

Motivating People – The Practice through Ages

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In this time of mergers, acquisitions, right-sizing, technology, restructuring, etc. one of the biggest challenges, corporate leaders are facing is the motivation of their troops i.e. workers, staff and management. According to an estimate, in the past four years only, more than 10000 people were laid off from corporate Pakistan and this transition is not over yet.

Before I move on, let me quickly clarify a very important myth, i.e. “There was no need for this”. Well, if we keep our emotions aside and think realistically then the truth is something like this. All the developed nations have passed through this transition in some point in their history. There is no other way to where we want to go without taking this pain. The fact is that there was a time that one of the major competitive advantages, Pakistan had, was that of inexpensive labour. Over the period of last ten years, we have lost that advantage. Last month, when I was in Dubai, I was told by one of the businessmen that till 1990, 70 percent of his entire workforce comprised of Pakistanis that he has now reduced to only ten percent and he is even considering replacing them with Indians, Philippians, Sri Lankans and Bangladeshis. The answer to what made him do this was simple and straight: “Pakistanis are more expensive and their work efficiency has reduced over the past ten years.” The readers might want to know that why has the efficiency of Pakistanis reduced? I believe that it is a different topic altogether and beyond the scope of this writing and someday I will provide my views on this. The purpose of the example was just to share the perception (if it is right or wrong, that is again out of the scope, here) of others about us. Well one thing is very clear here and requires no debate that Pakistani workforce is now one of the most expensive in the region and for this; you can refer to many studies available on this topic.

The bitter truth is that with the increased wages, high cost of raw-material, high cost of capital, etc., the cost of production/operation has increased, and profit margins have shrunk. Coupled with this, due to globalization, many imports have become cheaper and Pakistani companies are left with no other option but to cut-down the cost of production or operations. All the changes that I have mentioned above are due to the very same reason. It is no more a choice; it is a must for the survival and for staying competitive in the 21st century.

One can well imagine, what would have happened to the morale of those who were considered fortunate to survive the change but are now confronted with many other challenges, e.g. continuous pressures for increased effectiveness and efficiency, pressures to motivate their teams in this time of uncertainty, etc. Other after-effects include but not limited to:

- Lower morale
- Pain of losing friends
- Lack of trust on leadership
- Decreased organizational integrity
- Lack of interest in the work
- High stress level
- Blaming and complaining behavior
- Increased interpersonal conflicts
- Fear of losing their own job

The major challenge, corporate leaders are now confronted with is how to motivate those who survived the changes. To this end, a number of initiatives are being introduced by these multinational companies (MNCs) and a lot of money is being allocated for these initiatives, including:

1. Enhancing the quality of the work environment
2. Increased remuneration of those who survived
3. Pay for performance and other reward system
4. Three companies reported that they have provided better medical, food and uniforms to the workers to motivate them
5. Providing job security assurances to those who survived
6. Making work more interesting
7. Job redesign to create additional challenges in the work
8. KAIZEN, and other initiatives to enhance employee's involvement and participation
9. Design and delivery of many training and development programs, both in-house and by external trainers. Seven companies even reported that this is the first time in their corporate history to invest in training and development
10. Creating a culture of respect, appreciation, recognition
11. Promotion open communication
12. In-company events, functions, family get-togethers

One could conclude that a lot is being done to increase the motivation level of employees but unfortunately if you ask the leaders, they are not satisfied with the outcome of these initiatives. It is to this end that 1998, I undertook a challenge of revealing the reasons for this phenomenon and in the paras below, I am sharing my discoveries with you.

Let's look at the list above, one more time. If we did so, we would discover that items 1 to 5 address our **physical** needs, item 6 to 9, our **intellectual or mental** needs, whereas items 10 to 12 are meant to address our **emotional** needs. Now the dilemma here is same as being mentioned by many philosophers, scholars, intellectuals and prophets over the last several centuries. Everyone had his own way of conveying the reality, but the message was same. Unfortunately, due to our own biases, we never heard it aright. And even if we did, we did not buy into it, fully. We as humans, have four dimensions of us. We have a body, we have a mind, we have a heart and we have a soul. It means that we have physical needs, we have intellectual needs, we have emotional needs and we have spiritual needs. The truth of the life is that we can never reach our full potential and be at peace unless all of our four dimensions are in harmony to each other.

