

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION
(Power does not flow from the barrel of a gun)
T.T.Srinath

I have just completed reading ‘Intimacy-Trusting Oneself and the Other,’ a book by Osho. Three concepts he talks about have been engaging me for a long time, but I have found expression of these difficult, particularly in corporate circles, where I have even found these ideas unacceptable to my audiences.

Succinctly the concepts are:

1. Accept yourself
2. Let yourself be vulnerable
3. Be selfish

It might sound absurd to talk about being selfish, but I have my take on that and I shall share it in detail.

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 in the presence of his boss wet his pants. The boss asked him if meeting the psychiatrist had not helped. The recruit this time chirpy and self-confident said it had helped him, only now he was no more embarrassed.

Accepting myself is accepting self 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 pressurized. 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 told that if God created all good people in red and all bad people in green, what colour she would be. She promptly replied that she would be streaky, i.e. a mix of two colours.

Every human being must therefore realize that he / she has goods and bads. 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

Defense mechanism, a powerful tool employed by persons within organisations and otherwise, to self-protect, often times leads to a losing position. One needs to protect oneself as the individual feels threatened and some times 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 defenses. When I drop my defenses 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 defenses in order to be able to receive feedback. Anyone showing signs of blocking or restricting inflow of feedback is many times 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 practicing '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 they chose to debate with Ramakrishna who they believed had great influence among poor folk. On the appointed day the representative from the Samaj met with Ramakrishna and decided to challenge him. He asked Ramakrishna if the fakir was willing to answer questions. Ramakrishna readily agreed. The Samajee asked Ramakrishna several complicated questions from the texts. To each question Ramakrishna responded by pleading ignorant and congratulating the Samajee on his wisdom. Half way through the debate the Samajee 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

When you board an aircraft, in the case of a drop in cabin pressure, you are asked to put on your oxygen mask, before helping others, with theirs. The reason is simply because if you do not take care of yourself you cannot take care of another.

A small child was talking to his mother and the mother said, "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 being 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 labeled '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 realize 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 practiced 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 within, will gain immensely from practicing the art of being self-accepting, vulnerable and selfish and in so being will allow the organisation to reveal its humaneness and authenticity.