



TIPS - TO - TRIUMPH

Business Coaching Publication Series

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Preface



About the author

It was around late 2015 when I had just completed my tenure with CIMA as the Regional Director, a long time banking client now a Buddhist monk Ven. Metta Viahri who runs a TV channel called Learn TV totally dedicated to education requested me to use his channel to impart my experience based knowledge that help me in my career. It was his persuasion that got me to record a five episode which were released in my youtube channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCQ5Znz2zA-YBEkxld6SzAXg>

Nearly six years later i am releasing this book as my friend Tanya Gunawardena helped to transcribe and my younger daughter Karishma (who is an Interior Designer) helped my to design this book

One of my friends once said the cemetery is the placed with knowledge that is not shared, feelings that we not spoken, dreams that were not realized and opportunities that were not taken. Life, work or personal teaches us what universities will not teach. We are often are shy to share these learnings in the fear of being judged. People will judge us anyway. Withholding your learning in my view is unfair for by the future generations. I believe that every generation has an obligation make the next generation better. This book is a little contribution to those who wish to become better more so for them to find their true potential. I have made it very simple and practical so that that the reader can easily absorb. So enjoy!

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Bradley has been a career banker prior to joining Chartered Institute of Management Accountant (CIMA as the Regional Director for Middle East, South Asia and North Africa, has worked at Commercial Bank as the Head of Operations, Nations Trust Bank as Head of Retail Banking and at Pan Asia Bank as the Deputy Chief Executive.

Bradley received the Top HR Leader's Award in 2017 and the Life Time Achievement Award in 2020 from the World HRD Congress.

Bradley is Key note Speaker, Pod Caster, ICF Certified Life coach and an Author. He has authored a book titled "Role - A Diagnostic Approach to Performance" published through authorHouse UK!

Clean Play

We now come to a lesson on conscience. A lesson on doing the right thing and the ill effects of those who do not practice clean play in the management of themselves and of companies. If you go on Google and search the 'top 10 corporate scandals of 2015', you will find top names in business coming up. You will also find 6 out of these 10 are scandals and frauds, because the numbers were being manipulated. What is this manipulation? You manipulate the numbers for the stakeholders to see the company in a better light than it is in. Why do you do that? Because you have not done the right thing, you have failed, and you are shy to accept it so you camouflage it to make it look like what it is not. That is cheating and it is a breach of public trust.

Why do I want to bring this up? This can only be achieved when people support it. What do you find common between the names of Marion Jones, Diego Maradona, Lance Armstrong? They were by their own standards, good. By their own natural capabilities, they were able to achieve something. Then why did they get into using banned substances to enhance their performance? Was it because of public expectations? Was it because there was pressure from the national side that they must win the gold? Was it unrealistic expectations which they forced upon themselves to gain unnatural energy so that they perform better than the others?

When you decide to do that as an individual, to do something crooked, to look good in the eyes of the organisation, in the eyes of the line manager, you have to lie to yourself. When you lie to yourself, you begin to paralyse your conscience. When you paralyse your conscience, you will not be able to tell right from wrong. I always had this dilemma of thinking, is it the fault of the individual who does something wrong? Or is it the company's culture that they want to win at any cost and compromise the value system of the people? Is it a top driven bad habit? If you take an organization where they set unrealistic targets and pressurise the managers that if they do not get this done, they are not going to get this benefit. Are we as senior managers not pushing them to do the wrong thing?

If you push them to a corner and say your career, your life, your job depends on you achieving this somehow, are we being unfair by pushing them in to doing something wrong? Are the people who do unethical things to make things look good bad by nature? Or are they victims of bad management? I used to wonder, is it the people at the middle who are bad? Or is it the culture that is driven from the top encouraging staff to be bad? If you look at the case of Enron, it is not Andrew the CFO who did wrong in my mind. To me, it is the CFO who did not check that and allowed the organisation to go down that road that was wrong.

Tip

When there are unusual results, there needs to be diligence by the CFO of a company to check whether the runs were scored the right way. After all, he is ultimately responsible for signing the balance sheet of the company.

Getting the numbers right or playing it clean has become a challenge. If large companies, big brands, like Volkswagen, Motorola with large balance sheets, some of them larger than the GDP of countries, stoop down to such cheap, corrupt, deceptive methods of deceiving the stakeholders and the market have they not breached public trust? Is it because we at the bottom support it, that they continue to do this type of malpractices and mislead people? Shouldn't there be a social responsibility of employees to flag up and say, 'I'm sorry, I'm not going to be part of it'?. We do not have the courage because our jobs are needed and our families depend on us. Isn't it the people who know that misusing you? Are they not exploiting your weakness? Your need to have a job and forcing you to do things wrong? In fairness to people who are doing things right, where is equity?

My dear friends, as managers, as executives, as CEOs, as people in power, why are we driven by a shortcut method of winning at any cost? Look at the scandals that we hear of, look at the crash of the economy, look at the fall of companies, look at the destruction, loss of jobs because of people who have not played it clean. This is because they want to win at any cost. We have a responsibility to stand up and say 'sorry, I will not be part of this, even if it means I won't get an increment, I am not going to take part in it'.

Tip

My dear friends, the money that we earned through a corrupt process or working for a corrupt company is corrupt. We do not want to feed our children with the kind of money that is not going to last. You must be a crusader to stand up and say, 'I would rather play clean and loose than cheat and win'. At the end of the day, you need to look back in your life and say, I ran a good race. I may have not won all. That is what makes me who I am. You must have that value in you. That is the purpose you are not corrupt. That is the purpose you have a conscience. So do not paralyse it and have the guts to stand up.

Anger as Positive Energy

In the series of why managers fail, I am going to focus on probably one of the biggest weaknesses we have – anger. Anger is a negative energy. Human beings and even animals get angry, which leads you to behave in an irrational and insensitive manner. It is understandable that sometimes at the workplace you could get angry, when things are not delivered the way you want, at the time you want. It happens at home, and it happens everywhere because human interaction leads to loss of expectation.

There are two sides to it where certain amount of anger is good even when it is shown. In my experience, there have been positives from my team thinking ‘they have made the boss angry’. I felt at the time that my anger was showing the team that my tolerance level for bad quality or tolerance level for poor timing, is short. In that sense, anger can set the standards, and re-establish boundaries by showing a bit of anger or dissatisfaction, when those standards are not met. What I have found in my career, when you set the standard and show dissatisfaction and show zero tolerance, a form of controlled demonstration of anger, without irrationally throwing out the anger, the outcome of good results can happen. But if you use your anger to cripple somebody intentionally, if you use your anger to harm somebody’s self-esteem and to break them down, then it becomes unproductive and inhuman.

There would be people in your organization who push you to that point. I am sure you would have seen many and you will probably see more in your career. There will be people who will take you to that point of giving up on your controls. I have seen so many people flaring up at each other. That is something that is not only bad for them, but bad even for you.

Anger is an energy. In energy there is an optimum point. Be it electricity, waterfalls, air, the wind must blow at a particular speed that it is not uprooting the trees, the rivers need to flow at a particular speed that they do not break the dams. You need to have electricity at a particular level so that they do not bust up your electrical items. Anger is the same, it is a similar thing like energy that is coming out of you. But it needs to have a level that is productive, like the wind, like the water, like the stream and like the electricity supply, you got to have the right amount of energy that gives you the positive outcome. I am not saying do not be angry, I am saying use it like the when the right amount so that it is pleasant and then do not carry it.

Tip

True leaders do get angry. Even if you look at some of the religious leaders, they have got angry. But that does not mean that you carry that as a grudge. Take your children for example we get angry out of love, we punish them out of love. They would not know right from wrong. When you are a child, you may wonder what is wrong with your parents. It is only when you grow up, you will know the benefit of that anger. We show that anger as a form of dissatisfaction and to show that something is not acceptable.

