SPIRITUAL ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Corporate organisations have recently started expending substantial resources on training and development of their future leaders. Though myriad aspects of leadership effectiveness are focused upon during their on-the-job grooming and in various professional and management courses, spiritual aspects of leadership development are often ignored or not considered relevant to the ground realities of the contemporary corporate world. In the following write-up, an effort has been made to highlight this point that various spiritual aspects of leadership development are known to play decisive role in grooming effective leaders in the contemporary organisations.
Keywords: Leadership, Leadership Development, Corporate Leadership.

Introduction

Are leaders born or do people opt to be leaders? The question has agitated the minds of academicians, leaders as well as of common man since time immemorial and there is no easy and commonly accepted answer to this question. Over the years, the concept of leadership has gained unparallel significance in management literature. Though pivotal role of a leader has never been ignored in military organisations; they are the profit-oriented, competition-driven corporate organisations and business schools, which have given a new meaning and significance to this concept. It is being argued that what the contemporary organizations need today, especially at the top and middle-level management, are leaders, not merely managers. The maxim of Peter Drucker and Warren Bennis, "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things," also points toward this thinking. Thus, management means efficiency in climbing the ladder of success; leadership determines whether the ladder is leaning against the right wall.

The Concept of Leadership

There are hundreds of definitions of leadership, though much of the variation in defining leadership is semantic. Some of the confusion about the precise nature of leadership arises from the fact that it has been referred as "a function, a characteristic, a combination of traits, a position, a relationship, a person or a group of persons, a process, an ability, an influence, a method of guidance, and even mere supervision; some also broaden the term to include any action a purported leader might take." In general terms, leadership is usually defined as the process of encouraging and helping others to work enthusiastically toward objectives. Robert Kreitner defines leadership as "a social influence process in which the leader seeks the voluntary participation of subordinates in an effort to reach organizational objectives. For the purpose of this paper, we shall consider leadership as "a spiritual relationship between the leader and the followers whereby the followers,

being inspired by their leader, are ready to carry out their willing and enthusiastic efforts towards attainment of common objectives."

Leadership and Followership

Without followers, no one can claim to be a leader, yet followers and the concept of followership have not received sizeable attention from leaders, professionals or academicians. In organisations, followers are expected to assume leadership positions in their respective areas of responsibilities. Everyone knows that one cannot become a leader without first becoming a true follower. Therefore, due significance must be accorded to the concept of followership.

Leadership in Corporate Organisations

Leaders usually perform the managerial functions of planning, organising, motivating, leading, coordinating, and controlling the behaviour of people. By virtue of their position in the organizational hierarchy, they have to interact with the environment in which their organisation is going to operate, make a vision about the future, decide about the mission of the organisation, define objectives, maintain goal direction, provide means for goal achievement and promote group cohesion.

Self-image and Real Worth

What others think of you, is their problem, not yours. But, if your selfimage is low then, in most of the cases, either it leads others to rate you low, or the tendency of other people rating you low forces you to adopt low self-image. Either situation is not desirable. As a human being, one's true worth reflects from what one does to self and/or to others. On the other extreme, a person might have a boastful self-image, but if his actions, habits and character do not provide credence to that image, he won't be able to leave his mark as a leader. In a nutshell, one can't assume the responsibilities of a leader, if one has been nursing low selfimage or an arrogant one. Therefore, before you motivate yourself to enhance your self-image through some of the quick fix methods, remember that self-image is not cosmetic reflection of your personality, your clothes, your bank balance or your apparent talk. Self-image is the ultimate product of our character and conduct and it cannot be changed from low to high just by reading some articles or books on leadership and personal improvement, by presenting the pleasant side of our personality, or by quoting the examples of great leaders.

Leadership Training or Leadership Grooming?

To start with, the whole concept of leadership training is a misconception; humans can't be trained to become leaders; however they may be groomed and developed. Now, question arises, "How can we groom leaders in organisations?" Experience guides us that this is considered as a fairly straight task; in order to groom future leaders, every big

organisation boasts of its own training units, staff colleges, etc, where future leaders are churned out. The second question arises, "Are these training units and staff colleges producing the leaders of requisite knowledge, motivation and character?" The answer to this question might be both yes and no. The reason being; that development of leaders is a much more complicated and baffling task than is usually accepted. To start with, it must be accepted by the top leadership that in the course of grooming leaders for future, they are dealing with human beings with their minds, feelings, emotions, and with their souls, the spiritual part of a person. Are organisations taking care of all these aspects of leadership grooming in staff courses? We all know that most of the corporate organisations have on the whole ignored these aspects of leadership development.

