

Chapter V

Leadership Skills

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Abstract: The text explores the intricacies of leadership, emphasizing the shift from traditional hierarchical models to more inclusive, participatory approaches. Leaders are encouraged to engage employees through collaboration, fostering an environment of innovation and motivation. Drawing comparisons between authoritative figures like Steve Jobs and non-authoritative leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, the discussion highlights the importance of inclusive decision-making for fostering creativity and employee satisfaction. Challenges in the decision-making process, such as composition and participation problems, are discussed alongside cultural and communication barriers. The need for effective implementation, where employees are motivated to take ownership of decisions, is underscored as essential for successful leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Decision-making, Inclusivity, Employee motivation, Innovation

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What should a leader do? How should the employees be kept happy? How good decisions can be made? And if you work as a team, including the leader, you are going to aspire to many more milestones than you reach already. I will start with it. Today's business environment is very fast and dynamic. It is technology oriented. Things are changing fast. For example, in the IT based systems, daily one or the other thing is happening. The original way of working is no more applicable these days. What you need to do? You have to be aware, you have to take care of threats, opportunities. You have to be agile; you have to react quickly. And you have to look around for the market to adjust to yourself according to market. And the leadership should be made a social process. It should not be like a hierarchy-based structure as we have in India, but it should be a social process where you interact with employees on a daily basis as friends and as part of the process and then only you will be able to reach to some business conclusions.

Okay, so you see these leaders. What is the difference? The first two are authoritative leaders. Steve Jobs and Adolf Hitler- they are considered to be the one of the toughest leaders. Steve Jobs is said to have fired one employee when he met him in an elevator to office. Steve Jobs raised one simple question to the employee and employee was not immediately prepared for answering that question, and he was fired in the lift itself. So, Steve Jobs had another partner again with the name Steve. I don't remember the last name, so he said that he will never work with Steve Jobs because of these kinds of characteristics. We also know about other non-authoritative leaders who have been successful- Martin Luther, Gandhi and Satya Nadella. So let us see, what makes them different from each other.

First of all, we need to understand, do we want to be a manager or we do we want to be a leader? So, what is the difference between manager and leader? A manager relies on authority for implementation. Yes, I am the manager. You have to do what I want to; I want to get it done. Leaders rely on persuasion for implementation. This was the characteristic of Mahatma Gandhi and the Martin Luther and the others. So, what is the question? When you have to do what the boss says, so that is something which nobody likes to do these days, at least Z generation. They don't want to work in companies like this and that is why the companies are facing a lot of attrition these days. But if you drive a culture where achievement of goal itself

is a reward, that is something that the modern generation wants, and they want to create new things, innovative things, and that is why you see that startups and so many IT companies are flourishing these days. And people want to work there. People, I mean, even if you pay less salary, they want to work there. So, our hierarchical culture needs this understanding.

I am giving you one exercise and there will be ten seconds allowed for it. You just have to find the number of F words in it. How many times F letter has been used in this sentence. Okay times up.

Students: "four sir, four times five. okay, five, five times"

Anil: You have counted four times/ five times. Any other. Okay, I will show you the correct answer.

So, these red ones are the F letters; these are six times. Let's see what happens. You know most people cannot find success. Why? because everyone sees the world differently. A leader has to learn from this experiment that everyone brings a different set of opinion, different constellations of experience, which they bring to the table. Since the leader has to take more informed decisions, better decisions, they have to get information from everyone. If they are able to gather all the inputs; if they are able to capture different sets of opinions; this will bring more creativity. There may be some things which may be bad for the decision making, some things which a leader may not have thought, so multiple perspectives matter and people will get more validation from the leader. So as a leader, you have to do two tasks- number one, you have to make decisions where to go, what is the ultimate goal of running the business and how to avoid the threats and then implement those decisions? These are the two most critical tasks.