Let me make it easy by providing a layman example. Once our physical needs are taken care of by our family, only then we would want to go to school/college to learn and to cater to our intellectual needs. The moment we have achieved that then comes our emotional needs, a need to be loved and to love, a need to be with someone, a need to be heard and a need to be respected , appreciated and recognized for our work, etc. When after having all of these three needs fulfilled, life seems to be empty, then we start pondering as to what is missing. A fortunate few, very soon and a majority of people, at very late in their lives, discover that one of the important dimensions of us has been neglected and that is our spirit. Most of them would try to do as much as they can to address their spiritual needs, but most of the time the earlier negligence would have damaged our souls which in return would have damaged our other three dimensions to the extent that nothing much can be done at that point in time, to recover from the earlier damages. The point here is that it is the bitter truth of life if you may call it so, but is the unchallenged law of nature that we could never be at our best by ignoring any one side of us and whatever happens to any of our dimensions, it, in the end affects the other three, positively or negatively.

You could even relate Maslow's hierarchy of needs with this law of nature and would find a number of similarities. A few minor differences that you might observe would be due to Maslow's own educational, cultural, social and religious background. Now the dilemma is that companies are investing a considerable amount of resources to motivate its people by addressing their physical, intellectual and emotional needs. But unless they address their spiritual needs, they can never achieve what they want to achieve. Now let's see what our spiritual needs are:

- A need to self-discovery (i.e. Who am I? Where I cam from, What is my true reality? What is the purpose of my being?, etc.)
- A work fulfilling enough that is also aligned with my personal mission and value statement
- Need to know the life principles and truths, and how do they affect me as an individual and the work to be aligned with those universal principles
- Opportunities to meditate
- Appreciation for my religious beliefs and the work and the culture where I could practice my religious beliefs
- Something that will also enhance the quality of my personal life including my relationship with self, my children, my spouse and the society as a whole
- A culture and opportunities to talk about and seek God's guidance

These are our spiritual needs. We can never be happy and in harmony with ourselves unless our spiritual needs are also addressed. Having this belief, I took an initiative of bringing spiritualism and God in my private practice in the beginning of 1999, as a business consultant, trainer, speaker and an author. In almost all the training programs, I conducted since then, the spiritualism

and God was an integral part blended with the modern management and behavioral science. The tangible results, we (i.e. me and my clients) achieved are miraculous:

- Product quality improved
- Continuous Improvement philosophy embedded
- Change successfully implemented
- A major cultural change achieved
- Right-sizing successful
- Sales increased
- Reduced wastage/repeat work
- Reduced overtime
- Increased productivity/efficiency
- Absenteeism reduced
- Reduced medical costs
- Customer satisfaction index improved
- Self responsibility improved
- Teamwork induced
- Reduced employee turnover
- Reduced management-workers tensions
- Reduced interpersonal conflicts
- Abuse and aggression eliminated
- Sales travel billing reduced
- Store stealing eliminated
- Over-invoicing reduced
- Plant/office cleanliness
- Motivation and morale improved
- Customers/vendors wait time decreased
- Family life improved

Is not it miraculous? Yes, it is. All of this may sound out of the world. But, my dear, not to those, who are called “men of understanding” in the Holy Qur’an. Well you must be thinking what sort of magic is this? Well, it is the magic of the “truth”. Truth is powerful. And if we have the guts, courage and a passion strong enough, anyone can achieve it. A question arises that what are those small activities that must be carried to achieve the above-mentioned results. The answer is simple. A knowledge of management and organizational issues and the associated behavioral aspects coupled with deep understanding of the religious philosophy and its practical implications topped with the rock-solid believe in what you are going to teach them. If one could bring these three things together, the results are guaranteed because this guarantee comes from the Creator. And one does not have to be a philosopher or a super-natural human being to discover all these. If you are striving for the truth and a keen observer of the best global practices, you will reach at the same conclusions as described in the Holy Qur’an, centuries ago:

