



# Management Ideas

**FOR STILL BETTER**

**RESULTS**

**RELATIONS**

**REPUTATION**

**RENEWAL**

a monthly newsletter to key executive-leaders on practices, possibilities and ideas generally for stepped up performance  
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## Season's Greetings

### 3812 FROM THE EDITOR'S DIARY

#### CORPORATE GIVING

Next to the pursuit of excellence, encouragement of excellence, suggested the British novelist, William Thackeray.

The same can probably be said about serving the disadvantaged.

A few in our country have taken it as a full time vocation. May be, we can serve the disadvantaged through these few.

Ideally, a team of us should make a visit, see for ourselves what is being done and what specific assistance will strengthen their hands and then offer whatever we can do.

A second best is to offer a donation on the Founder's Day or some such occasion.

My guess is that someone has compiled a list of such NGSs - on a "personally" researched basis, since there are NGOs and NGOs.

That list would include the following:

**Amar Seva Sangam**, Ayikudi, 627 852.

(The founder and the moving spirit is a paraplegic. The centre is serving the cause of the disabled children since 1981. The WEEK chose the founder S. Ramakrishnan as the Man of the Year, some years back.)

**Karuna Trust, B. R. Hills Karnataka**

(The founder and the moving spirit is a well-qualified doctor. The centre is serving the total cause of a tribal population. The area was rife with leprosy but no longer. A few other doctors and doctor couples have followed Dr. Sudarsan's example. Dr. H. R. Sudarsan, the founder, was awarded the Alternate-Nobel Prize a few years back.)

We have all heard children playing a game. One child asks another: How can you eat an elephant. The other replies: Bit by bit!

How can you help the country's disadvantaged? Bit by bit. We have little oases

in the country and let us help these oases expand. This IS in our hands.

### A 'NEW YEAR' GIFT

The stakeholders welcome a greeting as also a tangible token of greeting. One such token can be a book. One book can be Spiritual Culture in the Corporate Drama. (A recent review of this book appears elsewhere in this issue of Management Ideas.)

Companies like Excel Industries, Tata Chemicals, Godrej, Shroff Technical Services, Clariant, and Pest Control of India have ordered sets of one hundred copies of this book to be distributed to their executives, their customers and the relevant public.

*(Details can be had from Select Books, 3E1 Court Chambers, New Marine Lines, Bombay 400 020:Fax:022/200 0446).*

### 3813 CEO (AP) SPEAKING

*While acknowledging the Business Person of the Year Award the other day, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu Chief Minister Andhra Pradesh said:*

"Frankly I must admit that I was surprised at being chosen for the award. The only reason that I can think for my selection is, perhaps, that I represent the view that the business of government is not to be in business. Rather, government's business is to ensure an environment that promotes the interests of all stakeholders, particularly the poor. Growth is of paramount importance, but equally, if not more important, is distributive justice. Growth without equity can be a cause for social disharmony. Therefore, I favour growth with equity, distributive justice and empowerment. I advocate the concept of SMART government that is Simple, Moral, Accountable, Responsive and Transparent.

It has been said that there have never been any great men in the world, only ordinary men who took on great challenges. We are confronted today with many challenges. Greatness lies in transforming every challenge into an opportunity. History shows that nothing great was ever achieved to benefit from this transition.

We are about to enter a new millennium that poses new challenges. A millennium that

promises to usher in the Information Age, and with it, a 'Knowledge Society'. India is uniquely poised to benefit from this transition.

We are a highly talented people. Look at Amartya Sen or for that matter scores of Indians who have made their mark internationally. Though we find many examples of individual excellence, yet, as a country, we have somehow gone astray. We have failed to realise our full potential. I think that lack of clear vision has been a major cause for this drift. It is high time for us to reorient ourselves towards achieving excellence in the future. The future will not be a mere evolution from the present. Rather, the future will witness breaks and discontinuities. Knowledge will be the critical determinant of success or failure. According to the president of Mitsubishi, his country's success in the 1980's was dependent on the superior financial resources of Mitsubishi Bank. In the 1990s, it was dependent on the superior quality of Mitsubishi manufacturing, and in the 21st century, it will be based on the company's superior research and development capabilities.

