy and even though we never won the tournament (coming second, having being beaten famously by St. Peters) the certificate I got probably is the most cherished one of all.

No matter what we may like to claim, in reality, the only sustained inspiration and motivation comes from within, and we honestly need to take responsibility for our own motivation and not rely on organizations to provide it for us. If we are not getting the 'kick' we want out of the organization we serve, we owe it to ourselves, as well as the organization to quit. If we don't, at least shut up and just get on with the job.

SUCCESS

The Six pack – What it teaches you about Success inside the Corporation

Six finely chiseled abdominal muscles – every man’s dream and most women’s desire in a man (we men like to think!) The ‘six pack’ is the ultimate symbol of masculinity. To gain it, one must probably not have an ounce of fat in your body. I used to have a semblance of one that I used to sport quite vainly playing basketball, and at any given opportunity (though sadly no female quite ogled at it!) Having lost it somewhere in my early twenties thanks to copious amounts of ‘kottu’ and junk food, the ‘six pack’ became my quest (my ‘holy grail.’) But try as I might it still eludes me, though I am less concerned about it now.

Going for a jog at the BRC grounds at six o’clock in the morning, quietly cursing myself for having been so careless with my eating habits, I started wondering about my would be ‘six pack’, and what it teaches me about success itself.

THE DESIRE

Being fit is a desire. Either you have it or you don’t. If you did sports in College, then chances are you will almost

certainly 'have it' in you. It is quite different to actually get sick, and then walk because are compelled to. The desire to have that perfect physique becomes an all-consuming desire. Mentally you are prepared to push your body to its limit and do whatever it takes to claim that ultimate price. More than anything, it is a burning passion to not let anything get in the way of having that elusive boon that ultimate symbol of physical perfection.

Much of whether we become the next 'great' is in having the desire to be just that. The next great. It is a passion that should be burning deep within you and nothing should stop you from achieving the ambition that you have set out for yourself. Those who succeed in corporate life are those with ambition (not to be confused with over ambition, ego and hubris.) Without ambition there is nothing.

GOOD OLD FASHIONED DISCIPLINE

There are many who WANT the six pack, but do not have it in them to be disciplined about two things: eating, and exercise. You see, physique is a result of what you eat, and how much you exercise. You need to be disciplined enough to get out of the gluttony that plagues many of us who simply love our rice and curry, and more often than not, overeat. Our body needs surprisingly little food to actually go about our work; most of us eat more for the pleasure of it, rather than actually needing it. If you want

a six pack, controlling the food intake is critical. What you eat, and how much you eat both matter. Exercise is the second part of the equation. If you are serious about your six pack, you need two types of exercises. Firstly, you need to do enough cardiovascular exercises to actually burn your fat, and then you need to do strength training – and specifically exercises that focus on your mid-section. Most don't actually have in them to get out either first thing in the morning or in the evening after work, daily, to go get the exercise your body needs (even if not for the six pack!)

Discipline is the single biggest reason why a lot of very talented young people never reach the zenith they aspire to reach. Many actually believe, rather naively, that talent alone will enable them to achieve success. If you simply look at all those who have actually risen to the top of their respective fields, you will find that almost all of them have had the basic discipline to be able to steer through the corporate jungle and come out on top.

Discipline takes many forms. In its most basic form, it is the ability to do something repeatedly, with the same level of intensity and accuracy. Unless you have discipline it is almost impossible to convert talent and potential into seasoned competence.

Discipline needs to be built in anyone who wants to achieve anything in life. It is a fundamental building block that we sadly do not pay too much attention to but makes all the difference when you actually come down to it.

THE 'STUBBORN' PATCH

When you start to diligently train, and you start making progress, you actually come to a point where you see great results. Then, there comes a point when you simply don't seem to lose any weight at all, no matter how much you exercise or diet. At this point, you also tend to see that your muscles don't quite build at the rate it was before. I call this the 'stubborn patch.' This can be a very frustrating period and unless you keep at it, this can actually be the point where you give up. The trick is to vary your exercise, change into a regime that is completely different and 'shock' your body into kicking back its metabolism a notch higher, until you actually start the momentum again.

Rather similarly, we sometimes hit this 'crunch' in our careers, and in our leadership roles, where no matter what we do, results don't seem to come as easily as it did before. This is a good time to take a cold hard look at what you have been doing and ask yourself the pointed question whether you too need a 'jolt' and make a change in what you have been doing thus far. Most of us, if not all of us, get used to a regiment, and a basic modus operandi which we diligently follow. We tend to rely on this, because it has given us results before, and we KNOW it works. But, ever so often, this 'practice' does not work anymore, and when the results show that what we are doing is not having impact, just as we would vary our exercise type, we need to

learn to vary our approach to our work too. This may mean a simple variance to what we were used to, or a radical overhaul of our entire approach. This is pretty exacting; one has to try, and discover what will work for you.

COMMITMENT AND DEDICATION

Many of us who lose some considerable weight, start looking good again, and then we get complacent and 'happy.' We stop pushing ourselves just that much more. True enough a six pack is not all there is in life, and many of us who are married make the convenient (yet most of the time honest) excuse of saying that we would rather spend that time with our kids. But then, ask yourself why did you start out to get a six pack in the first place? The truth is losing that one more kilo becomes that much harder, the hundred sit-ups become a hundred and twenty, and that starts taking its toll on our not so youthful bodies and it all starts becoming a little bit too much.

This is where commitment and dedication kicks in, just as it does in work. The hours become a little longer, the duties and responsibilities a little bit more, the demands from the boss that much more demanding, the challenges that much steeper, the risks that much more, and of course the politics much more pointed. Many simply get comfortable and start telling themselves that 'this is enough.' But in reality, it is not. This is usually manifested in a deep sense of jealousy about a colleague who would

have got promoted faster than you just as much as we would feel sorry for ourselves when we see a batch mate of ours who never let go of the regiment we got used to, playing basketball, and still sports a perfect six pack!

Dedication to the cause you started out on and commitment to make sure you do what it takes to achieve it kicks in at this point. Unless you have REALLY changed course, and stop thinking that 'it does not matter anymore', you owe it to yourself to rouse yourself from your own lethargy and get on with it. Without this dedication many star performers never make it beyond the middle management tier.

SACRIFICE

Getting a six pack requires the ultimate sacrifice (for me at least) keeping away from those awesome Cheese Rotis, lip smacking KFCs and almost everything that actually tastes good. Being an absolute lover of food, especially the extra greasy variety, I am heartbroken when I can't really 'dig in.' It is at this point I really question my self – is this really worth it?

That's a question we all need to ask ourselves when we pursue success at work. Each individual will have a different perspective of what 'success' means, but if you are looking for the 'traditional' success of climbing the ladder faster than the average, then, be willing and ready for sacrifice.

One of the biggest sacrifices you have to make is that of your time. Most great organizations demand a lot of your personal time to be sacrificed in order to offer 'that much more' towards the success of the organization, and unless you are willing to commit to it, most organizations will see it as a lack of 'commitment' on your part.

There are many other sacrifices you may have to make. Your 'peace of mind', your personal ethics, your freedom and your sense of balance may all need to be surrendered as a supreme sacrifice towards achieving what you set out to achieve.

Is it all worth it? THAT is a question YOU need to answer!

GENETICS

Something you will grudgingly have to accept is that there are some who are born with the right 'genetics' that allow them to do much less exercise, eat much more (of anything) and still be able to sport a six pack. This certainly is the minority – but they DO exist. They seem to be charmed – they actually CAN eat like a dinosaur, and just do a few sit ups and end with a rather envious six pack. It's in the genes!

