



Excellence is a habit

For decades industries have forecast their production plans and continue to end up in trying to figure out why they are left with unused inventory. Instead of correcting the fundamental error, which is to take a relook at conventional forecasting itself, they try to employ technology and techniques in the hope to improve its predictability, which has never worked in banishing waste. If you continue to do what you are doing, you will continue to get what you are getting. If you need different results you need to change your habits.

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*"We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."
-Aristotle*

Imagine you are in a hotel room and order room service. The hotel will deliver to your room your specific order. In the process they actually prepare and deliver fresh food. Can the hotel forecast and pre-prepare room service orders in anticipation? They simply do not do it, because, what their customers ask may be different to what they think their customers may order. On the other

hand, look at the buffet, a concept menu of what the hotel thinks their customers will eat. Invariably you will see that there is unconsumed food at the end of a buffet. Understand what happens here. In the former case the hotel produces to customer's demand, and hence, there is no wastage. In the latter case they produce to the seller's forecast or conception of what customers might order, and end up with waste.



In manufacturing we are expected to deliver to our customers, products or services at the rate and time they are demanded. The German word is 'takt' time or simply demand rate. At the beginning of last year I was doing a programme for an industry that had scripted a marvellous growth trajectory over the past few years growing at 35 to 40 per cent annually. One of the questions being asked at that time was - how long will this growth continue? Explaining demand rate, I told them that I see trouble ahead in the coming year from the data they had shared with me. They had made sales plan wishing on a similar growth. To me, the sales plan issued for production contradicted with the fact - the demand rate. It was difficult for them to comprehend with my prediction of their year ahead. Tracking the demand rate enables one to read into its future. After the year ended, they told me that my prediction was correct. "The world is dying for want, not of good preaching, but of good hearing," thus wrote the priest and author George Dana Boardman.

The habit of using the demand rate helps one to proactively take corrective actions, be it with booking orders, product designs, new products or features, market segments, breaking barriers, enhancing reach, exploring new markets, on-time deliveries, etc. On the other hand, the forecasting habit which does not work, is likely to get an organisation into creating different wastes and accumulate inventory that is not required. Developing the habit of working with the demand rate will also help you to anticipate the future, while it guides your actions correctly.

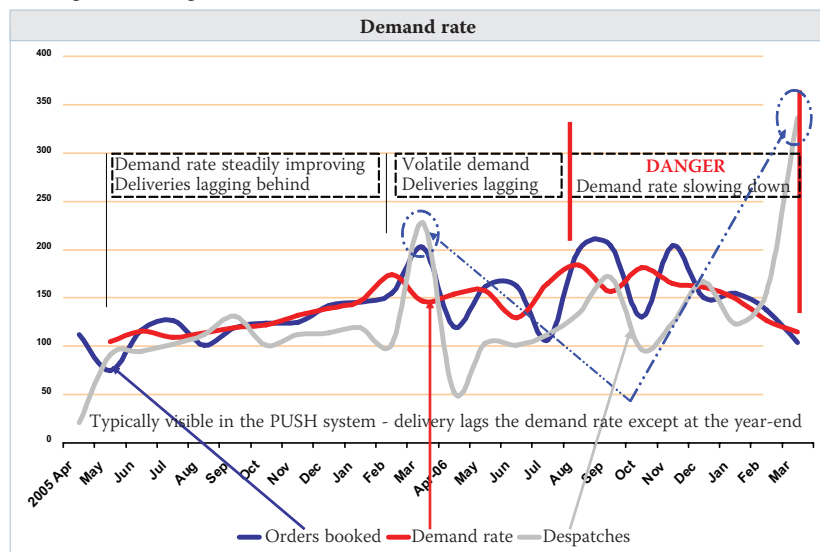
Power of habit

Nothing is stronger than habit. We are not only creatures of habit but we are more than the results of it. Over 95 per cent of our behaviour is formed by habit. In the above example, the habit formed is of duplicating a method from the American industrial system, whose practice has cemented the behaviour over the years. The habit is invisible in the beginning, but by repetition that the thread gets entwined into

a chord initially, later into a rope and finally becomes like a cable that will grout your habit - good or bad. Each time we repeat it we add strength to it making the habit more permanent. Remember poet John Dryden's words, "We first make our habits, then our habits make us."

