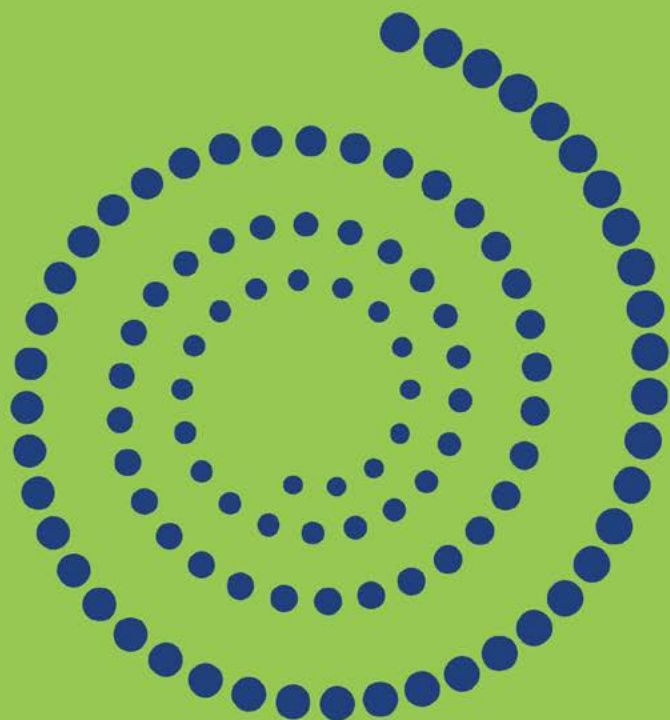


CONSCIOUS LEADERSHIP

A Journey Within



R Manandhar



Kabule Books

Conscious Leadership

A Journey Within

by
R Manandhar

Conscious Leadership: A Journey Within

by R Manandhar

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CHANGE IS POSSIBLE

About this book and me

to
the infinite potential
in you

This book is my medium to inspire you to believe that ‘change’ is possible.

- You can change yourself the way you want.
- You can develop your abilities to make changes in your surroundings – your family, business, community, or society at large.

My life itself is a proof that change is possible. I would further say – If change is possible, then dream is possible!

As a child and youth, I was never smart in the ways that people perceive and my upbringing was not a pleasant one either. My grades were poor both in school and college and I did not have any talents to impress people. Belonging to a poor family my parents could not afford expensive Private schools and I had to go to a Government – Nepali medium school. Thinking of writing a book in English back then was impossible for me.

But one quality that I had was the love for reading. Since my childhood I had inclination towards books that led me to reading literature– stories, poems and novels. Reading in English was pretty hard for me to comprehend; nevertheless I tried and got better with time. I started writing some short stories and poems in my mother tongue, but they seemed ridiculous. But give up I did not and by and by my hard work paid off and some of them started being published in magazines. This encouraged me a lot and I became even more fervent in my endeavour.

Some fifteen years back I started reading books on leadership, management and spiritual self-help guides. You may call it a synchronicity, as during the same time I also came across some inspiring trainers and was exposed to the world of leadership and spirituality. I enjoyed their training sessions a lot and soon found myself assisting them in their training sessions. Before long, I was delivering trainings on my own and started to be known as a Leadership Trainer!

In 2010, The Himalayan Times, Nepal's largest selling English daily, initiated a column on Leadership on its Sunday supplementary– Perspectives. As a leadership trainer, I was approached to contribute for the column. This was a great opportunity for me! Since then, it has been seven years with The Himalayan Times, and I have compiled this book that now you have in your hands!

How to handle success

I do not know how big an achievement I should mark of my being an author and leadership trainer. Looking back to see from where I started the journey, it is a big achievement for me, which today seems quite simple. What I know is that, had I said that I would be

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going to do these things 15 years ago, I would have been ridiculed by everyone.

Going through the experiences of life I have found two unhealthy ways of self-assessment– low self-regard and high self-regard. Low self-esteem can lead to depression, while too high self-estimation could be a symptom of a maniac. A wise leader refrains from both and keeps travelling on the lifelong journey of passion and learning. I would call the combination of the hunger for achievement and self-contentment going together hand in hand – the Tao of life. Certainly, we need to constantly endeavour to reach higher but even if you climb Mount Everest, the roof of the world, the sky still does not become any closer.

How to read this book: Leisurely for pleasure reading!

This is a collection of articles each written independently at different times for The Himalayan Times. So I would like to suggest you to read each of the articles as independent write-ups. It is not necessary in any way that you read this book cover to cover from first to the last page. This is not a serious academic work. This is for leisure and pleasure reading. You can turn any page and read the article there. I would suggest reading only one article in a day and contemplating on it for some time in your mind. Do not intend to finish this book. Just keep on reading whenever you feel like.

Sources of ideas in this book

As this is not written with the plan of a book, some ideas could

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be repeating at places. I apologize to readers that I did not have enough dedication to look into them and revise to create a perfect book. Another weakness could be that I might not have been able to mention all the sources of ideas in this book. In today's world of knowledge explosion, the age of information, it is becoming more and more difficult to trace the original source of knowledge. I apologize if I have not been able to trace the source of some of the contents.

Also there are many ideas that I derived from trainers and participants during training programs that could be their own or concepts they derived from somewhere else. I have not been able to trace their sources as well. Many ideas I got from Facebook posts of friends. In this way, I disclaim the ideas in this book as mine. However, I have not written anything that I was not touched by. From whichever sources they came to me, I have not written them until I have assimilated them internally into my own experience and transformed them to wisdom. In that sense, I own them!

Anyway, at the end of this book I have listed the influential and impactful books that I went through in the seven years of writing for the column in The Himalayan Times. I hope they would serve as bibliography and also recommended reading for the readers of this book.

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21 November 2017

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Kiran Gulrajani, CEO CoEvolve, is a wonderful facilitator from India, in whose presence more facilitators are born, I being one of them. Many ideas for my writing have been derived from his trainings.

Nithya Shanti, a spiritual teacher from India - who has been in corporate world and, interestingly, also a forest monk for six years. I met him in 2007 while he was still a Buddhist monk, the time he came to deliver training organized by me. After the training sessions we used to hold lively discussions on *dharma*. Though I have been learning *dharma* from childhood, he is the one from whom I acquired the meaning of *dharma*. I was fortunate to get a wonderful opportunity to spend ten days at his residence in Pune, India to practice meditation and converse with him on life and spirituality. I am fond of his Facebook writings which have been great source of knowledge for me and my own writing. I have quoted his posts at several places in this book.

Deepak Sawhney, Founder- Phrenimos India, is a Trainer and Leadership Coach - from whom I learned the art to present abstract ideas in the most down-to-earth manner.

The participants of my training – I have indeed learned more from each training that I delivered, than any of the participants. Each one of them has given me an opportunity to develop myself.

My wife **Manila** – she has never objected any of my whimsical decisions, such as leaving a lucrative job and becoming a vagabond trainer.

My brother **Anul** – he has taken time to read every letter of this book to check for any errors, in spite of his busy schedule in Canada. Such dedication is possible only from the heart. Without him the book would have contained many errors.

The biggest credit goes to **The Himalayan Times**. Without the weekly ‘Perspectives’ requesting me to contribute I would not have undertaken this journey. Seeing one’s writing being published and receiving overwhelming feedback from the readers motivated me to write more. And, before I knew it, it became an organically developed work. This has fuelled my passion to continue this journey and move forward.

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Conscious Leadership
a journey within

TRANSPLANTING TRADITIONAL WISDOM

The crux of leadership is to be connected

Farmers in the fields offer better lessons in leadership and team building than universities do. Farmers work together as a team and enjoy their work. Sharing a common goal, each of them contributes to the fullest to reap a good harvest. In a management university, students learn the theories of leadership, team building, motivation, attitude, job satisfaction, relaxation, etc. Farmers busy in plantation may not know these theories but they are the people who practice them most sincerely.

How do they practice this so spontaneously? The answer to that question is — connection. They are connected with the earth. Since they are in touch with the earth, they are grounded. The dictionary meaning of ‘grounded’ is ‘having a secure feeling of being in touch with reality and personal feelings’. They are connected not only with the earth but also with their responsibilities and the people around them. That makes them natural team players.

You will see the greatest team work in rice plantation. It is because farmers do not dwell in the duality of life and work. That is the reason the event of rice plantation is so full of life. Singing, dancing and work all go together. If we look at our traditions, work is always a celebration. Festivals are related to work. Connections bring joy.

Our pains are the results of duality and being disconnected.

The crux of leadership is to be connected. A leader needs to be connected with people, with the goal and all the works that lead towards the goal. He or she needs to be connected with the earth and the sky, connected to the ground reality and the potential for achievement.

The most essential connection for a leader is with himself. The self has many layers. At the deepest level, it is the spirit — the essence of your being — what you are. It is also the passions and feelings you have. It is the goals you set in your life and in your organisation.

We have to remember that the 'self' is never separated from our past. In pursuit of the future, in some ways, we have disconnected ourselves from our past. We can learn a lot from ancient wisdom and our traditions.

THE MELODY OF LEADERSHIP

You need to blend do-be-do-be-do

Leaders are expected to be active. They are engaged in activities to bring about anticipated changes. Thus, a leader's life is full of pace. When life is full of activities and events, time may be scarce even for self-reflection. However, for a leader to be effective, reflections are as important as actions.

A true and in-depth reflection demands respite, calmness and pause from routine engagements. To be precise – breathing space! The question in today's marketplace reality of cut throat competition and rat race is, whether it is good for leaders to leave the piles of pending tasks and sit calmly for self-reflection? Will it not bring slackness in their work and leave them behind in the competition?

But the fact is, actions and reflections are complement each other. Reflections bring efficiency to actions. Continuous action may exhaust a person. Outstanding leaders understand the realities of the market but they keep themselves away from the rat race. They understand that with the inevitable haste you may stand first in the rat race but you will still remain a rat. Leaders are not rats; they are supposed to be lions and for a lion, 'grace' is more important than 'race'.

What brings grace in you? Pace is important for progress but it is the 'space' in your life that adds grace. Profound reflection can happen only in a spacious 'space' and this space is not only external but internal as well. For reflection to be effective, it is not enough that you are away from work. The mind must be relaxed and free from pre-conditions. It should be filled with child-like wonder. The actual space needed is in the mind. Pace is about "doing" and space is about "being".

Pace is masculine. It chases success. Space is feminine and can be attained by remaining still. Blending the two results in creativity. Too much of work may bring results in the beginning but it will only wear you out in the end. Similarly, being may be pleasant at first but in excess, it will result in stagnation. That is why, only do, do, do or only be, be, be is not good for you. But when you blend do-be-do-be-do, you form a melody. The fineblend makes a leader's life melodious and effective.

DISAPPEARING DICHOTOMY

In the changed paradigm of leadership there is no place for blame

Leadership paradigm has changed over time, both in politics and in organisations. The world has witnessed many great leaders. Nepal too used to have national heroes. People often recall the good old days and make gloomy remarks about how we lack such influential leaders today. Leadership experts, on the other hand, take the situation positively. They analyse seemingly absence of a super leader as a result of people's growing conscience. Now not many people will accept one leader as being the ultimate and uncontested protagonist.

This also holds true in the business world. Brafman and Beckstorm reveal the power of leaderless organisations in their book *The Starfish and the Spider*. They explore how Wikipedia, Craigslist and Skype have become successful without having anyone in charge. Skype, which has a few employees and a handful of PCs to its name, wreaks havoc on the huge structured phone industries. The seemingly chaotic groups, without a proper leader, have become more and more powerful as compared to structured organisations. The concept of leadership — with one person leading the way — is fading to become a thing of the past. Instead, team leadership or shared leadership is on the rise. Deep commitment of every individual is the key to effective team leadership. The responsibility in team process is not as simple as

in hierarchical organisations, where people fulfil their assigned tasks. Every team member understands the team's as well as individual responsibilities. Team leadership can be described as a brilliant dance group in which every performer comes centre stage, as demanded. They also know when to disappear into the group, leaving the centre space for the next member.

We blame our leaders for always wanting to hog the limelight and not leaving space for others. However, in the changed paradigm of leadership there is no place for blame. In present-day leadership, there is no other option than reviewing your own actions and taking complete responsibility. How can you blame the leader when there is no division between the leader and the followers?

THE SPIRITUALITY OF LEADERSHIP

Experts and trainers have now started to look into old spiritual texts for new leadership lessons

Nowadays leadership is becoming more and more spiritual. If you attend an advanced leadership training programme, don't be surprised if you are asked to sit for meditation or a sound healing session. 'Spiritual intelligence' is the new topic for executives.

Leadership experts and trainers have now started to look into old spiritual texts for new leadership lessons. The new age leadership bible *The Tao of Leadership* is one such example. Writer, John Heider, based his book on age-old Chinese spiritual text of the Taoist master Lao Tzu. This paradigm shift shows that leadership is becoming a much subtler quality than just some concrete skills.

What has brought on this change? Today leadership is becoming less and less about controlling and more and more about inspiring people. And the best way to inspire and influence others is to present yourself as a model. So, leadership has now become self-leadership and spirituality has always preached to focus on self and self-change.

The latest trends in leadership have much to do with spirituality. Conventional leadership focused on traits, skills and styles,

while contemporary leadership approaches are concerned with transforming, inspiring and being authentic. In fact, these are spiritual qualities. To be effective you need to work in-depth with yourself.

You need to transform yourself to have the power to transform others. You cannot inspire just by asking others to behave in certain way. Conversely, if you model the behaviour in action, you may not even need to tell others how they should behave.

However, the point to keep in mind is that being spiritual does not mean running away from reality. The truth is, spirituality helps us transform reality. The first step in using spirituality in leadership is to develop the quality to see reality as it is. The second step is to accept them wholeheartedly, no matter how bitter they are. The third step is to be willing to face the challenges happily. Essentially, spiritual understanding and quality helps transform people in enduring and endearing ways. Organisations can become great places to work and the world a great place to live when leadership becomes the practical dimension of spirituality.

POTENTIAL FOR LEADERSHIP

Those who are confident that they are born with all leadership qualities may need to recheck themselves

Many people think they cannot be a leader because they do not possess leadership qualities. In the changed paradigm of leadership, people who think this way actually have potentials to become a good leader. Those who are confident that they are born with all leadership qualities may need to recheck themselves. The self-doubt of not having leadership qualities shows that one has high regards for leadership position and assumes leadership role as a highly responsible one. Is this sense of responsibility itself not a good quality of leadership?

People may think they cannot be a leader because of wrong concepts about leadership. They think being a leader means being in front of people, addressing the mass and having influence over others. New patterns are rather different — silent leadership, servant leadership and so on. Good leadership quality starts from self-leadership. How effectively you can lead yourself comes before leading others. Leaders are those who are determined to make a change. One may do it with lots of ado or silently.

In Hindu mythology, there is a story of deities and demons churning the sea (samudra- manthan) to get the nectar (amrit)

out from the sea. When they started churning, the log they used for churning could not stand upright because the seabed was soft. They went to lord Vishnu with the complaint and he incarnated as a tortoise and rested on the seabed. The log was put on its back and the churning was done.

In this story, is the tortoise a leader or not? Can we relate it with the concept of 'servant leadership' of Robert Greenleaf and 'leader as steward' of Peter Senge? Tortoise is a silent and slow creature. But it is very strong and outlives all other beings. Those who think they cannot be a leader because they cannot steal the show may in fact have a potential to be a great leader.

Self-admiration used to be considered a prerequisite for being a leader. However, recent researches reveal that people who think "I am better than others" are bad leaders. The researchers conclude that they are the very people who should not be leaders. The craving to be a leader in itself is a great disadvantage for being a good leader.

YOU ARE A LEADER — EVERYWHERE, EVERY TIME

There is no situation and time in which you are not leading yourself

Many people limit their leadership practice to their job. This is quite a limited vision of leadership. This is also short sight. Your leadership excellence is demonstrated when you are with your family and friends. Indeed, your true leadership quality is revealed when you are alone. The question is not if you are the leader in a given situation. There is no situation and time in which you are not a leader. The only question is if you are a good leader or a bad leader. You are a leader everywhere, every time. Leadership never leaves you alone!

What makes you a good leader? 'Clarity of aim' is the first and foremost quality of leadership. You have aims whether you are a student or a parent. What matters is how aware you are about it. As a student your aim could be to develop yourself for future success and as a parent to lead your children. Organisational aims are clear because they are in print. For personal purposes, you may have only a hazy idea. Communication and continuous learning are other qualities of leadership. Check yourself to see if you are communicating passionately and positively with your family members and friends. When you are alone, talk to yourself. Check your self-talk and see if it echoes optimism or helplessness.

How much you are open to learning? If you are a student, do you read only textbooks or expand your reading to literature and books on self-improvement? If you are a parent, are you eager to learn about children and parenting skills or you just take it for granted? There are many books and websites on parent leadership. If you are truly open to learning, you can learn from your children too. There is a beautiful book by Dan Allender called *How Children Raise Parents*. Be wise, when you are retired you will have only your spouse and children for your happiness.

The ultimate task of a leader is to inspire. You can effectively and authentically inspire others, by applying the aforesaid qualities — having definite aims, communication and openness to learning. These qualities are equally applicable when you are amongst people or all alone. When you think you are alone, you are in fact with yourself. A leader finds this time the best opportunity to lead oneself. If you are a true leader, you will develop yourself towards your goals when you are alone.

LEADERSHIP OR LEADER-SHEEP?

True leaders do not make followers. They produce more leaders.

When we see a person with many followers, we think he or she must be a leader. The general concept is —bigger the mass, greater the leader. We suppose leadership is about leading people. This notion is more about ‘leader-sheep’ than leadership. Otherwise, why would we despise some popular leaders? Let us look into the life stories of Jesus and Buddha to see if we can find the answer.

In the life of Jesus, we read that Satan enticed him for kingship if he gave up preaching. There is a similar story in the life of Buddha. The Mara or devil tempted him by saying that if he abandoned his meditation, he would become the ultimate emperor of the whole world. Both of them declined the lucrative exchange offer and refused to fall into the trap of leading a kingdom.

Basically there are two types of leaders. One is guided by the hunger of power to lead people. The other is driven by a vision and leads a situation. The above stories suggest that temptation to lead people is guided by devil’s motivation. Jesus and Buddha straightaway rejected it but many of our leaders have fallen into the lure of the devils inside them.

When people feel deficit of power within themselves, they seek to compensate it by acquiring power from external factors. Thus, power-monger leaders are born. The other type of leaders is overflowing with internal energy. They are inherently powerful and their energy is benign.

True leaders are known not by the number of followers, but by their vision. Greater the vision, greater is the leader. So, what is a vision? A vision is a desired state different from current reality. If current reality is situation 'A', vision is situation 'B'. This is what Peter Senge calls 'creative tension'. True leaders craft a vision in their mind and determine its manifestation. People who are inspired by the vision may join them. Some true leaders have thousands of followers and some none. The common factor between them is that they lead a situation not people.

LOCUS OF CONTROL FOR LEADERS

Research findings have shown that greatest threat to health occurs when people feel caught in a situation

It is a common attitude among us to blame the situation. We usually say –

“I know this is a brilliant idea but I cannot implement it because the office situation is not favourable to change”

“I want to change myself but my colleagues...”

“I want to do this good thing but my parents...”

There are so many 'buts' and you seem utterly helpless. There is no doubt that the stories are true, but truer is that blaming does not improve you or the situation around you. This attitude will only make you weaker and the situation worse. You become totally helpless because you yourself say, vocally or mentally, “I can do nothing.” It all depends on so-and-sos, but not me. When you think in this way, you are imprisoned. It is said that the instant you blame, you become lame. Physically lame person can climb Mt Everest but this attitudinal lameness will make you unable to move even a step forward.

Psychology says people are guided by two types of 'locus of control' — internal and external. If you think — 'The situation is there but I have some control over it', your locus of control is 'internal'. But if you think — 'The situation is greater than me and I cannot move until the situation becomes favourable', your locus of control is 'external'. Internal locus empowers you.

The attitude gives freedom to you to become an active actor even in the worst situation. External locus of control makes a situation govern over you. Then you feel yourself small and unimportant. In fact, when you blame something external you are declaring to yourself, "I am defeated." External locus leads to victim mindset while internal locus generates victor mindset.

Leaders are responsible people. What does it mean to be responsible? Responsibility is ability to respond to a situation or people. They have to respond, not to blame. Leaders are also change makers. They cannot make a change unless they have strong internal locus. That is why they are powerful actors even in adverse situations. The sense of control does not only make you successful but also keeps you healthy and happy. Research findings have shown that greatest threat to health occurs when people feel caught in a situation, while feeling of control reduces stress and chances of illness.

WHAT DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU SEE A PERSON?

Leadership is about discovering treasures within people, not unravelling their faults

The quality of leaders is reflected by their interaction with people. This is very subtle. It concerns not only what they say to people, but also in their attitude and way of viewing people. Recently I was touched by a question put up by a wise popular figure on facebook. The question was — "What do you see when you see a person?"

Ask yourself — what you see when you see a new person? Do you see the person or his or her background? We see and interpret a person through the lenses of our past experiences and beliefs. We see the outfits and conclude something. We judge by the language and word the person uses. In this way, we are able to see the personality but miss the essence of that person.

Sociologist Don Helmen has said that when two people are communicating, there are in fact six people involved.

1. Who you think you are;
2. Who you think the other is;
3. Who the other thinks you are;
4. Who the other thinks he or she is;
5. The real you; and
6. The real person he or she is.

If the person is familiar, the matter is even worse. Your views are based on the beliefs about the person that you have created through your past interactions. They could be true or false. Nonetheless, you see in the person what you believe the person is about. Another wrong way of seeing people is through your interest. Whether a person is important to you or not depends on whether he or she can serve your purpose. Here you see people as objects of your interest.

Check yourself — Are you, even if in the most subtle way, treating people as objects? We have a rich tradition that asks us to treat even non-living objects as animate. During festivals like Bishwokarma Puja, Dashain and Mhapuja, we worship objects that serve us.

So, if you do not know how to see a person, you do not know leadership. Leadership is about discovering treasures within people, not unravelling their faults. Nobody is nothing in this world. Everyone is blessed with treasures. You will find it when you are deeply connected with the person. To deeply connect with a person, you need to see and accept the person as he or she is. Once you are connected, the treasures become yours too, for it is non-physical.

Leaders' job is to develop and transform people. You can do this when you see people without presuppositions and accept them as they are. Then you will see what they could become. This process applies equally to you too. You can transform yourself when you see and accept yourself as you are.

LEADERS RAISE CONSCIOUSNESS

Great leaders raise the consciousness of the group by raising their own consciousness

Do you feel very dull sometimes and highly functional at other times? When you are dull, you feel everything working against you. You lack energy even to move a blade of grass. When you are functioning, you feel you are full of energy and can move the whole world. What is the cause for such variation?

According to David Hawkins, a researcher in psychology, it is your level of consciousness that makes all the difference. His research findings showed that it is your level of consciousness that determines your emotions. For example, at the lower level, you feel humiliated, despaired and anxious. At the higher level, you are full of affirmation, trust and optimism.

Your level of consciousness also determines how you view your life and the world. When you are at lower level, you feel life is miserable, hopeless, frightening and so on. When you are at a higher level, you feel life is practical, harmonious, meaningful and much more. This is similar to the age-old saying, "The world is a mirror. You see your own reflection."

Some leaders work on while some leaders work in. That draws

the line between average leaders and great leaders. According to Hawkins' book *Power Vs Force*, when you are suffering from lower level of consciousness you need to force yourself and people to get things done. When you are operating from higher level, you become the source of power. You empower people and change becomes natural. Force works on and power works in.

Similarly, Dr Demartini in his book *The Breakthrough Experience* has mentioned seven levels of consciousness. He relates the levels with verbal expressions. When you communicate with your work saying, "I have to do it", you are at the lowest level of consciousness. When you say, "I want to do it", you are at fourth level. If you say, "I choose to do it", you are at sixth level. At the highest level you say, "I love to do it." You can check your verbal expression and know where you are. You can raise your level by changing your expression for what you are doing.

According to Hawkins, you can shift your consciousness to higher level by allowing positive mental qualities such as courage, willingness, reason and love. Hawkins also finds, at some level, consciousness is shared. One's consciousness influences others'. Great leaders raise the consciousness of the group by raising their own consciousness.

LEADERS LIVE THEIR DREAMS

Not believing in our dreams of what we can become is to undermine our potentials

Do you know where you will be in five years from today? Leaders know where they want to go and what they want to be. They consciously choose their destinations and directions. In fact, every life has a great purpose. It is the purpose instilled within us that makes each one of us prospective leaders. The question is — why are so few people leaders and achievers?

It is said that we do not tell our dreams even to ourselves because we fear God will laugh at it. We do not share it with even our closest friends because we fear they will make fun of it. The fact is that we do not believe in our dreams of what we can become. That is to undermine our potentials. Our upbringing discourages dreaming big. Our elders tell us to be moderate and have a comfortable living.

I find in my training that many people are reluctant to set any goals in life. They have their organisational goals but not their own. Some people do not believe in dreams at all because it did not materialise for them. But dreaming is important. Living the dreams is also equally important. Here are the steps on how to do it.

First step is to find your dream — what your life purpose is. It should come from inside, not from outside. Our dreams could be easily influenced by outside glamour. We need to dream but consciously. Training, writing and counselling are my purposes. They are my inclinations. However, before choosing them I went through several life purpose exercises, personality tests, career counselling and even astrological counselling. Now I am counselling people to find their life purposes!

The second step is to have a clear plan to translate the dreams to reality. When you dream, dream like a leader. When you plan, become a manager. Dreams may not seem realistic, but plans have to be down to earth.

The final step is to implement the plans. Now you be a worker — a passionate worker of your own dreams.

A decade back, I made an intention to be a regular columnist in a national broadsheet and publish a book. Now I have achieved both and am planning for the next five years. What is your plan for the next five years? Leaders begin with the end in mind.

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

Once you relax and focus on yourself, you will find at least 10 options to respond to every situation

Anagram looks like just a play of words. However, while playing, it seems also that every word has wisdom in itself. By shuffling the letters of the word LEADER, the other word we can make is DEALER. In fact, to lead is to deal. A leader's responsibility is to deal with people and situations. Anagram often makes an interesting play. When you change the order of letters of the word ASTRONOMERS, it becomes 'NO MORE STARS'. LATENT has TALENT hidden in it. Similarly, the word REACTIVE, only by reordering the letters, can become CREATIVE.

Your leadership style could be reactive or creative. The letters in these two words are same but the attitude of these two leadership styles is totally different. Reactive actions are retaliation to other people's action or situations. They are more of 'tit for tat'. Creative actions are a result of your personal power. They are positive and benign. Generally, people think only poets and artists require creativity. However, leadership demands creativity as much as or even more than poetry and painting. Leaders design vision in their mind just like a novelist designs a plot or an artist internally visualizes painting. More importantly, artists and writers put down their ideas only in papers, but leaders have to make them happen in the real world.

Both reactive and creative have the word ACT in them. Leaders need to act. How you act determines your leadership style. Being reactive is painful to you and others. It could be aggressive and manipulative. Reactive behaviours are mostly mechanical, instantaneous and emotionally blind. They are painful and eventually backfire. Being creative is powerful. It is because when you are creative, you are aligned to the energy of creation. Creation is creative simply because she enjoys manifesting herself. She is not acting in reaction to another creation.

Creative actions generate out of conscious choices. They are spontaneous, relaxed and thoughtful. Creative leaders focus on the power of self. If you focus only on what wrongs are happening around you, you cannot see your own power and your responses become limited. Once you relax and focus on yourself, you will find at least 10 options to respond to every situation. Then you are more powerful because you have so many choices of your own. Thus, when you are reactive, you become a bad dealer. When you are creative, you are a good dealer and a good leader.

LEADER AS MEDIATOR

There are two ways of holding ideas — tightly or lightly

Lawyers are countless and mediators are few in our country. Had the case been the other way round, would we not have been in more peace and harmony? We would have been more prosperous too.

Considering the conflicts and disputes, in politics, organisations, neighbourhoods and families, we see people are equipped much more with “advocate” mindset than “mediator” attitude. The job of advocates is to backup one of the parties in conflict. That makes conflict more intense. They vie for win-lose position. Unfortunately, most of the time, competing parties end up with lose-lose situation.

In conflict, the worst thing a leader can do is to take side of one group. To avoid this, some leaders become neutral, which is better but is not mediation. Mediation actually means being equally aligned to both sides. That is why mediator attitude also helps in dealing with the issues that one is involved in. You can be equally at your side and the other party’s side at the same time.

Mediation seeks a win-win solution. This is a more relaxed way to approach a conflict. Its helicopter view allows you to see wider pictures of conflict backgrounds — not only the outer but also the

mental pictures, meaning deep desires and positive intentions.

The main tool of advocates is using logic to prove the other party wrong. We can see endless logics communicated between people who rigidly believe in different ideologies — be it materialism or spiritualism, democracy or communism, or other petty ideas. Their beliefs and logics are entirely different. Still, they have one common characteristic. That is, rigidity.

You may not be debating on grand theories but you may be rigid in your position that blocks you from seeing any good in the opponent's say. This does not mean that you have to give up on all your beliefs. There are two ways of holding ideas — tightly or lightly. When you hold your ideas tightly, your mind becomes rigid. When you hold your ideas lightly, the mind becomes open. Then it becomes possible to see other the person's point of view.