Similarly there ARE those who are born into the 'right circles.' That never GUARANTEES success, but it is in fact a rather well known fact that it DOES help – and they actually do not have to work AS hard as you would have to. Many will not like to accept this – but to me, this IS a fact.

There is little point in being envious or crying 'foul', just as much as there is no point wishing my dad was a seven foot Wasuti! What we have to commit to is to try harder and possibly, sacrifice hell of a lot more – IF we are serious about making that quantum leap.

POWDERS, SHAKES AND COUNTLESS PILLS

There seems to be a ton of 'supplements' these days for the hard core fitness freak. From the simple whey proteins to complex hormone tablets, they all promise to get you 'ripped.' Don't forget the newest fad, plastic surgery that can give you the physique you need – provided you have the money! Some work. Others don't. However, if you are a purist like me, you will feel that this is 'cheating.' However, no matter how you get it, if you got it, you got it - though some others will argue!

At work too, there are many ways of 'getting to the top.' You can suck up to the boss, you can play 'dirty' politics, and you can do a lot of little things perfectly articulated in Machiavelli's Prince. Again, the question you need to ask yourself is whether this is all you want. Remember though – like the pills, there will always be side effects!

'LUCK'

And of course, one must never forget a little bit of luck. Sure, call me totally unscientific in all this, but it DOES

help to have the gods on your side. Luck DOES play a part in all things and you never quite know how the dice will roll. Remember, for all the success stories you hear, there are many more of those that you never get to hear – of countless people who really try hard, do all the right things, and STILL never get anywhere. Then, you DO need to sit down and ponder why. If you don't have an answer, just put it down to luck and move on.

The key is not being bitter about trying!

AFTERTHOUGHT

Getting a six pack is not everything in life – neither is becoming the CEO at 30! But, if it is important to you, you need to go for it. But warn yourself that it is NOT going to be easy, and that there are many sacrifices that need to be made.

Many of us want a 'balanced life' – one where we have a decent upper slope in our careers, but also have the ability to do what we enjoy, whilst at the same time playing our part as a partner and a parent. At some point you will need to choose what is MORE important to you. I have yet to meet a person who got it all unless of course they were bequeathed with a ton of money and did not have to work for a living!

SOLVING OTHER'S PROBLEMS

What doctors teach you about your Role in Management in solving other's problems

My visit to Apollo was in extreme pain. My balls (with apologies for the language) pained as if though they had just been squashed by a sledgehammer. I could barely reach for the clutch and this even after popping two Panadols. I hated hospitals. I hated them. No choice, I just could not bear it any more. It had been paining rather slightly on and off, and in my usual machismo manner brushed it off to the cold weather (though why I linked cold weather to pain in my testicles I did not know!) So, here I was, almost cursing myself for not having gone earlier, paying at the counter, and asking for the doctor who was relatively free so that I could go in quickly, get out fast, and go back to work.

SIR, COME IN...

Finally. It had only been five minutes, but it seemed like an hour. I went in to meet a middle-aged gentleman who smiled broadly – almost as if though he knew my ailment without me even having to tell him. This helped. I eased up. I smiled back.

Very different to the last time I went to meet a doctor. I had waited for nearly an hour even though I was given a time of appointment, and when I went in, the doctor did not even look up at me and asked me what my problem was whilst writing furiously on his note pad. I felt instinctively worse – and I really did not want to tell him my problem.

We as managers play the role of the doctor when our subordinates, peers or even superiors come to us with a problem. What we miss, is that the waiting to meet, the first greeting and the manner in which we address the issue is as important as the solution itself – as much as we expect our doctor to see us at the appointed time, and greet us pleasantly when we walk in. We expect our superiors and colleagues to show us the same warmth and courtesy. If we had to wait for hours because the ‘boss’ was at a meeting (even though we were given a time slot) or if they looked too busy to hear us out completely, we instinctively feel that they will not really help us (even though they obviously could).

First lesson to learn: If you want to solve a problem, you need to ensure that the person who brings the problem is made to feel at ease, and that he is prepared to listen to you and help solve the problem.

SIT. WHAT SEEMS TO BE THE PROBLEM?

Doctor De Silva sat me down, and asked me, what seems to be the problem.

I told him as best I could, what I felt. He smiled. Even though I felt that no other person could possibly have had this kind of problem his all-encompassing smile told me that this was just another thing.

After being 'inspected' (much to my embarrassment and dismay) he asked me – 'does it really pain and is it continuous?' I told him it pained like hell and that it was not continuous. He popped a whole heap of other questions – all the while smiling.

It could probably be nothing – but let's see. I started asking him a whole series of questions, and I am sure I was in there for quite a while. He never rushed me, explained the most common causes for it and why he thought it was 'nothing serious.'

The initial 'chat' is almost never the last one. It is the start of a process. However, that initial chat sets the parameters, and unless the doctor is given the full picture, he cannot really help you. Lose out on a simple, yet what may prove to be a vital little fact, and the diagnosis can go horribly wrong. It is essential you tell him the whole story. This is at work too. When we play 'doctor' in solving some organisational issue, we need to establish the facts carefully, and this at times, takes time. You need to be able to patiently sift through what you need to know before jumping to conclusions and decisions. Remember to have a dialogue, never a monologue after hearing what you want to hear.

Similarly, the person who is going in for help or advice needs to understand that it is based on what he or she says that the person trying to help you will react to and base his judgment on. Try giving only half a picture and you will get half an answer. Take nothing for granted. Just because YOU know it, does not mean the person you are talking to does. State everything. Be precise and clear about what you need to tell, and be clear about the facts. Always discern between fact and assumptions.

TAKE THESE TABLETS – DO THESE TESTS AND COME IN A WEEK

Doctor De Silva started telling me what he was going to do. He gave me a few tablets for the pain, and told me to do a few standard tests and come back once the reports were done. He suspected a hernia – nothing more – or simply a sprained muscle in the groin. The tests will let him know if his assumptions were correct. The tablets were for the pain – nothing more.

Some doctors jump into assumptions and prescribe something. Sometimes even a common flue gets treated with a cocktail of drugs. Others carefully pick the root cause after completing a thorough set of tests. Unless the situation was felt to be life threatening, they will not rush to offer medication – because they know that the human body is capable of healing much by itself.

As managers, we too, at times, rush to give 'solutions' before analyzing the root causes and offering the person who comes to us the opportunity to sort it out by themselves. We assume that they came to us for a 'solution' and a 'solution' we give usually based on our experience. This may solve the immediate need but there are two basic problems. Firstly, you may have killed the 'symptom', but the real issue may well be at large, and secondly, the person will never learn to deal with the problem himself. Conducting a simple root cause analysis through a careful line of questioning (why analysis can help) with the person will enable the person to understand how to arrive at the solution so that he or she learns how to actually replicate if required. Simply offering an off-the-shelf solution may well be counter-productive in the long-term.

However, just as much as I expected some pain killers to stop the pain I was finding it unbearable, the person who comes to you for a solution needs a small 'fix' to solve his immediate problem too. A philosophical approach, or a more long-term approach is great – but you MUST help him overcome his immediate issue as well – immediately, and without this, the person will not be able to truly appreciate your long-term solution, because his mind will only focus on the immediate.

Second lesson to learn: Try offering a basic course of action to resolve the immediate issue – but always ensure you understand the root cause, and enable the person

to understand WHY his problem arose in the first place. Guiding the person through the long term perspective after the immediate issue is put to rest, is important.

Of the person seeking advice, remember that he needs to follow instructions and what was agreed upon. Many of us never quite take the tablets given, and stop the course half-way when we feel a little better, and any doctor who has given you antibiotics will tell you that this is of absolutely no use. Similarly, if you seek advice, then you need to follow advice to the letter. Stopping half way, or not doing it as planned will certainly not solve your issue – and then there is little point blaming the person who offered you help.

