

A few thoughts

Friends,

1995 has been a very successful year for Mercuri International-India Operations. We have started working with some large customers in diverse industries and continue to work with our old clients.

This issue of Mercuri Mail focuses on Leadership and the role of a Leader in influencing human behaviour. The Vintage Column expounds on factors facilitating and inhibiting communication.

The 'focus' looks at how Leaders are learning and how without learning one can't be a Leader.

The "Must Read" explores the poetic beauty of Max De Pree's "Leadership is an Art" a fascinating and thought provoking book.

As the 1996 dawns and we march into the millenium, may there be more true leaders with singular commitment and responsibility for the destiny of the followers who have permitted the leaders to lead them.

Vintage

BARRIERS AND GATEWAYS TO COMMUNICATION

Communication is the interchange of thoughts, opinions or information by speech, writing or signs.

Communication becomes effective communication only when both the parties involved in the act understand and respond to one another totally. The most common barrier to communication is our natural tendency to judge, to approve or disapprove the statement of the other person or persons. Our primary reaction is to evaluate the other party's statement from our point of view. Especially when strong feelings and emotions are involved, we tend to lose our objectivity and get personal, without considering the circumstances under which the statement has been made or the other person's point of view. This only leads to two different points of view, two judgements, two schools of thought and ultimately there is such a large communication gap that nothing is resolved and more confusion is wrought.

The only way one can overcome this barrier to communication, is by listening. Listening and understanding is the gateway to communication. If one listens and understands the other person's thoughts and feelings so well, that one can summarise them from the other person's point of view, it means that communication has cut across all barriers. In other words, put yourself in the other person's place before presenting your point of view to be able to understand his thoughts and his frame of reference.

But to be an objective listener presents its own difficulties. It needs courage. In trying to be impartial and yet understand another person's point of view, one runs the risk of being changed oneself and losing one's identity - one's attitude and personality being influenced by the other person's thought processes.

This sort of listening and understanding is very difficult when larger groups are involved like for example-two nations at dispute.

Moreover it needs a neutral person or an outsider to listen objectively and judge fairly especially in a situation where emotions are

at play. It has been found that an outsider can make a more sound judgement than a person who is involved or relates to any of the parties. This is not possible between nations or two religious sects. But this can be resorted to in small groups or person to person.

Differences in background, experience, sense of values also pose barriers to communication. To state an example-in the case of a boss and an employee, it often happens that the boss tries to explain his plan of action or his logical reasoning assuming that he understands what his employee has to say about it. He tries to get the employee to see things from his point of view. By ignoring his employee's feelings and rationalising his own, he blocks communication. He does not credit the employee with the power of reasoning. As a result the employee hears only his boss's attitude rather than the logical content of his words. He feels piqued, his self-esteem is threatened and he becomes more defensive and as a result his work suffers a setback.

On the other hand if the boss feels he cannot ignore the feelings of the employee, and instead of getting the employee to understand him he decides to listen to what the employee has to say, the employee begins to open up and feels accepted as a person credited with some sense. He perceives his boss as a source of help rather than a threat. He becomes less defensive and feels free to express his differences. This facilitates communication and his work is more productive because he has got moral support.

Even though the listening approach to any problem is a little difficult to put into practice, it is a challenge which should be explored to its fullest extent in today's world to facilitate mutual communication.

Thus man's ability to listen intelligently, understandingly and skilfully to another person opens up the floodgates of communication and today's companies, industries and universities should try to strive towards this approach for a better understanding and a brighter future.

EXCERPTED FROM "BARRIERS AND GATEWAYS TO COMMUNICATION" BY CARL R. ROGERS AND F.J. ROETHLISBERGER, HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW. □

THE INDIA JOURNAL OF MERCURI INTERNATIONAL

OUR VALUED CLIENTS IN 1995
- INCOMPANY PROGRAMMES -

ABT INDUSTRIES, ALFA LEVEL, APTECH COMPUTERS, BAJAJ AUTO, BLUE STAR, BRAKES INDIA, CHEMICON, CROMPTON GREAVES, DEEJAY ENTERPRISES, DIGITAL ELECTRONICS, DUN & BRAD-STREET SATYAM, EID PARRY, ELECTRONICA, FIRST FLIGHT, GATEWAY HOTELS, GODREJ & BOYCE, HARITA FINANCE, HARMAN ENGINEERING, HCL, HYDRAULICS, INDIAN CARD CLOTHING, INFOSYS, ITW SIGNODE, JMA RANE, J.N. GROUP, KIRLOSKAR BROTHERS, KIRLOSKAR ELECTRIC, KIRLOSKAR OIL ENGINES, KOTHARI INDUSTRIAL CORPORATION, L.G. BALAKRISHNAN & BROS., LARSEN & TOUBRO, MICROLINE, MK ELECTRIC, MULTITECH, NUCHEM, PAPER PRODUCTS, RATHI ENGINEERING, SAHAKEIL, SANMAR ENGINEERING CORPORATION, SATYAM COMPUTERS, STERLING HOLIDAY RESORTS, STERLING TREE MAGNUM, SUCCESS TRACK, TATA ELXSI, TELCO, TVS SUZUKI, WIPRO FLUID POWER, WIPRO INFOTECH.