Spiritual Aspects of Leadership Development

Spiritual aspects of leadership development are no less important, but have received scant attention from writers, academia and leaders themselves. The chief reason being that religion or spirituality has been conventionally considered as irrelevant to grooming of leaders, especially the corporate leaders. However, historical records and contemporary studies across the cultures have confirmed the central place of morality and spirituality in leadership development. In this regard, following constructs provide a reliable platform to launch a meaningful leadership development programme:-

(a) *Aim of Life*: A leader's aim of life is considered to leave a profound effect on his success as well as happiness, and his acceptance as a leader. However, what aim of life should a leader have, is a mind-boggling question since no one can tell a prospective leader about his aim of life. Before we can further probe into this question, we must, first of all, be aware of the philosophy of a leader about life itself. Does he believe that he has come into this world by chance or by intelligent selection by some Supreme Force? Does he believe in life after death? Does he believe in the Day of Judgement? Straight-forward answers to these questions would largely determine what will be his aim of life. If you believe that you have been sent to this world with a purpose and that there would be an eternal life hereafter and that there would be a Day of Judgement, then your aim of life would be considerably different from a person who believes that his present life is a result of mere chance of mating of two dots of his parents.

(b) *Creativity*: No Muslim can deny that Allah (SWT) is the greatest Creator, who manifested each and every thing in this universe from the state of nothingness and who created man from clay. And Allah (SWT) has endowed the man this quality of creativity in abundance. Have you ever pondered about the origin of our thoughts, even the most bizarre ones? Did you create them or they just appeared from nowhere? Did you ever experience the joy of reaching the solution to a complex problem through some instant thoughts, which seemed to descend direct from the Heavens? A leader, who aligns himself with his aim of life, would experience abundance of creativity in his mind and soul. This creativity, first of all, would appear in the shape of mere thoughts, but later on, these

thoughts would be converted into plans of actions, which would further manifest in the form of new roads, buildings, schools, colleges, universities, airports, and so on. In essence, there is no end or limit on the power of creativity of true leaders.

(c) *Enthusiasm*: A true leader ought to be enthusiastic about what he thinks about and what he does. He must believe in what he intends to do himself and what he wants his people to do. Enthusiasm of a leader is usually contagious. Inspired leaders inspire others to follow the suit; they inject untiring spirit in their followers to perform at their optimum level. In order to transfer their enthusiasm, leaders should frequently talk to their people on formal as well as on informal occasions. They should talk about the capability and capacity of their people. They should talk about the future and how they are going to reach the visualised future with the active support of their followers.

(d) *Kindness*: Enthusiasm alone would not open the doors of success unless the leader is also kind-hearted, especially in dealing with the employees working at the lower levels. Kindness generates feelings of mutual liking, respect and caring attitudes between the leader and his followers. Feeling of kindness leaves its mark in multidimensional manner. About effects of kindness on human beings, Dr Wayne W Dyer says:-

"The positive effect of kindness on the immune system and on the increased production of serotonin in the brain has been proven in the research studies. Serotonin is a naturally occurring substance in the body that makes us feel more comfortable, peaceful and even blissful…Research has shown that a simple act of kindness directed toward another improves the functioning of the immune system and stimulates the production of serotonin in both the recipient of the kindness and the person extending the kindness. Even more amazing is the persons observing the act of kindness have similar beneficial results."

(e) *Love*: As opposed to the feelings of hate, love converts inner thoughts and feelings from discord and disharmony to well-being and harmony. We can imagine ourselves as vicegerent of the Supreme Being, who has given us the option of either obeying His commands and love others as He loves them; or of digressing from the right path. Dr Wayne W Dyer refers this phenomenon as will of man to function either from the material world socket or from the spiritual world socket, or from the both. He further adds that when we plug ourselves in the material world socket, we usually feel anxiety, disharmony, anguish and hopelessness in solving our problems. On the other hand, when we plug ourselves in the spiritual world socket, we immediately feel a sense of peace, tranquillity and relief from angst. Thus, feelings of love dissolve all negativity, not by fighting against it, but by injecting the energy of highest frequency into it.

(f) *Generosity and Gratefulness*: No one can deny that man comes to this world empty-handed and so shall he depart from here. Even then, we see most of the people amassing and hoarding wealth through hook or crook. It is perhaps due to our short-sightedness that we fail to see beyond what is visible to the naked eye. However, when we muse over the working of this universe, we see that it is being run on the Principle of Give and Take. Just consider the example of our ecosystem. Due to heat of sun, water of oceans, rivers, lakes

and streams converts into water vapours that move towards the upper atmosphere, where the temperature of these water vapours drops to a considerable extent, thus they are converted into clouds. Then, these clouds cause snowfall and rain on the earth. Due to heat in summers, snow melts and converts into water, which after channelling through different streams and rivers, ultimately reaches oceans. We can well imagine the situation, if any component of the ecosystem refuses to give, what it is supposed to give. The ultimate result would be that no component would be able to receive either, what it wants to receive. Same principle applies in human relationships. Mostly, we get what we give. If we give happiness to others, we receive the same in return. Similarly, if we give tension and hatred to others, we should not expect getting tranquillity and love. From my personal experience, I can vouch that I have seen people becoming rich by spending and by giving away their wealth to the needy. Being generous also means being grateful to Allah (SWT), who has enabled us to spend our wealth on others.

