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The New Manager - **Management**

The absence of gratitude

Employers and employees should acknowledge the good the other has done them as it raises self-esteem, which in turn teaches one to appreciate others..

Paul Noronha



Mutual appreciation between employer and employees is exemplified in the Tata group's handling of the terror attack on the Taj Mahal hotel in Mumbai. (Above) Group chairman Mr Ratan Tata with employees at the hotel's reopening last month

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Organisations suffer not from lack of attention to detail as is believed, but from lack of gratitude.

When one enters an organisation he or she does so with a twinkle in the eye, dreams, aspirations and hope. Oftentimes, the chief architect does not recognise this. He or she believes that an employee joins to earn a living, and in so assuming forgets the very basic courtesy of thanking the one who has chosen to cast his or her lot with this organisation.

This is only the beginning, for the employee soon forgets that he or she joined the organisation to live out one's lifetime. Now commences a journey of bickering, dissatisfaction and distaste.

A simple lesson learnt in childhood has been forgotten - gratitude. Where does gratitude fit into this journey? When you learn to feel thankful for all that you have, a good job, good colleagues, security, predictability, you suddenly recognise that you are blessed. There is a lot more certainty to your life than is available to a farmer who awaits the unpredictable rain. You wake everyday to a routine when several are unaware of what the morrow holds.

Perhaps it is good to sit down and write a gratitude note; one expressing deep thanks for all we have.

A father once escorted his young child to a slum to show him how lucky he was, as a child living with plenty. As they approached the slum the child noticed a small hut with many children playing outside. In front of the hut ran a small stream of sewage. It was a well-lit night and the stars were shining. Behind the hut the child noticed a large dump yard on which several dogs frolicked. The child had seen enough and wanted to return home.

The father was sure his child must have recognised how blessed he was. The child looked up at the father and said instead, "Thank you, Father, for showing me how poor we are." The father did not understand and asked the child to explain.

The child said, "Father, there are so many children playing while I play alone. We have a compound wall to keep people out yet for the slum-dweller there is no wall to separate him from his friends. We have no little stream in front of our house and they have a rivulet. We only have a few electric bulbs to light up our house but the slum children have the whole star-studded night sky. We have no yard and they have a large dump. We have only one dog and they have so many. Thank you, Father, for showing me how poor we are!"

Such is true gratitude.

Gratitude is very liberating. When I feel a sense of gratitude I release myself from comparisons, from having to prove my worth, from having to be seen as the best. In organisations, competition and comparison exist because each one of us is trying to establish ourselves. When such thoughts grip us we have the need to prove ourselves and if we fall short of that we feel less of who we are. Organisations also foster this by encouraging performance comparison. While it is not incorrect to egg people on to perform, building comparisons hurt the collaborative and thanking process. Thus one does not acknowledge the other and believe it is the duty of one's colleague to support them. Duty it might be, but can I not express gratitude for the support given? In placing a demand on the other, I lose respect for the other and consequently mutual respect is lost. Gaining mutual respect comes from thanking and being grateful.

Gratitude also builds self-esteem and enhances self-appreciation. Thus when I learn to appreciate myself, I learn to appreciate others; I thank them for adding value to my life and enriching it.

A church, once popular, had fallen on bad days with few people visiting. The chief abbot was very worried, so called together the four remaining priests to seek their counsel. There was a lot of anger that was expressed with one blaming the other for the poor turnout at the church.

The chief abbot was dismayed and decided to visit the neighbouring village and consult with the local rabbi. The rabbi was a wise old man and on hearing the abbot's tale said he would ask God for guidance. The next day the abbot returned for advice. The rabbi said, "God says one of you is the chosen one." The abbot rushed back to his church and summoned his colleagues telling them what he had heard.

While each of them heard the chief abbot, each one thought to himself: "I know that I am not the chosen one, perhaps it is one of my brothers. Let me, therefore, be more respectful to the others."

By saying so, each one began to show deference to the other. Soon crowds started revisiting the church as they experienced true brotherhood.

When gratitude is demonstrated true comradeship flows as a consequence.

In recent times we saw exemplary work done by Tata group Chairman Mr Ratan Tata in the aftermath of the heinous terrorist attack in Mumbai and on the Taj Mahal Hotel which is owned by the Tatas. This was the most trying period in the life of the organisation. Senior managers including Mr Tata participated in funeral after funeral over the three days that were most horrible. Mr Tata himself visited the families of all the 80 employees who, either through death or injury, were affected and himself asked the families and dependents – what they wanted him to do. The settlement for every deceased member ranged from Rs 36-85 lakh in addition to several other benefits such as full last salary and medical facility for life for the family and dependents, complete responsibility for the education of their children and dependents and many such things.

How was such passion created within the organisation that its employees and employer went beyond the call of duty? How and why did they behave the way they did? The organisation is clear that it is not something that someone can take credit for. It is not training and development initiative that created such behaviour. It has to do with the DNA of the organisation, with the way the Tata culture exists and above all with the situation that prevailed that time – being grateful and valuing everything and everyone.

The whole approach was that the organisation would spend several hundred crores re-building the property; thus expressing gratitude and value for its biggest asset - its employees. An employee was valued even when he/she ceased to exist, by providing lifelong for the family, thereby true gratitude was expressed.

Thus organisations that want to build alignment among their members can attempt to recognise the good that it has, value and celebrate it.

Then, slowly but surely, the energy will spread and from a position of poverty both people and the organisation will move towards appreciating the abundance and bounty surrounding it.

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