

A POEM TO REMEMBER

Where the mind is without fear
and the head is held high,
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken
up into fragments by narrow domestic
walls;

Where words come out from the
dipth of truth;
Where thinking is
stretches its arms to embrace
perceptions;

Where the clear stream of reason
has not lost its way into the
drear, desert sand of dogmatic habit;
Where the mind is led forward
by the intellect's commanding
single and action -

into that heaven of freedom,
my Father,
let my country awake.

Santiniketan
Rabindranath Tagore

TAGORE Indian Nobel Laureate, (1861-1941)

THE EFFECTIVE EXECUTIVE

BY

PETER DRUCKER

There are essentially five such practices - five such habits of the mind that have to be acquired to be an effective executive.

1. Effective executives know where their time goes. They work systematically at managing the little of their time that can be brought under their control.
2. Effective executives focus on outward contribution. They gear their efforts to results rather than to work. They start out with the question, 'What results are expected on me?' rather than with the work to be done, let alone with its techniques and tools.
3. Effective executives build on strengths - their own strengths, the strengths of their superiors, colleagues, and subordinates; and on the strengths in the situation, that is on what they can do. They do not build on weakness. They do not start out with the things they can't do.
4. Effective executives concentrate on the few major areas where superior performance produces outstanding results. They force themselves to set priorities and stay with their priority decisions. They know that they have no choice but to do first things first and second things not at all. The alternative is to get nothing done.
5. Effective executives finally make effective decisions. They know that this is, above all, a matter of system - of the steps in the right sequence. They know that an effective decision is always a judgment, based on 'dissenting opinions' rather than on 'consensus on the facts', 'And they know that to make many decisions fast means to make the wrong decisions. What I need is the right strategy rather than razzle dazzle tactics.

These are the elements of executive effectiveness.

What Makes an Effective Executive

Great managers may be charismatic or dull, generous or tightfisted, visionary or numbers oriented. But every effective executive follows eight simple practices.

by Peter F. Drucker

An effective executive does *not* need to be a leader in the sense that the term is now most commonly used. Harry Truman did not have one ounce of charisma, for example, yet he was among the most effective chief executives in U.S. history. Similarly, some of the best business and nonprofit CEOs I've worked with over a 65-year consulting career were not stereotypical leaders. They were all over the map in terms of their personalities, attitudes, values, strengths, and weaknesses. They ranged from extroverted to nearly reclusive, from easygoing to controlling, from generous to parsimonious.

What made them all effective is that they followed the same eight practices:

- They asked, "What needs to be done?"
- They asked, "What is right for the enterprise?"
- They developed action plans.
- They took responsibility for decisions.
- They took responsibility for communicating.
- They were focused on opportunities rather than problems.
- They ran productive meetings.
- They thought and said "we" rather than "I."

The first two practices gave them the knowledge they needed. The next four helped them convert this knowledge into effective action. The last two ensured that the whole organization felt responsible and accountable.

Get the Knowledge You Need

The first practice is to ask what needs to be done. Note that the question is not "What do I want to do?" Asking what has to be done, and taking the question seriously, is crucial for managerial success. Failure to ask this question will render even the ablest executive ineffectual.

Asking what has to be done, and taking the question seriously, is crucial for managerial success.

When Truman became president in 1945, he knew exactly what he wanted to do: complete the economic and social reforms of Roosevelt's New Deal, which had been deferred by World War II. As soon as he asked what needed to be done, though, Truman realized that foreign affairs had absolute priority. He organized his working day so that it began with tutorials on foreign policy by the secretaries of state and defense. As a result, he became the most effective president in foreign affairs the United States has ever known. He contained Communism in both Europe and Asia and, with the Marshall Plan, triggered 50 years of worldwide economic growth.

Similarly, Jack Welch realized that what needed to be done at General Electric when he took over as chief executive was not the overseas expansion he wanted to launch. It was getting rid of GE businesses that, no matter how profitable, could not be number one or number two in their industries.

The answer to the question "What needs to be done?" almost always contains more than one urgent task. But effective executives do not splinter themselves. They concentrate on one task if at all possible. If they are among those people—a sizable minority—who work best with a change of pace in their working day, they pick two tasks. I have never encountered an executive who remains effective while tackling more than two tasks at a time. Hence, after asking what needs to be done, the effective executive sets priorities and sticks to them. For a CEO, the priority task might be redefining the company's mission. For a unit head, it might be redefining the unit's relationship with headquarters. Other tasks, no matter how important or appealing, are postponed. However, after completing the original top-priority task, the executive resets priorities rather than moving on to number two from the original list. He asks, "What must be done now?" This generally results in new and different priorities.