LET ME REFER YOU TO DR. VARMA

When I went to the doctor after about a week, my pain still persisted. It was still not continuous but the frequency started increasing.

Dr. De Silva looked at the reports, and told me all was clear – and that he felt that the issue was in the testicles itself.

‘You need to go to an urologist’ he told me and referred me to Dr. Varma. He saw the concerned look on my face, and reassured me it was nothing ‘serious.’

‘Go meet him – he is very good’ he waived me goodbye. He told me my files with all his notes and all the reports will go to Dr. Varma.

We will, on many occasions, come across issues that are not in our sphere or specialty, or we are too much a novice in management to solve. Having established your thoughts, your opinions and what you think is the issue it is best to refer the person to someone who has a specialized skill or is more adept than you are. Trying to solve a problem that is beyond your level of competence or authority is absolutely no good. Not only will you frustrate yourself, but you will, more importantly, guide the person who came to you for help down a wrong route, and possibly to a bigger mess than what he is in already.

But when you do refer a person, just like a doctor, please make sure you offer a proper brief, all your thoughts and notes to the person you are referring the individual to – so as to enable the ‘specialist’ to simply pick up from where you left off. Just as much as we hate to repeat ourselves to several doctors, most subordinates would not quite enjoy repeating themselves over and over again to different parties.

Third lesson to learn: if you cannot handle the specific issue, do not let it escalate and seek wiser counsel.

DO THESE TESTS, AND COME AND SEE ME ONCE THE REPORTS ARE DONE – IF THE PAIN PERSISTS, TAKE THESE...

Dr. Varma looked the ‘no nonsense’ type. He looked up at me, with half a smile on his face, but the moment he

started talking, I was convinced the man 'knew his onions.' He exuded confidence. I felt I was in good hands. He 'inspected' me again (more embarrassment!) spoke to me with quiet calm – and told me that it was not a hernia. Having established I had not had sexual intercourse with anyone (apart from my wife) and having had the reports to back it up, he was quite confident it was vericocile or hydrocile. Greek to me. He knew I was completely clueless about what he was talking about.

On note paper, he drew the whole thing out, and explained in quite good detail what it was all about. I was happy. I knew what it most probably was, why it took hold of me, and what I may have to do if that was actually the case.

At some point, after taking a person through the immediate issue, you need to analyse in great detail how the problem evolved to what it has become. You need to display a level of confidence in the person who comes to you for 'expert' advice – and ensure you win the person over as capable of appreciating help, and benefitting from the recommendation made. You should also take the time to explain how you see the problem, show how you arrived at the conclusion and also take the person briefly through the possible alternative scenarios.

Fourth lesson to learn: Take the person through the issue, one step at a time. Explain in detail, how it could have arisen, possible alternatives and the person's role in the solution you offer.

HERE ARE THE OPTIONS...

The tests (which were the most embarrassing as the 'scan' was done by a female doctor who in fact was doctor Varma's wife!) proved Dr. Varma right. It was indeed hydrocile AND vericocile – rather uncommon for a man my age (trust me to get 'awkward' issues!)

I went back to Dr. Varma again, with the reports, and he nodded knowingly.

'Okay. Here are the options. You CAN live with this condition. It is NOT life threatening. Do you have kids?'

"A daughter" I replied with a smile.

'If you don't want any more kids, you can live with this. It can reduce your sperm count – but apart from that, and of course the pain, it is quite okay.'

'I don't know about kids – but I certainly don't want the pain'.

'Then, you need surgery. It is not a difficult procedure and I do not foresee any complications'. He carefully took me through the whole procedure step by step, and informed me of the costs involved.

I hated operations. Never liked them, never will. There were no other options. Either learn to live with the pain, or undergo surgery.

I went out, promising to call back within a week with my decision. I wanted to talk this through with my wife before I took a decision.

It is important you are able to tell the individual who comes to you for advice, all the options available, as well as the positives and negatives related to each option. Ultimately it is the person who needs to take a decision on what to do – not you – and he or she needs to be informed of all repercussions. You can guide the decision but never ‘influence’ it too much then it becomes YOUR solution – not THEIR solution, which makes all the difference in the world.

Ownership of the problem and its solution has to be with one person – otherwise if it goes wrong, you will be blamed.

Also, the way in which a problem is approached is important. A doctor can make the problem seem really bad – or of no account at all. However, it is important that ‘reality’ is stated. Yet, there are those doctors who can make even a cancer seem ‘not so bad’ as much as there are those who can make the common flu look like the biggest disease under the sun. Learn to make the burden light on the person – it is bad enough that the person comes to you for help (because obviously he cannot solve it himself) but to blow it out of proportion is to torment the person unnecessarily. Remember three words – truthful, tactful, and helpful.

Fifth lesson: Offer options. Ensure you explain the options, as well as their relative merits and demerits. Shy away from ‘influencing’ the solution. Be truthful, tactful and helpful.

LET'S PERFORM THE OPERATION

I took the decision to have the op. The pain was too much, and having told myself I was not going to die in the operating theatre, I called the doctor and told him of my decision.

I went in and admitted myself at Apollo. Dr. Varma came in the afternoon, and took my wife and me through the procedure one step at a time. He answered all our questions patiently, and having reassured us that it was going to be fine, he left. He told me half-jokingly that if I was so worried, they could actually record the entire surgery – and to his surprise, I told him to do so! (Now, if I DID die on the table, there was proof of what had gone wrong!)

The operation was over before I knew it – and all I recall of it is freezing inside the ICU and asking the nurse in half-drugged state for an extra blanket.

Once you commit to a solution, see through the implementation of the solution with the person concerned. Never walk away until it is done, and done to completion. As much as a doctor operates with a team, make sure the person who came for help is offered all the choices he can get to resolve his problem, and make sure you guide the person every step of the way.

Sixth lesson: See through the solution. Your role as a manager is not only to help find solutions, but also to

ensure that the solution you arrived at actually resolves the problem the person came to you for. You must be as diagnostic in your approach as a doctor.

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

I stayed in hospital for about three days. Doctor Varma came to see me every day, and checked on me, and gave me and my wife advice on how I should watch over my incision for the next two weeks or so. He gave me pointers on how to have a bath without wetting the wound, how to have protective cotton wool stuffed down my pants, and even how to have sex without putting pressure on the wound (talk about a doctor who cares!) He made sure I was fine – both by word and deed, and never failed to spend time with me to allay fears or doubts.

Your job as a Manager in problem solving does not end just because the person completes the tasks, and resolves the issue. There is a definitive need to ensure that you are there to get feedback on the learning, coach through the lessons learnt and ensure that the person is fine afterwards. Sometimes certain decisions (such as firing a non-performing member of the team) can be emotionally trying, and the Manager needs to ensure that the person who took the call is comforted and emotionally stable.

Seventh lesson: Ensure you get feedback, and guide the person through the learning curve after the problem is solved.

GIVE ME A CALL ANYTIME

When I finally left the hospital, Dr. Varma came to say goodbye. He wanted me to visit after six weeks or so, and told me something I never expected from a doctor – ‘call me anytime’.

Once a person has taken you as a confidant and come to you for advice, you need to be there for the person any time. It is fundamentally important that managers make themselves available to their subordinates, and that they are accessible. Problem-solving is NOT a one-time event, and there can always be other issues that arise from the one decision taken – as much as there can be complications after surgery. If the doctor merely performs surgery, and then is not interested in you (since he has got his money) then we will never trust the doctor again and so it is with a boss.

Final lesson: Be there – always!