One of the common questions at my seminars is, "but our workmen will not change, then how can we implement lean successfully?" Simply look beyond the individual. Seek to understand what caused the formation of these habits; you will then know what actions can change them. In such cases, habits are not formed by workmen, but when managements fail to define and demonstrate the good habits that should be formed. The good news is, it does not matter, if you have identified to change a set of habits, you can.

The original meaning of habit was 'garment'. Just as we wear garments, we wear our habits too. Our personalities are composites of our attitudes, habits and appearance that identify our characteristics. We are not born with our habits; just as we acquire our clothes we acquire our habits. By repetition we reinforce them over a period of time. Habits are part of human beings; we cannot avoid them, but we can choose the kind of habits we want to inculcate. When we become slaves to our habits they end up working for us or against us.





*"In truth, the only difference between those who have failed and those who have succeeded lies in the difference of their habits. Good habits are the key to all success. Bad habits are the unlocked door to failure," writes author **Og Mandino** in his book 'The Greatest Salesman in the World'*

The only time we hear 'good' and 'habit' in the same sentence is when someone asks us to form good habits. As a growing-up child, I remember both the elders in the family and my teachers at school spent time on emphasising the importance of inculcating good habits. In those days there was neither TV nor internet to occupy the space of personal time. Such education may be becoming rare. Allowing the raw material to flow by responding to the customer's pull, conforming only to the demand rate is a good organisational habit to form. When we do otherwise, our bad habits get the attention in the form of inventory or wastes. We need to change our focus to the positive side of habits and put energy into building good ones. The benefits you get will reinforce your faith to do so.

Winning habits

Most companies never become true lean enterprises because they simply never cultivate the winning habits. Simply said, winning habits are those that will lead you to continually better performance, be it for your organisation or in your personal life. For organisations desirous of becoming lean, their habits and behaviour must follow a consistent pattern. While people may not like to change their habits, it is not difficult to do it. Psychologists tell us that it takes

about thirty days for human beings to change their habits.

We were taught the importance of good habits at school. I learnt them on the cricket ground and the basketball court. I had genuine passion for sports and played various games at competitive levels. Gopal Pai was not only an outstanding cricket coach but also one of the most successful ones, and he taught me the correct attitudes of the game while in school. He said there is more to it than simply hitting the ball, but footwork, defense, follow-through, pick up & throw, and every other finesse of the game. He taught me the importance of being a complete player. Throughout those days he taught us being good is not good enough to be in big league, one has to push harder to go beyond. He always said, "You learn those skills by practicing them day-after-day until that way becomes your natural play."

I was considered a difficult batsman to dislodge; it was because of my defense. One day in the nets, attempting to drive I edged a ball towards the slips. He immediately came up and said if I wanted to be a good run-getter, then, I must learn not to take my eyes off the ball until I had executed the drive effectively. I had edged because my eyes had come off the ball just for a fraction. He lost no opportunity to hammer home the importance of developing the right habits. He helped me develop the habits so well that I would have played the shots even in my sleep. So well did he ingrain the importance of right habits in us that not only did we form good habits, but much later playing for the Universities I would position a brick on the cover point boundary and imitate a Gundappa Vishwanath square drive with perfection to hit the brick two out of every three times.

It was because of people like him, my basketball coach Narayanaswamy or Balbir Singh and Pawar, trained coaches from NIS who coached us hockey, football, athletics, and gymnastics, that my education in the value of good habits was raised to a higher level. All these men I greatly admire to this day, for those painful drills we did and body-breaking exercises that I called 'time





in hell' were only meant to teach us values of good habits. These gentlemen had high principles that were actually their own habits. The fruits of forming good habits came much later than when I was forming them, when I led every team I played for to victory at competitive levels.

I became a good sportsman by repeatedly doing a thing well, as I was able to inculcate winning habits. You can do it too. Good habits do make a difference in everything we do. We do not succeed by doing something right one time; we succeed by doing things right all the time.

Changing habits

When I was working in South-East Asia, I weighed myself and found I was 96 kilos. As all grown men, I was a slave to my habits. I had surrendered my free will to the years of accumulated habits and the past deeds of my life had already marked out a path which threatened to imprison my future. My actions were ruled by appetite, passion, prejudice, greed, love, fear, environment, habit, and the last one, the worst - tyrant. So I decided, if I must be a slave to my habits, let me be a slave to good habits and shed some weight. To do that, I needed to change some habits.