Here “advocate” and “mediator” do not denote professions but mental attitudes. If you have a mediator's aspiration of win-win resolution, you will have many happy collaborators around you. You see, if our politicians had it, the parties would not have to suffer fractions and splits, which is a lose-lose situation for themselves, their parties and the entire country.

PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

With the advent of internet, old definitions of organisation and leadership are fast disappearing

We are living in the 21st century. What is special about leadership in this century? Does leadership have anything to do with the time factor? Well, let us see what leadership meant previously and what it means now.

Traditional age is symbolised by agriculture. Knowledge of farming made hunters settle in one place. Thus, civilisation began. The structure was that of a local community and led by community leaders. Communication was ‘one-on-one’ or personal conversation.

The modern age started with invention of engines. Here, organisations resembled an engine — a well-defined structure and unbroken hierarchies. Communication was also structural — one way at a time — top to bottom, then bottom to top. Through mass media like newspaper, radio and TV, communication patterns became ‘one-to-many’.

Now, what about our age? We enjoy clicking on one icon after another. That is the internet — the symbol of our age. With the advent of internet, old definitions of organisation and leadership are fast disappearing.

The aspiration of the new age is the ending of hegemony. In a newspaper, editors have control over writers. Many articles get rejected. Limited write-ups that do get published influence readers. The hegemony continues. With the advent of internet, now everyone is a writer. They can say to the world what they want to say. The structure of the internet is highly sophisticated. However, it is not meant to control, but to allow freedom of choice.

Now the communication pattern is ‘many-to-many’ in unrestricted structures. It is so overwhelming in dissolving structures that it has even transcended geographical boundaries. Yet at the same time, through internet you enjoy communal diversities at much higher intensity than ever. This has become a world of infinite possibilities.

What does this mean for leadership and organisations? Now the world belongs to love and freedom, not to controls and restrictions. Structure is a setback — slow and cumbersome in itself. Diversity, which was considered an obstacle, is now an advantage. Groups of different-minded people have proved to be more effective over organisations of like-minded people. Multiplicity of creative options is taking over standard rules. Equal treatment is superseded by catering differently to different people. ‘Rule by regulations’ seems dull before empowering mindsets and inspiring insights.

The world has shifted from the old paradigm of fitting people into a structure to a new paradigm of individuals joyfully participating in their self-created networks. For leaders, it is the age of co-creating and co-evolving by inspiring and being inspired in diversified connection.

QUALITIES OF BRAHMA IN LEADERSHIP

You can change a person more easily when you are a friend than an enemy

When it comes to leadership we mostly study western theories. Why not explore leadership in our own texts? In Hinduism, Brahma is the creator. The principal task of a leader is to create. They visualize what does not yet exist and create them. In Hinduism, Brahma has four faces. In Buddhism, Brahma has four qualities. These qualities are – friendliness (maitri), compassion (karuna), appreciative joy (mudita) and detachment (upekchhya).

It often happens that we want to achieve a goal but hate the process. Students want to get good results in exams. Employees want promotion, businesspeople bigger profit and social workers social change. But many students hate books. Employees hate their job and boss. Businesspeople hate employees who work for them and social workers complain about the evils in society. It's like you love the destination but hate the road.

The first quality of Brahma is to be friendly with reality, especially with all those that will lead you to your destination. If you are a student approach books, notebooks, pens, pencils, homework and teachers with the same attitude as you approach your best friend. In the same way people in professions can find people and

things that help them in fulfilling their goal and befriend them. Social workers need to be friendly with social realities. This looks contradictory, but you can change a person more easily when you are a friend than an enemy.

The next quality is compassion. True leaders do not set missions for themselves alone. Surely self is there, but we live in a society. Ryuho Okawa in his best seller *Invincible Thinking* writes, “If you use money just for your own sake, it will gradually disappear but if you try to use it for the sake of as many people as possible, you will find that it will continue to grow and multiply.” He gives the example of Henry Ford who succeeded in amassing a huge fortune by manufacturing cars. When a car was possible to only the elite, Ford’s dream was to make cars affordable to office employees and manual labourers. Manifestation masters also admit that an intention is more likely to manifest when you encompass other people in it than when you monopolise it for yourself.

The third quality, appreciative joy, is about being grateful and delighted about what you have. It is about being happy with your resources rather than focusing on what you lack. In fact, if you look around and inside you, you will find more causes to be happy than sad. This is true even in the most adverse situations. Good leaders recognise what they have, even though trivial, and feel happy. Complaining about what is lacking and wrong will only make it worse.

The final quality, detachment, makes you a leader of distinct quality. You have to befriend your goal, but being too attached to the goal can make you tense and restless. You cannot work wisely when you are stressed. While being friendly with your goal, at the same time if you can detach from it, you become more relaxed. When you are at ease, you are more thoughtful and active. As Bruce Lee says, “When I am relaxed, I become swifter and stronger”.

While the first two qualities, friendliness and compassion have to do with emotional intelligence (EQ), appreciative joy can be a part of adversity intelligence (AQ) and detachment spiritual intelligence (SQ) in the real sense. Now, you see how intelligent and practical our ancient wisdom is. We only need to relate them to today’s practical life situations.

THE ART OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership now is no more about good and bad, but about integrity and being authentic

It is the subtleties that make a big difference. What seems similar are actually not. In fact, many times they are opposites. There is great difference between being careless and being carefree, being lazy and being relaxed, being pushy and being proactive. Likewise, being greedy and intending higher achievements are very dissimilar qualities. In the same way, can you see the difference between being childish and childlike? Being irresponsible and being detached?

Qualities are subtle. And it is the subtle qualities that shift leaders from efficiency to effectiveness and from effectiveness to greatness. Do leaders always have to demonstrate good behaviour? Are there some things that leaders should always avoid? The difference between good and bad behaviour is concrete. But there is a very fine distinction between good and bad qualities. What we perceive as good deed is not always good, nor are bad actions always bad.

'Being nice to people' and 'truly loving people' may seem similar but are not the same. People who are nice to you may not love you and people who truly love you may not always be nice to you. Kindness is gentle, but if it is real kindness that comes from the heart, it can be ruthless as the situation demands. It is not easy to function from higher quality like

ruthless compassion. This is not just being rude. This is for the higher good of people and operates with great awareness. In the same way, benign compassion is not just being 'Mr or Ms Nice'.

The two words automatic and spontaneous also look similar. But these two qualities are totally opposite. Automatic behaviour is mechanical and lacks awareness. Great leaders function from the domain of spontaneity, which is more truthful and natural. Automatic behaviour is habit. They govern you because you are powerless.

Spontaneity, on the other hand, is free flow of energy from your inner source. Leadership involves many skills and technologies. But it is the art that gives leadership the fineness. Being carefree yet sincere to goals, being relaxed yet active, being proactive without being pushy are all arts of great leaders. They intend to achieve higher things without being greedy. They are detached yet totally involved. They behave adult-like and yet their being is childlike. These are the art and the heart of leadership.

Good and bad are two dimensional. When you move to the third dimension, you encompass both. They are integrated like white and black in yin-yang. Leadership now is no more about good and bad, but about integrity and being authentic. It is about being ethical beyond societal morals. The more you are honest, the more spontaneous you become.

When you are functioning from lower levels of moralities, seemingly good behaviour can also be harmful. When you are functioning from a higher level of ethics, seemingly bad behaviour also becomes benevolent. So, rather than only trying to improve ourselves from bad to good, it is more rewarding to shift ourselves to higher dimensions. When you are travelling on the road, your progress is counted in miles. When you start flying, height also counts. Leadership development is measured by the 'shift' to newer heights of your inner qualities.

DO, HAVE AND BE

The present time calls for everyone to become a leader

It is very common in our country to blame leaders for failure or inefficiency. It is also a usual practice in organisations to make leaders responsible for anything that goes wrong. This blaming suggests that leadership is limited to few powerful positions that can make big decisions and differences in the lives of many people. It also implies that the rest are powerless.

This is partially right, but mostly wrong. It is true that leadership is powerful and can significantly impact people's lives. But today, it is wrong to think that leadership is limited to top positions. And to think that you are powerless before leadership is wrong and harmful. It only weakens you and kills your potentials of becoming a leader.

We inherited this blaming notion from the leadership concepts of previous ages. In the traditional age, leadership was confined to few people. This meant that people at large could not be leaders. Leadership was mostly based on birth rights and age or some other predetermined factors that were beyond one's control. Leadership was also associated with divinity. Kingship and priesthood was fully based on birth. Some positions in society used to be handed over to most senior people, based on the idea that seniors had gained much experience and could decide better. We can still see this practice in traditional organisations, like Guthis.

In the modern age, leadership became a matter of competencies and charismatic qualities. Competencies could be education, technical knowhow or personal attributes. For higher leadership positions, charisma was expected. People who could demonstrate extraordinary qualities in difficult times were hailed as great leaders. They had large number of followers. We know many charismatic world leaders of modern age. During troubled times, their followers turned to them for charismatic solutions. Post-modern age has opened up leadership to everyone. It is now not destined to certain family backgrounds, nor designed to special personality traits. Everyone has equal potentiality to be leaders.

The traditional model of leadership was 'be, have and do'. This means to be a leader, first you need to be born or put to a leadership position. They are predestined with superior qualities and power over others. Then they do the job of leadership.

The modern age leadership model was 'have, be and do'. This suggests you develop leadership qualities, then be in a leadership position and act as a leader. The post-modern leadership model is 'do, have and be'. Anyone can start taking responsibilities and do required works towards change. By working, you will start developing leadership qualities. Finally, you will become a leader.

Present day leaders are judged by impact of their work. They are not expected to show one-time-charisma, but stability in their work and commitment. The leader-follower pattern is outdated. The present time calls for everyone to become a leader in their own way. It believes that the more people awaken the leadership qualities dormant inside them, the richer the world will become.

JOURNEY TO GREATER LEADERSHIP

Subtleties matter in relationships, communication, motivation and facilitation

When you are in school or college, you may feel you are insignificant. You have yet to prove yourself. When you start a job, you feel you are something, but yet small. You feel the need to grow and develop yourself so that you can become someone big. Then you struggle and get a higher position in job and in society and you feel you are successful.

The journey does not end there. It may take two routes. One goes straight — getting bigger and bigger, becoming more and more successful. That is a linear progress. The other takes a shift from ‘big’ to ‘great’. So, there are two destinations of success and leadership. As David Hawkins says in his book *Power Vs Force*, “There is success, and then there is success. The former frequently jeopardises life, while the latter enhances it.” In the same way, let us say there is leadership, and then there is leadership.

The turn from ‘big’ to ‘great’ is in fact a ‘U’ turn. So, it does not travel straight from ‘great’ to ‘greater’, rather it goes back to your original nature. But when you go back, you will not be the same ‘small’ you in the beginning, you rather become subtle. As your journey progresses, you do not grow greater and greater, but

turn to be subtler and subtler. Real greatness lies in subtleness. In fact, subtleties matter the most, whether in relationship or communication, motivation or facilitation. Even in physics, as science progresses, the search has turned towards subtle to subtler. Science has realised that when there is a shift in a subtle domain, the effect is immense.

So how to know which route you are taking? As Hawkins writes, “We all know people for whom just a bit of success is corrupting — who become arrogant, officious, and controlling when given even a small taste of authority.” If this is happening, know that you are not in the track of greater leadership. You use your leadership to show you are more knowledgeable, important and powerful than others. But inwardly, you become vain. It is a superficial journey. You are not developing, but the same you is just getting bigger. And the final fate is of an overinflated balloon — only to be blasted at some point.

Hawkins continues, “By the same token, we also know people of much greater authority who are cordial, sensitive, and caring.” This is the indicator of progressing in greater path. This path is non-linear. It is full of shifts. As liquid is measured in litres and area in inches, leadership progress is measured in shifts. Every shift transforms you to new level of understanding and truth. Following this route, you may get wealth, position and fame, but the more you get them, the more humble you become. As you become subtler, your qualities become finer. You start recognizing subtlest changes make greatest differences. There is great difference between being simple and being simplistic. The craving to get bigger is simplistic. Becoming subtle is being simple without being simplistic.

The final shift in greater leadership is of ‘nothingness’. You begin with ‘nothing’ and end with ‘nothingness’. Nothingness is not the same as nothing, but it encompasses everything.

APPROACHES TO SUCCESS

Success, like happiness, cannot be pursued

How important is success to a leader? Must be very important, no? But then how does one achieve it? Going through various literatures, I found three different approaches.

First is the simple principle of hard work. We are taught from childhood that if you work hard today, you will enjoy success someday. Though hard work is important for success, if your heart is not in the work, it becomes donkey-work. The success attained is limited to that in career rather than leadership. In our student life, we are asked to work hard with the enticement of a prestigious and lucrative job when we graduate. This hard work principle often robs people from joy of working. It is even considered that happiness is disparate from success. So, following this principle, people get success in their career but they find their jobs boring and meaningless. In such a case, how will they serve people wholeheartedly?

The second principle says what you think is more important than what you do. It emphasises on setting a success mindset. Surely, being imaginative, having a positive attitude and setting big goals are desirable qualities for leaders. But mind power promises too high and instantaneous success. It would be a great boon if positive thinking alone was enough to do everything. In his book *Breakthrough*

Experience, Dr John F Demartini says, “The longer I stayed positive, the more something would blow and I’d get really negative, either to myself or someone else.” A leader needs to complement positive thinking with realistic thinking. Another drawback of the overnight success literature is that for them success means becoming a multimillionaire. There is no place for integrity and compassion.

The third principle is age-old wisdom which holds spiritual quality and suggests not chasing after success, but letting it follow you. I cannot think of any other way that can make this clearer than this quote of Victor Frankl from his book *Man’s Search For Meaning*, ‘Don’t aim at success — the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side-effect of one’s dedication to a cause greater than oneself. Happiness must happen by not caring about it. I want you to listen to what your conscience commands you to do and go on to carry it out to the best of your knowledge. Then you will live to see that in the long run — in the long run, I say! — success will follow you precisely because you had forgotten to think of it.’ This is the quality the highest level of leaders carry.

This principle is based on sincere work instead of hard work, invincible mindset instead of superficial positive thinking and great perseverance instead of a quick success. The book titled *A Course In Miracles* says, ‘Infinite patience brings instant result.’ Let me end with a thought of my friend Nithya Shanti, a young spiritual teacher popular these days on Facebook, ‘If you must have expectations, be sure to balance them with an equal measure of detachment, else they will poison your life.’

STOP LABELLING, GET SPECIFIC

Self-image has tremendous influence on the way we think and act as a whole

While I interview people for training need assessment, I am surprised that most people believe themselves to be lacking confidence. They say, “Give us something that builds self-confidence.” And I am not talking about assistants or first time officers. Many managers express the same! I wish I could give them capsules for confidence building. More surprise for you — I too used to think about myself in the same way. If there were confidence capsules, I would be the first to take them.

Later I found that it is not a problem of self-confidence. The problem is of labelling oneself. Based on some incidents, we label ourselves — unconfident, nervous, fearful, et cetera. Then we believe it and it becomes our self-image. Confidence is only an example. This is true for all the labels we put on ourselves. I am reading a book on psychology and it says, “Self-image has tremendous influence on the way we think and act as a whole.” That is why it is said that be careful before you put any adjective after “I am...” It becomes conclusive.

We label ourselves based on our past experiences and by the way we are judged and treated by significant others. The book says, “Once formed, self-concept tends to maintain and perpetuate itself as it is. It serves as a filter through which we view our experiences,

so that experiences that are not consistent with the self-concept tend to be distorted or kept out of awareness.”

The words ‘filter’, ‘distort’ and ‘delete’ (keep out of awareness) are very important here. Once you label yourself and say, “I am not confident”, then you will not see the occasions you have been quite confident because they are filtered, or distorted or completely deleted by your subconscious mind. With labelling, you cannot see the things as they are. For self-improvement, you need to see things as are they.

You need to separate events from life. Life is much larger than events. If you generalise your life based on some events, you are not being fair to yourself. You can improve yourself when you notice what specific things have happened on specific occasions. These are mostly tangible and in the body. What you mean by not being confident in an occasion? Do your fingers tremble? Is the eye-contact not proper? Or you do not find the right words? Then you know what changes you want to make on yourself. Now change becomes easy.

This is equally applicable for positive self-images. See specifically what the positives are. Positives are not always positives. Generalising may lead to self-enchantment. And remember, there is no limit for development. Self-improvement is a continuous process.

Labelling is equally harmful when we label others. It works in the same way. Then the ‘halo’ effect and ‘horn’ effect starts. If you label someone as great, you will start seeing the halo around them and everything they do becomes great in your eyes. Once you label someone as bad or inefficient, you will mostly find them as you label. Not because they are so, but because of the ‘horn’ effect.

Being able to see oneself, people, events and things beyond labels is a great quality. That simplifies life, while labelling complicates it. You can continuously improve yourself by noticing your actions without labelling them. You can bestow people with the precious gift of honest feedback when you stop labelling them but get specific to their actions.

LEARNING SOFT SKILLS

All people who succeed dedicate themselves to continuous improvement

Nowadays organisations have realised that hard skills alone are not enough to compete in the market and soft skills are becoming the deciding factor. These skills are also called people skills or attitude skills and though called 'soft' are in fact harder to learn than hard skills. More attention is being given to soft skills also because of new discoveries in management. It is said people are hired for their skills and fired for their attitude. Peter Senge quotes a veteran practitioner of a learning organisation in *The Fifth Discipline*, "Personal mastery is the core. If you get the personal mastery element of these changes right, everything falls into place."

Yet, many managers have not understood the deeper significance of developing people and team. During training need assessment they say, "We do not have this problem but we have that problem." The concept of people development did not derive from problem-oriented analysis or thinking about what is lacking. That applies to hard skills. Trainings are given because you do not have the skill or you are facing problems with new technology operations. Soft skill training is delivered because you are already good but want to be better.

Hard skills emphasise on 'training' while soft skills focus on 'learning'. Anthropologist Edward Hall is quoted in *The Fifth Discipline* as saying, "Humans are learning organism par excellence. The drive to learn is as strong as the sexual drive — it begins earlier and lasts longer." Still management experts find that the investment on training-learning is quite insufficient. *The One Minute Manager* puts it in this way, "It's ironic. Most companies spend 50 per cent to 70 per cent of their money on people's salaries. And yet they spend less than one per cent of their budget to train people." *The One Minute Manager* provides three options for business success, "First you can hire winners. They are hard to find and they cost money. Or second, you can hire someone with the potential to be a winner. Then you systematically train that person to become a winner. If you are not willing to do either of the first two, then there is only the third choice left — prayer."

Anthony Robbins is one of the greatest examples of success today. In his book *Notes from a Friend*, he reveals the success mantra which is equally applicable to individuals and organisations. He says, "All people who succeed dedicate themselves to continuous improvement. They're never satisfied with just doing well; they constantly want to do better. If you dedicate yourself to this philosophy of constant and never-ending improvement, I can virtually guarantee that you'll not only continue your growth throughout your life — the real source of happiness — but you'll also succeed."

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Excess of anything — even positivity and strength — can be a pitfall

Self-awareness includes knowing one's own strengths and weaknesses. One vital question asked in most job interviews is, 'Tell us your three strengths and weaknesses.' If you prepare an answer to this question only for a job interview, you limit the benefits. Self-awareness is the base for self-development.

Everyone has strengths and weaknesses. There are no exceptions. Some people are more focused on their weaknesses and less aware of their strengths. In such cases, they develop a negative self-concept which is harmful to them. On the other hand, some people see only strengths. They may call this positive thinking, but when positive thinking is not complemented by realistic thinking, it does more harm than good. A person with negative self-concept may seek for self-improvement. So, when they improve themselves, they have a balanced perspective. But a person blind with self-enchancement does not see the areas one needs to improve. This becomes a bigger block in development.

A deeper analysis shows that weaknesses are no different than strengths. Let us see this through *Core Quality Quadrant Analysis* that is proposed by Daniel D Ofman in his writing *Core Quality: A Gateway to Human Resources*. According to this, weaknesses are

strengths or qualities that are overdeveloped. Excess of anything — even positivity — can be a pitfall.

I have a friend who has inborn quality of public speaking. This is a positive quality and he is much enchanted with this quality. But this does not mean that he cannot further enhance his quality of speaking. Good public speaking is not only about being confident. There are many skills such as structuring or composing brighter openings and impressive conclusions. As a very close friend, I suggested, “Public speaking is your core quality. Why don’t you further develop skills in the area?” He laughed and said, “Me and develop public speaking?” This answer came from his belief that he was a public speaker par excellence.

I have met many people with such limited beliefs. Some say, “I am very good at management.” They are not aware that there are different levels of management. In fact, they are good at day-to-day management, which is the lowest level of management. Then it becomes a blockade for developing higher management skills such as teambuilding, long-term planning, crafting and sharing vision, et cetera. It is not necessary that people who are good at higher management skills — say, motivating people — are equally good at management of emails. Sometimes it is dispensable. Indeed, great leadership comes with great challenges.

Conversely, for some people, strength becomes such an essential part of who they are and fail to recognise it as a specific strength. When I use *Core Quality Quadrant Analysis* in my training, people start identifying their strengths, weaknesses, pitfalls and challenges at the same time. They are astonished to find all these are not different entities, but different dimensions of the same quality. Rather than two-dimensional finding of strengths and weaknesses, this becomes a three-dimensional analysis.

POWER AND POSITION

Nobody ever really works for anybody else, everyone works for themselves

Power is a great seducer. People want to reach higher and higher positions, not only for money but also for the power attached to such positions. These forms of power are easy to recognise because they are crude in nature. There are many subtle forms of power which are difficult to identify but easy to get trapped into.

Some people want power over others by dominating while some intend to influence others by their virtuous deeds. Let us look at an example of subtle power exercise between a therapist and client mentioned by Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks in their book *At the Speed of Life*, “Therapy promotes a one-up, one-down power imbalance between the client and therapist. There is something very seductive about the power of being a therapist. It feels good to be so highly regarded, in charge of such powerful magic.” The Hendricks who are widely known as the therapists’ therapists also warn therapists, “This inequality will come back to haunt us”.

The ‘one-up, one-down power imbalance’ is everywhere — in offices, institutes and mostly in families as parents and children, husband and wife, et cetera. Any one-up and one-down relationship is destructive. It does not matter whether it lets others down by force

or virtues. When you use force, you blame others and expect them to take responsibility. When you become virtuous, you flatter others and take too much responsibility for others. Both are harmful.

What can correct power imbalance is the right attitude. Surely we need to enhance skills in the field we are working.

Teachers need teaching skills. Managers need management skills. Skills are associated with action. In Buddha's eight righteous paths, the first is 'right perspective' or Samyak Drishti. 'Right action' comes later. Right perspective develops right attitude, hence it changes the quality of action. Right perspective is to understand the non-dual reality. A teacher cannot be a good teacher until he becomes a good learner. He can learn best from his students. It is the same with trainer and participant, counsellor and client, coach and the coached. Employers have illusions that their employees work for them. They boast — I have n number of people working for me. But Blanchard and Johnson reveal the truth in their book *The One Minute Manager* — Nobody ever really works for anybody else. Everyone works for themselves. The responsibility of a good manager is to help people work better for themselves and benefit the organisation.

Yes, positions and hierarchies are there. They bear different responsibilities and everyone needs to perform accordingly. But these do not make anyone superior and inferior. Many people are too attached to their positions. They are hurt when someone among their equals or juniors is promoted and they have to work under one. But if you are hurt, it is basically because you identify yourself and people with their immediate positions. If you disassociate people with their positions, your pain will reduce. Surely, everyone needs to pursue promotion. But this quest should not be lured by the power attached to it. The only attitude that will lead people to their highest potential is continuous learning and development of oneself.

THE QUEST FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION

When we are willing to stand under others, we will start understanding them

There is a popular saying in management that communication is more than communication. This is because communication is the key to building relationships and getting results. Nowadays, communication is the topic for training that I am most requested to conduct. It is good that people are now more aware of its importance, but at the same time it is surprising that organisations have so much communication problems in spite of highly educated taskforces. Let us ask ourselves — why is our communication so problematic in spite of us being well-educated?

People do not learn much from what their teachers teach them. Rather, they learn more by seeing what their teachers and leaders are doing. All that happens in schools and colleges is 'teaching'. Teachers simply tell and students have to follow. They ask students to listen and learn. But all teachers do is tell and teach. Then, it is natural that when students graduate and join office, they do the same thing — tell and teach.

So in most organisations, we find everyone is teaching one another. Hence, communication is bound to fail. We often hear people saying with frustration, "I have said this so many times but these people never get it." Here is to apply one of Neuro-Linguistic Programming

(NLP) presuppositions — ‘The meaning of communication is in the response (or result) we get’. When we are not getting an intended result, it indicates that it is time to change our communication strategy. Blaming is of no use.

When people say they want to be trained in communication, they often mean they want to learn to speak effectively. When they come for training, they realise that speaking is given less importance and much emphasis is put on listening. In fact, the skill of effective communicator is listening. Listening is a part of learning. For learning, we need to understand and to understand means to ‘stand under’. But mostly we stand over the other person. When we are willing to stand under others, we will start understanding them and as a result they will start understanding us. To listen, we have to encourage others to speak. To get people to talk their heart out is a great skill of leadership. One effective way to get people to speak meaningfully is through questioning.

Generally when we have not mastered our questioning skills, our questions may provoke or embarrass the speaker. Questioning skill is not to provoke people but to evoke ideas and possibilities, which is done with genuine curiosity and wonder. True questioning is done out of the ‘empty-cup-of-mind’, a popular idiom in Zen Buddhism. When we question from the domain of ‘I-know-all’ it will surely discourage others.

The final but most important and also most neglected skill of communication is ‘to give space’. Imagine how this article will appear to you if there are no spaces between words, sentences and paragraphs. All the words and ideas will be meaningless, no? Same is with conversation. It is the space that gives meaning to words. One of my trainers says jokingly, “People who talk and talk until everyone is sick are ‘talk-sick’ (toxic).”

Even the wisest words with pure intentions become contaminated when delivered without space. Zen concept of ‘empty-cup-of-mind’ is actually the open space inside the mind which can be expressed outside in communication, while speaking, listening and questioning. This is the way to make our communication complete and meaningful.

MOVING BEYOND PROFESSIONALISM

Eastern laziness versus western laziness

Are you fighting with yourself to become more competent? Are you struggling hard to reach higher in your profession? Do you feel your inner self being killed while training to become strictly professional? The key question to consider is: Do we really need to kill our feelings, emotions and individuality to become a successful professional? Even more pertinent question is: Can we really distinguish our qualities as personal and professional? Are not most professional problems deep-rooted in personal limitations?

The mechanistic view of professionalism has long been abandoned in management. Humanistic principles, emotional intelligence, the red hat in *Six Thinking Hats* are attempts to recognise human feelings in professional world. However, they are introduced only as means to achieve the same old ends. In fact, the present practice of professionalism is based on the separatist view of means and ends. It is not only that someone is using you as means but people themselves are willingly sacrificing their essence in temptation to become successful professionals.

Surely, hard work is preferred to laziness. Hard work will make you a good worker, but it will not make you great in any way. In the same way, professionalism kills your greatness to make you good. I am deeply touched by the saying 'Good is the enemy of

great and great is the enemy of magnificence.' We try so hard to prove we are okay that we forget how wonderful we are. In fact, we are not only magnificent, but divine by nature.

We are not realising our greatness either because we are lazy or too busy. Sogyal Rinpoche has described it well in his book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* as 'Indian laziness' and 'Western laziness'. Indian laziness is passing time drinking tea, gossiping and listening to Hindi songs. Western laziness is being too engaged doing this and that and postponing time for one's purpose. Our understanding of being professional is moving from Indian laziness to western laziness.

The western notion is seeing everything as means. Staffs are means of achieving project goals. Clients and customers are means for profit. Even oneself is a means for career advancement. Present time is merely means to utilise for better future. This is what we regard as being highly professional. I am sitting here and writing this piece of article. I can do it as a job, which will lead to monotony and boredom. I can take the same act as a career, by which I will be struggling in the market. But if I can take writing as an act of manifesting my purpose, it becomes full of life — nurturing life into life.

Job is done for a living, career for advancement. Purpose is living the life we are born to live. At the purpose level, there is no separation between personal and professional, means and end. They become one. Here the struggle becomes a happy journey. Hard work becomes easy. Everything becomes a joy because they are an end in themselves.

When we are living a purpose, we are not only focusing on developing proficiency. The prime focus shifts to developing

qualities. In life, choosing one quality is enough. Other qualities will follow spontaneously, for all qualities are connected to one another. The quality I have chosen for myself is fulfilment. I train people, write articles and practice meditation. In all these, my aim is to find fulfilment.

JOY OF COMMUNICATION

'Blame' makes us 'lame' and 'claim' clears ways to our 'aim'

We have time and again heard the saying 'communication is the key to success'. But not many of us know that the key to successful communication lies in 'self-talk'. Inner communication determines how we communicate with the world. In fact, when our mind is positive, it does not chatter — but if it is already preoccupied with negativity and hatred, we will end up fighting with the people around us.

A mind full of alibi is harmful. Acclaimed success Writer Napoleon Hill says that people who fail have all the reasons for failure. They start with 'ifs' — "If my parents had raised me differently", "If I had talents", "If I were not married", et cetera. We can cleverly use alibis to justify our failure, but never to succeed in life. The only thing they can instantly create is a headache and a bad mood.

