

# THE **SEWA** WAY



KNOWLEDGE AMBASSADOR OF UAE  
**DR. RASHID ALLEEM**





Dr. Rashid Alleem's latest book *The SEWA Way* is a unique compilation of knowledge from the mind of an extremely successful manager, a gifted visionary and an iconic leader who achieves results and leads from the front.

*R.K. Pachauri, Executive Vice Chairman,  
The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) – India*

I find it packed with information and advice, which I doubt can be gathered like this from another source.

*Reaz Ahmed, Alpha Utilities – UAE*

This book paves the way by enumerating the key elements for a pragmatic approach towards sustainability. The transformation after reading the salient features of the book is like a rechargeable energy storage system, inculcating passion.

*Krishna RS, General Manager,  
Al Ghandi Electronics, Dubai, UAE*

The book is very enjoyable to read. Once again, Dr. Rashid is demonstrating a high level of scholarship in his writings.

I find this book essential to read and very beneficial to young and future leaders.

*Professor Maamar Bettayeb, Vice Chancellor for Research and  
Graduate Studies, University of Sharjah – UAE*

I would like to congratulate H.E. Dr. Rashid Alleem for his innovative book *The SEWA Way*. I was delighted reading the 15 winning principles that SEWA implemented to reach this level of pioneering and progress.

*George K. Aziz, Managing Director,  
SCAN Electromechanical – UAE*

Tomorrow the world will think of Dr. Rashid Alleem as not just the face of SEWA, but the leader who provoked a change in the system, capable of making a champion out of anyone.

There is no secret to his success, but not all can be like Dr. Rashid.

*Ansif Ashraf, President, Young Chamber of Commerce & Chief Editor, Cochin Herald Media Network LLP – INDIA*

The story of Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA) is an amazing one. Transforming any organization is a challenge. The challenge becomes even greater for a utility company that has to significantly balance all the pillars of sustainability.

*Professor Dr. Mohammad Arif, Professor of Sustainability and Process Management, University of Salford – United Kingdom*

“One should never be complacent or satisfied. If you do, you hit the dead end!” These words, written by Dr. Alleem, are some of the strongest words I have ever read (and they are true). *The SEWA Way* is a practical book full of real life lessons.

*Dr. Ahmad Bin Hassan Al Shaikh, Modern Printing Press, Hassan Bin Al Shaikh Group – UAE*

In *The SEWA Way*, Dr. Rashid Alleem, the visionary chairman of Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA), provides a unique and engaging perspective on creating success in a company through the use of 15 comprehensive principles.

*Farhad Bayati, CEO, mBELLAb Power Solutions LLC – UAE*

An extremely unique and invigorating view of a utility company that clearly focuses on its individuals. I believe that many leaders will find enjoyment in adopting some of the principles to their organisations.

*Milorad Ilic, Programme Director,  
Mott MacDonald*

The creative approach for improvement, efficiency and success in companies presented in *The SEWA Way* by the chairman of SEWA, Dr. Rashid Alleem, reveals a clear path for readers to follow in establishing success in their companies.

*Nikki Zadegan, COO & CBDO,  
mBELLAb Power Solutions - UAE*

Dr. Rashid Alleem outlines and demonstrates through real life experience and examples how organizations can link their strategies and global sustainable development agenda and targets.

*Hussain Al Mahmoudi, CEO,  
American University of Sharjah Enterprise (AUS Enterprise)*

In this book, Dr. Alleem has narrated the basic principles followed by him which brought targeted changes. These are the guidelines that people at the helm of an organization craving internal change should follow.

*Altaf Hussain General Manager CPA (Canada)  
CPA (Colorado, USA), GECO Mechanical & Electrical Ltd.*

This is one of the best works by a practical leader written in an easy to read and inspirational style. The author's admission that "leadership and learning are indispensable to each other" is the same feeling I got while reading this book.

*Saji George, CEO, SGY Chartered Accountants*

This book gives the grounds for building a high-performing team in an organization through a personal approach by engaging with the team members across all levels and functions. It is refreshing to see a book that brings back fundamental human values.

*Paul Y K Chin, CEO, Taiko Group – Malaysia*

It is perhaps the first book which speaks not only of corporate efficiency and its relationship to the working environment but really tackles the subject from the unique standpoint of the intellectual, ethical and spiritual development of the individual and society.

*Dr. Corrado Sommariva, Managing Director,  
Generation Middle East & Main Group Director ILF Consulting  
Engineers – Abu Dhabi*

*The SEWA Way* is an interesting new management principle that puts a premium on augmenting the happiness of people as a key to corporate success. Dr. Rashid Alleem advocates it even to augment the happiness of nations.

*MP Joseph IAS, Advisor, Government of Kerala  
I/R of Additional Chief Secretary – India*

Dr. Rashid Alleem introduces the concept of transformational leadership in his book, *The SEWA Way*. He defines transformational leadership as a process where “leaders and their followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation.”

*Mufti Ismail Ibn Musa Menk, Head of the Fatwa Department,  
The Council of Islamic Scholars of Zimbabwe known as  
Majlisul Ulama Zimbabwe.*

It is true that a reader today is a leader tomorrow, and knowledge is power, if applied. We have to instil the habit of reading in every mind, so that people find out their own inner selves and become true humans.

*David Thomas, Assistant Director, jETRO Dubai*

*The SEWA Way* is an excellent guide full of great examples and wise advice from the Chairman. It is completely practical and related to daily life – not only to business matters – as you can also use the tips in other fields.

*Mariam Saleh-Rohparwar, Manager Business Development,  
German Emirati Joint Council for Industry & Commerce (AHK)*

The message is abundantly clear, and the reader is directly invited to consider what he or she should do. In other words, the book enjoins action, more or less saying “Now you know what to do, you have no excuse not to start.”

*Peter S. Barlow, Senior Consultant, Pacific Consulting Services*

I resonated with the 15 principles Dr. Rashid Alleem has brought to SEWA. In face of the challenging environment, reforming the organization to move to a new chapter with the right engagement protocols is the only way to survive, revitalize and sustain.

*Chen Jian Hong, Manager (Market & Operations),  
Energy Market Company – Singapore*

Dr. Rashid Alleem continues to expand on his appreciation and recognition of human values with *The SEWA Way*. His insightful exploration of leadership focuses on the common factors of success across all industries and people.

*Kenny McGeachie, Chief Technical Officer,  
EXCELERATE ENERGY L.P. – The Woodlands, Texas*

Dr. Rashid has put in tremendous effort in devising a pragmatic and effective way to lead SEWA forward. His creative deliberation of the principles allows one to easily grasp and remember them. The concepts are insightful and inspiring.

*Henry Gan Wee Teck, Senior Vice President, Markets and  
Operations EMC – Singapore.*

Dr. Rashid is a great visionary and one of the few leaders I have come across in my professional career who can transform his visions and plans into reality with clarity. His latest book *The SEWA Way* is a perfect example of his clear vision.

*Yusuf Petiwala, Regional Director MENA,  
Open Systems International Inc.*

As society and business have globalized, so we need to review and refine our ideas on what is success and how we can achieve it. Dr. Rashid's *The SEWA Way* provides a succinct set of principles in this regard.

*Hideki Matsubayashi, President & CEO,  
YOKOGAWA Electric Corporation*

This book aims at the use of a balanced management system. It offers practical, lasting and tangible solutions that can be engineered and customized to all industries. Wonderful insight by its author, H.E. Dr. Rashid Alleem.

*C. Prince, Chairman & Managing Director,  
Gulf Eco-friendly Services – UAE*

OTHER BOOKS BY DR. RASHID ALLEEM

SUSTAINABILITY - THE FOURTH WAVE OF ECONOMY

MY GREEN JOURNEY IN HAMRIYAH

INSPIRATIONAL STORIES

MY LEADERSHIP SECRETS

IS SUCCESS A SIN?

SUCCESSFUL MARKETING PLAN

THE 13 CRITICAL TRAITS OF TEAM DYNAMICS

# Foreword

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It is with great pleasure that I write this foreword and congratulate the work of Dr. Rashid Alleem. I highly recommend *The SEWA Way* to anyone seeking to become a successful leader. As Dr. Alleem eloquently points out, leaders today need to meet expectations for delivering outputs with speed and efficiency, and foster a culture based on cooperation, participation and communication. And they need to be inspirational to their subordinates – not only as a passing whim, but for a lifetime. Dr. Alleem furthermore challenges one to not only meet his or her own aspirations, but also be driven by the greater cause.

At the heart of his book is positivism – he encourages positive thinking as the critical factor for successful leadership. The book is filled with practical tips and personal stories concerning the importance of skills development, networking, appreciation for diversity, effective knowledge management, communication, empathy, continuous innovation, work-life balance, and many more.

What makes this book uniquely inspirational is that it is based on the real life experiences of Dr. Alleem. That is why the book can speak to the readers directly, and challenge them to push their boundaries and look into their leadership and relationship skills with proven methods.

Dr. Alleem's wealth of knowledge and experience goes beyond the usual organizational development discussion and highlights the importance of sustainability as the core element for the future of this country and the world. This does not come as a surprise as Dr. Alleem has long been an advocate and champion for sustainability.

*The SEWA Way* will no doubt unleash the potential of each reader, by pushing them to be creative and realize change in individuals, organizations, communities and beyond.

**H.E. Dr. Thani Al Zeyoudi**

UAE Minister of Climate Change and Environment

# Foreword

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I had the privilege of reading this wonderful book on SEWA's 15 principles, which are the driving force of the Sharjah-based organization. The first thought that came to my mind about SEWA is its connotation to the Indian word 'seva', which means services rendered selflessly to the community by an individual.

Dr. Alleem, with his vision of transforming SEWA into a world-class organization, begins with the preaching of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) "*Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.*" This basic philosophy has enabled him to develop the 15 principles of SEWA that involve teaching and learning going hand in hand. He believes that to be a teacher one has to be a learner. Dr. Alleem has demonstrated how ardent a learner he is by compiling various management concepts, articulating and instilling them in employees so they become lifelong learners with a passion to find solutions. In this process SEWA emerges as an innovative and creative organization that can foster three Rs – responsibility, respect and reality – by focusing on the three Cs – choice, challenge and collaboration. In this manner they become the guiding principles that make SEWA an evolving organization in a dynamic and competitive environment.

Dr. Alleem believes that change is the only inevitable reality (truth) of life and by accepting this philosophy the organization moves closer to being a creative unit where each employee participates in finding solutions in a creative way.

His leadership not only lays down expectations for his employees but also provides a platform for them to communicate freely and promises that even the most trivial idea or thought doesn't go unnoticed at SEWA. SEWA leadership plays a pivotal role in encouraging its employees to participate in value addition to the organization through creative ways.

One of the best practices that he has advocated is competition not from outside but within. This encourages employees to compete with themselves: "*We are our best competitor, we should be continuously challenging ourselves to be more productive and outdo our previous performances.*"

Dr Alleem has coined the concept of critical thinking – which is a unique blend of ‘critical and lateral’ thinking that enables striking the right balance between both and getting a synergetic effect to emerge as a creative organization.

Dr. Alleem is the personification of a transformational leader and the UAE and the world needs leaders like him to make the world a better place to live.

## **Nitin Anand**

Director & Chair of the Executive Council,  
Skyline University College

# Foreword

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The current global economic climate is complex and challenging. Tough times not only call for tough measures, but also encouragement and positivity in the workplace. Corporate leaders today have the responsibility of not only building winning businesses, but also creating engaging and exciting workplaces. Talent attraction and retention of both young and experienced staff is critical to keeping companies successful and a step ahead of the competition.

*The SEWA Way* references Dr. Rashid Alleem's vast personal and professional experience to lucidly explain how workplaces can be empowering, educative and inspiring. *The SEWA Way*, consisting of 15 principles to create a winning future, is definitely a ready primer for business leaders.

From self-goals to motivating fellow employees, the examples and anecdotes make this book a page-turner. I particularly enjoyed the chapter on how to keep the smile intact on a customer's face, as that's a real struggle companies across the world face.

Finally a word on the SEWA and ABB relationship, which only seems to grow from strength to strength. We are proud to be their partners and share their goal of achieving greater efficiency and technological advancement in power generation and transmission.

I hope this book is not the last to come from Dr. Rashid!

**Frank Duggan**

Board Member & President, ABB

# Acknowledgements

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The undertaking of this book would not have been possible without the participation and assistance of so many people whose names may not all be enumerated. However, I would like to express my deep appreciation to all those who contributed to this book's ideas and preparation, especially Dr. Mohammad Tariq, Chairman of Developer Bldg.Cont.LLC for his constant and generous support and encouragement in bringing this book to life.

I must record the help given to me by my Research & Development Officer, Ms. Syeda Kanizul Fatma. To her fell the arduous task of producing drafts after drafts of various sections. She has been constant in her encouragement and advice.

I would like to thank Kumar, Head of Design – SEWA, for cheering me on in my creative endeavour. I would also like to credit the Marketing & Branding team for the relentless support in spreading the SEWA principles inside and outside the organization.

And last but not least, a big thanks goes to my loving family, who through their support and continuous motivation have given me the confidence and platform to undertake the mission I am now on.

**“Successful people are not people without problems. They are people who respond quickly and positively to their problems. In essence, their problems are not stumbling blocks, but stepping stones for personal growth and success. They keep challenging tomorrow.”**

**DR. RASHID ALLEEM**

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(LET'S SET THE STAGE...)

## Leading the Turnaround

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THE BOOK YOU are holding tells a story of transformation, commitment and determination. It's about conscious leadership that inspires, fosters transformation, and brings out the best in others.

*The SEWA Way* offers an in-depth and behind-the-scenes look at a dramatic cultural and behavioural transformation journey undertaken by me. It chronicles my hard work and ability with a laser focus on a singular goal – to make SEWA among THE BEST authentic organizations in the world.

### THE TURNING POINT

Wednesday 22nd April, 2014, was a historical day in my life. It was 3pm and I was in the middle of a late lunch with my beloved family when I received a call from the executive office of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammad Al Qassimi, a member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates and the Ruler of Sharjah, stating that His Highness had chosen me to chair Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA) as he was displeased with the previous management's performance, both financially and administratively.

He wanted me to report for duty the very next day, that is, Thursday morning at 9 am to officially appoint me and give me some private directions and instructions. The call was a huge surprise! I could not believe my own ears and was speechless for a moment. I could not even enjoy the rest of my lunch.

It was decided that I was to report to His Highness directly without intervening board members to ensure speedy and efficient decision making. SEWA's performance had to improve rapidly in order to rescue the authority from expected *bankruptcy*.

It was a transformational moment. I recognised that this was going to be the toughest assignment I had ever been asked to do, which was a self-evident fact as His Highness had personally given me the responsibility. Hence, I took the plunge. It was inevitable that I would have to struggle against a myriad of obstacles and challenges in order to restore the image of the authority and reinstate its honorary position in the country.

His Highness's call reminded me of a similar call from his executive office back in 2010. That time, I was called to rescue Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF Zone), which was in a similar situation to SEWA. I was requested to take immediate corrective measures and revive the business, which had almost \$2 billion in debt.

Under my tenure, SAIF Zone witnessed massive growth and remarkable success and I was recognized for creating a *built to last* organization. So much so that society and people around me started calling me *The Change Leader*. At that point in time I was planning to share the secrets of my success by writing a book called *The Business Miracle*. However, I dropped the idea after receiving the SEWA call as the issues and challenges there were 100 times bigger than the SAIF Zone ones!

## **CAN DO**

I felt I was given a mighty challenge in bringing back to life an organization that had only one per cent (or less) chance of survival. It was a tough call, my innermost beliefs and timeless principles echoed within me, and my internal voice said, "*Rashid, it is just another tough/challenging assignment. Nothing you should worry about. You can do it. Mr. Achiever. Go ahead. God bless you.*" I knew that this new venture would demand incredible amount of resilience and persistence. Therefore, I embraced it with self-confidence. Yes, I was up to the challenge!

Self-confidence is truly one of my innate leadership qualities that have enabled me to transform businesses to A-class organizations wherever I have been in my professional career. In this book I have reinforced the importance of self-confidence and show the path to instill and fine-tune this marvellous attribute in one's persona. This is the linchpin of success.

Prior to my role at SEWA I had been the Director General of four big and respected Government Authorities (running them all at the same time). I always love to call them ‘The Four Big Sisters’: The Sharjah Seaports Department, The Sharjah Customs Department, The Sharjah Airport International Free Zone (SAIF Zone) and The Hamriyah Free Zone Authority (HFZA). Under my wings, they were the best performers among all Sharjah Departments for 10 consecutive years with an annual growth rate of 25-30%. Even during the meltdown of 2008-2009, our growth didn’t dip below 20%.

As a matter of fact, I have also authored a book, *My Green Journey in Hamriyah*. This book is a beautiful illustration and a candid account of my experiences in transforming a barren desert into a world-class economic zone. I recollected my early days of struggle, the challenges that confronted me, and how they were eventually overcome. It’s a detailed account of all the incidences that further reaffirmed my faith in my vision, the importance of team building, and overcoming trials and tribulations before tasting the sweet fruits of success.

As a result of my tireless efforts and a positive vision, Hamriyah Free Zone stands out today as an exemplary organization. It pursues the goals of sustainability as the culmination of social, economic and environmentally sound business practices driven by an ingrained faith in serving society as a whole. This success wasn’t down to a stroke of luck but a payback for my visionary leadership. *My Green Journey in Hamriyah* contains glimpses of my craftsmanship in creating a professional as well as personal vision.

This was followed by something that would surprise you, a rumour spread like a wildfire that His Highness was planning to transfer me to the municipality as they were running into issues and financial difficulties. The rumour was almost accepted as a fact as wherever I went people would ask me when I was going to be transferred and others would congratulate me. Honestly, whenever I heard this, I just smiled without saying anything. It felt good. Although I hadn’t even completed a year at SEWA, people were already talking about my outstanding performance. Society had started to look at me

as somebody who has the leadership qualities and the managerial skills to rescue any department. The saviour perhaps!

In today's world, a leader leads by *persuasion* and *motivation*. My focus is on building role models, not merely leaders. This era resonates with a value-based mindset and leadership style. A leader needs to penetrate the subliminal mind of his followers/protégés and be a life-time source of inspiration. This book epitomizes my ambition for bringing about a transformation to build a corporate culture based on cooperation, participation and communication.

Success is coveted. Everybody wants it. I may sound a bit clichéd but I strongly believe that there is no shortcut to success and no alternative to hard work. A positive approach is the key here. That is why I have dedicated a full-fledged chapter on positive psychology and positivity at the workplace. It's a beautiful account of my innate belief in positivism.

This book is my humble effort to bring about a ripple in the ocean. To create a wave of change in the attitude of today's leaders, especially as in their hands lies the future of the next generation. This book takes you through the ups and downs of a man who armed with his relentless perseverance and extraordinary leadership quality brought about a remarkable transformation in the world around him.

Hence I sign off here with a beautiful quote by my friend and colleague, Shiv Khara. It idealizes the title given to me of *The Change Leader: "Winners don't do different things, they do things differently."*

Welcome to true leadership. Welcome to the truth of leadership.

Enjoy reading the book!

Kind regards,

*Rashid Alleem*

rashid@alleem.com

September, 2015, Sharjah, UAE

‘A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.’

JOHN MAXWELL

## About the SEWA Way

(LET’S GET PREPARED...)

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MOST LEADERS, ENTREPRENEURS, and CEOs pursue the question, “How can I succeed? What is it *for me*?” I pursued a different question: “What is it *from me*? What can I *contribute*?” I firmly believe that a company or an organization *doesn’t* merely exist to maximize profits, but it has to delve deeper to find the real reasons for its being. Therefore, I laid down the cornerstone concept of *The SEWA Way*.

### AN OPPORTUNITY FOR ACTION

*The SEWA Way* consists of 15 principles to create a winning future. These principles are intrinsic to this company but it will harmonize seamlessly in any corporate arena (where transformational change is required!) This book reflects and blends with my leadership style and is emblematic of my professional acquisition of knowledge and skills.

*The SEWA Way* is a personal memoir and a testimony of my first year’s experience here at SEWA, which motivated me to list these 15 principles to succeed in business as well as personal life. These principles are the embodiment of my 15 years of experience in government, semi-government and private companies. Hence, *The*

*SEWA Way* reflects my personal core values and the translation of those values into a comprehensive set of operating practices, business strategies and cultural norms. This book is an archetypal example of the new generation workplace ethics and dynamics.

Leaders today face a stream of remarkably complex challenges, whether it is expanding into volatile international markets or steering the organization through a rough phase. And if this sounds like you, these principles will definitely prove handy. What makes it more intriguing are my personal stories, as each principle has one or more of them related to it. I need to mention here that I have simply tried to narrate the events as I saw them. The opinions expressed are strictly my own.

It is also worth mentioning here that *The SEWA Way* is not a comprehensive, balanced, or official history of SEWA (for that you must look elsewhere). What I recount here are things I witnessed and dealt with in my first year of appointment.

This book is about doing the right things and doing things right in a sequential way. I am sure this book will delight the right people! It is meant for leaders, dreamers, history makers, reformers, wave-makers, visionaries and all those enthusiasts who want to know about *The SEWA Way*.

With this in mind, I hope that my personal story at SEWA will be informative, intuitive, and most important of all, enjoyable to read. I also believe that as you begin to understand this book, you will find ways to adopt *The SEWA Way* to realms of your professional as well as personal life.