- ye who believe! Guard your own souls: If ye follow (right) guidance, no hurt can come to you from those who stray.... (5.108)
- Evil as an example are people who reject Our signs and wrong their own souls. (7.177)

- Because God will never change the grace which He hath bestowed on a people until they change what is in their (own) souls. (8.53)
-It is not God Who wrongs them, but they wrong their own souls. (9.70)
- Verily never will God change the condition of a people until they change it themselves (with their own souls)..... (13.11)
- And if any strive (with might and main), they do so for their own souls: for God is free of all needs from all creation. (29.6)
- And be ye not like those who forgot God; and He made them forget their own souls! Such are the rebellious transgressors! (59.19)

Some people call me crazy, weird or over-Islamic. Some call me impractical by saying that what does Qur'an has to do with the modern management. For all those, I have one answer and that is something like this. It does not matter what we like or what our individual biases may be. The fact of the matter is that we are a part of a universal system created by God and there are prescribed and set rules and guidelines called "laws of nature" to run this universe. We are not powerful enough to change these "rules". However, our Creator has given us a choice either to conform to these laws of nature or discard them. If we choose not to conform by the prescribed laws, which we easily can, then on one hand we will never reach our full potential and on the other, we will pay the fine for our non-conformances. The fine can be anything. Therefore, it's a matter of choice. Remember that the "Qur'an" has been called the FINAL book as it lists down guidelines for everything. We cannot discover any other or a different way than what is already there. It is simply not possible. If it was possible then the "Qur'an" could not have been called the "Final" book.

As long as we keep our hearts, eyes and ears open, we will see and discover the truths of life and they will not be different than already listed in the Qur'an. Even the non-Islamic modern world is revealing the truths in each and every walk of life, which were already listed in the Qur'an, centuries ago. Now take the management history for an example. The management history does not go back very far and dates back only to the early 20th century. If we quickly glanced through it and the subsequent writings of various times, we observe following trends:

- Early 20th century till late 50s:** Focus was on having more and more people by giving them good wages to start with and then later on addressing their other physical needs as listed earlier. It was the time of industrialization. More people were required for mass production. It was the time when it was generally considered that people need to be controlled and organized. As a result, "watch-dog" concept leading to tiers of management emerged. In addition, the administration departments were set up to control people with heads coming from army, police, law and finance backgrounds
- From 50's till 70's:** This is the era in which it was realized that people are not only physical beings but also intellectual beings. Their intellectual needs were realized and the training function was established in organizations to cater to the intellectual needs of people, e.g. need of learning and growth. The focus was initially on the technical training (job-oriented training) and then gradually moved to management training. The responsibility to perform this function was handed over to the newly established personnel departments with heads coming from diverse backgrounds such as technical, education and management, etc. based on the individual needs of organizations. Organizations finally, took over the responsibility of training its people to get the most out of them
- Late 70's and 80's:** This is the third era in which, people were accepted as emotional beings. The focus started shifting from training to development. People were recognized as an important resource that continuously needs to be motivated and developed to perform at its best. This is the era in which human resource function replaced the orthodox personnel function responsible for listening to people, involving them in various decisions, exchange of feedback, job enrichment, teambuilding, etc. During this era, emerged the concepts of rewards including various corporate get-togethers, functions, events involving families, etc. The stress on respect, equal treatment, enhanced quality of life, reducing the tiers of management, getting rid of management tiers, team members, also increased. The HR managers were being trained in behavioral sciences and were given responsibility to organize various behavioral training sessions for the emotional uplift of their people. The annual confidential reports of the last era were replaced with performance reviews and subsequently with performance management systems. By the end of the era, the management development term was replaced with the people development. The scope of development broadened and included the personal development aspect in addition to professional development
- From 90's onwards:** This is the fourth era. People were finally declared as human capital. It was realized that the only difference between winners and losers will be the quality of its people including their character, beliefs, habits, personal motivation, abilities, etc. People were realized as spiritual beings with various spiritual needs and wanting to experience spiritual growth. Authors who published in the last era but people never understood them became popular and best-sellers. A