Alibis have a magical effect of magnifying external problems which can engulf us with unnecessary troubles. We then become helpless and start blaming people and situations around us for our helplessness. The instant we see that a situation is stronger than us, we become its prisoner. This is a sure-fire way to fall into a quicksand. We struggle hard to get out of the situation. But the harder we struggle, the faster we drown.

However, there is joy in replacing reactivity with creativity. This frees us from self-imposed mental prison and lets us become a creative, productive being. We start claiming instead of blaming — we lose our loser attitude and embrace the winner within us. ‘Blame’ makes us ‘lame’ and ‘claim’ clears ways to our ‘aim’.

Only when we transform our mindset from a ‘prisoner’ to a ‘free actor’, can we start enjoying communicating with others. Limitation in communication is created by ‘either... or’ thinking — ‘Either you are right or I am!’ Sometimes we become so opinionated that the other person feels suffocated. That does not mean you should not voice your opinions at all. Instead, take others’ opinion into account as well. Now instead of ‘either... or’, it becomes ‘my idea plus yours’. This leads to a win-win situation while communicating, which can reap great results.

I often meet people trying hard to change someone around them. They have been at it for several years now, but without the expected outcome. They fail to ask themselves why this change has not happened even after so many years? And if it has not happened so far, what is the guarantee that it will in the days to come? It is as foolish as pushing a wall. We are constantly repeating the same mistakes, but expecting a different result.

I suggest these people to change the way they think and perceive the people around them first. We can see a positive change in a relationship only when we begin to trust the other person. Trust allows us to step back and take a U-turn. It would halt the push coming from one direction and both the parties involved will move together in a new direction.

If you want to strengthen a relationship, joy of communication could be a precious New Year gift for yourself and your near and dear ones.

THE BEING OF A LEADER

Many leaders carry ‘to-do’ list, while only a few carry ‘to-be’ list

We all want achievement in life — whether profit or promotion, prestige or position. In leadership too we want to move higher. Many leaders have plans for where they want to reach. But few leaders aspire to develop qualities. Many leaders carry ‘to-do’ list, while few carry ‘to-be’ list.

One of the causes of stress and anxiety in successful people is that they have not developed inner qualities in proportion to their achievements. For success and happiness to go together, progress in ‘doing’ and ‘being’ should be in equal amount. Enduring leaders are those who develop inner qualities before attaining outer success.

Developing qualities in life is in fact easy. It does not demand as much time as achievements. One thing we can do in the morning that requires only few seconds is to intend the quality of the day. It could be anything positive — peace, happiness, contentment or kindness.

In the beginning, I intended a different quality for each day. While continuing this morning exercise, finally one day I discovered the

one quality that I was meant to pursue for my life. And now I find the quality spontaneously flourishing in me day by day. The quality is 'fulfilment'. Now I find fulfilment in everything I do and am.

If we symbolise this, quality is like a bag in which our attainments are kept. We can hold attainments as big as the size of the bag. The difficulty comes when we expect bigger attainments than our bag or the holding capacity.

In organisations, people strive for promotion. If they focus on developing qualities, promotion would be more natural. I have seen many people have had difficulties holding promoted position when they have not developed enough qualities. It is same in business. Business will naturally increase when you increase your quality. Training is my business. I do not focus on getting more training business. I focus on continuously increasing quality of my training. And that is enough.

So, what should we do when we go to sleep? Sleeping is not a meeting. So, just relax and be yourself. And it will change the quality of the following day too. Leaders who nourish qualities have a quality day and night.

SELF-HEALING FOR PROFESSIONALS

Why do we sacrifice our lives in order to sustain it?

The cause of problems in life is that we are living a bundle of paradoxes. And a great paradox is — “We sacrifice our lives in order to sustain them”. This is quoted from the book *Self Healing* by Meir Schneider. Meir was born with blindness. He discovered physical intelligence in his own body and cured it himself. Later, he taught thousands of others with incurable diseases to heal themselves. Beyond curing illnesses, when I read his thoughts about the life style of modern professionals, I found it so simply enlightening that I cannot help but share them here.

The body is the base of our being. But some spiritual nonsense criticises the body and asks us to disregard it for spiritual achievement. Materialists consider the body a means for gaining worldly success. They put their bodies at stake for achievements of wealth, fame or power. For business people, the body is something to invest for making profit. Our schools and colleges, society and organisations insist we focus all attention on success for which body itself is dispensable. When we achieve success or money, again we maltreat our bodies. We go for superficial happiness which we call enjoyment and again spoil the body. Thus, Buddha's first teaching of middle path was to refrain from two extremes — torturing the body and pampering the body.

Meir says: “The irony is that if a person will take the time to work on himself, the tensions and pressures of life and work become much easier to deal with. They do not go away, but the person brings much more to his activities if he is relaxed and feeling strong and capable. Usually he can accomplish more, and more successfully. However, it is difficult to impress this upon people who give their lives for their work, their family and friends, their country, but cannot find an hour a day for themselves.

“It is this mentality which has separated us as individuals from the deep inner source of life. We become enslaved by our ceaseless round of activities. Is this really living? We need to take the time to find and develop our inner resources, and then bring these resources to our work and our interaction with other people. Everything we do should be a part of our development and a step on our journey of self-discovery. Then nothing is done mechanically, but with new meaning. The quality of life is as important as life itself.”

See, isn't this simply obvious? I would like to add that when we learn to be relaxed from within we can sense the intelligence in the body. The body loves us and constantly provides us with guidance for our good whether we listen to it or not. But we are so concerned with success in the outside world that we do not hear the body or we ignore it. When you get a proposal or idea, the body will give a benign vibration if it is good for us and a negative vibration which may associate with fear or disgust if it is bad. This is very brief that we can notice only if we are settled in the body. Once my body gave a strong negative warning, but my mind disobeyed it due to temptation and family pressure. I suffered the negative consequences for years. Since then I respect physical intelligence over my calculative mind.

THE SQ AT WORK

Finding meaning in life, society, the work we do and the world we live in

After Intelligent Quotient (IQ) and Emotional Quotient (EQ), now Spiritual Quotient (SQ) is on the rise. It is becoming mainstream in scientific inquiry and increasingly used in corporate settings. It received wider popularity after Stephen Covey placed SQ at the centre of other intelligences in his landmark book published in 2004 — *The 8th Habit*. The timing itself indicates that SQ is something for the new millennium.

SQ arrived after travelling a long journey which began several thousand years back as religion. Some centuries back, it took a huge turn to 'spiritualism' by embracing the essence of all religions. Then some decades back, it developed to just 'spirituality' that denies any institutionalisation. Finally today it is now in front of us as SQ. And now it is more of an individual quality, which is demonstrable in the behaviour and life of people rather than being a super-concept. It has lost association with any organized religion at least in the conventional sense. So, you may have high SQ with or without believing in a religion. And the opposite is also equally true — a person may strongly believe in God but may lack SQ.

So, what is SQ indeed? Science or materialism is about means. Spirituality is about meaning. In life we need both — means and meaning. The broader we see meaning in life, society, work we do and the world we live in, the more SQ we have. Spirituality invites us to see things in holism in order to understand the broader meaning. When there is a sense of separation of self from surroundings, work, goal or the world, life becomes painful. When we see them in integrity, life becomes blissful.

When we find meaning in life and link this personal meaning with professional job, life and job both become a celebration. That is the crux of logotherapy propounded by Victor Frankl in his book *Man's Search For Meaning*. It requires courage to see the world not as the world sees it but from one's own unique perspectives. It requires much courage to understand oneself and others not as other human beings but as unique creation with exceptional meaning.

I had an opportunity to interact with a regular reader of this column. I requested her to suggest a topic for my writing here. She asked how she could deal with one customer after another in a long queue whole day. I want to take this opportunity to respond to her. See a customer as not different from us. See them as yourself. No separation; no dualism. Then approach each customer as a new individual. Do not carry the negative emotions received from a prior customer to next one. But if you get positive feelings, deposit it in the heart just as we deposit money in our bank account.

Without SQ, effectiveness means becoming more and more mechanical. With it, work becomes spontaneous. Notice the nuances. The more SQ we have, the more nuances of life we will recognise. There is only subtle difference between the ordinary and divine.

REFRAMING REALITY

Life is wise even when it seems otherwise

William Shakespeare says, "There is nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Indeed, reality is neutral until our mind makes a story of it. That is why Byron Katie says in her book *Loving What Is*, "Reality is always kinder than the stories we tell about it." Stories are frames and we can be trapped in self-created frames.

Great leaders have always used the principle of reframing for their success. A very good example is Mahatma Gandhi, who is known for the Khadi (handmade cotton cloth) movement. While the movement was just gaining momentum, a follower in frustration told him, "I just saw a person in Khadi drinking at a local bar. This is defaming our movement." Gandhi's eyes were filled with tears of happiness and he murmured, "Oh! See the success of our movement! Even drunkards have started wearing Khadi." Reality is reality. How we perceive it makes all the difference.

Another example is of Thomas Alva Edison who invented over a 1,000 items, many of which we use at home now. While he was trying to invent an electric bulb, he failed 800 times. His assistant got tired and told Edison that since he had failed so many times, he should give up. Edison replied with enthusiasm that since he reduced 800 wrong methods, he was nearer to the right method. If Edison had stopped at that time, we would not have electric light in our rooms.

Well, how can we use reframing in our daily life? Reframing is done by attaching a meaning to reality. People have complain against load shedding. But I find more time for family and meditation during these power cuts.

If you are caught up with the past, it means you have put negative frames to past events of your life. Once you change the frame, the negativity dissolves. I was reading the life story of a healer. Her childhood was full of maltreatment. She says that if she had not gone through an abusive childhood, she would not have been able to understand the pains of her patients. She attributes success in her practice to the pains of her childhood.

It is not reality but our frame over it that makes life distressing. Reframing soothes life and empowers us to move ahead. When you master reframing and become positive, there is another level to move. That is — un-framing.

Byron Katie's The Work Therapy removes all frames of mind just to love reality as it is. John F Demartini's powerful Quantum Collapse Process is achieved by seeing the complete picture of reality. According to him, when we become aware of all positive and negative aspects of a reality, it leads to quantum collapse. Then we become free of all frames of mind and realize freedom which is our innate nature. Nithya Shanti, a young spiritual teacher and a friend of mine rightly says on Facebook, "Victims frame. Positive folks reframe. Wise ones deframe." I read somewhere, "Life is wise even when it seems otherwise."

THE POWER OF REWORDING

Verbal skills using positive words

We all know that the words we use in our communication influence others, but only few of us are aware of their influence on ourselves. Words have power over our feelings and once you become aware of this, you will choose a different vocabulary.

Let us start with the word 'failure'. The word 'failure' itself is so harmful that it can lead us to it. Once we say, "I failed", it becomes difficult for us to rise again. Personal development experts ask to replace the 'failure' with 'practice'. Say, you went for a job interview, and you failed. Instead of saying, "I failed", you could take it as a practice and say, "I am practicing to appear in job interviews and each time I am improving." The principle of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) says, "There is no failure, only feedback." From whatever action we take, we either get a 'favourable' or an 'unfavourable' result. But there is no failure.

Public speaking is one of the most common fears that people face. I am reading a book on self-empowerment where the author shares her account of public speaking. In the book she recalls that when she went to talk in public for the first time, it was not very good. Usually when this happens to us, we do not feel good about ourselves and then brand ourselves 'nervous'. But she said to herself, "Hmmm... if I keep talking like this six more times, I will be a great orator." She was taking her first talk in public as a practice.

The other word that can harm us is ‘worry’. See this sentence, “I worry how I can overcome my business loss.” Now let us see the same sentence replacing the word ‘worry’ with ‘wonder’: “I wonder how I can overcome my business loss.” When we worry, we are focused on the problem. When we wonder, we can find solutions. The word ‘problem’ gives us a headache. When we replace it with ‘challenge’, we get tempted to overcome it.

Anthony Robbins found the power of rewording when he was in a business meeting with one of his partners. He mentioned the event in his book *Notes from a Friend*. Someone tried to take advantage of them and they were angry. But one of the partners said, “I am peeved” rather than saying, “I am furious”. He found the change of word reduced the negative effect on their emotion and gave the power to think of a better way out. Then he started transforming negative emotion words to positive ones.

He asks, “If you say you’re ‘angry’, ‘pissed off’, and ‘devastated’, what kind of feelings are you going to have? But suppose instead of ‘angry’, you’re ‘peeved’? Instead of ‘overwhelmed’, you’re ‘in demand’? Instead of ‘pissed off’, you’re ‘tinkled’? Instead of ‘irritated’, you’re ‘stimulated’? Instead of ‘rejected’, you’re ‘misunderstood’? And instead of ‘devastated’, you are ‘mildly annoyed’? Do you think you’d start feeling different? You’d better believe it!”

Robbins suggests that we can also raise the volume on happy emotions simply by changing how we describe them. For example, instead of just ‘okay’, be ‘ecstatic’; instead of ‘all right’, feel ‘superb’; instead of being ‘fortunate’, be ‘unbelievably blessed’.

My mobile was stolen last week. Usually we say, “I lost my mobile.” I said, “I parted with my mobile.” This gives me opportunity to find a new mobile that would serve my life more effectively.

HOW TO BE A SALES CHAMPION

All selling is ultimately selling happiness

The most common property involved in all business is selling. Training is my business but I will not get a chance to train people until I sell my training. It is not only a salesperson but everyone that is into selling — be it a product or service, tangible or intangible. As Walter Hailey says, “Nothing happens in this world until somebody sells something to somebody.” Selling is a crucial art for success in any field.

Contradictorily, most people have difficulty admitting that they sell. Even salespeople have this identity crisis. My training in sales surely includes selling skills, but it moreover focuses on making salespeople comfortable with their identity. Salespeople are astonished when I present Obama, Amitabh Bachchan, Madonna, Maradona, Mother Teresa and even the Buddha as salespeople. In fact, they are successful because they enjoy selling themselves and their services — be it physical, emotional or spiritual.

Then, what is holding us back? Deep down somewhere in our mind, we have this concept that making money is evil. And sales and business involve getting money from others. The seed of these thoughts come from what we are directly or indirectly told hundreds of times — ‘money is evil’ or at least ‘money is the root of all evils.’

This makes salespeople uncomfortable with their identity. Business leaders also face crisis with what they do. Somehow we think social

service or religious acts are virtuous and business is evil. John F Demartini says in his book *How to Make One Hell of a Profit and Still Get to Heaven*, “If you believe that sales and marketing are not respectable or somehow manipulative, you’re setting yourself up against the forces of nature. You’d be wise to have a change of heart because sales and marketing are a part of the divine order and are vital ingredients in your fulfilment.”

He further says, “Even plants are engaged in marketing when they put out flowers. Their colours and perfumes draw insect customers to their products (the nectar and pollen). A fair exchange of labour and reward takes place, life blossoms, and beauty is the vehicle of the transaction. That’s how life works.”

During training, I have found salespeople themselves carry an undertone that selling is cheating or blackmailing. I ask them how many items they buy in a day or in a month. Certainly, many. Further I ask, “Do you feel cheated while buying a nice dress or cellphone or attending my training itself?” Their answer is ‘No.’ Strange is it not that we feel happy to buy things but not to sell?

All businesses are about happiness. All selling is ultimately selling happiness. Happiness is the only thing that sells, whether food or clothes, a movie or preaching. If we want to grow our sales and better serve people, we should ask ourselves everyday, “How can I make my customers happier?” That is true spirituality and corporate responsibility, rather than donating a small portion of profit to social organisations.

When guilt is replaced by love, business becomes a source of fulfilment. With this attitude, sales become almost automatic. When you love selling, people will love buying from you and you become a sales champion.

ADVERSITY INTELLIGENCE

How to stand strong, true and continue to grow in troubling times

I start my stress management training with a Japanese proverb, ‘Willow trees do not get broken by piled-up snow.’ There is a similar quote by J Marriott, ‘Good timber does not grow with ease, the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees.’ All living beings want a pleasant situation — a natural intelligence of survival. However, adversity is also a part of life and efforts to prevent it proves futile. This is when we need to apply adversity intelligence (AQ). If our AQ is low, we will drown in adversity but if our AQ is high, we can turn adversity into an opportunity for growth.

Paul G Stoltz writes in his groundbreaking book *Adversity Quotient*, ‘Your AQ determines whether you, regardless of all other factors, will stand strong and true, continuing to grow when faced with adversity.’ In organisations, leadership may not matter much in normal circumstances because usual tasks are run by mid-level managers. But leadership is really tested during tricky times. How to deal with tough times and rescue business can be more of an art than science. As Stoltz says, “In the times of chaos and change, it is not enough to lead. As a leader, it is your responsibility to make sure people have the capacity to follow through challenging times.”

Based on my experience, to test our AQ, we do not need to wait for troubling times. We encounter small problems and stressful situations almost every day. Generally we do not take them seriously and only respond mechanically. However, we can build our AQ by dealing with them sensibly because fortunately, unlike genetic traits, our AQ is learned. It can be enriched and strengthened. If we can practice AQ in everyday situations, it will help to deal with turmoil in the long run.

What do we feel when we find ourselves in an unwanted situation? We start to feel stressed out and negative thoughts rule our mind. If we act out of this negative state, our actions will surely be of less intelligence.

For better results, we need to change this state of mind during trying times. 'All is well' is a very powerful affirmation. It was used as humour in the Bollywood movie *3 Idiots*, but it really is taken from Louise L Hay's book *You Can Heal Your Life*. When things seem to go wrong, instead of being anxious, remain calm. Repeat an affirmation that will change your negative state into a positive one. Then you will become stronger and be able to deal with tough situations with ease. Use of affirmation generates a strong mental attitude and creative thinking followed by intelligent responses to the situation.

THE DEEP CONNECTION

What is seen at the surface may not be the essential truth

Leaders are known by their views — while some of them carry common views, others see things differently and put across uncommon prospects that people in general rarely perceive. We recognise the former as average leaders and the latter as great leaders. Everyone sees what is happening on the surface, which is visible. But what is seen at the surface may not be the essential truth. Most often, truth is the opposite of what is visible outside. And great leaders are able to see beyond the visible truth.

Emotional quotient (EQ) says people's feelings are hidden beneath words and expressions. Words can mislead and to discover real feelings, we need to go deep into people's hearts. Unless we are connected heart to heart, the feelings people show outside will only deceive us. Spiritual quotient (SQ) asks to go even deeper. Beneath feeling is a person's being. At the being level, we will find the person's honest intentions. Outer levels are only a persona or projections; at the core is the essence. The deeper we connect the better leaders we become.

It applies not only to people but also to situations. The present situation of the country can be a good example to analyse. At

present, the country is going through disturbances and many people are anxious. But I look at it a bit differently. I also see that underneath the conflict, harmony and unity is in the making. Most importantly, Nepali people are becoming familiar with issues and concerns of one another for the first time in the history of the country. This is a prerequisite for enduring peace. Indeed, when there was peace in the country, seeds of conflict were breeding underneath. Now there is conflict, but it can be the foundation for lasting peace. I am optimistic.

In the same way, organisations also go through turbulent times. And in times of trouble, while people panic, great leaders remain calm. On the contrary, while all rejoice during happy times, leaders may be contemplating the situation. It is because wisdom senses something deeper than what appears on the surface. Something benign could be going on beneath the turmoil. Something devastating may be cooking below the smooth surface. If we are prepared on a smooth day, we will not be troubled by turbulence. Great leaders are not only able to face problems, but also enjoy riding the waves.

To connect ourselves with the innermost core of reality, we need the skills of deep listening. Listening is not only through the ears, but also through the eyes and the heart. Generally we listen through our knowledge and experiences. Then we are taken over by negative emotions, which hold us back from listening honestly. When we put aside negative emotions such as fear, craving, pride and move beyond our own projections, natural wisdom awakens within us and we can see, listen and understand people and situations distinctly. The essence is wisdom and when we are connected with it, we can see the essence or the wisdom in people and situations.

DEBATE OR DIALOGUE?

If we want to progress on a topic, we need to enter into a conversation

We hear debates everywhere — in families, with friends, at tea-shops, in offices and in politics. We love debating so much that we have become obsessed with it. We admire someone with the power of logic. We also mentally rehearse to find impressive logic so that we can defeat our opponents. Most often, the opponent is not an enemy but our near and dear one. What could be the reason behind this?

One reason is that in schools and colleges, we are taught only one way of proving ourselves right — through logic. Edward De Bono, author of 67 books on thinking, traced the tradition of debating back to ancient Greece. He gives an example of Greek-based logic system: “All fire burns, therefore, this fire will burn you.” Bono says in his book *How to Have a Beautiful Mind*, “This system has been wonderful in science and technology, but much less useful in human affairs where there are interactive loops.”

Logic has its own place. Mathematics is all logic. But, because of the domination of science, we learned this system of thinking for our life too. Most obvious is the ridiculous show going on among political parties. They think that when they can prove their

opponents wrong, they become automatically right, just as in mathematics. But human reality is not as simple as mathematics. Life is full of spectrums. There are no truths or untruths, only spectrums of truths.

Buddha has criticised people obsessed with debating as argumentative, and says that they become blind due to their own ego and ideas. It is this obsession among our leaders that has led to our country's uncertainty. Bono has created the term 'logic bubble' and he says, "It is easy to label a person as stupid, ignorant or malevolent. But that person may be acting 'logically' within his or her 'logic bubble'. That bubble is made up of the perception, values, needs and experiences of that person. If you make a real effort to see inside that bubble and to see where that person is 'coming from', you usually see the logic of that person's position."

The communication method to see inside the bubble is dialoguing. If we want to progress on a topic, we need to enter into a conversation. Such a dialogue begins with the openness of the mind. It is an exploration — exploring inside the 'logic bubble' of the other party. Before proving someone wrong, we can explore the real causes behind the person's logic. Logic is only the mask and the real person is behind it. Only when we are able to see behind the mask are we able to understand the real causes behind the opinions. Then we can create a shared understanding from where communication can reach a new level.

Dialoguing is done with a learner's attitude and the sense of wonder and readiness to explore all possible ideas to discover the best options which is yet to emerge. It is an adventure in communication to find collective victory that includes the involved parties and people at large.

BE GOOD OR BE TRUE

If you really are good, kind, and loving, why do you have to prove it?

Last week while I was planning to write on a topic, I came upon an enthralling novel *The Knight In Rusty Armour* by Robert Fisher. The knight, the main character of the novel, thought of himself as good, kind, and loving and was doing all the things that knights with such traits would do. One day he found that he was stuck in his armour, which was a metaphor for the qualities he had adopted — good, kind and loving.

When the knight complains of being stuck in his armour, someone says to him:

*We're all stuck in armour of a kind.
Yours is merely easier to find.*

Unknowingly we project good qualities for our protection and when we become obsessed with it, we are stuck in the invisible armour created by ourselves. One of my trainers often says during his training that he tried to be a good son to his parents and he could not be a true son. What is the difference between being good and being true? Are they very different things?

Let us first explore why we want to be good? Is it because we are really good or because we want approval and appreciation? If we are appearing good because of the greed for appreciation or fear of criticism, then we are not true. Greed and fear themselves are bad emotions. How can they lead to real good?

Many times, being good could be equivalent to being submissive. Our culture labels submission as good behaviour and reinforces it by compliments. Some people wear the armour of anger and rudeness to protect themselves because they think the armour of being good is too weak for their protection.

The real question is not about being good or bad. The problem starts when we use a certain pattern of behaviours as our protection. With time, we become so efficient with behaviours that they become an unconscious pattern. It is good to be good with people, but at the same time it is also important to learn how to disagree where our mind or heart does not concur with boss or colleagues.

Many people in my training express that if they disagree with their bosses they will lose their jobs. To disagree without being rude requires professionalism. If we adopt everything from people around us only to be accepted in the group, we are killing ourselves. While being ourselves, we also need to acknowledge the differences in others. Then differences do not become a source of conflict but something of wonder.

The most difficult but crucial skill is to respond to an unfavourable situation. At times we are required to take harsh interventions which may not be good for everyone. A good leader acts without dilemma. If we are really good from inside, we do not need to be concerned about looking bad outside. As the magician asks the knight in the novel, “If you really were good, kind, and loving, why did you have to prove it?”

THE POWER OF CHOICE

We can create the life we desire and the world we want

Life is mostly controlled by external factors. This is a reality for all of us, whether we believe in destiny or not — 99 per cent of things in life are out of our control, while merely one per cent is in our hands. Leadership is born out of focusing on the one per cent in which we have a choice. I was surprised to observe that in a training of senior leaders, people were debating on whether leaders are born or made. Stephen Covey has ended this age-old discussion in his leadership books by stating that leadership is neither in-born nor nurtured — it is born out of the power of personal choice.

There are two mottos of my life — we can create the life we desire and the world we want. The more I read leadership lessons, the firmer my beliefs become. For Stephen Covey’s ‘freedom to choose’ is the foundation of his *The 7 Habits*. Anthony Robbins’ works are based on ‘personal power’, which he regards as the most valuable. Peter Senge starts *The Fifth Discipline* with the chapter ‘Our actions create our reality’. And Buddha says: *Atta hi attano natho* (You are your own master). We may doubt, “How can it be true? My life and the world seem opposite to what I have intended.” That is a leadership test — how persistent you are. As

the saying goes, “There are decades of struggle behind overnight success.”

There is a basic difference between focusing on what is in our control and what is not. When 99 per cent of our focus is on things we cannot control, we feel helpless and victimised. Then we like to blame people and circumstances around us, which is counterproductive. On the contrary, when we focus on the part we have control over, we have freedom to act. Out of that we can choose our action. This is the beginning of responsibility. When we focus on things that we have control over, it is not imposed positive thinking. We need to recognize circumstances over which we have no control; at the same time understanding where we have control. This is realistic thinking.

While delivering training on Life skills, I ask participants to list down three types of problems in life — the ‘easy ones’ which can be solved with some attention and effort; ‘medium scale problems’ which can be solved but demand effort of months to years; and ‘problems without solutions’ which can only be solved by time. We need to be aware of all three types of problems. But often we only see most severe problems and become overwhelmed with pessimism. If we start with the easy ones, we gather power to tackle more difficult ones; and by the time we have solved them, it could be that severe problems are also eased by time.

SPEAKING AUTHENTICALLY

Most communication problems occur because we speak everything but the truth

Larry King, award-winning host of CNN’s Larry King Live was very nervous on the first day of his radio broadcasting. He writes in his book *How to Talk to Anyone, Anytime, Anywhere*, ‘My mouth feels like cotton. The music comes on. Then I fade the music down so I can begin to talk. Only, nothing comes out. So, I bring the music up again and fade it again. Still no words come out of my mouth. It happened a third time. The only thing my listeners are hearing is a record going up and down in volume, unaccompanied by any human voice.’ Finally the general manager (GM) of the station kicked the door open and exploded: ‘This is communications business.’

That instant, Larry leaned forward on the microphone and said his first words as a broadcaster: ‘Good morning. This is my first day ever on the radio. I’ve always wanted to be on air. I’ve been practicing all weekend. I’ve had a theme song ready to play. But my mouth is dry. I’m nervous. And the GM just kicked open the door and said, ‘This is communications business.’ He then writes, ‘I was never nervous on the radio again.’ What Larry did was authentic speaking, that is, simply communicating exactly what is going on at the moment. It was so powerful that it transformed the situation. Had he tried to hide the nervousness and pretended to be confident, the problem would have worsened. Authentic

speaking is effective — not only in the case of nervousness, but in all situations.

Most communication problems occur because we speak everything but the truth. It is not because the truth is very complicated, but because it is very simple and we ignore what is simple. Truth is the only obvious, but we do not pay attention to it, hence it becomes oblivious. Here truth does not mean something philosophical but the simple things going on around us and how we feel inside.

Mostly what we talk about are our interpretations, arguments, justifications, judgments and rationalisations. But not the truth! According to a communication expert, truth is that which cannot be argued about. If we can include them in our communication, our communication becomes authentic.

If we analyse what Larry said on the air, they are unarguable. He said, “My mouth is dry.” It was a bodily sensation. Physical sensations can never be argued about. Then he said, “I’m nervous.” It was his core feeling. Can someone’s feelings be argued over? He said, “I’ve always wanted to be on the air.” This was his intention. How can we argue someone’s desire? Rest of what he talked was the plain description of the situation.

Usually rather than simply describing things, we unintentionally complicate the situation by trying to explain it. If we can only be little more in attendance to our bodily sensations, sense feelings of the heart, observe the thing with neutrality and articulate them precisely, our communication will be much powerful.

PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

We try so hard to prove we are good that we forget we are magnificent

Generally, when we talk of personality, someone popular and dashing comes to mind. In some way, it is right because the word personality is derived from the Latin word persona. Just like laakhey naach in Kathmandu, plays in ancient Greece were performed by an actor with a mask of the character. So, personality is commonly understood as personal façade that somebody wants to show to the outside world.

But in psychology, personality means the sum total of behavioural and mental characteristics that are distinctive to an individual. The conventional psychological theories perceived personality as unchangeable — accrediting personality formation to unconscious dynamics, genetic and environmental influences. But the present humanistic approach, while accepting those influences, emphasises on ‘free will’ of the person. So, despite the past factors, people can modify themselves — both externally and internally — with their will power.

Let us start with the external because when someone sees us, they first see our body. So, positive body language matters a lot in personality. For example, imagine you are a college student returning home with your final grade card, in which you have failed in several subjects. You would have the worst body language

at that time. Again imagine the same situation, except that you passed with distinction. At that moment, you would possess a highly positive body language. To improve my body language, I have imagined such situations while walking on the road. As the saying goes, 'If you can fake it, you can make it'. But rather than faking, it is practice. So, practice it until you make it.