Think of this book as a sampler. You, the reader, need not start at the beginning and work your way through to the end. If you want to, feel free; otherwise, scan the table of contents and read whatever items interest you most.

## **WHY SEWA'S PRINCIPLES WILL WORK FOR YOU**

What makes a successful business leader? How to climb the corporate ladder? What if you fail? These are just a few of the questions that ring in our minds every single day!

I can say with certainty that *The SEWA Way* is the answer to all these questions and many more! The core essence of this book, 15 fundamental *winning* principles will guide you through your leadership journey. This book is my effort to empower the readers (yes, you are one of them!) to become leaders/experts in their respective fields.

There are tons of books on leadership and other related topics, so you may ask what's in this book for me? Does it really have something new to offer? A secret mantra for success? Well, that's for *you* to find out! All I can say is that this book is definitely unique. What really sets it apart from the rest is the *fresh* approach towards leadership in its entirety! I am not a fan of technical jargon and *heavy-duty* words, so I have steered clear of them. Simplicity is a virtue!

The ultimate test of a great leader is not the absence of difficulties, but the ability to *bounce back* from setbacks – stronger than before. I staunchly believe that it is all about *living* by your core values, fundamentals, and principles. They form the DNA of your organization. But if you were to think of *The SEWA Way* being only about 'values and principles', you would be terribly mistaken. In reality, this book is about igniting your core values with imaginative new practices. Learning, innovation and growth paired with intense belief in ethics and integrity are the keynote principles of this book.

No two companies are alike, and even the organizations with very identical business practices have vastly different culture and business norms. Similarly, no two individuals are alike. This book will enable you to unleash your *USP (Unique Selling Point)* and *enthusiastically* urge you to go that extra mile to achieve your goals. A lot of time, energy and thought-provoking sessions have gone into the making of this book and it will definitely make you a better leader.

Leadership is like a muscle, the more you train, the stronger you get. I sincerely hope that *The SEWA Way* will prep you to go to the gym right away (and discipline you to keep going back). Do make this book your daily regime as it is packed with all the necessary tools and techniques to achieve your personal and professional goals.

Furthermore, to spark your interest, I have drawn heavily on my professional experience and latest researches, using anecdotes and examples that I found helpful and hope you will too! Above all, I am certain that this book will become your 'friend' and 'guide' in tough times. Count on me!

On behalf of everyone at SEWA, I wish you happy reading.

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a smile”

BERNARD KELVIN CLIVE

PRINCIPLE 1

## Smile

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### SMILING CITY

“SMILE - YOU ARE IN SHARJAH” stated a signboard that was installed in Sharjah’s Al Arouba Street, the main street, by the late His Highness Sheikh Khalid Bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, the Ruler of Sharjah back in 1971. His wish was to see a smile on everyone’s face who lived in or came to Sharjah. This positioned Sharjah in the whole region as the smiling city. Later, when His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qasimi took over in 1973, he supported the idea by laying down a bed of roses, with *‘Smile, You are in Sharjah’* engraved on it.

Thank you Your Highness for positioning Sharjah as the city of smiles. I strongly believe that smiling is the most peaceful yet powerful language on Earth that does not need any medium of translation to be conveyed. Max Eastman said it right, *“A smile is the universal welcome.”*

### LET US ALL SMILE

A smile is a curve that sets everything straight! It’s a free therapy that gives an instant facelift, so let us all smile. Little do we know about the power of a smile. It can make someone’s day, it

can turn around someone's life and it can soften the hardest of hearts. In a working environment the smile is of vital importance and SEWA understands this. It enlivens everyone and sets the pace of a good day's work leading to productivity and efficiency. We could ignore the importance of such a seemingly trivial thing, but it is backed by scientific research. Who doesn't want a boss who smiles with his employees?

### **IMPORTANT ASSET**

A leader's most important asset is a smiling face even in a time of difficulties. At SEWA we bring a smile to each other's faces because we work towards fostering the culture of togetherness and coherence. With a smile on our face and a vision to be among the best authentic organizations in the world. We are a smiling winning team.

### **WHY SMILE?**

You might ask, why have I put the smile as the first principle out of my fifteen? The apt answer is that it was one of the toughest challenges. My organization was facing frustrated and unhappy customers. The customer satisfaction survey carried out at SEWA revealed a very low satisfaction index compared to the industry trends.

So, I started with the 'smile' for two main reasons. First, to restore the vision of His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan that whoever comes or lives in Sharjah should be happy and, second, to build a customer-oriented organization where the customer's voice is heard loud and clear.

In one of my early speeches I was quoted saying, "*We are a customer-driven organization, for us the customer comes first and whatever we do should satisfy the customers, whether residential, commercial or industrial. Period.*"

### **THE SMILE ENIGMA**

The other day, I was reading a *New York Times* article which was actually a Sunday book review of the famous book *Stumbling on Happiness* by Daniel Gilbert (an influential psychology professor at Harvard University). It really fascinates me to see how the subject of happiness has emerged today as an inter-disciplinary

field that has attracted psychologists, economists, and other empirically minded researchers.

Out of all the basic human expressions, the smile is perhaps one of the most widely studied. A recent research has shown that a smile is actually a potential predictor of both a person's current emotional experience and a host of downstream life outcomes.

### **WHAT RESEARCHERS DISCOVERED ABOUT HAPPINESS**

An important aspect revealed about the hidden potential of our smile is that people with the most intense smiles have an elevated subjective wellbeing compared to those with less intense smiles. Whoa! So if you want to live a longer, healthier life, the secret code is right under your nose!

This makes me happy, as these kinds of studies give us the ray of hope that happiness (how ever elusive it may be!) is the most sought after aspiration. The world is moving towards happiness and, for me, the journey begins with a smile.

### **SEWA SMILES**

A big signboard with a smiley on it welcomes people right at the SEWA head office's entrance. I had it installed with the intention of strengthening His Highness's vision of spreading smiles and happiness. It is my effort to enliven the customer's, as well as employee's face with a smile when they enter or leave SEWA.

You can't imagine the positive feedback I received from both employees and the community. I received many posts with the smiley sign in social media (Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook) with complimentary comments. That put a bigger smile on my face.

### **ENCOURAGING QUOTES**

There are motivational and encouraging quotes hung along the office corridors to bring a smile to people's faces and uplift their morale. Furthermore, we also have smiling portraits of real employees that showcase their achievements and triumphs in and around their office cubicles. I believe light-heartedness is the key to achieving any goal and winning hearts. I am sure that if we win people's hearts then success will come to us eventually.

## THE POWER OF THE SMILE WINS

As they say, “*You don’t get a second chance to make a first impression.*” Here’s an interesting anecdote. One day I was leaving the office on my way to the Government House for an important meeting when I saw an angry and frustrated customer who was complaining about his monthly electricity bill at the reception desk. I approached the customer with a big smile and requested him kindly to sit down in our waiting lounge, which calmed him down. We talked about different subjects and the gentleman eventually felt better and started to smile.

Relieved to see him smile, I asked his permission to leave for my meeting. The gentleman stood up, shook hands with me and couldn’t believe his ears that I was the chairman of SEWA – yet I had refused to leave without solving his problem and restoring his smile!

Such is the power of a smile. The angry and upset customer ended up smiling and thanking me for making his day! What a wonderful, beautiful and marvellous tool.

## HIGH-TOUCH CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

High-touch customer service is a type of interaction with your customers that requires human intervention. Organizations/companies need to optimize this situation and it should be considered as a golden opportunity to tie-in your customers. Simply put, “*complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction.*” I see the flip side of it, to me Customer Complaints are opportunities to:

- ☞ Evaluate how well you are doing
- ☞ Identify weak points in your systems and processes and put them right
- ☞ See situations from the customer’s point of view
- ☞ Improve customer satisfaction
- ☞ Create long-term loyalty

This is where our smile journey begins. Where it ends – well, it will never really end. Our new focus on customer experience has no final destination; rather it represents a relentless effort to make tomorrow’s experience even better than today’s.

## CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE EXCELLENCE

Customer satisfaction is one of our key success factors and I have made it a priority for the whole organization, and not just a department. I want to ensure that everyone at SEWA gives their best to spread a smile in people's lives. Naturally, I celebrate great service by sharing exceptional stories with the entire organization. A smile brings kindness and as Henry James rightly said: *"Three things in human life are important. The first is to be kind. The second is to be kind. And the third is to be kind."*

This reminds me of an interesting book in my library that keeps motivating me to offer superior service to customers. It's titled *The Experience* and is written by Bruce Loeffler and Brian T. Church. The book delves deep into the *5 Principles of Disney Service and Relationship Excellence*.

*The Experience* talks about 'I. C.A.R.E' Principles, and the Experience Quotient offers a path and the advice to help you do exactly that:

- I. IMPRESSION:** The first and lasting imprint on people's minds; this is the catalyst to build a great relationship.
- C. CONNECTION:** The pivotal point between contact and relationship. Striking the right chord to convert clients and customers from consumers to ambassadors (those on a mission to tell the world specifically about you). All this rests upon the ability to create a deep intellectual, emotional and personal connection.
- A. ATTITUDE:** Attitude is the lens through which you see the world. It's the outlet of the outer expression of your inner feeling. It's the manifesto of everything you think, say and eventually do.
- R. RESPONSE:** The hallmark of customer service and an exceptional experience is the response. The motto of service is to respond and not react. The crux lies in the response time, tone, and talent.
- E. EXCEPTIONALS:** The management team and employees must be prepared, empowered and endowed to have the Exceptional experience living and breathing within them.

## **GIVE SOMETHING MORE**

The essence of successful customer-centric thinking is to evolve a customer's needs and associated behaviour. This means offering products and solutions that not only meet their expectations and fulfil their needs, but also *create new ones*, anticipating their behaviour. This is the point where “blue ocean strategies” meet “customer-centricity”.

Here are some classic examples: Organizations like Ritz-Carlton implement this by striving to achieve excellence in each and every point of contact with their customers. On the other hand, BMW practices excellence in customer-centricity by creating experiences for its key customer groups (for example, VIP parking at major events, factory tours in Germany, BMW magazine subscriptions, exclusive digital access to BMW lifestyle content etc.). Mercedes Benz's customer strategy ‘driven to delight’ by examining and refining every touchpoint is another great example.

## **SMILING CUSTOMERS, STEADY GROWTH**

Modern organizations need to understand the importance of a smile that leads to kind and empathetic interaction with the customer. It doesn't cost a thing! Lending a patient ear to a customer is the best one can do for his/her organization and the benefits are long-term. There are instances wherein your most angry customer becomes the most loyal customer. Just listen and cooperate! Kindness could also be a stunning profit enhancement tool. So just go those extra *ten* miles to bring that staggering smile! Will you?

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the slogan *Smile, you are in Sharjah* was initiated by the Ruler of Sharjah almost more than three decades ago and it is still relevant today. How outstandingly it has survived the test of time! As Thich Nhat Hanh so beautifully said, “*Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy.*”

In fact, the latest research has revealed that a smile can directly affect your body and brain! Ronald E Riggio, in one of his blogs, mentions that we are actually better looking when we smile. We are attractive. People treat us differently when we smile. We ap-

pear to them as reliable and relaxed. In his words, “*each time you smile you throw a little feel-good party in your brain.*” So, wear that wide smile right away.

## **800 SEWA**

We at SEWA will never give up on our pledge to delight all our customers and give them THE BEST experience.

To create an effective and consistent way to capture customer feedback with the right customer listening tool, I created two things:

**1. My voice** (anyone, sitting at any corner of the world can lodge his/her complaints, grievances or innovative suggestions by accessing our website [www.sewa.gov.ae](http://www.sewa.gov.ae) The concerns are directed to my desk).

**2. Toll free** number-800 SEWA (around-the-clock service for all our customers).

I would like to leave this principle with a great quote that I love, “*Successful people always carry two things on their face. Smile ☺ silence. Smile is the way to solve many problems, and silence is the way to avoid many problems.*”

So, smile and enjoy reading the second principle.

“The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another.”

MARVA COLLINS

## PRINCIPLE 2

# Teaching and Learning

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### PERSONAL RENEWAL

AT A GATHERING IN PHOENIX, Arizona, John W. Gardner delivered an influential speech to a group of professionals at McKinsey & Co. Interestingly, the speech was not about money or power, and instead it was titled ‘Personal Renewal’. Clearly, his focus was largely on the learning imperative. Here’s a few words from his inspiring speech, *“We have to face the fact that most men and women out there in the world of work are more stale than they know, more bored than they would care to admit.”* He urged, *“Be interested. Everyone wants to be interesting, but the vitalizing thing is to be interested....”*

This speech was delivered on November 10, 1990, and this timeless advice is still beneficial in today’s head-spinning era. The best leaders are insatiable learners. Don’t be satisfied with what you already know. As in Bob Pritchard’s words, *“If you are not learning – someone, somewhere else is. When you meet – guess who has the advantage?”*

## WHERE DOES LEARNING HAPPEN?

Learning need not – and, most of the time, does not – take place in a formal training environment with a certified instructor; rather, most teaching and learning happens informally throughout the work day. As Bossidy and Charan state in their book, *“Keep in mind that 80% of learning takes place outside the classroom. Every leader and supervisor needs to be a teacher.”*

In my opinion, both teaching and learning go hand in hand as one has to be a learner to be a teacher and they are really two sides of the same coin. There is no end to learning in life and teaching is never restricted to only the classroom. We are all fortunate enough to live in this era of open information, communication and intellect. It is all about challenging your perspective and exiting the classroom bubble/delusion. In an organization or any other work place area, the manager becomes your role model. Knowingly or unknowingly you are constantly learning one thing or the other from your leader, it’s a mutual phenomenon. The following quote by John F. Kennedy sums up my feelings, *“Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.”* Are you determined to learn something new every day?

Islam propagates that seeking knowledge is *obligatory* for every Muslim. Prophet Mohammad, (Peace Be Upon Him) always encouraged all humankind to procure knowledge as is clear by his famous statement: *“Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave.”* What an elevated rank the act of seeking knowledge has!

## THE QUEST OF KNOWLEDGE NEVER ENDS AT SEWA

At SEWA we aim to engage ourselves in such a learning process wherein anybody can learn from anyone and embed a culture of openness for ideas and views. Learning is bi-directional here. As we learn from each other the pillars of the organization get stronger and pave the way for an A-class organization.

There is plethora of information and knowledge in this world, we just need to open the window of our mind and absorb it. A human is *mortal* but the teaching that he/she imparts to humankind stays behind leading to immortality of his/her thoughts and views.

In today's era, with the advent of science and technology, the act of learning has undergone a tectonic paradigm shift. With *e-learning* simplifying the entire procedure of teaching and learning, it certainly satiates our desire for knowledge.

I have seen highly-reputed universities offering PhD degrees through e-learning. What a shift!

Technology has many perks, one of them is e-learning. These days we don't search online, we *google it!* I want to share a real life example of technology at its best: While in the creating process of this book, I came across Mary Barra's, CEO of GM, speech to Stanford University's graduates. And I was extremely inspired by it. See, how beautiful! She is not even aware that her speech inspired someone sitting halfway across the world. Here's an excerpt: "*Hard work beats talent if talent doesn't work hard.*" I couldn't agree more! I say, "*Education opens doors. Talent opens worlds. But it is hard work that will enable you to accomplish your dreams.*"

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING AT SEWA**

SEWA is not just focused on training people to adhere to the guidelines of a policy. Employees want it to be a safe haven for their customers, whom they consider '*a valuable business asset.*' We at SEWA challenge ourselves to reflect and push our boundaries, to come out of the comfort zone with the outcome that there's never a *dull* moment at SEWA. We believe good leaders are good teachers as well. The diversity of employees and the unpredictability of day-to-day life keep the teaching and learning process alive and perpetual.

It's all about fostering more collaboration between colleagues, which eases the exchange of ideas and views and tickles the critical faculty of our mind leading to innovation that is the need of the hour. It's not about '*my point of view*' or '*your point of view*', we believe in the '*teachable point of view.*' SEWA aims at instilling in its employees the passion of life-long learning in a world which is continuously changing and in dire need of positive solutions. In the most apt words of Chip Wilson, "*the pursuit of new knowledge generates excitement along with opportunities.*"

## SEWA KNOWLEDGE SEEKERS

As part of my personal effort to bring positive energy and encourage employees who strive for higher education, we started to recognize those seeking knowledge and higher education certificates during our monthly gathering under the banner of *'knowledge seeker'*. This has really created a learning environment where employees started reaching for higher education. As I am writing this paragraph there are already two of my managers enrolled in a PhD programme, and fifteen in different master programmes, mainly MBAs.

## BE YOUR OWN GUARDIAN ANGEL

One interesting thing that I hear often when talking to executives of renowned companies is that companies value and seek employees who are willing and have the ability to learn new things much more than they value job experience or a college degree. This poses a challenge, how does one adapt and stay relevant in a world that's changing in a jiffy? The answer is, take charge. Be your own guardian angel. Accept the fact that the world around you is *oozing* with knowledge and information both relevant and irrelevant. Look for avenues to hone your existing skills or learn something abstractly new. Exploit the free resources at hand. YouTube, Google, LinkedIn and all the social media apparatus is at your service. You just need to jettison the excuse and understand that you can learn *anything, anytime, anywhere*. Just challenge yourself. Will you?

Retaining your employment is a must in today's rapidly changing environment, which in turn calls for constant learning and re-learning. There are times when your boss changes, which means employees may be required to unlearn previous sets of workplace behaviour and ethics and start a whole new process from the beginning. Hence, never say never. Commit to continual learning right away.

## IT'S TIME FOR A CHANGE IN MINDSET

One of the challenges I noticed from the first week of my appointment to chair SEWA was that most employees never conformed to training and development programmes. What made

me sad was that top executives and seniors who were supposed to lead and manage the Authority did not have a clear career development plan. I remember the first thing I did was to implement a full-fledged section in the HR department called ‘training and development’. Its job was to set up strategies covering both technical and non-technical programmes and include each and every one in SEWA.

I feel that employees at companies today are “hungry” for the **3Rs – Responsibility, Respect and Reality**. However, leaders and managers can meet these needs by focusing on the **3Cs – Choice, Challenge and Collaboration**. So, it is a two-way communication. I will be elaborating more on both the 3Rs and the 3Cs in coming chapters. Just keep on enjoying reading!

### **LET’S OPEN-UP!**

The hands-on, management-by-walking-around approach became a SEWA tradition the moment I joined on April, 24 2014. Interested to know more about it? Below is my version of MBWA (Managing-by-walking-around).

### **WALK AND TALK MEETINGS**

Being the chairman and running such a huge organization, I go through periods where unexpected events, interruptions, personal matters and day-to-day chores cause me to be reactive rather than acting peacefully according to a plan. To get back on track and focus on the business at hand I had to invest a great deal of time, which often involved sorting out the small stuff. To fix this, I adapted a best practice called *walk and talk* meetings, where small and quick decisions are taken while walking out of my office towards other offices, in the corridor or even on my way to the parking lot. It saves me a great deal of time. Not surprisingly, this approach found favour with great leaders like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg. So, why not follow suit?

### **GRAB-AND-GO**

Today, leadership is all about conversation and smart communication. Smart leaders are always on the look out to find ways to

use conversation to manage the flow of information in an honest and transparent fashion. In order to quickly cut out the nonsense and get to the core of things we practice quick *grab-and-go* sessions to exchange bite-size organizational knowledge.

### **OPEN DOOR POLICY**

Here's a story I would like to share with you: I was doing my walk-through in our Headquarter when I noticed that nearly all the offices with wooden doors had them closed. I immediately got the doors unhinged and since then we have an 'open door policy.' My belief is that by opening doors we are welcoming information and human interaction. This makes it easier for communication between management and employees and creates a more informal and relaxed atmosphere for exchanging ideas and thoughts.

### **TYPEWRITER**

Let me share a funny yet very helpful experience: I went to visit the Halwan office in the main city to catch up with my employees and interact with our customers to gauge how we were doing. In one of the offices, I observed that one of the employees was still using a *typewriter* for some documents related to the central store. I could not believe my own eyes. "*Who uses a typewriter in today's business world?*" I asked. The employee had been with the organization for over 20 years. What surprises me is that people are threatened by new technology, whereas they should be embracing it as it makes life easier and the workplace more efficient.

Using typewriters was the first thing that Steve Jobs stopped at Apple. He said, "*NO typewriters at Apple... We believe the typewriter is obsolete. Let's prove it inside before we try and convince our customers.*" What a coincidence!

### **NO PRINTER**

You may think that's a funny story? Well, then you'll be amazed to read this one: I requested the manager of the purchase department to meet me in order to resolve the issue of delayed service at the water and gas divisions. After a root cause analysis, I learnt that the key reason was '*absence of printers.*' The fact was that there were no printers installed for printing the documents at

both the divisions. I am still wondering how these departments functioned without printers for years! Who do you blame?

### **DUMPING STATION**

The next thing that caught my attention was a small meeting room that had been converted into a dumping station where old files and PCs were stacked. I felt that was definitely the wrong place to store such things as they should either be in recycling bins or filed in the right place. “*What the hell is going on in this place?*” I asked. After some thought I decided to clean up the room and transform it into a knowledge paradise where management, motivational and self-help books are kept for employees to come and read in their free time.

### **SEWA READS**

You can’t imagine how popular this place became with employees for reading and small meetings to share and exchange their knowledge. It made me proud to say *SEWA Reads*.