A FINAL THOUGHT

Doctors save lives – Managers save organizations and their teams. They both play a fundamentally similar role on problem analysis and solving. As much as the doctor, the patient also has a part to play – it’s a tag team. A good doctor will not be able to cure a stubborn patient who does not listen to his advice; neither can a manager help

a stubborn subordinate who thinks himself beyond the manager. In problem solving a partnership is required. It is in the best interest of both parties to ensure that the solution works, and to this end, both parties must commit themselves.

ART OF MANAGEMENT

What cooking teaches you about the Art of Management

Watching 'Ammi' cook was always a delight – as a child – and even now. I have always loved food, and I have always wanted to cook. Though I can cook, I can never quite 'get it right' – yes it's edible, but I could never seem to get it just right – the flavours, mix of colours and the texture. Something is always missing, even if I follow the instructions to perfection and use exactly the same ingredients. Frustrated and baffled, I wondered if the age old saying that you need to 'have it in you' applied to what seemed to be the simplest of things to do.

The debate has raged from time immemorial as to whether management was an art or a science. I guess it is a bit of both, just like cooking: just that we are taught, over and again in Management Schools that it is indeed a science and success can be replicated. I guess it is right to a point, but what is dangerous about this notion is that we think anyone can do it and do it well just as watching a cookery demonstration convinces us that if we diligently follow the instructions and stick to the ingredients shown, we too can be excellent cooks.

A FEW LESSONS IN HUMILITY:

- › The best recipes have a secret ingredient – and it is usually passed down only to family.

My '*Aththamma*' used to make the most awesome '*hath maaluwa*' (a signature Sabaragamuwa dish involving seven types of vegetables, traditionally cooked only at the New Year or during a very special occasion.) No matter who makes it, it never is quite like hers. To her dying day, she never told anyone her 'secret ingredient' – and when she passed away, she took the signature taste of the dish I used to devour with her to her grave. Pity. But, she DID pass on a few other secrets to her siblings, and thankfully I get to savour her unique taste that much longer thanks to her.

My '*Aththamma*' was not alone. Many a time, I have asked for recipes of dishes I have found irresistible, hoping to recreate it at home, but I have always found that there is a little something missing. It is never quite the same – and no matter how many times you try, you know there is something missing. Don't you just hate it when that happens?

Management I believe is no different. When the so called 'professionals' do research about why organizations are successful, I honestly believe they never get the full picture. No fault of theirs. But just like my '*Aththamma*' would protect her little secrets, most organizations will never be completely forthcoming about why they are so

successful while 'lesser beings' are going bankrupt. After all, why would they want to put it out in the first place - wasn't the idea of capitalism to build wealth for yourself and not for your competitors? I don't think capitalism has yet evolved to being so benevolent or broad-minded to truly look at the triple bottom line or social well-being just yet and until we do, the secrets of the corporations will remain just that – secrets – and shared, if at all, amongst a few selected 'family members.'

This would explain why many organizations who have tried to mimic or copy the emerging concepts from Google or Microsoft or GE or Toyota have failed more than they have succeeded. So, the next time you pick up a management book, or an autobiography of a once great leader of a corporation, don't be foolish to rush headlong into trying everything in it thinking that you will be able to replicate his or her success. Remember the recipe: you can be almost certain there are a few 'secret ingredients' they have happily kept to themselves.

› Learning to cook is easy – to master it takes time

Anyone who has a passion for cooking can pick up a book of recipes and start cooking. With little effort you certainly can become a person who can proudly proclaim 'I can cook.' But, how many of those who can cook, can do it really well with minimal effort, and with anything that is around as ingredients? Most of us will find it very difficult

to improvise to a great extent, and will be lost without a few key ingredients that have worked for us and we rely on. Some of us will also rely on tried and tested utensils, and be crippled without them.

To me, the mark of a great chef is the ability to improvise, cook with anything he lays his hands on, and with any utensil that is around. I have had the good fortune of meeting a few of them – and Kolu (of Sri Lankan fame) comes to mind. What sets Kolu apart for me is his ability to just improvise, rather than being 'lost' without his favourite ingredients or his signature kitchen. He is the sort to find inspiration in anything, and amazingly to whip up something quite unexpected out of the seemingly ordinary.

We as managers are no different. There are a great many managers in a great many organizations, but just like the chefs, are lost without a particular person they works with (or their team, which is why when a manager leaves you have his entire team leaving with him!) the team provides the particular culture or the necessary set of parameters that enables him to perform. To me, what marks a great manager is his or her ability to function under any circumstance, or setting. This adaptability is critical specially in hiring people from outside the organization where we assume that the candidates' past performances will equate to performance within our organization too, which rarely is the case. Just like a great chef, a great manager is actually a rare commodity.

- Some just get it – others need to try infinitely hard, and may well remain mediocre

Some just dive into cooking, and can almost instantly turn out dishes that will astound even the seasoned professional chef. Others will try really hard and get it right. Still others can try all they want and never quite get it right. It is actually wise to understand that there is such a thing as a gift for cooking, and unless you have it, you have to satisfy yourself into being mediocre at best.

I honestly believe that all things in life are such, and that complicated leadership or management development programs can never quite give you the edge as a manager unless you have it in you. If you have it, then all that exposure can mean the world to you and will make a huge difference in who you turn out to be – but without that little something in you, all you do will only make you mediocre at best. What you really need to ask yourself is ‘do I really have it in me?’ and if the answer is no, then don’t kid yourself into being the next Jack Welch!

- Each great cook has a signature style – and a signature meal

No two chefs are quite the same. They may cook exactly the EXACTLY the same dish but invariably it tastes different. Try the hot butter cuttlefish from 88, Chinese Dragon, Flower Drum and the Wok, they will taste so very different to each other, yet it is EXACTLY the same dish.

Trying to imitate never gets anyone anywhere. Once you know the ingredients, a great chef will try to add something of his own to it, making the dish his, and thereby creating a signature all his own.

This is one of the most important lessons in management to learn. It is truly unrealistic to 'copy' or 'imitate' anyone or any organization. Once you know the ingredients that went into their success you need to have the ability to 'put your special twist' to it, make it your own, so that it fits your people and culture. Without this, it is almost certain that the initiative will just be a fad and will fail to take root within the organization. Indian Food in Sri Lanka will not taste exactly the same as having it in India, or the countless Chinese food outlets never quite tasting like a meal in China, and rightly so – because if it did, do you really think 'Chinese' will be so deep-rooted in our country? If you understand the palate of the population and get it right, it will be a roaring success, as much as Chicken Tikka Masala has overtaken fish and chips in England. The next management initiative you undertake has the power to make a lasting impression within your organization, but only if you are able to actually bring it that little twist and make it your own.

- No matter how great you are not everyone likes your food – in fact you can be quite certain there will be a few who downright hate it!

I have been aghast to see some of the places I love to eat out at being ghastly rated by friends and family. My wife can't quite take 'cheese *roti*' from Pilla – my parents never quite understood my salivating over the signature '*Kottu*' at Don's (some time back) and my in-laws do not quite enjoy the buffet at Galle Face Hotel. How can this be? It is great! I would often argue with them, pleading to agree with me that the places I love food at are actually great, but much to my pity, they too stand firm in their convictions! I must admit that I feel a lot better when people don't like my taste or choice in food for I now know that even the greatest chefs have those who don't like their food!

Something to remember in Management is that every 'great' has a detractor. No matter who it is, and what they have done, they all have their critics.

Something we attempt and do in Management is to try and please everyone. There is no such thing. Chances are the more successful you are, the stronger the criticism will be and at times, for no fault of yours, but purely the law of averages teaches you that you are bound to have those who will not agree, it must happen – mathematically. It is IMPOSSIBLE for any manager to have a 100% buy in from everyone within the organization. Every little detail matters

'God is in the detail' is something I have heard as a mantra from my '*ammi*' trying to teach me the finer details of getting a dish right. From the ingredients to where you

got the ingredients from, to whether you ground it the old fashioned way or used the electronic version – whether you cooked on the clay pot or on a non-stick pan – whether you cooked it fast or slow – on high heat or a low fire – whether you fried it before or not – whether you kept the lid on or not – it all makes a difference in the final dish you place on the table. This is why what seems to be the simplest dish like a dhal curry can taste amazingly different.

