

Practical Management Insights – Some Anecdotes



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Living the Code of Conduct

- I was invited to deliver a lecture on the occasion of annual day of a company. I decide to talk on ethics. I raised a question - is there an ethics policy of the company? many hands went up (though not all), then I asked have you read it ? fewer hands showed, I then asked - have you understood it , still fewer hands showed. Finally I asked - do you live by it ? only two hands went up. It is good thing for a company to have an ethics policy, but more importantly employees must also live by it
- I was a speaker at one of the seminars at Chennai organized by the Institute of Cost Accountants of India. Sitting on the dais alongside was a senior professional lady from a company based in Noida. As is customary after the presentations by the speakers a memento was offered to all sitting on the dais. When the gift packed memento was handed over to this lady she whispered in my ears “what is the cost of this?” I was surprised , I said ‘Madam why are you bothered ..this is just a token of appreciation for your having come all the way and participated as a speaker at the seminar ” she said ‘ No, Dr. Gupta my company has a gift policy. If whatever is there inside the box exceeds that threshold amount, then sorry I would not be able to accept it “I was startled. Here was a lady who was living the ethics policy of the company in true sense.

With optimism and strategy, a weakness can, be converted into an opportunity

- A young boy aged around 9 years lost his left arm in a road accident. He became subdued. He started to stay at home only not mixing up with other children of his age because of his handicap. His father took him to a kung fu academy and requested the trainer there to let him visit the club every day and punch the bean bag with the right arm. slowly the trainer started training him into the art of kung fu and then one day he asked the boy to get his father along the next day. His father upset thinking about the cause of his being called by the trainer. Next day father went to the club with his son. Trainer said that there was a tournament of Kung Fu happening in the district

and that he wanted his son to take part in that. Father said please excuse me, but my son does not have one arm, I do not want him to get hurt by other able strong competitors. But the trainer assured him that nothing will happen to him. Reluctantly the father bowed to the request of the trainer and allowed his son to take part in the competition. The boy won two rounds and entered the semifinals. His father came and met up with the trainer pleading with him that enough was enough and that now he would not allow his son to continue in the competition as now the competition will become even tougher. The trainer reassured the father that he stands a good chance of progressing to the finals. The boy won the semifinal bout and also the final. He was awarded a big trophy. Father was feeling very happy and proud. He asked as to how he made the boy win the tournament despite his handicap. The trainer replied I taught him a jab executed with right hand, and the only way for the opponent to stop getting punched was to defend by holding the left arm of the opponent. Since the boy did not have left arm, there was no way of stopping him to be the winner.

Culture of the organization and managerial performance

- A senior marketing manager of a company was moving on. The company selected a competent professional to replace him. A small get together was organized to welcome the new employee and to bid farewell to the outgoing manager. When the function got over the new employee went over to the outgoing professional and said - You have successfully been associated with this company for over 10 years, please tell me some tricks of trade so that I can also be successful in this company. The outgoing professional said - all right. He wrote something on three small slips of paper, put them inside three separate envelopes and numbered them 1,2 and 3 and handing them over to the new incumbent and said - anytime you find yourself in a fix open envelope number 1 and you will find a solution to your problem. Anytime you find yourself in a tougher problem, open envelop number 2 and then if you get into real tough problem, then open envelop number 3 and it will suggest you a solution. The new employee was very happy, and he confidently started his innings in the new company. After a few months he was faced with a problem. He opened the envelope number 1, took out the paper and it read - Blame your predecessor. (it is quite natural for the new incumbent to say that the outgoing had messed up everything. He told this to his boss, and he said Fine, carry on. After a few months he once again came across a problem. He could not think of a solution. This time he did not want to rush to open envelop number 2, then only one more will be left. But when he could not find any solution to his problem he opened envelop number 2 and it said - blame the company systems. he told his boss and he got away this time also. After about six months thereafter he once again came across a problem. He tried his best, burnt lot of midnight oil but could not find a solution. With trembling hands he tore open envelop number 3, took out the paper and read it - it said -it's time now for you to prepare these three envelopes. Actual problem was the person had rich experience and was very competent, but he could not adjust himself with the culture of the new company. The performance of a person depends to a large extent on the degree to which he can adjust with the culture of the organization