### **MORAL OF THE STORIES**

The lessons that we learn from these stories is that human beings have a tendency to get into a comfort zone very easily, but we need to jostle ourselves to make a conscious effort adapting to the growing and ever improving world. We have all heard of “*Darwin’s Law of the Survival of the Fittest*.” Huge and powerful animals like *dinosaurs* could not survive as they could not adapt themselves to the changing environment of the world. We definitely need to learn the lesson from this example. Change is the only constant in life. You should be observant, talk less but listen more. This will make you a wise person. I like what the Dalai Lama once said, “*When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new.*”

### **READING FOR LEADING**

“*A reader today a leader tomorrow*” is one of the greatest quotes I have come across in my professional life. I am a strong believer of imparting knowledge and transferring it to the younger genera-

tion. This is one of the principles I have lived with while leading different organizations for the past 15 years.

### **WHERE TO START**

*Teaching* is about being a teacher to a group or team of employees. *Learning* is acquiring knowledge or new skills and building your capacity to strengthen your core competency, thereby enabling you to maximize job performance and exceed employer expectations. The former is incomplete without the latter. Wondering where to start?

### **READ 1 BOOK PER WEEK**

A remarkable quality of leaders and great achievers is commitment to lifelong learning. I love the message '*Work in progress*'. One shouldn't stagnate. One should never be complacent or satisfied. If you do, you hit a dead end!

Read everything that comes your way or interests you. In fact, if you read one hour per day in your field (or outside your field), that will translate into about one book per week and eventually to about 50 books per year. Expanding your knowledge horizon isn't restricted to books: Listen to relevant *podcasts* while driving and *seek out mentors* vigorously.

### **HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW**

As a Chairman, I need to fight fires and address issues every day. HBR audiobooks are my virtual advisors, (especially on days when I am totally burnt out and tired). As a part of my subscription with HBR, I get access to the latest business bestsellers, as well as a world of exhaustive case studies and other management tools. Hence, on my way to and from office, I just plug-in and transcend into that world.

In addition to the above, I passionately (when time permits) read their weekly newsletters, journals, articles, white papers and all other new releases. And yes, I eagerly await their '*The management tip of the day*' notification. They have proven quite handy!

You don't just need to be a master in your field, you need to be a *well-rounded genius* capable of talking about any subject whether it is financial, political or sports related. Consume knowledge

like air and put your pursuit of learning above all else! You will see yourself rise above everyone around you.

Many years ago, Earl Nightingale, (very rightly) said that one hour per day of reading will put you at the top of your field within three years. Don't you want to be on top? All it takes is just one book per week. Go ahead, invest in your personal and professional development. The benefits are manifold.

### **FOCUS ON COLLECTING KNOWLEDGE**

Who doesn't want to win? Well, *competition* is not all that bad if it's healthy and has a *higher* purpose. Even if you are not competing with anything/anyone, chances are that someone, somewhere is competing with you. So how do you beat that? Trust me, the only way is to be on top and gain a competitive advantage by having more relevant and industry specific knowledge. No amount of technology, resources or capital (in all their cumulative effort) can come on par with knowledge. Verily, "*Knowledge is power, if applied.*" So, where will you start? Here's how...

### **FOCUS MORE ON CONNECTING WITH KNOWLEDGEABLE PEOPLE**

Having prioritized the importance of knowledge, another smart move that can get you the prime spot is being with knowledgeable people in your company/team/friend circle etc. Moreover, you are known by the company you keep. So, bring it on. Network with knowledgeable people and never ignore the message/knowledge just because you discount the messenger. Good advice is good advice – regardless of the source.

### **ALLEEM BRILLIANT NETWORKING**

Networking creates a fabric of personal and professional contacts who will provide support, feedback, insight, information, and resources. Today, networking is at the heart of all business. Personally, I feel networking is part and parcel of any leader's development plan, hence the idea of *Alleem Brilliant Networking* was born.

Alleem Brilliant Networking has created a two-way flow of value by serving as a resource and helping others succeed. It is an opportunity for both to give and receive targeted leads and referrals.

Successful networking is created on the grounds of mutual trust, shared knowledge and valuable relationships. People do business with those they like and trust. This will allow one to grow their business by dealing directly with other firms or by referring one another. Networking is clearly an individual's or firm's best marketing strategy. Alleem Brilliant Networking's face-to-face networking events enable participants to create lasting impressions in the minds of people you meet. The advantage of cultivating personal relationships helps set you apart from the crowd. In addition, it inspires one by boosting self-confidence to take the plunge and start your own business or just expand your industry knowledge.

I always say that, "*Ultimately, it is not about who you know; but who knows you*". Our dynamic and structured networking events consist of insightful keynote addresses focusing on how to do effective networking and training on how to use social media education. The strategy behind Alleem Brilliant Networking is to empower professionals and organizations to forge meaningful and relevant relationships, which will help propel their success.

I see SEWA as a fountain of immense knowledge. Powered by years of experience, most of the employees are a living source of invaluable knowledge and expertise and I had to tap this potential. Hence I had the knowledge heaven constructed. Continue reading to find out more about it.

## **VIRTUAL KNOWLEDGE HEAVEN**

To add to the essence of teaching and learning, I have created the SEWA e-library – an idea suggested by my research & development officer, Syeda. This is a platform for avid readers, as well as people who just want to read to relax or reference. Books are downloaded from reputed websites like *Amazon*, *Goodreads*, *Barnes & Nobles*, *eBay* and also my personal website, *alleem.com*.

I personally ensure that all the latest books from diverse fields, whether technology or self-help motivational bestsellers, are readily available for the employees. Knowledge has to be in usable form. Unfortunately, I have seen a lot of companies that have an extensive library of DVDs, videotapes and transcripts that capture some of the expertise of retirees, but the material has not

been edited and organized in ways that make it easily findable. I aim to create a real and virtual knowledge heaven. I always say that the best leaders I know aren't just the boldest thinkers; they have the most insatiable hunger for knowledge. Knowledge is power, if applied. Don't you agree with me?

### **AGILE MINDSET**

The latest neuroscience research has shown that the human brain is highly plastic, which means you can mould it into any form and shape. So, the good news is that we can learn new behaviours and modify deep-set behaviours at any age. Fantastic, isn't it? But it requires hard work and real focus. In today's unsteady and shaky business environment, with unpredictable challenges and competition, we need to be agile learners. We need to break free of our *fixed mindset* and believe that we have reservoirs of untapped potential. And how do we tap that potential? By exhibiting a growth mindset and keenness to learn over time with agility. Learn and grow! So, do you see your potential as fixed or growing?

### **SEWA'S GROWTH MINDSET**

SEWA houses employees of various age groups and cultures. I love hiring young, talented people as they bring a fresh approach and energy into the workplace and they have the *zeal* to learn and grow. On the other hand, I respect experienced employees as they are seasoned enough to tackle important issues and they are the building blocks of the organization. With experience comes knowledge. I just love this combination.

But I know that with time the human mind does slow down. We tend to become stagnant. This is a nightmare for me that I fear the most. So, I am always on the lookout for fresh avenues to hone my talent and learn something new and I feel the urgency of providing my employees with the opportunity to do so as well. Hence I turned to *glocalization*. It is one of my approaches to inspire the *growth mindset* of SEWA.

### **THE SEWA GROWTH CYCLE**

Growth is the 'Holy Grail' of our corporate strategy. It's a universal truth that not only do high-growth companies deliver sig-

nificantly greater shareholder returns than the average, they are also five times more likely to survive as independent entities than their low-growth counterparts.

The SEWA growth cycle is driven by our vision, mission and core values. I call it a *cycle*, because it's an on-going process. It's a never-ending phenomenon. It's progressive!

With *customers* spearheading the process, our growth cycle encircles the various prominent phases – gains momentum with Partners – and completes its full-term with 100% customer satisfaction, 100% of the time. Voila!

### SEWA Growth Model A 10-Part Process



Let's take a closer look at it:

1. **Customer:** Our motto is to exceed our customer's expectations. We adapt the latest technology and trends to provide them with convenience and comfort. Our only aim is to delight our customers.
2. **I am Creative:** It's an initiative to boost SEWA's IQ. Employees are inspired to pour in their ideas/suggestions, and the best idea is implemented and awarded every month. It's CRITICAL thinking in action!
3. **Sustainability:** I have pledged to incorporate sustainability practices in all walks of my life, and SEWA's every move is testimony of that. The world we live in is our responsibility, and adapting/promoting sustainable development is the crucial need of the hour.
4. **Competitiveness:** Competing with rivals is passé. We out-innovate them by leveraging global standards in all streams of our business. We revolutionize the industry and create our own benchmarks.
5. **Winning Team:** Our champion team members put their heads, hands and hearts together to form a winning team and come out with flying colours.
6. **Partners:** Authentic partnerships with fair and trustworthy partners is SEWA's key to success. We strategically collaborate to align our businesses for mutual inter-dependency.
7. **Value-added Services and Products:** We constantly endeavour to add that X-factor in our products/services to stay ahead of time and amaze our customers with pleasant surprises.
8. **Strong Brand Image:** The SEWA brand building centre is dedicated to strengthening our brand presence. It develops the brand identity, which is an asset for SEWA's success.
9. **Continuous Improvement:** Our processes are hinged on ceaseless efforts to improve continuously. Small, incremental but instrumental!
10. **Excellence:** 100% Customer satisfaction, 100% of the time is our business slogan. In pursuit of excellence, we push our boundaries, challenge ourselves and are always on the lookout of fresh avenues.

The above 10 processes formalize our growth model. They work together to accomplish our goals, to enliven our mission and to reach our vision.

### **GLOCALIZATION – ACT GLOBALLY, THINK LOCALLY**

According to [business.dictionary.com](http://business.dictionary.com), *glocalization is the end product of globalization and localization. Products or services are designed to benefit a local market, and at the same time are being developed and distributed at a global level.* This is the need of the hour. Companies need to reach out to every nook and corner of the world to make a mark and sustain themselves in the industry. Plus this management journey enables you to accumulate wonderful ideas and business practices from all over the world and assimilates them to improve your business or transform it totally for the better. Exchange of knowledge and experience is of utmost importance in today's scenario.

### **FRESH THINKING**

In another effort to promote teaching and learning, we sought help from *globally* recognized brands. We want to include the best academic thinking and the best insights from global organizations. Below I have recounted a few such efforts of being *glocal*.

### **THANK YOU SIEMENS**

Siemens has done multiple projects for SEWA over the last 10 years. Some were very successful and others were not, for several reasons, like the SEWA project team lacking the proper project management skills which resulted in delayed strategic projects and the team ran over time and budget. So, after the first meeting I had with their senior staff, I decided to go for a crash course in project management at the Radisson Blu hotel in Sharjah on 5th of November, 2014. The agenda was to endow the top executives of SEWA with a chance to learn from real life project management success and failure stories from Siemens. It was a comprehensive two-day programme full of knowledge and excitement.

### **WELL DONE PHILIPS**

Back in the summer of 2015, while I was doing a lot of intensive inhouse research to manage the peak load and reduce its impact

on the system, an idea of replacing the conventional street light bulbs with the latest LED ones to manage the peak load materialized. Philips came to my mind as one of the leaders in this field. I contacted them right away and was overwhelmed by their quick response. In less than two weeks' time they visited my office with their representative in the UAE, Mr. Srinivasan Krishna, who is also the General Manager of Al Ghandi Electronics.

It was a successful and productive meeting that resulted in the idea of a pilot project on one of the most important roads in the city of Sharjah. A month later the project was executed and completed before time. It resulted in much better illumination, saved tons of greenhouse gas emissions and reduced the power consumption by almost 40%. The initiative was welcomed and appreciated by the community, which resulted signing an agreement with Philips that included 10 kilometres of lighting in different areas of Sharjah.

### **SEWA WELCOMES LINKEDIN**

It's always been a pleasure for SEWA to embark into a congenial relationship with globally renowned companies. I personally look forward to partnering with international companies/organizations as it serves the dual purpose of fostering our relationship with them, as well as laying the foundation for the exchange of ideas and information. In other words: co-learning. I envision SEWA at an international level and these efforts to join hands with such cosmopolitan companies help me to capitalize on the opportunity to go global.

One such example is the alliance with LinkedIn – the well-known business-oriented social networking site that is mainly used for professional networking. Mr. Ali Matar, Head of LinkedIn Middle East & North Africa, met me in my office on 8th December, 2015 to further discuss our partnership and mutual management commitment. They also presented me with my *InMap* – an interactive visual representation of my professional universe. It was really fascinating to see my personalized people network. We both decided to take the relationship to the next level by signing an agreement.

The LinkedIn team led by Rajai El Khadem – Head of Government & Alliances, signed a three year contract with us on 29th of December, 2015. A new beginning at the year-end! That wouldn't have happened that fast without such commitment and professionalism displayed by both.

### **HELLO TOMORROW**

I had an occasion to meet Mr. Khalid Jassim AlSerkal, District Manager Sharjah & Northern Emirates of Emirates Airline on 22nd of December, 2015, and decided to sign an MOU. This initiative was taken to provide SEWA employees with better offers on air travel and vacation itineraries. Emirates has a great reputation in the global market as an industry leader in the aviation sector. It is renowned in the global market for its speed, efficiency and sheer professionalism.

### **EUROPEAN UNION MEET**

January 6, 2016 was a memorable day due to the meeting between European Union representatives in the UAE and myself. Mr. Faouzi Bensara, Senior Regional Advisor for Cooperation and Development for EU requested to meet with me. They were really amazed to see a government entity following global trends and setting international benchmarks and standards. They were really keen to know the transformational change we are going through in our business practices and processes. It was a proud moment for me!

It was a fruitful meet. The agenda was to explore the opportunity to be a global partner with EU. We shared common interests and discussed some valuable insights upon the newly released Global Goals for Sustainable Development, energy policies, long-term planning and capital finance for infrastructural mega projects, as well as staff developments and capacity building.

### **ERICSSON CHANGE-MAKERS FORUM**

It is worth mentioning here that Ericsson organized a one-day event on 10th of January, 2016, called *Change Makers Forum* with the theme of turning change into growth. I was exclusively invited to deliver a speech there to over 300 delegates from the region. It was an avenue to explore and network with brighter

future prospects and exchange ideas and learn a lot more about upcoming breakthroughs and innovative trends.

### **EMERSON WELCOMED ONBOARD**

Mr. Randy Page, President of Emerson Process Management, visited my office on 12th of January, 2016 to express their interest in dealing with us. He, personally, was appreciating SEWA and its efforts to position itself as a global brand. Emerson, itself, enjoys the 484th position in Fortune's list of top 500 largest companies. I was glad that such an international company was recognizing our efforts/initiatives/business practices and showed interest in working together.

In the meeting, we discussed an assessment on our existing Gas Pumping Stations, Smart Metering, SCADA System and an overview of the entire SEWA Gas Distribution System.

### **IBM EPS**

I met Mr. Najj Najjar, IBM Energy and Utilities Industry Leader, on 14th of January, 2016. During the meeting we discussed the latest best practices IBM has developed called 10 Essential Practices as a business approach to building up security capabilities for their clients. I liked the approach very much. I decided that IBM would conduct a gap analysis to understand the security essentials. As a result they came up with the following 10 EPs with the goal/top priority of intelligent cyber threat protection and risk management. Here are the 10 EPs in summary:

1. Build a risk-aware culture and management system.
2. Establish intelligent security operations and rapid threat response.
3. Secure collaboration in social and mobile workplace.
4. Develop security-rich products, by design.
5. Manage IT hygienically.
6. Create a security-rich and resilient network.
7. Address security complexity of cloud and virtualization.
8. Manage third-party security compliance.
9. Assure data security and privacy.
10. Manage the digital identity lifecycle.

## **SUSTAINABILITY WITH DELL**

I was very inspired by the meeting I had on Tuesday, 19th of January, 2016 with Mr. Mark Prosser, Client Solutions Sales Specialist of Dell, to discuss with him the recent IT trends and how exactly true sustainability can bring a better tomorrow. In that meeting, Mark was kind enough to work closely with SEWA to improve the IT infrastructure and information security, as well as doing a gap analysis to ensure the business practices here at SEWA are aligned with the best practices that Dell is doing globally. I believe that we all are stewards of the planet we share. Dell is committed to the environment, and with initiatives like Dell Reconnect, Global Takeback Leadership programme etc. they responsibly recycle old PCs, thereby lowering their environmental footprint.

## **IT EMPOWERMENT WITH HEWLETT-PACKARD ENTERPRISE**

On 1st of February, 2016, I had the occasion to meet Mr. Stanley Sudhakaran, Channel Manager for Hewlett Packard Enterprise. It was a great meeting and they decided to empower SEWA IT infrastructure by improving/enhancing the existing mainframe, as well as providing add-on services to eventually strengthen our competitive and market position by accelerating business innovation with IT.

## **MOTT MACDONALD: NEXT-GENERATION PROJECTS**

I am pretty sure that *yesterday's* tools and technology are a thing of the past. To be the trendsetter, one has to embrace the latest and upcoming ways to improve and benchmark. Hence, I shook hands with Mott MacDonald. It's a global management, engineering and development consultancy adding value for public and private clients on agenda-setting, next-generation projects worldwide. I met Mr. Milorad Ilic on 28th of March, 2016 and we signed an MOU with regards to providing consultancy services for the preparation of 33/11kv substations.

## **YES, SCHNEIDER, LIFE IS ON**

Schneider Electric had organized the 4th edition of the "Power to the Cloud" event on the 17th and 18th of April 2016. Over 800 high-profile delegates including entrepreneurs, C-suite ex-

ecutives, government dignitaries and influencers attended the event. It was an exclusive Schneider Electric exhibition showcasing their latest technologies with innovations transforming the worlds of energy and efficiency. It was a perfect platform to showcase business and technological innovations and to discuss the role of innovation in a knowledge economy.

I joined the other VIPs on April 17th for the inauguration and to deliver a keynote speech at the plenary session where about 800 business professionals were invited.

### **A PROUD MOMENT**

Shortly after the event, I received a thank you note/email from Mr. Benoit Dubarle, President – Gulf Countries & Pakistan. He had personally written to express his deep appreciation for my distinctive presence at the event. He moved on to say that he had received exceptional feedback on my heartfelt speech, and that personally he was deeply touched by it. It really made me proud to hear such amazing things from them. It reassured me that although the world is talking about giving power to the cloud, we need to *empower the heart first*.

### **ABB**

ABB is one of the world's leading power and automation engineering companies that provides solutions for secure, energy-efficient transmission and distribution of electricity. They have been our partners/suppliers for ages, however it was the first time that they organized an event on Advanced Grid Automation Systems.

I remember I met Mr. Martin Zuercher, Hub Business Unit Manager – at the end of 2015, and we discussed organizing a workshop to get updated about the latest know-hows and tech-innovations. The workshop took place on 26th of April, 2016 and I was invited to give a welcome speech. It was a great success, moreover it was also attended by ABB's foreign faculty who flew down from California and Switzerland to participate in the event.

### **ECOMAGINATION WITH GE**

Regional Executive for GE Water, Mr. Myron Van Ert, and Regional Director Mr. Majd Hamdallah met me at my executive

office on 28th of April, 2016. I was very impressed by their Eco-magination portfolio/approach towards sustainability. We discussed the challenges, opportunities and innovative solutions in promoting efficiency in the water sector (desalination treatments). It was a great, constructive meeting.

### **A FORWARD LEAP WITH HONEYWELL**

On 11th of May, 2016, I met Mr. Simon Webster, Regional Business Director. This was just a day after the SEWA Project Management Day and co-incidentally he mentioned about the **LEAP** approach towards project management at Honeywell. I was really impressed by the idea. It intrigued me and I immediately researched it and found out that it stands for **Lean Execution of Automation Projects**. It centres round Lean management and incorporating new technologies to mitigate risk.

### **XEROX ONBOARD**

On 30th of May, 2016, a big team led by Mr. Kadeeb Al Zaabi, Chief Relationship Officer of Mohamed Hareb Al Otaiba Group, visited SEWA with XEROX General Manager, Andrew Horne. It was an exciting meeting that resulted in signing an MOU. Xerox is committed to sustainability, and they proposed to do a gap analysis for SEWA, to execute best utilization of in-house photocopier machines, as well as improve the e-billing facility. All this while being a steward to the environment.

### **CONSERVATION EFFORTS WITH WWF**

Emirates Wildlife Society is a national (UAE) environmental organization that works in association with WWF. On 20th of June, 2016, Mr. Ida Tillisch, the Director General, met me at my executive office to discuss our future collaboration to conserve nature and implement conservation solutions through science, research, policy, education and awareness.

### **ASSET MANAGEMENT WITH DNV KEMA**

DNV KEMA is committed to driving the global transition toward a safe, reliable, efficient, and clean energy future. I met Mr. Hans Urner, senior consultant energy advisory – Middle East

on 21st of July, 2016, at my executive office. We discussed asset management and valuable lessons to be learned from power failure investigations, not only in view of tracing the root cause, but also in order to prevent recurrence and improve the system.

### **GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP WITH EMC**

Energy Market Company Pte Ltd (EMC) operates Singapore's wholesale electricity market – Asia's first liberalised electricity market. On 18th of August, 2016, I met a delegation led by Henry Gan Wee Teck, senior vice president, to improve energy efficiency and energy management, as well as capacity building. A small team from SEWA will be travelling to Singapore EMC operations to have hands-on training on the efficient manner of energy distribution and management. Singapore is globally recognized as one of the most energy efficient countries.