I had heard fitness coach Bob Green say on an Oprah show that when it comes to weight loss there is no magic pill or potion that one can take, but it has to be done through diet and exercise. I decided to change my eating habits, and use the well-equipped gymnasium in my apartment complex. Good habits result from resisting temptation. From that day on, my nutrition was lots of fruits, juice, salads, little rice, some chapattis; curd and warm water to drink; absolutely no fried or sweet stuff. Four months later, I had shed over eleven kilos. My pants were falling off me because my waistline had changed a lot. I had decided to become a slave to good habits and succeeded by doing it everyday. It does not matter what your habits are, changing them is only a decision away.

Attitudes can be changed and so can habits. Never use the age of the person or the length of the habit as an excuse



for holding on to it. All it takes to change habits is some desire. While long-standing habits may take some work to change, know that it is possible. The old dog too can learn new tricks, even if it is the exception than the rule. Each one of you can be that exception. Every organisation can be that exception. But the starting point is still the same – seeing the need and having the desire. If they are not there, no help in the world is good for you.

Trying to break a bad habit through will power may not work. What needs to be done is replace the bad habit with a good one, the one where the behaviour is more positive. Benjamin Franklin in his autobiography lists the following thirteen qualities that he wanted to have:

Temperance: Eat not to dullness, drink not to elevation

Silence: Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself; avoid trifling conversation

Order: Let all your things have their places; let each part of your business have its time

Resolution: Resolve to perform what you ought; perform without fail what you resolve

Frugality: Make no expense but to do good to others or yourself; that is, waste nothing

Industry: Lose no time; be always employed in something useful; cut off all unnecessary actions

Sincerity: Use no hurtful deceit; think innocently and justly, and if you speak, speak accordingly

Justice: Wrong none by doing injuries or omitting the benefits that are your duty

Moderation: Avoid extremes; forbear



resenting injuries so much as you think they deserve

Cleanliness: Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes or habitation

Tranquility: Be not disturbed by trifles, or at accidents common or unavoidable

Chastity: Rarely use venery but for health or offspring, never to dullness, weakness, or the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation

Humility: Imitate Jesus and Socrates. He put them in order of priority and wrote each one of them on a separate page in a book that he kept in his pocket. He concentrated on one quality at a time. He made a note in this book each time he failed at practicing that particular quality satisfactorily. He would then work

on each one to eliminate the cause. He focused on improving one quality at a time until the old habits had been replaced with new ones. He did not attempt to do all of them simultaneously. He continued to do so until this technique helped him replace his old habits with new ones, and there was no more need to make these jottings in his pocket book. Thus, he was able to eliminate a set of behaviours that worked against him, and replace them with a set of behaviours that were beneficial to him. A process like this helps one realise the faults we carry, and by conscious effort one can replace them with better habits to become a better person. Similarly an organisation can change habits to perform better.

Habit and character

Phil Woolpert, the American Basket Ball coach, known for coaching University of San Francisco Dons to two straight national championships, says, "Good habits make the difference ... in everything we do." There is also a relationship among many character qualities that I have mentioned before in

this column. In the 18th century the priest and author George Dana Boardman said, "Sow an act ... reap a habit, sow a habit ... reap a character, sow a character ... reap a destiny."

Good habits result from resisting temptation. Good books to read on the subject are Stephen Covey's 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' and 'Restoring the Character Ethic,' and Benjamin Franklin's autobiography. Covey says that too many people are seduced by outward success; they attain it and yet feel empty. They learnt methods to obtain things without developing the principles and habits that result in feelings of fulfillment and self-worth. I think when our country was younger; character ethic was more taught and talked about. But these days we seem to have moved away from it as people look for quicker ways to acquire material wealth. Covey sees the need to return to focusing on great qualities that made us based on his premise, "Restoring the Character Ethic' taught that there are basic principles of effective living, and that people can only experience true success and enduring happiness as they learn and integrate these principles into their basic character."

A dog was lying on the front porch moaning and groaning. A passer by asked the dog's owner, "Why is your dog moaning and groaning?" The owner replied, "It is because he is lying on a nail." To that the passer-by responded, "Then why does not he get up and move to another spot?" The owner explained, "Oh, he is not hurting bad enough to move, he is hurting bad enough to moan and groan!!" Some people just lay around moaning and groaning, and others decide to take actions to change their thoughts, philosophy and reality, therefore taking every area of their life to a higher level. Which type of person or organisation would you like to be? **MMT**



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