Knowledge and its management are rapidly becoming major issues in a competitive world. The global explosion of knowledge holds the prospect of widening disparities in an already unequal world. I would like to quote from the World Development Report for 1998 which is significantly titled 'knowledge for Development'. Reflecting on which countries will stand out in the first quarter of the 21st century, it says, "It will surely be those that have mastered the acquisition of knowledge, increased the capacity to absorb it, and improved the means of communication for all its citizens".

In a world where the only permanent feature will be change, we will have to be agile and fleet-footed. We will have to rise above a petty and narrow mindset to focus on achieving excellence. **It is for this reason that I have stopped talking politics except during elections.** (Emphasis added).

The political process has an important role in a vibrant democratic society. However, politics should not overshadow economic issues. We must define a shared vision for ourselves, and irrespective of political affiliation, work as a

nation with single-minded devotion to achieve our goals. We hardly have any time to lose.

I have embarked on an exercise to determine a long-term vision for my state. The Vision 2020 exercise is aimed at defining clear agenda for the future, and working out the detailed modalities for its realization. Modernising governance, ensuring peoples' participation, providing a better life for the poor, and laying strong foundations for a knowledge society are key elements of the vision. Greater social investment coupled with good governance is the surest means of achieving the vision.

I recognise that weak infrastructure and scarce and inadequate social services are important barriers to sustained rapid growth in any state. I am therefore trying to emphasise on literacy, improved access to healthcare, empowerment of women and weaker sections, development of backward areas and creation of safety nets. Information technology can help to constantly monitor and continuously respond to emerging situations, putting to rest the misconception that information technology helps only the rich and the educated.

As the Businessperson of the Year I would be failing in my duty, if I do not invite you to participate in our vision. You will find in Andhra Pradesh a government that is friendly and helpful. A government that is keen to do away with red tape and complex procedure.

I am going back convinced that we can do it; India can do it."

*We pray for his continued success. He may serve as the multiplier model for our country.*

*When pointed out, a VIP said: Singapore is a small country. I hope he will not say now: Andhra Pradesh is a small state!*

### **3814 Y2K**

*Y2K is the challenge we will face in about 12 months, when computers read the two-digit year "00" as 1900.*

*Bob Bennet, who is chairman of the Senate Special Committee on the Year 2000 Technology Problem, argues that CEOs cannot afford to leave Y2K to the "Techies" and explains this in a recent number of Wall Street Journal.*

The question that accompany Y2K awareness fit a predictable pattern. How bad will it be? Which systems are most at risk? How much will it cost? And how did we get in this mess in the first place? Perhaps because we've all learned to expect miracles in today's high-tech world, there is also a combined sense of denial and faith: SURELY THE TECHIES WILL BE ABLE TO FIX THIS IN TIME. IT CAN'T BE THAT BIG OF A DEAL.

Although I've been immersed in this issue for more than a year now, I don't know how bad it will be in specific terms, and nobody does we're all guessing. There is no precedent for a problem of this kind to give us any historical benchmarks.

I can tell you which systems appear to be the most vulnerable right now, but I can't predict with any certainty what's going to happen to those systems in the 12 months we still have left. Some that appear to be high-risk today may turn out to be the easiest to fix. John Koskinen, the president's Y2K czar, believes that this is the case with respect to the Federal Aviation Administration, once considered the federal agency in the most Y2K trouble. But others that seem to be fine may fail.

I also don't know what it is going to cost. In all this uncertainty, however, there are some things I do know:

### **THE PROBLEM IS GLOBAL**

That means that any business, government agency, or other organization that has international operations must pay attention to what Y2K will do outside the U.S. I once was president of a very small operation-less than \$5 million a year-that bought a key component of its product in Asia. If I were running that company today, my Y2K concerns would center not only on my own systems but also on questions as fundamental as whether I'd be able to get a dial tone in the country where those components were manufactured.

**THE GREATEST AMOUNT OF TIME CONNECTED WITH SOLVING THIS PROBLEM IS TIED UP IN TESTING.** I recently visited a power plant in Southern California, where a very efficient and well-informed chief information officer laid out her utility's program for achieving Y2K compliance. On the timeline she had drawn up, she had reserved 15% of

the time for remediation of the problem and 70% for testing to be sure the fixes really worked. Those who have already gone through some degree of Y2K remediation confirm that mix is about right. Anyone who is planning to get this taken care of in the last quarter of 1999, with just one month or two of testing, is kidding himself.