### **LAW OF ATTRACTION**

The business definition of the law of attraction means, “The law of attraction is the name given to the maxim *“like attracts like”*, which in New Thought philosophy is used to sum up the idea that by focusing on positive or negative thoughts a person brings positive or negative experiences into their life. Hence, we applied a positive approach to the business arena where we focused on acquiring and sharing knowledge and industry expertise. As a result we ended up attracting the global mega-corporations cited above.

It was definitely a fruitful step and, as they say, the rest is history. This practice was followed by big global brands such as Google, Oracle and many more. This initiative created the potential for a healthy cross-fertilization of new ideas and techniques necessary for prosperous innovation.

### **WHAT'S NEXT?**

After meeting and signing with the aforementioned multinational companies, I immediately thought that SEWA should move to the next level by becoming a learning organization. As the world becomes more interconnected and business becomes more complex and dynamic, work must become more *learningful*. Therefore, I set a goal for myself and

my team to be the best learning organization in the UAE, where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and fresh thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn and think together.

We understand that to sustain the learning process in an organization one must discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in the organization and there are three broad factors that are essential for organizational learning and adaptability: A supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership behaviour that provides reinforcement. We refer to these as the building blocks of the learning organization.

### **LEARN OR DIE**

Please don't ignore the above header, because if you can truly understand the meaning of 'learn or die' your life will never be the same again. At SEWA we know that we need to learn more than ever, and we have to be a learning organization to sustain our services. Our employees will be skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge. These people could help their firms cultivate tolerance, foster open discussion, and think holistically and systematically. Such learning organizations would be able to adapt to the unpredictable more quickly than their competitors could. Henry Ford's quip, "*Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty*" says it all.

In this tumultuous era, where uncertainty pervades over everything, only an innovative learning organization can survive, simply because of its ability to respond quickly to change and distinguish itself from its competitors. Continual learning is the key here, that is how you continue to grow in life. Dr. Edward Hess says it clearly in the title of his book: *Learn or Die*.

But learning is not only vital for success in life and business. According to neurologists learning makes us mentally stronger. When we learn, the connections between our brain cells grow stronger, and new pathways are etched into our brains.

In order to build SEWA as an innovative learning organization, my top priority is to personally seek employees who are willing and able to learn, have open minds, and embrace change. I am fully aware that today's best and brightest employees want more from their jobs as they are constantly seeking growth opportunities to develop their abilities.

“Experience gathered from books, though often valuable, is but the nature of learning; whereas the experience gained from actual life is one of the nature of wisdom”.

SAMUEL SMILE

### PRINCIPLE 3

## Learn from Experience

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“*THE FASTEST WAY TO SUCCEED*,” IBM’s Thomas Watson, Sr. once said, “*is to double your failure rate.*” Given the fast pace of change confronting managers, employees and employers today, it is critical that they develop the capacities to learn from current work situations and adapt this learning to new situations. Executives worldwide know that failure is an integral part of breakthrough innovation, but the question is, *how do you encourage the right kind of mistakes?*

SEWA employees do it by taking mistakes in a positive vein. Optimism is the take away from our experience as we believe in every mistake there is a lesson learned and potential for growth. Good experience teaches us to do even better next time, while a bad experience tells us not to repeat that approach and tackle the issue in a better way. At SEWA the learning curve is upwards in the pursuit of job success and happiness. Psychologists refer to learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour as a result of experience.

## FAILURE'S A PREREQUISITE TO SUCCESS

Achieving success means you will fail, there's practically no way to avoid this truth. That's perfectly illustrated by this quote from Kristi Loucks: *"The road to success is littered by failures, but the lessons learned are crucial in plotting your course to success."*

I always advise people around me to have 'a *short-term memory of failures*'. Failure certainly hurts, but learning from it and moving on to the next challenge is the best way. There's no need to be depressed or demotivated. Never give up and do what you love to do. If you *love* what you do, you will do it passionately and it won't feel like work. As Winston Churchill said, *"Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm."*

It sounds simple, but it's not a cakewalk. Every moment of our life gives us a chance to learn as there are *always* external stimuli acting upon us (physically/mentally/emotionally). The challenge is to extract the right end product. It is said, *"practice makes a man perfect"*, but it's about practicing the right thing. A liar definitely becomes a better liar if he keeps on lying all the time, but is that a virtue or a vice? It is up to us to decide. Only if we have a positive attitude discriminating between vice and virtue can we advance on the road of self-mastery.

The more mistakes we experience in life, the more opportunities we have to learn new lessons. In today's world, the competitive arena forces you to be a pro at everything. It's not only about learning from our own mistakes, it's also about learning from others' mistakes. Wow! That's also a great time-saver. This encouraging quote by Aldous Huxley is for you: *"Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him."*

## LIFE ISN'T FAIR: DON'T GET AFFECTED BY FAILURES

When you hit trouble resulting in a dead-end, ask yourself, *"What is it trying to teach me?"* Lessons are not always good news! As writer Norman Douglas said, *"There are some things you can't learn from others. You have to pass through the fire."* Take risks! Reach out! Understand that failures are part and parcel of *eve-*

*ryone's* life. Don't get *frazzled* when things go wrong, don't waste your time by being upset or moaning about failure. You are not alone. The world is filled with helping hands, so pick up the phone and find the help you need to conquer that set-back.

At a personal level, I know everyone hates to fail. Why? Because it means facing embarrassment or loss of face. And in this competitive business world, a mistake can mean losing a bonus, a promotion, or even a job. No wonder people are petrified of failing or committing mistakes! Here, I have a different viewpoint: If you see danger/failure/dead-end ahead, change/modify your goals. Realize that there is *more* than only one way to reach your destination. Live by your own definition of success, even if it seems like failure to others.

This brings us to the role of a leader who is tolerant of failures. These are people/leaders/executives who through their words or actions help their people overcome the fear of failure. They create a culture where a deliberate, well thought-out effort that didn't succeed is not only excusable but desirable. And yes, in terms of the stigma of failing, avoid those *naysayers* who postulate, "*You are doomed, if you fail.*" Think carefully, is it written anywhere that your life and career will be permanently doomed if you fail in some of your attempts? No, is the obvious answer.

At SEWA, I have created a culture of *intelligent risk-taking* as I know this is the only way to sustained innovation. If someone fails in his attempt, we say, "*It's completely OKAY to fail. Try again.*" GM's Kettering, regarded as second only to Thomas Edison as America's leading inventor, felt that every educated person needed to learn "*that it's not a disgrace to fail, and that you must analyze each failure to find its cause... You must learn how to fail intelligently. Failing is one of the greatest arts in the world. One fails forward toward success.*"

In fact, there are a number of valuable things that only failures can teach us, such as:

### **HOW TO FIX SOMETHING THAT BREAKS**

What happens when you mess things up at work or home? You feel guilty and embarrassed and have the urge to apologize. But

that's always an easy thing to do! A mistake gives us the opportunity to reflect on what went wrong and teaches us to backtrack and fix whatever we broke. I know, I know, we are all pressed for time – but we should be conscientious enough to identify the mistake that caused us to fail and fix it ASAP. This is one critical life and business skill that we all need to learn. Failures are invaluable in enabling us to learn this art.

### **HOW TO SET INTENTION**

I don't mean to say that we set out with wrong intentions, but it happens (most of the time) that our intentions are not clearly defined or we are not totally committed to them. It is an undeniable fact that we have too many responsibilities to juggle and we tend to prioritize one thing over the other depending on the situation. What happens next? We falter and fail. We are humans after all!

However, failing teaches us to stop, think and formulate intention through the simple process of telling ourselves and the world around us that we are focused and will not get distracted. Make sure that you excel at what you do.

### **HOW TO FAIL AND KEEP GOING**

None of us look forward to making our next mistake, but we all know life is full of mistakes! A hero becomes a hero only when he faces challenges and emerges victoriously. The lesson is that failure is not a dead-end, it's just a big part of the journey we call *life*. So make mistakes, get up, smile and move on. And above all:

### **HAVE A BIG HEART**

Leave an indelible mark in people's minds by having a philanthropic heart. Forgive and forget. Holding a grudge due to an unhappy conclusion is destructive (both psychologically and physiologically). So don't get intimidated by any hurdle en route, rather convert stumbling blocks to steppingstones. I know, I know it's not easy. Why? Because, we are arrogant and want to succeed every time! My advice is to see the bigger picture and have a bigger heart!

## **FAILURES OR FAILURES!**

That doesn't mean that all mistakes are pardonable. Some are lethal and should be called blunders as they are the outcome of sloppiness and carelessness. These are not forgivable. Encouraging failure doesn't mean compromising supervision, quality control or respect for sound/best practices. As a result the leader/manager has to differentiate between failures and take action accordingly.

## **THE TURNING POINT**

In the troubled aftermath of the 2008/2009 financial crisis, the world realized the need to work in groups or teams to ensure the success of projects. These teams consisted of the best thinkers and innovators. The first step taken by a leader to build a winning project team is to ask the following four important questions:

- ☞ What kinds of experience do they have/need?
- ☞ What is their availability?
- ☞ What knowledge and skills will they need?
- ☞ Will they work well in a team environment?

As we learn about extracting the best out of our worst experiences and turning them into the turning point of our lives, let me introduce you to the 3 Ps of Project leadership that we follow here, to ensure success right from the start to build a lasting organization.

## **IT MUST BE AGILE**

Agile is the ability to move quickly and easily. Agile in project management draws on the objectives of reducing waste and promoting and prioritizing activities that add value.

According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), research into the use of agile practices within a business suggests that high-agility businesses generate 30 per cent more profit and grow 37 per cent faster than companies with low agility (Project Management Institute, 2012).

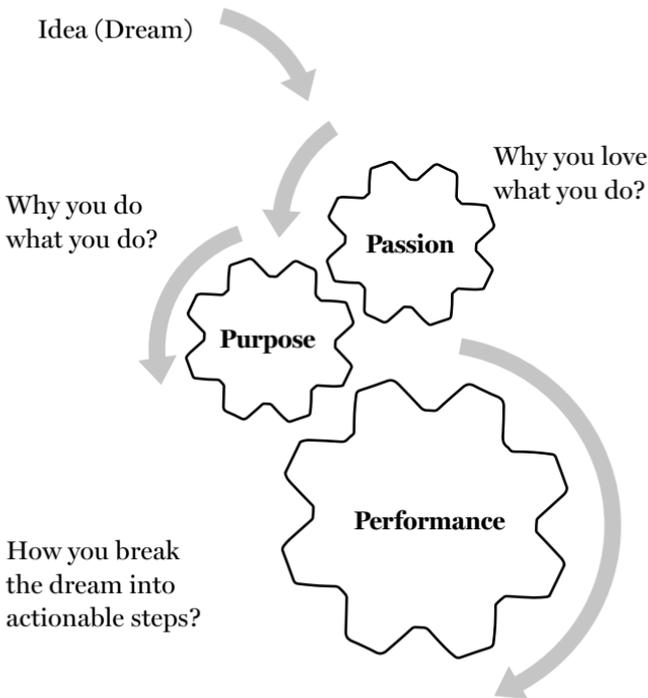
## **GREENFIELD AND BROWNFIELD PROJECTS**

To agile practitioners, the term sprint zero means the initial phase of work where you sort the project out to make sure you

start properly when you're about to tackle a large programming endeavor. In SEWA we renamed it to a perfect start-up. It's a common term you hear in the project department before undertaking any project, which is further classified as a greenfield project (refers to an activity in a completely new area of investment, construction and development, creating something from the ground up without the need to consider previous work) or a brownfield project (refers to starting a project based on prior work or to rebuild/reengineer a project from an existing one).

### THE 3 Ps OF PROJECT LEADERSHIP

Here at SEWA, we abide by the following 3 Ps of the project leadership model, which gives us a flying start as it works fine with almost all kinds of projects. It has proven quite fruitful for us, and the best part is that you can apply it to any realm of your 'personal and professional' life.



To avoid pitfalls, the model is usually displayed in the project meeting room where the project team sits together and finds an answer to each part of the model. We start with the aim of substantiating an idea that is our dream. Then we move on to answer the following:

1. Passion (*why we love what we do?*)
2. Purpose (*why we do what we do?*)
3. Performance (*how we break the dream into actionable steps?*)

The above model forms the basis of our project and is used at the *visualization* stage of a project life cycle, which is later integrated with the project milestones. But remember, the payoff is not in the *diagram* but in the doing.

### **THE ART OF MILESTONING**

Now it's time to master the art of milestoneing. Yes, you got me right, milestoneing is an art for sure and it requires a lot of mindfulness. So, let's get started: Become a *Milestone Champ*. Use milestones on e-v-e-r-y project, big or small, as a matter of routine, but in a clearly defined manner. It stands to reason that the milestones you set should be realistic and achievable. Setting unrealistic milestones only leads to stress and failure. Establish-landmark-benchmark – and, most importantly celebrate the achievement of a milestone.

### **LEARNING BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER**

Before you start a new piece of work, you should check if anyone has done something similar before and if there is anything you can learn from him/her. While you are engaged with that piece of work there should be a stage (or several) where you reflect on what you have done so far to help you decide how to continue forward. This brings you to the final stage of learning upon the work completion. Here, it is recommended that you review the work in its totality, so that if you or someone else were to do a similar task again, the approach can be improved following your review.

## **PAUSE AND LEARN**

Pause and learn is a team conversation facilitated by a knowledgeable outsider, who helps the team to identify and capture knowledge gained at key project stages. Elements of the conversation are documented in the form of knowledge maps, which is a visual representation of a conversation, highlighting valuable insights and comments within the context of that conversation.

The fundamental elements that make Pause and Learn effective are:

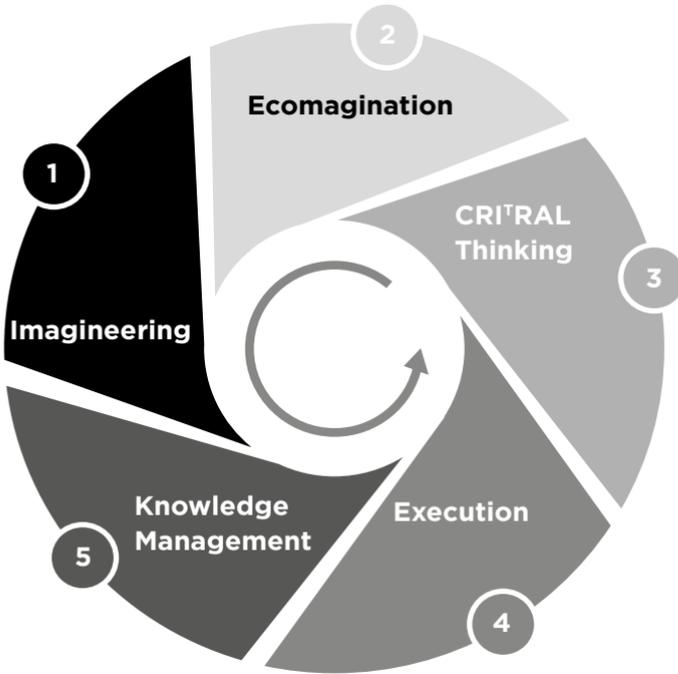
- ☞ A sufficiently knowledgeable facilitator
- ☞ A well facilitated conversation
- ☞ Key questions
- ☞ Team ownership of the process
- ☞ Clear and immediate benefits

## **EIGHT CHALLENGES I FACED WHEN I STARTED AT SEWA:**

1. Lack of visibility and clarity of all projects
2. Insufficient resources (funding and personnel)
3. Gaps in communication
4. Unclear project objectives
5. Overruns of schedule and cost
6. Starting projects but not finishing them
7. Managing scope creep
8. Poor communication/ collaborative working

The challenges were incredible and I knew that I was the lone warrior and saviour. Therefore, I sketched-out a detailed and fool-proof plan to put projects back on track and mitigate the challenges. Below is the master plan:

## SEWA PROJECT LIFE CYCLE



1. **Imagineering** - Combines the words 'imagination' and 'engineering'. Imagineering is the implementation of creative ideas into practical form. Imagineering is letting your imagination soar, and then engineering it realistically.
2. **Ecomagination** - The ability of the mind to be creative or resourceful enough to find environmentally-friendly solutions.

### SEWA ECOMAGINATION STATEMENT

Ecomagination is SEWA's top strategic plan to **reduce** environmental impact at a local scale through providing clean and green solutions for our community and through our own operations. As a part of this strategy, we are **investing** in cleaner technology and business innovation, and developing solutions with our **partners** to create a cleaner, greener, smarter tomorrow.

**3. CRITICAL** – This is a unique blend of ‘critical and lateral’ thinking. Critical thinkers analyse the nitty-gritty of any issue based on facts and figures. Lateral thinkers, who are more rightly called creative thinkers, look beyond the face-value and create solutions that are not mundane.

**4. Execution Plan** – The governing document that establishes the means to execute, monitor, and control projects. The plan serves as the main communication vehicle to ensure that everyone is aware and informed of project objectives and how they will be accomplished.

**5. Knowledge Management** – Ideally, the SEWA KM comprises of six pillars (See KM on page 75). However, the first key element related to Project Management is Document – This means conducting lessons-learned studies to examine what went well and what didn’t. Through this type of analysis the wisdom of experience is transferred back to the project organization, which will help future project teams. Usually, the close up document answers three important questions:

1. What should you keep doing?
2. What should you stop doing?
3. What should you start doing?

**Performance Monitoring** – Helps prevent scope creep and ensures that the project accomplishes what it set out to do on time within the allotted budget. This allows you to make the necessary adjustments regarding resource allocation or budget. Furthermore, it clarifies comparisons between your original plan and current progress.

SEWA will embed the principle of *‘learning before, during and after’* in each and every programme and project life cycle.

### **THE MODEL BENEFITS**

The benefits of adopting the SEWA PM Model are many. Here are a few of them:

- ☞ On time
- ☞ On budget
- ☞ Meeting goals and business objectives

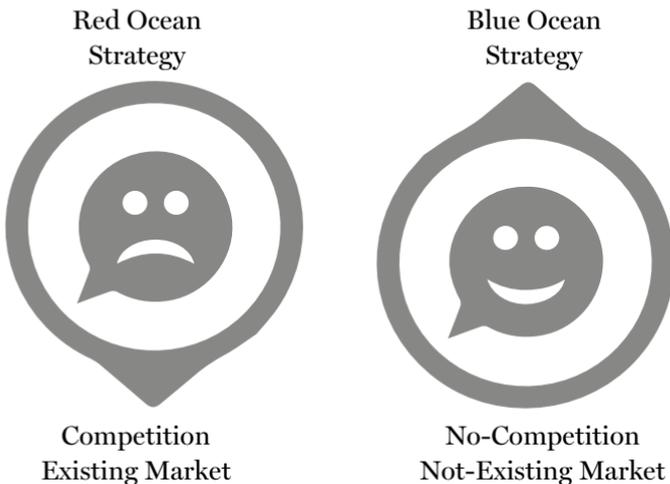
- ⇒ Meeting/exceeding return on investment (ROI)
- ⇒ Customer happiness

### THINK BLUE

This is another piece of advice that I give my employees. Let's rise above the concept of competition with each other. Let there be no friction and competition. Find a new way, a new direction of doing business. I like what's written in the Bible: *"They that go down to the sea to do business in deep waters will see the wonders of God."*

The blue ocean strategy challenges companies to break out of the red ocean of bloody competition by creating uncontested market space that makes the competition irrelevant.

The below model further explains the blue ocean strategy concept vs. the red ocean strategy:



### THE EDGE OF A BLUE OCEAN THINKER

All over the world today, organizations face intense competition, shrinking profit margins, and declining brand power. As competitive pressure continues to heighten, understanding how organizations can break away from the competition and achieve differentiation and lower costs becomes increasingly important.

In this manner blue ocean strategy, which provides companies with a strategic logic, tools, and frameworks to directly address this challenge, strengthens the value that a *blue ocean thinker* can bring to organizations.

In my latest book, *2016 Resolutions to Succeed*, I have titled one of the resolutions as *'Excel. Don't Compete.'* Here's an excerpt from the book: *To excel means to reach beyond the best you have ever given while honestly admitting and managing your weaknesses.* To compete means to run in the same race, in the same way as everyone else. David Sarnoff wrote, *"Competition brings out the best in products and the worst in people."* But I want to unleash the best in people. Best people produce best products and not vice versa.

### **KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT**

Is this just another fad? A new buzzword for the millennium? My answer is definitely 'no.' The words knowledge and management are two very broad concepts when separated, but when the two words come together, it speaks of the concept of *creating, acquiring, and communicating knowledge and improving the re-utilization of knowledge towards the success of an organization.* In my words, it is about making *the right knowledge available to the right person at the right time with the right tools.* That is knowledge put to action.

I have always been passionate about acquiring knowledge and feel it's my *duty* to pass on that knowledge to my subordinates or people around me. In fact, it is every individual's prime responsibility to give back to society what he gains from it. That's what I call a knowledge cycle. It really saddens me to see people who are neither bothered nor concerned with being accountable to preserve their knowledge bank, and enlightening others with their knowledge.

### **THE KNOWLEDGE AMBASSADOR**

One of my leadership qualities is emphasis on continuous learning and the lifelong seeking of knowledge. It is worth mentioning here that I was recently recognized by our beloved Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum as *'The Knowledge Ambassador of UAE.'* This is indeed a great honour.

