

Subject: Week 54 Learnings
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Dear All

I have to speak at a Leadership speaker series with Shashi Tharoor and Bimal Jalan. Each of us has 6 minutes to talk about leadership from our careers!. This is what is the gist of what I will say in 6 minutes:

In my experience, I believe business leadership is about two things :

- a. Working for the common Good and
- b. Knowing that money is not the answer to everything.

Good business leaders work beyond the traditional roles they play. Business is about doing good for society as much as it is about running the business properly. I have seen that Doing good for society always makes a successful business and not the other way around. As we become leaders, we think that power and authority will get people to listen to us. I have seen that in every role that I have done, I have had to reach out to others, in order to build consensus to move the business forward. People can dispute facts, can dispute intent but they can never disagree on the 'common good'.

How does a leader shoot for the common good?

I believe there are three behaviors that a leader exhibits in the journey to 'common good':

1. Authentic and not Arrogant
2. Balanced and not Biased
3. Courage and not Cowardice

In my experience the three behaviors are linked and interdependent.

Being authentic is about being who are and not being what others want you to be. Leaders must be proud of what they have done but never arrogant about it. Pride is when you are confident in your skin and is inward driven. Arrogance is external and is with an intent to show that you are better than someone else.

Subordinates are very good at figuring out if a leader is authentic or not. Trouble is that they do not tell the leader their view!

Leaders get different points of information and different inputs. Much of the information a leader gets is contradictory. A good leader keeps balance in the face of differing opinions and does not gravitate towards a bias. The moment a leader is biased, he stops getting the real truth and good advice. A leader with balance will invariably encourage good debates in meetings and that is healthy for the team.

A slow world gave leaders choices between black and white. A fast changing world is more grey and needs decisions with imperfect information. Leaders must have the courage to move forward and not hide behind committees and seeking more analysis to buy time. Courage as Nelson Mandela said is not the absence of fear but the ability to overcome it.

Money is a funny thing. Having too much money is as much of a problem as having too little money. I have seen many business leaders equate money with success, money with power and money with competence. All three correlations are not necessarily true. Equating money with leadership is the wrong idea of success. A company that makes money is not a well-run company and equally a company that doesn't make too much money is not a poorly run company. Any given day, I would choose stretch job with lower salary versus an easy job with a higher salary. But, that's me!

Weak leaders offer money as a motivator while good leaders offer culture as a motivator. The Beatles said years ago 'money can't buy me love'. Money also cannot buy you happiness.

Working for the common good can give you immense happiness. Leadership legacy is hard earned and is lifelong.

Thanks, feedback welcome !

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