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Focus

HOW TOMORROWS LEADERS
ARE LEARNING THEIR STUFF

Peter Senge, Author of the Management Classic - "The Fifth Discipline" says "We know how to invest in technology and machinery but we are at a loss when it comes to investing in human capital".

In today's world of rapid changes, a leader has a challenging role to perform-influencing human behaviour. Ronald. Heifetz, Professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government expands on this - a real leader does not tell what people should do but helps people to solve problems that don't have readily available solutions.

Jim Collins, Author of "Built to Last" reports that successful companies are passionately loyal to a set of values and also create the environment to energise people to act in accordance with those values.

Hewlett-Packard, Fuji Xerox, General Electric, Mckinsey and Pepsico call it "Making the soft stuff hard" - a real management conundrum indeed! All are evolving processes to reduce subjective observations to hard numbers. In other words, quantify and there by demystify the art of human development.

Procedures like these may not be immediately successful but sustained effort has proved that "soft-processes" can become a source of competitive strength.

Roger Enrico, Vice-Chairman of Pepsico couldn't have put it better-"Human interactions are a lot tougher to manage than numbers and P & Ls. So the trick is to make the soft stuff hard, to operationalise it."

Defining Leadership in an era of change is in itself a daunting task. What is indisputable is that Leadership is character-a leader must be worthy of respect. He must "walk the talk". If there is ambiguity in his message or values, people will opt out. Jean Krasnica who heads a multifunctional sales team at Hewlett-Packard understands what she herself responds to. People she would follow "bring out the best in me by making me want to handle myself in the same way. I want to be part of their world".

But if leadership is character, can it be taught? The consensus view is that it cannot be taught but it can be learnt. Creating a right ambience for this learning involves a harmonious blend of disciplines like selection, appraisal, job-assignment and mentoring.

Evidently, the first step would be to find people who share your values. Emphasis on accountability would then harden the softer stuff. Rajat Gupta who reigns as first among equals in the Mckinsey partnership explains the leadership screening systems at Mckinsey - very demanding, continuous and very subjective as well.

Once the future stars are identified, then comes formal employee training and education. While formal training transmits skills and values, people learn leadership from on the job experience. Failure is a great teacher, but best met early in life.

Future leaders need support through mentoring as the MBAs call it but friendship may be the reason it works. Joel Bleeke, a Senior Partner in Mckinsey elaborates - Mentoring for leadership is not just conveying problem-solving skills but conveying aspirations, values, excitement, a spirit that believes anything is possible. One of Bleeke's apprentices says that one is more confident with someone supporting you because the mentor's comfort zone is probably much bigger than your own.

While measuring leadership behaviour, the focus would be designing appraisal and other systems that would unite the whole organisation's behaviour with core values. Leadership is character, requiring growth and personal change. The companies that are most successful at developing leaders, are in general the most successful. Pepsi's Calloway warns "I'll bet most of the companies that are in life or death battles got into that kind of trouble because they didn't pay enough attention to developing their leaders."

HOW TOMORROW'S BEST LEADERS ARE LEARNING THEIR STUFF - STRATFORD SHERMAN. EXCERPTED FROM FORTUNE INTERNATIONAL, NOVEMBER 27, 1995. □

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Must - Read

If you think leadership has very little to do with poetry and philosophy, think again. De Pree's thoughts, messages are gentle raindrops cascading softly into the depths of the soul - sheer poetry, each drop breathing truth and beauty.

"Leadership is an art" is all about the 'why' rather than the 'how' of corporate life. It is easy to understand why Max De Pree is Chairman and CEO of Herman Miller Inc, chosen as one of the 100 best companies to work for in the United States. His writing reflects the conviction of a man who does what he believes in.

To De Pree, leadership is an art designed to link the variety of gifts people have to the work and service of the organisation. "Leaders don't inflict pain, they bear pain". Leadership is serving as opposed to owning. It means, accepting that relationships count more than structure.

"Work is one of our greatest privileges. Work can even be poetic." This is the gift every leader owes his team. Every employee has the right to be needed to be involved, to understand, to be accountable, to make a commitment-to be able to say 'yes' to the following question: is this a place where they will let me do my best?

