

# Why should one indulge in Ethical Management?

The story is attributed to Swami Vivekananda, that a young man who hailed from a rich family and had completed his education, approached the Saint and said, “Swamiji, every young man only wants to earn, grab and get more and more. I wish to give to society instead of taking from it. I need your guidance how to give to society.” The youth was shocked when Vivekananda told him, “Fine. First go out and start earning some money.” He protested, “I didn’t expect you, a sage, to say this to me,” and the sage replied, “You can never give away anything unless you have earned it. Learn how difficult it is to earn, and then decide whether you will give away even a part of it.”

This highlights the approach that any young and upwardly mobile Indian should take at the threshold of his professional life – develop the capacity to earn, understand its value, and then learn how to spend it wisely. One need not become an ascetic to find a deeper purpose in life, but one needs to understand the actual benefits of being ethical and upholding the highest of values.

I personally learnt this lesson very well when decades ago I was graduating from IIT. The British CEO of a multinational known as GKW had come to interview some of my

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classmates for campus recruitment. He casually asked the first one, “How much phosphorus is there in phosphor bronze?” Despite being a Metallurgist, my friend did not know. But not wanting to cut a sorry figure, he hazarded a wild guess. “Around .... 25%, sir?” The gentleman said, “Yes, absolutely right!” and let him go. He came out and shared this with seven other classmates who were waiting to go in. None of them knew the answer. The Englishman kept asking the same question during his interview to each one of them, and they all parroted the same answer with great confidence.

At the end, the CEO came out and addressed the boys. “Gentlemen,” he said, “I would have loved it if you had been truthful and told me that you do not know the answer. But you copied one after another and tried to bluff me. I would not like to have people like these interacting with me day in and day out in my company. Let me tell you, Young Men, that there is NO phosphorus in phosphor bronze, and there is NO job for you in GKW. Good Day!” and he walked off.

What do we learn from this incident, if anything? Do we realize that if one boy had the courage of conviction to admit frankly that

he did not know the answer, he would have landed a cushy job in a multinational company? These principles may not be taught in many B-Schools, but they do form a part of the business practices of some of the most illiterate but successful businessmen. Here is a live example:

In my childhood I lived in a suburban area where there was not much commercial activity, and people generally drove down another two kilometers to reach the nearest marketplace. I often used to walk down in my free time to our main road where there were two Chemists' shops side by side. One of the owners, Mahesh, was friendly with me, and used to encourage me to come and sit with him. I was puzzled when I noticed that whenever a customer walked in and asked for a medicine which he did not have, he immediately used to tell the customer to go to the adjoining shop. "Are you not losing business by sending people to your nearest competitor?" I asked him. Mahesh explained a very simple philosophy – he said that people rarely stop there for shopping, preferring to go to the main marketplace. If they ask for a medicine, and do not get it, they will not stop by and even ask next time. If they are sure that their requirement will be met with in either one of the shops, then they will get into the habit of stopping there only – and the business of both shops will flourish. How many of us have the courage and ability to think so broadly and create a synergy, instead of continuously trying to put down our competitor?

Another very fascinating incident I had read about happened in USA. There was a

small shopping mall on the highway, which did quite mediocre business. A couple of dozen shops, each owned by an independent person, catered to the needs of the few customers who would stop by. One of the shopkeepers had an accident and became a paraplegic. He needed a wheelchair to move around. When his neighbors saw his difficulty, they decided to chip in and make slopes at every curb and step, and ramps at the entrance, so that he could freely wheel himself all over the place. They thought they were doing a favour to their friend. What they had not realized was that soon their business grew in leaps and bounds. People with elderly parents who could not walk much, came pushing them in wheelchairs. Young mothers found that they can maneuver their babies' prams with ease and handle their shopping bags. Disabled customers drove from miles away since they could shop with dignity. The simple gesture brought manifold returns to every shopkeeper in the mall.

Values, ethics and morals are not just high-sounding norms that one indulges in for some far-away "Moksha" or celestial rewards. They are sound principles of business and management, which get considerable returns right here in this world. Whatever one may say and do, the turtle always wins the race against the hare. An organization or a manager may get quick returns if he takes short-cuts, climbs over others' shoulders, or puts down his competition – but in the long race of professional life, he is inevitably left behind.

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As a counsellor dealing with both emotional and career aspects of life, I have often been confronted with people who question where their life is headed, even when they are earning well. I deal with mid-life crises, burnouts, frustrations, addictions – of people who initially thought that they are on the fast track, and that all is fair in love and business. It pains me that when there are such fulfilling and rewarding ways to make money and rise up the corporate ladder, often people seek unethical short-cuts. I look forward to any queries that I may be able to answer, purely from the

practical experience of observing, analyzing innumerable people and getting to know them in depth, sometimes even better than they know themselves. And if you happen to be an ambitious young man or woman, I exhort you to have faith in the highest power that created such a perfectly functioning universe, identify yourself as a part of that unending universe, accept the simple fact that we are all connected through a Vasudaiva Kutumba, and carve out a road less traveled, maybe even a path where none existed. You will never regret it.

### ***Will the correct door open?***

*Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about that : but evermore  
Came out by the same door wherein I went.*

*Omkar Khayyam*

*Why does it appear at times that we are going in and coming out of the same door all the time? Even though material wealth has increased considerably and we now have the best of living conditions, there is emptiness that many complain about, a feeling of always being “rushed”, a greater feeling that something is missing.*

*Is it because we are going to the Doctor and Saint of Wealth and Power, the ever-elusive and yet always attractive magnets that draw us to them like moths to the flame? Lately I have been reading about watches that cost a crore of rupees, hotel rooms at 18,000 dollars a night, Kalyan Mantaps that charge five lakhs and have to be booked one year in advance, cars that are being bought hungrily even with price tags running into crores. On the other end of the spectrum I see every little hut has a colour TV, every coolie has a mobile phone and a bright T-shirt, and every restaurant is overflowing with people.*

*In this scenario what more could a person want? Success is coming at earlier and earlier age, health care has taken giant leaps, home delivery of food is guaranteed in 15 minutes (“If we delay you don’t have to pay anything”), most children are earning much more money than their parents ever saw in their lives. Then why is it that we have no time to see the sunrise or sunset? Why are we entering doors all the time, when we need to be out in the fresh air? I have asked the questions, but I don’t have the answers. Do you?*

*-Ali*