typical example is of Stephen Covey's "Seven Habits of Highly Successful People" that included spiritualism and addressed centuries-old "laws of nature" now forgotten by our material society. No one had known him earlier but suddenly he became a "guru". The book had nothing new in it especially for those who understand the religion and have believe in the "laws of nature" but the popularity of the book reinforced the facts that how unknown the universal truths are and how desperate the world is to have solutions to their problems. The emphasis of developing good managers and workers changed to making people good "people" first. If we could just treat them as good human beings, they would automatically become good managers, workers, etc. The emphasis started shifting from the personality traits to the character traits. A simple life truth re-emerged and i.e. how could we have ethical organizations without having ethical people in it. It was also realized that personality traits could easily be taught to anyone but it is extremely difficult to infuse character traits in to people and that is a prophetic work. By the end of the century, the emphasis started shifting from spiritualism to God. By the turn of the century, God finally regains entry in the modern world's corporate life and is being recognized as a part and parcel of our everyday's life. The HR managers are expected to be mentors, spiritual leaders, healers, etc.

That was my observation of the management history. Now let's see how fast God is coming in our corporate life and what the modern world is saying on this. An article published in "Business Week" of August 30, 1999, under the heading "21 Ideas for the 21st century", highlighted:

- Why are we here? What does it all mean? Human being will ask these big questions and the religion will provide the context.
- Neither economic efficiency nor scientific rationalism has diluted the overwhelming force of religious beliefs, rituals, and myths.
- The pull of religion will intensify. Science and religion will find common grounds.
- Today, faith fills a void that material comfort cannot.
- In the U.S., 9 in 10 people claim to engage regularly in prayer and 3 out of 4 do so on a daily basis.
- The narrow-bore scientific disciplines of the late 20th century will give way to interdisciplinary approaches asking the larger, over-reaching questions about the complex patterns of life.
- The correlation between brainwave patterns and meditative states, faith, prayer and healing will emerge.

How quickly, all of this was achieved is evident from another article published in "Business Week" of November 08, 1999, under the heading "Religion in the Workplace":

- There are 10,000 Bible and prayer groups in workplace in the U.S. (which are retraining corporate America on the powers of the religion, character and morality, etc.)
- Companies like Xerox, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut and Wal-Mart Stores regularly organize sessions for the spiritual uplift of their employees
- 48 % of American talk about religion in their workplaces everyday
- 51% of American wants to pray everyday
- Many CEOs regularly consult various spiritual leaders seeking help with important decisions
- 78 % feel the need of spiritual growth in their life as compared with 20 % in 1994
- 95 % of American have absolute trust on God
- "Once words like "virtue", "spirit", and "ethics" got through the corporate door, God wasn't far behind.
- Body, emotion and brain. The only thing that was missing from the equation was spirit. And its finally here.

Whatever they have discovered is not something new and can never be "new". However, the struggle, hardships and the "fine" that the world must have paid and also the pain of not realizing our full potential by wasting so many years to discover what was already there could have been avoided if the laws of Qur'an would have been blindly pursued. Now, it seems that even the credit of introducing "God" in the corporate world would go to Americans. And learning form Americans and following them, like always, by the time, we finally catch up, they will have established yet another benchmark for the world and that would be no different than "Qur'an" no matter what they will call it. I leave you with a question to ponder, "Why are we so far away from our religion? Is it because of those who used the religion to serve their own vested interests and earned a bad name for our religion or maybe it is because of our own ignorance as to what exactly it is?"