How we interact on daily basis also demonstrates our personality. When we meet people, we smile and greet them. But smile an inner smile before you smile at someone and you will see the difference. Eric Borne, founder of Transactional Analysis, says, "To say hello rightly is to see the other person, to be aware of him as a phenomenon, to happen to him and to be ready for him to happen to you." Whether you shake hands or say namaste, do it with inner warmth and heart connection.

Now, let us look into the internal aspects of personality. In psychology, one personality type is not considered superior. Every person has good and unique qualities. Some could be creative, while others well organised. Some could be assertive, whereas others cooperative. Some could be high spirited and others calm but persistent. The first step of personality development is to perform a personality treasure hunt — discover your good qualities. This is part of self-awareness. Once we recognise and appreciate our qualities, the journey of personality development starts. Sometimes we become so absorbed with the qualities of others that we overlook our own beauties. I heard somewhere, "We try so hard to prove we are good that we forget we are magnificent."

INCREASING INNER CAPACITY

We prefer to live between upper and lower limits that we set for ourselves

Have you sometimes experienced that you receive appreciation and do not know how to accept it? Rather you become embarrassed and confused about how to respond. Finally, you humbly deny or only take partial credit for it. If we wonder why this happens, we realise a vital principle that applies to success and happiness — personal or organisational.

A feeling of discomfort when receiving a genuine appreciation reveals that deep down in our unconscious mind we feel we do not deserve it. This principle applies to success, happiness, relationship and many other factors vital in life. Louise Hay writes in her book *You Can Heal Your Life*, "If we do not accept the idea that we 'deserve' to prosper, even when abundance falls in our laps, we will refuse it somehow."

Just to make my point clear, some people have heart attacks when they receive extremely good news. This is simply because they never believed they were worthy of it. Gay Hendricks has termed it the 'Upper Limit Problem' in his book *The Big Leap*. We have set upper limits for ourselves, so anything larger than the limit just overflows.

Over excitement indicates our incapability of holding success and happiness. Old people's warning is true: "Don't be too thrilled, you will soon find a reason to be sad." Those who feel worthy, simply feel happy, become grateful and acknowledge it. Similarly, pessimism indicates our inability to deal with failure or problems — those who are simply unable to accept the challenges and deal with it. So, there is a lower limit problem too. We prefer to live between upper and lower limits that we set for ourselves. When life crosses the limits, we feel nervous.

Like people, organisations too carry their own upper and lower limits — the ability to tolerate success and failure. Until organisations expand their limits which is in their own inner core, bigger success could backfire. This holds true in many other aspects too. Love is exciting but soon you will be fighting with your partner and making yourself miserable. Same thing may happen in honeymoon trips. And again when people become more popular than their inner quality can sustain, they fall into scandals and have to go underground to save face. Similarly, Ryuhō Okawa writes in *Invincible Thinking* that rather than searching for an ideal partner, it is more important for you to develop yourself to be ideal for your ideal type.

All these apply to organisations in the same manner. An organisation has a limit to hold growth, popularity, people only to the extent of their inner capacity. In this day and age, going to space is no longer a big deal. But venturing into one's own inner space and doing away with blockades is still a daring act worthy of adventure.

BREAKING THE PATTERNS

Why do we act the way we do?

Some people worry, some constantly talk about problems and some feel tense all the time. We find many people working under time pressure, while some are very short-tempered. One of these could apply to us as well. What makes us so? Is it outer reality or our habit?

The person with these attributes may think of it as their nature, but the people who work closely with them may find such behavior not only unusual but even difficult to deal with. For the constant worriers, it is not that their life is full of worrying situations but that they believe they need to worry in life. If they realise they are not worried, they will start worrying about not worrying. The same applies to people who are habitually tense, scared, short-tempered or working under pressure.

We find these traits mostly in officers, managers and leaders. What is worse, they believe these patterned behaviours are helping them sustain themselves. They identify themselves with the pattern so much that they become the pattern. For Mr Worry, being worried equates his existence. The same thing applies to all the patterned behaviours.

There are many other patterns. Some are argumentative. They think everyone argues with them, but do not see that they love arguments. In the same way, there are Mr Victim, Ms Critic, Mr Devoted, Ms Overloaded, Mr Urgent, Ms Emergency, Mr Fighter, Ms Accidents, et cetera. It is no wonder that all accidents happen to Ms Accidents and Mr Urgent always finds himself in a rush.

If we worry, are angry, or tense sometimes, it is natural and understandable. But we need to check if we have developed some obsessive patterns. If you think that by not worrying or being angry, or stressing yourself, things will go wrong, then you really need a thorough self-examination.

In fact we all carry some patterns. Those patterns may have developed sometime in the past and they might have been relevant or useful to protect or develop ourselves at that point. Then it was not a pattern but our response to the situation of life. Since it has been beneficial for us, we might carry it in later life while our life situations have changed and the response is no more relevant. Then it becomes an unconscious pattern rather than a productive action.

We need to identify our patterns. If we cannot find it ourselves, we can ask our close friends or family members as they could have been dealing with our pattern for years. When we start to practice coming out of our pattern, it may feel like the world will collapse. But by and by, we will find the world goes around exactly as it has been. Moreover, we may find ourselves more effective and the world more beautiful when we break out of the pattern.

WISDOM IN PARADOXES

THERE IS NO CONTRADICTION IF WE UNDERSTAND THE CRUX OF THE MATTER

There are two contradictory proverbs — ‘Look before your leap’ and ‘Opportunities never come to those who wait... they are captured by those who dare to attack.’ Which one is true? Well, both are, it is only limitation of language that requires the same truth to be expressed in two opposite sounding sentences. Wisdom is in understanding the truth in the paradox and applying them in life.

Voltaire says “*The best is the enemy of the good*”. I generally say during trainings, “Good is the enemy of great.” The book emphasises that in life just being good is enough. In my trainings, I say, “Being good is not enough. Along with doing good business, we should pursue greater business potentials.” So, who is right? Actually there is no contradiction if we understand the crux of the matter. When we try to be best, we may not even be able to be good. But then, if we are satisfied at the level of good, we may not achieve the best. The contradiction reveals that truth of life is greater than words in languages. Life becomes effective when we understand the sense of both and apply them equally.

Most debates take place when we are caught in words. Debates are

not only unnecessary but also harmful for our relationships. They take us nowhere. *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter Senge talks about 'mental model' where everything (or everyone) is partially right but largely wrong. It is because our mental model can see only a part of truth. Senge says the problem is not that we see partial truth but that we mistake it as the whole. Then the fight begins.

We already have enough agenda for fighting — political opinions, religious beliefs, et cetera. We have had many fights in the names of Gods. Amazingly, we have never seen the Gods of different religions fighting with each other. Rather than us debating whose God is mightier, why not let Gods fight and decide once and for all? Yet, humans are fighting and killing each other, almost like children quarrelling over which movie star is stronger.

People love to argue. I have sometimes seen managers fighting over which management theory or model is superior. Some take seven habits training and say it is most effective. Some participate in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) trainings and say NLP is everything. There are other professionals who criticise one or the other for being unoriginal or unscientific. But every management theory and tool has its own place and none is superior over the other. No theory or programme is fully original, yet each one contains some originality.

Whenever we have an argument, let us understand that we are holding our personal viewpoint very tightly. The wisdom is not in the views but the underlying sense of different ideas. Wisdom is in seeing the point in different and paradoxical views.

MONEY MATTERS

Plan wisely today for a better tomorrow

Managing one's income could be an important skill to learn — all the more so if your income is rising. Nowadays some organisations have started paying handsome salaries to their employees and even distributing bonuses. You are lucky if you are employed in such a company, but if you are not managing income properly, this may become counterproductive in no time.

I became aware of money management literature only after I turned 40. I imagine how my present financial situation would have been different if I had come across them when I started my first job at 25. For well-paying companies, it could be an important responsibility towards their employees to train them on managing income for a better future. Their investment in the right business can contribute not only to personal benefits but also to financial prosperity of the country in the long run.

Right attitude and skills in money management could be an important quality to make you a leader. This skill is important whether your salary is barely enough to make ends meet or high enough to party every evening. It is not how much you earn but how you manage money that makes you financially secure and prosperous. If you want to be a leader of higher quality, you can also rise from 'managing money' to 'leading money'. Money is like people. You need to understand it as you understand human

beings. It demands respect and wants you to be wise with it. The more skilful you are in leading it, the more it will follow you and give you happiness. Arrogance of having it or frustration of not having it make it turn away from you.

Like theories in managing an organisation, there are mantras in money management. The aim of money management is to give you financial confidence, freedom and a secured future while you enjoy life to the fullest. Money asks you to be optimistic as well as realistic. The human mind has an unrealistic tendency to escalate the feeling of present happiness or sadness to the faraway future. If you have started to earn a bit well today, you will be so happy that you will generate a feeling that your earning will increase at the same ratio in the future. Similarly, if you are in financially challenged condition, you start having a gloomy picture of your whole life. Both are unrealistic. As I am nearing 50, I have seen many rich people and families turn poor and vice versa. Reality remains and keeps changing. That is why money asks you to plan wisely today for a better tomorrow.

Money management starts from saving, but it is not limited to that. When you learn to manage money well, even with a small income, you can have a good saving, wise investments and a family holiday every year. You do not need to act miserly to have ever-increasing saving. Money management is not only a self-focused attitude. With wise investments, you can contribute to the prosperity of society also.

EXPERIENCING THE WHOLE

Each individual is a never-ending sequence of polarities

Many of us do not like our jobs. Some may like their jobs, but there are parts that they hate — people, certain tasks or particular aspects. If so, we need to give that a serious thought because we spend the most vital period of our life in our jobs. As James Austry says, “Work can provide the opportunity for spiritual and personal, as well as financial growth. If it doesn’t, we’re wasting far too much of our lives on it.” If we take a broader view, likes and dislikes apply not only to jobs but all spheres of life — family, friends and society. We have love and hate relationships. At its core, this conflicting relation exists with ‘self’ too. We love ourselves the most and yet we engage in so much of self-criticism.

We can understand the inner and outer conflict through Gestalt psychology. According to Gestalt, each individual is a never-ending sequence of polarities. We like strengths in us and dislike weaknesses. We like to feel happy and do not like to feel sad. Sometimes we are fearful and other times courageous. Sometimes we are sure and sometimes not. Sometimes we are sane and other times crazy. The opposite is present inside us and also outside in the relationships with people and environment.

Gestalt implies wholeness. It is a German word for ‘complete

pattern' or 'unified whole'. In existence, everything comes in a package. As life begins, pleasure and pain too begin as integral parts. The same applies when we begin a relationship or a job. What we perceive as opposites are in fact inseparable polarities. Whether we like or dislike, they are there undivided. The Chinese yin-yang symbolises this reality perfectly.

Fritz Perls, the founder of Gestalt therapy, writes, "We begin to live for fun, enjoyment, for being turned on." He continues, "It is, however, a serious setback. Namely, that we have become phobic towards pain and suffering. Anything that is not fun or pleasant is to be avoided. So we run away from any frustration that might be painful and try to shortcut it. And the result is lack of growth. I'm talking about facing honestly unpleasant situations."

When we accept and own impartially the parts we like and dislike in us, we become a whole person. That leads us to emotional wellbeing and we become more beautiful. Then we can also accept and love the people we live and work with. In the same way, when we see our job in the reality of its wholeness, we can befriend the disliked parts as well. It may even be that if we first deal with people and tasks in office that we dislike, we become more effective and enjoy the job.

KNOW YOUR STRATEGY

Reorient your autopilot to alter the way you behave

Nowadays I am learning driving. The instructor says, "You should take charge of the vehicle, not the other way round." In the same way, in life: do we control our emotions or do they control us? Who is in charge? Why do we become so helpless with our emotions and habits?

For instance, we explode with our partner even though we vowed not to be angry again. The vow was taken by a conscious mind and the emotions are from an unconscious mind. The unconscious mind is much stronger. That is why, no matter how hard we try to be confident in a certain situation, we get nervous when it actually happens. We become helpless victims.

It seems there is someone driving us from inside. In the language of neuro-linguistic programming (NLP), it is called 'autopilot'. Autopilot is not always against us. In fact, it works for us. For example, you are sitting on a chair. You can stand up from the chair in less than a second because of autopilot. If our conscious mind had to instruct every step of our movement, just imagine how long it would take. There is a long series of activities in everything we do whether physical or mental. This sequence of activities is called 'strategy'.

If we want to change our patterned behaviour, we need to change the strategy. To change the strategy, we need to understand it first by 'chunking down'. This is a Gestalt term. Just like numerous steps involved in standing, there are even subtler steps in our emotional and mental behaviour. Many things happen within us before we actually get angry or scared or worried. We need to chunk these emotions down to small steps and stages. For examples: What triggers the emotions? Is it something in the mind or visual or a sound or a feeling? From where does it enter? What reactions do they create within us? What next?

There is a long series of things that go on within and outside of us before the emotion becomes visible. And these are very personal. You have your unique strategy to get angry, sad or worried. Even in being happy or peaceful, you follow your own strategy. It is so personal and unique to you that only you can know your strategy. Once you know your strategy, you can modify it to your preference. You can reorient your autopilot. This change strategy applies not only to mental but also to physical behaviours. If you want to look, move or talk smarter, you can understand your present strategy of performing those actions and then replace with a new strategy.

For me, it is simply amazing to watch how I act — how fear and worries enter the mind, how a spark of anger ignites, how negative mental talk or self-criticism starts in the mind; and also how happiness and peace gently rises in oneself. Besides being a self-change tool, this has also been a simple yet powerful technique of meditation in active life.

FEMININE MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

Female leaders are more transformational

For thousands of years our thoughts have been guided by the myth that men make better leaders than women. Even the traditional leadership approach is called Big Man Theory. It was only around 1980 that scholars started examining the taken-for granted opinion. Now leadership journals and business magazines are filled with research results with headings such as: Women and men as leaders; Gender and leadership style; Sex differences in leadership; Female leadership advantage, among others. The recent assessments on gender and leadership discovered that indeed women have, though slightly, a leadership advantage. It is because female leaders are more transformational than their male counterparts.

Social change has increased the number of women in leadership positions. However, here we are going to explore feminine qualities for effectiveness in leadership. Northouse, in his book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, has drawn attention to research on women and leadership. The conclusions have been that overall men and women are equally effective leaders, but women were less effective to the extent that the leader role was masculinised. Role of women was devalued until leadership used to mean being autocratic and directive. Now the leadership paradigm itself has shifted from transactional to transformational.

It was assumed that women would be more interpersonal and less task-oriented. But no research found that women are less task oriented. As

Northouse concludes, “The only robust gender difference found across settings was that women led in more democratic, or participative, manner than men.” He concludes, “Newer conceptualization of effective leadership, such as transformational leadership, no longer highlight traditional masculine traits but underscores the importance of feminine and androgynous traits.”

Nowadays conscious women themselves are promoting feminine aspect of leadership through newer technologies. An astounding facebook page that I recently came across was *Joyous Woman*. One of the posts read, “In the feminine model of leadership, leaders create more leaders, not followers. Leadership is about the work, not the person.” This is enough to challenge the traditional masculine thinking of leadership as the glory of great men. A Victorian age historian went to extreme to state, “History is nothing but the biography of a few men.” History is ‘his’ story and not ‘her’ story. It may be because femininity has no craving to personalize accomplishments.

Another post in Joyous woman says: “In the patriarchy, physical strength became force, and force came to mean power, and then power became domination. Both women and men are relearning that physical strength and power are not synonymous. We are relearning that true power is called shakti — the female principle of divine energy. Shakti personifies the dynamic, manifesting energy that creates the universe. Feminine leadership is not new. It has only reawakened. *Tao Teh Ching*, the 2,500-years-old Chinese text, pleads it strongly:

*Know the masculine,
Keep to the feminine,
And be the brook of the world.
Know the white,
Keep to the black,
And be the pattern of the world.
Know the glorious,
Keep to the lowly
And be the fountain of the world*

HR FROM THE HEART

We feel fulfilled when we find our work and life is purposeful

Our age is such that we need to be seriously concerned about the working environment in office. It is because a large portion of the population works in offices. Hence, they spend the crucial part of the day at work. They invest the most productive part of their life in office. No wonder a lot of significant matters in our life are determined by our work-life. So, in the present age the role of HR can be pretty crucial and dynamic and not just limited to administration job, as in the past. The challenge for HR today is to aim for a broader role for the complete wellbeing of the employees so they are able to experience more fulfilment in their overall life.

James A. Autry, an author on leadership truly says, “Work can provide the opportunity for spiritual and personal, as well as financial growth. If it doesn’t, we’re wasting far too much of our lives on it.” So, besides earning, in business, we need to consider many other factors. Business can keep your health glowing and also deteriorate your health to death. It can give you fulfilment or can rob you of your fulfilment. So, we need to be alert on these while we are working in office.

When I was studying Psychology in university, I read in a Personality

textbook, “We have all heard about hard-working executives who drop dead while relatively young — in their forties or fifties. On the other hand, many people of prominence have led very demanding and productive lives well beyond the age of seventy.” I would say that the ultimate responsibility of one’s wellbeing lies with oneself. However, HR has a big role in creating favourable environment and making people feel responsible towards their health. Indeed, not only HR or organization but it must be the concern of the state, as ultimately it is related to the health of large portion of its citizens.

The word ‘health’ in Old English means wholeness or being whole. In Middle English, health also means prosperity, happiness, welfare and safety. So, people’s health is more than physical state. However, even physical health is affected by psychological state and spiritual well-being. To the contrary our offices have health insurance policy for employees and that ends everything concerning their health.

Today problems of health are arising not by physical labour but by sedentary yet a hectic life style. I see that this lifestyle starts early on. As students we spend whole day sitting on a bench. How good is it for our health to hold this position for an entire day? Students leave the house early to catch the school bus and come back late from school. Again there is homework and project works to deal with. They do not eat on time and have no time for physical activities. They focus mostly on monotonous academic development. Schools and colleges justify this kind of suicidal lifestyle by saying that today’s marketplace is full of cut-throat competition and students need to be prepared for it. The same repeats at work. It is no amazement that people get chronic diseases before entering middle age.

Besides physical problems, there are many mental stresses at work. If people have lots of complains about work in their mind, it can cause major health hazards. As Psychologist B F Skinner has said,

“Escaping from stressful situations by becoming ‘sick’ is rewarding.” To address the issue, many organizations have started stress management programmes for their employees. It will help to some extent. But the real concern is not only to manage stress but to make people feel joyful at work. Thus many trainers have rephrased their training from Stress Management to Joy at Work.

The major cause of people not enjoying their job is alienation. During the industrial age the term ‘alienation’ denoted how industries isolate workers from what and why they produce. The management believe financial incentive alone was enough to motivate workers. Later, ‘alienation’ was used with broader meaning – any kind of isolation of individuals in the process they are involved can be termed as ‘alienation’. Alienation is a pain that afflicts all levels. Human beings are social animals that want to remain connected. Every one of us needs a sense of belonging and being cared for.

The other factors psychologists have found correlated with health and longevity are sense of coherence and growth orientation. Sense of coherence means a person’s confidence that the world is understandable, manageable, and meaningful. Growth orientation is the effort in continuous development of self. Like, the hierarchy of needs proposed by Abraham Maslow — human’s developmental needs are from basic biological needs to self-actualisation.

The final and most impacting factor in life is a sense of being purposeful. Our purpose guides how we think and feel. The impact of how we think and feel is not limited to our health but also to our life at large. Its impact is so strong that Viktor Frankl found that sense of identity, dignity and purpose as deciding factors for survival even in Nazi concentration camp.

Once I discussed about the topic with my friend Nithya Shanti, who

had studied Human Resources from XLRI and worked in the field of HR and corporate strategy before becoming a Buddhist monk. Nithya said, “Remember that HR stands for ‘helping humans return to source’. Rather than manipulating people to attain organisational objectives, it’s about helping people discover their genius and find purpose. Remember that a ‘job’ is a chore you do so you can pay the bills. A ‘career’ is motivated by money, prestige and advancement. And a ‘calling’ is work done as an end in and of itself. Help people discover their calling.” Someone asked him: “How was your learning from university different from the learning you received as a Buddhist monk?” His reply was, “One was concerned with getting a good job and the other with doing a good job.”

In the agriculture age, people needed hands to work. In the modern age, people need brains to increase productivity and profit. But what is still lacking is heart at work. Today’s question is how we can listen to people’s heart. Mostly, it is also true that people are not listening to their own hearts. The voice is deeply suppressed. So, how can HR facilitate people to find the voice of their heart? This could be a worthy task for HR professionals.

Deeper than heart, in human beings, is the soul. As the heart goes for love, the soul is in search of purpose. The soul dies down when it does not find meaningful purpose in the work the body and mind is involved in every day. People need to believe that by working they are making a difference. That is their purpose. We feel contentment when we find our work and life is purposeful. This purpose is certainly not only meeting daily needs, or buying a big house or a car.

There is a sense of fulfilment in performing something of one’s passion, and moreover in helping others find their passion and purpose. An HR person can enjoy the delight of both.

JOB AND JOY

People are born with intrinsic motivation but our prevailing system of management has destroyed our people

Many people complain that there is no joy in their job. It seems ‘job’ and ‘joy’ are polar opposites — a lifeless activity they carry on only for their livelihood. Is this an unchangeable reality of life? I believe employees lack joy in their job when work systems are too dependent on extrinsic motivation alone. Pay, benefits, rewards are necessary, but they are not sufficient for people to feel energetic in their work.

Edwards Deming describes it beautifully in Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline*: “Our prevailing system of management has destroyed our people. People are born with intrinsic motivation, self-respect, dignity, curiosity to learn, joy in learning. The forces of destruction begin with toddlers — a prize for the best Halloween costume, grades in school, gold stars — and on up through the university. On the job, people, teams, and divisions are ranked, reward for the top, punishment for the bottom. Management by objectives, quotas, incentive pay, business plans, put together separately, division by division, cause further loss, unknown and unknowable.” Similarly American Economists, Bowels and Gintis find in their research that the education system kills our intrinsic motivation and replaces it with extrinsic ones.

External success can provide us comfort but not fulfilment. But our social, educational and economic systems teach us to work hard today so we can be happy in future. In the process, humans themselves become means for future success.

In a reply to the question, ‘What surprises you most about humanity?’ Dalai Lama said, “Man. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money. Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. Then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived.”

I have found some people are so completely trained in transactional system that they have accepted the mechanisation of life. Out of discontent, they search for meaning. Again, their search directs towards the future, as that is the only way we have learned to find something. However, the meaning they search for is inherent in the present.

We are born with purpose within us. Some people asked me how they can find joy when they are doing routine work. Routine workers are indispensable and serve many people very meaningfully. The world needs routine workers. For me, it is easier to find joy in routine work because it is easier to be present while performing routine work than non-routine work. You see, in meditation camp, life is strictly routine. When we become present in what we do, the meaning appears by itself.

PREPARE TO DESCEND

Start with the end in mind

In a training that I received some 20 years back, the trainer asked the participants to prepare a funeral speech for oneself. The crux of the exercise was that we have to act from today on how we want to be remembered after we have passed away. In the language of project management — start with the end in mind.

I like Edmund Hillary’s idea about successful Mt Everest expedition. According to him, success does not mean only reaching the summit, it is equally important to ensure safe and successful descend and coming back home.

When all our attention is on climbing up the career ladder or business success, we may forget to contemplate on climbing down. Some scholars say that a leader is someone who can foresee into the future. If you really foresee, you will prepare yourself physically and psychologically to move down as well. Whether we like it or not, one who goes up, sooner or later, has to come down.

The reality of descending is in multiple areas of life. It can be in your career or business. It could be in your financial situation. And it can be anytime because change is unpredictable. That is why there is the saying, ‘Expect the best and prepare for the worst.’

The unexpected may come in love and relationship too. Are you prepared to handle it? One thing most certain in life is that you have to descend through age.

I am not suggesting you always worry about failure or old age. At the surface we ignore them for we feel unpleasant and helpless when we think about them. But deep down, we carry the fear one way or the other. Our focus on success itself could be guided by the fear. We keep ourselves constantly engaged in climbing up and up so that we can keep our attention away from the reality of descending.

The way we prepare for failure and losses — in business or life — is a core part of self-leadership. We learn organisational leadership but forget self-leadership. Ken Blanchard and his friends write in *Leading at a Higher Level*, “...effective leadership is a journey beginning with self-leadership, moving to one-on-one leadership, then team leadership, and ending with organisational leadership.” Indeed, self-leadership could be the first and ultimate leadership task we can learn in our life. As a scholar has said, “The last thing we learn in life is what to put first.”

Nowadays I am meeting many old people who have been successful in different fields. A common experience among them as they grow old is the feeling of disappointment about the life they lived. They ask their visitors not to choose the field they chose. There is nothing wrong with the path they took. They have made significant contributions to the society from their field. They did everything right in their life. The only thing they could not take into account was the descend while they were struggling to ascent. The Buddhist principle of ‘adi kalyanam, madhya kalyanam, anta kalyanam’ applies to all spheres of life. It suggests to think of a good start, a good progress and a good ending.

LEARNING TO RELAX

Rest is more important than all the rest

In today’s cut-throat competitive world, increasingly society has put more and more emphasis on business success and for it you need to work harder than ever. This gives immense stress to your body and mind. That is why stress management programmes are so popular nowadays. For your benefit, I would like to present the essence of my stress management programme here.

Relaxation has two parts: physical and mental. Stress arises more due to mental tiredness than physical tiredness. So, a relaxed attitude is very important in work effectiveness. You may be resting physically but still mentally restless. So, when I say ‘learn to rest’ it means learn to develop a relaxed attitude. Otherwise, just to rest physically taking leave from work or taking a break or lying down should be enough. However, taking a break physically is an important part of relaxation. I repeat in training, “Without a break, we will break”. Certainly, we have many breaks in a day of training.

For a relaxed day, I prescribe the following routine. Get up with a smile; put your feet on the ground with a feeling of gratitude. It does not matter what you feel grateful about; the attitude of gratitude itself is great enough. That is why gratitude is called the

greatest attitude. In one Buddhist meditation tradition, you are asked to just remain grateful for a whole month for being born as a human being. That is the first practice in the tradition and only later other practices are followed.

Then you can have a vital breathing exercise. If you have time, you can do physical exercise too. You can follow through pranayama or just breathe slowly and deeply for 10 times. Then have good breakfast and leave for work at an unhurried pace. Think of good things about work as you are on the way. Enter the workplace with freshness and energy.

Complete the tasks on a priority basis. Be able to say 'no' or 'later' to others and yourself, for tasks that are not a priority. Take a short break every hour during which you can stretch your body and breathe deeply. Enjoy lunch. You deserve it. You have worked hard for it. So, take time and appreciate the taste and texture.

Resume working again with aliveness. Say thanks, express gratitude and appreciation to as many people as you can. Do not delay to say 'sorry' for your mistakes and also be generous to forgive people. This you can do best over tea with your friends.

When you step out from office, drop official concerns one by one with every step and empty them as you reach home. Think of home sweet home and the lovely people there on the way home. Or friends you are going to meet. Greet them and mix with them with aliveness. You can have some evening exercise or a walk.

Enjoy dinner, but keep it small. Last, but most important: For the whole day never feel helpless, but as you go to bed surrender yourself. Rest is more important than all the rest.

LEADING WITH WISDOM

In training and retreats, you discover that all you need is already within you

Nowadays I find people have become more enthusiastic about leadership development. Students want to learn it. Managers want to enhance it. It seems leadership is a mystical subject that can change their lives. The inquisition is praiseworthy and the speculation is true at some level. However, at the same time, we should not forget that real leadership lies within us. We are complete with leadership spirit at the core of our being. The pursuit of leadership should not move us away from our innate leadership nature.

What is it within us that drives us towards leadership? It is the wisdom that constantly advises us to act differently. If we observe ourselves, we will find most of our actions are guided by our habits, patterns and emotions. If we stop for a moment before jumping into action, and listen to what the wisdom within us has to say, we may find the result is totally different from what we usually do. Our wisdom asks us to take an extraordinary step, but we choose an ordinary step. That is what we do. That is what society expects us to do. That is what is called normal and understandable behaviour. But it does not make us a leader.

During the time of Rana autocracy, it was normal for the whole nation to remain suppressed. But few people like Ganesh Man or

BP or Pushpa Lal acted differently. They became leaders. Every prince dreams to be a king and prepares himself for it. But prince Siddhartha left the palace. And that made all the difference. He is still a leader for a large population on earth. These could be big examples. In our daily lives, there come numerous times that we decide and act. For every occasion, we behave differently. Many times, we react automatically. But as soon as we allow wisdom, we find creative ways to behave. In a given situation, animals react in the same way, but humans find many different options for the same situation.

A trainer in my circle who organises self-mastery and leadership development retreats wrote on Facebook, “What if you realized that you did not need to go for any workshops to learn anything? Did not need to go for any retreats to discover yourself? All of this is right here right now within you to access.” For a trainer, it could be advice harmful to his business, but it is true. In training and retreats, you discover only that all you need is already within you.

