



## The organisation and I

**T.T. Srinath**

*How selfishness can be good for your career graph...*

*Defence mechanism, a powerful tool employed by persons within organisations and elsewhere to self-protect, often leads to a losing position.*

In *Intimacy — Trusting Oneself and the Other*, Osho talks about three concepts that have been engaging me for a long time, but I have found it difficult to express them, particularly in corporate circles, where I find these ideas unacceptable to audiences.

Succinctly the concepts are: Accept yourself; Let yourself be vulnerable; Be selfish.

### ACCEPTING YOURSELF

A new recruit, frightened and timid, tended to wet his pants every time he went into his boss's room. This embarrassed both the recruit and the boss, who realising the recruit's plight referred him to a psychiatrist. One week later the recruit returned, but again wet his pants in the presence of his boss. The boss asked if the meeting with the psychiatrist had not helped. The recruit, this time chirpy and self-confident, said it had helped... he was no more embarrassed.

Accepting myself is accepting me with all my fragilities and strengths. When I accept myself the way I am, I am then able to accept others without demand and expectation and in so doing I gain personal power.

Personal power is important in the context of organisational roles, as each individual has necessarily to claim his/ her space, establish one's identity and thereby make a firm statement about self. In establishing personal power one can influence others, take charge and become accountable without the burden of being pressurised. Personal power is a result of choice and choice allows one the freedom to use 'I can' instead of 'I must'.

A little girl was once asked that if God created all good people in red and all bad people in green, what colour would she be. She promptly replied that she would be streaky, that is, a mix of both colours.

Every human being must therefore realise that he/she has good and bad. Accepting myself the way I am allows me the freedom to be imperfect.

Leadership is also about accepting my fallibility and owning it up. In so doing, I communicate that I am human and I am prone to error as is anyone else. Thus my pursuit is for excellence and wholeness, not perfection.

## LET YOURSELF BE VULNERABLE

Defence mechanism, a powerful tool employed by persons within organisations and elsewhere to self-protect, often leads to a losing position. One feels the need to protect oneself, as the individual feels threatened and sometimes unclear. Clarity of intention, in terms of what is being said to me, how I choose to receive it and how I respond and recognising the context in which the message is being communicated helps me drop my defences. When I drop my defences I assume I become vulnerable, and while this may be true, it also strengthens me as I do not have to prove myself or establish credibility because I know who I am.

In the context of organisations, leaders must also drop their defences in order to be able to receive feedback. Anyone showing signs of blocking or restricting the inflow of feedback is often not told the truth and thus there are chances of miscommunication.

In being vulnerable a leader is able to show by example that he/she is receptive and willing to respond rather than react.

Allowing oneself to be vulnerable also gives one the power of domination without being loud, crass and vulgar.

The Arya Samaj movement was gaining impetus in Bengal around the time Ramakrishna Paramahansa was practising `bakthi' as his means of devotion. The Samaj believed that knowledge or `Gnana' was more important than `bakthi' and in order to establish this ascendancy it chose to debate with Ramakrishna, who it believed had great influence among poor folk. On the appointed day the representative from the Samaj met Ramakrishna and asked him if he was willing to answer questions. Ramakrishna readily agreed. The representative asked Ramakrishna several complicated questions from the texts. To each question Ramakrishna responded by pleading ignorance and congratulating the representative on his wisdom. Halfway through the debate the representative rose and confessed defeat. When questioned he replied, "How can you fight somebody who does not defend himself?"

Such is the power of allowing your vulnerabilities to show.

## BE SELFISH

Inside an aircraft, when there is a drop in cabin pressure, you are asked to put on your oxygen mask first before helping others with theirs. The reason is simply that if you do not take care of yourself you cannot take care of another.

A mother told her child, "Remember always to help others." And the child asked, "Then what will the others do?" Naturally the mother said, "They will help others." The child said, "This seems to be a strange scheme. Why not help yourself, rather than shifting it and making things unnecessarily complex?"

Selfishness has often been confused with hoarding. But selfishness also teaches you the humble art of receiving with grace. Most of us have been taught to give and thus be labelled `generous'. Strangely, if you do not know how to receive you will not know how to give. A child is taught to first ask with its palm open, for in this way the child learns to be humble. While it might be construed that the child is only being taught to ask, parents realise that when a child has got enough it will willingly give away simply

because it is satiated. Thus, when I am full I am able to give freely and without greed.

Leadership is also about receiving with grace and kindness and passing on this receipt to others. When I receive compliments and learn to enjoy them I am able to freely pass them on. If I have only been giving, my emotional bank will quickly deplete and I will not have much to give. A constant inflow is also required to allow for an equal outflow.

Selfishness is thus not a debilitating trait, provided however that it is practised with the intention of self-preservation and willingness to share. In the absence of a desire to be equally rewarding to those who give us, selfishness becomes destructive and damaging.

Organisations, particularly leaders, will gain immensely from practising the art of being self-accepting, vulnerable and selfish and, in so being, will allow the organisation to reveal its humaneness and authenticity.