So, we will see what are the impediments in making the decisions and implementing the decisions. First of all, making the decisions, a leader has to have an inclusive approach. If the leader involves everyone to participate in decision-making, it brings you two benefits. Number one is, information benefit- the head part, and a motivation benefit, which is the heart part. If the head part and heart part both meet together, then the head part will bring experience, expertise, and perspective, whereas the heart part will bring contribution, partnership, and overall implementation eliciting understanding, commitment and ownership of the project.

Of course, we have understood that leadership should be participative, but can we involve everyone in the decision-making? A company may have six hundred employees. For example,

my company has six hundred employees and TCS and other companies have thousands of employees, so certainly we cannot involve everyone in decision making process. What we need, we need to do. We need to involve representatives from different backgrounds, so we need to involve women, men, juniors, seniors, technical, non-technical people and make a representation of them in the committee or a group that you are forming for decision-making, right? But what happens is that there occurs a process loss, the first type of process loss-composition problem. What happens that we are most comfortable with simple and like-minded people, and we try to avoid diversity. We are most comfortable with those who agree with us, who give their opinion in accordance with our opinion, okay. But different perspectives from different composition that creates innovation, creativity and problem-solving we have discussed earlier.

Then there is another process loss which is type 2, this is a participation problem. Of course, you have created a team. You have heard this lecture and now you go back and make a representation from different background people. But what happens? People don't participate in the committee. Meetings are held for thirty minutes, one hour and there are forty members to voice their opinion. They get very less time and people, and, especially if they are junior or middle level, when boss is present, they start looking right and looking left to see what the majority of people are talking about and then they start making their opinion according to the majority of people.

And then there are cultural factors. If you have people from different countries and different companies, different countries and companies have different cultures. For example, if you talk of south-east Asian countries- Indonesia and Taiwan, etc.- these countries don't really speak up during the meetings, they will always nod their head whenever a speaker is speaking but the speaker will think that they are agreeing with me, but at the end the result will be zero. You have to take into account the culture of those countries and companies before you really make the participation a success. Then the solution is like you should break the team, the committee into smaller groups, you should increase the air time for everyone to voice their opinions and then you should always let everyone be introduced in the beginning because people are very hesitant to start talking. When a speaker starts speaking, they always think my number may not come, or at least I should be the last to speak. Bring them out of their comfort zone.

The biggest problem at least in India is English language. Many of us come from that background where English is hardly spoken. We don't feel comfortable speaking English. If

you have to bring new solutions, if you have to bring creativity, then you have to speak in native language. For example, my company is an MNC company and we have meetings with our foreign counterparts; of course, with them, we do speak in English. Our employees also speak in English. But when we are meeting internally at least I always try to speak in Hindi so that everyone is comfortable. We have modellers, we have engineers who come from rural backgrounds- they are not comfortable in English. If you want some solutions to come out, suggestions to come out, then you have to break that discomfort and give sufficient time for people to grasp the subject. Sometimes the agenda is not circulated in advance and suddenly meeting is called. Then people come to meeting without understanding what the topic is and what is going to be discussed. Let them understand the subject and then speak out, don't rush on it.

There is another type of loss, process loss, which is the influence problem. Why did we make groups? We made groups to make informed decisions; otherwise, there was no need of it. There was one person- boss- sitting at the top and he would have made the decisions, but we made the groups to take informed decisions. But what actually happens is that first few speakers, especially if there is a senior MD, CEO or, and in your case, Principal is sitting in the meeting, they will always influence the later speakers. What happens when they start speaking like- "We have gathered here to take a decision on some certain subject. I am thinking to adopt this route; what is your opinion?" Maybe in a government department it may not be such a problem. People are open to speaking. But in private sector, junior or middle level managers- they understood what a senior wants- they will always toe the line and they will always say, "Oh, yes sir, you are very you are very right. We should always adopt it". Original thoughts should not be suppressed; as it is, it is difficult to voice disagreement in public. What is the solution? You should encourage young and vulnerable to speak first. First of all, you ask them what is their opinion. Then only the real creativity or real thoughts will come out. So, sometimes people as I said get influenced by majority, sometimes they get influenced by seniors. You should ask them to write their views beforehand, even before the meeting has started or discussion has started. You should ask them to write their views on a piece of paper. This way they are comfortable speaking at a later point of time and this makes disagreements more comfortable. Being comfortable doesn't come in one day. It has to be hard work of six months, one year, two years. A leader should become friendly with his/ her employees; employees should have a confidence that a leader will not punish them for voicing their opinion.