Everyone is blessed with an equal amount of wisdom. The only difference is that some listen to it, while some have doubts. To awaken leadership is to follow one’s own wisdom. But the problem is that we seldom listen to it because most of the time what wisdom suggests is contrary to our normal behaviour pattern or what society expects. It seems unsafe to follow wisdom. It invites us to come out of our comfort zone. We are afraid of following wisdom because we fear we might lose our ground, we might seem ridiculous, and we might be rejected by society. But we cannot expect different results without acting differently. To listen to wisdom means to take risks, jump into the unknown and act differently. Initially, it means voluntarily being in difficulties. But in the long run, by facing all the difficulties, the leader in you matures.

KNOWING AND HAVING

Leadership, like swimming, cannot be learned by reading about it

There is a great difference between knowing and having something. Knowing all about leadership does not ensure having leadership qualities. Mintzberg says, “Leadership, like swimming, can’t be learnt by reading about it.” Then could there be ways to develop leadership?

We are brought up with education that focuses on knowledge. Education imparts anything as a subject teaching. There are topics on leadership and management in business courses. Learning theories on leadership makes you knowledgeable on the subject. But the purpose of leadership development is not to make you more knowledgeable, rather it is about developing leadership qualities within us. It is about awakening the leader in us.

Real leadership is about choice. Deepak Chopra says, “Becoming a leader is the most crucial choice one can make — it is the decision to step out of darkness into the light.” You become a leader by making decisions for yourself. And the first and crucial decision could be to become a leader.

Indeed, to become a leader means to become yourself — truly yourself. You may think I am talking more about spiritual than business. If so, you are not wrong because Hendricks and Ludeman find more mystics in boardroom than in a monastery or cathedral. They say, “The very best kind of mystic — those who practice what they preach — can be found in the business world.” They give the example of Bob Galvin’s father, the founder of Motorola. Galvin says about his father: “Dad once looked down an assembly line of women employees and thought, ‘They are like my own mom — they have kids, homes to take care of, people who need them.’” Galvin interprets: “It motivated him to work hard to give them a better life for he saw his mom in all of them.”

Hendricks and Ludeman found the following qualities in corporate mystics: integrity, fairness, self-awareness, non-dogmatic spirituality, acting from higher-self, openness to change, sense of humour, inspiring vision and commitment, self-discipline and finally, balance. These qualities cannot be learnt from books or a teacher. They need to be cultivated — bit by bit — until they become an integral part of our life.

Leaders instil leadership in people not by teaching them word by word but through idealised influence and inspirational motivation. They become the model they want to see in their people. There is a saying, “I don’t care how much you know, until I know how much you care.” What you know does not count much. John Wooden says, “It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts.”

THE BEING IN HUMAN BEINGS

You can develop yourself by making choices

Humans are amazing beings. They have surprised in the toughest times in human history. I find it extraordinary that humans have discovered within themselves the power of free will. They discovered it during the world wars, when life was under extreme threat and choices were limited. But what is astonishing is that humans discovered the notion of ‘free will’ and ‘freedom of choice’ amidst the wars and in seemingly helpless detention camps.

With the realisation of free will in human beings by existentialists, the long debate ensued between trait theorists and behaviourists whether leadership is born or made. For existentialists, qualities in people are neither born nor shaped by upbringing alone. People develop themselves using the power of choice. So, you are responsible for what you are and want to be. Now you cannot blame fate or environment for the reason that you can develop yourself to your liking by practicing your free will. If you are not what you want to be, you are not using your free will or personal choice that you are equipped with by birth.

The word ‘human being’ itself is amazing. ‘Being’ is not a static word; it is a verb and in continuous form. It expresses actively developing qualities of human beings. We are continuously

inventing and reinventing ourselves. See how beautiful the concept is and how powerful we are. Existentialists express humans as 'beings-in-the-world'.

According to Abraham Maslow, humans have a strong sense of freedom, which leads us to believe that we have free will. For Maslow, the most developed person is the most autonomous one. Thus, the existentialist's 'being-in-the-world' turns inward in humanistic approach — 'the being in human being'. The contemporary development in leadership is based on humanistic philosophy which stresses on the special, active and aware quality of human beings. It believes that life develops as people create worlds and give meaning to it for themselves. The view further develops from 'human being' to 'human becoming'; that is, the healthy personality exhibits an active movement toward self-fulfilment.

I believe that people are born with some traits. Traits are important because they make you unique in the world. I also believe that our upbringing shapes our thoughts and behaviours. Our situations affect us. However, in spite of in-born qualities and environment after birth, the final deciding factor in our life is us. We can decide for ourselves what and how we want to be through our own personal will.

JOURNEY AND DESTINATION

The key to being happy is to enjoy the present

We get excited when given an opportunity to travel to a new place. Effort to attain success is similar to travelling to a new destination. When we travel we enjoy the journey from the very beginning. We keep the destination in mind but we experience joy at every step of the journey. We do not say — I will be happy only when I reach the destination.

But in our journey to success, it does not seem like we enjoy the journey as much. We focus too much on the destination or achievements and keep our happiness postponed till we achieve our aim. If we are students, we work hard to be successful in examinations, but mostly we do not enjoy studying as much as we celebrate the success. Even the celebration of success does not last for many days. It is because you see the next destination. When one is in school, passing out from school with distinction could be the destination. Once achieved, the next destination becomes college, then university, then a good job and again a better job. In this way we are always stressed by success. This situation is described beautifully in *Alice in Wonderland*.

When Alice is at the Mad Hatter's tea party, she notices that no jam is available. She asks for jam, and the Mad Hatter says, "Jam

is served every other day.” Alice protests, “But there was no jam yesterday either!” “That’s right,” says the Mad Hatter. “The rule is: always jam yesterday and jam tomorrow, never jam today... because today is not every other day!”

If we are too focused on the destination, we might experience the same situation. There will be very little joy in life. It is because life is a long journey. Destinations are only stopovers. There is no final destination where once you reach you will be happy forever. So, if you decide to be happy only with success, there will be very few occasions in life to be happy. Either you will be happy tomorrow when you achieve success or you can be happy remembering yesterday’s success.

In contrast, when you are happy with your journey, there are constant opportunities to be happy. Great leaders hold remote vision. They reach far because they enjoy every step of the journey. Sometimes the path is smooth and sometimes the path is rough. Sometimes the destination seems close and sometimes very far. The key to keep enthusiasm intact is to focus on one step at one time. The key to being happy is to enjoy the present. The way to unhappiness is to lament about the path — too rough, too hard, too far.

When we look back at life, the recollections of journeys become more interesting than destinations. People are spellbound by the description of an adventurous journey than merely to learn about your achievements. Journeys make you humble, and achievements can make you arrogant.

COMPASSION IN ACTION

The more grateful we become, the happier we are

A mother is praised for giving birth to us. But do we remember the midwife who supported the delivery? What could be the value of her effort? Can that be equated with her salary and forget about it because she has been paid for the job? The service we receive and give in business has deeper value than money alone.

Business is all about happiness. What do we feel when we buy clothes? We feel happy. The clothes may cost some hundreds or thousands of rupees. But do we consider the rigorous process from growing cotton in the field to making the clothes? How many people have been involved in the activity? Certainly, they all are paid for their work. And you have paid for the clothes. But considering the long process, the happiness, warmth and prestige you get by wearing the clothes is far higher than the amount you paid for it.

As a customer, we need to be more grateful and thankful for goods and services we buy. Likewise, we need to see the deeper meaning in businesses we are in. We are not merely making profit out of it. We are serving the needs of people in the world.

Life has been much easier with science and technology. We do not know the people who made the internet and social networking

sites. We do not know the people who are working so that we can communicate through mobiles and internet applications. Now, everything is at a click away on your device and at nominal cost. So, science, technology and business all create happiness and comfort. Thousands of people are anonymously working for us. Is it not spiritual enough? If we are not happy, it is because we are taking things for granted. We value them less than the money we paid. The more grateful we become, the happier we are.

When we are in business, we need to find purpose to the business. If we see it only as a way of making profit, we will not find much fulfilment. The purpose of business is to make a difference in people's life. We can ask ourselves: how can I add happiness to my clients' life with my business? Business is compassion in action. When we do not take things for granted, we will find how blessed we are. When we raise our business from profit to purpose we are being compassionate to the world.

HUMAN BECOMING

To understand ourselves and our relation with the world, we need to understand the dynamic nature of the both

In talking sessions, some youths ask me which subject of study they should choose and which profession they should opt for. Knowing me as a psychological counselor, they think I have definitive answers for them. Indeed, I studied psychology and I came to know that there are no definitive answers in life. The world is ever changing and even more fluid is the 'self'. What seems to be a correct answer for today does not necessarily remain correct after some years.

A definitive answer may be applicable in education because education deals with the outside world. When we are born we are new to this planet. So, we spend a couple of decades in education to get familiar with the systems and etiquette of the world. This is necessary for living in a human society, but it does not guarantee development of potential.

When I meet youths I find them full of energy and enthusiasm, but they seem confused. It is because they have only a partial picture of the world. What is missing is the 'self' that is in the center of the world.

Reality is not the world alone. It is created through the interaction

between the being and the world. In addition, self and the world both are in constant change. So, the human world is not predictable like the world of physics. Dr Wayne Dyer, an author of several bestsellers, writes, “You developed a self-image based on what teachers, test scores, and academic performance indicated — you learned you were average at spelling, above average in art, but mentally challenged in mathematics. What you didn’t learn is that tests only measure how well you take tests!”

To understand our inner potential, we need to understand further than “being in the world”. And that is “being in the beings”. Dyer gives an example of another bestselling author Louise Hay, who had been abused as a child, did not have the support she needed to finish high school and grew up with the notion that she was not very smart. But now she is the largest selling women author on New Thought self-help. Furthermore she is teaching others how to appreciate their own self-worth!

To understand ourselves and our relation with the world, we need to understand the dynamic nature of both. Both of them are constantly changing.

In addition, humans make conscious and active movements towards self-fulfilment. Fifteen years back, I didn’t have the slightest idea that training, coaching and counseling would be my profession. All I could think of was getting a better job in a larger organisation than I had been working then.

So, it would be more precise to characterise a human being as ‘human becoming’. From external and internal inputs, we are continually crafting and constructing ourselves. I respect psychological testing and self-assessments. They tell us what we are.

But no tests and people can tell us what we can become. We solidify ourselves by making decisions for ourselves, taking actions and accepting complete responsibility for our decisions and actions. Both successes and failures move us towards maturity. To understand ‘human becoming’ is to comprehend that we are dynamic beings, We can make conscious choices and shape ourselves to our preference. Importantly, even our preferences keep changing in the process of development.

WHEN YOU WONDER, YOU ARE WONDERFUL

Gear your mind towards creativity, wisdom and solutions

What are the feelings you mostly have? Happy, joyful, excited or sad, depressed, tensed? Or fluctuations among them? Our feelings describe us. They describe our life. There are so many feelings. Positive ones could be peaceful, hopeful, confident, calm, determined, relaxed, relieved, loving, et cetera. Some negative ones could be guilt, upset, worried, bored, angry, anxious, jealous, helpless, hopeless, et cetera. We go through all these feelings in our life. However, the question is, how much are we aware of our feelings? Feelings have more powerful effect on our life than thoughts as they determine the quality of our life. Everything changes with our feelings — our look, thoughts, actions, life view and world view. So, to understand and transform our life, we need to be aware of our feelings. I want to discuss about two important feelings — sense of wonder and curiosity.

Have you ever wondered why we like to read novels and watch movies? Certainly, we feel happy and sad along with the development of the story. Ultimately, suspense makes us curious and hooked to the story. Life is also uncertain and full of surprises. But we live and think as if life is certain. Something happens and we decide if it is good or bad. We think of the consequences with such decisiveness as if we own the power of clairvoyance.

How many times we have viewed at happenings in our life with a sense of wonder. Do we approach to the future consequences with ultimate decisiveness or with curiosity? When we have good and bad feelings but lack a sense of wonder and curiosity, our life will be like a movie full of all feelings except suspense. How boring a movie will be with all the certainties in the story? Be it in life or business, wonder about the situation. There will be more creativity. When we hold decisive opinions on life's incidents, life becomes anxious.

Wonder is a combination of amazement and admiration. We can admire the uncertainties of life. When any good or bad things come in our life, we can be curious about the result rather than being anxious. Anxiety is the combination of wish and worry. When a good thing happens in life, we become excited. There is pleasant anticipation. Excitement is combination of enthusiasm and agitation. So, though it seems positive, we find it difficult to relax when we are excited.

Wonder and curiosity are neither too positive nor negative feelings. They are enthusiastic but neutral feelings. Like the neutral gear in a car, it is a good state to start the engine and change to the right gear as the situation demands. Whether encouraging or discouraging things are happening in life, it is very helpful to return from time to time to the feeling of wonder and filling oneself with curiosity so that we can gear our mind towards creativity, wisdom and higher solutions. When we wonder, we become wonderful. When we are filled with awe, we become awesome.

CORPORATE MYSTIQUE

The more staff are empowered, the better mystique they build for their organisation

We have different feelings for different organisations. There are some offices, which we would like to visit, and others, we even hate to think of. What makes such a difference? We can call this quality which we feel but cannot describe as 'mystique'. Whether we are aware of this concept or not, we all have experienced it while visiting different organisations with different ambience.

Mystique is defined as a special quality or air that makes somebody or something appear mysterious, powerful, or desirable. We cannot express it in words but we can strongly feel it. A fine organisation puts deliberate effort to develop its mystique. They work by determining how people should feel as soon as they enter their space. They develop motto, credo and values of such places so that mystique can be strengthened. All the staff share the same qualities. Therefore, whom you meet in the office does not make a difference. You feel the mystique all over the organisation.

As a consultant, I have to visit many organisations. I have found only a few of them conscious about mystique. Most organizations have vision and mission statements but only few have a defined mystique. The organizations with a well stated mystique are pleasant to visit. There we find people being warm, with extended care and support. It is not only about managers and officers, but also the guards,

supporting staff, receptionist all talk and deal in a very humane way. To the contrary, in other organisations I feel different qualities at different departments. The people at HR department could be warm but people at the finance department could be cold. To develop a mystique means to make a person feel the same all around the organisation.

So, to develop mystique, having a warm and welcoming attitude at reception or sales department is not just enough. Nor it is enough that the care is extended to customers alone. Mystique is woven in the air of the organisation and in the heart of employees. The secret to developing mystique first starts among staff. Primarily, staff should feel the mystique within the organisation. How staff are valued and how they treat one another within the organisation. Staff treat customers and other stakeholders as they are treated. Mystique is not about fake care but about uncompromising values.

I have found staff in organisations with a developed mystique. Such staff have a greater ownership towards the organisation. They feel they are a part of the business and they have influential roles. To the contrary, in many organisations, it is very common for staff to say that they are helpless and hopeless within the organisation. They know what needs to be done for the progress of their organisation but they feel their voice will not be heard or taken seriously. It is very unpleasant to listen to the suicidal statements from staff towards their own workplace. More surprising is that such expressions come from high-level staff in large organisations. I can easily correlate the higher belongingness of the staff towards their organization with a higher level of mystique of the organisation.

Determining and defining mystique could be the concern of the board. However, staff are the key people to carry and deliver the mystique. The more they are empowered, the better mystique they

build for the organisation.

LESSONS FROM RELIGIOUS STORIES

Problems do not happen to us, they happen for us

There are many lessons in age-old religious stories. Here are some interesting lessons I learnt from Mahajanak Jatak, the story of a previous life of the Buddha. This story had been so inspiring to late Thai King Bhumibol that he did research and presented the it for a wider audience.

The father of Mahajanak was killed in a war when he was in his mother's womb. So, he and his mother lived far away from Mithila. When he grew up, he wanted to regain his reign of Mithila. His mother had carried with her lots of precious stones while she escaped from the palace. So, she offered them to her son for the expense to carry on a war. But he declined the offer and decided to travel to Subarnabhumi, believed to be today's Thailand. He wanted to do some business and earn the money required for the war. This encourages to become self-made persons. It is not only the amount of money earned but also the experience gained in the process.

After days of travelling by ship, the sea became rough and the ship began to sink. People began to cry. But Mahajanak did not lose

the presence of mind, but prepared himself to swim. He calmly ate the food that would retain energy for many days. He rubbed his body with oil to protect himself from the cold water. He saw people around the ship were being eaten by fish. So, he climbed the tallest mast and dived into the sea. This suggests presence of mind and intelligent action even in challenging time.

Later Mekhala, the goddess of the ocean, appeared and asked him, "Why are you swimming in the sea which has no end?" He replied, "It is the dharma of human to keep on their effort till they can." Again Mekhala asked, "What is the use of your effort? This ocean is too vast for you to reach an end before you die." He replied, "If I leave my effort and die, I would be condemned for being indolent. But if I die during the endeavour, I would be remembered as industrious." Mekhala asked over and over, "But what is the use of suffering in this way, if you know that your final destiny is to collapse?" He said, "I know this ocean has no end and I am aware of my limited strength. But nothing can be worse than accepting self-defeat and being lazy. My fellow travellers who did not make an attempt have already been eaten by fish. But I am still talking with you. Is it not an achievement in itself?"

Being touched by Mahajanak's invincible attitude, Mekhala lifted him from the sea and put him down in Mithila. By then the king of Mithila had already died of illness. He had only a daughter. People were looking for a king. When they knew Mahajanak was the son of their previous king, they happily offered him the throne. The story reminds us that adverse situations 'add verse' into life and problems do not happen to us, they happen for us.

BORN TO LEARN

Once you begin to learn there is no end to learning

Even though I am in the training profession I do not call myself a 'trainer'. I prefer to introduce myself as a 'learner-facilitator'. I have found, as a facilitator, my learning is intensified in every training. After each programme I facilitate, I feel I have moved a step higher. I remain grateful to the participants for providing me with wonderful opportunities of self-development.

Teaching is not effective until the teacher is ready to learn from students. When we teach, people learn to teach. When we are ready to learn, people too become ready to learn. People learn not from what we say, but from what we do. This applies not only to school teachers, but also to supervisors who want to teach their subordinates and to parents who want to teach their children. The same applies to training, coaching and other human development businesses.

Learning is not limited only to learning a mechanical skill or lessons from a text book. It is a very wide phenomenon that happens in every situation. Indeed, teaching is much easier than learning. Learning needs more energy and attention. However, if we look back at our childhood, we understand that learning has always been a natural process. To quote Edward Hall once again,

“Humans are the learning organism par excellence. The drive to learn is as strong as the sexual drive — it begins earlier and lasts longer.”

As children we are fast learners. A child is curious, inquisitive, willing, open to experiments and can see endless possibilities to learn. The learning attitude fades away as adults start to teach them. Eckhart Tolle presents a good example of it: A child asks with curiosity how a bird knows direction while flying high in the sky. The knowledgeable parent replies, “It is instinct.” The child gets a new word in response to his wonder question. Thus, slowly, amazement is replaced by information and so-called education.

Let me tell you a story of a great kung-fu master. Lying on his death bed he asked his students to place a white-belt on him. When his students asked for the reason he said that he wanted to die a beginner. The students queried further, “Since we know you, you are already white-bearded. We don't know who your teacher is. Can we know about your teacher?” The master replied that his teachers were children. The master said thousands of children had been his teachers. He goes on to tell them about his first teacher.

The master was in a room with a child and there was a candle burning. He asked the child in arrogance, “Can you tell me where the light comes from?” The child with utter simplicity blows away the candle. And then asks him, “Can you tell me where the light goes out?” That was the beginning of the master's learning journey. And as J Krishnamurti says, “Once you begin to learn there is no end to learning.”

WHY POLITICAL LEADERSHIP FAILS

We have gone through many revolutions without any real change!

In the last three decades Nepalis have gone through several revolutions. Within less than three decades, our country transitioned from autocracy to democracy, and again to republic, then again to federalism. People have always been in the center of every revolution. They have exhibited extraordinary courage and many sacrificed their lives for the change. That is why every revolution has been successful. And with every change the excitement and optimism of people has risen. I, being no exception, have been thrilled every time with every change the country has undergone. But we have also experienced that the excitement has been short-lived and most of the time people have lived in despair.

Sadly, although we have seen many changes at many different times in political system and in leadership, but we have not experienced any real changes in our day to day life. We face all the difficulties when we go to get a service at a government office. Existentialists call life is as being absurd, but we must say that we experience more absurdity in politics and bureaucracy! The standard of services we receive from government offices can be

portrayed well only with the term ‘Kafkaesque bureaucracy’. The changes of system and leadership could not change our country.

How can we analyze such changes? Should we call the revolutions successful or failure? I would quote Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire’s words that best describe the fate of our revolutions, “The problem with oppression is that once the oppressed throw off the oppressor, the only leadership role models they have are the very people who oppressed them. Thus, the oppressed become the new oppressors. This phenomenon creates a new breed of self-serving leaders overseeing a system where all the money, power, and recognition move up the hierarchy and away from the people the organisation was established to serve.”

It could be the reason that during my leadership training, the most common remark I get from participants is, “Our political leaders need to receive this training. They should know these lessons.” Certainly, successful leaders are the people who need to learn leadership theories and practices the most. They may think – we are already top leaders so why do we need to learn? Leadership starts from oneself– self-awareness, self-change, self-transformation. To the contrary, our political leadership starts by condemning the opponents. All our revolutions start with anger and hatred. The politicians mobilize people’s sentiment by making them angry against the establishment and spreading fear about the future.

The true leaders do not fight against oppression out of anger with oppressors, but they fight out of love for people. Che Guevara, Argentine revolutionary, says, “Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality.” For a change to be real and

enduring, the leaders need to cultivate higher qualities than anger and hatred.

Besides the time of uprising, there is one more time when Nepalis show strong emotions and solidarity. At times of crisis. As and when the country undergoes a critical situation, we are overwhelmed with motivation to defend the country. Such overwhelming nationalism was recently observed in the wake of disaster brought by the earthquake in 2015. Nepalis from all over the world were so united in providing relief to earthquake victims. People were talking about building Nepal better. In unity everything seemed possible.

However, I expressed doubt through my writing at the time, saying that we outperform at hard times, and forget everything as soon as the hard time passes. Then the usual life starts – division, apathy, corruption, laziness. We start criticizing and pulling one another down. The biggest problem is that our national memory is very short.

Now we can see earthquake victims are still in tents. There is no change for them except that the tents they are in have been torn. Now we see them as a usual sight without any sensitivity. We people and our leaders are not different in any sense!

MANAGEMENT BY RELAXATION

With a relaxed mind we can attend to work effectively

When I talk about relaxation during training to managers, people ask if they relax, will they not be beaten in the competition? The business world is full of cut-throat competition. There is a feeling that relaxation is harmful to work progress. Relaxation is often misunderstood for laziness.

There is an old popular story about relaxation. A villager was taking rest under a tree. A city man came and condemned him for being idle. The city man suggested the villager to work. The villager asked what he would get by being laborious. The city man replied that he would get money and after some years of saving he could start a business. Again, the villager asked what he would get from doing a business. The city man replied he could make lots of profit and after some years he could become a merchant. Again the villager asked what he would get by becoming a merchant. The city man replied he could earn a great wealth enough for living with relaxation. Then the villager said – Is that not what I am doing now?

When I heard the story while in school, I liked it very much. After I finished college and went to work, I did not like the idea of the story. I thought it promotes laziness and with such an idea, people and society will not move forward. But after two decades of working like

a dog in different organisations, I started seeing meaning in the story.

There is a great difference between being relaxed and being lazy. Lazy people are not necessarily relaxed. They may be physically idle but their mind may be more restless than people who are working. True relaxation is more of a mental quality than a physical state. There are many benefits of being relaxed. When we are relaxed, we have better concentration and mood, less frustration and more confidence to handle problems. Indeed, rest is more important than everything else.

It is good to be hard working when it is required. But also it is good to have enough time to rest. It is desirable for both physical and mental wellbeing. So for a manager, planning should not be limited to work alone. Rest also needs to be included in the work plan.

Worries and anxiety can make the mind restless. When the mind is troubled and you cannot relax properly, it is important to figure out the emotion that is governing the mind. Is it feelings of insecurity, fear or resentment? Byron Katie says, “The moment you project what’s going to happen, it costs you your life.” Most of the time the mind is troubled by the stories the mind itself has created.

When I now reflect the above story of the villager and the city man, I find a deeper truth. We work to earn a lot of money for a secured future. We think that once we are secured, we can live a relaxed and happy life. But can any amount of money give us a real feeling of security? It is the feeling of insecurity within us that prevent us from enjoying moments of life. This is the bitter reality, anyway. But with a relaxed mind, we can attend to work effectively which in turn provides a more secured life.

CAN YOU IMPROVE YOUR PAST?

We create our reality through our focus and interpretation

How would you react if someone said that he would want to go back into the past and change certain aspects of it, say, a bad circumstance into a good one? You would probably conclude that the person is out of his mind. But do we all not have regrets and wished we had done things differently? We dwell on what ifs and what could have been. This phenomenon is not only seen in common people but also among leaders and public speakers. For instance, they opine, ‘If certain events in the history were different, our country could have been better.’ To all of them I have one reply, “We cannot change the past. Scientists have not yet invented a time machine for us to revisit our past. What is done is done.”

We can hold grudges for our difficult childhood, lost opportunities, wrong decisions et cetera. We can blame people, situations and sometimes ourselves for our terrible past. We can keep complaining about our unpleasant yesterdays and justify our weaknesses or failures. But it is in no way helpful for our way forward. On the contrary, they simply block our progress. When we dwell on our past mistakes, sadness overtakes us. The emotions it creates are negative – hate, regret, despair, guilt, grief

et cetera. None of these are good for our physical and mental health, let alone for leadership growth.

We all have our past. No one is an exception. In the same way, we all have resources to avoid negativity in our future and move forward to explore new dimensions. When we focus on the resources we have, we get the power to change our past. To present an example, I was educated in a public school where the quality of education was poor. It is a Nepali medium school and we all were poor in English. I can blame my parents for not sending me to a good school. I can blame the teachers for not teaching well. Instead, as I grew up, I devoted myself to learning English from preliminary books. I began by reading English textbooks of primary grades of English medium schools. That was how I could become a columnist here.

Now it is your turn to check if you are nursing any 'ifs' about the past. We cannot clear the past, but we can clear the complaints about the past. When we clear the complaints of the past, we make our future clearer. It is about our focus. When we focus on the negative parts of the past, our past becomes horrible. When we focus on the resources we have we become empowered. It is not about reality. It is about how we tell the story about the reality. I can tell a story about my childhood in the most hopeless manner focusing on negativity. I can also tell a story about the same thing with all enthusiasm and brightness. We create our reality through our focus and interpretation.

We can improve the past not by complaining but by forgetting or forgiving. Psychology says human memory is selective and reconstructive. So, why not choose to forget the part of our past that bothers us? If we cannot forget we can forgive the people involved. Nelson Mandela, while stepping out of prison after 27

years of imprisonment, thought if he went out of the jail with all the bad memories of tortures, he would still be in a mental jail. He said that he forgave the perpetrators so that he could really be free. He said, "I was not a messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances." Nelson Mandela would not have become a great leader, if he had not practiced forgiveness.

MANAGING WITH MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness empties the mind from unnecessary thoughts and emotions

What you would feel if your car is at very high speed in an expressway and the driver suddenly collapses? Most certainly you would panic. When it happened in a recent accident in India a person in the car was completely frozen. But there was another person in the car who was fully aware of what needed to be done and he saved his life and other two. His senses were wide awake and fully functional when such a catastrophe was occurring.

Leader's true test comes in times of adversity. True leaders are those who can remain calm and normal at abnormal times. Being calm, they complete extraordinary tasks that address the needs of hard times. Mindfulness helps people remain calm and see things clearly. That was exactly how a person with mindfulness training acted in the car that was just about to collide.

It was my friend Nithya Shanti from India who wrote on his Facebook page – “I almost died last night”. Two weeks back, he was travelling from Mumbai to Pune with a friend. They were sitting in the back, talking amongst themselves and also to the driver. Without warning, the driver suddenly jerked his head to the back and released the steering wheel. The car began moving off the road. He realised that

the driver had some kind of a seizure. Quickly he clicked off the seat belt and leapt up to catch the steering wheel. Just seconds before a full speed collision with the side rails on the highway, he managed to straighten the car enough that it barely scraped the side rail.

Luckily the driver's foot was off the accelerator and the car began to very slowly, decelerate. Steering from the back, over the body of the driver, he managed to keep the car in the emergency lane. He reached for the ignition and switched off the car. Finally he reached for the emergency brakes and brought the car to a stable stop. The situation would have been very different if they had had a full frontal collision with the side rails at the speed they were going!

Nithya is a phenomenal trainer. But what is really fascinating about him is that he has been Buddhist monk for six years, the time he underwent rigorous training living with meditation masters in remote forests across South East Asia. He believes mindfulness has saved three lives including his. He described that the whole time the incident happened he was in a state of Zen like clarity, just the clarity of what was happening and the next important decision to be made, and thing to be attended to. Is it not the ultimate quality that is desirable among managers or leaders?

This is the reason more and more managers are turning towards mindfulness training. Mindfulness, although derived from religion, is not anything mysterious. Mindfulness empties the mind from unnecessary thoughts and emotions. Then our vision becomes clear and senses sharper. Then, there is you and your reality to be dealt with. Then you are faster and decisive which means more effective. Without doubt, you become practical at dealing with situations. Mindfulness is beneficial in day-to-day management and at challenging times. Practice mindfulness to face life situations with the ability to respond quickly yet calmly.