- **YOU CAN HAVE ALL YOUR COMPUTERS AND SYSTEMS UNDER CONTROL AND STILL GET HURT.** It's my current guess, for example, that the big manufacturing firms will fight their way through their mission critical systems and get their Internal problems solved. But somewhere in the supply chain, feeding them raw material for their products, is likely to be a small firm that manufactures a key component and has not paid attention to its Y2K problems. "For want of a nail a shoe was lost" begins the old proverb; in this day of just-in-time inventory, it is still an apt one.
- **SOME SYSTEMS WON'T WORK EVEN AFTER BEING "REMIEDIATED."** The "hits" will be random and unpredictable. The Defense Department is discovering this. Some of the systems the Pentagon has certified as compliant turn out not to be after further testing. There is no way to be completely sure until the time actually comes.

When you put all these "knowns" together and weigh them against the unknowns, one thing becomes clear: Preparing for and meeting the Y2K challenge is a top management issue. We cannot "leave it to the techies," as many seem willing to do.

Which are the mission-critical systems that we absolutely cannot allow to fail? How soon should we start looking for alternatives if key suppliers appear to be lagging? What contingency plans need to be drawn up? Confronting key questions like these is not in the job description of the chief information officer. These are the kinds of things we pay chief executive officers to address.

It is clear from the testimony I have heard and the evidence my committee staff has accumulated that Y2K will not be "solved" by New Year's Eve 1999. This means that CEOs will have to perform triage- focus on what is critical to sustain the life of the firm, ruthlessly

stop action on the less critical activity and lay out realistic contingency plans, starting no later than the last quarter of 1998-that is, now.

Good CEOs have already discovered this truth; foolish ones have turned the problem over to their CIOs and moved on to other issues that are "more pressing." Nothing is more pressing than a company's survival, and if Y2K questions are not properly answered, survival will be jeopardized.

As I talk this way around the country and in the Congress, I am sometimes accused of being an alarmist. I respond by saying that I am trying to be Paul Revere without being Chicken Little. Like the British in 1775, the problem is coming. However, the sky has not yet started to fall. Whether it does depends on how many, and how soon, CEOs, and other top managers address the real questions and prove they are worthy of the corner offices they occupy.

### **3815 MOTIVATING PERSONNEL**

*Inspiring workers to peak performance is a continuing challenge. Some of our ideas are at work and some not. A reminder can activate the dormant ones. The following survey-based article is one such reminder.*

The two most valuable assets any business has are its employees and its customers. The more sophisticated an organization becomes, the more demanding both employees and customers become.

Most managers recognize an organization must have a strong commitment from its employees if it is ever to have loyal, committed customers. Managers also realize the significant effect a lack of employee commitment has on the bottom line of any organization.

The Public Agenda Foundation in New York conducted an employee study that revealed:

- Less than one out of every four employees say they are currently working at full potential.
- One-half said they do not put effort into their job over and above what is required to keep their job.
- 75% said they were capable of being more effective than they were being.

- Almost 60% of Americans on the job believe they don't work as hard as they used to.

Although big businesses can afford to absorb a few "floaters" among its work force who are not motivated to carry their loads, a small company can scarcely survive if each employee is not pulling his weight at optimum productivity.

Leadership is the key, according to management consultant and author Warren Bennis.

"Management is getting people to do what needs to be done," he said. "Leadership is getting people to want to do what needs to be done."

If so, what can managers do differently to inspire greater interest and productivity among employees?

In January, **Fortune** referred to a Gallup survey of 55,000 workers. The survey attempted to match employee attitudes with company results. It found that these four combined attitudes correlate strongly with higher profits:

- Workers feel they are given opportunity to do what they do best every day.
- They believe their opinions count.
- They sense that their fellow workers are committed to quality.
- They've made a direct connection between their work and the company's mission.

In addition to attitudes, initiative is a must.

Initiative is about working in the white space on job description. It's doing the work that is not spelled out in the job description but needs to be done and is only accomplished when someone steps forward and tackles it.

There is no simple prescription for getting your employees to the point where they take initiative and adopt these attitudes as their own. However, there are a few steps managers can take to affect employees' attitudes about their work:

- Trust your employees.
- Praise employees for achievements on the job.