To refer again to America's best-known CEO: Every five years, according to his autobiography, Jack Welch asked himself, "What needs to be done *now*?" And every time, he came up with a new and different priority.

But Welch also thought through another issue before deciding where to concentrate his efforts for the next five years. He asked himself which of the two or three tasks at the top of the list he himself was best suited to undertake. Then he concentrated on that task; the others he delegated. Effective executives try to focus on jobs they'll do especially well. They know that enterprises perform if top management performs—and don't if it doesn't.

Effective executives' second practice—fully as important as the first—is to ask, "Is this the right thing for the enterprise?" They do not ask if it's right for the owners, the stock price, the employees, or the executives. Of course they know that shareholders, employees, and executives are important constituencies who have to support a decision, or at least acquiesce in it, if the choice is to be effective. They know that the share price is important not only for the shareholders but also for the enterprise, since the price/earnings ratio sets the cost of capital. But they also know that a decision that isn't right for the enterprise will ultimately not be right for any of the stakeholders.

This second practice is especially important for executives at family owned or family run businesses—the majority of businesses in every country—particularly when they're making decisions about people. In the successful family company, a relative is promoted only if he

or she is measurably superior to all nonrelatives on the same level. At DuPont, for instance, all top managers (except the controller and lawyer) were family members in the early years when the firm was run as a family business. All male descendants of the founders were entitled to entry-level jobs at the company. Beyond the entrance level, a family member got a promotion only if a panel composed primarily of nonfamily managers judged the person to be superior in ability and performance to all other employees at the same level. The same rule was observed for a century in the highly successful British family business J. Lyons & Company (now part of a major conglomerate) when it dominated the British food-service and hotel industries.

Asking "What is right for the enterprise?" does not guarantee that the right decision will be made. Even the most brilliant executive is human and thus prone to mistakes and prejudices. But failure to ask the question virtually guarantees the *wrong* decision.

Write an Action Plan

Executives are doers; they execute. Knowledge is useless to executives until it has been translated into deeds. But before springing into action, the executive needs to plan his course. He needs to think about desired results, probable restraints, future revisions, check-in points, and implications for how he'll spend his time.

First, the executive defines desired results by asking: "What contributions should the enterprise expect from me over the next 18 months to two years? What results will I commit to? With what deadlines?" Then he considers the restraints on action: "Is this course of action ethical? Is it acceptable within the organization? Is it legal? Is it compatible with the mission, values, and policies of the organization?" Affirmative answers don't guarantee that the action will be effective. But violating these restraints is certain to make it both wrong and ineffectual.

The action plan is a statement of intentions rather than a commitment. It must not become a straitjacket. It should be revised often, because every success creates new opportunities. So does every failure. The same is true for changes in the business environment, in the market, and especially in people within the enterprise—all these changes demand that the plan be revised. A written plan should anticipate the need for flexibility.

In addition, the action plan needs to create a system for checking the results against the expectations. Effective executives usually build two such checks into their action plans. The first check comes halfway through the plan's time period; for example, at nine months. The second occurs at the end, before the next action plan is drawn up.

Finally, the action plan has to become the basis for the executive's time management. Time is an executive's scarcest and most precious resource. And organizations—whether government agencies, businesses, or nonprofits—are inherently time wasters. The action plan will prove useless unless it's allowed to determine how the executive spends his or her time.

Napoleon allegedly said that no successful battle ever followed its plan. Yet Napoleon also planned every one of his battles, far more meticulously than any earlier general had done. Without an action plan, the executive becomes a prisoner of events. And without check-ins to reexamine the plan as events unfold, the executive has no way of knowing which events really matter and which are only noise.

Act

When they translate plans into action, executives need to pay particular attention to decision making, communication, opportunities (as opposed to problems), and meetings. I'll consider these one at a time.

Take responsibility for decisions. A decision has not been made until people know:

- the name of the person accountable for carrying it out;
- the deadline;
- the names of the people who will be affected by the decision and therefore have to know about, understand, and approve it—or at least not be strongly opposed to it—and
- the names of the people who have to be informed of the decision, even if they are not directly affected by it.

An extraordinary number of organizational decisions run into trouble because these bases aren't covered. One of my clients, 30 years ago, lost its leadership position in the fast-growing Japanese market because the company, after deciding to enter into a joint venture with a new Japanese partner, never made clear who was to inform the purchasing agents that the partner defined its specifications in meters and kilograms rather than feet and pounds—and nobody ever did relay that information.

