

- Management & Leadership Studies -

Can There Be Any Better Advice to Today's Manager?

SWAMI BODHANANDA

2 June, 2004



...In the corporate world what matters is market share, customer satisfaction, share value, innovation and quality products. This creates fierce competition among corporate players. Though the above are the declared objectives of all players, corporate governance takes to many undesirable stratagems to gain market share and profits. As the saying goes, 'everything is allowed in war and love'. Companies consist of people with varying interests, backgrounds and expectations. To knit them together and motivate them to pursue a shared goal is difficult involving many compromises. Both these tasks lead to unethical practices.

The old problems of ego, arrogance, intolerance and greed creep into the civilized corporate world. In India we have the additional problem of poverty and the resultant corruption- using public office for private gain or taking without contributing in the name of social justice.

So leadership has many contradictory challenges- to eradicate poverty, illiteracy and illness; to develop infrastructure; and to create an entrepreneurial mind set. Indian corporations have to operate in such a constrained environment.

These problems are systemic, not just individualistic; cultural than ethical, political than economic, leadership than managerial, theoretical than practical, strategic than tactical, long term than short term, has to deal with the big picture than tinkering with small issues. India is like Stephen Hawking, the famous astrophysicist who suffers from a debilitating motor organ disease. India's legs and heart are weak, but the brain is in excellent condition. India's legs are the 700 million poor, the heart is the 200 million middle class and the head is 100 million upper class and professionals.

India lives in three layers. Dialogue and collaboration between these three layers are important for purposeful and sustained growth. Our effort to create an Indian Management style will have to take all these factors into consideration. Essentially corporate management is an upper class activity, but they don't have much voice in determining the political environment, which is influenced by the lower and middle class people.

Duryodhana's arrogance and stubbornness has to be understood in this light, like even the Indian corporate world has to deal with the arrogance and irrationality and populism of the Mayavati-s, Laloo-s, Paswan-s, Mulayam-s,

Mamata-s and Jayalalita-s as well as the stubbornness of the Leftist Marxists and the Trade Unionists. If Dritarashtra were not born blind he would have been the king and Duryodhana would have been natural heir to the kingdom. But that was not to be. Duryodhana felt cheated by fate and became bitter, jealous and vengeful. In a materialistic culture where there is no inner discipline or acceptance conflict is inevitable. Duryodhana's intolerance led to war and the more accommodating Pandavas won.

The lesson I learn from this collaborative, win-win, policies are always better than intolerance and zero sum games. Pandavas were forced to play a zero sum game and at the end all lost heavily in terms of men and material. The Mahabharata war was a case of mutually assured destruction [MAD]. Hitler's were a zero sum game as well as that of Pakistan in the Bangladesh war. Can you, Give us some analogies from the corporate world for zero sum games and win-win situations? The key negative words are 'arrogance', 'greed', and positive word is 'Coexistence' and 'collaboration'. A paltry settlement is no settlement and Pandavas would not have long been happy with that kind of a humiliating situation.

....

Dritarashtra had a weakness for his son which was genetic and psychological. D felt guilty that because of his blindness his son was denied his natural right to the kingdom and his wife Gandhari was denied sight and the pleasure of seeing her children grow up. It was this guilt that made D indulgent to his son Dryodhana and turns a blind eye, literally and figuratively, to his misdemeanors. Poor Dritarashtra deserves our sympathy. Indian wisdom tradition brings Vidhi/fate in the understanding of fateful events whose denouement follows the inevitable twists and turns of a Greek Tragedy. Now, my question is: is there any thing like this vidhi/fate/karma concept in the corporate vocabulary to understand certain decisions taken- like the BJP decision to go for general election before schedule- which lead to inevitable disaster. In

such situations only spirituality can come to your aid at least in absorbing the shock.

Recently I read that there are three requirements for success - 'Competence', 'concept' and 'connections'. The last requirement is very important for business success anywhere in the world. And there are economic and practical reasons too for that. It is said that in B-Schools what you pick up is just connections and nothing else. Now my question, How you distinguish between using connections and nepotism? The Kaurava model was successful in the case of the delinquent Samir Jain of Times of India taking over the reins after his father who increased business from Rs. 250 crores to Rs. 800 crores in five years. Can we have a SWOT analysis of the Kaurava model that is universally practiced? Capitalism and the corporate world thrive on inherited wealth and power. What is the role of professional management in all this?

....

Who will be the sacrificial lamb - hero- in business wars? Is he the one who takes risk, incubate and commission new projects and if it doesn't work pack up and leave as per the exit plan or B plan? Where will you place Abhimanyu in a business model? I am sure such heroes are the initial trailblazers after who march successful men.

....

Focus on the process with awareness of the error free end in the background, without unduly worrying about the result and anxiety for personal self is the central teaching of the Gita. Therefore, since there is no other way for a dignified life, Arjuna, Get up, fight and win, gain glory and enjoy power and wealth that success brings. (Gita 11-33)

Can there be any better advice to today's manager?

War is the last resort after sama, dana, bheda and danda. But unless one is battle ready one will not have the leisure, wits and self-confidence for employing the earlier methods of conflict resolution. Strength, tact, vigilance and

the determination to win are the price of success. "It is the striped one who survives in the corporate jungle"- A judicious mix of collaboration, conciliation, manipulation and flexing the muscles according the contingency of the situation is the right solution.

SWAMI BODHANANDA

Source: Email Response Sent: Wednesday, June 02, 2004, 9.04 PM

Swami Bodhananda is Chairman, Sambodh Foundation, India; The Sambodh Society Inc. USA; and Bodhananda Research Foundation for Management & Leadership Studies. He is the Inspiration and Guiding Force for all Sambodh institutions.