The call of the true manager is to use his anger as constructive energy. Anger can bring out your true feelings, therefore you cannot pretend to be angry. You can pretend to be nice, but you cannot pretend to be angry, the anger really brings out who you are. Anger is an honest feeling that you show. People will get to know who you really are when you get angry. As I mentioned earlier, it should never be intended to break somebody down or make somebody feel small. Anger should not intend to destroy somebody's aspiration. When you are in a situation that people who will try to push you to that point, just walk out.

As good leaders, good managers in a workplace we will have to control the use of anger as a positive energy. As a manager you must demonstrate anger correctly. There are ways you can use anger as a characteristic of your management style as long as the intention of that anger is to align somebody. Consider the way coaches scream, when the team is on the field, how they get angry, what they are trying to do is get the best out of you. The coach is trying to make you win the game and playing it the right way. If you take anger as an energy like wind at the right speed, filling up the dams at the right level, it can create energy. So, you need to use anger as a positive energy.

Take punctuality for example. If someone is not punctual you will get angry, because you set the standard on timing. If somebody is not doing the things the right way, the ethical way after you've set the standards, you will get angry because you will not tolerate mistakes. If you set the standard by demonstrating anger, where your tolerance levels are, that is what anger does at work. As a manager, when you get angry, at one point the team will know that that is your level of tolerance. Anything beyond that will make you angry, which means you are dissatisfied, it is unacceptable, and your team is not doing what is expected out of their job.

Tip You can use anger as a benchmark. The moment you use anger beyond that, the moment you convert anger into a grudge, that is the moment you carry anger into victimization. Here is when you carry anger into breaking people down and making people feel small. This is when you fail.

Anger is an energy all leaders have from Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King to anybody. If you look at them and how they have got angry, the point between good and bad is clear. That is the way you use anger an energy to drive people to get aligned. The moment you use anger to make somebody feel small, or to insult somebody - that is when managers fail.

Impact of Balance

We now come to a question that I used to pose in my training program to the participants. I would ask them to name the characteristics of a good manager. I have found that in an audience of 20, I would get at least 15 different characteristics being named. They would start from knowledge, integrity, honesty and, as you can imagine, the list goes on. One of the things that has never come up is the characteristic of having good 'balance'.

We all know what it means to lose balance and when you lose balance, what happens? You fall. Maintaining balance is important. In the context of a manager, we need to consider balance in relation to two aspects. Is it equality or is it equity? Is there a difference between that? Can you dish out the same thing to everybody and expect the same results? No, you cannot because the capabilities of people are different. A good manager needs to understand the concept of equity or fairness, support and distribution should match individual skills.

Tip

One of the reasons why managers fail, is because they have no sense of balance. If you lose your balance you fail. We all know too much of anything is not good. You've got to have a balanced distribution of whatever you have. Be it your time, your knowledge, your energy it must be distributed in a balance way among the people.

When I say, 'balance among the people', this is what I mean - you could have a weak staff member who will need a little bit more of your time and a little bit more of your guidance, and you could have a superstar in your team. In identifying the members of your team, you could use the BCG matrix in deciding who your dog is, who your cash cow is, in an attempt to categorise your team. Where will you put more of your time? You will put in more time to guide and encourage the people who are trying, not praising the cash cows or the stars all the time. Your star performers will most likely always be stars. You as a manager will have a responsibility to balance your skills and knowledge in such a way that the people who deserve your support get it.

Management or leadership is about the moderation of balance. How do you equalize it? How do you distribute it in a moderate way? How do you strike a balance? How do you integrate the star and the one who is trying? How do you make sure the one who is trying has the confidence to come and work with the star? We do not focus on this. We like the good guys, because they do the job for you, and you recognize them most of the time. There will almost always be somebody in your team who is also relying on you, who also has faith in you that you will help them become a star. But what do we do? We focus on the ones that are really performing, highlight them, recognize them, favor them, hang out with them, isolating the people who have been looking up to you. In this case, where is your balance? There must be a balance.



Here I am talking about human beings, regardless of what background they come from. As managers, we have people coming to us from different backgrounds, different education levels, different family standards, and when they come to us, do we treat everybody in a balanced way? Do they have the confidence that when they come in to work it does not matter where they are coming from, they are coming to a balanced place? That would be our responsibility as human beings, even before we consider management.

Let us look at a family. If there is a child who needs greater attention, let us say one who has a disability, what would the parent do? The parent would give that child more attention since he/she needs the additional support. My dear friends, people who are working for you ought to be treated like your children because they are looking up to you for guidance, they are looking up to you for support.

Tip

If you look at your kids and your staff the same way, you will automatically bring in that balance and provide the confidence to the weakest, while you give the stars the strength. You need to make sure you do not widen the gap between the star and the one who is trying. If you focus on the one who is trying, the one who is a star performer will also begin to focus on the one who is trying. One thing you must remember is that 'a chain is only as strong as its weakest link'. If you do not identify the one who is trying and if you fail to support them your chain will break. If you do not identify the weakest link in your team, the team will crack. Thus, the importance of maintaining balance. In other words, distribute the right amount of attention and guidance in your team, the ones who are very good needs only a little attention.

Let us consider a class teacher. Where does she put her attention the most? How do you measure her performance when everybody hits the grades? If you are going to focus on somebody who is really hitting the grades anyway that does not ensure equal performance among her whole team of students. The teacher will have to balance her time and distribute her attention in such a way that the ones who are trying will also succeed in their exams. That is the satisfaction you have when you look back in your life, when you look back at your days, when you look back at your career, when you leave an organisation, you can look back and say, 'oh wow I have moved this person who was weak to a position of strength'. That is what you will be happy about in your career as a manager. If you do not do that you fail. Balance is the word and the key.

Know your Job

We begin this chapter by using a tool of diagnosis, a 360° assessment that provides managers with insights on how they carry out their roles. I specifically want you to consider performance in your job role. Often, people do not spend time understanding their role, instead the thought process is, we have a designation, there is a prescribed or historical function that it is associated with, and we just plug ourselves into that. That does not always bring the best out of you in relation to a role.

Let us take an example of a lady getting married, from being a carefree bachelorette she now embarks on the journey of getting married. There is a clear change of a role from being a daughter to a wife. What often happens when that change takes place is multiple influence factors upon that person. There are different influences from religious background, culture, family relations, in laws, particularly the husband, who expects a certain pattern of doing things, which accumulatively we associate with the expectations of the role. On top of that, the girl herself would have her own convictions based on religious, family, cultural, media, influences that define what she should be doing when she becomes a wife. Inevitably, there will be a gap between what she thinks she should be doing and the expectation of the people around, which we may call in a corporate sense, stakeholder expectation.

In a corporate environment, let us take a situation where you got your last promotion. Let us go back and think of that moment. You may have moved from one function or one role, to a higher role. If you went for an interview, you would have been preparing for that opportunity. Most of your preparation could be based on your perceptions of somebody who is already holding that position, and what he/she has been doing and you may define the role based on it.

Now, let us bring you back to the girl who is getting married. On one end you have what she knows in her own mind to be the role of a wife and on the other end you have the expectations placed on her based on what the people around tell her. What she will start developing is known as an attitude towards the role. Attitudinal changes happen from the time of being a carefree bachelorette to developing a different set of skills, including patience, listening, assertiveness. After all she cannot be the same free-spirited person that she was in her home when she moves to her in laws house.

What we all need is a different set of skills to face different challenges. Similarly, you got to start acquiring knowledge about your role, and how to perform better at it. Be it a good wife, a good supervisor, a good manager, or a good executive.

Tip

When you get a new job, understand what influences the role and what the expectations are. First, you have your own expectations of performing a particular role. Secondly, you have the expectation of your management, then you are defined by the framework, be influenced by the peers already there, by the company's culture. The context of each company will also differ. The role of a manager in a Western company or an MNC would be different from a family-owned business or a startup enterprise.