It's just as important to review decisions periodically—at a time that's been agreed on in advance—as it is to make them carefully in the first place. That way, a poor decision can be corrected before it does real damage. These reviews can cover anything from the results to the assumptions underlying the decision.

Such a review is especially important for the most crucial and most difficult of all decisions, the ones about hiring or promoting people. Studies of decisions about people show that only one-third of such choices turn out to be truly successful. One-third are likely to be draws—neither successes nor outright failures. And one-third are failures, pure and simple. Effective executives know this and check up (six to nine months later) on the results of their people decisions. If they find that a decision has not had the desired results, they don't conclude that the person has not performed. They conclude, instead, that they themselves made a mistake. In a well-managed enterprise, it is understood that people who fail in a new job, especially after a promotion, may not be the ones to blame.

Executives also owe it to the organization and to their fellow workers not to tolerate nonperforming individuals in important jobs. It may not be the employees' fault that they are underperforming, but even so, they have to be removed. People who have failed in a new job should be given the choice to go back to a job at their former level and salary. This option is rarely exercised; such people, as a rule, leave voluntarily, at least when their employers are U.S. firms. But the very existence of the option can have a powerful effect, encouraging people to leave safe, comfortable jobs and take risky new assignments. The organization's performance depends on employees' willingness to take such chances.

Executives owe it to the organization and their fellow workers not to tolerate nonperforming people in important jobs.

A systematic decision review can be a powerful tool for self-development, too. Checking the results of a decision against its expectations shows executives what their strengths are, where they need to improve, and where they lack knowledge or information. It shows them their biases. Very often it shows them that their decisions didn't produce results because they didn't put the right people on the job. Allocating the best people to the right positions is a crucial, tough job that many executives slight, in part because the best people are already too busy. Systematic decision review also shows executives their own weaknesses, particularly the areas in which they are simply incompetent. In these areas, smart executives don't make decisions or take actions. They delegate. Everyone has such areas; there's no such thing as a universal executive genius.

In areas where they are simply incompetent, smart executives don't make decisions or take actions. They delegate. Everyone has such areas.

Most discussions of decision making assume that only senior executives make decisions or that only senior executives' decisions matter. This is a dangerous mistake. Decisions are made at every level of the organization, beginning with individual professional contributors and frontline supervisors. These apparently low-level decisions are extremely important in a knowledge-based organization. Knowledge workers are supposed to know more about their areas of specialization—for example, tax accounting—than anybody else, so their decisions are likely to have an impact throughout the company. Making good decisions is a crucial skill at every level. It needs to be taught explicitly to everyone in organizations that are based on knowledge.

Take responsibility for communicating. Effective executives make sure that both their action plans and their information needs are understood. Specifically, this means that they share their plans with and ask for comments from all their colleagues—superiors, subordinates, and peers. At the same time, they let each person know what information they'll need to get the job done. The information flow from subordinate to boss is usually what gets the most attention. But executives need to pay equal attention to peers' and superiors' information needs.

We all know, thanks to Chester Barnard's 1938 classic *The Functions of the Executive*, that organizations are held together by information rather than by ownership or command. Still, far too many executives behave as if information and its flow were the job of the information specialist—for example, the accountant. As a result, they get an enormous amount of data they do not need and cannot use, but little of the information they do need. The best way around this problem is for each executive to identify the information he needs, ask for it, and keep pushing until he gets it.

Focus on opportunities. Good executives focus on opportunities rather than problems. Problems have to be taken care of, of course; they must not be swept under the rug. But problem solving, however necessary, does not produce results. It prevents damage. Exploiting opportunities produces results.

Above all, effective executives treat change as an opportunity rather than a threat. They systematically look at changes, inside and outside the corporation, and ask, "How can we exploit this change as an opportunity for our enterprise?" Specifically, executives scan these seven situations for opportunities:

- an unexpected success or failure in their own enterprise, in a competing enterprise, or in

the industry;

- a gap between what is and what could be in a market, process, product, or service (for example, in the nineteenth century, the paper industry concentrated on the 10% of each tree that became wood pulp and totally neglected the possibilities in the remaining 90%, which became waste);
- innovation in a process, product, or service, whether inside or outside the enterprise or its industry;
- changes in industry structure and market structure;
- demographics;
- changes in mind-set, values, perception, mood, or meaning; and
- new knowledge or a new technology.

Effective executives also make sure that problems do not overwhelm opportunities. In most companies, the first page of the monthly management report lists key problems. It's far wiser to list opportunities on the first page and leave problems for the second page. Unless there is a true catastrophe, problems are not discussed in management meetings until opportunities have been analyzed and properly dealt with.

