

Spirituality in management

Imagine needing to cross a boundary. Not in a literal sense however, but in your mind. Because boundaries come in all shapes and sizes; they lurk on the edges of our comfort zones everywhere we turn, either at home or in the office.

Consider the following as examples: making a difficult decision, dealing with illness, competing with a rival for a promotion, doing an unfamiliar task, a new job, moving home, handling rejection, or generally, facing a conflict situation head on. Do these feel familiar? Are these not boundaries which we are required to cross almost on a daily basis?

Our human nature suggests that we often fear any form of unknown, and stepping into uncharted areas requires a tremendous amount of courage and perseverance in order to make the transition fluid, sustainable and as least stressful as possible.

ONE-EYED SAM

To illustrate this from my world, I'd like to share the following example of a wilderness trail in the Okavango Delta, with friend and mentor Sam Matabele.

One-eyed Sam is a deeply humble man with a powerful intuitive connection with his surroundings. In his quiet and unassuming manner he is at total peace with the world, and watching Sam in the bush is like watching a fish learn to swim. He is a completely authentic human being.

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One of our clients in the trail party had a very nervous disposition. It seemed that every part of the experience was a challenge, from the flight in a small aircraft to sleeping in tents at night. The trail appeared to be one boundary after another for her. One morning on a walk, Sam found some fresh

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lion tracks and thought that they were in reach. I discussed this with the client, who understandably, became fidgety and nervous at the prospect of tracking lion on foot. I suggested to her that she cross one further boundary by following the big cats, because I knew that finding the lion would reap an exciting, energising and uplifting reward. She hesitantly agreed, and we started walking on the trail, quietly following Sam. My skilful old friend soon found the pride of lion and we were treated to a fine sighting on the edge of a beautiful flood-plain.

Turning to face the client, the first thing I saw were tears of elation streaming down her cheeks. The occasion, in its raw beauty, had touched her soul, and she stood in contented silence absorbing the magical surroundings before her. She was at peace.



Later, around the campfire that evening, she described her emotions. She explained that the fear-boundary with the lion was an imaginary one, and in exploring the other side, there, quite unexpectedly, lay a serene and comforting place. Tracking the lion broke down a significant barrier in her heart. And it was because of Sam's humility and her trust in his confidence, that she did it. For the first time in her life, she had 'illogically' entrusted a complete stranger to lead her through a fearful wild-land, and as a result,

discovered a reservoir of inner strength that she did not know existed.

SVARAT SAMRAT BHAVATI

There is a Sanskrit dictum: 'svarat samrat bhavati', which means one who can rule or govern himself, can also direct others. I believe that, deep in the African bush with Sam that morning, someone truly discovered the meaning of this ancient life-force. And it has



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travelled all the way to boardroom level of a major European corporation, where it is alive and well. And judging by the change I witnessed, I am left in no doubt how meaningful the encounter was, and how Sam's dignity of self and emerging spirit catalysed the engagement. Sam, without actually knowing it, lived the Sanskrit belief. He didn't force a thing, or even say a single word.

From a Western viewpoint, his passive style of management may stem from a simplistic lifestyle. And in our modern world of instant communication, quick decisions, relentless pressure, and social media, he would be probably be considered as some kind of dinosaur (I remember my first trip to the Netherlands, and the 'Crocodile Dundee syndrome' very visibly!) But, with first hand experience, I can argue that this passive management lifestyle (as opposed to just style) can be as successful in a boardroom in Amsterdam as it is in the Okavango Delta in Botswana. If you respect the integrity and humanness of others around you, this understanding will flow back in your direction.

SOFT LEADERSHIP

And is not a reality of our world that hard forceful leadership is seen as a sign of strength, status, and often a necessity? And with the same understanding, soft leadership or spiritual management, is interpreted as an oddity, practised by hippies, and marginalised as any commercial value within economic enterprises. The reality, in fact, is that this soft approach is not a sign of weakness, but just the opposite. Perhaps by putting the spiritual back into management, the soft edge of leadership is polished, contributing to more meaningful engagements, energy, connections that defy any logical definitions than they just feel right, and ultimately it is hoped, far more sustainable transformations. It transcends office, home and leisure.

There is so much more to 'management' than administering companies, profits and employees. It's about managing a meaningful attitude to your own self first, then toward others.

And as you sail from a safe harbour to track your inner lions, what management style will you bank on? ■

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