The market perception of a particular role also has an influence. If for example, you are Marketing Manager, how do you deal with the media has an impact on how you perform your role. All these stakeholders force different expectations on you. Individually if these people do not get the expectations met, in their own mind they form an opinion saying that you are not performing.

Take Disney for example, the people who work there at Disney are not called employees, they are called cast members because they are performing a role. They would act as Mickey Mouse or Pluto or as one of the better-known characters and that is why they are called cast members. Let us take a stage player or an actor, they play different roles throughout their profession. They make different kinds of movies, playing the bad guys, good guys, making us laugh and cry. How do they do that? They get the script, they listen to the director's expectation, and they begin to transform themselves to that character. They understand the role and expectation of the character. They may be playing a role of a father, a husband, a teacher, or even that of a cop. What they do in different roles, is be consumed with the expectations of the director, expectation of the script, and transform themselves into that role. It is only then you give life to that role. Therefore, when we watch a movie or a drama, we say they 'brought the role to life'.

We often do not do that in office, we just move on from promotion to promotion and designation to designation. As accountabilities increase, responsibilities increase, but do we stop and review? You must stop to consider 'what is it that I have to do differently?'. We must not get into the rut of continuing the glorification of the previous role and carry a little bit of baggage, of the previous job.

Take time to diagnose the zone. When you diagnose the zone, then you perform better. That is what happens in cricket. Before the match, we do a pitch report which is what determines how the pitch is going to behave and you perform according to how the pitch will behave. You will know who the bowler is on the other side, and how the pitch is going to be and that is why we take a pitch report to diagnose the playing field. The key is to understand the repercussions of the external environment and then adjust yourself so that you get it right.

When you move into a new role, naturally there is an attitudinal change that will take place and a shift that will happen in your mind. Your change in attitude will be evident not only at work, but also at home. Imagine you would get a job and you are given a company car, this undoubtedly changes your attitude.

Tip

For you to equip yourself at an effective level of performance, you got to acquire extra skills. Remember you might have been hired for the skills you have but your progression will depend on the skills you acquire. To perform better you will have to acquire new skills and enhance the knowledge not just of the role of the job, the industry the people around you, but also what the competition is doing.

Just as you have your attitudes that are bound to change to fit the role, you will have to enhance your skill, you will have to expand your knowledge so that you can perform. The trap you want to avoid is confusing 'behavior' with 'performance'. Imagine you are an executive and you suddenly become a manager, your workplace changes, your perks change, you probably get a better smartphone, you will be given a car, but as these external factors change, it will lead to changes in your behavior. So, first thing that happens in every role is that you begin to behave differently. That behavior is influenced by the perception you had of the role, the expectations of the others, the skills, the attitude, the knowledge, and most of all the responses that is given to you and how you behave.

Consider for a moment is it behavior that is expected from you, or is it performance? Is there a difference between behavior and performance? How do you convert that behavior to performance? Behavior and performance are different. These are the intricacies we will be considering next.

Envy as Energy

We have all heard the word envy and most of the time it has a negative connotation. Envy is an extension of aspiration. You aspire to be like somebody, so you envy. You can have envy in a positive sense, which drives your aspiration. It is good to be aspiring so that you deliver the true potential of yourself. When you look at somebody who has achieved something, and you may think 'I envy this guy' in a positive way. In a negative way also can be a craving to achieve something that someone has achieved at a faster track. Now that is where it gets dangerous.

Let us look at the positive sides of envying. Envying cultivates aspiration and aspiration is necessary for you to find your true potential. Most of the time we work, we live, not recognising our true potential, because of that aspiration is needed. Aspiration is driven by envy in a positive sense. As a developing individual, as a manager, having positive envy will get you to start moving up so that your followers can come along with you. Your team is raised when you raise your standards. You learn, you acquire skills, you acquire knowledge, you become a better performing manager. When you become a better performing manager, the people who work for you get elevated as well.

However, there is always a point that you do not cross. The moment envy crosses a point it becomes greed, then it becomes jealousy, then it becomes anger. When that happens, your thinking become very self-centered. Here you tend to compare somebody's achievements, positions, profile, market acceptance, and you want to get there. You may not want to get there by going through what they have experienced – we would not know the time that person took, the trouble they endured, the learning, the effort, and the struggle someone would have gone through to get where they are.

When you envy in an inward way, trying to get there with a craving mentality, you tend to take the shortcuts that I have mentioned that narrows yourself. It will lead you to driving yourself with a sense of grudge, a sense of vengeance and close your sense of imagination. When you close your factors of imagination, there is nothing much your team can get from you. Your focus is then not on performing your day-to-day functions, but on a fast-track route to get where you want to get. Envy would cause you to look at somebody and constantly compare asking yourself – What is that person doing? What is their social image? I want to get there! I want to have the same number of admirers! I want to have the same amount of recognition! I want to have the same level of followership! The moment you start to envy somebody this way and start to mirror them more than anything else, then you are losing yourself. Once you lose yourself, you forget who you are - you lose your personality, you begin to confuse your identity. All of this is because you are lost in your own imagination. Now you see that envy can be dangerous. If it crosses that line, then you are in trouble.

Even if you are working for an envious manager, you should be able to recognise it. The best way to recognize envious manager is when he talks ill about others. Be it talking ill of his superiors, his peers or his staff. Envy can bring with it a sense of self-destruction. This is far from the sense of aspiration it can bring.

Tip

If you are envying somebody, in what I call ‘aspiration mode’, then you will only talk good of them. If you are envying somebody in what I call, ‘destruction mode’, you will talk bad of them. So that is the time you've got to pause and check your level of envy, and say to yourself ‘hang on a second, this is not the right level of envy, because I am talking ill of somebody’. The moment you start to talk ill of somebody among your people in their absence, that is yours signal to stop. Eventually you will even lose the respect of those listening to you, because they will be quick to know that you will do the same when they are not there.

Remember then that envy used positively drives aspiration, envy on the negative mode will drive destruction. How you know whether you are on destructive mode or on an aspiration mode is from what you say. You can pause and check this for yourself. Am I talking ill of somebody? Then you know that you are on destructive mode. If you are talking good of someone, then you are on aspiration mode. You can regularly pause to do a self-check of the level of envy you have within.

Tip

As a manager it is important to check the level of envy you have. Check whether you are talking ill about one staff member to another and if you run down someone's personality to another? This could be another reason you lose respect, and it can be a reason why managers fail. Envy could be the reason a manager cannot get the team together. Envy can be the reason that brings you down. So, it is important to regularly pause and look at your actions and at your choice of words.

These checks that we place on ourselves are necessary because we are humans and as humans, we feel the emotion of jealousy. When we do not like to see somebody doing good, we run them down. When we do not like somebody looking better, we run them down. When we do not like to see somebody achieving their targets, we run them down. That is the destructive nature humans have. As a manager you need to address those destructive tendencies. As a manager your level of envy should be at a constructive level, and you need to regularly check your words and actions to know whether it is destructive and respond to it with corrective action.

Lust in Careers

I am going to talk a little bit more about the reasons why managers fail. In the previous chapters, I laid before you many reasons why managers fail. Yet another reason is unchecked eagerness. To describe it I am going to use the word lust here. To put it more in context – I am referring to the lust that describes an intense craving or as an intense desire, not necessarily the lust as commonly associated with.

It is very clear that you need to be passionate about what you do. There is no doubt about it, there must be a direct connection between your passion to do something, and the results that you get. In fact, it is critical to have that connection. However, when you have a craving to draw attention, when you have a craving to acquire more power, when you have a craving to make more money, the intense craving to be recognised, to be more powerful, to accelerate your career progression, for recognition, the so called word ‘worship’ tends to creep in. Here we have that intense craving that's driving you beyond doing the right thing, the right way. Because in your mind, you have already moved to a position of recognition, to a position of power, to a position of financial superiority and to a position of control in your mind. That is what intense craving does to you. It elevates you subconsciously to a position that you are not in.