Staffing is another important aspect of being opportunity focused. Effective executives put their best people on opportunities rather than on problems. One way to staff for opportunities is to ask each member of the management group to prepare two lists every six months—a list of opportunities for the entire enterprise and a list of the best-performing people throughout the enterprise. These are discussed, then melded into two master lists, and the best people are matched with the best opportunities. In Japan, by the way, this matchup is considered a major HR task in a big corporation or government department; that practice is one of the key strengths of Japanese business.

Make meetings productive. The most visible, powerful, and, arguably, effective nongovernmental executive in the America of World War II and the years thereafter was not a businessman. It was Francis Cardinal Spellman, the head of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of New York and adviser to several U.S. presidents. When Spellman took over, the diocese was bankrupt and totally demoralized. His successor inherited the leadership position in the American Catholic church. Spellman often said that during his waking hours he was alone only twice each day, for 25 minutes each time: when he said Mass in his private chapel after getting up in the morning and when he said his evening prayers before going to bed. Otherwise he was always with people in a meeting, starting at breakfast with one Catholic organization and ending at dinner with another.

Top executives aren't quite as imprisoned as the archbishop of a major Catholic diocese. But every study of the executive workday has found that even junior executives and professionals are with other people—that is, in a meeting of some sort—more than half of every business day. The only exceptions are a few senior researchers. Even a conversation with only one other person is a meeting. Hence, if they are to be effective, executives must make meetings productive. They must make sure that meetings are work sessions rather than bull sessions.

The key to running an effective meeting is to decide in advance what kind of meeting it will

be. Different kinds of meetings require different forms of preparation and different results:

A meeting to prepare a statement, an announcement, or a press release. For this to be productive, one member has to prepare a draft beforehand. At the meeting's end, a preappointed member has to take responsibility for disseminating the final text.

A meeting to make an announcement—for example, an organizational change. This meeting should be confined to the announcement and a discussion about it.

A meeting in which one member reports. Nothing but the report should be discussed.

A meeting in which several or all members report. Either there should be no discussion at all or the discussion should be limited to questions for clarification. Alternatively, for each report there could be a short discussion in which all participants may ask questions. If this is the format, the reports should be distributed to all participants well before the meeting. At this kind of meeting, each report should be limited to a preset time—for example, 15 minutes.

A meeting to inform the convening executive. The executive should listen and ask questions. He or she should sum up but not make a presentation.

A meeting whose only function is to allow the participants to be in the executive's presence. Cardinal Spellman's breakfast and dinner meetings were of that kind. There is no way to make these meetings productive. They are the penalties of rank. Senior executives are effective to the extent to which they can prevent such meetings from encroaching on their workdays. Spellman, for instance, was effective in large part because he confined such meetings to breakfast and dinner and kept the rest of his working day free of them.

Making a meeting productive takes a good deal of self-discipline. It requires that executives determine what kind of meeting is appropriate and then stick to that format. It's also necessary to terminate the meeting as soon as its specific purpose has been accomplished. Good executives don't raise another matter for discussion. They sum up and adjourn.

Good follow-up is just as important as the meeting itself. The great master of follow-up was Alfred Sloan, the most effective business executive I have ever known. Sloan, who headed General Motors from the 1920s until the 1950s, spent most of his six working days a week in meetings—three days a week in formal committee meetings with a set membership, the other three days in ad hoc meetings with individual GM executives or with a small group of executives. At the beginning of a formal meeting, Sloan announced the meeting's purpose. He then listened. He never took notes and he rarely spoke except to clarify a confusing point. At the end he summed up, thanked the participants, and left. Then he immediately wrote a short memo addressed to one attendee of the meeting. In that note, he summarized the discussion and its conclusions and spelled out any work assignment decided upon in the meeting (including a decision to hold another meeting on the subject or to study an issue). He specified the deadline and the executive who was to be accountable for the assignment. He sent a copy of the memo to everyone who'd been present at the meeting. It was through these memos—each a small masterpiece—that Sloan made himself into an outstandingly effective executive.

Effective executives know that any given meeting is either productive or a total waste of time.

Think and Say "We"

The final practice is this: Don't think or say "I." Think and say "we." Effective executives know that they have ultimate responsibility, which can be neither shared nor delegated. But they have authority only because they have the trust of the organization. This means that they think of the needs and the opportunities of the organization before they think of their own needs and opportunities. This one may sound simple; it isn't, but it needs to be strictly observed.

