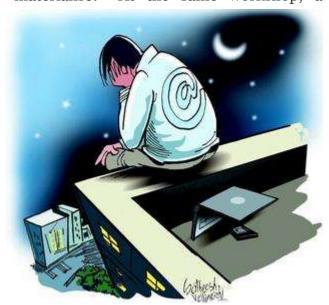# From college to the cubicle

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Organisations must re-orient their thinking to make sure they do not foster anxiety and fear among young, new members of their teams.

At a recent training program for youth entering work life from campus, a young lady came up to me and said, "You are urging me to believe in myself, to dream. Will they materialise?" At the same workshop, a young man, whom the organisation considered a lateral since he had worked earlier, said to me, "While I have always nourished self-belief, the last organisation I worked in systematically destroyed my dreams. What you are saying is not practically realisable."

Two contrasting perspectives on understanding organisation reality is what stares youth, particularly in the age group of 20 to 30, in the face, at a time when we believe they must exercise choice and want to be happy.

As trainers and motivators, our work with youngsters tells us that there is much we can do for them. Yet caught up as we are in addressing organisational roles and responsibilities, words like 'accountability,' 'reliability,' 'customer centricity,' and others, confuse these youngsters who want to move ahead with their dreams.

An emerging philosophy of recognising health in life and organisations, appreciative inquiry, emphasises that you see what you believe. It, therefore, is the responsibility of soft skill trainers to encourage this thought. Another thought that appreciative inquiry posits is that 'life grows towards positive energy.' This, again, is a belief we must encourage.

Caught in dilemma

Youth are caught in a dilemma between an assumed reality that life is hard and organisations breed ennui and boredom, and on the other hand, that they must have faith and hope, which will lead to a meaningful life. In such a case, disillusionment, fear and anxiety set in.

In an exercise, where I ask youth to capture what they expect from organisations and what organisations expect from them, many of them quickly put down their expectations as, job security, work-life balance, good salary, career growth, learning opportunity, recognition and such. While capturing organisation's expectations, they wrote punctuality, discipline, dedication, commitment, and other such qualities. Sadly, youth seldom say that organisations want them to be happy. Also, in their assumption that organisations must provide job security and such, they are assuming that these are not present. The challenge, therefore, for those of us who induct youngsters into organisations, is to demystify the ghosts that they are battling and show that organisations can also be a place of joy and happiness.

While children are essentially born happy, they acquire hurt and pain as they enter youth and, therefore, need therapeutic support and help. This is evident from the fact that a three or four-year-old child will climb a cycle and even though she keeps falling off, will continue to ride till she becomes proficient. Yet, the same child, as she grows up, loses this optimism and is then sent by organisations to 'personality development' courses to rekindle the lost spirit.

Likewise, three or four-year-olds will stand in front of a mirror and imitate their favourite hero or heroine, often messing up their faces with creams and talcum powder. Yet, in their youth, the same children, hardly look into the mirror to appreciate themselves. Most often, they are looking at the mirror to find out what is wrong with their faces. Why do these children lose their ability to appreciate themselves? John Powell, a Franciscan priest, says in his book, *Why am I afraid to tell you who I am?*, that by the time children are five years old, they are fed messages that they are not good enough. Thus, as they grow up, they carry the belief that they are less than they are meant to be.

Training programs on soft skills must restore this child-like quality in people to help them regain spontaneity and naturalness.

Lack of choice

When youth enter colleges, they exercise choice: on the course they want to pursue, the subjects they want to take, activities they want to participate in and others. Yet, the same youth, when they enter organisations, suddenly feel choice-less, and often victims of situations they believe they cannot alter.

Where does this belief come from? Unfortunately, though organisations launch induction programs as a way of gently breaking in youth, soon after the induction, they dump them on the job and expect them to perform. Rarely, if ever, are they given time to ingest the values that the organisation believes in and practices.

Further, organisations hardly ever brook questioning and, thus, the youth slowly, but surely, become 'adapting pawns' in the system.

Mentoring programs in organisations, which are instituted with great verve and enthusiasm, however, suffer owing to fatigue, the difficulty of keeping up to the demands of youth and preoccupation with results. The passion which they want youth to demonstrate is not evidenced in the way mentors work with youngsters.

My experience in working with organisation tells me that most often organisations are uncomfortable with ambiguity. Thus, they foster anxiety and fear in members within the organisation, more so youth who have had to to cope with life's uncertainty in their own ways.

Organisations, thus, must re-orient their thinking from believing that causality is linear to causality is discontinuous; that decisions need not necessarily be based on facts and data but on tensions and patterns; that efficiency and reliability are not necessarily measures of value, but responsiveness to the environment is; that all systems are not the same; individual behaviour is not predictable; and finally, that organisational mentors are not necessarily authorities but only facilitators.

If organisations can become less harsh on themselves, less judgmental of their performances and more open to the ambiguities that surround them, they will encourage entrants, particularly youth, to experiment and learn.

(The writer is an organisational and behavioural consultant.)

Youth, caught between the fear that organisations breed ennui and boredom and that they must have faith and hope, often tend to get disillusioned with life.

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