The danger here is that you try to do things to take your physical body to that mental position as quickly as possible. It is a behaviour, an internal drive, which we lose track of. We create this inner craving which is natural, but if you do not control it, it can become a disaster. That is where a lot of the managers after a certain time find their ratings of interpersonal skills, their performance, their strategies, their thinking capacity, all beginning to deteriorate.

There is a process of development of a human being. There is a timeline, decades of life that the maturity kicks in and the thinking pattern changes. But what happens is that the craving, the lust for power, recognition of money, takes your position to a floating position which is in an unnatural state. Then you try to bring your real person to where your unreal person is and you will try to do things as much as possible, find shortcuts to get to your position to that craved position which eventually will drive you down. It may give you a short-term gratification, the moment you feel that 'I could be this' and you beginning to feel the reality of being what you could be. It gives you satisfaction, it starts massaging your ego, it creates expectation of yourself. It will create recognition of yourself, by yourself. Then you begin to expect the people around you to give you that recognition. That is the intense craving that drives young managers down. Unless you control it, it can and will create chaos.

What would you do when this happens? You begin to move to your false position, which has been created by an intense craving. Here, you want people to like you, to recognise you, to praise you, to agree with what you say. You start moving up there, that craving tries to elevate you and that is when you begin to lose control over your values, morals, and you try to find shortcuts to get there as quickly as possible. You forget that the rules and regulations are there to guide you. Therefore, you force people to follow you.

There are enough cases in the corporate world of people who, due to their cravings and lust for recognition, power and money have breached rules and have been exposed, disgraced, and destroyed. Lust in the sense of intense craving for recognition, for finances, for power, for control, for glory, which is not earned the hard way, makes you look for shortcuts. When you find the shortcuts, you lose your ability to think and strategise. If you had to run it right, if you had to run it clean, you are constrained. When you are constrained, that is the time that you innovate. Put on your thinking hat and let your imagination begin to work.

Tip

When your resources are less or when you feel constrained, there are two things you can do. One is to imagine and create a new route and the other is to find a shortcut. Sadly, most people take the easy way out and find a shortcut, break the rules, and assume no one will know. As a manager when you take a shortcut, you are taking the entire team down the wrong route along with you. You have a responsibility to make sure either when you leave, or when they leave, that they have learned the right things from you.

When you have lust, you do not teach people to follow the right way, to persevere, to endure, to have courage to stay the course. Most of all, you do not develop character. Intense craving destroys your character, it removes your personality, and brings you down. It is a very short-term gratification to stand up on a podium and get recognition. As soon as people get to know that the route you have taken is not the right route, you are going to crash. Now it must be clear to you how lust can lead a manager to fail. Be careful of that intense craving, accelerated positioning of yourself that can bring you down because you begin to find shortcuts to get to where you want to go faster. As a manager, never move away from the right thing. It is always better to do the right thing the right way. It may take time, but it is sustainable. If you take a shortcut, it is not only you who is going the wrong way. Everyone who follows you is going the wrong way and you are doing wrong by the people who are following you.

Mind Power

We now embark on an all-important lesson that you must learn, master and practice daily. Human beings are powered by their own mind, the body and the brain are the slaves of the mind. So therefore, we need to protect our mindset. When you have the right mindset, then your thoughts are right, then you are less stressed, and you perform better.

Where do you get your mind power from? It comes from years of learning, years of cultivating good thoughts. We all visualize life and situations, both negative and positive situations. Visualisation has a major impact on your mind. When you picture something, it is the first opportunity you get to form your ideas. Let us take the example of an architect. He visualises the house and then brings life to it, in the form of a drawing and then a structure. Visualisation is what creates your mind power and brings it closer to reality. When you contemplate on something, it enhances your mind power. The more seeds you plant, more flowers you get out of your brain. When you start contemplating on the seeds that you have planted, the thoughts will become more colourful.

What formulates your mind power? Primarily it is your internal thinking process and how you visualise things. Your visualisation whether you know it or not, begins to register and ultimately you bring out what you visualise. Your mindset is to a great extent, how you visualise things. Look at an actor, he reads the script, he visualises the scene, and brings out that role into life.

Visualisation forms your mindset, that is why when you are contemplating you compare situations, and then you visualise. This is what helps you to build on outcomes, to consider the different scenarios that can happen for yourself. Your next tool is affirmations. This is how your mind becomes stronger. Through affirmations, your mind gets formatted.

Tip

Your intellectual input, your intellectual engagements, the conferences you attend, the books you read, the podcast that you listen to, everything formats your mindset. When you have such powerful inputs to your mindset, the output of your mind is going to be very rich.



If you do not plant, you do not harvest. You plant good seeds; you have yam on your table. It is as simple as that. You must make sure that you continuously plant seeds, so that you can have as much harvest at the right time. What you see as the reality of your life is your own internal power. Never doubt that internally, you are exponentially powerful, much more than your external power. This is what will translate into your power of position, power of designation, power of wealth. All of which is nothing compared to the internal power we all have.

Take the example of Mahatma Gandhi. When he stood up against the British Government to fight against their rule and asked them to leave India, he was standing up against the entire British Government, a massively powerful organization. He was a humble man himself choosing to stand up and insisting on how it should be done. He firmly believed that you could get rid of the British from India. In fact, no one would have felt the way Gandhi felt when he had a strong belief and vision and power of mind that they could get the British out of India.

Learn this lesson well so that it can change your life. Your inner power is exponentially greater than the external powers that come through designation, wealth, or position. The outer result that you see always reflects inner strength again taking the example of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and of Nelson Mandela. All these leaders have demonstrated with patients that their inner strength is strong enough to rattle the systems that have been there for 150 years such as the British rule. Imagine the mind power of one man and his inner strength of being in prison for 26 years, and the strength of mind of another man who bought an end to apartheid.

Tip

If you look at everybody who has achieved great things, you will see that they were humble and very strong inside. Your mind is the most powerful weapon at your disposal. It is not to be displayed in your armoury, but yours to master and learn how to use. After all, a strong character is greater than a huge bank account. Your integrity is greater than your income. Everything flows from and originates from your mind. That is why we call it mind power. Your mind is the most powerful asset you have.

Remember, the body and brain are slaves of your mind. In that case, you need to ensure that you feed the mind, protect the mind, and strengthen your mind. How do you do that? You do that with your intellectual engagements, your daily reflections, the contemplating that you do and through visualization. Ensure that your mind gets tuned and trained. The more you plant, the more you harvest. The inner strength is greater than outer wealth.

Every outcome that you see first germinates from inner strength. Throughout history people who are humble and yet strong willed inside have brought great outcomes that impacted generations to come. Remember to listen to your mind, to train your mind so that it becomes more powerful. Ensure that the power of your mind is reflected through your career, your character, your action, and your words that it inspires others to have inner strength.

My Mistakes, My Learning

In this chapter, I share with you what has helped me with my career. I am sharing these insights that I have gathered throughout my career with the hope that it will help you when you learn it all together.

The first thing I want to share with you is learn from your mistakes. It is said that there are three kinds of people. One is someone that learns from his own mistakes, the other one who learns from the other's mistakes, and the third kind who will never learn. The first mistake I made when I started my career as a banker was to sign where the branch manager should sign. People who are in the banking industry will know getting Signing Authority is the first major milestone of career progression. I was asked to reverse some vouchers, and there was a column for initials in the register. I marked off the reversals and then I thought it needs to be initialed by the person who reverses it. So, I initialed it and I sent it to my manager.

This manager had been in the bank for a long time, and he has become signatory only after about 20 years of service. It was so important for him that he signs it, and here was I, just probationer one week into the bank and I have signed in his place. You can imagine the kind of volcano it created. He lost his temper, he started screaming, and I was nearly in tears. I was just out of school and had started banking. It was in front of others inside a small office. At that point, I told myself, that in my career in the bank, I will make sure that nobody will ever scream back at me. That was my learning. I made a mistake, I got humiliated, but the way I reacted to it was to make sure that what I do, will be perfect all the time. That nobody will ever find a mistake. That was one of my concrete convictions, a determination that I had throughout my career. It was my first lesson in the first week of my career.