NEGATIVE SIDE OF POSITIVE THINKING

We can change a negative reality only by accepting and facing it

Let me start with an interesting anecdote; a patient suffering from depression went to a therapist. The therapist suggested that he go to a circus to see a famous clown renowned for making the audience laugh. The patient said that the clown could be helpful to others but not to him. The therapist asked in surprise why it was so. The patient replied that the clown was none other than himself.

This has been the case with Robin Williams. He has entertained the world, but not many knew about his pain. Similarly, Earnest Hemingway, who authored the life inspiring novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, contradictorily committed suicide. In the same manner, you may become highly motivated by motivational speakers speaking about positive thinking, but you do not know how their life is.

However, I present some aspects of positive thinking in my training. It is useful to limited conditions. Many people tend to enlarge negativity by three to 10 times. Most vulnerable are adolescents who are sensitive to criticism and develop a self-image accordingly. In such cases, positive thinking is helpful to bring a balance.

But in many cases positive thinking works negatively. Matt Clarkson

of The Mind-Body Training Company writes: With the popularity of teachings like ‘The Secret’ and ‘The Power of Positive Thinking’, it seems we humans do not like talking about how sad, depressed, anxious or fearful we really are – maybe in part because we think we are actually creating more of it or manifesting it. If we are trying so hard to be positive and refusing to acknowledge these feelings, we are actually feeding those issues and giving them the opportunity to take over, destroy our happiness, and even our lives later on.

Although I show some benefits of positive thinking in my training, I have always refrained from solely presenting it or overemphasising its benefits. Certainly, positive thinking is a fascinating idea and anyone can be easily attracted to it. So, writers, trainers and speakers become tempted to present it to quickly magnetise people. I really liked one of my participants digging down into positive thinking. She pointed out that positive thinking itself is founded on negative thinking. First, the mind detects something as negative and then we try to redefine it positively. Critical thinking may be more helpful in many ways.

Robert Fritz writes in *The path of least resistance*: If you wake up in the morning and feel sick, tired, and headachy, one school of positive thinking would have you force yourself to think something like, “Boy, I feel great today. Isn’t it fabulous to be alive?” A second school of positive thinking would have you say to yourself something like, “I really feel sick. I think it’s just wonderful that I feel sick, because good things always come from these kinds of situations. What a wonderful learning opportunity.”

Reality consists of both positive and negative. We can change negative realities only by accepting and facing it. J Krishnamurti said in a lecture in 1958, *The Importance of Negative Thinking*, “Positive thinking is conditioned thinking and that there is no change in that.”

DO WE REALLY NEED LEADERS?

The new leadership is friendship

When we talk of leadership, we often talk about exceptional characteristics great leaders possess. Sometimes we talk about leaders as directive or participative. There are also times we talk of awakening the leader within. Every time we talk about leadership, we are knowingly or unknowingly referring to different leadership theories.

When you describe a leader with his or her characteristics such as dominating, co-operative, intelligent, confident, influential, *et cetera*, you are talking about traits. Trait researchers attempt to find a universal set of traits that make effective leaders. Therefore, trait theorists believe in selecting the right person to assume leadership positions. When you talk about a leader's style, such as authoritarian, supportive or team manager, you are referring to behaviourism. Behaviourists try to identify critical behaviour determinants of leadership success. They rely on training people in helpful behaviour or styles of leadership. Both theories being deterministic — one inborn quality and the other learning experiences — gave rise to the grand debate: Are leaders born or made?

Then came the 'third force'— transformational leadership, which is based on existentialism and humanism. Contrary to the belief that human nature is determined by inborn factors or environment, existentialists believe in 'free-will'. For them, leadership development is a matter of personal choice. With strong commitment and inner

motivation for a cause, one can transform oneself, people and the whole culture. So, if you say everyone can become a leader by developing a vision and commitment, you are becoming a transformational leader. It is humanistic approach that encourages exploring alternative views, such as eastern spiritual philosophies. This has made meditation retreats a part of life of top leaders and managers.

We have a natural tendency to ask, "Then which theory is right or best?" If we say trait theory is right then there is no room for us to improve ourselves because everything is predetermined by birth. Then we have to wait for a super hero to descend to save us. Behaviourism gives some optimism that leaders can be developed through training. But again the question that arises, can we train leaders on a mass scale just as we train animals? Is leadership just a matter of shaping behaviour?

Then again, using the principles of transformational leadership, motivational writers and speakers claim, "Everything is possible. Dream positive and everything will be positive." But positive thinking has its own negative effects. Too much of optimism can lead to disasters. If you believe you can do everything and if it does not happen, you will feel shattered.

The debate is never ending. Whether we believe in trait theory or not, when we meet people, our senses look for their characteristics. When hiring employees, we use personality assessment tools. We also find that trainings are helpful to develop leadership. At the same time, we believe in our inner-self and its power to transform oneself and an organisation or society as a whole.

The journey of leadership theory is still continuing. The internet has become a breeding ground for leaderless revolutions in many spheres of life — business, society, politics and even spirituality, putting the question whether we really need a leader at all.

BE YOURSELF — THE GESTALT WAY

Both positive and negative polarities equally exist within us

You must have heard this simple advice many times – ‘Be yourself’; or even strongly – ‘Just be yourself’. However, it is not as simple to understand as it sounds. I wonder much – what does it mean by being myself? Am I not being myself? How can I not be myself? Some people may attempt to answer by saying – ‘being yourself’ means being true or being genuine. Again the complexity is not answered.

If we understand the meaning of being oneself, it can be the answer to many crucial questions in life. In fact, we are always ourselves. Sometimes we are at our better self and sometimes we are at our worse self. When you are at your worse self and you try to hide it by acting differently, then you are not being yourself.

I would like to repeat that we are always ourselves. The fact is that polarities exist within us. Sometimes we are courageous and at other times fearful; sometimes devilish and at other times angelic. We need to understand that we are both. In other words, both polarities equally exist within us.

Many people ask me what the qualities of a good leader are. We often hold an image of a leader we appreciate. The images could be a gentle one, courageous or so knowledgeable that one has answers to all difficult questions. But deep down this is not true. Polster and Polster write in *Gestalt Therapy Integrated*, “There is nothing new about looking at polarisation in man. What is new is the Gestalt perspective that each individual is himself a never ending sequence of polarities. Whenever a man recognises one aspect of himself, the presence of its antithesis, or polar quality, is implicit. There it rests as background, giving dimension to the present experience and yet powerful enough to emerge as figure in its own right if it gathers enough force.”

The quality of a leader or a good human being cannot be summarised in some attributes. To the contrary, I would say the awareness of one’s polarities can be the first step towards one’s development. The second step can be the acceptance of both the polarities. When we deny or fight with one of the polarities we are fighting with ourselves.

We mostly become self-conscious when we are at the state we do not want ourselves to be. We can replace self-consciousness with self-awareness. We can start being self-aware when we are at our best or the state we desire to be. If we think you become nervous in a situation we need confidence the most, we can start practicing being aware of our state when we are naturally confident. This means the state you are being yourself. A state means body language, breathing, tone of voice, feelings that run through the body and the mind.

Certainly, this needs some practice to master it. The polarity of being true is faking. There is no problem if we are faking with awareness. It is often said, “Fake it to make it”. I prefer body language expert Amy Cuddy’s saying, “Fake it until you make it”. So, you can fake being yourself until you truly become yourself.

WORK ON TEAM WORK

How to create common vision and common goal

Many professionals feel they are smart with their technical knowledge and skills. They think a leader with higher technical competency is enough to lead an organisation to success. Job related skills are basic but the indispensable quality is team building. As leadership trainer and author Ken Blanchard says, “None of us is as smart as all of us”. Another leadership trainer John C Maxwell says, “Teamwork makes the dream work, but a vision becomes a nightmare when the leader has a big dream and a bad team.” This much is enough to clarify the importance of team.

Moreover, team harmony has direct impact upon workers. As a trainer and consultant, I have worked with about 100 organisations. I have found that employees, junior and senior, are happier in the organisations which have strong team spirit. Similarly, employees have lots of grudges and stress in organisations that lack team harmony.

Today, organisational success depends largely on team effectiveness. Without team spirit, a bunch of knowledgeable people can be a hindrance rather than strength. That is why, nowadays organisations are giving so much importance to team building. Anyway, team building is not an event alone. Certainly

training and retreats on team exercises help rejuvenate team spirit. More importantly, teamwork needs to be a part of organisation culture.

So, let us see here what makes a great team. Teamwork starts with common vision and common goal. When a group of people shares a common vision, moves toward same goal and also realises common fate for the outcome of their effort, the group begins to transform to a team. That is the beginning. The second important element is trust. It keeps the team intact. As Phil Jackson said, “The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.” Trust creates a comfortable environment. Research says that when people feel the environment is comfortable, serotonin is produced. It is the chemical that helps people communicate better and think positively. In a trusting environment, a great deal of confidence is gained. This gives people inner motivation to contribute more than expected.

A good team has common understanding but it does not mean all team members are the same. A good team recognises differences among team members. It treats every member as a unique being. When understood and taken positively, different qualities of different members become the strength of the team. We may think that if all people in the team were similar in quality, it would be easy for the team to function. However, diversity is the beauty of a team. A team that respects diversity expects different viewpoints and gives way to creativity and innovation.

Another essential element of team building is participation. Indeed, participation brings a sense of belongingness. When each member has an opportunity to participate in every process, they feel they are worthy and it is empowering. Participation also

includes open communication, collective decision making and common discipline. A team with open communication is more interactive and interdependent.

A good team practices reflection on a regular basis. It reflects its practices and monitors progress. Achievements are owned by the team and celebrated. Drawbacks are detected with the intention to do away rather than to find a person to blame. A good team does not mean it will never have a conflict. It is more about healthy and unhealthy conflicts. Then again, how conflict is taken and managed has high significance. Learning, changing and developing is a continuous process of a lively team.

The definition of teamwork itself is developing to higher level. In recent time, teamwork includes shared leadership. Therefore, you are not only a member under a team leader, but each member shares the leadership role and responsibility.

CLASS WITHOUT WALLS

The diversity of the world is never discussed in classrooms

For my M. Phil. thesis which was on leadership, I interviewed some ex-student leaders about their early days of leadership practice. From their stories, it was revealed that their leadership started outside the classroom or education system. The conclusion was that education has no or very little contribution to leadership development. Moreover many times education has obstructed leadership development. Here are two interesting cases of leadership development from my research:

Ram (name changed) is a boy from a remote village who came to Kathmandu to continue school at the age of 11. Ram described that he unknowingly started his leadership journey during the 1990 people's movement. He had been limited to classroom and home only but the agitation brought him out on the streets. He was participating in processions against the then system chanting slogans that he did not understand. He was throwing stones at government buildings.

He experienced lathi-charge, tear gas and witnessed gunfire from police. It was a risk to life but still a thrill that he did not want to miss. In this way, he came into contact with then student leaders

and he himself became a student leader in right-wing politics as he entered college.

Shanti (name changed) is a girl from Gorkha. Shanti studied in Amar Jyoti Janata Madhyamik Vidyalaya, the school which has produced talented leaders like Dr Baburam Bhattarai and Dr Upendra Devkota. She came in contact with the then underground rebels when she was studying in grade seven. Unknowingly she was inclined towards leftist ideology. She refrained from speaking with outsiders or strangers due to the conservative values for girls in her village. But as she came in contact with party activities she became bold and outspoken. She started speaking in front of masses without fear. Affiliation to an underground party was life threatening. But she was dedicated to the ideals and had no fear of death.

What I find common among students is that they want to explore and experience the real world outside a classroom. They find classrooms dull and passive while the world outside is lively and exciting. They are ready to risk their lives in order to interact with the outside world.

Humans are innately intelligent and committed to learning. They know there is much learning in the world outside than in classroom lectures. When this stimulus of students is not recognised by the education system, political leaders tend to exploit it for their own interest. Both the student leaders mentioned above and many others in my study now feel disenchanting with politics.

If education can understand the interest of students to learn from the real world and encourage it they do not have to be exploited by others for their leadership development. Even those who have been successful in politics like Gagan Thapa feel that the function of education in leadership development is insufficient.

He expressed in Shikshak bi-monthly (July-August 2012), “I do not find much contribution from my schooling to what I am today. Apart from the emphasis on doing well in exams I did not have much opportunity to learn from school. The diversity of the world was never discussed in classrooms. It was never taught that people have different views and they need to be respected. We have not been able to create our constitution because it is difficult for us and our leaders to work with different views.”

Albert Einstein has rightly said, “Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school”.

COMPLETE WELLNESS

Strive for continuous growth and learning to nurture your mental wellbeing

We work hard to earn money for food, clothes and shelter. They are a prerequisite of a well-rounded and comfortable life ensuring healthy living. But when it comes to health, we neglect the body so much that we never have time for it. We work hard to ensure a good life. But the most forgotten fact is that it is our body that makes it possible for us to have a comfortable life. We neglect our body and take our health for granted. We have to remember that the body is the foundation. Active body is good not only for physical well-being but also for our mind and spirit. This is why, many great leaders, in spite of demanding responsibilities, pay attention to their health and take care of their body.

Health, like leadership, is a matter of choice. It depends, by and large, on your decision. *Wellness: Concepts and Applications*, a book on health, quotes a study, “About 53 per cent of factors influencing quality of life can be affected by the lifestyle of the individual.” Among other factors, 21 per cent is environmental, 16 per cent genetics and 10 per cent health care.

The book proposes five dimensions of wellness. They are spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual and physical. It says, “The importance of spirituality was confirmed recently in a study of 232 seriously ill patients who had undergone open-heart surgery. Those who were

able to find strength and comfort in their religious outlook had a survival rate three times higher than those who found no strength in religious faith.” Besides, the benefit of meditation is proven. Even short meditations of five or 10 minutes have profound effect in overall wellness.

Wellness is not limited to you alone. Our connection with others matter a lot. How we manage relationships with others determines our health and happiness. That is why learning interpersonal and social skills is also a part of wellbeing. This requires reading, training, communication and attitude development.

Similarly, our emotions play a great role in our mental health. Mostly, emotional reactions take place unconsciously. We are not aware of them. This does not mean that we need to control all our emotions. It is mostly about finding appropriate ways to express our emotions. In a present-day term, this phenomenon is called ‘emotional intelligence’. To be emotionally intelligent, we need to be aware of our feelings, be connected to them. Also, it is good to nurture our heart through music, art and poems, and whatever delights your heart.

Strive for continuous growth and learning to nurture your mental wellbeing. Learning is not limited to childhood. A healthy person learns throughout life and learning new things or skills keep our brain cells active. Investment in physical health could be the wisest deal. This means to follow a positive lifestyle.

Start your day with each component of wellness. Engage in some physical and breathing exercises, reading some paragraphs from a favourite book, talk with loved ones, listen to music and discourses. All it takes is less than an hour. It is not about duration but more about quality of time spent.

SANE OR INSANE?

Accept what you cannot change

In my training sessions I always reflect on our thinking process which is not 'sane' all the time. Accepting everything within and around you is a sane thing to do. Pushing the boundaries forcefully to make changes is an insane thing to do. We live with many 'ifs' about our past and wish to change it to alter our present.

Wishful thinking about changing the past makes us yearn for a time machine! If we had one we could go back into the past and change what we cannot accept. But, such is not the case. We can keep on complaining about the past, but it does not make any difference to our today. Clinging to the past is a big blockade to our future. If we want to move ahead, the first condition is that we need to free our mind from complaints about the past. We think that because of a bad past, our present is not good.

To think in a sane way, is to remove 'because of' and replace it with 'in spite of'. Every leader acts in spite of bad situations, bad people et cetera. That is how they move ahead and change reality.

How would you think about a person who is pushing a wall because he wants to move it a few inches? Certainly, you would say that he is not of a sane mind.

However, we continuously act in this way. When we want people or situations to change, we start pushing them. Surely, it does not work. When it does not work we push harder. The result is that in the process we lose our mind! We often say, "I have told you so many times, but". When we push a person, he does not change. He will push back. Even if he obeys for some time because of your power, he does not change is not ingrained in him. To make a change we need to resolve the push. Pushing is 'thinking within the box'. Only after we resolve the push, we can think 'out-of-the-box'. To really change someone or something, fighting is not enough. We need to befriend, understand the core and act thoughtfully.

Many times we fight with ourself as well. We want to change ourselves in a certain way. We push ourselves hard but still it does not work. Fighting oneself is just like pressing our fists against each other. Your energy is drained but nothing changes.

We want ourselves to be peaceful, happy, positive, effective and energetic always. But we get frustrated when we find ourselves in a negative situation. Positive and negative are two sides of a coin. It is impossible to keep one side and get rid of the other one.

If we want to change ourselves, we need to resolve the fight with ourselves. Accepting oneself as is is the starting point of change. When you accept the whole coin, it is up to you which side of the coin you choose to show.

GET DOWN TO EARTH

Acceptance gives space to accumulate the power to change

The mighty earthquake of 2015 caused unimaginable damage. We did not want it, but anyway it has happened. Disasters do not stop happening just because we do not want them. The worst things keep on occurring in our life. This is simply because they can occur — just like the earthquake.

Besides natural disasters, many tragedies come in our life. For example: your near ones can betray you; your business may go down; you may get cheated. Life can undergo the worst situations beyond our expectations and imaginations. We cry and lament when such things happen to us. We cry because we think they should not have happened. We think it is unfair to us. In situations like these, we fail to understand that us complaining does not make any difference to the event but causes more mental disturbances.

Earthquakes happen because this is planet Earth and it has its own mechanism. That is the rule of the Earth. Tsunamis can arise because that is the rule of the sea. Storms can hit us badly because that is the rule of the wind.

Similarly, fate can cause you harm. People can deceive and betray

you. Organisations go through good and bad times. To grumble and say that this should not have happened is denying the fact of our existence in this planet. I got this idea from Byron Katie who can magically change people's miseries by letting them accept the reality as is, no matter how cruel and bitter it is. Once we accept a fact as a fact of life, the bitterness is less. She says, "When I argue with reality, I lose — but only 100 per cent of the time."

I have heard a story about an enlightened master from Thailand — Late Ajahn Chah. A disciple from London came to him to learn meditation. But while walking on a Bangkok street, he was hit by a car and hospitalised. Ajahn Jha went to see him. He was thoroughly complaining to the master that the accident should not have happened. He was walking on the right side and it was the driver's mistake. After listening to the man complain, Ajahn Jha quietly said, "If it should not have happened, it would not have happened." Then the master taught them how to practice meditation lying on a hospital bed.

At a training for psychological counselors I was conducting 'the work therapy' devised by Byron Katie. Different people had different complaints. But after long inquiry, they found that behind every complaint was a common scream that was causing the most pain. The scream was, "I have been treated unfairly. This is not right."

If good is possible on earth so is evil. When good things happen to us we take them for granted. But when something bad happens we start to complain. Being human, crying out can be good for sometime but we have to understand that this will not improve the situation one is in. Once we accept reality as reality our mind adjusts to it helping us cope better. Acceptance gives space to accumulate the power to change.

SPIRITUALITY FOR PROFESSIONALS

Spiritual intelligence and meditation make people healthier and happier

After the earthquake, we can see many people engaged in meditation and spiritual activities. Psychologists and psychosocial workers are conducting such programmes for professionals in offices and outside.

It has been proved by scientific research that meditation and spiritual understanding help people cope with stress and adversities. It makes you efficient and effective at your work when your mind is stress free. It is good that we have psychosocial response programmes in the post-earthquake scenario. However, it is not certain if meditation and spirituality will get continued support in offices across the country.

It is because, generally, spirituality and business are considered to belong to two different worlds. However, I have observed many professionals have an inclination towards meditation. They ask about meditation and many things about spirituality when they are alone. The need seems to be serious but remains unexpressed. Professionals find it difficult to express such needs openly and there are reasonable causes for it. There is much disbelief attached to spirituality. Generally, it is considered that getting into

spirituality means renouncing the world. Or, a spiritual person should not be thinking of profit. Or, if you start meditation, you will become humble whereas business requires aggressiveness. Because of such misconceptions, anything spiritual is stigmatised in the business world.

It is true that spirituality and professionalism hold some opposite qualities. But does opposite not mean two sides of the same coin? Just like day and night complete each other, opposite qualities sustain each other. That is why tired officer-goers seek meditation for relaxation. Stressed executives hunt for meditation retreats. The law is – opposite attracts. The cry for spiritual solace is there deep inside of us.

Many professionals go to meditation camps as well. Some benefit from them but most complain about the hard rules. Traditional meditations are designed for a handful of people who choose spiritual path in isolation. The present day need is to make spiritual knowledge and meditation applicable to everyday life and helpful for personal as well as professional day-to-day life. J. Krishnamurti and many philosophers of modern times have pleaded hard not to create duality between practical world and spiritual world. For a fulfilling life, professionalism and spiritual practice need to go hand-in-hand.

Indeed, life becomes beautiful when an individual has the balance of both. Spirituality compliments the qualities that are not taught in business schools. For an example, you cannot find how to get peace of mind in business training. But, do you not need peace of mind to be effective at work? With peace, you become more thoughtful and hence, you become a better decision maker. You are more emotionally intelligent to deal with your own emotions and that of others. When we are peaceful, we enjoy our job better.

Spiritual intelligence makes us a better warrior in adversities. We become stronger and resilient.

Meditation does not only make you stress free in normal situations but it also prepares you to deal better with stress under more than regular stress situations. Above all, we gain more control over mind and matter.

Spiritual intelligence and meditation make people healthier and happier. Such people can contribute more to the team. They are happy as a person and much effective as a professional. It is beneficial for the business to create an environment for employees to learn and practice meditation and spiritual intelligence on a regular basis.

LEADER VERSUS HERO

We unconsciously invent a kind of hero image of leaders in our mind

Recently a psychologist friend of mine complained that she could not sleep well at night. She is a therapist and also a healer. You might wonder how it can happen while she cures such problems in her clients. Similarly, another friend of mine who is a yoga teacher, motivational speaker and promoter of positive thinking felt down after he discovered he had high blood pressure. You may question what the use of his lessons is if he could not live them in his own life.

As a matter of fact, we are all first human beings. No one is infallible. It would be unrealistic to expect a person to always function at their best. Everybody is vulnerable to personal problems and emotional traps, including leaders in all sectors. Problems are part of life. Anyone can be disturbed for a period of time. It is important how we bounce back to normal after we are disturbed. I found the yoga teacher hale and hearty after curing himself of blood pressure through yoga practice.

We unconsciously invent a kind of hero image of leaders in our mind. We expect them to function accordingly. However, leaders too are human beings with some virtues and some setbacks just as

everyone else. Certainly, some people demonstrate extraordinary qualities in some conditions. But it would be unrealistic to expect such qualities all the time in all situations. If you are fan of a celebrity, do not have such expectations. Let them be human.

Once, I was watching the movie 'Diana' by Oliver Hirschbiegel. Princess Diana was very much emotional and fragile in her personal life. At the same time she demonstrated great courage in social work, not only helping in fund raising but also in taking up issues like removal of landmines. Media sometimes portrayed her as a hero and sometimes would bring her down. It is not only the media's fault. We, as readers, are mentally hungry for such gossip and rumours.

Many times we expect heroism from ourselves too. We set standards for ourselves and when we fail to meet the standard, we feel guilty and blame ourselves. This guilt and self-blame makes us even weaker to bounce back to normal life. We need to recognise that we are all equally vulnerable to stress, fear, failure, mistakes, misfortune. Fear and stress is normal in abnormal situations like natural disasters and all of kind adversities created by humans or situations.

It is not only adverse situation that makes our life difficult. Our thoughts and feelings towards the situation are more responsible for our stress and worries. They make us powerless to deal with adversity and overcome it. Again, we cannot overcome negative thoughts by fighting with them. We can overcome them by recognising them as thoughts and emotions which are separate from the situation itself. As best-selling self-help writer Karen Salmansohn says, "Often the opposite of negative thinking is not positive thinking but realistic thinking."

It is unrealistic to expect that our life can be free of adversity. Also, it is unrealistic to expect ourselves to be immune of negative thinking and feelings. Above all, it is unrealistic to think that adversity will remain forever and they will swallow us. It would be empowering to think, "Tough times do not last; tough people do". You can become a hero by bouncing back every time you become a victim of adversity.

KNOW THE BALANCE

A distinct characteristic of good leaders is that they practice balance in life

Balancing is the key. Anything can be beneficial if you exercise the right amount at the right time. But your knowledge and good qualities can be harmful if you do not know the balance. There is a proverb in Nepali that poison too can be good if you take in the right amount. Likewise, nectar can be harmful if you take too much of it.

A distinct characteristic of good leaders is that they practice balance in life. You may see a hardworking committed CEO who spends quality time with their family. They are dedicated in office and still have enough time for oneself. Their diligence and relaxed attitude seem to go together.

Balance in life is not limited to work and rest. You cannot progress in life without some ambition. But if you are too ambitious, it can kill you and your dear ones. Again, balancing does not mean you have to be 50 per cent ambitious and 50 per cent easy-going. At some point in life you may need to be very ambitious. Without that you cannot make a start. But it is important to recognise when you need to slow down. Balancing is like driving a car. You need to first move in first gear, which is powerful enough to move

a stationary car. But as you go ahead, you change gears to higher ones. Again sometimes you need to slow down. At times you need to stop completely. Also, your car needs servicing with time. If you apply the same rule in life, you can enjoy different destinations — success and happiness, money and peace, work and family.

Movement of a car is visible, so you practice it. Life is also a vehicle. But with life, it is not easy to determine when to speed up and when to slow down. Our aim in life is not visible as physical destinations so we do not know how far or close we are from our goal. So, sometimes we may keep our speed up and meet with an accident. Or in frustration we completely stop pursuing our goals. And, both are equally harmful for us.

The philosophy of balancing is not limited to personal life. It is equally applicable in society and the world outside. On a social issue, sometimes we need to speak out and at other times we need to listen to others. It is understandable that being submissive is suicidal. But always being aggressive can be equally harmful. Now, at this crucial time, in the making of the constitution, we need to balance ourselves on speaking and listening, opposing and agreeing. Our unbalanced act can cause long-term disruption in our society.

Another area we need to find balance is on scientific advancement and peaceful living. Science has simplified our living. We have cars, computers, mobiles and a lot of other devices that make our life easy. But unchecked use of these machines is causing harm to the planet Earth. The Chinese philosophy of Yin-Yang applies everywhere. The circle looks beautiful until the black and the white is in balance. Otherwise scientific progress may prove the prophecies of religions that the world is coming to an end.

LEADERSHIP LESSON FROM BIRDS

We human beings could be the dumbest creatures on earth

Humans think they are the most intelligent creatures on earth. This could be true in some respect but we could also be the most stupid creature on this planet.

Dr Tim Elmore, President of Growing Leaders, studied leadership behaviour among animals and said, “I am always intrigued at how much we can learn from the instincts of animals. So often, humans can discover life-changing lessons simply by watching creatures in nature and emulating them. Somehow fish, plants and animals know how to function without ruining the environment or igniting a world war. It may be true that humans are, indeed, the only ‘wild’ animals.”

We all like to watch animals and their behaviour in nature. Have you ever wondered why we feel good watching animals? It is because animals are livelier than us. And, because feelings are transmissible we ourselves become livelier while watching them. David Hawkins, a psychiatrist has found in his research that pet animals calibrate higher than humans on the log of consciousness. We become more relaxed and happy after playing with pets — be it dogs, cats or rabbits.

There is a paradox when we compare humans and animals. Animals live much more uncomfortable and insecure lives than us. They could easily fall prey to humans and other stronger animals. But they are full of enthusiasm towards life. If you watch a sparrow, a small fragile and vulnerable creature, you will find that it is always chirpy, jumping around with such ease and light heartedness. In comparison, humans could be the dumbest creatures on earth. Most times we are filled with anger, fear and negative thoughts and feelings.

The first and foremost requirement to be a leader is to be alive — to be full of enthusiasm and joy. We need to learn this from animals. Researchers have found more specific and interesting leadership and team building lessons to learn from animals. The most famous one is the flocking behaviour of birds and fish travelling long distances. We see birds in the sky flying in V- formation. There is a leader in the front and this leader faces the headwind. Other members of the flock honk at the leader at times. They are not criticising but encouraging the leader.

Contrary to human beings, geese do not believe in individual progress. They believe in team achievement. We humans want to be the first and reach the destination alone but for geese all birds need to reach the destination together. They know they can achieve greater distance and perform better when they fly together.

It is a proven fact that when geese fly in flocks they are 71 per cent more effective than when flying alone. When we study geese we will find that they are more humane than us. When one goose falls behind, others support it to remain in the V-formation. When one goose is hurt two others go down with it until it dies or recovers.

Above all, when a leader is tired, it leaves the space for another member to take its place.

FEEL THE FEELINGS

The feeling we have towards our job makes a great difference in our performance

Professionalism is understood as being detached from feelings. Offices want people to work like machines. It does not matter whether you are at a lower level or at the top, you are expected to work through rules alone, without being influenced by feelings. However, is it natural for a human to be devoid of feelings?

Humans are emotional beings. Emotion is at the core of our existence. We can be unaware of it or we can ignore it. Despite that, feelings are continuously influencing us, whether we are aware of them or not. When we are unaware of our feelings, they can have more negative influences. Because then you cannot control the influence rather the influences control you.

Whether we are aware or not, we have feelings towards our office and the job we perform. Sometimes the feeling is positive and at other times it is negative. We have a feeling when we prepare to go to the office. We have a feeling when we are leaving the office. We have certain feelings when we meet the boss, and when a meeting is about to start. In short, there is an associated feeling at all times in the office. Most of the time we ignore them because office has no space and system to recognise a feeling.