(g) *Connectedness:* The mankind was created from a single dot, declares Holy Qur'an. It means that all of us are connected with each other, irrespective of one's creed, colour, caste or status in the society. When we become aware that we are not alone, and that there are many people out there, who would come to our help, we feel ourselves stronger. Occasionally, tell yourself: "You are not alone in this world; you are not what you possess, what you do or what others think of you. Rather, you are connected with Allah (SWT) and with the entire human race through a common heritage. Thus, you have an unlimited inventory of resources available to you for problem resolution."

Seven Vices of a Corporate Leader
Arrogance

Arrogance and know-it-all mindset makes a person blind and deaf, not in physical sense but in virtual sense. An arrogant person finds it unnecessary to see the things and events from others' point of view and often considers it useless to listen to the suggestions of people around him. In the process, he actually denies his own access to valuable information, facts or recommendations – not good omens for eventual success of a leader. Therefore, a corporate leader must always endeavour to save his soul from this disease.

Backbiting

In our society, backbiting has attained the stature of our national pastime, therefore, all types of people, whether educated or uneducated, men or women, elder or youth, can be noticed indulging in this self-destructive hobby. It is seen that we usually backbite about those people, who have either some physical / psychological handicap, or who invoke feelings of jealousy in us due to their status in the society, or who are simply considered to be a laughing stock. Neither of the above-stated premises is a valid reason for contracting this vice. In the long run, this vice also makes one unhappy and discontented with one's own circumstances.

Boasting

Boasting is another spiritual disease which attacks mostly, when a person attains a relatively senior position in the organisational and / or societal hierarchy. In the history of mankind, many promising leaders are known to be wasted due to their inclination to boasting their achievements and image out of proportion. In initial stages of this deadly disease, the victim might be aware of his true value, but with the passage of time, he starts believing in his own concocted stories of Greatness. A true leader must be watchful of such tendencies from the very beginning, because they would be easier to be kept in check there and then. However, if a leader starts enjoying his boastful image, he would soon become blind of his surrounding, his peoples' genuine needs, and of their worthy suggestions.

Miserliness / Extravagance

Being miser or extravagant in one's behaviour is tantamount to losing one's balance in the race of life. While a miser voluntarily makes himself, his family and his organisation poorer than they actually are; an extravagant person digs his own grave by wasting the precious resources on useless things and projects. Therefore, a real corporate leader must adopt a middle path – the balanced one.

Egoism

Ego means self-image, awareness of self-worth or opinion of oneself. However, when a person becomes egoist, all of his faculties of hearing, sight, speech, even thinking are overtaken by one's own judgement. Such a person becomes blind and deaf of his surroundings and tends to ignore the pleas of his juniors and counsel or suggestions of his colleagues. If such a person happens to occupy a leadership position, he becomes the biggest liability of his organisation.

Hopelessness

Nothing is more damaging for a society or for an organisation to be led by a leader, who loses hope due to adverse circumstances. If a leader becomes hopeless, there is no hope left among people working in a corporate setup. Without hope, nothing happens and nobody moves. Therefore, a true leader must make utmost endeavours to save him from this vice.

Ridiculing / Slandering

Ridiculing and slandering behaviour does not match with the dignity of a leader. A person, who is habitual of ridiculing and degrading other people, seldom gets their cooperation, hard work or respect. Rather, such a person is hated by those, who become victim of his curt behaviour. If a leader loses his dignity and respect, he in fact loses his right to lead.

Conclusion

Are leaders born or do people opt to be leaders, has been a burning question in all ages. Leaders usually perform the managerial functions of planning, organising, motivating, leading, coordinating, and controlling the behaviour of people. No amount of leadership training at Staff Colleges, appointments at key posts, or attendance of myriad management and leadership courses can create leaders, though these experiences provide important inputs and impetus towards preparing people for the leadership roles. In short, an individual's own commitment, organisational environment, leadership development by the organisation, and the spiritual aspects of leadership development are known to determine whether one would become leader of the people or not. Now, question arises, "How can we groom leaders in organisations?" Organisations usually tend to prepare their future leaders in their training units / staff colleges or through on the job development, where various aspects of leadership development are taken care of. However, spiritual aspects of leaders' character are mostly ignored. The chief reason being that religion or spirituality has been conventionally considered as irrelevant to the process of leadership development, especially in the corporate setup. In the author's viewpoint, spiritual aspects of leadership development include aim(s) of life, creativity, enthusiasm, kindness, love for people, connectedness, generosity and gratefulness of leaders. Out of these spiritual aspects, seven virtues of leaders emerge, which include vision / futurism, contemplation / wisdom, courage, emotional intelligence, trust, justice, and solitude / service. On the other side, there are seven vices, which prevent a person from becoming a leader, which include arrogance, backbiting, boasting, miserliness / extravagance, egoism, hopelessness, and ridiculing / slandering.

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