The second thing that I have learned is - no blame, no excuses. We have situations that are sometimes beyond our control, we cannot achieve things. We always tend to blame somebody else. When you blame somebody else, you are giving yourself an excuse. Once you get into a mindset of no excuses, and when you tell yourself 'I am somebody who will never give an excuse', then you find a way to do it, then you do not blame others either. Gradually, you will be known as a man or woman who delivers. At the end of the day, careers are built on attributes and personal credibility. You must start building your career from day one. Learn from your mistakes and make sure those mistakes never get repeated. It is as important not to blame anyone else. The moment you have a culture of blaming someone, you get used to finding an excuse. When you find an excuse, you do not deliver, and when you don't deliver you do not progress. So, try to have a mindset of no excuses, no blame, and when you stop blaming you will not give excuses.

The third point that I want to share with you is prioritisation. This is written everywhere as 'have a to-do list'. I would suggest for you to have a 'not-to-do-list'. Because most of the time, we do things that we should not be doing, and we always have a to-do-list where you run out of time. If you write a 'not-to-do-list' then you will have time, then you can prioritize the things that you really ought to do. What are the things that you really ought to do? Number one, the ones that are most important to your company. Number two, the one that is most important to yourself. So, if you can identify these two, your work gets better. Only when you get better your opportunities get better. So, there must be a conscious attempt to make the industry look good, the company look good, your department look good. Consider - what it is that is important for your progression and is important for your learning. Prioritize those.

Tip

What happens when you get a job is, we do not look at it with a view of what you could learn out of it. When you have that mindset, then you look for new difficult things and you will not settle down to doing the same thing repeatedly. Because if you do not learn, you do not progress. You are the same old frog in the well who sees only his part of the sky, when the sky is so vast. You need to get out of that mindset and make sure that you prioritize what is important, the company or your department and then relate it on how important it is to you. Remember, do away with the to do list. Make a 'not-to-do-list' so that you will know how many things you are doing that you do not have to do at all.

For example, everything that comes to your table as a manager, you need to look at and ask yourself – ‘why should this come to me?’. Is there someone else who can do this? If yes, why is someone else not doing it. Whenever I saw this in my career, I empower, authorize and then delegate. This way you start moving things which are mundane, so that you have time to think, and you have time to do the things that are more important to the company. Instead of overworking yourself and reducing your ability start passing that on. Prioritisation is something that I have consciously done - identifying what is important to me, what is important to the company and that is how you progress in your career.

Fourth, learn to say no. This is one of the most difficult challenges most of the managers face, they cannot say no. It is okay to say no, and there are times you have to say no. When you do not have this quality, you start getting involved in things that you should not be doing and then you burden yourself. When you burden yourself, how can you commit time and concentration to something that you need to be doing? Learn to say no. Here I am not talking about passing the buck, I am talking about saying no to things that are not relevant to your career progression. You do not have to take everything that comes your way. What I am talking about here is learning to say no, for unnecessary time-wasting activities, that will not add any value to your career nor make your department look good. Keep your internal calls brief and to the point. Even on mails – keep it to the point. Get to the point and get started quickly. This of course may depend on your organisations culture.

The next point I want to talk to you about is - take the focal point when you go for meetings. When you go out for a gathering, make sure you stick around the smartest person in the audience or in the crowd. When you go for a meeting, it is common that you tend to look for a comfortable seat in the second row of the room. If there is a table and chairs around the table, you will probably sit in the back table. It is normal even when you go for a presentation. Nobody sits in the front seat in Sri Lanka, they always sit in the second seat. My suggestion to you and based on what worked for me, every time I went for a meeting, I sat straight in front of the person who was conducting the meeting as much as possible. I had eye contact with them. When you do that, you get their attention, when you sit in a side you lose that. So, when you go for a meeting, try to be right in front of the person speaking, the man who is controlling the meeting, then you get their attention. He gets your attention; you get his attention and that is how you build your persona. Similarly, when you go for a cocktail or a social function, you hang around the people who are smart, who are thought leaders, who are people who can make an impact. Remember, you are judged by the company you keep. This is also how you build your network. Just by hanging around, listen to their conversations - you are bound to learn a lot. The others may judge you on the same level, that adds to your persona.

Tip

The five things in this chapter I want to share with you that I have practiced in my career is - number one, learn from your mistakes, and then take it as a motivation and tell yourself that you are never going to find a mistake. Second - try not to blame others, because when you blame, you are giving yourself an excuse. Third, prioritise. The fourth would be - learning to say no. Final point is getting attention by being the focal point, so that people can see you, address you. Progress begins from getting noticed. So, next time - sit right in front of the person who is conducting the meeting.

Heading

In this Chapter, I am going to share with you five further points that worked for me in my career. I am going to talk to you about a common thing that we all face in office, the rush, the rat race. What I told myself is do not rush. That does not mean you do not do it fast. When you rush, you tend to miss the point. But when you do not rush, you can still do it fast. You can build a reputation for doing it fast and without mistakes. When you rush, you tend to make mistakes, and you tend to miss the areas that should have covered.

We are all under pressure in the corporate world. There is a lot of rushing that we do in the workplace but that does not mean that you cannot work fast. To correct the mistakes that you made because you are in a rush will cost you time. So better not to rush, but to work fast. How do you do that? That is my next point. Focus on one thing at a time. I can tell you in my entire career, from banking to my final place, I would have only one thing on my desk, I would just focus on one thing at a time. That way, you can tick them off quickly. What happens is when you do one thing at a time, your entire mind focuses on that. Then you can finish it faster. There are days that I walk into my office, I tell my PA, no phone calls no visitors, so that I completely focus on what I must do. I encourage you also to get into this culture.

Tip

In today's world, the biggest distraction you have is your phone. There are days that I even leave my mobile phone with my PA when I go into my office and say no calls no visitors. This way you focus on one thing at a time as a habit. You will be amazed at the output that you get when you are the first one in your office and try not to have visitors or calls. Even the people around you will get used to it and you can work fast without rushing. One of the things that I have told myself and have achieved it to a great extent, is when somebody wants something on a particular day, I would always give it the day before. Then you start building a reputation of being quick.

This way whenever there is a need to do something faster, your name comes up right on top and you start building a reputation. So do not rush, work fast. How do you work fast? By concentrating on just one thing at a time, one paper at a time, one issue at a time. Get it done completely so that you are not going back to the same document again and again. You do that by focusing on one thing at a time.

The next point to lay before you are planting more seeds in your mind. The golden rule in a garden is 1% of the seeds give 50% of the flowers. So, the more you plant in your mind your thinking becomes wider and your approach becomes wide. We hardly read about our job or about what our competition does. If you plant seeds in your mind, the thoughts that come out are better. Your actions come out of your thoughts. Your thoughts come out of what you plant in your mind.

Tip

What I have done in my career as much as possible is read about my job, I read about everything that I had to do be it operations, be it international trade, education, I will read everything about it. So that when you respond, when you write something, when you propose something, you have an absolutely holistic approach to it. So that the document that comes out has every detail that is relevant.

The next point is follow-up. When you follow up, things get done. When you continue to follow up, you will realize over a period, things get done even without having to follow up because your team will know you will chase things up. I can give you a recent example. I called a government department to get something done on a particular document and this gentleman said you can have it on Friday. Then I asked this gentleman – would that be Friday morning. Then I asked – what time on Friday morning. Then he said 10.30a.m and I replied saying it would be fine and mentioned that I will call around nine o'clock to see whether it is ready. On Thursday, the day before the due date, I call and said just to remind you that there is a document is due tomorrow. Due to my follow up I was not disappointed. I admit that a follow up can be a pain to do but at end of the day, you have to follow up to get results.