I will tell you one example. In my company, we did one quality check program last year when covid had started. Because we were in virtual mode, we were not really sure what quality of work employees are sending to our country units sitting at home. We thought that we will start a random quality check. I made a committee of six, seven senior engineers and they were tasked to examine the work of their respective teams. Now in the beginning every employee was really afraid that in this random picking of projects, my work should not get scrutinised. Even though in a public meeting I had mentioned that it is not for punishment, it is for improvement. This was I think May 2020 and today my engineers tell me that now employees themselves are coming forward saying, “Why don't you take my project for a quality check this time so that I can learn where I made mistakes and I can improve”. This is the time frame that a leader has to spend to make the employees comfortable and another part of it, is of course that, you should avoid constant nagging. Let us make things more positive. Let the employee feel my boss is suggesting something because it brings more improvement. He never scolds me or penalises me. Thus, inclusiveness doesn't happen when there are the three process losses. But when you have made the committee, you have made the group but people are not voicing their opinion; why doesn't manager or leader himself or herself tries to make an inclusive group. First of all, managers often overestimate their decision-making ability. Also, they look down upon juniors; they feel that if I ask opinion from my juniors, they will feel that this boss doesn't have that charisma to make decisions. He is coming to us. But as I said, inclusiveness provides motivation and information to make better decisions.

Now we have made better decisions. Let us say the leader has taken all these steps to make a better decision now. The second part is implementation. You must have heard the name of Eisenhower, he was a 34th U.S. President and Army General. He said leaders get followers to want to do what the leaders need them to do. Leaders don't force them to do something what he wants, but he makes, creates a desire in their hearts to do something which the leader is saying. As I said, implementation is equally difficult as was making decision. Why? because quality of decision doesn't mean that success is guaranteed. What happens that you must have seen in your organization or in your schools, colleges etc. that the boss or the teacher or the professors take some decision. For example, in government departments, normally the circulars come from DOPT, Department of Public Training. They say the expenditure has to be controlled in the organization. They will say reduce the paper consumption. Photocopy should be reduced. They don't take into account whether this photocopying or no consumption of paper is really required or not. They simply pass on the circular? What happens after two months.

Everybody forgets. Implementation will not happen because there was no motivation for the employees; there was no knowledge why this circular has been passed. First of all, employees should have a transparency in this. They should understand why the decision has been made. If you have taken suggestions from them, they will be able to understand it better, and thus, better able to implement it as they will take the ownership of that decision. For example, if in a committee, some of your students says, "Sir, we want to suggest something". Whatever his suggestion is, if you say, you are the one who suggested, why not to take that ownership of it. That employee/ student will be very happy to take that decision and will feel elated because their suggestion has been accepted by some authority. They are happy that they have been given the task to implement it. Now you can very well imagine that the work will be done in minutes. Now what happens if implementation is not inclusive? As an employee joins any organization, I have seen people, they are very energized; they want to bring changes in the organization; they want to bring new ideas. But what happens when they put forth an idea and the manager doesn't want to include that. Everybody knows that the ideas were very good, but manager doesn't want to include them. What happens? The employee becomes frustrated. They don't want to make any contribution any further. And then the third stage comes when they become apathetic, indifferent to organizational decision making and they just turn off. And the fourth stage comes when nothing materializes and the feels further frustrated; anger starts building up, the employee becomes counter-productive. Now they become attention-seeking and counter-productive. And finally, they leave the organization.