Management is in the detail. Different combinations offer infinitely different results. This is why if you REALLY want to learn, you need to observe, and observe well. Just as much as you would learn to cook by watching the person cooking, and the little idiosyncrasies they bring that makes their dishes signature, if you REALLY want to learn management it is essential to observe (and observe diligently) those who excel in it. A casual look will never do, a simple demonstration will never do – you need to truly study them and learn from them. This is probably why it matters greatly whom you observe within an organization and who you truly learn from.

A word of warning – when it is your turn to put your learning and observations into practice, you can almost never completely replicate, as such, remember to keep that window of opportunity where you are your “master chef.”

- The best kitchen and the best utensils do not translate into the best dish

Some of the best-tasting food I have ever had have come from the humblest of kitchens. Some of the best managers I have met have come from the humblest backgrounds and the not-so-glamorous organizations. Enough said.

➤ The proof of the curry is in the burp!

Ultimately whether or not your food is great is in the compliment of the burp you get after the meal (if you are allowed to burp without having to feel bad about it or it being a social faux pas!) The ultimate test of a manager is in the numbers – and the smiles on the faces of his or her team. That really is it. Sometimes we have managers who get the results, and have almost everyone who works for them leave in the process – and then there is the polar opposite of those who are loved but can never seem to get the job done. Both are hopeless, as much as there are chefs whose dishes look awesome but taste bland or are looking quite pathetic but tasting divine. We will all agree that both matter, but depending on our preferences we may offer a little bit more emphasis on one of the two factors. Some of us like a well presented dish, and are willing to accept a little tastelessness – some others will not worry too much about the look and feel of it as long as it tastes good. Knowing your chef is the key, and so it is in management. We have very few who get both the people-management aspect and the results-perspective just right – and as much as a

chef getting it both just right, it is the ultimate objective one must strive for. But if you must choose – then know what the organization will pay more attention to.

- Finally, when it comes right down to it, it cannot be taught – it must be learnt with time, practice and diligent persistence until you get it ‘just right’

You become ‘great’ over time. The best chefs have the talent, but they have also invested considerable amount of time and effort into ensuring they have understudied the best in the field, learnt recipes, experimented and failed, and learnt from the experience, learnt from friends and family, travelled and got to know cooking from different regions of the world, taken part in competitions, attended conferences – all with the aim of making sure they become better with each passing year.

Management requires just the same. A manager who demands excellence from himself or herself needs to commit to a lifetime of patient learning and self-development. There is precious little others can ‘teach’ you – you HAVE to ‘learn’ it for yourself. Yes, others can help by way of wisdom and their own experience, but just as much as a chef will never be great by simply copying recipes that have worked for others, a manager will never get far from merely listening to experiences from others. Ultimately, there is no substitute to the exposure and experience you gather for yourself. What is essential is

that you go for seminars, read, learn from veterans, throw yourself into unfamiliar situations, fail and learn from it, and above all else, making sure you have grasped for yourself what works in what circumstances.

Being the Chef at the Hilton is of no use if your diners complain about the food!

Getting the title is easy – living up to it is tough. That's the bottom line.

PRINCIPLES OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

What sitting for exams teaches you about the Principles of Performance Management

The A/L's was probably the only exam I truly applied myself to. Not to say I did not study for my O/L's or my degree – I did. But, I never quite applied myself the way I applied myself for the A/Ls. I knew that the A/L's was crucial in going to campus, and I knew if I missed it, there was no turning back. I had long before told myself that I will not sit for the exam twice over – it was that time – or none at all. So, I diligently did my work, almost every day. Having a set of teachers who truly believed in teaching ensured that I did not have to take extra classes, and when I came back from the exam, I was cockily confident of the results I would get!

I have had many arguments with a lot of people about performance management systems, and I think the A/Ls are a good place to start to understand HOW we should manage the appraisal cycle.

THE EXAM IS THE SAME FOR EVERYONE

The first thing, which is probably the most obvious of all, is that the exam itself, the method of correction and the

pass mark is the same for everyone. No matter where you come from, what school you go to (or not going to school) whether you come from rich parents or poor ones, whether you are a 'bright student' or a 'not so bright' one, the exam is all that counts. If you do that one exam right, you are assured of a place in campus – it is that simple.

Performance appraisals need to have a uniformity of approach. Just like an exam, a performance appraisal is an attempt to differentiate a performer from a non-performer. The first, and probably one of the most critical aspects is that the parameters for assessment must be the same for all concerned. Unless there is uniformity, it is only natural that employees will cry 'foul'.

INPUT VS. OUTPUT

At the end of the day, what matters is the grade you get. No matter whether you studied or not, whether you were lucky or not, whether you went for tuition or not – what matters is the result. If you get an A you get an A – period. Just because you studied more you are never assured of an A, in fact, no one asks you how much you studied in the first place, they assess that by the output you give in the answers you produce in the given three hours. It's that simple.

We need to take the same brutal approach to performance management. This is why I personally am not in agreement to assessing 'non measurable/quantifiable

aspects such as attitude, leadership, etc. as part of a performance appraisal. Don't get me wrong, they matter. In fact these aspects matter more so than performance itself – especially when you choose a candidate for promotion to a leadership position. However, this does NOT equate performance. These are attributes that are required for development purposes, not to be confused with how well he or she has performed during the given period.

NO MARKS ARE DEDUCTED FOR POOR ATTENDANCE OR BAD BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL

Even in school, marks are never deducted from your grades for bad behaviour in class. What you score in the exam is what you score. Period. However, bad behaviour means that you will be punished, and in a worse-case scenario, be expelled from College, no matter how brilliant a student you may be. The two are taken as different aspects. Both matter to a student and it will be reflected in the school leaving certificate you get. Unless you have been a student worthy of accolades, and have been within the norms, traditions, rules and regulations of the institute you will never have a school leaving certificate that you would want to show anyone else. But, no matter what you do, even if you are expelled from school, no one will deduct a single mark off your grades.

Most of us seem to confuse 'performance' appraisals and 'development appraisals'. There is absolute merit in ensuring we demand the soft skills from our team – no

doubt. But this does NOT matter at the performance appraisal. Reprimand a person who does not live up to the values, or in a worse-case scenario, sack him or her – but that should NOT colour his/her performance. Performance, just like the exam, is in black and white – if it is an OPINION and not a fact, then it is NOT a performance appraisal (in my mind at least). I know this is a bone of contention, but I honestly think performance appraisals and development appraisals must be divorced from each other, because if not, we dilute the importance of both.

SOME PROVINCES GET CERTAIN PREFERENCES

In order to qualify for campus, there is a cut off mark, and this mark is fluctuated depending on a number of facts such as resources available in the school system within the province etc., in an attempt to make the exam as much a level playing field as possible. It is far from perfect, but it happens, and it is the best that can be done.

Similarly, when setting targets and objectives in appraisals, we need to ensure that there is some thought given to how we can make a level playing field. Especially with regard to sales, production and related targets given, certain geographic and demographic considerations must be taken into consideration. There is little point in giving unrealistic targets, at the same time, there is little point in rewarding people for meeting a target that they can meet with their eyes closed.

Balancing the variances is important to build credibility. It is never easy, and never perfect, but we need to work at it until we get a reasonable formula to even things out. Without this little intervention, there will invariably be a lot of dissent about the entire appraisal process.