We all work with others so not everyone will have your speed of work, not everyone will have your level priority. Some of the things you do is only important to you. How you get things done is by constantly following up. The general rule is 'what gets followed up, gets done'. Make follow ups a habit by checking on something when you are passing by. If you have given an assignment to somebody, you can casually mention politely 'I hope you're working on the assignment I gave you'. Make sure it is always a positive way of following up.

My last point is, love your job like a painting. You have seen how painters work. It has to leave you with a feeling of satisfaction. It has to look good and be appreciated by everyone who sees your work. When you finish it, be it a proposal, be it a presentation, be it a discussion forum that you engaged in, whatever you do think of it as a painting. What does a painting do? It makes a sketch more colorful. When you see something colorful it feels good, so love your job.

Every day, every transaction, every function you do, treat it as a painting. Make it look colorful. When you present - make it look colorful. When you write - make it look colorful. Even in the details make sure the formats are nice, the text you use are clear, the layout is easy to read and likewise.

So let me recap - number one is do not rush but work fast. Next one, focus on one thing at a time, plant seeds in your mind so that your job becomes like a painting it becomes clear. The more seeds you plant, more flowers you get, and your output becomes more colorful. Follow up, follow up, follow up. Finally, love your job, treat it like a painting and when you submit your work, it should bring a smile on you and the person reading it.

The Power of Pausing

We now come to a habitual practice that can be simulated into your daily self-management routine that will pay off in making your career avoid irreversible pitfalls. What I am offering is a clear, actionable control to put in place, enabling you to fight frustration at work, make savvier decisions, and avoid costly mistakes when we are short on time, attention, and choices. This is a lesson I have learnt through personal experience and too valuable not to impart.

In discussing this I use an audio-visual mechanism that we can all relate to. You have seen the four buttons, in an audio player or video player. You have the favorite of them all – the play button, there is also the fast forward button, you have the rewind button, and you have the pause button. Which button do you suppose is used most of the time? The play button obviously, and often a fast forward button in our general haste to get to the next scene or song as quickly as possible.



As a manager, the button that you should be using more often is the pause button. It is an intentional stop to see whether you are going in the right direction. It can be seen as a check we place on ourselves with an option of restoring the ability to reset.

The underpinning to the effectiveness of pausing comes from the organisation that expects accountability and is relying on you to deliver the results the right way. Lest we forget that in the capacity of a manager, there are lots of people relying on us. This follows through to the resources that you are allocated, and you have control over to be used exclusively for the purpose of the company's objectives; making the reliance on you clear. Even the people who are working with you are relying on you for guidance and direction. It is a whole gamut of people around you looking up to you.

It is not unnatural to expect a fast pace of activity as managers. After all it is a rat race, we are all driven by KPIs, driven by results, given quarterly, monthly, weekly targets to achieve so we could find ourselves running. In this rat race, remember even if you win you are still a rat, so do not get into a directionless rat race. Instead, what you must cultivate is the inner strength to pause. It will help build the endurance you need because your career is a long race. It is not a 100-meter dash, in fact it is a marathon. In a sense, there could be a lap that you run slowly, there could be a lap that you need to run fast. But the important thing is how you preserve your energy to complete the journey. If you start running a marathon like you are running a 100-meter dash, you are not going to even complete the race. The important thing here is to give yourself time to take the correct impactful direction.

Tip

Even during work hours, take a pausing break before making any important decision. Especially if you are in a situation that you must achieve something with a sensitive outcome, with implications to others whichever decision you choose, then it is important to pause, stop and erase your mind and look at things afresh.

As a general habit, we do not pause in our lives. As a result, we go down a wrong road which results in creating a reverse effect in our careers. In back tracking for the lack of taking a moment to pause we would have lost time, resources, and wasted energy. Most vital of them all is the respect and reputation we would have lost for having taken a wrong turn. Personally, having to reverse a decision will no doubt bring you down. All this will be a result of not making a pause when we were at a crossroad.

There might be time that intuitively, we move in a direction because we want to catch up. We might want to beat the time or beat our colleagues to look good in the eyes of the management. Thus, tempted to run in haste regardless and at any cost. This will lead to not even having a mindset to pause to say to ourselves, “am I doing the right thing?”

The most important thing you can have as a manager, my friends, is to know that you have a followership. After all people learn from not what you say but from what you do. Actions do speak louder than words. As a manager, it is important that you pause and review the action before you make it actionable and irreversible. I encourage you to first look at the outcome and at the consequence, which we fail to focus on most of the time.

We tend to only look at the outcome because that is what is set for you. You are given your outcomes in your in your appraisals, your objectives are set which automatically drives you to be outcome driven. There is nothing wrong with that however, in going after this outcome, if you do not pause to check whether you are going the right way, you lose focus on the consequences and sometimes the consequences can be more devastating than the outcome. It can have more negative and have an irreversible impact. Therefore, the pause button is the most important button that you should be using as a habitual pitstop in your decision-making process.

Tip

May I suggest you have a visual aid of this concept you have now learnt to assist you daily. Get your mouse pads or the coasters on your desk that you place your coffee on and imprint a pause button on it as a personal reminder that you need to pause and review which way you are going on a regular basis.

You should always remember that people are following you and that there is a lot of reliance placed on you. One wrong move you make can have implications on the organisation, the organisation's reputation, your personal reputation, your family's reputation, your staff's reputation, and the reputation of the brand; all of which are built over time, with a lot of effort. One snap decision taken because of failure to pause to check, can destroy all what you have built and once you have lost it, you would have lost it forever. Remember, once you do something wrong in today's world, there is no comeback. So that is why it is always good to pause before play.

Tip

Pause before you play and look at the consequence not solely on the outcome to which you are bound. How you run the race is what matters. Your reputation is built on how you play the game, and not how many matches you won. Remember that. When you come to a point of decision making, pause. When you finish the day's work, pause before you leave your office and see whether you played the game right. Ask yourself what you could have done better and consider the consequences of the decisions you have made that day.

As it would be in a game, it is better not to have scored than be run out in your haste since you can always catch up if you wait for the right ball to score. So as a manager, remember the reliance placed on you. There are people watching you and people learning from you. People learn what you do, and not what you say. So, make sure you pause and think of the consequences and do the right thing. Pause before play.

Pride, a source of success and failure

I want to leave you with a powerful thought on why managers fail. Just as there is lots of guidance and research on how to be successful, managers need to be warned equally of what to avoid. In this chapter I will draw attention to some of the reasons why managers fail so that you can try to avoid this kind of pitfalls.

I'm going to talk about one of it, which I call 'the pitfall of pride'. As human beings, it is natural, that we have a sense of pride, you got to have a sense of pride, because of the gift of life you have, and the opportunities you have. An appropriate level of pride helps build your self-esteem, that builds confidence. It is healthy, to have a certain level of pride. Sometimes it is even necessary for you to motivate yourself. Where does the pitfall come, or when does it begin to harm you as a manager?

These are things that subconsciously drive your behaviour, these are things that subconsciously shape your attitude, this is something that will also affect your interpersonal skills, if you do not consciously control the growth of pride. Pride is a seed that can go into you and grow wild, and you tend to enjoy that. That is why you begin to crave recognition, you begin to expect people to stand up and salute you, regardless of how you are, but because you have a position. That pride gradually gets you into some blind spots, and you lose your sensitiveness to certain things. As a result on the long run, you would fail.

One thing we need to understand as managers is that by ourselves, on our own, we are nothing. You have got to remember that. Our success will depend on the level of empowerment that is given to us. The level of commitment that we inculcate and, harness from the people working with us, and the level of cooperation we get from our peers. Our performance will depend on the level of responsibility we get from the top, the level of commitment we harness from the bottom, and the level of cooperation we get from our peers. It is a top-down, across and bottom, influence on our behavior.