We've just reviewed eight practices of effective executives. I'm going to throw in one final, bonus practice. This one's so important that I'll elevate it to the level of a rule: *Listen first, speak last.*

Effective executives differ widely in their personalities, strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs. All they have in common is that they get the right things done. Some are born effective. But the demand is much too great to be satisfied by extraordinary talent. Effectiveness is a discipline. And, like every discipline, effectiveness *can* be learned and must be earned.



CONTINENTAL BANK

CONTINENTAL ILLINOIS NATIONAL BANK AND TRUST COMPANY OF CHICAGO

SIX STEPS OF PROBLEM SOLVING

1. DEFINE THE PROBLEM (the WHAT)

THE PROBLEM IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WHAT YOU HAVE (PRESENT SITUATION) AND WHAT YOU WANT (OBJECTIVES).

WHAT IS THE PRESENT SITUATION?

- Specific facts and figures.
- Critical incidents—symptoms.
- Policies—Bulletins—Procedures.

WHAT ARE THE OBJECTIVES?

- What do we want?
- What demands do others have?
- What effects/results should be maximized (minimized)?

2. IDENTIFY THE CAUSES (the WHY)

- Why does the problem exist?
- Analyze the facts of the present situation.
- Think of all the possible causes.
- There may be causes of causes.

3. DETERMINE THE MAIN CAUSES

- Rule of maldistribution (80/20)
- Complex main causes can be separated and treated as problems.

4. IDENTIFY THE SOLUTIONS (the HOW)

- Solutions remove the causes.
- Think of all the possible solutions.
- Consult the "experts" (people directly involved).

5. EVALUATE THE SOLUTIONS

- Effectiveness in removing the main causes (greatest)
- Feasibility (most)
- Cost (least)
- Conduct a pilot test of the solution selected.

6. DECIDE/RECOMMEND THE ACTION.

- Decide, if problem and solution do not affect other areas of responsibility.
- Recommend, if problem or solution affect other areas of responsibility.
(Generally requires a written report. See reverse side.)

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Writing BETTER Reports

DEFINITION

A report is the communication of information to someone in the most convenient and usable form.

CONSIDER THE READER

- Who will read the report?
 - Will anyone else read or use it?
- Answers to these questions will help you decide: length, format, style, language, and comprehension level.

TYPES OF REPORTS

INFORMATIONAL

1. STATUS REPORT— describes conditions at a specific moment in time.
2. PROGRESS REPORT— relates changes in conditions over time.

ANALYTICAL

1. PROBLEM SOLVING REPORT— an analysis of facts or data from which conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.
2. PROPOSAL REPORT— suggests or recommends some new improvement or change.

FORMAT

PROGRESS/STATUS REPORTS

1. Title (Subject of report)
2. Statement of Purpose (Introduction)
Tells the reader the purpose of the report; why the report was written.
3. Discussion (Body of report)
4. Conclusions (If any)

PROBLEM SOLVING/PROPOSAL REPORTS

1. Title (Subject of report)
2. Statement of purpose (Introduction)
Tells the reader the purpose of the report; why the report was written. What the problem is. Idea.
3. Summary/Recommendation/Action
Brief, concise summary of conclusions and recommendations.
What action should be taken. Gist of report without going into detail.
4. Analysis (Body)
Background information. Assumptions. Facts. Significant causes.
Alternatives. Consequences of each. Costs. References to charts, graphs, tables, etc.
5. Conclusions
Should follow logically from the analysis.
6. Implementation (If required)
How. Method. Procedures. Who. Where. When.
Time schedule. Follow-up.
7. Appendix
Charts, graphs, tables, exhibits, etc..

A LEADER IS BEST, WHEN PEOPLE BARELY
KNOW HE EXISTS.

NOT SO GOOD, WHEN PEOPLE OBEY AND
ACCLAIM HIM.

WORSE, WHEN THEY DESPISE HIM.

BUT OF A GOOD LEADER WHO TALKS
LITTLE,

WHEN HIS WORK IS DONE AND HIS AIM
FULFILLED, THEY WILL SAY,

“ WE DID IT OURSELVES ”

— LAO - TZU
A Chinese Philosopher

(From the desk of JACK SMITH, CEO, General Motors)

When less is more



Soon after he became prime minister, Winston Churchill wrote to the head of the British navy to say, *Pray Sir, tell me on one side of one sheet of paper, how the Royal Navy is preparing for the war.* Churchill knew that if he did not qualify his request he would receive an unreadable 400-page report. Brevity is a great virtue, but nowhere more than in the world of action — in business, politics, and war — where one has to communicate clearly, briefly and boldly. Hence, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg address is only 212 words long, and it is one of the great speeches in history. The Lord's Prayer is only 78 words, but the European Economics Commission's report on the import of caramel is 17,400 unworthy pages.