But these feelings influence our mood and the work we do.

What we know and how much we know is very important to the job we do. But the feeling we have toward our job makes a great difference on our performance. Within the job too we have different feelings for different tasks. Moreover, the feelings keep changing with time. Generally, you may think that feelings are abstract and cannot be much specified. You may say that you are not clear about your feeling. It is true that it is not an easy task to understand feelings specifically. It is because we do not think it is necessary to figure out feelings. We may say that having feelings is futile knowing that we have to be on the job whether we like it or not.

I would say if you understand your feeling correctly, you can change your life. Likewise, if an organisation cares to understand its people's feelings, the organisation can be transformed. If you sense, feelings are not abstract; they run over your body. Feelings are very tangible. That is why we feel them strongly and they have a deep impact on us.

Certainly, organisations cannot run by feelings alone. They must run by rules and must be guided by objectives. But, on the contrary, at the core of every organisation — is a feeling. At the end, an organisation wants their clients to be happy. No business can run without making their clients happy. And happiness is a feeling. In the same way, employees join an organisation not only for salary, but mainly to be happy. An employee cannot deliver happiness to clients if he himself is unhappy. Feelings are associated with motivation. By understanding feelings of employees, an organisation can find ways to increase their motivation. It is by itself motivating that your organisation cares about your feelings.

CRISIS: BLESSINGS IN DISGUISE

It challenges us to think creatively, be innovative and act diligently

My training games are very simple. But when I first explain what they have to do in the game, many participants say it is not possible. Some think it is very difficult and not possible within the time allotted. However, as they start playing, they find it is not as difficult as they initially thought. As they play they start to enjoy the game. They become confident that they can perform that which seemed so difficult. Moreover, they complete it before the target time.

The objective of such games is to let people realise that we should not undermine our potential. We have much more abilities than we think. But we do not use them until we are challenged. Indeed, challenges are the real gurus in life.

We think negatively about crisis. But management experts believe that people and organisations perform miracles when there is a crisis. At normal times, our performance is average or even below average. When there is no crisis, you do not think much. Life is easy as usual. So, you do not utilise your potential. Barbara de Angelis says, “We don’t develop courage by being happy every day. We develop it by surviving difficult times and challenging adversity.” A crisis makes us think out-of-the-box and perform exceptionally. It challenges us to think creatively, be innovative

and act diligently. That is how we are able to perform miracles.

Not all crisis will lead to miracles. It depends on how we respond to a crisis. Maxwell Maltz says, “Close scrutiny will show that most ‘crisis situations’ are opportunities to either advance, or stay where you are.” If we respond reactively, it will swallow us and we become its victim forever. Only when we respond creatively and courageously, we become able to convert a crisis into a transformation. When we face a crisis, it is natural that we become puzzled and discouraged. But after a while, if you think calmly, you will find options that you have never thought of. Certainly, these options are not easy. They are equally challenging. But if you choose them, they will change your life forever.

It is natural that we want to avoid a problem. Anyway, we cannot always avoid one. In fact, it is good that we cannot avoid problems. A trainer friend of mine, in a training session, interestingly explained what ‘problems’ mean. He says this about ‘problems’:

P = Predictors
R = Reminders
O = Opportunities
B = Blessings
L = Lessons
E = Everywhere
M = Messages
S = Solvable

So, a problem or crisis is not only negative. Problems predict our future. They remind us of our potential. If we look deeply, there are many opportunities and blessings hidden inside them. We learn life lessons from problems. And, whether you like it or not, problems are everywhere. It is unavoidable. If we listen well,

problems convey valuable messages. And finally, most significant is the fact that problems are solvable. There are no problems that cannot be solved. That is why it is said – problems do not happen to us, they happen for us.

CONNECTION BEFORE CORRECTION

Communication is not an event but a process

Many popular training in management contain communication tools. Be it Six Thinking Hats or Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) or Seven Habits, all occupy big portion on communication skills. It is not only because communication is highly important but mainly because people often make simple but grave mistakes in communication. It does not matter whether you are at the entry level or a senior executive.

British satirist George Bernard Shaw puts it most simply and strongly, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” You should not assume that because you have said something communication has taken place. Communication is not an event but a process. It requires much patience and energy. It is said that you can say something very fast but faster people will forget it. Further, it could be worse if people get your message wrongly. Or worst can happen if people get you wrong — they may think you are arrogant, dominating et cetera.

One of the big reasons why communication fails is that we mistake communication for speaking. We are always eager to express ourselves. We think speaking will make us look smarter. So, we think we need to offer advices to people when they say something.

Actually, when you start giving two penny worth comments on every topic, you become less and less smart.

Then what makes you smart? Should you not speak at all? You need to speak when you need to speak. However, before speaking you need to follow some process. One NLP principle says, “Resistance in any interpersonal communication is a sign of a lack of rapport”. For communication to go smoothly, we need to first build rapport. Author and motivational speaker Leo Buscaglia says, “Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around”. That is why it is said ‘connect before you correct’. Often we are in a hurry to correct a person and we find resistance. If you try to connect first with the person and his message, and then you try to correct him, you will be more successful both in result and relationship.

The ways to truly connect with a speaker is to follow the five A’s — attention, acknowledge, appreciate, agree and accept. Research has shown that in normal listening we get only 50 per cent of what is said. If we are to get the full of what is said, we need to pay attention fully. Mostly we speak to draw other people’s attention. But if you pay attention to other people, they will like you more. Edward the Bono has rightly said, “A good listener is very nearly as attractive as a good talker”.

Acknowledging the message is very important. Mostly people think acknowledging means agreeing. Acknowledging is the action that signals the speaker that you have correctly heard what was said. It could be nodding or producing sounds like ‘hum’, ‘ye’, ‘right’. Whether you agree or disagree, you can appreciate the speaker for bringing up the issue or idea. Often we rush to see what we do not agree in the message. This breaks the rapport. You

would connect with the speaker faster if you start with the points you agree on. Then you can move to the points you disagree. You can explain why you disagree without blaming the speaker. Finally, if you find something convincing and you need to change your perspective, there is no benefit of debating for the sake of ego. It only looks ugly. People will keep you in high regard if you accept to change your idea when the other person is more convincing.

All these help you to connect better with people. When you have established a good connection, people will be willing to change upon your correction without resistance.

'OPENNESS' OPENS MANY OPPORTUNITIES

For effective communication demonstrate an open posture

Openness is a part of your personality dimension. You can feel it as soon as you see a person. You feel an air of ease with an open person. On the contrary, you get a sense of uneasiness in the presence of a closed person. It does not require further description or definition. This is something we feel in our everyday life.

Our face is not just a face. It is the signboard of our personality. When we meet a person we see the face. We recognise people by their face. Our face speaks the most about our personality. There is a basic difference in the facial appearance of an open personality and a closed personality. We feel a great difference with a smiling face and an unsmiling face. A smile adds brightness to the face. It is said a smile is the best make-up we can apply. Moreover, it is said that open laughter is the best wrinkle-lift. We do not need to buy expensive wrinkle-lift ointments if we laugh with an open heart.

However, although all the above written things are true, it would be premature to judge any person based on appearance. Appearance certainly has great value, but at times, if you base your judgment on it alone there is a great chance of being misled.

I have a friend who is highly intellectual yet practical and friendly to everyone without discrimination. He once told me that he looks serious in photographs. He gives the best smiles but appears serious in photographs. He then practiced a smiling look in the mirror for weeks so that he appears smiling to other people. You cannot expect such practice by everyone.

The next clue is body posture. Whether you are standing or sitting, your body posture suggests if you are a closed or an open person. When you are mentally closed, your joints become stiff. This is not only stiffness of your body but also of your mind. This means you are not open to new ideas. When you are open, your body is loose and relaxed. You are at ease which makes the other person feel easy.

That is why the first rule of effective communication is demonstrating an open posture. This encourages other people to speak their heart. It suggests that you are listening and willing to listen more. Openness is an important factor in the 'Big Five' personality model. This model finds that open people are more likely to be effective leaders. It is because they are more creative, imaginative and sensitive. They cope better with change. They are more liked by people because they are flexible and agreeable. Besides all these positive aspects, an open person may lack the skill to close a deal. They may not be a good negotiator. So, when you are practicing to be open, this is the small area that you need to be careful. Otherwise, open personality has such charm and unlimited benefits that it opens doors of many opportunities in life.

'BECAUSE OF' VERSUS 'IN SPITE OF'

Leaders do not have excuses, people or situations to blame

According to a research, all prisoners around the world have one same answer for crimes they committed. It is, "The situation forced me to do so. If you were in that situation, you would have done the same."

We too talk about situations most of the time. We talk about the sad situation of the country, society, organisation et cetera. We justify ourselves by blaming the situation. You can rationalise your inefficiencies by doing so, but will that improve anything? Things do not change because we say 'because of'. We use 'because of' to give a good reason for why we are the way we are. People become leaders by acting in spite of the bad situation. The conjunction for leaders is not 'because of'. It is 'in spite of'. They act in spite of the situations.

When you think or talk in that way you become a prisoner of your own thinking. What is worse is that you cannot act as asked by the situation. Only when you think that you need to act in spite of the situation, you get freedom to act.

Certainly, there are many things that go wrong in the world. But what makes it worse is when you concentrate only on the wrongs in

a situation, you forget your own power. Leaders think that a certain situation is a bad one but they also know that they (the leaders) are also there in the situation to make a difference and hold the power to change it for the better. That is how they prove their existence. When you only blame the situation, you are denying your own existence. That is how you become void. You cannot become a leader by waiting for the situation to turn favourable. The only way to become a leader is to act in spite of the situation.

We like to read biographies. We like to quote a hero's struggles against adversities, the difficulties he undergoes in his life. I do not think anyone will read a story of excuses, how you become victim of situations and you could not do anything because of the situation you were in. That would be the dulllest story. But we tell the dulllest stories to ourselves.

Leaders do not have excuses. They have no people or situations to blame. All they have is the responsibility to make things right. They do not point at others but they ask questions to themselves: What could be the best way to act in this situation? What does the situation ask me to do? What should I do in my present responsibilities and duties? What would be the wise action to take now? What can I do to change people/ situation?

I cannot remember the source book of these questions, but I have been conveying them in my training as golden questions. You can also say these are magic questions. What happens when you ask these questions is that your focus is shifted from outside to yourself. When you blame, you are disempowering yourself. That is reactive. With these questions you empower yourself. Then you think in terms of being proactive. Then you find possible solutions. Then an action is possible. Focus on what is possible and everything will be possible.

HOW EFFECTIVE IS MINDFULNESS?

Management tools are devised to increase mindfulness

While many professionals are attracted towards mindfulness some people question its effectiveness. If you understand mindfulness correctly then you would say that it is mindfulness alone that brings effectiveness in our life. We are effective to the extent that we are mindful.

Mindfulness is not a different tool. All self-effectiveness tools have the component of mindfulness in different forms. For example, let's examine emotional intelligence (EI). Self-awareness is considered to be the most important element of EI. You cannot be emotionally intelligent without mastering self-awareness. When you are aware of your emotions, you understand your emotions. Then you can prevent your feelings from ruling you. Empathy is another important element of EI. Empathy is simply being aware of other people's emotions. You cannot be aware of emotions of yourself and others without mindfulness. The moment you are aware, you are mindful. The moment you fail to be aware, you are not mindful.

In the same way, Transactional Analysis (TA), devised by Dr Eric Borne, cannot be used without mindfulness. Here, 'transaction' means the basic unit of a social intercourse. TA analyses every

transaction in your communications and interactions if they are dominating, submissive or assertive. That is how you become more aware of communicational transactions. Then you know how you can make communication more effective. That is why the new revised model of TA, puts 'mindful process' in the centre of its diagram. It says 'mindful process' is a basic requirement to access to effective mode of communication.

Mindfulness is not a tool but a quality we need in order to make management tools effective. In other words, management tools are devised to increase mindfulness in a certain area. The tools may or may not mention the word 'mindfulness'. For example, Thomas-Kilmann conflict modes make you aware of your ways of conflict handling. It has five modes of conflict handling — competing, compromising, avoiding, accommodating and collaborating. It has described the pros and cons of each mode. It has also suggested when to use which mode.

With this instrument you become aware of your conflict handling mode and you can choose the appropriate mode. Without it, you would be reacting unconsciously; dominated by a mode you are habituated to. Thus, Buddha has said in the Dhammapada, "Mindfulness leads to deathless. Mindlessness leads to death". This means when you are acting out of mindlessness you are like a dead person. It is because you are not acting out of awareness.

You can conclude every management tool to mindfulness. Let's take the time management tool referred by Stephen Covey in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. To practice the time management tool, you need to be mindful of what you are doing right now. Are you attending to what is important or what is urgent? Indeed, time management is about being mindful of what you attending to at present. Are you spending time in time-wasters? Or you are

spending too much time in fire-fighting? What is the important task you need to attend to now?

Mindfulness is about awareness. But bare awareness does not bring effectiveness. Awareness means you observe what is going on in the present moment. This is not only self-focused. You observe what is going on in yourself and in the environment (which includes other people). Then you take time to reflect. Sometimes you discover a new fact about yourself. This becomes an 'Aha-experience.' You will find what is effective and what is not on your own.

COMPLETE THE WHOLE

Great leaders understand truth in its completeness

The word 'health' is derived from the word 'whole'. That is how we have the word 'wholesome'. We are healthy when we are whole or complete. When we are fragmented, we are unhealthy. I am not referring here to only physical health but by and large to our thinking.

Aristotle says, "Whole is more than the sum of its parts." Whole is not only the collection of different parts. When the parts are organised, the whole becomes much more than the total of parts. Gestalt psychologist Kurt Koffka further develops this concept when he says, "The whole is other than the sum of the parts." When it is whole, it becomes an entirely new thing.

Great leaders understand truth in its completeness. When we see only a part of reality as truth, we start debating. When we see the whole, we start collaborating. Truth is like a diamond. It has uncountable facets. Each facet is a reality. Each facet has equal shine. When you say one thing is true, the opposite is also equally true in different contexts.

Jainism has a beautiful philosophy called 'Anekantavada'. It respects pluralism and multiplicity of viewpoints. It can be translated as

‘multi-sidedness’ or ‘manifoldness’. It ends absolutism. Truth is not exclusive but inclusive. When we think in terms of ‘either/or’, ‘right/ wrong’ it limits our vision. This is a ‘win/lose’ theory — if one is right, the other has to be wrong. When two people debate, one has to win and the other has to lose. You may win a debate, but actually in life, you are losing. You are losing the truth in the point of view of the other person. So, ‘win/lose’ thinking is in fact ‘lose/lose’ in practice. We often like to stick to ‘my point of view’ and forget that it is only the view from the point we are seeing.

We have heard many a times that the more a person becomes wise the less he is obstinate. Instead, he becomes more humble. It is because he has understood truth not only partly, but in a broader perspective. Chinese philosophers invented ‘yin yang’ to depict the wholeness of truth. Yin yang is a circle, which symbolises the whole. Half of its part is white and half dark. It indicates that the nature of truth is not plain but diverse. The most interesting part of yin yang is that there is a white circle inside the black half and a dark circle inside the white half. It suggests that the nature of truth is complicated. Even the black is not plain black; it consists of white and vice versa. In fact, there is no pure white or pure black. All blacks and whites are a spectrum of grey. They appear black or white only in comparison to objects less black or less white.

Jainism has another philosophy called ‘Syadvada’. The meaning of syad is ‘possibly’ or ‘in some way’. You may like to argue ‘this is right’, but syadvada prefers to say ‘in some way this is right’. You may like to say ‘this is wrong’, but syadvada would suggest, ‘in some way this is wrong’. This is a more humble way of stating your opinion. In fact, whole is difficult to perceive by mind. We can see and express one aspect of reality at one time. So, it is good to be open to greater truth. An open mind is far healthier than a closed one.

HANDLING CONFLICT AT WORK

Five possible ways to handle conflict at the workplace

Whether you like it or not, conflict is a part of life. It is how we handle conflict that makes a difference. In team work, if conflict is resolved tactfully, there are many benefits. It increases motivation and creativity. On the contrary, if it is not dealt with in a proper manner, it will result in poor relationships and decreased productivity.

Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) was introduced by Kenneth W Thomas and Ralph H Kilmann in 1974. TKI is based on two opposing human behaviours — assertiveness and cooperativeness. When you are concerned with your interest, you are assertive. When you are concerned with the interest of the other party, you are cooperative. With the blend of these two attitudes, TKI presents five possible conflict handling modes: avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, and collaborating.

It seems collaborating is the best option because this is a win-win solution. However, it is not possible to collaborate in all situations, nor is it desirable. In some situations, the other modes are helpful as well. For example, if the issue is trivial, it is better to avoid. Also, avoiding an issue for a while is good if you want to deal with the

issue later after cooling down and getting more information on the issue. But if you always avoid, then you will lack credibility and self-esteem.

Accommodation seems like submission, but there is a time when using this mode is preferable. When you realise you are wrong, it is preferable to submit. Or when the gain of others outweighs your loss, it is better to sacrifice. You can accumulate credit for more important issues in the future. In this way, you will promote harmony within the team. However, if you always use this mode, people will treat you as a doormat.

On the contrary, some people think they always need to win. They will use all the personal and positional power to get the result. If you are the one to think and act in the same way, in the long run, you might be losing a lot. Your decision could be counter-productive as you are not listening to other people's perspectives. You might be living in an elusive world created by yourself and 'yes' people around you.

These 'yes' people will show their true colour when you are weak. Above all, people will consider you as a bulldozer. When you need a quick decision or your issue is so important that it cannot be compromised, you may need to use this mode. Sometimes, you may need to speak for the disadvantaged people against dominating people, then, for a purpose, you will have to be highly assertive.

We think compromising is the best way of conflict resolution. Compromise could be a temporary settlement only, but it is not necessary that it will build harmony among conflicting parties. However, you can adopt this mode when you feel your effort to collaborate or compete is not working. You can use this mode also

when you need a temporary settlement.

Collaboration is rarely used among conflicting parties, but this is the only mode that gives a win-win alternative and brings synergies. It resolves important issues through creative solutions. In this mode, both parties need to think out-of-the-box. However, it demands much time and energy. It is not desirable to use this mode, if the cost of collaboration is not worth the result it fetches.

The purpose of management tools is to provide you options. Now whenever a conflict arises, you have options to choose from. You can choose the mode you think best suits the situation. As an NLP presupposition goes: Having choice is better than not having choice. Now you are empowered with choices that you can make consciously.

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION

Motivation, like thirst or hunger, comes from within

There is a beautiful proverb which says, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink.” This is the best example of motivation. No one can motivate anyone. Motivation, like thirst or hunger, comes from within. Others can create a favourable condition. They can offer you food to your taste, but cannot create an appetite for you.

If you are a leader, you need to understand your motivation and then your people’s motivation. You cannot influence others, to do good or bad, without yourself being motivated. In addition, you cannot make someone move without understanding his or her motivation.

People keep on working but this does not ensure that they are motivated. There’s a proverb in Nepali ‘Rajako kam, kahile jala gham.’ In an office, there would be people who look at the clock many times a day to see if it’s 5 pm yet. This shows apathy. The person is not interested in the job. There would also be some people who follow the rule. They work till 5 pm. They sincerely complete the job they are assigned to. But they limit themselves to their job description.

There are also people who are enthusiastic about their work. They understand the company’s vision and want to contribute to the development of the company. At the same time, they want to develop themselves so that they can become leaders in the sector.

Again this does not mean that people’s motivation remain constant. Like in hunger, the same food is appetising when you are hungry and it is distasteful when you are full. The level of motivation keeps on changing. This is a challenge for a leader to understand when the motivation of people around him changes.

There would be many internal and external factors that affect motivation. Motivation is like fuel for a vehicle. You need to refill it at times. Otherwise you will run out.

If your motivation is for ‘what’, it is likely that the motivation will decline soon. But if motivation is for ‘why’ or if there is a greater cause, motivation remains for a long time or could be for a life time. If you join a company for a job, you will soon find the job boring. If you join a job for pay, soon you will find that the pay is not enough. But if you enter a company to move ahead in the sector, it is likely that you will enjoy more. Then, even the difficulties become learning for you.

Change in motivation is not always negative. To develop yourself and move to higher level of leadership, it is desirable for that motivation to keep changing in a positive way. This means there is growth in motivation. Maslow in his principle of hierarchical motivation tries to show how motivation changes with a person’s development. It is important for a leader to grow their motivation with age and time to higher levels. At the same time it is important to help your people develop motivation to higher levels.

EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE

Difficulties are the reality of life and obstacles are a must on the way to success

Some motivational speakers shout at the top of their voice, “Everything is possible”. This fills the audience with a positive feeling that all their dreams will come true. People live with different dreams. Mostly they want to be rich and famous. The dreams are fabulous, like a fantasy but reality is tough. As you start your journey, things start to appear conspiring against you and you feel discouraged.

This is because you do not understand the full meaning of “Everything is possible”. The phrase does not mean that only good things will possibly happen; it is also equally possible for bad things to happen. If you prepare yourself for the latter, you will be strong enough to achieve your goal.

Difficulties are the reality of life and obstacles are a must on the way to success. The path to achieving your goal is filled with adversities making goal achieving all the more challenging. As you start the journey towards your dream, you will encounter unexpected hurdles. Many times they are the ones that you have never imagined. But if you prepare yourself before the journey for anything that can go wrong, you will be less upset and disappointed.

Once I was leading a group therapy of psychological counsellors — people who help other people deal effectively with problems in life. However, I found the counsellors themselves living with deep-rooted complains of what happened in their life.

As a part of the therapy we enquired into the complaints. We went to deeper layers of these complaints. To our astonishment, we discovered one common complaint lies at the foundation. It is, “This is not fair” or “What happened to me is unfair”. I was conducting the session for others but this sudden discovery relieved me too. Underneath all my small and big complaints, there was the same complaint — this was unfair to me.

If you follow the principle “Everything is possible”, then you have to accept that everything unfair can happen to you. If fair is possible, unfair is equally possible. All kinds of difficulties are possible in your life. They could come from people and circumstances. People can be mean. They can cheat you. They can mistreat you. They can misunderstand you. They can be ungrateful to your kindness. The family circumstance, society or the new law of the government could be adverse to your dream goal. Last year, we experienced devastation after the earthquake which took away so many things in less than a minute. Unwanted things happen in life unexpectedly. We cannot stop everything. We cannot stop people. People will be unfair to you as far as it is possible for them to act in such a way.

You have to reach your dream goal in spite of all the difficulties. The obstacles become harder when you deny them. But they become softer when you accept them as a truth. You will find the way to handle them when you stop resisting them. When you accept that every obstacle is possible and keep moving ahead in spite of them without being discouraged, then dreams become possible and you will then say, “Everything is possible.”

NEED APPRECIATION?

Catch people doing things right

In my training, I give participants appreciation slips. This is for the participants to express appreciation towards one another. I have named the slips SMS. I tell them fondly that telecommunications charge for sending SMS, but my one is free of cost. Participants laugh even more when I say that SMS here means 'Some More Smiles'. At the bottom of these SMS slips is written: Heart to heart appreciation. Appreciation needs to come from the heart and touch the receiver's heart. This would bring a smile on the face of the receiver.

We all need appreciation. When a baby starts to learn to stand up for the first time with the support of a wall she looks back at his/ her guardians for approval. The guardians are delighted; they smile and cheer. This encourages the baby to try over and over again in spite of falling down a couple of times. This act of appreciation is practiced throughout our lives. We can't undermine the importance of appreciation. Leaders need to master the art of appreciation. There are both pros and cons of appreciation — the right ones help and the wrong ones hinder.

A must-read book for all managers on praise and reprimand is *The One Minute Manager* by Blanchard and Johnson. This is a short but a very powerful book. Appreciation must immediately follow a good job. The best phrase in the book is — Catch people doing things right. This emphasises on appreciating people when they do a good job. If you appreciate people for a right job, they will do more right jobs. This means reduction in doing things wrong.

This is an effective and happy-for-both approach contrary to our usual way of 'catching people doing things wrong'. In fact, people who constantly criticise others have poor self-image. They are full of self-criticism. In the same way, constant appreciation is also not a good symptom of psychological health. These people seek approval and validation from others. A person with a sound self-image can appreciate and condemn freely without being personal at both ends. It is done with appropriate body language and tone of voice. Most importantly, it is an art, not something mechanical.

Most researches have shown positive results of appreciation at work. But in a few cases it has shown negative results. When some pilots are appreciated by their boss for very smooth landing, their landing becomes more and more rough. The appreciation might have increased their confidence too much. Also when you are appreciating too much it could be that you are simply being nice because you fear losing people or their validation.

Jeff Foster, a spiritual leader says, "Don't be nice! Nice is boring. Nice is fake. Nice was an adaptation designed to win you love. It doesn't work. Be real instead. Say what you mean! Say yes when you mean yes. Say no when you mean no. Take the risk of looking after yourself!"

Again there is fine line between being true and being rude. They say they are assertive but actually they demonstrate aggressive behaviour.

Nithya Shanti, a spiritual teacher and a friend of mine says, "A lot of people are confused between being authentic and being obnoxious. Being authentic is sharing your truth and taking full responsibility for it. Being obnoxious is spilling your garbage all over the place and demanding someone else takes responsibility for it."

IS THERE A GOOD PERSON?

Prime determinant of our behaviour is the calculation of implication on oneself

There must be rules that inflict bad implication for bad behaviour. In its absence, people become cruel.

Is there a good person? You would be upset with my answer — ‘No sir, there aren’t any.’ This includes you and I. I am saying this with five decades of experiencing life and reading psychological research. However, I would add, ‘Yes, you can become a good person.’

There is a well-known experiment in psychology called the Stanford Prison Experiment conducted in 1971. This experiment has been so impressive for such a long time that a movie was also made in Hollywood based on it in 2015. The experiment was carried out by Professor Philip Zimbardo with the hypothesis that the inherent personality traits of prisoners and guards are the chief cause of abusive behaviour in prison.

It is believed that jailors torture prisoners because they possess a sadistic personality. Prisoners act violently because they have criminal traits. On the contrary, the result of the experiment showed that it was not their internal characteristics. People act

based on the situation they are in.

In the experiment, people were randomly, at the toss of a coin, given the roles of guards and prisoners. The guards had power over prisoners, but prisoners had only one choice — obey the rules. Even though it was a role play, people in both roles became violent. Violence began from the second day and heightened so much day by day that the entire experiment had to be stopped by the sixth day although it was initially planned for 15 days.

People who act as guards had not shown sadistic characteristic in life. But when given the power to control prisoners they became abusive. This shows that you might be acting as a good person only because you are powerless. Abraham Lincoln knew it much before the experiment. He said, “Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.” I am always with the people who have been dominated. However, it is not that the dominated ones are always good people. Once their position is changed, they can become worse than the presently dominating people. Very obviously we have seen our country’s leaders who once fought against exploitation start exploiting people and resources as soon as they come to power.

A prime determinant of our behaviour is the calculation of implication on oneself. We act as gentlemen because we are aware of the implications on oneself if not acting gentle. But if this implication is removed, as in the case of the prison guards, we are capable of inflicting harm on helpless people. You might be doing it to individuals or a group of people unknowingly at home, in society and at work. To make matters worse, if you get a reward or encouragement for being bad to people, you can become terrible beyond imagination.

That is why, immediate implication is very important at the workplace or anywhere. While we should hold the belief that people are good by nature as a part of positive thinking, we need to be practical as well.

However, there are always exceptions. There are a few people who act sanely even though they are in power or there is no adverse implication. Are they saints? I would say no. They just know that even if they do not get an immediate bad consequence for wrong doing, in the long run, the result can be severe. Simply, they are farsighted and can calculate long term impact. If you too can see reward or punishment, in the long term, then you would act saintly. You would do this without thinking of the result — a gratifying one or harsh one.

LIVE A FULFILLED LIFE

Life has three layers — social, psychological and inner

How to get satisfaction in life is a big question for everyone. Some people may be dissatisfied because they could not achieve what they have longed for in life. But the people who have achieved what they have wished for are also not satisfied. The question is, why are we not satisfied? Or, how can we get satisfaction? Is something missing in our education and upbringing?

Living this life on earth for half a century, I found that life has three layers — social, psychological and inner. But we are educated only for the outermost layer — social. For example, when we are infants, we are taught to speak, and that is the language of the society. No doubt, we need to learn a language to interact in a society but it is not the language of your heart.

Our behaviours are shaped by our society. We are merely acting as we have been taught to for decades. Our values are not ours. They are taught by the society we live in. But we are so conditioned that we think they are ours (and real)! Anyway, these learning are our survival kits — very essential basics. It is out of love that our elders teach these skills so that we can fit in the society and live a comfortable life. The problem starts when we stop here forgetting that there are two more layers of life.

The learning we get from the society is for our social life — the life we want to show to the society. And, how can we find contentment in a make believe game? How can we find fulfilment in the life in which ‘self’ is missing? So, you may be successful in business or politics or artistry, but do not be surprised if you find yourself empty. All your life you worked for yourself but not for your ‘self’.

Then people turn to spirituality. But spiritual practice is not easy. You have been disturbed so much, how can you sit quietly? Your mind has been trained to think incessantly. How can you find peace? You could have difficult relationships. You could have earned many enemies. You must have survived much unfairness. Moreover, you might have cheated and hurt others. All the grievances are going in your mind. It is very difficult to sit quietly in meditation in such a condition.