Tip

When we do not control our pride, you build a wall around the top-down approach, the bottom-up approach, and side-in approach, and we get isolated. But you got to have pride, what happens when you are too proud? It drives you to a feel-good scenario. You feel good, that you have achieved something, that you have people reporting to you, looking up to you and there is a dependency from your management for your performance. Do not forget envy from the peers which you may enjoy. Naturally, when you perform you want your peers to envy you. So, this drives the formation of pride, which is a natural thing. But it begins to have an adverse effect on you when pride comes on top and every action that you do has an intention of enhancing that pride. This is where we tend to start losing focus and this is where we start failing. When you do something with an intention of enhancing your pride, if that becomes your sole focus, then you become insensitive to what drives your performance and progress.

Therefore, you need to be sensitive to the people top-down, side-in, bottom up, that will drive your performance. What happens when you become insensitive? You develop blind spots. It clouds your thinking, it colours your vision. It is like sitting in a cockpit and going through the clouds, you are only depending on the radar. Your inner radar is made up of your values. Even if you have a cloud of pride, and you cannot see further, it may be as if you are in a cockpit of a flight and going through a massive cloud, you do not see anything. What drives you is the radar vision; the radar is our inner value system.

Tip

How do you control your pride? If you are getting irritated due to something that is not happening according to your expectation. You feel something is going to affect your position, your profile, or the perception people have of you. If you feel that it is going to affect your level of pride, then you have become insensitive to the people that you are supposed to be contributing to.

We need to remember that we are not dropped to the top of the ladder. If you are dropped to the top of the ladder, you will never know how to come down. It is like a cat. I do not know how many of you have watched a cat climbing the tree. It will run towards the tree and climb the tree and then it will look down in confusion almost thinking 'how would I go down'. Pride takes you to that kind of mindset, they come to a point and then you accelerate your growth of pride. It starts blocking your sensitiveness to the people around you. Then you start to override them. What is the first thing that you do when you are blinded by pride? You become blind to what keeps you down.

I want to share a little story that you can relate to. I am sure at one point of time or the other, we have all flown a kite. To keep a kite flying high, you need two things. One - there must be wind against the kite and only when the air is against the face of the kite does it fly high. Similarly, one has got to face the air that is blowing against you. The other is the string that is attached to the ground. If the string is not attached to the ground, you will not reach the altitude needed for the kite and it will just drift. If you want to progress in your career, remember the kite story. To recap the two elements, you need is - to be facing the air and the string that the kite is tied to must be firmly attached to the ground. If the string is detached, you are gone.

Once again, one of the reasons managers fail is that they do not have control over their pride. Remember that it is good to have pride and self-esteem and use it as a good motivator, but not to the degree that gets you blinded.

Strength of Sharing

In the series of why managers fail, I want to talk about the next one, which is called absence of sharing. If you look at your career, your starting point, the journey from where you started to your current position. Just imagine if your line manager, or your peers, or the people who are supporting you - did not share anything with you. How do you think you would have progressed? We all know how much of information we need outside what comes to our desk to make us perform. This is something we forget. Some 20 or 30 years ago, there was an era where people would not share information because they feel insecure, they used to think sharing will dilute their position. On the contrary, sharing information strengthens your position. Sharing information can even make you look knowledgeable and make others dependent upon you.

Tip

One of the reasons managers fail is that they do not share. But to share you got to have. So as managers, once in a way, you got to get into what I call 'a clean slate'. You got to erase what has worked for you and you must bring in new knowledge, new way of doing thinking and that is how you can continue to share something new with your team.

One suggestion I can throw to you is if you have a team of 1,2,3 or 4 teammates, once in every 10 days, have a three minute stand up meeting to share something new. It could be about your industry, about your competition, it could be about what is happening around in the world, about personality development. I encourage you to do some research, get onto a clean slate, write something new, because end of the day, if your team feels good, then they do good. If they do good, you look good. So, take time in sharing information.

As managers you will have a challenge, to determine how much you should share. Of course, there is always a control over the flow of information, not everything that you hear from your seniors can be shared. Equally, not everything that you hear from the bottom can be shared.

Tip

Sharing has two aspects to it – sharing information to improve someone and how you treat confidential information when information is shared with you. How do you handle that? You do so in a manner that does not breach the trust of the person who shared the information with you confidentially.

One of the reasons how managers fail depends on the way they share information, how much of it they share, and how they handle the information that is shared with them. Do some homework get onto a clean slate once in a while find something new, call your team for three to four minutes and stand up in the morning and say 'there is something I want to share with you and here's what I thought is beneficial and that is why I am sharing it with you'. Remember, to say to your team 'I am sharing something I thought was beneficial for me, so I want to share it with you so that it can be beneficial for you'. The moment you use these lines, your team will know that you are genuinely interested in them getting benefits out of what you are sharing. They will know that you are genuinely interested in making them feel good, do good and thereby, they respect you.

Now let us look at the second aspect of it - sharing information received by you. How do you manage what is shared with you? Number one, the fact that someone is sharing it with you is because they respect you, and they have confidence that they will get a fair, unbiased reaction from you. Most of the time, we tend to compromise this as managers. Sometimes, immediately you tend to sort of share with someone else, and that reduces your credibility, that reduces the confidence they have in you, so naturally, they will stop sharing information with you. When information is not shared, you cannot perform. That is why you need to make sure how you manage the information that is shared with you.

Most of the time managers have favourites in certain places, you tend to share confidential information and the moment you share information given to you, you are compromising the integrity of the person who has spoken to you, and you are compromising the integrity of yourself along with the trust that is placed on you. Therefore, sharing out and sharing in is critical for you to manage your performance.

If you do not manage any of this, if you continue to share knowledge with your people, in the short term and energize them they will not give you their best and when that happens, you will fail. Similarly, in a more sensitive way, the information that is coming to you, is coming to you because they have faith in you, it is coming to you because they trust you and respect you and how you manage that information and how you react to that information is important. What you do with that information must be in the best interest of the person who has brought it to you and in the best interest of your team and in the best interest of your organisation. Therefore, remember sharing in and sharing out and how you manage the information that goes out and that comes in, makes you stand or makes you fall.

Most Good Plans End Up Unexecuted

We now come to the all-important topic of execution. Execution has been the biggest problem, be it at national level, be at corporate level. Here we focus on execution at a personal level. Let us look at the new year resolutions we make. How many of those resolutions do we really execute? We make good resolutions, we start well, and it all fades off halfway. The success of your life, your career is in the execution. I believe that you started what you want to do and began where you want to go. But then how well do you execute? Researchers have shown nearly 90% of the corporate strategies do not get executed to its maximum. There are reasons for this. Because external factors change, environmental change, the dynamics are such that you do not execute by tweaking the strategies but find a way through it by consistently focusing on where you are going and instead, you tend to give up on your journey.

Execution is mainly dependent upon your capabilities. Whether it is corporate or whether it is national, it comes down to the resourcefulness of a nation or a company or yourself along with your capacity to extract those resources to achieve what you want. Enthusiasm often falls off as you start moving on the execution. Because we do not stay focused on what we want to do. No journey, be it business, be it national, be it personal is easy. But everybody who has climbed the ladder, has taken the trouble to climb the ladder. They have not given up on what they want to do. We do not start the journey with the end in mind. Take an example of a sculptor. What does he do? Be it a piece of wood, be it a piece of stone, he sees the end. When he sees the log, he sees what he can make out of that. He visualises what it will be at the end of it.

Beginning of every year, we talk about New Year's resolutions. Let me challenge you and ask a different question. Have we lived the last year? We may have started off living it. If you start asking that question, and if you ask yourself why I did not, then you will realise that you changed course because of external factors. You lost interest in what you wanted to achieve, your physical fitness and mental preparedness was not there to go where you wanted to because you did not build that.