We Indians are verbose, and need to be reminded that human beings were born with two ears and two eyes, but with only one tongue, so that we should see and hear twice as much as we say. Our judges write judgements that are too long; our lawyers ramble on; our executives try to impress with lengthy memos; our politicians — well, try to get in a word. Our public affairs would improve tangibly if our power to be silent were equal to our power to speak.

That less can be more is especially true in good writing. I discovered this at Procter and Gamble, a company as famous for its legendary one page memo as its products. Its wondrous one page memo was created out of the same confidence in reason and technology that built America, and is as elegant as Panini's grammar or Euclid's geometry. Based on the reasonable assumption that all managers suffer from an overload of paperwork and files, it is simple, factual, and logical; the reader scans it in minutes, grasps its contents, and comes to a decision. It has just enough data that a manager needs to make a decision and no more. It is clear, precise, eschews hyperbole, and it actually improves the speed and quality of decisions, and hence is a source of competitive advantage.

The one page memo generally consists of five or six short paragraphs. Its first sentence tells the reader what to expect—why should you be interested in what I have to say? Hence, the smart writer puts his best foot forward and states upfront the conclusion or recommendation. There is an inherent conflict between the reader and the writer's interests, for the writer wants to build a case slowly, leading to a conclusion, but the busy reader wants to quickly get to the conclusion (and is only interested in the rationale after that). Remember, this is not a detective story, and a good first paragraph ought to focus on the *what* and not the *how*; but it must, of course, offer one or two reasons to believe in the recommendation.

The second paragraph offers background—it is historical, factual, filled with data, and tells the reader why the problem or opportunity has arisen. The third para is the detailed recommendation — the what and the how, but don't confuse the reader here with the why. The rationale comes in the next paragraph — here are three reasons why you should accept my recommendation — and typically cites precedents, benefits (financial and otherwise) and risks. The fifth paragraph tells the reader that I have looked at alternative courses of action, and why this is the best. The last paragraph addresses the next steps and lays out a plan of action that will flow from the decision.

What I have said here might apply to any business letter and the Maharashtra Administrative Reforms Commission is so impressed with it that it is thinking of recommending it to the government to make bureaucrats efficient. Shakespeare too, I think, had Indians in mind when he wrote in *Richard III*: Talkers are no good doers; so, he offered us this advice in *Henry V*: Men of a few words are the best of men.

RAY KROC'S FAVORITE HOMILY

" P R E S S O N "

NOTHING IN THE WORLD CAN
TAKE THE PLACE OF PERSISTENCE.
TALENT WILL NOT; NOTHING
IS MORE COMMON THAN UN-
SUCCESSFUL MEN WITH TALENT.
GENIUS WILL NOT; UNREWARDED
GENIUS IS ALMOST A PROVERB.
EDUCATION WILL NOT; THE
WORLD IS FULL OF EDUCATED DERELICTS.
PERSISTENCE AND DETERMINATION
ALONE ARE OMNIPOTENT.....

Four qualities which should be built up by every good executive:

- the ability to get along with others (described in phrases as "is generally liked," "doesn't antagonize people," "establishes smooth working relationships")
- decisiveness ("willing to take responsibility," "has the guts to fight for what he believes")
- maturity of mind ("shows poise when the going is rough," "keeps himself under control")
- creative imagination ("shows fresh thinking," "generates a lot of good ideas")

(From "Business as a Game"
by Albert Z. Carr.)

'Success is defined by what you leave behind'

My parents set the foundation of my life and the value system which makes me what I am and defines what success means to me, says Subroto Bagchi

I WAS the last child of a small-time government servant in a family of five brothers. My earliest memory of my Father is as that of a District Employment Officer in Koraput, Orissa. It was and remains as back of the beyond as you can imagine. There was no electricity, no primary school nearby and water did not flow out of a tap. As a result, I did not go to school until the age of eight. I was home-schooled. My father used to get transferred every year. The family belongings fitted into the back of a jeep – so the family moved from place to place and, without any trouble, my Mother would set up an establishment and get us going. My parents set the foundation of my life and the value system which makes me what I am today and largely defines what success means to me today.

As District Employment Officer, my Father was given a jeep by the government. There was no garage in the office, so the jeep was parked in our house. My father refused to use it to commute to the office. He told us that the jeep is an expensive resource given by the government – he reiterated to us that it was not 'his jeep' but the government's jeep. He also made sure that we never sat in the government jeep – we could sit in it only when it was stationary. That was our early childhood lesson in governance – a lesson that corporate managers learn the hard way, some never do.