Adyashanti, an American Zen teacher, said in an interview, “I would guess that the vast majority of people who come to see me, or any other teacher, would probably do well with a little help from a good psychologist. I think psychologists can offer tremendous aid to people who are trying to transcend their conditioning. You can have direct experiences of deep reality, but if you have too much psychological conflict or your ego is still too fractured and not functioning coherently, it will keep holding you back. Ego, by its very nature, is never completely coherent, but well-functioning egos are nicer to be around.”

Society, whether you are in a crib or in university, teaches you only about society — not about you or your mind. You need different skills to deal with your feelings and thoughts. Actually, you may need healing or therapy. You have ignored your heart and mind for too long, now you need to heal them. When they

are healed even a little, you’ll feel at peace. Many people mistake this as spiritual experience. No, it is just psychological.

‘Spiritual’ is about your essence. It is above psychology, emotions and thinking mind. It is a process of awakening. It is awareness, not what you are aware about. It would be futile to describe it in detail. However, we can conclude that for a healthy development we need social, psychological and spiritual development. That is how your life can be fulfilled. If you are already an adult full of problems then you need to seek some healing. Youngsters can combine all three in their development. As Frederick Douglass, African-American reformer and writer says, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men”.

NOTHING IS POSSIBLE

Anyone who wants to sell you overnight success is not interested in your success; they are interested in your money.

Motivational speakers often say, “Nothing is impossible” and “Everything is possible”. I prefer to be a demotivating speaker. I would say - “Nothing is possible”. It is not enough that you are motivated. Things will not become favourable just by thinking positive. Mostly, the state of motivational high is brief. Soon after, you become frustrated. After a while of pretending to be positive, your mind becomes even more disappointed.

It is better to understand the reality of the world. It consists of both positive and negative. Without your positive actions, you cannot do away with negative things in your life. The positive actions can be tough. When you listen to your favourite music, you feel delighted. But if you learn to play guitar for the first time, it is not a joyful act. In the beginning it requires a tedious struggle to get the tune you want. You will not get the first lesson until the skin of your fingertips peel off. This applies to learning any new skill, whether it is singing or dancing, cycling or driving. Sometimes it is exciting, but most of the time it is painful and frustrating. The way to success is even more troublesome. So, I would say - “Nothing is

possible without an untiring determined devotion”.

A father was asking his lazy son to be hardworking. The father said, “What do you expect to be in future without hard work?” The son replied, “When I grow up, I will to become a movie star.” American comedian and producer Kevin Hart says, “Hollywood has a way of making everything seem like an overnight success”. It is romantic to listen to stories of overnight successes. But Lisa Morton, an American author and screenwriter, reveals the reality, “Some say I’m an overnight success. Well, that was a very long night that lasted about 10 years.” Bo Bennett, a successful writer warns, “Anyone who wants to sell you overnight success or wealth is not interested in your success; they are interested in your money.”

My other principle is - “Everything costs”. The cost is less in terms of money, but more in terms of sacrificing luxuries. If you want to have a good looking body, you need to exercise in the morning. Then the price you pay is your morning sleep which is a pleasant luxury. It is unwise to think to get ‘something for nothing’. Every business demands investment.

I have a different meaning of “Nothing is possible” too - in a spiritual sense. Here ‘nothing’ means emptiness or nothingness (shunyata). It is possible to be engaged outwardly in everything that comes in our daily business and at the same time inwardly we have the space of emptiness. Again, to achieve this state, we need to invest a lot of practice. This ‘nothing’ is also not possible for nothing.

Nowadays many professionals are trying meditation expecting a relief from daily hassles. They would think meditation should be a pleasant break but this may not be so easy. Just like learning any new skill, learning meditation at the initial stage is also a combination of excitement and boredom. Only after rigorous

practice, a meditator moves beyond excitement and boredom and can rest in nothing.

TAO OF LIFE

The key to real success is balance

We get confused reading different literature. Some say you must be ambitious, have big dreams and strive for success. They ask you to give 100 per cent so that you can reach the top. And others say you should remain content with what you have. If you chase success too hard, you will go insane with intolerable stress.

These contradicting lessons can put anyone in a dilemma. Should you be struggling for money and status or you should be relaxed and satisfied? Both are tempting to us, aren't they?

There is a famous story in Taoism. Chuang Tzu, a Chinese philosopher of 4th Century BC, was walking with a disciple to a village. In the village they saw an unexceptionally huge tree. They asked the villagers about the tree. The villagers replied, "This is a useless tree. The wood is so twisted and knotted that it is completely useless. It is neither good for firewood nor for furniture. Because it is so useless, no woodcutter has even bothered to chop it down. So, it grew wild for centuries." Chuang Tzu told his disciple that the tree grew to its fullest and lived for centuries because it was useless.

That evening they reached a friend's house. The friend, honoured by his visit, asked a servant to cook a goose. He had two geese — one cackled and the other did not cackle. The servant wanted to know if he should kill the goose that cackled, or the one that did not. The friend responded, "Obviously, the one that cannot cackle".

Chuang Tzu told the disciple that the goose who could not cackle was not so useful, so it was killed. The disciple could not sleep the whole night. He faced a dilemma — was it good to be useful or useless? The next morning the disciple put the question to Chuang Tzu. He replied, "The art of life is to know when to be useful, and when to be useless."

The world is full of polarities. There are two extremes in everything. Every extreme contains some good and bad and that is the reality. The key to real success is balance. We need to choose both wisely and keep the balance between them. Balance does not mean always remaining at the middle point. Sometimes you have to go to one extreme and at other times to the other. The important thing is that when you are at one extreme, you are aware that the opposite polarity exists.

Sometimes you have to be highly ambitious and work hard. Other times, you can relax and enjoy yourself. Sometimes you need to be aggressive, and at other times friendly and peaceful. Sometimes you need to focus on the outer world, and sometimes reflect inward. The problem happens when you go too far to an extreme and forget to get back.

The Chinese have a beautiful symbol of yin-yang — black and white in a circle. If you see black and white only, you have not understood the full meaning of yin-yang. You will get the real meaning when you see black, white and the complete circle. In life,

you need to recognize polarities and see how they are organised together to make a whole.

WHAT DOES DOING YOUR BEST MEAN?

Work with some extra energy

How fast and how far can you run? You cannot run much unless you are an athlete. If you have a competitor running with you, perhaps you will run a little faster and farther. But if someone is chasing you with a gun, you will be running with all your might. We all have the capacity inside, but at normal times, we do not use the capacity at its fullest.

Generally we say, do your level best. But we do not know what the best level in us is. However, at the time of crisis, this 'best level' appears from nowhere in particular. If you are a student, just a day before the examination, you can study all night without sleeping. Other days you may feel sleepy within 10 minutes of reading. If you are an officer, you might be taking a week to write a few pages of a report. But as deadline approaches, you can complete your report within half a day.

One of the NLP (Neuro-Linguistic Programming) presupposition goes, "People have all the resources they need to succeed." The question is how to tap into the resources. We do not care about the resources until difficult time comes. We need someone to chase us

with a gun from behind to make us run faster. Isn't it ridiculous? For success we need to make the most of the inner resources in our everyday life.

The law of life is that when there is a challenge or crisis, we start to apply extra energy. At the beginning of a crisis, we may feel the mind going blank and we cannot think of anything except the worst anticipation. It is because we sense that our existence is under threat. However, after sometime we start thinking of a way out. Then we start thinking of options and alternatives.

That is when our thinking becomes most creative. I do not mean creative in artistic or poetic sense. But at such times we have to creatively solve the problems. For a while it might be very difficult that you do not see any solution. But after sometime, we get ideas that we have never thought of before.

One of the ways to be successful is to work with some extra energy at normal times too. This would prevent crisis in life. Even if you have some crisis, you would be prepared in different ways. Mark Sanborn, author of *Fred Factor* writes, "We compete against our potential every day. And most of us, me included, fall short of what we are capable of doing or being. And while this competitor may not beat you out for a job promotion or take away corporate market share, it will just as surely diminish the quality of your performance and the meaning you derive from it."

EDUCATION OF THE SELF

We need to learn to deal with our emotions and feelings

Education is a part of socialisation. It has a great impact in people's life. Humans from early years go to school and spend the first quarter of their life in education system. It teaches languages that are needed to communicate with the world. It teaches mathematics without which people cannot understand profit and loss. It teaches social education, history and geography so that they know the world they have to live the entire life. Moreover, they are taught to earn money and be successful.

A student gains a lot of knowledge in schools and colleges. It makes them easy to fit in the world. But at the same time, they lose many important matters — they lose connection with self. Education teaches everything about the world except the individual for whom everything is being taught. That is why after graduating from university people still feel confused. Furthermore, by the age of retirement, people feel something missing even after achieving everything they were made to achieve.

Our education is all about the world. There is no space for self. So, people do not learn anything about self. They graduate being illiterate about self, or even disconnected with self. They learn to deal with the world, but are uneducated about self. If we want better quality of

life, education of self is important. We are living a curse — we know everything but oneself.

What is self? Self is a whole system functioning as a human being. It consists of body, mind and spirit. The body acts. The mind thinks and feels. The spirit is the consciousness that is aware of self and the things around. The biggest problem of grown up or educated people is that they have no control over their thinking mind. It goes on and on. The thinking which helps towards solution or problem solving is fine. But thinking goes incessantly in the mind. Professor Peter Kinderman, President of British Psychological Society, has found that the uncontrolled negative thinking running in the mind is the biggest cause of mental health problems. Most of us experience it often when something negative happens to us. We know rumination is unproductive and self-torturing, but we are illiterate to deal with it and go crazy.

Similarly, we do not know how to deal with our feelings and emotions. At times, we feel anger, fear, disappointment, and hopelessness. We do not know how to overcome them, but we plunge into them. We all want peace, but we do not know how to be peaceful. We are aware of the things we want, but we are not aware of ourselves. This is the tragedy of our life.

In the present system of education, some understanding of psychology, life skills and some mindfulness practices can be inculcated to make people aware of their mind and behaviours. Collectively, we can call it education of the self. It will arm people to function better at both good and bad times. They will become more harmonious with self, have a better understanding, become more peaceful, more optimistic and courageous, loving and forgiving, finally more wise and inspiring. These people will contribute better at work and create loving environment at workplace and in society.

A SILENT MIND

Clear your mind of thoughts

The biggest competitive advantage of humans over other animals is that they have a mind which can think. But the same mind can work against you if your thinking is irrational. In English there is phrase — negative mental talk. But you will not find anywhere the opposite phrase — positive mental talk. It is because when the mind is positive, it does not talk. The cure for negative thinking is not positive thinking, but a silent mind. For example, when you are planning to fight with a neighbour, your mind becomes occupied with all negative thinking. But when you plan to go to the temple, your mind does not think so much, except few things that are really required to plan a trip to the temple.

A peaceful mind is of utmost value; it will give you both success and happiness. Even when you're troubled, you need a peaceful mind to tackle the problems and think things through. If your mind is full of negative thoughts, there is little room for creative thinking. So, how to quiet your mind?

You might have tried hard to stop the ceaseless thinking. The harder you try the more tense you feel. The mind cannot be made to keep quiet by fighting with it. Instead be aware of the thought process. It is a part of mindfulness practice. Prof Peter Kinderman, chartered clinical psychologist, says, "Rumination tends to be eased if we learn to be

mindful; if we are able to be aware of, and understand how our own thoughts work. This does NOT mean taking up any kind of religious practice, but some of the practical techniques of clearing the mind of 'clutter' can be helpful."

Again you may find that being aware of thoughts is very difficult, almost impossible. It is because we are too caught up thinking hard. We don't practice being aware of mental activities and lose ourselves in thinking. Psychologists prescribe some strategies that will help to reduce mental noise.

You will not believe but most psychologists prescribe regular physical exercise for mental well-being. Mind.org.uk writes, "Regular physical activity is associated with lower rates of depression and anxiety across all age groups". It adds, "Exercise is essential for slowing age-related cognitive decline and for promoting well-being". After an hour of physical exercise you will find your mind is much quieter and manageable. Carrie Barron, co-author of *The Creative Cure* writes, "Take a boxing class if meditation does not work for you. Some people need to punch it out."

Before you are able to be mindful to your unnecessary thinking, you'll have to learn to change or distract reactive thinking into creative ways. Prof Susan Hoeksema, a leading researcher of over thinking writes, "One of the simplest but most important strategies for freeing yourself from over thinking is to give your brain a rest by engaging in pleasant distractions." These distractions could be reading a book, listening to music, watching comedy or meeting a friend.

However, these distractions are only temporary solutions. What will make you the real in-charge of yourself is mindfulness. It frees the mind from nonsense, and makes space for creative and productive thinking.

MONEY IS ENERGY

Not necessarily the root of all evil

Money could be the most difficult thing on earth to understand. It is a very confusing item. We are caught in a dilemma — should we be focussing on money or not? Does the age-old saying— ‘Money is the root of all evil’, say it all? On the other hand, we are taught from our childhood that we should be earning money when we grow up. Religions condemn money but in most religions there are some gods or goddesses of money or prosperity. Such contradictions only confuse us more.

Many people think that to have concerns of money is to be a materialist. This is the biggest mistake. I would say money is not matter but energy. What we see as matter is, in fact, mostly energy. For example, we take food in order to live but the body actually takes the energy that is in the food. We live not on food but on the energy in the food. In the same way, money is just energy. It contains value. It has a certain worth. I present five principles here to help you learn to deal with money:

Principle 1: Fulfilling needs. To understand money, we need to understand the barter system that existed before money was invented. We know that barter system is an exchange of needed goods between two persons. You give what others need and take what you need in

exchange. Business is also basically fulfilling the needs of people. Money is only the medium. Henry Ford has said, “A business that makes nothing but money is a poor business”.

Principle 2: Fair exchange. Just as in the barter system, the underlying principle of good business is fair exchange. The money you take from a person should be equal to the value of the goods or services you offer to the person. If this is balanced then money is not evil.

Principle 3: Business planning. Many times it so happens that you see some people who are less talented than you are earning more than you. You become jealous of them. Many talented people focus only on developing their talent, but forget to develop a business plan. They make a mistake of not developing a business plan. If you are talented, it is not enough to grow only your talent, but you also have to hone your business skills.

Principle 4: Free is evil. If you are satisfied only with your talent and the compliments you get for it, after some years you will be frustrated. Just as much as charging more money for an item of less value will attract evil so will taking less money for an expensive item or giving it away for free. When you start a business, especially of services, you might be confused how much you should charge. In such cases, the easiest way to determine the price is to ask yourself how much would you be willing to pay if you were buying the same service from someone else?

Principle 5: Save money. The old saying goes: Money is a good servant but a bad master. For me, money is a friend. When you lose your job or business, your savings will support you more than any of your relatives or friends. You need to start saving a certain per cent of money from the first day of your earning. Don't treat money as a servant but as a friend. It will support you in both good and bad times.

HOW DO LEADERS THINK?

Your thoughts determine your actions

You may have asked yourself — what makes a leader? Or how can I become a leader? Or how can I develop qualities of a leader? What could be those qualities? Well, the answer is — leaders think differently. As a result of thinking differently they act differently. This is the basic difference between thoughts that lead you ahead and those that pull you back.

Most people focus on negative aspects in life and the reasons for their misery. They think in terms of ‘because of’ or ‘due to’. For example, some of you think that because of your parents or your childhood or your situation, you could not achieve what you wanted. You want to portray yourself as ‘poor me!’ Of course, you will get some sympathy from people, but you will not get ahead with these thoughts.

Few people think in terms of ‘in spite of’. They are in the same situation or even worse than yours. But they think they need to act in spite of bad situations or negativity around them. If you read biographies of leaders in any sector, you will find that they have struggled to succeed in spite of adversities. If you want to be a leader or want to move towards success, leave all complaints and start thinking ‘in spite of’ and act accordingly.

Another pitfall to failure is ‘reactive thinking’. Reactive contains the same letters as creative. Reactive thoughts are violent, complaining, whining, manipulating and destructive. You will not be happy with such thoughts, nor can you solve any problems with those thoughts. This is not to say that leaders are never victims of such thinking. Sometimes they are attacked by such thoughts because they too are humans just like all others. But they do not remain there, they move to creative thinking and proactive actions. In such situations, they ask themselves — what would be the wise action to take now? If they are trapped in a situation, they ask themselves — what other options and alternatives can I explore?

In life, we have problems that have no solutions. The people who will be successful put their efforts on the problems they can solve. To contrary, the people who will not be successful pay their attention on the problems they cannot solve, and they do not see the problems they can solve. If they keep themselves busy in solving the problems they can solve, with time the harshest problems will also disappear. It is all about where you focus your attention and action. If you only focus on the problems in life that cannot be solved, you will just become helpless.

You need to check what kind of thoughts are going on in your mind; if the thoughts are useful or just reactive ones. Negative thoughts will torture your mind and take you nowhere. The worse thing about negative thoughts is that they haunt you like a ghost. It is very important to be aware of your mental contents because they are the determinants of your happiness, peace and success. Sometimes you may not be able to stop negative thoughts and at such times you can divert your thinking to creative or productive thinking. Or you can engage yourself to a task that is fruitful to you and others. Your thoughts determine your actions. Your actions determine your future.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO BECOME A LEADER?

Study your role models, research and analyse

Leadership has two parts — the being and the doing. ‘Being’ is related to thinking and feeling. ‘Doing’ relates to the actions you take in order to achieve your goals. A leader needs to focus on being as well as the doing part.

Most people, when they graduate from college, become confused on what’s to be done next. You may get a job or you may not. Even if you do get a job it might not be what you expected it to be. You want to do something else but you don’t know exactly what it is that you should be doing.

Until you are in college you know what to do. That’s easy — study hard. You do not need to think what to study. It’s all in the curriculum. I don’t know if it is good to give students a prescribed curriculum and textbooks. It seems easy but it takes away the decision making right of the students. They lose the ability of decision making as everything is decided for them — step by step.

But as you graduate from college there is no curriculum. You have to make your own path. The word ‘curriculum’ is derived from Latin which means ‘course of a race’. Now you are on the real race of business and you don’t see any course. You have spent your

entire life attending tests, now you are on the real test of life. You want to be a leader in your field but you don’t know what exactly you need to do to become a leader. You wonder what leaders in their sectors have done to be successful.

The first action is to study what your role models have done in their initial days. You may know their success but you may not know their struggles. It is said that behind every overnight success there is struggle of at least two decades. They too have gone through the same days of confusion and frustration. If you want to be a leader in your field, first of all know what top leaders did in their life at your age. It would give you not only encouragement but also ways ahead.

At first you may not be getting the job you have desired. Even if you are hitting middle age or sometimes old age, you may not know what to do to reach the goal you have targeted. The big difference between a stupid person and an intelligent person is that one just thinks about the goal but the other also studies what it requires to reach the goal. It is just like a physical journey. If you are going to Pokhara, you will find a map, means to reach there, the cost involved and things to prepare for the journey. Same applies to the journey leading to success. So, the first thing you have to do is research. For it, you may have to read books, surf the net, talk with knowledgeable people, experiment et cetera. Successful people are successful because they have done thorough research on the subject of their interest. As you begin to research, you will find what you need to do step by step.

JOURNEY TO SUCCESS

Success is not so much about what you achieve outwardly but about the transformation that takes place within you during the journey to success

I think the most beautiful scenes are that of mountains. Even their pictures are attractive. We are lucky that our country is full of them. Hills are lovely. Green mountains are graceful. The most mesmerising view of them all is that of snow-capped mountains. How would it be to stand on top of a summit? You'd feel like a winner!

There are photos of a person standing on top of a mountain that are used for motivation. The person is so happy that he is spreading his arms towards the sky as if he has won the world! For most of us, sumitting the peak of our career is akin to sumitting a mountain. We all want to see ourselves at the top. Sometime in our life we set a big goal and we visualise ourselves being on the top. This is so pleasant and motivating that it becomes our golden dream.

At some or the other occasion we all must have set a big goal in our mind or on paper. But there are very few people who actually achieve their dreams. Why is it so? Generally people think the way to the goal they have set is straight like royal highways. They

can reach the destination from where they are standing now just by walking straight. But as you start the journey, it is most likely that something unexpected happens on the very first step. If not on the first step, sooner or later you will experience difficulties which you have not imagined when you had set the goal. Then you become so demotivated that you will start perceiving the world as a gloomy place. You will see yourself unworthy and you become very discouraged. Now all your enthusiasm turns to pessimism. Then you will settle for something lower and live a dull life without dreams.

Just as mountain summits are attractive, the reality is that the roads leading to these mountains are deadly. The higher the summit, the more difficult the journey. There are no short-cuts, no comfortable ways. Climbing a mountain is a perfect simile for journey to success. Both are exciting, alluring and adventurous. Both are motivating and equally challenging. So, only having a dream and setting a goal is not enough for success. You need to know the road and be ready for all kinds of hardships. On the way there will be steep climbs, frightening slopes, rivers without bridges, and you'll face many adversities. At the same time you will be complimented with breathtaking scenes and a sense of achievement.

You may wonder why all the achievements of life are made so difficult — be it climbing a mountain or the ladder of success. It is because without going through all the adversities you will not deserve the success. The roads are made so in order to qualify you for success. You become gradually mature with the journey. You learn. You develop strengths. And finally you transform yourself during the journey. Success is not so much about what you achieve outwardly but about the transformation that takes place within you during the journey to success

A CRASH COURSE ON LEADERSHIP

The first thing is to have the right perspective

While compiling this book and reviewing the articles, it suddenly occurred to me what if the crux of it all be presented briefly? That could be helpful for the readers. And while doing so and as I reviewed article by article, I could clearly see how the lessons on leadership that I wrote were in fact in alignment with the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddha. I was ecstatic and am I glad beyond bounds to offer it to you as summation of it all!

Generally people start with a plan or an action. But the right way is to have the right understanding first. It is said that if you don't know where you are going, any road will lead you there. In a worse case scenario, if you don't know why you are going, you might be frustrated after reaching there. Before you make a journey towards success, you need to have the right understanding of life, yourself and the world you live in.

The Buddha has proposed Noble Eightfold Path to attain liberation. I find that the same steps can lead to worldly attainments that will give you not only success but also happiness and peace. The eightfold path includes body, mind and spirit. Body is concerned with action, mind with concentration and spirit with wisdom.

The eightfold path contains: Right Perspective, Right Resolution, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Samadhi. The first two (perspective and intention) are concerned with wisdom, then following three (speech, action and livelihood) with actions and the last two (mindfulness and samadhi) with the mind.

It would be wise to start the journey of life towards success with wisdom. Then, at the end, you will not have to regret about the journey you have undertaken in your life. First of all, one needs to understand oneself — what is one's passion and purpose. Also, we need to understand the world in its true nature. The world in its reality can be unkind and cruel. You need to mentally prepare yourself to proceed in the journey in spite of the world.

Only after you gather inner strength against all hurdles, you will have the right resolution. You set goal — not only superficially, but from the core of your heart. It is because of firm determination that the Buddha could go through all hardships to attain his goal of Buddhahood. Yes, you can have positive intention and all the positive visualisations. They will be helpful, but it does not mean the way will be smooth all the time.

Right speech is also very important. It is not only what you talk with people but also what you talk with yourself — your inner dialogue. You need to check what inner dialogue is going on in your mind. It will determine your feelings and in turn your fate. When working in a team and with clients you will need to communicate. Your speech has to be right. People judge you through your speech. That is why, in organisations nowadays, communications training for their staff is gaining so much popularity. You can filter the speech through a Sufi saying: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it necessary?

Right action is also equally important. You need to distinguish the actions that will help you to reach the goal from what will hinder your path. If your actions don't match with your goal, you will be walking away from the goal. That is why you need to have a plan. At the same time you need to be careful that some actions may quickly lead to the goal but may not be the right action. For real happiness and peace of mind, both means and end have to be right.

To become successful this much is enough. But if you want lasting peace and real happiness, you need to practice mindfulness in your action, speech and mental contents. Then you see yourself through your own inner eyes. And that seeing is detaching; objectively being able to look at things. There is a great bliss in detachment which will ultimately lead to Samadhi.

I am planning to study Four Noble Truth and Noble Eightfold Path more deeply because I find that they can be used simultaneously for both worldly and spiritual success. Studying other religions such as Jainism, Sikhism and life of Muhammad, which I only briefly know about now, is also gaining much of my interest lately. I want to study and contemplate deeply on them and write another book on leadership – how to successfully lead oneself in the material world Without and spiritual world Within.

Suggested Reading

While I read a lot of different books in developing the content of this book, I feel that the following titles are truly inspiring in learning about leadership.

A Thousand Names for Joy: Living in Harmony with the Way Things Are by **Byron Katie**

Adversity Quotient: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities by **Paul G. Stoltz**

As a Man Thinketh by **James Allen**

At The Speed of Life: A New Approach to Personal Change through Body-Centered Therapy by **Gay Hendricks & Kathlyn Hendricks**

Change Your Thoughts Change Your Life: Living the Wisdom of the Tao by **Dr Wayne W Dyer**

Daily Afflictions: The Agony of Being Connected to Everything in the Universe by **Andrew Boyd**

Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ by **Daniel Goleman**

Freedom from the Known by **J Krishnamurti**

Games People Play by **Eric Berne**

How to Have a Beautiful Mind by **Edward de Bono**

How to Make One Hell of a Profit and Still Get to Heaven by **Dr John F Demartini**

I'm Ok-You're Ok by **Thomas A Harris**

Inspiring Leadership: Learning from Great Leaders by **John Adair**
Introducing NLP: Psychological Skills for Understanding and Influencing People by **Joseph O' Connor & John Seymour**
Invincible Thinking: There Is No Such Thing as Defeat by **Ryuhō Okawa**
Lateral Thinking by **Edward de Bono**
Lead with Luv: A different Way to Create Real Success by **Ken Blanchard and Colleen Barrett**
Leadership: Theory and Practice by **Peter G. Northhouse**
Leading at a Higher Level by **Ken Blanchard**
Loving What: Four Questions That Can Change Your Life by **Byron Katie**
Notes from a Friend: A Quick and Simple Guide to Taking Charge of Your Life by **Anthony Robbins**
Power Vs Force: The Hidden Determinants of Human Behavior by **David R Hawkins**
Psycho-Cybernetics by **Maxwell Maltz**
Reflections on the Self by **J Krishnamurti**
Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by **Stephen R Covey**
Six Thinking Hats by **Edward de Bono**
Tao Teh Ching by **Lao Tzu**
The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness by **Stephen R Covey**
The Art of Possibility: Transforming Professional and Personal Life by **Rosamund Stone Zander and Benjamin Zander**
The Big Leap by **Gay Hendricks**
The Breakthrough Experience: A Revolutionary New Approach to Personal Transformation by **Dr John F Demartini**

The Corporate Mystic: A Guidebook for Visionaries with Their Feet on the Ground by **Gay Hendricks and Kate Ludeman**
The Fred Factor: Every Person's Guide to Making the Ordinary Extraordinary! by **Mark Sanborn**
The Knight in Rusty Armour by **Robert Fisher**
The Last Talks by **J Krishnamurti**
The Lazy Man's Guide to Enlightenment by **Thaddeus Golas**
The Path of Least Resistance: Learning to Become the Creative Force in Your Own Life by **Robert Fritz**
The Power of Intention: Learning to Co-create Your World Your Way by **Dr Wayne W Dyer**
The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment by **Eckhart Tolle**
The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations by **Ori Brafman and Rod A Beckstrom**
The Success Principles: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be by **Jack Canfield**
The Tao of Leadership by **John Heider**
The Ten-Second Miracle: Creating Relationship Breakthroughs by **Gay Hendricks**
The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying by **Sogyal Rinpoche**
The Zen Teaching of Bodhidharma by **Bodhidharma**
What Do You Say after You Say Hello? by **Eric Berne**
Working with Emotional Intelligence by **Daniel Goleman**
You Are a Brand! by **Catherine Kaputa**
Your Sacred Self: Making the Decision to Be Free by **Dr. Wayne Dyer**



A trainer and columnist on leadership and youth development, R Manandhar has been passionately devoting himself into training professionals.

He is the founder of 'Kabule—the Wise Leader', a specialized training centre on leadership development and mindfulness. His programs have touched the lives of many, who claim to have been positively transformed following their participation.

Interestingly, he has been a Buddhist monk for five years, living in monasteries across Thailand, which explains his calm, quiet and confident demeanour and approach to life, also reflected in his writing.

R Manandhar has been a professional in the UN and several INGOs for over two decades. He is also a certified Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) trainer and psychological counselor.



R Manandhar understands the need of an entire generation entering the workforce and head honchos who are striving to stand out as true leaders in the business world by meaningful contribution to society and to find a way to balance profits and a sense of personal fulfilment.

His column in The Himalayan Times over the years have helped readers find spiritual strength within them in the ever challenging business world and to use it in a positive manner to strike a perfect balance.

May you enjoy this most important journey of discovering yourself... a journey we all have to make if we truly want to contribute to the sectors we work in and to be true leaders with a vision of a true world.

Terence Lee

Former Chief of Special Projects, The Himalayan Times
Presently, CEO, Nepal Traveller

Facts and figures prove that in the past 3-4 decades, Nepal could not strive as fast as many other developing countries, especially in socio-economic development. It is clear that one of the main reasons for this sorry state of affairs is certain weaknesses in leadership in the whole gamut of governance. I hope this book will be an eye-opener to present and future leaders engaged in the governance of the country.

Sugat Ratna Kansakar

CEO, Nepal Airlines Corporation