Tip

If you take an athlete who takes part in a triathlon - of swimming, running, and a cycling event. What do they train for? They train for swimming, they train for endurance, they train for power, they do their breathing exercises, they practice cycling, they practice running, they practice swimming before they get into a race. When they come there and when they start at under the starting orders, they know they must swim, run and cycle. They come in mentally prepared, physically fit to go there.

Similarly, execution is a matter of physical and mental aspect. If you do not get your mind focused, if you do not get your body prepared and if you do not have the resourcefulness in terms of knowledge, you are not going to execute what you want to execute. Before you start on the journey, let us say you want to get into a competition where you must swim, run, and cycle. You must ask yourself first whether you have the endurance to keep up to these three events. Number two, whether you have the endurance to beat somebody in every event, whether your mind is ready to take the pain and convert it into a success.

Tip

Execution fails because we do not have the end in mind. Execution fails because the resourcefulness of yourself - physically and mentally is not geared to the dream that you want to achieve. You need to visualise the end and then you begin to execute. It fails because you do not treat your work as a craft. A craftsman sees the end before even he starts, he visualises the end. When you treat your work as a craft, you begin to work towards it. The final thing is the detail. The devil is in the detail they say. Execution fails, because we have failed to give attention to a little detail that becomes a mountainous issue.

Let us recap. Success lies in the execution; the rubber must hit the tar if you want to win the race. You got to get out there and drive. Why do we fail? Because we do not start with the end in mind, and we do not see a function or task as a craft. We need to make sure we are physically and mentally ready to endure the distance we need to run. Finally, make sure that every day, you rewind that day and ask yourself, 'have I lived the way I should have?'. The same way, look at the year, the week, the month, and ask yourself 'have I lived that day, that week, that month, that year, the way I should have? And 'do I have any regrets?'. If you can rewind and review your previous days, previous weeks, previous months, then you will know how to fast forward your present and execute what you want to achieve.

Winning with the Slight Edge

We now come to what I call 'the law of slight edge'. If you have been watching the Olympics swimming meet or the 100-meter dash, you would see that the gap between the one who wins and the one who comes next is seconds. Second place could be someone who missed it by a fraction of seconds. It is so close that, even before you could blink one could either win or lose. That edge makes all the difference across industries across personal lives or across careers.

It is that slight edge that you recognise and sharpen, and it will help you become a legend. Now take for example, the Blackberry. BlackBerry as we all know has been the phone for the executive. If you go into a board meeting where there are 10 guys around the table, you can guarantee that at least one of them will carry a Blackberry. Blackberry came with a massive edge giving access to emails and they became the executive phone of the world. What happened to them is that they could not enhance that age. When Android phones came into the smartphones industry, we had Blackberry still believing that they can manage and hold on to their position of the innovation that worked very well for some time in the past. Today, we know Blackberry is becoming buried where it has been a huge challenge for Blackberry to come back.

Here too you can see that the gap between winning and losing is just a fraction. This slight edge is what you need to understand. It is all about running now. That is why you will find people saying, "we run a business". Why do people say, "we run a business"? Because every business is in competition. Likewise, you also should begin to say, "I am running my career". In a sense, your career is also in a competition. Everybody inside the company, outside the company, probably outside the country is a potential threat for you winning at your career race. So, if a business needs to run, then the employees need to run. Running a business is about having a collection of business athletes within the company.

What makes an athlete? How do you measure the performance of an athlete? An athlete is someone who has an objective to achieve. An athlete is someone who trains, recognising who he is going to be competing against and trains knowing the standards of the competition, to be ahead of that standard and to train with that purpose. When you wake up and come to work, how much have you prepared? It is about running with an objective. It is about running with the view to win. It is about training to run to win. An athlete is measured by his competitiveness. Such is the case with a business athlete, you are measured on your competitiveness to run in your job role.

What are the parameters of measuring an athlete? On time, definitely - how fast you can run and how well you run within the track. It is not about running fast and wild, you must run fast and disciplined. If you start running before the start signal is given you are disqualified. You must follow the rules. You must keep to the track limits, and you must run without having taken any anabolic steroids - on your own you must run. It is the same with work. Today, you can get your services from anywhere in the world, you can get your products from anywhere in the world. In that sense, you are basically competing with everybody not in your company, not outside your company, not within the country, but you are competing with the world. Your standards, therefore, should be global standards.

Your first measurement criteria, therefore, is timing. Ask yourself 'how fast am I and how well do I deliver within the framework of time? Can I deliver it better than the others?'. That is what makes you an athlete. That is what makes your company an athletic company.

To run fast, you must have energy. Energy is physical, but to be energised is a mental strength. To be energised, you must be focused and driven, you must have a clear objective, and a burning desire within yourself to be better than what you were yesterday so that it energises you. Also, you must be physically fit. This means, waking up early, joining that 5.00a.m club. Don't wake up tired, most of us start the day tired. When you start the day already tired, how are you going to gather that urge to run the entire day? How will you show enthusiasm? You need to be an energised individual to the people around you. Competitiveness is measured by timeliness which is an outcome of your energy. You need to not only build energy, but you need to have an energised mind so that your actions help you win.

The third thing that you need to have as an athlete is your creativity. How well do you differ from the other? You've got to imagine the end, look at what your competition is and then you create your own advantage and your own uniqueness. This how you have the advantage of the law of the slight edge. After all, it is a fraction of a second between life and death. I am sure you have experienced the value of that second if you had been near an accident and just moved away from the spot in time. It is the same between winning and losing. It is just a fraction of a second or a blink of an eye that makes the difference. You need to start discovering how to differentiate yourself so that gives you that slight edge in what you are doing. Remember, everybody in your company wants to be the CEO. Everybody in the company is your competition. So create that slight edge that gives you that advantage of a fraction of a second, that makes you a winner.

Finally, an athlete is measured by skill. It is not limited to athletics. Even if it is a singing competition, a speaking competition, at end of the day boils down to how well do it. That is your skill set which is unique. No one can teach you skill because you are unique. Only you will know what your body can do and what your mind can do. Your skill set, therefore, must be sharpened only by you.

Can you look at Michael Jordan and start training like that? It does not work that way. You must pick up your skill and then try to tailor it to fit into your body so that you become effective. Most of the mistakes we make is by trying to plug in, cut and paste the skillset of somebody else - it does not work, and you will fail. Important thing is recognising the skill set you require to have to become an athlete and tailor it to fit into your body structure. Then you become effective. Take time to prepare every day.

Tip

To most of us, life is a routine and most of us wake up to a routine. How do you make an impact? When you wake up to a routine, you live to a routine, and you die to a routine. What is the point in grumbling and grudging that you are not happy about your life? Your life is your business. Instead, take time to prepare and to improve. How many hours does an athlete put into win? Usain Bolt was quoted saying that he trains 10,000 hours for a competition that lasts less than 10 seconds. Look at the time put into preparation. When you win it is the 10,000 hours that you put in that made the 10 seconds worthy of life. Remember that example.

If you do not prepare, you are not ready to compete. If you are not ready to compete, you are not going to take the advantage of the slight edge. If you are not prepared at work, you will know it first. People say, 'today is my off day'. Why? Because you are not prepared. When you are not prepared, your team will know that. Even your boss will know that you are not prepared. How many times have you gone to meetings unprepared and got caught? The most dangerous part is your customers will know you are not prepared. When you go for a meeting and have a conversation, if you cannot answer the question they ask, even they know that you are not prepared.

When you need to prepare for customer meetings, find everything about the customer, have potential questions and answers ready. Share the questions that you face with your staff so that they get ready. Preparedness is what makes you win. To summarise, you have got to have the energy physically and you need to be energised mentally.

Instead of this phrase 'think outside the box' do something new. Get into the practice of Visual Thinking. I want you to imagine what it looks like. When you imagine what it looks like, it becomes more real. What I am suggesting to you is to get into a habit of Visual Thinking, imagine physically, what it is going to look like and when you feel it you are better prepared, then you can have the advantage of the slight edge.

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