You can try as many times as you like but if you don't have the required grades, you will not go to campus. There are those who will try, many times over, to get into medical faculty, or the engineering faculty. Some get through the second time around. Some others, even after four tries, fail to get in. There is little sympathy (actually no sympathy). You either get the required aggregate or you don't. It's all cut-and-dry.

We sometimes 'cut some slack' for those whom we feel are truly trying, and 'adjust' the appraisal scores. This is very counterproductive. We should never offer excuses to for bad performances, even though we may truly like the individual. Performance is performance, and unless we drive this home – then we leave room for favouritism to take root, and this is a HUGE problem in most organizations. The performance appraisal should not be a tool to legitimize favouritism, it must be an unbiased, fact-based mechanism that is able to discern those who perform and those who don't. If you don't perform you don't perform – that's it.

I believe that rewards must be aligned to the appraisal. Just like the reward for getting good grades is

going to campus, getting good ratings for performance must equate to better rewards. If all are rewarded equally, no matter what the appraisal score is, then the whole point of having an appraisal is lost.

Promotions and career advancement is a wholly different matter. Here, as much as you have performed in the current job, you need to critically assess whether or not the candidate has the required soft skills to do the next job. Just as much as there are entrance exams to 'qualify' for a MBA, we need to have some form of assessment centre to assess whether the candidate is ready for promotion. Good performance DOES NOT automatically qualify a person for a promotion, but you certainly need to be a performer to be considered for a promotion. There is a world of a difference between the two.

ULTIMATELY YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR GRADES

Ultimately, whether you were in the North where you were shelled because of the war, or you came from the deep South where you had no electricity – or whether your parents are too poor to buy you the books or send you for tuition, the bottom line is that you have only yourself to blame for not passing the exams.

So it is at work. Whether you had a bad boss or the weather was bad which resulted in bad sales, or the Tsunami swooped in, or anything else ultimately, we need

to take the crunch for a lack of performance. Until we do so, we will never quite bind with the mindset required for a performance-driven culture.

SOME THOUGHTS FOR MANAGERS

- There are those who set papers to ensure students fail – and others who set the paper to truly assess whether they know the subject. Similarly, we as managers need to set targets in order to truly stretch a person’s ability and see if he/she will deliver, never with the intention of ensuring failure.
- In particular years, especially if some major calamity has taken place, the marks required to get into campus is lowered. Similarly, we need to revise the ‘pass mark’ even though the yardstick remains the same.
- Students who are differently abled are offered alternative measurements, though the content remains the same. Similarly, if we have employees whom we know are having mental or physical limitations, we need to alter the scheme to accommodate them (provided we have a policy of employing them). Measuring them with the same yardstick is no different to a midget being asked to play basketball with the NBA all-stars!
- It is tempting to black-list a student who misbehaves, even if he gets good results, as much as it is tempting to

make a prefect out of a straight A student with little or no leadership potential. Both are counterproductive. As Managers, we need to keep a level head about the same. Most 'brilliant' performers are a little harder to manage and most of whom you consider 'loyal' employees lack the drive and soft skills to be anything more than executives. You need to see what is best for the organization when making decisions. Either way, it is certainly not the best thing to promote if only based on loyalty OR based on current performance, nor is it right to reward (financially or otherwise) people who have not performed but are seen as 'nice people.' If you are working towards a performance-driven culture, you need to be able to call a spade a spade.

INFLUENCING

The little things kids teach you about influencing you Superiors and Colleagues

I really do think that we do not give enough credit to what children teach us – if we want to actually stop, humble ourselves and learn. Having a child at home is indeed a wonderful thing and as they grow, observing how they actually manoeuvre their way, having little or no authority, to get what they want out of their ability to influence, is an amazing thing to watch. On many occasions, I have sat down and wondered how well she had made a ‘sucker’ out of me – and all that without ever making me feel small.

So here are a few things I learnt from my seven year old about how to effectively negotiate and influence.

PICK YOUR BATTLE CAREFULLY

My daughter – all of seven years old, is in all seriousness, a great student of Tsun Tsu. She obviously has no idea who on earth Tsun Tsu is, has never seen the book – let alone have read it, but seems to know instinctively, as all kids do, when to do what in order to get what she wants!

She would almost never just barge in and demand. She watches my mood, and she knows what she can get with ease, and she knows what she will have to fight for.

She is wise enough to know that some of the battles are not worth the effort she would need to put in, and though she may desperately want to have an ice cream (when she is having a cough) she knows through her own little experience that there is little point asking – for no matter how much she asks, the answer will be no.

Much of the time we get into situations we KNOW are hopeless. Somehow, even though experience may have taught us otherwise many times over, we somehow want to believe that THIS time it would be different. We pursue something or the other we want to get – such as a new computer or a bonus for the team or a much awaited event such as a company trip, even though we know there are no budgets for it. Even though people argue that a good ‘negotiator’ can get ‘anything they fix their eyes on’ in most cases this is being grossly unrealistic. There are many instances when even a seasoned negotiator fails, and that of a novice is in knowing which battles to pick, and which never to get into in the first place.

When all is said and done, there is little point in getting into something with all the positive attitude you have, and all the right intentions, then getting ‘turned down’, and you losing heart. Some battles are best avoided!

WHO TO INFLUENCE – AND THROUGH WHOM TO INFLUENCE

Baby has a lovely flank attack, perfected with time. She never comes to me for many things, she instead goes

through the mother. Once she knows she has convinced her mother, she knows she will do the rest on her behalf with me! Many times over, she has artfully managed to get around her mother and then wait for Rowena to come to me with the proposition, and she knows out of experience that I would rarely say no to Rowena, but would not bat an eyelid to say no to her. Not that I have two yard sticks, just that if Rowena has agreed, I would not want to show a divided view by contradicting her. In fact, she knows this so well that at times she has the cheek to come and tell me jubilantly “*Ammi* said I could watch cartoons today – and that it is okay not to study for the full two hours!” I do my best to keep a straight face, but she knows she’s won.

Some people are tough to negotiate with. They are tough minded, and once they make up their mind, they rarely change it. Most of the Managers and Directors I had the good fortune of working with were certainly tough minded – they needed to be in order to manage the large work forces they had.

The other fact is that most Senior Managers view ideas that come from juniors (especially if they are radically different) with some caution. Once again, this is to be expected. Ultimately if your ‘crazy idea’ fails, then it is THEIR neck (not yours) that is usually on the line. Also, time has taught them to be cautious, and not jump into decisions with haste, as many younger managers and executives would like to. So, like my seven year old, we

need to then find a route that has less resistance. Most of the time, if you are able to convince a confidant of the boss, and have the idea put across through him or her, the chances of getting a nod of approval is dramatically increased. The trick is to 'sell' the idea to someone who has more clout than you have – and get that person to influence the superior or senior colleague. If you can let go of your ego, and focus on getting the 'job done' this is one of the best ways to influence others especially when you are just starting out your Management career.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Baby knows that her father is at his happiest after coming home after work, having a shower, having his dinner, and a quiet smoke. Baby knows full well that I am at my worst in the morning – for I have never been an early riser, and having to wake up at 5.00 a.m. every day is not exactly something I relish. I wake up like a bear out of hibernation (unless of course it is a Saturday and I have happily slept until 7.30 a.m.!) and she avoids me like the plague until I have had my shower and breakfast. She carefully picks the time to talk to me about 'important things' and she knows that the somewhat 'tough' dad can more easily be overcome if he is in an extra 'cool' mood. If there is something she REALLY wants, and she knows it will be a tough call, she will be extra good all day, and ensure that her mother 'praises her' when I come home, and then,

after I have had my dinner, will come sit on my lap and make her request with the voice of an angel and the look of innocence. HOW can I say no? How can any dad?