To me, knowledge is a fluid asset and it saddens me to see it wasted. Here's a typical example of reckless loss of knowledge wealth when I came across one such employee during my early days here at SEWA. That employee had been here for 40 years and it was disturbing to find out that SEWA didn't have a succession plan for him. Furthermore, he was near retirement and to my shock, there was nobody to take over his responsibility! What a waste of knowledge! To make matters worse, the man was not cooperative and left the company without transferring his knowledge and important/critical information.

That very day I decided to make *Knowledge Management (KM)* one of the key strategies in SEWA and created a new position called Chief Knowledge Officer (CKO) to look after the strategies.

### **KNOWLEDGE IS WEALTH**

Professor Davenport claims that the most *important asset of companies is the knowledge of its employees*. I endorse this point of view. In fact, I see knowledge as an actual asset rather than an intangible concept. I believe "*knowledge is power, if applied.*" Therefore, knowing how to manage knowledge is equally imperative.

I personally feel that knowledge, just like wealth can go waste and become a *non-recoverable/big loss* if not managed intelligently. It becomes a *sunk-cost* (an amount of money that has been spent and is gone forever). Therefore I diligently focus on *documenting/storing* knowledge in what is called a 'knowledge bank': Where the data, information, facts and figures or policies are stored/recorded for continuous re-utilization.

I introduced the Document Management System in all departments, which means almost every paper get scanned and stored in the knowledge bank where it can be retrieved in years' time if needed at the tap of a finger.

### **WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?**

Below I have cited a few perks of knowledge management for SEWA:

☞ It facilitates utilization and re-utilization of knowledge

- across all departments (refer to SEWA's principle #2)
- ☞ It helps SEWA learn from past mistakes and successes. (refer to SEWA's Principle #3)
- ☞ It enhances SEWA's ability to innovate and create. (refer to SEWA's Principle #4)
- ☞ It promotes long-term focus to develop the right skills and competencies and 'delete' the obsolete ones. (refer to SEWA's Principle #13)

Below are some of the SEWA Knowledge Management System slogans (these are also the lessons learnt):

- ☞ *"It is not what you know, but who you know that makes the difference."* (This encourages us to do networking)
- ☞ *"I know more than I can tell - I can tell more than I can write."* (This encourages the employees to exchange and transfer knowledge)
- ☞ *Self-talk: "Are my meetings and workshops as efficient as they could be?"* (This encourages us to track our business progress and log productive activities)

I am certain that the above benefits of *knowledge management* must have ignited the desire to go for it. Right? In order to make things easier here, I will share some of the techniques I personally use in this process. These '*tried & tested*' tools have lasted centuries and are still the most impactful ones. Amongst others, I frequently use the technique of *storytelling* and *coaching and mentoring*.

Storytelling helps me to shape the vision, identity and organizational culture and pass on my accumulated knowledge and wisdom to others. And, of course, to *emotionally connect* with my employees. Once you are connected with them they are inspired to do more. I always encourage them to read my book *Inspirational Stories* that contains more than 30 real life stories of great people and thought leaders.

## **NASA**

NASA is a great example here. It promotes and facilitates knowledge collection and knowledge sharing by Lessons-Learned-

Information-System (LLIS) as an initiative of Kennedy Space Center (KSC). Employees can post the stories of their project outcomes on this forum, allowing others to access it for their future projects.

Innovation Expo and NASA Connect are other similar initiatives where employees can interact with each other to share their stories.

Arthur Aufderheide was right, "*All knowledge is connected to all people, and the fun is in making the connection.*" Well said.

Knowledge Management is definitely a key enabler for SEWA to achieve its goals and vision. But what fascinates me most is the process of encouraging my employees to practice the above-mentioned tactics/techniques and also providing them with some hands-on experience.

### **PROGRESS MEETINGS**

At SEWA we carry out a couple of exercises to seize the opportunity of sharing experiences and learning from them. I organize '*monthly progress meetings*' where all the department heads and managers appoint three to five representatives to come up with a 10 minute power point presentation about their work experience, challenges, solutions, opportunities, growth stories etc. It's a great platform to share these experiences and receive feedback. This fosters a healthy camaraderie among employees and bosses and gives them the opportunity to showcase their work challenges. The *brainstorming* session at the end churns out multiple ways to arrest the issue/hurdle thereby leading to efficiency and growth. This group activity provides the chance to learn from one's experience and is also a very lucrative self-assessment exercise.

### **MUST DO!**

On the other hand, I made it compulsory for all the top executives and managers to attend no less than five conferences or exhibitions related to water and energy management, which in turn becomes an important milestone for their annual appraisal system.

So, the point that I want to drive home is that both the above

exercises are focused on enabling employees of all rank to learn from their's, as well as each other's experiences. Henry Ford believed, "*Don't find fault. Find a remedy.*" I strongly agree.

Knowledge management involves innovation, individual learning, collective learning and collaborative decision-making. The immediate outcomes of *KM* are improved organizational behaviour, decisions, products, services, processes and relationships that catapults the organization's overall performance.

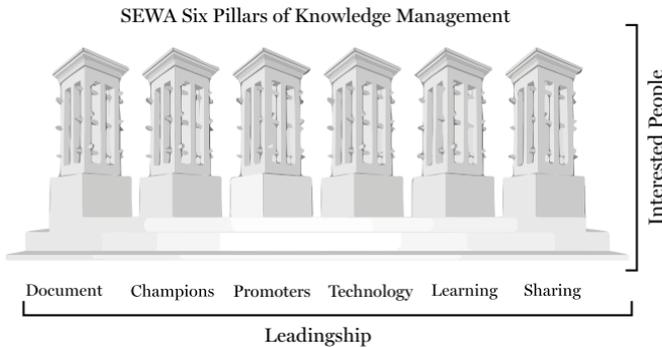
### **SEWA SIX PILLARS OF KM**

The benefits of knowledge management are manifold. Keeping everything in mind, I came up with SEWA's six pillars of knowledge management. Below is a brief summary of the six pillars:

1. *Document*: To conduct lessons-learned studies to examine what went well and what didn't. Through this type of analysis, the wisdom of experience is transferred back to the project organization, which will help future project teams.
2. *Champions*: They are talented employees with a focused vision and the aptitude to align knowledge management with business tactics. They usher strong and dedicated leadership to SEWA.
3. *Promoters*: They develop, promote and facilitate knowledge. They create, collaborate and align the operational processes and SEWA strategy with the KM framework.
4. *Technology*: Technology is the main tool that leverages the SEWA KM framework. All technical solutions add value to our processes, and the lack of the same further adds to failure. Therefore technology is a definite fundamental and having the latest machines and programs is a must.
5. *Learning*: The best tools and strategies fall flat if the desire to learn and acquire knowledge is missing. Learning is a never-ending process here at SEWA, and I emphasized it by nominating it as an important pillar of SEWA's KM.
6. *Sharing*: Knowledge should be free flowing. According to me, hindering knowledge from being shared is detrimental

to any organization. I consider knowledge as wealth that multiplies when shared and collaborated. The more you give, the more you get back.

*Leadingship* is a must here in this framework. It forms the solid base that supports the six pillars. I always remind SEWA managers that the key success factor is leadingship, however, interested people (a willing and winning team) is crucial for the success of leadingship. Leadingship is about leading the interested people towards the True North in order to realize a common shared vision. Therefore, I came up with the following model, which illustrates the six pillars:



## PEOPLE, PEOPLE, PEOPLE

Remember, KM is fantastic but nothing without interested people! For any organization, employees are the building blocks. And for any successful organization, the employees need to have the drive to be that important brick/block that puts the organization on firm ground.

## LEADINGSHIP IS AN AFFAIR OF HEART

First, find out the subordinate's/follower's *interests*. What is his/her passion or pursuit? Listen, listen, and listen. Then align your interests with his/her and move ahead together. Understand and satisfy the interest of those who you lead. In short, practice interest-based leadership.

Second, find the *right tone* for your message. People will listen to a voice that shows concern and not control. You can neither be too pushy nor too casual. You need to master the art of effective communication while keeping in mind the concern, interest and style of your people.

Third, keep motivating them, as Rupert Murdoch said: “*In motivating people, you have to engage their minds and their hearts.*” Mastering the above-mentioned tactics will help you to ease your way into the hearts of your people. That’s a great deal! That is how to sustain KM.

### **ENHANCING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

- I. Sharpening the knowledge focus in all operations.
- II. Promoting and empowering staff in the practice of knowledge generation and sharing.
- III. Strengthening external knowledge partnerships to develop and disseminate knowledge.
- IV. Enhancing staff development programmes to improve technical skills and manage knowledge.

### **LIKED THIS CHAPTER?**

If yes, you might also be curious to know the best way to infuse creativity in and around you. What’s the smart way to unleash innovation? Where do new ideas come from?

The next chapter has everything you need.

**“All achievements, all earned riches, have their beginning in an idea.”**

NAPOLEON HILL

## PRINCIPLE 4

# Generate Sound Ideas

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HOW DO YOU KEEP NEW ideas flowing? Well, it is an accepted fact that everyone gets stuck. What do you do when you are in a rut? How to keep the creative juices of your mind at work? No breakthrough comes from relying on easy and out-dated ideas. It is all about sound ideas, and in order to generate them one has to unleash his creativity and embrace unfamiliarity. Breakthroughs are an offshoot of risks. People who take risks have faith in his/her idea. Furthermore, they are not ashamed of the failure or rejection that can accompany great ideas.

A single idea has the potential to change lives generation after generation. What nurtures our mind to come up with such ideas? Let's consider the story of the Traveller's Cheque:

### **THE AMERICAN EXPRESS IDEA**

In 1892, during a European vacation, J.C. Fargo, the president of American Express, had a hard time translating his letters of credit into cash. *“If the president of American Express has that*

*sort of trouble,”* he said to himself, *“just think what ordinary travellers face. Something has got to be done about it,”* he thought. As a result the traveller’s cheque was created – and that innovation created a robust business model.

The idea was simple: In exchange for a small fee, travellers (customers) could have both peace of mind and convenience. As for American Express, it had discovered a riskless business as customers always paid cash for the cheques. Like all brilliant business models, this one didn’t shift existing revenues among companies; it created streams of new, incremental demand.

Today, with the advent of science and technology, everyone has so much to do. Check Facebook, follow someone on Twitter, change WhatsApp status or share a LinkedIn job opening with a friend. Who has the time to stop and think? Not many people in today’s era can spare a few moments to even stop and ponder where their life is going. Blogs. Status updates. Family photo albums, viral videos. The list is endless. We are increasingly overwhelmed by distractions flying at us from various connected devices. Smartphone and tablet use is spiking, and we now use digital media for an average of over 12 hours per day. This hyper-connected state does not allow us to process, recharge, and refocus.

Self-realization is the need of the hour. We need to be introspective about our own lives and change our perspective towards living it. Practice mindfulness. We need to frequently ask ourselves questions: “Are we really pushing things as far as we can?”, “Can more be done for less?”

Change is the only inevitable truth of life. These days everyone has a bunch of things to do. If you are stuck with something, quickly switch gears to some other project/work and let the previous problem sit for some time. The solution eventually pops, often when you are into something totally unrelated. Creativity isn’t just an abstract. It’s about finding similarity between seemingly dissimilar things, objects, views and experience and concocting something new out of it. According to a well-known proverb, *necessity is the mother of invention*. The need comes first and the idea follows.

## **SEWA THINKS IN AND OUT OF THE BOX - HOLISTIC VIEW**

At SEWA, the employees are encouraged to *think in and out of the box*. Even the most trivial idea or thought doesn't go unnoticed. It is a sea of knowledge here at SEWA as people are brimming with intelligence and wit, and it is all about tapping this wave of brilliance/acumen and channelling it the right way. This is where SEWA leadership plays a pivotal role. We shoulder the responsibility of parenting the talent and providing a conducive environment for it to flourish and proliferate. Therefore we prepare the powerhouse for generating sound ideas so that the world can change for the better. Lives can change and our perspective towards living it can change as well.

In this super ambitious era, with cutthroat competition all around, we need to ask ourselves, *Who are we competing with?* An array of images and figures fill our minds ranging all the way from our colleagues and neighbours to friends and even family members. However, I think we are our own best competitor and we should be continuously challenging ourselves to be more productive and outdo our previous performances. Whether we compete with ourselves or compete with each other, one thing to remember is that customers should be the beneficiaries. Customers are ultimately at the receiving end and we serve them, so it is logical that churning out sound ideas and implementing them should be in their welfare and interest. Not so?

Don't let competitors rule your life. They are not your problem. The only source of excellence is you. We should draw inspiration from Howard Mann's (Associate & Senior International Law Advisor for IISD) statement: "Obsessing about your competitors, trying to match or beat their offerings, spending time each day wanting to know what they are doing, and/or measuring your company against them – these activities have no great or winning outcome. Instead you are simply prohibiting your company from finding its own way to be truly meaningful to its clients, staff and prospects. You block your company from finding its own identity and engaging with the people who pay the bills... Your competitors have never paid your bills and they will never." Period.

For any customer-centric organization like SEWA, it is of paramount importance to keep customers happy and satisfied. As easy as it may sound, it is definitely a daunting task to keep that smile intact on their faces. Hundreds of people come with different demands every single day and to top it off these demands keep changing. Industrial demands are very different from residential ones.

SEWA caters to all of them with equal expertise. Every challenge teaches and leads to the generation of new ideas. The attitude with which you handle a hurdle decides the solution of the problem. If you want a perfect solution, look at the problem in a positive light. It's that simple.

We have to make it a practice, only then will change be substantial. Just knowing and not implementing will do more harm than good. Remember, there is a big difference between knowing and doing.

### **CRITICAL THINKING**

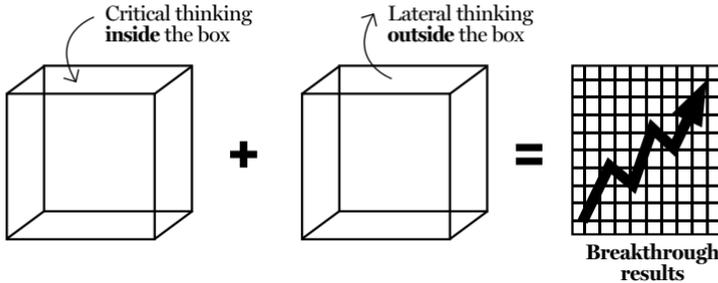
*"The true test of a first-rate mind is the ability to hold two contradictory ideas at the same time."*

F. Scott Fitzgerald

The above maxim has become a daily reality for organizations worldwide. My philosophy rests on my self-coined term of thinking called *CRITICAL Thinking* – it's a unique blend of *critical and lateral* thinking. The human mind is permanently burgeoning with ideas. Critical thinkers analyse the nitty-gritty of any issue on the basis of facts and figures, while lateral thinkers (or better called creative thinkers) look beyond the face-value and delve deep into the subliminal layers of any particular thing and come out with solutions that are not mundane. The big question is what happens when you put the right-brain thinkers together with the left-brain thinkers? Collisions!

The way I see it, both are equally imperative in this era. One just needs to know how to strike the right balance between both and get synergization between analysis and artistry. Bombard your mind with new/various experiences and then connect the dots...

The result: Outstanding and breakthrough thinking. From the innovation perspective this is critically important to understand, especially as it will help you get the best from yourself, your colleagues and your boss. Here's how:



### CRITICAL THINKING PHILOSOPHY

#### CREATE A WHOLE-BRAINED TEAM

As a leader it is your challenge to find both your own and your team members' thinking style in order to solve a problem or actively manage the innovation process. Innovation takes place when different people present different ideas, perceptions and information judgement.

The so-called *left-brain* thinkers tend to approach a problem in an unemotional but logical and analytical manner. The *right-brain* thinkers rely more on intuitive approaches. Companies that effectively collect, synthesize, and *collide* these two approaches stand the highest probability of success.

#### EVERYONE IS GIFTED/LET'S INSPIRE CREATIVITY

At times I ponder the fantastic nature of being creative. Are we creative by choice or by chance? Creativity is definitely that *extra factor* that adds a spark to your persona and distinguishes you from the rest. It could be the way you talk, the way you dress, how you cook or the way you perceive any situation in life. I believe everyone is creative and everyone is gifted. It's the environment that either helps to proliferate or stifle it. The world is jam-packed with people who would raise eyebrows at your creative endeavours, but on the other hand there are plenty of opportunities to showcase your creativity.

The key is to focus on perception and the latest neuroscience research has plenty to say in that regard. Novelty arises when we perceive things differently. However, the human mind has an innate tendency to slip into routine shortcuts. Therefore soaking up new perceptions or recalibrating our brain requires effort and energy. Have you ever felt completely mentally drained when you try to be creative or innovative? Most certainly yes!

Fresh, creative insights are invaluable. But creativity is not a trait reserved for the lucky few. Once you conquer the initial challenges, creativity comes easily to you.

Innovation is inherently risky, and getting the most from a portfolio of innovation initiatives is more about managing risk than eliminating it. As no one knows exactly where valuable innovations will emerge next, and searching everywhere is impractical, don't push yourself too hard. The best ideas show up when you are relaxed! Aim for excellence, that's it!

I am highly encouraged by the following quote of Tom Watson, "You 'achieve' excellence by promising yourself right now that you will never again knowingly do anything that is not excellent – regardless of any pressure to do otherwise by any boss or situation."

### **INNOVATION PROMOTION SYSTEM (IPS)**

In friendly discussions with Professor Mohammad Arif, my professor for Sustainability and Process Management and later my PhD advisor during my years of studies at Salford University in Manchester, UK, the idea and the concept of IPS was born. We knew that most great ideas remain dormant because people don't have the courage, resources, time or money at their disposal to take action. Innovation sits in a lonely place as few people have the courage to dream up big, radically different ideas. Those who do take action are often unprepared and take the plunge without weighing the pros and cons, which eventually drains their valuable time and energy.

As an advocate of *CRI'RAL Thinking* I instituted an Idea Management System called Innovation Promotion System, which is my contribution towards a better innovative society. The idea and concept behind IPS was instilled by many organizations and implemented at SEWA as well.

It was one of the recommendations by my PhD advisor, Professor Mohammad Arif, to write a book on the Idea Management System (I am still working on it!). The other suggestion was to summarize my thesis in an audio and visual aid (DVD), which could act as a source of reference and inspiration for individuals and organizations who are keen on practicing and improving their Idea Management System.

When I was appointed by His Highness to chair SEWA, one of the first steps I took towards IPS was to create a fully independent department called the Excellence Department. One section was created under the name *I am Creative*, which is dedicated to collecting ideas and suggestions from nearly 5,000 SEWA employees. The employees have different backgrounds and intellects but it is definitely a hub for innovative thought processes. The creative team is responsible for collecting and evaluating ideas and reward good ones on timely basis.

### PICK CHART

To pick the best idea every month, we scrutinize it through a PICK Chart. When faced with multiple improvement ideas, this chart comes in quite handy as it helps us to cluster ideas and prioritize the most useful one. There are four categories on a 2\*2 matrix; horizontal is scale of payoff (or benefits), vertical is ease of implementation. Below is the matrix:

	<b>LOW PAY BACK</b>	<b>HIGH PAY BACK</b>
<b>EASY TO DO</b>	<b>POSSIBLE</b>	<b>IMPLEMENT</b>
<b>HARD TO DO</b>	<b>KILL</b>	<b>CHALLENGE</b>

Innovation is a growth multiplier. Millennial companies have claimed that innovation is a definite driver for rapid and profitable revenue growth. In fact, they consider it as a *competitive necessity* for their organization. In PwC's recent study, 'Unleashing the Power of Innovation', (74 per cent) of CEOs regard innovation as

equally important to the success of their company as operational effectiveness, if not more. This is the first time in recent history that innovation has been in parity with operations in the C-suite.

The above study, and my personal research and observance, lead me to declare that the world has witnessed a paradigmatic shift. I love to call it:

### **COMPUTER AGE TO CONCEPTUAL AGE**

Everything has a shelf life. Not only machines or products, but even thoughts and concepts have expiry dates. Apparently the world is buzzing with new mind-boggling ideas or tectonic shifts of mindsets. But a trend that has emerged lately is that we are moving from the logical, geeky, and computer-based age to a conceptual age, one where creativity, novelty, interests of community and the landscape view (big-picture thinking) is recognized and rewarded. (I am very happy about this!)

The world definitely belongs to the future leaders, those with a right-side mindset of course. Daniel H. Pink wrote in his book *A Whole New Mind*, and I completely agree with him, that the MFA (Masters of Fine Arts) is the new MBA. According to him, the world wants products that are physically beautiful and emotionally compelling. Your product (or services) ought to have design and story. It needs to touch people's mind as well as hearts. It should have meaning to you. Thinking like a designer can transform the way you develop products, services, processes and even strategy.

Apple Inc. has a physically beautiful and emotionally compelling range of products that bear testimony to the fact that the world has shifted towards design thinking. But what goes into making such great products? A lot! Below is an excerpt from a Forbes article related to the innovation process of Steve Jobs. I couldn't help but fall in love with it. I am sure you will too!!

### **JOBS' SECRETS**

One of the fascinating stories I like to share with my colleagues is *The 7 Innovation Secrets of Steve Jobs*. We all know Apple was close to bankruptcy and we all know what happened next, when

Steve Jobs returned to Apple after a 12-year absence. Below, I have summarized the seven principles that Jobs used to achieve his breakthrough success.