- Listen to them and ask for their opinions.
- Recognize employees for their ideas. Give credit where credit is due.
- Provide clear direction as to where the organization is going with clear goals and performance measures.
- Provide adequate training for employees to do their assigned jobs.
- Clearly define work processes.
- Clearly delegate responsibility.
- Encourage employees by giving them feedback, resources and open, honest communication.

When managers change their attitudes about employee relations, skepticism is likely to follow. Employees typically question the motives of leadership until leaders prove their consistent support. It takes time for the necessary trust to build and for employees to feel valued.

Building strong, positive employee relations and getting the most out of your employees can be challenging, but extremely rewarding.

*Source : Glen Bounds in Dallas Business Journal*

### **3816 A BOOK REVIEW**

Spiritual Culture in the Corporate Drama by N.H. Athreya (Vijay Foundation, Mysore)

*(Copies can be had at Rs.129 per copy from the sole distributors, namely, Select Books 3E1 Court Chambers, New Marine Lines, Bombay 400 020)*

Set in poetic style, in an easy-to-read format, the author — in this book — commends to corporate personnel two reality-based cultures — the stage culture and the spiritual culture. With these cultures, he deduces that role excellence becomes joy and corporate well-being a certainty. The joy of leadership, the author tries to drive home, is to accept it "as a responsibility," and "enjoy the responsibility while it lasts." A few more ideas will impress everyone: "Nothing but the best from me. Nothing but the best for the customer." "Respect each and every role. Respect each and every role holder." The urgent need, as the author tries

to explain, is "to make spiritual culture an integral part of the work place." Something which is missing in these times. We think, as the author says, that the spiritual is for the tired, the retired, and the recluse, and not for one in the corporate work place. However, a few of us have already begun to explore, like this author, possibilities of not merely talking in terms of spirituality in the workplace but also making bold experiments in this regard. This is an interesting, practical book not just for those in the corporate world, but also for those who are aspiring to learn the best that the world can offer.

*Source: Swagat, August 98.*

### **3817 NATAPROBU**

The acronym is more for self-respect. It stands for the National Association of Professional Bureaucrats and is devoted to paper-shufflers everywhere "who by their steadfast dedication to the principles of dynamic inactivity, have kept things from happening, and thereby prevented mistakes from being made". We were of course quite unaware of this unique Washington institution until we saw a recent issue of the Wall Street Journal.

The high priest of NATAPROBU is James Boren, a former US State Department official and now a Washington consultant, who is sworn to the ideal of according to 'creative bureaucracy' its rightful recognition and rank in human affairs. (Don't frown on the word "creative". Bureaucracy does create inactivity!) And Boren's frequent advice could pass for its motto: "When in charge, ponder. When in trouble, delegate. When in doubt, mumble. Then refer it to a committee for review".

NATAPROBU was started in 1968. But after barely three years of 'nothing happening', things have started happening. Boren is worried. "It's a contradiction of the original commitment", he says.

Of course, nothing would have happened but for the "Order of the Bird". This is an award, a metal statue of an "unfeathered, pot-bellied bird", presented by NATAPROBU to those "who exhibit excellence in bureaucratic excess". The first winner was an US Internal Revenue official for his beautiful, lengthy memorandum on the length and look of

employees' sideburns. But things are looking bad. No one wants to get the bird. Not even Spiro Agnew, the US Vice-President who was nominated winner at NATAPROBU's 1969 awards banquet (red tape delayed it to December 1970) for his "alliterative achievements in communications". Mr. Agnew declined the honour. In fact, bureaucrats have found a way of getting even with Boren. As soon as a nomination is made, they not only decline the award but embarrass the NATAPROBU founder by letting a job get done quickly. Take, for instance, the case of a handicapped Korean War veteran. The Social Security Administration cited regulations to deny him a total-disability rating even though he had suffered a third heart attack. When Boren heard about it, he sent a press release nominating the officials involved for the Order of the Bird, "in recognition of constant devotion to punctilious and amblyopic interpretation of Social Security rules". But the officials fought shy of personal recognition and granted the veteran the rating after all.

Or, take the case of the Denver inventor. Early this year, the Federal Aviation Administration threatened to fine him for failure to get FAA clearance before flying his tethered, home-made helicopter six inches off the ground. But when Boren wired congratulations and a nomination (also released to the press), the local FAA office passed the buck to Washington, who bucked it back, and it dropped the case.