The driver of the jeep was treated with respect due to any other member of my Father's office. As small children, we were taught not to call him by his name. We had to use the suffix 'dada' whenever we were to refer to him in public or private. When I grew up to own a car and a driver by the name of Raju was appointed. I repeated the lesson to my two small daughters. They have, as a result, grown up to call Raju, 'Raju Uncle'. To me, the lesson was significant – you treat small people with more respect than how you treat big people. It is more important to respect your subordinates than your superiors.

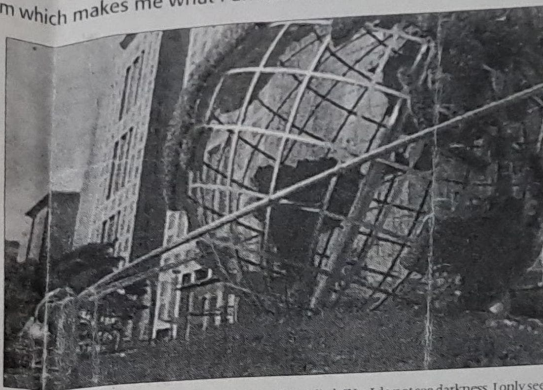
Our day used to start with the family huddling around my Mother's chulla – an earthen fire place she would build at each place of posting where she would cook for the family. There was no gas, nor electrical stoves. The morning routine started with tea. As the brew was served, Father would ask us to read aloud the editorial page of The Statesman's 'muffosil' edition – delivered one day late. We did not understand much of what we were reading. But the ritual was meant for us to know that the world was larger than Koraput district and the English I speak today, despite having studied in an Orissa medium school, has to do with that routine. After reading the newspaper aloud, we were told to fold it neatly. Father taught us a simple lesson. He used to say, "You should leave your newspaper and your toilet, the way you expect to find it". That lesson was about showing consideration to others. Business begins and ends with

that simple precept. Being small children, we were always enamored with advertisements in the newspaper for transistor radios – we did not have one. We saw each time there was an advertisement of Phillips, Murphy or Bush radios, we would ask Father when we could get one. Each time, my Father would reply that we did not need one because we already had five radios – alluding to his five sons. We also did not have a house of our own and would occasionally ask Father as to when, would give a similar reply. "We do not need a house of our own. I already own five houses". His replies did not gladden our hearts in that instant. Nonetheless, we learnt that it is important to measure personal success and sense of well being through material possessions.

Government houses seldom came with fences. Mother and I collected twigs and built a small fence. After lunch, my Mother would and with those she and I would dig the rocky, white ant infested surrounding. We planted flowering bushes. The white ants destroyed them. My Mother brought ash from her chullia and mixed it in the earth and we planted the seedlings all over again. This time, they bloomed. At that time, my Father's transfer order came. A few neighbours told my Mother why she was taking so much pain to beautify a government house, why she was planting seeds that would only benefit the next occupant. She said, "I have to create a bloom in a desert and whenever I am given a new place, I must leave it more beautiful than what I had inherited". That was my first lesson in success. It is not about what you create for yourself, it is what you leave behind that defines success.

My Mother began developing a cataract in her eyes when I was very small. At that time, the eldest among my brothers got a teaching job at the University in Bhubaneswar and had to prepare for the civil services examination. So, it was decided that my Mother would move to cook for him and, as her appendage, I had to move too. For the first time in my life, I saw electricity in homes and water coming out of a tap. It was around 1965 and the country was going to war with Pakistan. My Mother was having problems reading and in any case, being Bengali, she did not know the Oriya script. So, in addition to my daily chores, my job was to read her the local newspaper – end to end. That created in me a sense of connectedness with a larger world. I began taking interest in many different things. While reading out news about the war, I felt that I was fighting the war myself. She and I discussed the daily news and built a bond with the larger universe. In it, we became part of a larger reality. Till date, I measure my success in terms of that sense of larger connectedness.

Meanwhile, the war raged and India was



fighting on both fronts. Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Prime Minister, coined the term 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' and galvanized the nation into patriotic fervor. Other than reading out the newspaper to my Mother, I had no clue about how I could be part of the action. So, after reading her the newspaper, every day I would land up near the University's water tank which served the community. I would spend hours under it, imagining that there could be spies who would come to poison the water and I had to watch for them. I would daydream about catching one and how the next day, I would be featured in the newspaper. Unfortunately for me, the spies at war ignored and never got a chance to catch one in action. Yet, that act unlocked my imagination. Imagination is everything. If we can imagine a future, we can create it, if we can create that future, others will live in it. That is the essence of success.

