

COMMITMENT

A leader's secret strength

Where does commitment begin? I think it starts in the heart. Commitment precedes achievement. You will achieve only after you commit. Many a times you may run out of oxygen half way through your journey, and then you have to finish the journey with your heart. Second in the series on 'leadership', this article explores the impact of commitment...

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*I am only one,
but still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
but still I can do something.
And because I cannot do
everything,
I will not refuse to do the
something that
I can do ...*

- **Edward Everett Hale**

This year, I began the New Year holidaying with my family by motoring up and down the east coast of India at the international township of Auroville and the erstwhile French colony of Pondicherry. Our stay was particularly enjoyable; thanks to an architect couple Ajit & Ratna Koujalgi who decided to give us the best experience of this place. Ajit and Ratna are successful practicing architects, and perhaps many have read about their various projects in lifestyle magazines. After over a decade of work in Europe, they came down to Auroville and fell in love with it. Today they spend a lot of their time here. Ajit's reputation as an architect precedes him. He revels not only in designing buildings, hardly any surpass him in restoration of a heritage. An architects' architect one might say – seeing him at work, I could see tremendous

passion for architecture oozes out of him. At the NGO INTAC where Ajit spends a lot of his time, we were among the privileged ones along with the President of Oxford's Corpus Christi College, among others to be taken on a heritage walk in Pondicherry. At INTAC, Ajit is trying to preserve the 'heritage architecture' of Pondicherry, a job made difficult because of the absence of heritage laws. You're not obligated to win, you're obligated to keep trying to do the best you can every day, wrote Marian Wright Edelman.

Trying to take something that is decaying and crumbling and restoring it to its antique and aesthetic beauty is not only a work of art but also that of genius, and Ajit does it with his Midas touch. He sees beauty that is inherent in those old French and Tamil buildings, where others see only the commercial value. Unlike many other things, a proper appreciation of 'heritage' is perhaps not handed down parent to child, and 'heritage' is absent in the syllabi. For a man sought in many parts of this world for his skills and competence, why should Ajit be involved in this work at Pondicherry? As I see it, it's because he is 'committed' to preserving something more beautiful than the mere commercial value. In fact, I think he actually gives it respectability that adds value. On this heritage walk, we saw many old building projects that he had taken up and actually made them more beautiful. The 18th century French buildings that were to be demolished have instead become heritage and boutique



luxury hotels. Scores of houses in the Tamil and Muslim parts have restored facades. Gardens and streets are being given the heritage looks. We saw that Ajit had restored streetscapes to the yonder years' look. Going to the owners of old heritage buildings and trying to convince them not to destroy it is no easy job. And being repeatedly told to 'take a hike' is not easy to swallow. It takes a huge amount of courage to keep going when nobody wants to take it. To be able to face them and yet persevere takes immense amount of 'commitment'. The most powerful weapon on earth is the human 'soul on fire'. *Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilisation work ...* Vince Lombardi, and that says all about Ajit and his team. In the years to come, Pondicherry may well be one of the very few heritage townships in India, the transformation is already becoming visible, and when that work is done, Pondicherry will owe it to the commitment of this dedicated artist and his team.

Pope Julius II invited Michelangelo to Rome asking him to sculpt a magnificent papal tomb. But on his arrival in Rome, he was instead asked to paint a dozen figures in a small chapel in the Vatican. Michelangelo's passion was sculpture and not painting. History tells us that he reluctantly accepted the job, as his rivals were waiting to discredit him had he refused. For four years he lay on his back painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Michelangelo paid a great price. The work permanently damaged his eyes and wore him out, and he was old before his time. As he himself has said "after four tortured years, more than 400 over-life-sized figures, I felt as old and weary as Jeremiah. I was only 37, yet friends did not recognise the old man I had become." *"Spectacular achievements are always preceded by unspectacular preparation,"* said Roger Staubach. The impact of Michelangelo's commitment was far reaching. He pleased the Pope – his benefactor – and received other commissions from the Vatican. But more importantly, he made a huge impact on the artistic community. His Sistine Chapel frescos were so original, so boldly painted and exquisitely

executed with committed attention to details, that it caused the others including Raphael to alter their styles. Although his talent created the potential for greatness, he could not have influenced art without his commitment.

"The successful person has the habit of doing the things failures don't like to do. They don't like doing them either necessarily. But their disliking is subordinated to the strength of their purpose" ... E M Gray. Commitment can be different to different people. To a runner it is running that extra mile when you are exhausted of strength and energy. To a boxer, it's getting off the mat one more time when he has fallen down. A missionary says good-bye to his own comforts while making life better for others. To a soldier, it's going over the hill not knowing what is waiting on the other side. *"The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence,"* elaborated Eddie Robinson.