The author sees a corporation as a group of people working closely together within a covenantal relationship - something akin to a Renoir painting. Leadership must be "a gift to the spirit". Sophisticated and trained managers are skilled at quantification but "wonders" the author - How often do they concentrate on the spirit or the debt they owe the future?

An effective corporation enables people to have 'space' and give meaning to their diverse gifts. De Pree chooses to look at quality in terms of integrity - "A fine sense of one's obligations". Finally a leader needs to be sensitive to all signs of entropy. De Pree's interpretation of different signs of entropy are extremely thought provoking.

There are beautiful moments throughout the book, but the most touching - why must a leader weep?

The style is simple and elegant, the tone conversational. There is no trace of 'holier than thou'. One must own this book in the true sense of the word. This book will set you on a spiritual journey where the maps are love, trust, respect, grace and warmth. And yes, this journey has no destination, it is forever.

"LEADERSHIP IS AN ART" BY MAX DE PREE (ARROW BUSINESS BOOKS,) 148 PAGES, £ 5.99.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH ENDURING VALUES

What makes a Leader. The concept of leadership has been in existence from perhaps time immemorial, whether it is political, social or business.

LET US REFLECT ON WHAT A LEADER DOES

1. He plans, analyses, steers and manages the operations of his people.
2. He harnesses the potential of people who work with him and for him to achieve excellence in tasks and values.
3. He contributes to the development of the people who work for him.
4. He shapes and transforms people to live their full lives.

And much more perhaps!

Through this column, over a period of time, I wish to pause and reflect and examine what is the true meaning of leadership.

If we start with the basic hypothesis that, a leader, is one who:

- a. has been given the great opportunity to be responsible for the destiny of his people.
- b. has been given the mandate to guide them towards certain levels of excellence.
- c. has been trusted of his competence, courage and compassion and conviction that he is worthy of being a leader.

One thing that emerges very distinctly and clearly is that, a leader always puts his people above him. A leader decides actions on the basis of the impact of the actions on his people and not on himself. A leader defines reality as what is ultimately beneficial for the followers and consequently for the activity of the corporation. A leader looks at himself as a servant, as a tool, towards contribution to his own people and for which he is ever grateful. A leader measure his success based on the success of his people. A leader sets standards which are difficult but achievable and he will be able to perform those standards without feeling the sense of achievement for himself. Could we call it "SELFLESSNESS".

Is it a worthwhile proposition for a leader to look at this as a fundamental philosophy. Does it mean there is an element of sacrifice, there is no scope for ruthlessness for his own ambitions. Perhaps this is a difficult question to answer but it is very likely that a true leader does not even consider this as selflessness but looks at it as his way of life and unless somebody reminds, he perhaps will never even realise it. He even ignores the question and marches forward in his chosen path!

Until next time.
('He/She' - no gender bias!)

AIMS SO HIGH YOU'LL NEVER BE BORED

The greatest waste of our natural resources is the number of people who never achieve their potential. Get out of that slow lane, shift into that fast lane. If you think you can't you won't. If you think you can there's a good chance you will. Even making the effort will make you feel like a new person. Reputations are made by searching for things that can't be done and doing them. Aim low: boring. Aim high: soaring.

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Notes from all over

IMAGINE YOU'RE THE IDEA

Imagine that you're a parking meter. How does it feel when coins are inserted in you? What is it like when you're "expired." How could you be easier to use? Imagine that you're a box of cereal on a grocery shelf. How can you be more attractive? What can you do to force the grocer to give you more shelf space?

How would you feel if you were the idea you're developing?

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

"What concerns me," remarked the philosopher Epictetus, "is not the way things are, but rather the way people think things are." If you think you're creative, you'll act that way - and vice versa. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. As you think, so you are.

In what ways are you creative?

DIG DEEPER

Emile Chartier: "Nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it's the only one you have" Don't stop with the first right answer you find. Dig deeper and look for others. How do you keep a fish from smelling? Cook it as soon as you catch it. Keep a cat around. Burn incense. Cut its nose off. Remember: the best way to get a good idea is to get lots of ideas.

What good ideas are below the surface? What's the second right answer?

Courtesy: The Creative Whackpack, Roger Von Ouch

I also recommend the person below for a copy.

Name :

Address :

..... Ph :

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Cut and Mail to :
Mercuri Goldmann (India) Pvt. Ltd.
 No. 988(1st Floor), 12th Main, 1st Cross,
 H.A.L. 2nd Stage, Bangalore - 560 008.
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* I have to let you go, Woody. We've decided to put this plant in your corner *

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Mercuri International
 India Operations

	Bangalore	Pune
Our Telephone Numbers	080-5260192 080-5278492 080-5262053	0212-364395 - -
Our Telex Number	0845-3220 MERI IN	- -
Our Fax Number	080-5278492	-