- 1. Follow your passion:** Do what you love; passion is everything. Ask yourself, “What makes your heart sing?”
- 2. Put a dent in the universe:** Have a bold and specific vision that pushes you to act. Jobs believed in hiring the best people and keeping them aligned towards achieving the vision. Big picture thinking!
- 3. Connect to create:** Know how to connect the dots. Bombard your mind with new experiences completely outside your field. This will give you the competitive edge, for sure.
- 4. Say no to 1,000 things** - “Innovation comes from saying no to 1,000 things,” said Steve Jobs. His motto was to make his products simpler, cleaner, and user-friendly.
- 5. Create ‘insanely great’ experiences:** Steve Jobs innovated around the customer experience. He had a bigger vision to create exceptional experiences for every customer, every time.
- 6. Master the message:** You may have fantastic ideas, but if they aren’t convincing enough you will fail to get your audience to buy into your concept. Hence, your ideas would never see the light of the day. So, do fine-tune your product story.
- 7. Sell dreams, not products:** Nobody cares about your products, instead build up a product/service around customers’ needs/desires/dreams - think about how your product will enrich their lives. If you could tap into this, the rest will follow - you will win over your customers, if you win over their dreams!

Innovation can take various forms, including incremental, disruptive, and breakthrough innovation. But research shows that most successful companies resort to more structured way of innovation, which means they develop a reliable and repeatable process to drive the innovation drill. They experiment, learn from the experience, and then repeat.

## **BRING EVERY BRAIN INTO THE GAME**

It is my innate belief that everyone in this world wants to be heard, people want an outlet for their voice and they want to do so with dignity. I fully endorse that everyone should have this right. I

am a big fan of creativity and if it is paired with novelty and excellence then it creates that “wow” moment for me. I am all game!

But there’s a small problem: People are wired differently. Some are logical and analytical (L-brain thinkers), while some are intuitive and imaginative (R-brain thinkers). And trust me, magic (innovation) happens when the two thinking styles clash (come together). However most of the time, instead of constructive discussion, unproductive disputes take place that destroy the creative process. It’s only theoretically correct that only a particular province of the brain speaks creativity. In reality, the human brain as a whole should be at work together to create that magic. This problem made me lay down a simple and clear guideline:

### **HAVE YOUR SAY**

At SEWA, every single employee is treated with dignity and endowed with the right to express his or her voice with candour. We believe *no point is pointless*. No approach is wrong, it’s just different. As I always say, “Disagree, but don’t be disagreeable.” Show respect! A single problem could be approached differently by an accountant, entrepreneur, playwright, engineer, etc. I truly believe that understanding other’s preferences (thinking style) helps people communicate and collaborate.

### **ALMOST THREE IDEAS A DAY**

After the successful implementation of this principle we were able to collect more than 500 innovative ideas in less than six months. On December 15th, 2014 – when we had our first annual gathering – the individual with the highest number of creative ideas was tagged as *The Ambassador of Ideas*. It was Aziz, a purchase officer, who won the first title. Now that’s what I call *creating the powerhouse of ingenuity*. It’s just another step towards redefining creativity. So think!

### **3M THINK LAB**

In search of excellence and thinking in a new way a SEWA team of five members from the Excellence Department visited the 3M Lab in Dubai in September, 2014. They were amazed at this global brand’s new and future products.

## **THANK YOU GOOGLE!**

With great pleasure I would extend my gratitude to Mr. Peter Lorant, Director – Google Search for Work and Mr. Abdel Wahed Bendaoua, Google General Manager – Enterprise Middle-East and Africa. I had the privilege to meet them in my office on Wednesday, 21 October 2015, and I had an extremely interesting and insightful conversation with them. It was such a delightful experience to be with such intuitive and vibrant minds of a great company.

And the best part is that, in the middle of the conversation, they mentioned about *Google's 10x Thinking Ideology*. And how they have been beautifully incorporating this very ideology tool at their workplace. That caught my attention. I became increasingly inquisitive to know more about the 10x Thinking. I googled and deep-dived for further information. The resulting knowledge was impressive and I decided to incorporate that very 10x Thinking tool at SEWA.

Just to make things easier for my dear reader (and to save time) below is a summary of my findings about the 10x Thinking tool.

## **10X THINKING**

### **1. It's human**

10X Thinking is a distinctly human process, rooted in the fundamental and enormous potential of the human condition to persistently dream in new directions.

### **2. It's a mindset**

10X Thinking is a mindset that sees every opportunity as a possibility and every possibility as an opportunity.

### **3. It's boundless**

10X Thinking is boundless, and moves beyond traditional containers and boundaries to extend thought and ideation in multiple directions and tangents. There are no limitations and this degree of freedom opens the mind to question, to consider, and to be open to ideas in all directions. 10X thinkers are willing to bravely step through a threshold from the traditional and expected to the bold and unknown.

**4. It's about distance**

How far can an idea travel? What is its arc of impact? And beyond a distance, what are the depths and breadth of an idea?

**5. It's a language**

How people communicate their ideas matter. Do you have a language that supports how people talk about ideas? Do you have a language capable of supporting a mindset of 10X Thinking?

**6. It's everywhere**

The next 10X idea is only a click away. It's in the next conversation. It's in a photograph. It's in the next sentence. It's in the morning at 3 AM. It's in a glance. It's in the next idea. It's in a daydream and it can be anywhere. Learn to recognize 10X ideas when they present themselves because they will.

**7. It's about urgency**

10X Thinkers put things into play now and get better at them. Education doesn't have time to wait, bold ideas are needed now.

**8. It's about design**

10X Thinking requires incubation. And then acceleration. Acceleration causes collisions. And collisions set in motion new trajectories that lead to new insights and thinking beyond the traditional and expected.

**9. It's a choice**

10X Thinking is a conscious choice. It's about giving yourself permission to think in a new way.

**10. And most importantly, it's about culture**

It's about the capacity, and the willingness, to rethink everything together, and sharing the responsibility of thinking boldly and leading boldly. It's about a cultural value of risk-taking and creating the conditions for nurturing and incubating big thinking and big ideas. It's about the acceptance of being wrong and the expectation of the relentless pursuit of right, however right is defined. It's about the willingness to express ideas, and the expectations that others will have that you do. It's about a culture of willingness and the capacity for creating this type of thinking in everyone... and in the process, creating the cultural conditions

for making everyone leaders in their own right.

Thank you Google for teaching me something new and thank you for conducting a great workshop on 24th of November 2015, titled “Creative Skill for Innovation,” for almost over 100 SEWA family members. It was a delight to see how my people benefited from it. It was very enlightening and fun! The Google Way.

### **8Ps OF LEAN THINKING**

Another line of strategic thinking that I draw inspiration from is Lean Thinking (derived from the Toyota Production System in the 1990s). Lean is the ability to continuously improve both the products and manufacturing process. Lean emphasizes a model that looks to take out cost and value in a business’s core activities. Well, this management tool has been there for decades but I believe that as time changes, the business strategies should also change and modify. I, in my own way, have tried to redefine the Lean thinking and a special mention goes to the white paper research by Professor Peter Hines: Redefining Lean Thinking. (Do look into this meticulous article for detailed analysis).

So let me introduce you to the 8Ps of Lean Thinking:

1. Purpose
2. Process
3. People
4. Pull
5. Prevention
6. Partnering
7. Planet
8. Perfection



### **1. Purpose**

Codifying the purpose, why you exist, is the key job of the top management at SEWA. So, as a leader you need to first understand the purpose and then align the organization with the same. My advice is to communicate the purpose in a way that engages the workforce. This would serve the dual purpose of setting a vision as well as employee engagement (so, you have the best of both).

### **2. Process**

Most of the time, leaders or managers tend to focus only on the core processes that lead to profitable (monetary) growth, but I suggest looking at Lean more holistically. Each process has its own important part to play and directly or indirectly it does contribute to the overall growth (both monetary and non-monetary). Hence, for sustainable growth, consider all the processes as the wheels that drive one single cart in the right direction.

### **3. People**

Linked to leadership is the ability to engage people in the business. And how do we do that? By allowing the people who know the work the best – and the people who do the work best – to work out ‘how’ we are going to improve. Respect people for who they are. For the sustainability of continuous improvement respecting people is fundamental.

### **4. Pull**

A pull based improvement system requires absolute clarity on what the business/company is trying to achieve (focus on employees, customer, and society). Moreover, it is equally important to effectively communicate the same to everyone in the organization (So that everyone heads towards the same direction together). Finally the ownership of any project/complex issue should reside locally and pulled by the team at that level at the place of action/workplace.

### **5. Prevention**

When it comes to quality control and prevention of failures, the organization needs to focus on the right tools that facilitate continuous improvement. Specific tools that are simple and effi-

cient should be intelligently selected according to specific needs. Prevention is better than cure.

## **6. Partnering**

No company or organization is an island and to create a world-class organization usually requires the creation of a world-class supply chain. In fact, I personally focus on a high-performing supply chain. I suggest all my readers (who aspire to be leaders!) to invest a huge amount of effort into mutual partnerships. One of the core principles of SEWA is dedicated to partnership for mutual benefit. Trust me, any organization that focuses on the partnering principle has dramatic improvements in its performance.

## **7. Planet**

For me, it is always green Lean thinking. Lean thinking is all about reducing human effort, space, and scrap, which in turn means reducing the amount of energy and waste by-products too, and leading to rescuing our planet Earth. We need to respect our environment. I have always been the first one to put the green agenda on SEWA's map and introduce the concept of sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental in action.) You can refer my latest book, *Sustainability: The Fourth Wave of Economy*. We created a Green Team.

## **8. Perfection**

Perfection is the key element of Lean business thinking. Having said that, I do believe that perfection is a relative term and every organization has their own benchmarks and standards. So I develop a vision of my specific perfection and have my own bespoke roadmap on how to move towards it. But do remember to keep your goals realistic and achievable. The perfect goal needs to be envisioned as tangible and achievable milestones.

## **ATTAINMENT VS MAINTENANCE**

Most of us have set goals for ourselves before, whether it's losing weight, saving money or training for a marathon. Goals help us to focus our minds on achieving what we set out to do. We know that setting goals makes us more likely to attain what we want.

In fact, some of us achieve our goals easily. We find ourselves highly motivated and we set out to achieve them, but maintaining them becomes a real challenge. But for others, it's the opposite. That is, we feel motivated to tend to what we've already achieved, with the attainment of the goal being the real struggle. Having said that, the struggle may become smoother if your goals are well thought out.

### **THINK TANK**

I am sure by using all the three ideologies of thinking: CRITICAL Thinking, Google's 10x Thinking and 8 Ps of Lean Thinking, SEWA will soon be the most admired think tank in the Middle East. Just wait and see!

See SEWA at the top always!

**“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments.”**

JIM ROHN

## PRINCIPLE 5

# Instil Core Values

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THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT values and timeless principles are the cornerstone of a successful workplace. In this modern business era, we constantly come across the term “core values” and company’s “principles”, but are these just corporate jargons or do they really have some value and a deep meaning? The reason why an organization needs to set its goals on the pillars of core values and principles is that it makes the goal itself SMART (**S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**ealistic, **T**imely).

Core values support the vision, shape the culture and reflect what the company values the most. They are the quintessence of a company’s identity, its philosophy. Principles which are timeless form the base of *sustainability* in any workplace area. The business grows and changes while these elements remain unfazed and continue to inspire people everywhere in the world.

## **SEWA'S VALUES AND TIMELESS PRINCIPLES**

At SEWA our values are a part of our organization's DNA. We believe that living by strong values and adhering to timeless principles and fundamentals open up the avenues for good business and its sustainability as well. Our values create a vibrant company culture, where people can smile, ideas can blossom and success can flourish. Our values and principles inspire us to make a positive contribution *every day*. That is the reason why these core values, along with a rigorous code of conduct, are at the heart of *every* decisions that SEWA makes. The following list of core values reflects what is truly important to us as an organization. These are not values that change from time to time, situation to situation, or person to person, but rather they are the underpinning of our company culture.

Let's have a close look at SEWA's core values:

### **1. AUTHENTIC AND EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

People will not follow a leader they regard as inauthentic. Authentic leadership at SEWA is built on an ethical foundation and promotes openness. It is defined by courage to seize the right opportunity/initiative and welcome responsibility, as well as being accountable for the same. It is about '*seeing the bigger picture*', having a clear vision of SEWA's aims and objectives and, of course, building a strong business and diverse talent.

### **2. PEOPLE & SAFETY**

Our employees are our most valuable asset. We invest in the development and support of our staff and leaders. Safety is *never* compromised at SEWA. It's a conscious effort and an absolute commitment that no job is so urgent that it cannot be done in a safe and an environmentally responsible manner.

### **3. PASSION FOR CUSTOMERS**

We strive to develop a long-term customer relationship by *consistently* delivering quality, innovation, and business value that meet or exceed our customers' expectation. SEWA is obsessed with customer service excellence and practices quick responsiveness to complaints with 100 per cent adherence to

ISO 10002 standards and valuing customer's feedback.

#### **4. EMBRACING EXCELLENCE**

Excellence is a *continual* quest at SEWA. We join hands to achieve world-class standards in all aspects of operation. We have a dedicated team of "Quality & Excellence" which encourages convivial and passionate pursuit of excellence and improvement through a formal system of benchmarking and assessment. Simply put, Mediocrity out, Excellence in.

#### **5. OWNERSHIP**

A sense of engagement, responsibility and accountability is another step towards employee motivation and the key to *thinking like an owner*. We purposefully focus on employee involvement in the decision making process (big or small) – whether it's owning the problem or owning the project. Mutual interdependency is the way of life at SEWA. The employees treat the company's assets as their own and SEWA, in turn, makes explicit efforts to seek out and address the fairness concerns of the entire workforce. Thereby SEWA establishes a sense of trust and security, and ingraining in them that: *We are a family*. I ensure that the employees realize that they are wanted and precious to me.

#### **6. ETHICS**

Acting in an ethical way is the bedrock for our business. We are honest and straightforward. We treat each other with respect and do not tolerate harassment or intimidation. We uphold the values and principles of SEWA in everything in order to demonstrate the unwavering commitment to do business the right way – *The SEWA Way*.

#### **7. INTEGRITY**

We are guided by the moral compass of integrity. We refuse to offer bribes or make questionable payments. We do not give/receive inappropriate gifts or hospitality. We communicate accurate financial, timely and relevant information and other reports to our stakeholders. Transparency leads to trustworthiness.

#### **8. TEAMWORK**

It leverages our individual strength. It binds us to a common goal, which is to be among the best ‘authentic’ organizations in the world. Everyone is expected and encouraged to actively participate and communicate up, down and across the organization. The diversity of workforce makes SEWA an arena of burgeoning ideas where everyone willingly shares their ideas and resources. Be it a veteran or a novice, we “teach and learn” from each other. **TEAM** (Together Everyone Achieves More) is what we believe in.

### **9. PASSION FOR WINNING**

We have a healthy dissatisfaction with the status quo. Driven by our compelling desire to improve and win, we are determined to be the best in everything that we do. We love success and celebrate achievements. Each employee gets a chance to be coached and mentored, which in turn enables them to accomplish positive results. And the best way to celebrate success is as a group. All in all, we are a Winning team.

### **10. TRUST**

We have confidence in each other’s capabilities and intentions. SEWA believes that all individuals can and want to contribute to their fullest potential. We take tough calls only with the trust in ourselves to push our boundaries and explore new opportunities. The company trusts in employees and invests in them to grow and prosper by providing them with international standard training programmes and development plans. We believe that if we don’t have trust inside our company then we *can’t* transfer it to the customers.

### **11. EVERY IDEA COUNTS**

Here, everyone has a voice and each individual’s contribution is respected and valued. Our success depends on encouraging the knowledge, skills and creativity of the employees and instilling in them the sense of being admired and appreciated. There is no such thing like a “silly” idea, rethinking the familiar is “*innovation and being creative*”.

Here, I would like to throw some light on Core value #9 – *Passion for Winning*. Doubt aside, it is an essential action-ori-

ented core component. But, do you have what it takes to be a winner? Here's a simple, single checklist:

### **THE 9 Ps OF WINNING (AT EVERY LEVEL)**

- 1. People-centeredness** – Your prime job is to create an authentic and palpable connection with your listeners. Recognize what is missing in their lives and address their concern. You'll be a people magnet!
- 2. Paradigm-Breaking** – Showcase an attitude that's a deliberate combination of 'challenging the status quo', 'purposeful reinvention' and 'skilled communication.'
- 3. Prioritization** – There's a fine line of demarcation between what *must* be done and what *should* be done. Define what matters most, articulate it loudly, and allocate resources to accomplish it. You will be surprised at your achievement.
- 4. Perfection** – There's no such thing as perfection. However, if you do not strive to be perfect, you will not reach excellence. The burning desire to do the impossible renders you strength.
- 5. Partnership** – Honest and open communication is imperative. You have to trust people, and never offend the people you need most on your side. Partnership is promising and powerful.
- 6. Passion** – Winners eat, breathe, talk, sleep and live passion. Winners are driven by something deeper and more powerful than mere interest or curiosity. Emotion, vision and commitment springs forth passion.
- 7. Persuasion** – Winners don't tell, they convince. They are stoically determined and marshal their best arguments and delivery to galvanize people around them. The upside is that you even earn trust and build reputation.
- 8. Persistence** – Without persistence, winning is impossible. Adaptability and survival is the key. Winners see what's coming, and reinvent themselves. They make their own rules for the game. Most importantly, they know the magic mantra to 'stay relevant'.

**9. Principled Action** - Strict standards and corporate culture are the key. Winners have a social responsibility followed by accountability. Your uncompromising integrity will differentiate you from others. In short, *“Say what you mean and mean what you say.”*

### **ETHICS AND INTEGRITY - OUR RULE OF THUMB**

I ensure that the core values and the SEWA vision come alive. It is just not heavyweight words on paper. My mission is that the employees not only believe in it, but also live and breathe it. That is when I consider the job well done! I communicate regularly with my staff and reinforce these values and principles in them in my own unique way and appreciate their effort with rewards. I see SEWA as a dignified body, the values and principles constitute the soul of SEWA. It is my prime job to sustain it and keep it alive! As Bill Donahue said, *“A leadership strategy without ethical clarity produces moral and economic bankruptcy.”*

Profit in dollars or power is temporary, but profit in a network of people who trust you as a person of integrity is forever. Trust is an offshoot of integrity. Warren Buffet, Chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway said it best, *“In looking for people to hire, look for three qualities: Integrity, intelligence, and energy. And if they don't have the first one, the other two will kill you.”*

A word of advice to those struggling with a reputation for integrity: *Avoid those who are not trustworthy. Do not associate with them in any way.* We are under constant scrutiny by the world. It is important to realize that your character is inevitably judged by others based on the character of your friends. And why not? It is beyond doubt that we become more and more like the people we surround ourselves with, eventually adopting their behavior. *“Do what is right, let the consequence follow.”* This quote serves as daily reminder for SEWA employees that *truth should prevail, come what may!*

### **SUCCESS WILL INDEED COME AND GO, BUT INTEGRITY IS FOREVER**

It gives me immense pride to share an episode here where I had

taken strict disciplinary action against an *unethical* act by one of our suppliers. The moment I became aware of the act, I immediately asked my legal advisor, S. Manoj Kumar, to send across '*an unfair trade notice*,' to the company mentioning that SEWA is vigilant enough to notice any unethical or unfair practice/tactics and will not hesitate to take strict disciplinary action against it.

Below is the letter sent to them:

Chairman  
ME Global L.L.C (not real name)  
Sharjah, UAE

Sub: Notice of unfair trade practice.

SEWA would like to express displeasure about the unethical act of your authorized officer.

We have identified non-conformance and breach of SEWA's principle's and core values by your company personnel/representative. Moreover, an attempt has been done to mislead SEWA staff to gain unlawful advantage. The claims that your staff raised were utterly false, heinous and against truth.

All of the above is against the fair and accepted international business ethics and SEWA never could encourage or approve such trade practices.

Your company is required to acknowledge, that the higher management of SEWA is well aware of all unfair tactics played throughout these years. SEWA is vigilant enough to point out any and all underplays and unethical tactics. You are required to take remedial action. In the meantime, our rights are reserved.

With Regards;  
Manoj Kumar  
Legal Advisor.

It is true enough that developing an organization culture with values requires CEOs who are open-minded, considerate, reflective, curious, respectful, principled, composed, future-oriented, and socially-responsible among other character traits.

But what happens when the CEO compromises ethics and values in the course of attaining profit margins? Or what if he just ignores his (and his company's) bearing towards society?

### **THE VOLKSWAGEN EMISSION SCANDAL**

Most of us are aware of the recent Volkswagen emissions scandal (refer to the CNBC article, *'What You Need to Know About the VW scandal' dated 22nd September, 2015*). The company made a deliberate attempt to deceive consumers and regulators by using a pollution-hiding software. Is this a justifiable act? Is this expected from a global brand? Who is to be blamed?

Martin Winterkorn, then Volkswagen CEO, naturally resigned, but then he issued a statement, *"I am doing this in the interests of the company even though I am not aware of any wrongdoing on my part."*

No wrongdoing? What about failing to lead in a way that ensured that decisions made under you are ethical every single time? How about the company's core values listed on your website? Where are your social responsibility and sustainability statements? Are they to be used or to decorate company's walls?