To a leader it's all this and much more, because everyone else is depending on you. An effective leader is one who is committed, for true commitment inspires others and attracts people. Commitment shows that you have conviction. Followers believe in the leader only if the leader believes in the cause. People will buy into the leader first, then his or her vision. *"There are only two options regarding commitment. You're either in or out. There's no such thing as a life in-*



between,” explained Pat Riley.

Where does commitment begin? I think it starts in the heart. Commitment precedes achievement. You will achieve only after you commit. Many a times you may run out of oxygen half way through your journey, and then you have to finish the journey with your heart. “Heart is what separates the good from the great,” said Michael Jordan. If you want to make a difference in the lives of other people, look at your heart to see if you are really committed. We once had a situation that could be best described as: too many quality issues, too many deviations, loss of overseas markets, demand slow down due to recession, absolutely no orders, forced closure of the factory and financial losses resulting in a near BIFR case. “The achievement of your goal is assured the moment you commit yourself to it,” said Mack Douglas. When we actioned the turnaround strategy, my boss then – Vikram Kirloskar – visited us almost every week relentlessly, to personally see the progress we were making in getting back to the numero uno position in the market space. He had to travel many times over 400 km to get there, and I know he did it in spite of many odds. Kirloskar showed us his sense of commitment to the purpose that provided

the leadership for others to follow. At the core of his heart, he was genuinely interested to see this turnaround succeed, and his commitment accelerated the speed of our achievements.

How do you test commitment? “There’s no scarcity of opportunity to make a living at what you love. There is only a scarcity of resolve to make it happen,” said Wayne Dyer. The only real measure of commitment is action. Nothing is easier than saying the words, nothing is harder than living them day after day. For an auto component Industry; whose product is Pumps, it should ideally take less than an hour to manufacture and assemble the unit, means they should be working with an inventory turn ratio of 150–300 depending on different levels of efficiency rather than the present six turns. They want this to happen (the three digit inventory turn figure), but lack the will and leadership to do it. Wishful thinking will get the company nowhere without taking actions. Adding capacity to cope with increase in demand without addressing waste elimination and gains through productivity, will further burden this company whose profitability is diminishing every year at a time when demand is jumping leaps and bounds. The test of commitment is not in the words but in the actions that can be seen through results. ‘Actions speak louder than words’. When it comes to commitments, it is necessary to follow through on your words.

“The probability that we may fail in struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just,” once said Abraham Lincoln. What do you see in just the two examples cited above? It is commitment that opens the door to achievement. One is a case study to emulate; the other may in time be history. At Pondicherry too, I understand that the government is slowly opening up to the ‘heritage idea’. If they commit to it, they too will revel in achievement. As a leader you will face plenty of obstacles and opposition, and it will be only your commitment that will carry you forward. “Commitment is the enemy of resistance, for it is the serious promise to press on, to get up, no matter how many times you are knocked down,” urged David McNally. If you want to get anywhere worthwhile, you



must be committed.

There are four types of people, when it comes to commitment:

- Those who have no goals and do not commit - *the cop-outs*
- Those who do not know if they can reach the goals, and therefore are afraid to commit - *the holdouts*
- Those who start towards a goal, but quit when the going gets tough - *the dropouts*
- Those who set the goals, commit to them, pay the price to reach them - *the all-outs*.

Reflect on what kind of a person are you?

Have you been reaching your goals or falling short? Are you achieving all that you believe you can? Do people believe in you and follow you readily? If your answer is 'no' to any of these questions, the problem may be in your level of commitment.

So what can you do to improve your commitment? First, measure your commitment. Sometimes we think we are committed, yet our actions indicate otherwise. Tally your words with your actions. Measure the time you spend at different places,

measure the money you spend at different places or under different headings. Your findings may surprise you. Second, you must know what is worth dying for. Ask yourself "what am I willing to die for?" What in life would you not be able to stop doing, no matter what the consequences. Meditate on this thought and write down your findings. Then match your ideals and your actions to see where you stand. Last, you can use the Thomas Edison method. Whenever Edison had a good idea, it is said that he called a press conference and announced it. He then went into his lab and invented it. Making your plans public may drive you to achieving them.

In manufacturing too, if you want to go lean, you can get there only by committing to the objective. You will never know how much you can get accomplished until you start and endeavour. The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials. Commitment is the secret strength of a leader, and it can be yours too. **MMT**

Look out for Part 3 in the March 07 issue



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