We make the horrible mistake of not paying heed to the little idiosyncrasies regarding times of the day in relation to our superiors. We think it is their DUTY to listen to us and actually say yes to us all the time. Sadly, nothing is further from reality – because they too, even though they ARE the bosses, are only human. As such, all infallibilities that plague us mortals plague them too.

Pick timings carefully. There is little point getting a really good idea shot down purely because the boss was in a bad mood. Find out what his/her mood is before you enter the room and gush with enthusiasm (the secretary should be able to give you a rather good idea of what the boss's mood is!)

Also pick a time when you know the person is relaxed, and have time to spend with you. No point rushing it. Far better to ensure you reschedule and go in when you have his or her undivided attention.

STONE OF VOICE

Baby knows that there is a certain tone of voice that puts me off instinctively, and that no matter what she says, that particular tone of voice will put me off completely. All kinds have a certain way of taking a 'higher pitch' when they want to press their demands, and I for one have never been okay

with a child (or an adult for that matter, but especially so if you are a kid) taking on a higher pitch or a sarcastic tone of voice. It's an instinctive reaction, and I react negatively. I have always been one who has believed that one needs to maintain decorum and civility at all times, just call me old fashioned, but if you need anything, there is no way you will get it by raising your voice or being sniggered at. Baby knows this and she knows that no matter how many 'aw dads' she does, she will never get anything by raising her voice or being difficult.

I don't think I am alone in this. Most of us don't pay enough heed to the tone of voice we take when we are negotiating or trying our best to influence someone. We instinctively tend to take a somewhat 'superior' tone of voice (especially when we KNOW we are in the right) and at times can be downright condescending. I honestly think that most people will be completely put off by this tone of voice, and you will lose any chance you possibly had of getting a nod of approval. This is not to say for one moment that we need to go on all four and plead, not at all – but it certainly IS required to keep your composure and decorum at all times.

The wrong tone of voice (even if you never meant it to be that way) can certainly get the wrong result.

WHEN TO PRESS, WHEN TO RETREAT

Baby has that uncanny ability to know when to press me – and when to quit before she gets reprimanded. She is a

skillful influencer mainly because she has the ability to know when to quit. But, when she presses, she presses hard, with facts, reason, logic, emotion, guilt and a plethora of other tools all rolled in one. She tries all angles, all avenues, but when she knows that I am losing my patience, she offers a kiss and retreats – but I know full well she will come back, with a completely different angle.

I must admit it is sad that we adults have somehow outgrown a child's ability to read the 'mood' of a person, and act accordingly. We have got so used to simply 'pressing' without having that ability to withdraw before we piss the other person off completely that there is no more room to manoeuvre. We then get wholly disheartened and blame our bosses for not having the right 'leadership skills.' As much as we need to know how and when to press for what we believe in, we need to know when to retreat so that we may fight another day. There is no glory in dying before your mission is accomplished!

PERSISTENCE

Probably the most deadly arsenal she has is her persistence. Baby will NOT give up once she has locked her sight on something. No matter how many 'no's' she encounters, no matter how many times she may get scolded, no matter how difficult it may be, once she has decided for herself she wants it, she will NOT let go until she has got it. Coming from stubborn stock, I am not surprised!

I remember fondly how she wanted a particular doll that was very expensive. I flatly refused to buy it. She persisted. I wanted her out of my hair (the little I have left!) but then she put that impossible to avoid question – what do I have to do to have it – and I told her that she needs to get straight 'A's in class for all her subjects. This was an almost impossible task for her to do, because her grasp of Math and Sinhala was very poor. I guess she knew it too but from then on, she bugged Rowena and me to take extra lessons with her and she diligently studied for nearly three straight months and finally ended with straight 'A's (much to my delight AND disappointment!) I had no option but to keep my end of the bargain and get her the doll she so badly wanted but she won something that day which she did not know about – my respect.

What defines a person to me is his or her persistence towards the objective set out before them. We tend to give up far too easily, and blame it on a host of things or people. If you have your eyes set on being able to influence other you need to gain respect, and nothing gains more respect than persisting patiently and doggedly and then succeeding. When you do something that others say is impossible, the respect you gain (from both superiors and juniors) is almost instantaneous (though they may not tell it to you in so many words.) We need to learn to persist – not by becoming a right royal pain in the backside – but by being dogged in our perseverance, which gains

a reputation for you as being a person who will beat the odds, and who will not take no for an answer very easily!

'IT'S EASIER TO ASK FOR FORGIVENESS THAN ASKING FOR PERMISSION'

One of the most interesting lessons I learnt from baby is that it is actually easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to ask for permission. Baby has this ability to come and ask over and over again for something, without actually being 'pushy' about it – and ever so often, when she is convinced that it will be okay for her to do it anyway, she goes ahead and does it – like this one time she asked me whether she could have an ice cream (she had been pestering me for nearly a week) and then being told no to again, she just went ahead and had it, and true to her nature, came and told me so! I really did not know how to react. She explained with no hesitation whatsoever that she DID NOT have a cough – or a sore throat – and that if she DOES get the cough in the night (as I told her she would if she has the ice cream) that she would not bother me or her mom, but would take the medicine herself and moreover, suffer the consequences in silence. She also, very sweetly, offered a humble apology, adding that she would not do it again. Rowena did not have the heart to scold her, neither did I – though I did stare her down!

At work, sometimes, there are times when we need to put our neck on the line and take that call. Provided we

had the organization's best interest at heart, and we own up to a mistake – we will – most of the time, be forgiven. We ARE required to take decisions by ourselves at times even if our superiors have said no. Obviously, you can, and will be summarily punished for disobedience – but even the toughest boss will give you credit for doing what you thought was right, and provided you did it to ensure the business succeeds, chances are you will not be found fault with too much. If you want to always play safe you will never gain that invaluable leadership exposure you will rely on later on in your career. Dangerous – yes – but effective too!

NATURE OF BUSINESS AND MANAGEMENT

What Nature teaches you about the Nature of Business and Management

The rains came down in torrents. Just like that. It was a clear blue sky just two minutes ago – and now it's pelting down. Thunder and lightning; sheets of rain and a howling wind. The trees swirl, roofing sheets barely held down.

I sat down with a hot cup of tea, and resorted to some mental storm as well.

EVERYTHING IS A CYCLE

The first thing nature teaches you is that everything in life has its cycle. Everything. It starts with birth, ends with death and rejuvenation. We all go through it, and nothing escapes this basic law. Nothing has lasted forever: nothing has, nothing will. Everything is finite. Everything has its cycle.

Organizations are no different. They go through good times and the bad. One has to accept it. No organization can ever hope to have a growth curve forever. No matter how great you are, or no matter what the strategy is, or how great each of the processes adopted are, at some point, things will come crashing down.

This is in stark contrast to what we are made to believe, because the underlying 'theory' is that if you do all the 'right things' there is no way you can lose; no way can you go down and no way you can hit that ebb. True, calling it 'karma' or 'god's will' and doing nothing is certainly not the answer, but neither is trying to avoid the inevitable. It will come – it is only a matter of time. No matter how prepared you may be it will come.

What matters and what people will remember you by is how you handled in when it DID happen. The ultimate test of character and honour is always tested in your worst times. In good times, we all go about talking platitudes, which rarely are held when it finally comes down to it.

GENERALLY, YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW

Nature teaches you that you reap what you sow. So does all religions. Some resulting actions are immediate, some others manifest much later, and in much more indirect ways. Global warming has been taking place for decades – thanks to the levels of pollution that has exponentially grown. But we don't see it at catastrophic levels just yet. It might be generations later that we actually see the repercussions truly manifesting.

