

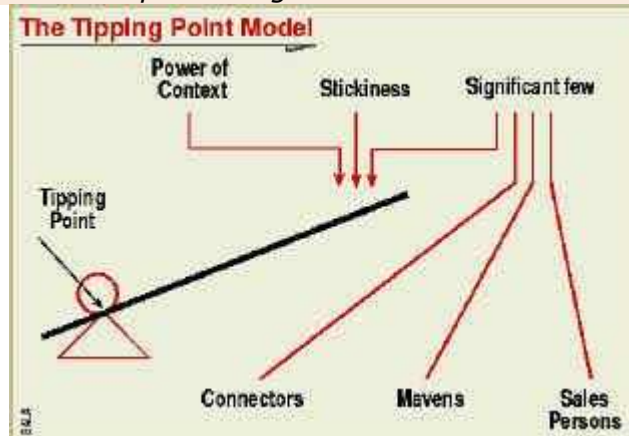
## Business Line

Financial Daily from THE HINDU group of publications  
Thursday, Mar 10, 2005

### Tipping the scales

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*Become aware of what it takes to tip the scales. That learning could positively impact organisational and personal growth.*



I HAVE often been asked by clients to create processes which, while addressing human interaction are also able to significantly impact the 'bottomline.'

As a process trainer, I have realised that while several methods are used to facilitate human interaction, often the impact on 'profitability' is only seen over time and not immediately.

*On an afternoon in April 1775, a young stable hand in Boston overheard a British army officer say to another that they were going to decimate the colonial militia. The boy casually mentioned the news to a silversmith named Paul Revere. Revere listened gravely and mounting his horse rode from home to home from Boston harbour, through Charlestown, Medford, North Cambridge and Menotomy, he knocked on doors and spread the word, telling local colonial leaders of the oncoming British, and telling them to spread the word to others. Church bells started ringing and drums started beating. The news spread like a virus, and when the British finally began their march towards Lexington next morning, they were met with organised and fierce resistance. What happened next has become a part of a historical legend, a tale told to every American school child, a war that we all know as the American Revolution.*

What Revere did that day tipped the scales?

The tipping point is an idea that is simple. It is a way to understand the emergence of trends and any number of mysterious changes that make ideas, products, messages and behaviours spread like a virus.

As human process trainers, if we become aware of the dynamics that operate in tipping the scales and build our modules and interventions around this, the impact on organisational and personal growth will be phenomenal.

The energising forces that tip the scale are those of the significant few, those kinds of people who are critical in spreading information; stickiness — that in order to be able to spark a change, ideas have to be memorable and move us to action; and the power of context — for epidemics to happen, we have to be sensitive to the conditions and circumstances of times and places in which they occur.

#### The significant few

*A young trader in West Asia, pedalling his wares, earned a meager income back in 1969. When the erstwhile trader passed away in 2002, he had revolutionised Indian business and was considered an icon. The man known to all of us as Dhirubhai symbolises the significant few.*

The success of any kind of 'social, industrial epidemic' is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of gifts. These are exceptional people who understand trends and through their social connection, energy, enthusiasm and personality tip the scales. These are exceptional people who are capable of starting epidemics.

Such persons demonstrate the quality of being connectors, mavens and salespersons.

**Connectors** are people with the gift of bringing the world together. They are people who occupy different worlds and niches. Their ability to span many different worlds is a function of something intrinsic to their personality, some combination of curiosity, self-confidence, sociability and energy. Connectors are social glue.

**Mavens** coming from Yiddish, meaning those who accumulate knowledge, represent those who pass on what they know in a way to motivate educate and help. Mavens are data banks. They provide the message.

**Salespersons** have skills to persuade us when we are unconvinced of what we are hearing; they are critical to the tipping of epidemics. What separates a great salesperson from an average one is the number and quality of answers they have to objections commonly raised by potential clients.

#### Stickiness

The idea of the importance of stickiness in tipping the scale has enormous implications. We tend to spend a lot of time thinking about how to make messages contagious and how to reach as many people as possible with our products or ideas. The hard part of communication is often in figuring out how to make sure a message does not go into one ear and only to come out of the other. Stickiness means that a message makes an impact. You can't get it out of your head; it sticks to your memory.

*When a small-scale manufacturer of detergent soaps in Gujarat decided to challenge India's most reputed manufacturer, he realised that he must*

*reframe the way the world thinks about such products; he packaged information that was irresistible. He demonstrated an idea that moved people into action. The story of Nirma is now part of Indian folklore.*

#### Power of context

The key to getting people to change their behaviour often lies in attempting to think about the future, stretch and sensitise them about external environment changes, reduce information gaps and guess correctly for the scales to tip. It requires commitment, time and preparation. 'Scenario thinking' is an excellent technique to anticipate changes in the external environment which will impact.

*\*\*In April 1970, America's third scheduled Apollo moon-landing spacecraft lifts off uneventfully. Shortly into the four-day journey, part of the spacecraft explodes. When Flight Director Chris Kraft (Ed Harris) orders an engine shutdown, Commander Jim Lovell (Tom Hanks) concludes, "Gentlemen, we just lost the moon." Now, the "problem" becomes how to get the crew home.*

*The survival plan has the crew continue towards the moon to use its gravity to "fling" Apollo 13 back to earth while using the tiny lunar module (LM) as a three-man "lifeboat." Director Kraft challenges his staff, "I don't care what it (the LM) was designed to do; I want to know what it can do."*

*Life-death decisions continue as NASA engineers work methodically to rig an adapter to lower near-fatal carbon-dioxide build-up. Meanwhile, backup astronaut Ken Mattingly (Gary Sinise) improvises in a darkened simulator to squeeze from an energy-drained LM those last few volts needed to power the re-entry.*

*As the world prays for a safe return and Commander Lovell's wife is dogged by the press, we feel the desperation of NASA engineers working in concert as Kraft predicts, "This will be our finest hour."*

The three triggers that tip the scale create that "magic moment when an idea, trend or social behaviour crosses a threshold, tips and spreads like wildfire."

As human process trainers, if we are able to create learning experiences to:

- help people recognise their unique quality of being connectors, the need and process of acquisition of knowledge and ways to be persuasive and influence,
- help people to understand the content of the message as being as important as the process; a communication model, and
- help people 'map their mind,' foment 'scenario and possibility thinking,' we would have helped address impact both in the short- and the long-term.

The belief that change is possible, that people can radically transform their behaviour or beliefs in the face of right impetus suggests that we are powerfully influenced by our surroundings, our immediate context and the personalities of those around us.

By thus providing the right stimulus, by tinkering with the presentation of information, and by finding and reaching those special people who hold social power we can shape the course of epidemics. Tipping point is a reaffirmation of the potential for change and power of intelligent action. Look at the world around you, it seems immovable. It is not. With a slight push, in the right place, it can be tipped.

\* *Concept: Malcolm Gladwell*

\*\* *Source: The Internet*

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