Over the next few years, my Mother's eyesight dimmed but in me she created a larger vision, a vision with which I continue to see the world and, I sense, through my eyes, she was seeing too. As the next few years unfolded, her vision deteriorated and she was operated for cataract. I remember, when she returned after her operation and she saw my face clearly for the first time, she was astonished. She said, "Oh my God, I did not know you were so fair". I remain mighty pleased with that adulation till date. Within weeks of getting her sight back, she developed a corneal ulcer and, overnight, she became blind in both eyes. That was 1969. She died in 2002. In all those 32 years of living with blindness, she never complained about her fate even once. Curious to know what she saw with blind eyes, I asked her once if she sees darkness.

She replied, "No, I do not see darkness. I only see light even with my eyes closed". Until she was eighty years of age, she did her morning yoga everyday, swept her own room and washed her own clothes. To me, success is about the sense of independence: it is about not seeing the world but seeing the light.

Over the many intervening years, I grew up, studied, joined the industry and began to carve my life's own journey. I began my life as a clerk in a government office, went on to become a Management Trainee with the DCM group and eventually found my life's calling with the IT industry when fourth generation computers came to India in 1981. Life took me places – I worked with outstanding people, challenging assignments and travelled all over the world. In 1992, while I was posted in the US, I learnt that my Father, living a retired life with my eldest brother, had suffered a third degree burn injury and was admitted in the Saldarjung Hospital in Delhi. I flew back to attend to him – he remained for a few days in critical stage, bandaged from neck to toe. The Saldarjung Hospital is a cockroach infested, dirty, inhuman place. The overworked, under-resourced sisters in the burns ward are both victims and perpetrators of dehumanized life at its worst. One morning, while attending to my Father, I realized that the blood bottle was empty and fearing that air would go into his vein, I asked the attending nurse to change it. She bluntly told me to do it myself. In that horrible theater of death, I was in pain and frustration and anger. Finally when she relented and came, my Father opened his eyes and murmured to her, "Why have you not gone home yet?" Here was a man on his deathbed but more concerned about the overworked nurse than his own state. I was stunned at his stoic self. There I

learnt that there is no limit to how concerned you can be for another human being and what is the limit of inclusion you can create. My Father died the next day.

He was a man whose success was defined by his principles, his frugality, his universalism and his sense of inclusion. Above all, he taught me that success is your ability to rise above your discomfort, whatever may be your current state. You can, if you want, raise your consciousness above your immediate surroundings. Success is not about building material comforts – the transistor that he never could buy or the house that he never owned. His success was about the legacy he left, the memetic continuity of his ideals that grew beyond the smallness of an ill-paid, unrecognized government servant's world.

My Father was a fervent believer in the British Raj. He sincerely doubted the capability of the post-independence Indian political parties to govern the country. To him, the lowering of the Union Jack was a sad event. My Mother was the exact opposite. Consequently, our household saw diversity concerning the world, the Old Man and the Old Lady had differing opinions. In them, we learnt the power of disagreements, of dialogue and the essence of living with diversity in thinking. Success is not about the ability to create a definitive dogmatic end state: it is about the unfolding of thought processes, of dialogue and continuum.

Two years back, at the age of eighty-two, Mother had a paralytic stroke and was lying in a government hospital in Bhubaneswar. I flew down from the US where I was serving my second stint, to see her. I spent two weeks with her in the hospital as she remained in a paralytic state. She was neither getting better nor moving on. Eventually I had to return to work. While leaving her behind, I kissed her face. In that paralytic state and a garbled voice, she said, "Why are you kissing me, go kiss the world." Her river was nearing its journey, at the confluence of life and death, this woman who came to India as a refugee, raised by a widowed Mother, no more educated than high school, married to an anonymous government servant whose last salary was Rupees Three Hundred, robbed of her eyesight by fate and crowned by adversity – was telling me to go and kiss the world!

Success to me is about Vision. It is the ability to rise above the immediacy of pain. It is about imagination. It is about sensitivity to small people. It is about building inclusion. It is about connectedness to a larger world existence. It is about personal tenacity. It is about giving back more to life than you take out of it. It is about creating extra-ordinary success with ordinary lives.

Thank you very much, I wish you good luck and Godspeed. Go, kiss the world.

The author is the Vice-Chairman and COO of Mindtree Consulting. The article was his address to the Class of 2006 at IIMB on July 22, 2004.

The way we see the problem is the problem

We must not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we began and to know the place for the first time. – T.S. Eliot

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then is not an act, but a habit. – Aristotle.