Then last summer the US Congress decided to hear him. Boren was a star witness at a hearing by a House Public Works Subcommittee into ways to reduce government red tape. Boren was eloquent in his opposition: "To deny dedicated finger tapper an adequate supply of paper on which to record the results of his prodigious ponderings is to deny him the tools of creative nonresponsiveness". If you wish to control government bureaucracy, Boren suggested, create another bureaucracy. It could be called the Department of Adjusted Procedures and Orchestrated Clearances, or DAPOC. There could also be subagencies like Office of Orderly Overruns, Permeations and Statistics (OOPS) and Governmental Linguistic Obtusity Bureau (GLOB)

NATAPROBU has 500 members now. If you wish to join, you could, provided you paid the

\$ 10 membership fee. All new members get a special kit: it includes a bureaucrat's pencil with erasers at both ends.

*Or better still, we could do with a Jim Boren in India itself, adds the Editor.*

*Source: Science Today (January 1972).*

### 3818 "FIRING" AND HEART ATTACK

*Heart attacks need not be fatal. But they can be. These can be induced by what happens on the job. One is stress and the resulting tendency to fire. Here are the findings of a recent study.*

Santa Fe, N.M.- Feel bad for folks who get fired? Maybe you should pity those who do the firing.

A new study released yesterday found that managers run double their usual risk of a heart attack during the week after they give someone the axe.

The research offers some of the strongest evidence yet that even brief spurts of on-the-job stress can be bad for the heart.

The study, conducted at 45 hospitals across the United States, attempted to see whether anything that happened at work in the days before people's heart attacks might have contributed to their health problems.

"The strongest effect was for working under a high-pressure deadline and having to fire someone," said Dr. Murray A. Mittleman of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston.

Most people probably already suspect that bad things at work might be hard on the heart. But there has been virtually no research to prove that a specific stressful incident can actually trigger a heart attack.

Some studies have suggested that chronic work stress - especially pressures that are beyond employees' direct control - contribute to heart disease. However, many experts are skeptical about how important this kind of stress really is, since just about everybody who works for a living has at least some daily job stress.

"What's different about this study is trying to individualize discrete episodes of stress, instead of having people simply saying, 'I'm stressed,'" said Dr. Philip Greenland of Northwestern University, who was not involved in the study.

Mittleman presented his findings at an epidemiology meeting sponsored by the American Heart Association.

Between 1989 and 1994, doctors interviewed 791 working people who had just undergone heart attacks about what they had done recently. The researchers concluded that **firing someone or having a high-stakes deadline doubled the usual risk of a heart attack during the following week.**

Only two study participants had been recently fired - too few to suggest whether this too may trigger heart attacks - although Mittleman believes it probably does.

"The question is, what do we do about this?" Mittleman said.

The best advice, he said, is getting exercise, watching your weight, your cholesterol and your blood pressure, and not smoking.

For a healthy 50-year-old man, or a healthy 60-year-old woman, the risk of a heart attack in any given hour without any trigger is about one in a million. Even in a typical heart disease patient, the ordinary risk is one in 100,000.

*Source: Democrat & Chronicle*

### 3819 FROM THE PROBLEM SOLVER'S DIARY

#### The Learning Hour

"The senior people say they are very busy. They also say they cannot spare the junior people either. We are not able to have any training activities, either within the company or outside."

This in brief is the problem posed by the Chief of HRD of a Bombay company.

He admitted that the company has a good conference room, a facility that is used only occasionally. He also agreed that the bosses would not mind the interested to be away from work for a couple of hours a month or even a

week. He further agreed that Top Management is very alive to developmental needs and urgency.

A Learning Hour was what was considered desirable and feasible. Without prejudice to other priorities, the conference room will be used for this activity. Every day there will be a 90 minutes learning "hour". Personnel can take permission from their superiors and attend. There will be no formalities like "tea and biscuits". The "hour" will be an

undisturbed one, however. Since work is part of life, the focus will be on Good Life. The specific topics will be ones that are of interest to those present.

This way learning becomes a self-chosen activity, a continuing activity, an open-to-everyone activity.

The idea is to engender a learning culture, a learning atmosphere and a learning ritual (ritual in the best sense of the term.)

### 3820 LAUGHING MATTER?



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