This Volkswagen saga is yet another example that all the 3Cs of leadership – Competencies, Character, and Commitment are essential for good leadership.

### **DEARTH LEADS TO DEATH**

By all means Volkswagen is not the only troubled company. The recent 2008-2009 meltdown was the result of a host of fraudulent cases, astonishingly carried out by one of the world's largest corporations, The Lehman Brothers Bank, that eventually lead to its tragic bankruptcy. What is the point of reaching dramatic heights only to face a dizzy collapse, and that at the expense of thousands of employees and the stakeholders? To this day, many wonder how a bank so big and so powerful disappeared almost overnight. How did it fool the Wall Street community?

The downfall of The Lehman Brothers bank shows that the dearth of ethics could lead to the death of your company. The company was charged for *'securities fraud and accounting ma-*

*nipulation,*' thereby leading to the greatest bankruptcy of all time. According to me, an ethical lapse is a heinous crime. The leader/the top management should bring fame to the company for good reasons and not bad ones.

## **FRAUD AND CORRUPTION**

Another such tale is Enron Corporation in the USA. Before the bankruptcy it was one of the world's major electricity, natural gas, communications, pulp and paper companies with over 20,000 staff members and claiming a revenue of nearly \$111 billion in the year 2000. But it was revealed that the company pulled off its shady business by an institutionalized, systematic and creatively planned accounting fraud. This is an iconic example of wilful corporate fraud and corruption. The collapse of Enron was an unfortunate incident, but it is important for us to understand why and how it happened, so that a similar incident can be avoided in the future.

Arrogance, greed and foolishness from top management are the key reasons. A leader's position is critical. He has the authority to take all kinds of decisions (both wise and vice). It is completely up to the leaders' character and deep-rooted values that drive his decision-making skill. Remember that forgery and fraudulence will not take you far; the results are short-lived and the penalty is severe.

The leaders of today need to ensure that leaders under them are ethical and act with integrity, especially when it comes to decision making. My advice to foster this is to create a culture of candid conversation/discussion where it is *'okay to agree to disagree.'*

Our culture is our strongest asset. It is embedded with collaboration and innovation. SEWA employees are accustomed to working with colleagues of different nationalities. Furthermore, the employees are aware of the deeper purpose, and guided by, SEWA's principles and core values. We know that we are here to serve humanity and make a remarkable difference in our community, wherever we go, whatever we do. The people strategy here is fully aligned with the business strategy.

“My purpose: To lift your spirits and to motivate you.”

MAVIS STAPLES

PRINCIPLE 6

## Create Positive Emotional Energy

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### **BUILDING POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

MY BELIEF IS THAT “POSITIVITY *breeds Productivity*”. When a company makes positivity one of its policies, and makes deliberate attempts to foster a positive working environment, both the company and the employees obtain outstanding outcomes. Respect and positive interaction in a workplace forms the basis of the “positivity vibe”. It is about creating a conducive environment where one doesn’t worry about respectfully disagreeing with his superior or colleagues. Intimidation is a complete no-no. The tightening job markets and the 2008 economic meltdown has increased the level of stress in the workplace.

I aim at creating *positive psychology* in the office as I believe that happy and satisfied employees do far better than those who feel frustrated and overlooked. Employees are willing to be more flexible and more accountable when they are drawn by love and care, rather than driven by fear. Bestselling leadership author

John Maxwell wrote about the importance of leveraging constructive energy by noting, *“While a good leader sustains momentum, a great leader increases it.”*

You see, the human mind is like a garden. If you do not deliberately cultivate flowers, weed will naturally grow without any effort from your end. Similarly, if you do not deliberately cultivate positive thoughts, negative thoughts will eventually arise in their place. As John Milton famously wrote in *Paradise Lost*, *“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.”* I hold a similar view as I am well aware of the power of the mind in shaping our future course. A quote that inspires me is: *“Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.”*

## **HAPPINESS**

Contrary to the popular belief that success brings happiness, I believe it is the other way round – happiness brings success. This means that if we wait to be happy, we are delaying success. As simple as that. Be positive and optimistic and success will follow. My view has its roots in research done around the globe. For example, research conducted by Shawn Achor found that, *“When the human brain is positive, you’re 3x more creative, intelligence rises, and productivity rises by 31%.”* So let’s reframe our way to happiness at work (at home too!)

During one of my visits to New Delhi as a Guest Speaker in the Global Summit on MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises), I came across the *“Laugh out Loud”* programme in almost every part of the city. The motive behind it was to infuse positivity in and around ourselves, and the health benefits of hearty laughter are undeniable.

Another interesting fact is that the kingdom of Bhutan has embedded Bhutanese happiness as its growth policy. Instead of GDP, they have GNH (Growth National Happiness). It’s their way of showing commitment to building an economy that would serve Bhutan’s culture based on its spiritual values. So we see that spreading happiness is a global agenda and not confined to a particular race, caste, colour or creed.

Today the world runs around breathlessly attempting to manage time, but my opinion expressed to friends, subordinates and employees has always been that time is finite but energy isn't! Therefore:

### **MANAGE YOUR ENERGY, NOT TIME**

I recall reading a wonderful HBR article on human energy that stated *energy comes from four main wellsprings in human beings: the body, emotions, mind and spirit. And, in each, energy can be systematically expanded and regularly renewed by establishing specific rituals (behaviors)*. How interesting! This means that unlike time (which we cannot expand or stretch), human energy can be regulated with conscious effort, and surprisingly it could be accomplished by bringing small changes into our lives, which will eventually directly affect our time at hand. Wow.

### **NOW, MANAGE YOUR ENERGY**

Here's how you can better manage your energy (aka time): Set an early bedtime, quit smoking/drinking, start yoga, join a neighbourhood laughter club, pick up that lovely hobby of yours, go to the gym, say thank you more often! The list goes on and on.

A quick tip: Make your own list right now, jot down those *sweet little things* that create positive energy in you, and practice them frequently. Trust me, you'll have all the time in the world!

Some senior business people skilfully and consciously manage their energy, emerging refreshed and alert after crossing multiple time zones or working late into the night. Yet we also know caffeinated and careworn executives who, after hours of wakeful slumber, struggle to recall simple facts, seem disengaged and uninspired, lack patience with others, and can't think through problems or reach clear-cut decisions. What could be the reason behind this?

Inadequate nutrition and lack of physical activity are mainly to be blamed for this. However, I would also draw your attention to *sleep (mis)management*, to me it's a larger part of the energy management challenge. In this hyper-connected world,

in which companies now expect their employees to be on call or answer their email 24/7, employees with their droopy eyelids are insanely sleep deprived and zombie-like. This adversely affects the overall performance/competency, as well as their precious physical health. I strongly urge my readers to think about this and find a solution.

### **POSITIVITY BREEDS PRODUCTIVITY**

I picture a productive, creative, and attractive work environment for my employees and I know the only way to achieve it is to infuse positivity in them. I need to enable them to strike the right work-life balance and be zealous towards their daily chores at work. I am a practitioner of the “*one step at a time*” philosophy – wherein small initiatives incorporated daily/weekly/monthly helps you to accomplish your daunting task. Forget praise, forget punishment, you need to make your employees’ job more interesting by adding a deep meaning to what they do. That’s the true source of positivity.

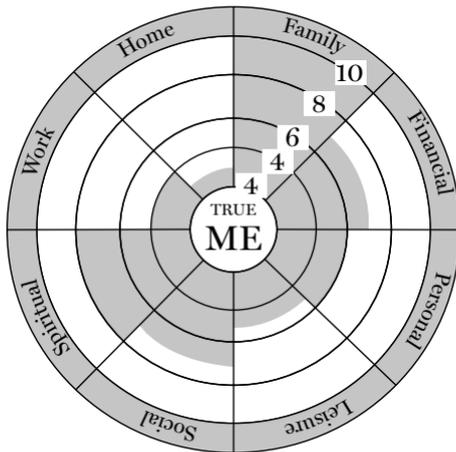
In my view, our stockpile of positivity starts to deplete when we are bulldozed by a daunting task (professional or personal). The intelligent way is to break it down into bits and pieces and take things individually. Don’t get overwhelmed or overpowered by the task, instead find ways how you can make it more exciting and interesting – leading to positivity in and around you. The magic mantra is to strike the right chord of harmony between your work and personal life. Studies show that stress is a poor motivator. Creativity and innovation emerge from a culture of encouragement and motivation. Crisis kills creativity.

### **THE POSITIVE ORGANIZATION**

Research done at the University of Michigan suggests that when individuals or teams hear five positive comments to every negative one, they unleash a level of positive energy that fuels higher levels of individual and group performance. Kim Cameron, a POS (Positive Organization Scholarship) researcher, has demonstrated how this positive approach has helped the workers at Rocky Flats, a nuclear site in Colorado, tackle difficult and dangerous work in record time.

## RATE YOURSELF

SEWA employees can thrive at work and in life by adopting the following leadership assessment (*True-Me Model*), which revolves around finding their strengths and connecting with ourselves and others. We rate our performance in eight areas (Family, Financial, Personal, Leisure, Social, Spiritual, Work, and Home). The following assessment will help you evaluate the quality of your life. It will serve as a benchmark, because you have to keep repeating this assessment at least once a month, to gauge what has improved. Rate yourself on a scale of 2 to 10 according to each of the eight areas (2 being lowest, 10 being highest).



Each individual is endowed with unique capacities. Some learn “right away” while some “take a while” to get it correct. I respect both approaches and believe that by adequate encouragement, enrichment and instruction anyone can excel in his/her work.

## THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT

I always advice my employees that small incremental steps, practiced over time and consistently focused towards a specific goal, can't help but bring your dreams to reality. I keep reminding them about the butterfly effect. Wondering what's that?

Here's a story that explains its origin: In 1961, American mathematician and meteorologist Edward Lorenz was using a numerical formula to assess a weather model when, as a short cut,

he entered the decimal 0.506 instead of 0.506127. The result was a completely unexpected and quite different weather scenario from what was initially predicted. From this experience he coined the term, ‘butterfly effect’. In it small, tiny, incremental changes (such as the flap of a butterfly’s wings) can have major consequences.

This is the lesson: Little initial decisions and challenges successfully build a foundation that promotes us to the next stage. This next stage opens doors for new and potentially unforeseen opportunities, which helps us to rise even further in our personal development.

### **HERE’S HOW TO INSTANTLY BOOST YOUR PRODUCTIVITY**

An interesting fact is that tweaking our daily chores could result in productivity all day long. You ask how? Below I have cited a couple of ways to instantly boost your day’s productivity:

- ☞ The next time you are stressed out, shift your focus to what you can do for others, donate some money to the needy, or remind yourself of an act of kindness. Trust me, this will make you feel in *control* of the situation.
- ☞ Try and pair your work activities with pleasurable experiences such as brainstorming over a cup of coffee or writing a report while listening to soft, soothing music.
- ☞ Maintain a daily journal. Roughly log your activities and at the week’s end (over a cup of your favourite beverage!) look for things/activities that sapped away most of your time and energy. Conduct a self-feedback drill.
- ☞ And, my favourite: Do not let perfect become the enemy of good. Reading a book for only 10 minutes is better than not reading at all!

### **THE D.R.E.A.M ORGANIZATION**

*“I work here because this is my dream organization”* – that is the ultimate answer I want to hear from my employees. I always ask myself this tough question: *“Why should anyone work here?”* I am convinced that positive employees shape up produc-

tive organizations. But does such an organization exist in real life? What would a dream organization look like? I found the ultimate answer in a fantastic book by Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones, aptly called *Why Should Anyone Work Here?* The book talks about dream organization and they came up with an apt mnemonic. Let's take a sneak peek into this dreamlike reality:

**Difference** – *“I want to make a difference where I work, I want my organization to help me unleash my uniqueness.”*

**Radical honesty** – *“I want to trust my organization. There shouldn't be an iota of doubt about what's really happening around me.”*

**Extra value** – *“I want to work in an organization that magnifies my strengths and adds value to my personal evolution.”*

**Authenticity** – *“My organization should have credible causes, and a reason for its existence.”*

**Meaning** – *“My aim is to find meaning at work. Work shouldn't feel like work!”*

**Simple rules** – *“Keep it short and simple. The rules should make sense. Anything that's nonsensical, is a complete no-no for me.”*

On the surface, the above attributes may seem like child's play – but it's quite a tough challenge. You scratch the surface, and underneath you find knots and tangles. But never mind, I am game! I want to make SEWA a DREAM organization. This is my dream!

I believe one of the most important strategies a leader should have to create a dream organization is to blow open the doors of business-as-usual and discard traditional management rules, rituals, and expectations by discovering the great people in his/her organization who are turned on, passionate, in love with what they do, and eager to use their skills, gifts, and talents to the fullest. And that can be done by building TRUST.

## **SEWA EMPOWERS EMPLOYEES**

Employees work for their boss, right? Not if you are at SEWA. In SEWA, it's 'People First'. I do whatever they need to thrive better, including inspiration, training and development, resources and peace of mind. In fact, it doesn't make sense to expect your

employees to function effectively in an environment that does not acknowledge their psychological or emotional needs.

One of the strategies I use to spread positivism at SEWA is endowing the employees with the choice of choosing their working environment – to the extent of choosing the furniture as well as colours of the walls, curtains or cushions. This empowers the employees to embrace the workplace, be happy about their surroundings and makes the place more inviting. “*What can you do to make tomorrow better than today?*” I ask them.

### **RISE AND SHINE**

Employees working at companies that care about them are far more than satisfied – they are engaged, loyal, and fully committed to the organization with their minds and hearts, which helps create loyal customers and increases profitability. Workplace plays an important role in employee motivation. One should be proud of his/her office. I came up with the idea of transforming a waiting area into a plush, tastefully designed lounge-like place. It’s called Rise and Shine and is one of the most beautiful places in SEWA today. It’s open for guests as well as employees.

This place has made me proud. How? It just happened that Ms. Salha Obaid Ghaabish, the General Director of the Cultural and Media Office for the Supreme Council of Family Affairs, visited me. She was so smitten by this place that she wrote about it in her magazine – *Marami*.

### **WHY SHOULD ANYONE WORK HERE?**

Authentic leaders provide the inspiration to turn aspiration into reality. To position SEWA as one of the authentic organizations in the Middle East, I restricted the working hours throughout the week so people can balance their personal and professional lives. Working hours are defined and respected by all employees, however overtime is given to those who really need to come during off hours as we are trying to balance the personal and professional life. I know in some cultures, like the Japanese one, people work for 12 hours a day, six days a week, for months or even years (the Japanese even have a word, ‘karoshi’, which means

literally ‘death from overwork’).

Besides having office boys to serve them during office hours, I have also ensured that vending machines are made available for the employees across the organization for coffee, tea, and other beverages. After some employees highlighted special dietary needs and requested healthy food, we allowed specialised catering companies to serve them around the clock.

In addition to the above, in the Holy Month of Ramadan free meals are provided for staff workers on shift duty during the hours of breaking the fast.

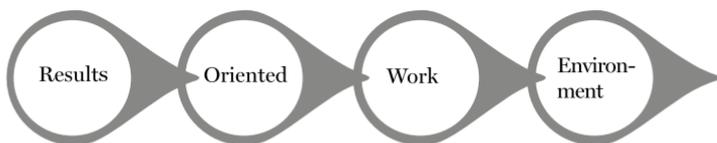
Last but not least, an eco-car cleaning service, as well as minor car maintenance in our workshops, is provided to the employees in our workplace. This is how I value people and people’s time.

The above are a part of the strategy I introduced to my employees, which resulted in trust. Trust is another element that ingrains the seeds of empowerment in employees. The level of trust by the manager/leader determines the quality of work output by the employees, which we reflect in our core values.

### **R.O.W.E**

A **Results-Oriented-Work-Environment** gives team members complete freedom to do their jobs how and when they see fit, as long as they produce agreed results to specified deadlines.

The most important part of working successfully in a ROWE setting are clear, meaningful and measurable goals for your people, and monitoring their performance. Discuss goals with them individually, and make sure they agree that each one is relevant and fair. Then hold people accountable for the delivery of these goals – otherwise, the whole R.O.W.E approach falls apart. Below is the framework:



R.O.W.E Model

## FROM ME TO WE

Rising above self-interest requires strong will and discipline. That's why I never say 'I did it', I always ask the department's manager to announce the incentive as if it is his/her suggestion or idea. Then I bestow my blessings on it. I like what Lao Tzu believed in: *"A leader is best when people barely know he exists, Not so good when people obey and acclaim him, Worse if they despise him, But of a good leader who talks little, when his work is done, His aim is fulfilled, they will say, We did it ourselves."*

Another interesting thing I keep doing is ensuring that media and newspapers capture the photographs of my managers and employees, not just me. I want them to feel good and proud of their effort and contribution. Modesty is a critical character trait for great leaders.

In addition to this, I encourage recruitment of the children of retiring employees. Besides fostering a sense of belonging to the organization, this initiative has also spread a lot of positivism and emotional energy in SEWA. Employees and their families convey appreciation for this effort of mine and I often receive big smiling thank-yous.

Instead of focusing on self, leaders need to divert the spotlight onto their employees and enable them to emerge as competent future leaders. As far as my methodology is concerned, I vouch for coaching and mentoring my employees.

## COACHING

According to the chief executive of IBM, *"hierarchical, command and-control approaches simply do not work anymore. They impede information flows inside companies, hampering the fluid and collaborative nature of work today."* I say that the world has shifted from command-and-control to collaborate-and-coach.

Who is a coach? Simply put, a coach is a person who trains, instructs and prepares you. Coaching is an act of unlocking a person's potential to maximize his/her own performance by helping them to learn rather than teaching them.

For me coaching is not just an act, it's a phenomenon, it's a process. I look at it as an event and a *journey*. This is how I view coaching:

A *Coaching Event* is when a team member comes looking for help or support.

A *Coaching Journey* is about helping that same individual grow and progress over time.

## **THE SIX OS OF THE COACHING EVENT**

The six Os of The Coaching Event that I use most of the time are as follows:

### **1. Overview**

Let your team members narrate the situation to you as they see it. Encourage them to look at the same situation from the perspective of other players.

### **2. Open-ended Questions**

Encourage the person for more thought and more than a simple one-word answer. Help the person to hit upon the answer rather than giving the answer on your own.

### **3. Options**

Encourage the team member to explore a range of options, avoid discussions about who is right or wrong. Focus on exploring the possibilities rather than ‘what *cannot* be done’. Be positive.

### **4. Objectives**

Be clear about your goal or what you want to achieve. Dig to find out the root causes rather than dealing with it superficially.

### **5. Obstacles**

This is a reality check. Weigh the *pros and cons*. Discuss all the potential hurdles and their solutions as well.

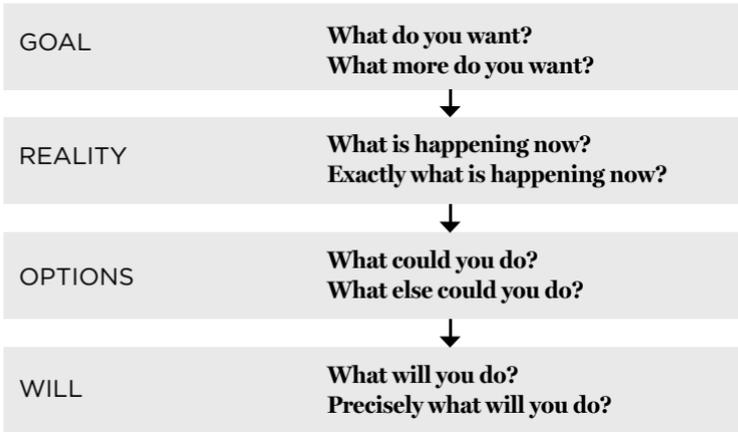
### **6. Outcomes**

Ask the team member to summarize what the outcomes of the sessions are. He/She should summarize what he/she has learned and his/her future course of action. The goal is to help fix the key points in the mind of both coachee and coach.

The six Os is a wonderful tool I have been using in SEWA and it has shown great results.

The fascinating fact about coaching is that it raises awareness and responsibility in the team member – helping him/her to unlock his/her potential and maximize his own performance. Here, I have to mention one of the most beloved models of coaching: **The Grow Model**, which was created by Sir John Whitmore and his colleagues in the 1980s. Below I have tried to summarize the model (If you prefer to dig deeper, you can refer to Sir Whitmore's book *Coaching for Performance*.)

### The GROW Model



To make your GROW sessions effective you have to set **S.M.A.R.T** goals. At SEWA, we have taken this concept a notch above to **S.M.A.R.T.E.R** goals.

The acronym **S.M.A.R.T.E.R** has many variations, including this:

- S** – Specific, significant, stretching
- M** – Measurable, meaningful, motivational
- A** – Attainable, action-oriented, agreed upon
- R** – Realistic, relevant, result-oriented
- T** – Timely, tangible, trackable
- E** – Explicit, encouraging
- R** – Resolving, radical

Almost always, a **S.M.A.R.T.E.R** session is followed by crafting a doable action plan and seizing the opportunity. One has to remember here that the goal is *what needs to be resolved in the*

*next half hour* (or however long they have for the next GROW session). One needs to determine the most effective steps to be taken *now*. That's why the first question on the list is, "*What do I want from the GROW session?*"

## **MYTHS ABOUT COACHING**

### **Myth#1: Coaching is just another name of mentoring.**

Mentoring is a long-term relationship, while coaching is temporary. Mentoring is an open-ended, non-specific contract, while the coaching contract is for a specified period of time, to work on specific issues with measurable outcomes.