Difference between a Worker and a Manager

- There was a great worker who worked in a five-star hotel. Once there was a party in the hotel and in every party, potatoes are cooked in some form or another. This person was given a sack of 20 kg of potatoes and was asked to peel them. He finished the task in 20 minutes and told his supervisor that the task was done. The supervisor went

over to the place and found all potatoes nicely peeled and stacked properly. He was very much impressed with the worker and said, you are a very efficient and great worker. After a week or so there was another party in the hotel. He again gave him 20 kg potatoes and told him that these need to be peeled. but mind you this party is for VIPs, so peel only good potatoes. If you peel a bad potato, I will peel you off. The worker started to work. He did not come back even after 3 hours. Supervisor went over to the place where he was working and found that he was sweating and had just finished 4 kg potato peeling. He asked him what happened...? last week you finished the task within 20 minutes. He said sir today you told me to peel only good potatoes. I am not able to decide quickly whether a potato is good or bad. Should I or should I not peel it. He was a great worker; he was not a manager. he was not good at decision making. What distinguishes managers from workers is their decision-making ability.

Strategic Pricing and marketing success

There is a company in Yale, UK, which Manufactures locks. Its product was the best available in the market and cheapest. The Marketing manager was very confident that he will be able to sell 1 million locks in a year as the product was very good and it was the cheapest. There would be no problem selling the same. After 6 months a review was undertaken. To everyone's surprise it was found that only 2 lakh locks had been sold. Achieving target of 1 million by the year end seemed unachievable. A consultant was hired to find out the reasons for poor sales trend. Consultant went to the marketplace and observed consumer behavior. Consumer used to come to the shop and ask for good quality lock. Shopkeeper showed Yale lock and would tell how many they get for 3 pounds. Customer asked is there any better-quality lock. Shopkeeper said yes and pulled out lock of another brand, this is for 4 pounds. Any other better lock...? shopkeeper pulled out lock of yet another brand ..this is for 6 pounds. People (as per natural buying behavior) purchased the 4 pound lock. Consultant suggested that the price of Yale lock be increased only then the lock will start selling in expected quantities.(against the canons of law of demand).The reason given was - people perceive price as an indicator of quality. The lock was not being preferred by the customers because of its low price. The lock had 3 levers. Another 2 levers were added at a cost of 1 pound and the new 5 lever lock was priced at 4.5 pounds. The lock started selling like hot cakes.

Who is clever-teacher or student?

- Three MBA students bunked the class on the day of test. When they came next day the reason, they gave was they had gone out somewhere and the tyre of the car got punctured. Since they were in a far-off place the same could not be mended. Professor said find. All of you appear for the test two days later wherein there will be a compulsory question to answer. They agreed. The Compulsory question was - Which tyre burst during your last journey - options - front left, front right, rear left, rear right

Customer Delight

- Last Deepavali I went to a jeweler's shop and picked up a small item of silver for giving a corporate gift. I paid for the article and it was nicely packed and handed over to me by the shopkeeper. I turned to leave the shop. Suddenly he called - saab ek minute I turned back to see what happened. Then he said chotu lana..next I saw a helper of his bring something gift packed . The shopkeeper gave it to me and said - happy Deepavali Sir. this was customer delight. I never expected this. Once I got into my car I curiously opened the pack. There was a glass bowl worth probably only around 150 rupees. But the way it was given made me a lifelong customer of that jeweler -true customer delight

You need Spark to succeed

- I was once a member of the interview board. There were three members. The interviews were being conducted for the position of Manager (Finance). One of the candidates answered 8 out of 10 questions. He was happy and confident about his performance. After the candidate walked out we all turned towards each other. One of the board member said - wo spark nahin dikha.. we all tended to agree. The candidate was not selected. Today it is not enough to be having knowledge or academic distinctions. One needs to be enthusiastic, and appear to be a go getter, with fire in the belly for being successful in life.

Work smarter not harder

- A man was without a job for a long time. Finally, he got a job as woodcutter in a timber yard. He was paid on the basis of number of logs cut. He worked very hard but could cut only 15 logs on first day. He went home and told his wife that he will work still harder the next day and would cut more than 15 logs. She said sure she was confident of his ability. He worked harder than the previous day, but he was surprised when he found out that at the end of the day, he had cut only 13 logs. He went home and asked his wife that even after working harder, why he could cut a smaller number of logs, his wife said don't worry, I am sure you will do better tomorrow. Next day he tried even harder but could cut only 12 logs. His wife was also perplexed as to why in spite of working harder and harder the output was coming down. She said we are illiterate; you please talk to your Seth tomorrow. He will be able to guide you. He asked his Seth the next morning and he asked him a question. When did you last sharpen your saw...? He said on the first day. His Seth said, that is the reason for the reduced daily output. Worker said I wanted to earn more and more money and did not want to waste time sharpening the saw. That was a mistake. Moral is even we professionals have to keep sharpen our ax by reading and keeping ourselves up to date.