One of our biggest responsibilities as Managers is to ensure that we offer our future generations of Managers a better organization that is better than what we inherited – not worse. Sadly, many of us never quite take on this

responsibility seriously, opting to look at short-term results rather than long-term survival. Just as much as we destroy our planet in the name of GDP growth (to hell with all those who will be born after we are dead) we as Managers sacrifice the robustness of our organizations for quarterly results. We may be able to mess with the numbers (legally of course) and show profits (when there is actually none – or certainly the other way around for tax purposes) but some of the ‘quick fix’ decisions we take to reach the bottom line targets erode the organization’s capability to succeed in the long- term.

Nature should teach you that you reap what you sow – and it is prudent to pay heed.

SOMETIMES, YOU MAY HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH IT

Much of what we see today as freak weather has been attributed to man’s callous disregard of nature. There is no denying this; we are certainly destroying the planet we live in. However, not everything happens according to the logic we are able to muster in our limited understanding of how things work in the universe. Even the most illustrious scientist will humbly accept that we know less than what we know. Freak incidents DO happen – like what may have happened a millennia or two ago, which wiped out the dinosaurs. It certainly could not have been our doing.

Management 'theorists' have, in my humble opinion, always put a little too much 'weight' on organisational success being attributed to strategy and leadership. There is no denying the role a leader plays, or the processes play, or the strategy plays in an organization's success. But honestly, ask yourself, is it really that simple? Do people sit down, draw something up on a paper and then follow it flawlessly, and hey presto, there is success? What would usually happen is that we will blindly pursue a plan of action – because of the sheer brilliance of the thought, or the brilliance of the leadership, or the team spirit that was present, and we succeed? Then, everyone wants to know about it. Then everyone writes about it. Then everyone tries to figure out HOW it went right (or wrong) and a theory is born. What we at times forget is that it may well have been by being in the right place at the right time or in the wrong place at the wrong time. Either way, blindly copying it may not be an answer to all others who want to cash in on its success; neither does a failure mean that the entire thought process was wrong. More often than not, success or failure cannot be attributed to just one thing, and linking it to one attribute may certainly make sense to simplify it – but may be wrong in the conclusions it derives.

We as Managers take a little too much credit for our successes, and too-little blame for our failures. We happily declare fat bonuses and pay hikes when things go right (because it was our brilliance that got the organization

there) and pay very little when things go wrong (because THAT is down to economic conditions or factors beyond our control.) If we DO take credit for success, then we must be willing to pay the price (rather than others below us) for failure.

Nature SHOULD teach us to be a little more humble.

NATURE DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE

When catastrophe hits – it hits everyone. The rich and the poor, the god-fearing and the heathen, the strong and the weak and the sick and the healthy. If you are prepared, you may stand a little chance to get away in time, but no matter how prepared you are, sometimes, nature can quite simply, devastate. Take a look at Hurricane Katrina or the Asian Tsunami, and you will certainly understand the fury of nature let loose.

Modern business environments have just about the same level of turbulence. When we were taught 'business management' we forecasted and 'planned' for 10 years, conducting ROIs, NPVs and so many other indicators for 10-15 years. Seems like an absurdity now when we cannot seem to quite predict a quarter, let alone 5 years! When markets ARE hit by volatility and catastrophe, it does not affect only those who are 'badly managed.' We seem to be under the illusion that if we are 'well managed' then all the sub-prime issues will not quite affect us – not so! No matter how well you are managed, when an environmental

catastrophe does hit, it hits you. Planning and better management is never a guarantee against it.

CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT

Nature also teaches you that everything changes, from time to time. Just like the seasons, this is the most dramatic illustration of and reminds us that change is constant in everything around us, including ourselves who also change with time. Absolutely nothing remains the same.

Inside our organizations we WANT things to remain the same. If a strategy is working, let's keep it that way, if the customers are happy – they will always be happy, if we have a successful organization it will be always so: wishful thinking.

Nature should teach us the importance of accepting change with grace, and making sure we are aware of it. As Management we should always remember that if things are going good, the 'tough times' could be just around the corner. This is not to say that we have doom and gloom being propagated all the time, and remain ultra-cautious – not at all – just that we MUST be prepared to change, at a moment's notice, because it will be required, if not now – later.

IT'S NOT THE STRONGEST OR THE MOST AGILE THAT SURVIVES – IT IS THOSE WHO ADAPT

The dinosaurs were wiped out, so were the Dodos. So were a million other species. Not being the fastest, or the

strongest creatures on the planet, we humans survived because we adapted. The only true method of survival is to adapt to the environment. We can never 'control' it, we can only do our best to predict the kind of changes that may come about, and adapt ourselves in case of such eventualities. If we do, we will survive – if we don't we will become extinct. It IS that simple.

Organizations are just the same. The organizations which have stood the test of time, all have one thing in common – they adapted. They adapted their people, processes, strategies, leadership styles, products, services – and in fact, in some cases, their entire business model to meet changes in the environment.

Needless to say, we in Management should change too. We often demand change and adaptation from others, without really demanding the same of ourselves. Middle and Senior Management are as change resistant as everyone else – when in fact, we are charged with ensuring the business' success or failure. We cannot control the forces of demand and supply for too long (even if we could do it for a while) neither can we steer the way people perceive us no matter how well we market ourselves. We NEED to adapt, and keep adapting. We stop doing this – no matter how big, strong or agile we are we certainly are dead.

Finally, what nature teaches you is that you are but a small part of a wider whole – which you can control to an extent, but by far IT controls you. The lesson to learn

is to have an open mind, and a sharp wit about you, so that no matter WHAT happens, YOU are never rattled or taken off guard. HOW you deal with things around you is completely up to you – WHAT happens around you is never in your control. The response to this is what defines character, and this is what defines a great manager or leader.

Read Rudyard Kipling's IF – it is by far one of the most inspiring Leadership lessons I have ever read (though it is indeed so simple a poem.)

GLOSSARY OF SINHALA WORDS AND ITS MEANINGS IN ENGLISH

ARCHCHI: Grandmother (mother's mother)

KOLLA: a little boy; little assistant

AMMI: Mother

APPACHCHI: Father

ATHTHAMMA: Father's mother

HATHMAALUVA: a mixed curry containing 7 vegetables – usually made in the Sabaragamuwa region of Sri Lanka during the Sinhala New Year season or during special occasions

KAPUWA: Matchmaker

MAALU PAAN: Fish bun

PARRIPU: Dhal; but Thomian parripu is a slogan chanted by Royal College (the arch rivals of the Thomians) to mean 'Thomians are nothing'

SEEYA: Grandfather (mother's father)

VEDDA: Indigenous Sri Lankan – similar in many ways to the aborigine of Australia. Usually used to refer to a 'less civilized' person

ROONA: A word which I lovingly use for my wife Rowena

SHAAKYA: My seven year old daughter

Taking a rather unusual approach to discuss Management, Jargon Free takes inspiration from every life. Culling out principles from seemingly unrelated life's moments like getting married, having children, buying a car or gardening, the book attempts to understand and explore management principles without resorting to 'jargon.' The book explains every day life's incidents and then brings the key concepts from them to life in an easy to understand manner : making management something we can all relate to - and learn.



Vidusha is a multidisciplinary professional specializing in HR and Leadership Training. Having started his career in Branding and Marketing he finally moved to HR and headed HR and HRD functions for a local arm of a Fortune 500 company before setting up High5, a boutique training and consulting practice based out of Colombo, Sri Lanka. High5 has run assignments in 9 countries regionally, and works with top tier corporates and NGOs.

Vidusha was also a talk show host, a CIM lecturer, and was also featured at TEDx Colombo in 2017, where he showcased High5's unique approach to developing leaders.

His full bio is available on LinkedIn or High5's website.