### **Myth#2: Coaching takes a lot of time**

Coaching relationships can last anywhere from three months to two years, depending on what the coached team member is trying to accomplish. But during that period it should take at most 30-45 minutes a week of check-in time.

### **Myth#3: Coaching is a kind of Psychotherapy**

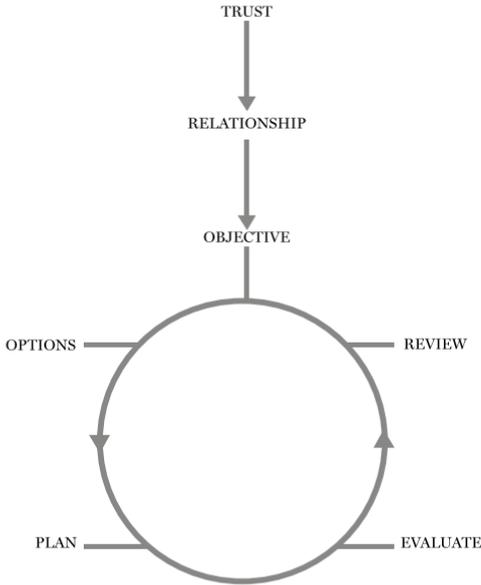
Coaches, like all businesspeople, need to have a grasp of psychology, such as what to do now, not on what went wrong in the distant past. Coaching looks at the present and goes forward. It's always future-oriented.

### **Myth# 4: One recipe can handle all coaching solutions**

There is no *one-size-fits-all* approach to coaching. Just as individuals and their goals are different, so is what each person needs to learn to achieve them.

## **TROOPER COACHING PROCESS**

As mentioned earlier, coaching is a process, and not a *one-time activity*. The coach and the coached team member have to strike a healthy, trusting relationship. In fact, the success of a coaching process directly depends on the level of trust between the two. To illuminate my point here, I am introducing the Trooper Coaching Process. The model below emphasizes the trusting relationship within the coaching process. Trust enables the coaching relationship, which can then approach a number of objectives in a cyclical manner and achieve the goal successfully. Let's have a look:



## MENTORING

On the other hand, I also take up the role of a mentor. A mentor is a wise, trusted and influential supporter or a counsellor. *“There is a time in life when you have to realize that it is not about you. It is about what you can do for someone else,”* says Edmund Lewis, a mentor by profession. This is what I love about being a mentor, to be able to *touch people’s lives*. The process is forward looking, change-oriented and developmental. Even if I am able to make a difference in one person’s life, it’s a great achievement for me.

## MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP

Nonetheless, mentoring is quite challenging, mainly because people are very selective, they won’t just allow someone to dig deeper and deeper into their lives – you have to earn that privilege.

This is what Ken Sande has to say about mentoring, *“In the back of their minds, people are usually asking these questions:*

1. *Can I trust you?*
2. *Do you really care about me or love me?*
3. *Can you really help me?”*

4. Do you really care about me and my performance?
5. Can you really help me?
6. Do you want to see me at the top always?

Well, in my opinion, if you have positive answers to these questions then you are laying down a solid foundation for a mentor-mentee relationship.

### **SEWA COACHES AND MENTORS**

I play both these roles as it is imperative for any leader to showcase the best of both attributes. I personally enjoy *shouldering* both the responsibilities as it also enables me to understand the employees' strengths and weaknesses to bring out the best from them. I draw my inspiration from this beautiful quote of the German poet Goethe, "*If I accept you as you are, I will make you worse; however If I treat you as though you are what you are capable of becoming, I help you become that.*"

Most renowned companies, these days, have developed successful mentorship programmes wherein everyone, even the CEO, is actively involved. Accenture is a good example. Interestingly, here every team is assigned two mentors: a formal mentor, who helps guide their long-term (strategic) goals and a project mentor, who helps them deal with short term (tactical) goals. This practice has become an important part of the company culture and helped make Accenture a very successful company. This is definitely a new wave in mentoring and I look forward to incorporating this practice in SEWA.

### **CORPORATE LOYALTY**

Building corporate loyalty is the need of the hour. In the past decade, the employees would stay with their employer for the entire career span, but now things have drastically changed and the work force is quite mobile. People *job hop* more often now and even companies adopt the *hire and fire* strategy quite a bit. So in order to foster positive psychology and make the worker feel that the company has invested in them and actually cares about their progress and development, I lay down a mentoring relationship, thereby building the foundation of a worker-employer camaraderie, right from the start.

My coaching and mentoring is always *on the go*. There is no fixed or specific time to do them. I just grab the right moment whenever I see something go wrong, or needs improvement. I take charge of the situation myself and explain in a *soft tone* to the employee the right way of doing it.

### ISO (INTEREST, SKILLS, OPPORTUNITY)

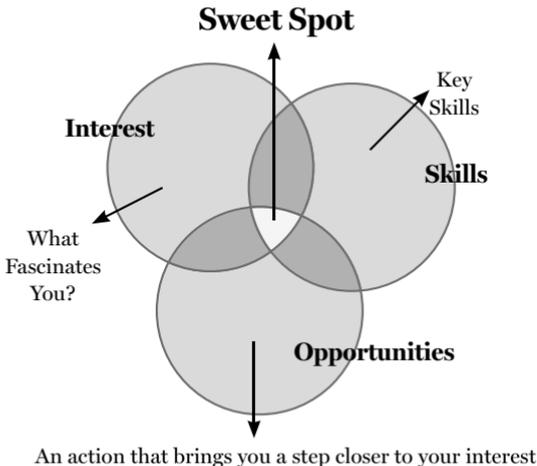
Since time immemorial, people had little need to know their strengths. A farmer's son would be a farmer. A carpenter's daughter would be a carpenter's wife. But things have changed drastically. People have choices now and therefore they need to know their strengths.

The successful using of mentoring and coaching results in what I call *ISO*. It stands for **I**nterest, **S**kills and **O**ppportunity. The intelligent combination of ISO – Interest, Skills, and Opportunity leads to finding the *sweet spot* of a person.

Here's a diagram illustrating your way to find the sweet spot.

### THE SWEET SPOT

In this process, all the three elements of ISO work together (hand in hand) at the same time where 'Interest' answers the question *what fascinates you?* 'Skills' answers the question *what is your core competency?* And 'Opportunity' answers the question *what action do you take to bring you a step closer to your interest?* And the cumulated result is the sweet spot.



In this process the person discovers that he/she was born to do only one thing in their life. The sweet spot is what they are good at and can excel if practiced regularly. It answers “*What are you passionate about?*”. Passion is everything. Innovation doesn’t happen without it. Dig deep to identify your true passion.

Steve Jobs said, “*It’s the intersection of technology and liberal arts that makes our hearts sing.*” Ask yourself, “*What makes your heart sing?*”

It is a genetic or a God-given talent, and perhaps you could become one of the best in the world in applying that talent. Focusing solely on what you can passionately and potentially do better than any other human/organization is the only path to greatness.

The point that I want to bring home is clear: If you have the passion, drive and smarts then you can excel in your chosen profession. What’s required is self-knowledge. Remember you cannot manufacture passion, or motivate people to feel passionate. You can only *discover* what ignites the passion within them.

### **LET THAT MIRACLE HAPPEN**

Here’s a bit of insight, being passionate about doing something is one thing and being good at doing something is another. Miracles happen when you are good at your passion. Do you want to know how?

Here are four questions you should ask yourself to make this miracle happen:

1. What skills have helped you survive?
2. What is your strength or what makes you feel in control?
3. What made you stand out in the past or what is your super power?
4. What compliments do you usually get?

Now grab a pen and a paper, and write down the answers to the above mentioned questions. Is there a common thread among all of them? The moment you home in on your underlying assets or your core strengths, the miracle is bound to happen. Why wait?

Following here are some initiatives I introduced to bring positivity and emotional energy to the work place at SEWA:

## THANK YOU - THE MAGICAL WORD

In this fast-paced digitalized world, taking a moment to say ‘thank you’ to someone is a rare deed. Our days are chaotic and filled with important daily chores. Many times, today’s agenda becomes tomorrow’s plans. Our calendars are *ultra* scheduled. Our inbox is overflowing with important emails and not to mention the phone which is always ringing!

Everyone is busy catching up with life itself. I do understand it takes a lot of effort to even think about appreciating someone. But pause for a moment and give it some thought! You know why? Because the magic created by ‘thanking someone’ has a ripple effect in your own life. The positive energy and emotion that you will create in that person’s life will find its way into your life as well. It will bounce back to you.

Feeling challenged by my thoughts? Let us establish a new habit in our lives. How do you start your day? With a cup of coffee or maybe with a daily dose of news while you drive to work. Let us just tweak it a bit. Start your day with a ‘thank you.’ It’s an overwhelming feeling to make someone else’s day. The real happiness lies in making others happy. Even research suggests that happiness derived from unmaterialistic acts or deed lasts longer and has positive effects in your overall well-being too. It’s magical. Give it a try and see it for yourself.

Peter Drucker in his HBR article, *Managing Oneself* points out that manners are the lubricating oil of an organization. Simple efforts like saying *thank you* and *please* or *knowing your employees name* does make a big difference. The small stuff makes a huge difference.

## CHAIRMAN RECOGNITION

Who doesn’t like recognition and praise? Everyone craves *lime light* and appreciation at the workplace. Gratitude is definitely a sure fire way of increasing positivity. I have made a commitment to notice and praise the efforts of employees and reward them for the same. At SEWA, even the minutest of effort doesn’t go unnoticed. Usually my executive secretary writes a mass email, on my behalf, praising the employees’ performance, and sends it across to all the employ-

ees. It's titled as *Chairman's Recognition*. These are *personalized* recognitions congratulating their attributes and contributions towards SEWA. Nothing matches up to social recognition, not so?

### **BRAVO CARD**

Employees are awarded this card to boost morale and make them *feel special*. Big or small, if a task is done effectively by anyone at SEWA, then the employee is awarded this card. Interestingly, this card can be given by a superior to a subordinate or vice-versa. I strongly believe that appreciation and recognition is what today's employees need the most. The Bravo Card stations are all over the place and made accessible to everyone anytime of the day.

### **MONTHLY GATHERING**

We organize monthly events to give employees the chance to participate and be praised.

Events like "Month of Conservation", "Volunteering Month", "Energy Month" etc. are organized to inculcate social responsibility and accountability amongst the employees and the participants are nominated for different categories like "Hidden Heroes", "Personality of the Month", "Time Manager", "I am Creative", "SEWA Friends", "SEWA Pioneers", and many more.

Each month has a theme and the following table shows the themes for the year 2016.

<b>Month</b>	<b>Theme</b>
January	SEWA Energy Meet
February	Excellence
March	Conservation
April	Sites Visits
May	Leadership & Management
June	Mercy and Charity
July	SEWA Reads
August	Volunteerism
September	Loyalty
October	SEWA Teams
November	Creativity and Innovation
December	UAE National Day

### **PAT ON YOUR BACK**

Believe in the *pat on your back* philosophy! It works wonders. This step is implemented across the departments at SEWA daily and I myself practice it almost every day. The motive is to make the employee feel valued and his/her effort being recognized and appreciated right away.

Improving *positive psychology* and infusing satisfaction and happiness in the workplace need not be a complicated thing. Small improvements and little steps can bring about tangible change that is needed to see improvement in workplace dynamics. We say happiness is contagious: what starts with one soon spreads to a department, a division and ultimately to the entire floor. As the Dalai Lama has said, "*Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions.*"

### **COFFEE MEET**

I am a big believer of employee satisfaction, it has to be teamwork. A leader cannot lead if he doesn't have a winning team and to keep the team intact and up and running, the leader should adapt to gratitude. According to many experts, feeling appreciated is usually the first step to being truly satisfied on the job.

What SEWA does to ensure a better communication among its leaders and employees is allowing the leader with his small team to brainstorm or discuss anything related to the work, including the annual appraisals or setting goals for a new project, away from the office premises at a nearby coffee shop. It's worth it to spend couple of hours having fun and discussions.

### **KNOWLEDGE CAFÉ**

The motivation for people to capture and transfer is built on learning and applying knowledge. This is crucial knowledge for the knowledge sharing enterprise. So how do you bring people together? A knowledge café allows people to have open, creative conversations on topics of mutual interest. It encourages people to explore issues that require discussion in order to build a consensus around an issue.

In an effort to facilitate the free exchange of knowledge, les-

sons learned, and best practices in an easy-going environment, I designed SEWA Knowledge Café. It is ergonomically designed and has a dash of modernism to it. Employees can take a break from their work and hang out here, share lessons-learned over a cup of coffee, or surf through journals and books available at the café. Facilitated discussions and conversations lead to valuable insights. This is the core essence of a learning organization.

### TIPS OF EFFECTIVE MEETINGS AT SEWA

Running an effective meeting is a highly-valued endeavour. Why? Simply because meetings are a congregation of multiple minds. To me, it's a get together of diverse talent, which means new ideas, innovation and much more. But it's crucial to make the most out of that talent and time (both very precious elements). Here's what we do to make meetings a great success:

1. **Arrive 5 minutes early** (so that we start and end on time).
2. **Come prepared** (share all relevant data and freely express your experience)
3. **Challenge ideas rather than people** (Appreciate and politely disagree)
4. **No private/side conversations** (Only one person talks at a time, the rest are alert listeners)
5. **Have fun!** (A meeting need not be sad and serious)

Well, these are just a few golden rules that we follow and you can incorporate them in your meetings and improve upon them as you like. The outcome is splendid. Give it a try!

### LET US ALL BE N.I.C.E

I advise all my employees '*let us all be nice to each other!*' Let us all together *make our world a better place. "For me, the word nice has an extended meaning. For SEWA employees, N.I.C.E stands for Noble, Inspirational, Challenging tomorrow & Enable others to act. So, even you can be N.I.C.E from today!"*

Noble (doable for you and me? Yes)

Inspirational (doable for you and me? Yes)

Challenging tomorrow (doable for you and me? Yes)

Enable others to act (doable for you and me? Yes, of course)

The pay-off: See the world (in and around you) change for good.

## HAPPINESS ALL AROUND

It is worth mentioning here that according to the World Happiness Report compiled in 2013, UAE has been ranked 14th amongst the happiest countries in the world and the happiest in the Arab world. The government is aiming to be amongst the top 10 happiest countries in the world. According to Professor Jeffrey Sachs, a leading economist, author and director of The Earth Institute at Columbia University in the United States, *“The UAE is number 14 on the list. This is a great accomplishment and reflects the very hard work that is being undertaken in this country with a lot of insight and creativity to promote widespread well-being.”* Thereby, in an effort to support the happiness programme, SEWA and I as a whole pledge to spread happiness.

*“The National Agenda aims for the UAE to be among the best in the world in the Human Development Index and to be the happiest of all nations so that its citizens feel proud to belong to the UAE,”* the UAE’s Vision 2021 plan says. United Arab Emirates’ attempt to secure happiness for its citizens led to Ohood Al Roumi’s appointment to the position of Minister of State for Happiness, which was announced on Wednesday, February 10, 2016, via Twitter by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Prime Minister and Vice President of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai.

The world is indeed in dire need of peace and happiness. Every nook and cranny of the world is inflicted with some or other thing, be it wars, epidemics, natural calamities, poverty, scandals, or petty crimes. My only urge to everyone is to kindly pause for a moment and ponder! Who is at the receiving end? Humanity. We are harming ourselves. It is a really sad state of affairs, which is why I really love what Ramona L. Anderson once said, *“People spend a lifetime searching for happiness; looking for peace. They chase idle dreams, addiction, religions, even other people, hoping to fill the emptiness that plagues them. The irony is the only place they ever needed to search was within.”*

**THANK YOU UN**

As far as my personal contribution is concerned, I have pledged to spread peace and serenity among my every walk of life. For this I was recognized on the eve of 20th March, 2013 – the United Nations’ International Day of Happiness – as one among the 100 UAE nationals who have contributed immensely to the ‘happiness’ of the UAE and created a motivational work environment.

**“You win by working hard, making tough decisions and building coalition.”**

JOHN ENGLER

## PRINCIPLE 7

# Make Tough Decisions

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MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS AMIDST CHAOS has never been easy, it takes practice. At times, human beings have a tendency to steer clear of conflicts, avoid making difficult decisions and even run away from reality – but these behaviours are of little use if you are a leader. A leader has to make regular and rigorous attempts to face the challenge ahead, which (most of the time) calls for making tough decisions.

I understand that even the tiniest of decisions can *make or mar* the situation and it can have serious impact on the organization. One needs to master the skill of impromptu decision making, especially if you are holding a position of leadership.

As Alan Autry sums up, *“Leadership demands that we make tough decisions”*. I, too, share his opinion and believe that in today’s era, leaders need to equip themselves with leadership decision-making skills that will lead to improved accuracy of his estimates and structure effective negotiations, thereby making your organization smarter.

Making tough decisions does not mean rushing to judgment. You take tough decisions after giving yourself a chance to look deep and analyse the situation, while keeping in mind the big picture.

Here are a few lessons that I learnt from my first year's experience in SEWA:

### **KNOW THAT MOST PROBLEMS ARE NEVER AS BAD AS THEY INITIALLY SEEM**

Don't take situations at face value, it is about our *perspective* towards any problem/obstacle. Things become smoother if one has a high level of emotional maturity and a positive mental attitude. This holds true most times, but in extremely adverse situations painting a *rosy picture* can actually backfire. Optimism is fine as long as it doesn't separate you from reality. Listen to your gut instinct!

### **LOOK AT THE BIG PICTURE**

Weigh the pros and cons before taking a decision. Find an answer to "*How, what, when, why and what if...*" Evaluate *both* the long-term and short-term consequences. Don't rush to judgment.

### **PUT YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE (EI) TO WORK**

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to understand and manage your emotions and those of others. Emotional self-control is one of the core components of decision making. When you develop this skill, you are aware of your emotions, you are influenced by your emotions, but you are not *blinded* by them. However, the goal is not to take feelings out of the decision-making process, but to be able to not get carried away by them and lose emotional self-control.

According to Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence is the *sine qua non* of leadership. Point taken!

The fact is you may have the best degree/diploma in town, the smartest ideas and the latest technology at your disposal, but if you slack at EI, you are bound to fail or compromise with mediocrity. Moreover, I agree with the research I came across that stated, "*EI not only distinguishes outstanding leaders but can also be linked to strong performance.*"

## COMBINED INTELLIGENCE

So what is Combined Intelligence? It's the amalgamation of Emotional Intelligence (EI) and Spiritual Intelligence (SI). Spiritual Intelligence can be defined as *"the ability to behave with Compassion and Wisdom while maintaining inner and outer peace (equanimity) regardless of the circumstances."* You could say that SI is an extension of EI. Once you cross the threshold of self-awareness and self-development, you connect with something higher than yourself, the supreme power. That's when you attain Spiritual Intelligence. And people who can strike a chord between EI and SI are winners in life.

## STATE OF MIND

In my own private office at HQ, I have a small, 1x1m square place called *'state of mind,'* I strongly believe that meditation/prayer is a must for leaders among the daily agenda.

## ARE YOU AVOIDING IT?

**Remember:** The choices we make dictate our life, and as fate would have it life tends to throw us a curve ball at exactly the time when everything is going fine.

One has to be adept at facing these unsolicited challenges of life. No leader can wriggle out from workplace challenges that require intensive decision making. However, what happens when leaders avoid tough decisions? Frustration, low morale, poor customer service and big loss of opportunity. *"Nibbling around the edges"* doesn't pay off, it is an outcome of fear. Honestly speaking, passing the buck on key decisions can adversely affect the organizations and prove detrimental for the company's future/anticipated ventures.

## THE SCIENCE BEHIND TAKING THE TOUGH CALL

The good news is that science has shown us some tactics and habits that can help us improve our judgment and wipe away the fog of human irrationality that often dampens our decision-making skills.

## 5 WHYS: FIX THE ROOT CAUSE, NOT THE SYMPTOMS

Douglas Horton's famous quote, "*The art of simplicity is a puzzle of complexity,*" really inspires me. Simple components, artistically arranged, solves bizarre bothersome puzzles. Wonderful, isn't it?

This also forms the basis of a classic Six Sigma lesson. The 5 Whys is a technique used in the *Analyse phase* of the Six Sigma DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyse, Improve, Control) methodology. It is a great tool that does not involve data segmentation, hypothesis testing, regression or other advanced statistical tools, and in many cases can be completed without a data collection plan.

By repeatedly asking the question 'Why' (five is a good rule of thumb), we can peel away the layers of symptoms that can lead to the root cause of a problem. Very often the obvious reason for a problem will lead you to another question. In this manner you conduct a spot-on analysis of the issue at hand.

### HOW TO PERFORM THE 5 WHYS

1. Write down the specific problem. Writing the issue helps you formalize the problem and describe it completely. It also helps a team focus on the same problem.
2. Ask *why* the problem happens and write the answer down below the problem.
3. If the answer you just provided doesn't identify the root cause of the problem that you wrote down in Step 1, ask *why* again and write that answer down.
4. Loop back to step 3 until the team is in agreement that the problem's root cause has been identified. This may again take less or more times than five *Whys*.

### ASK, ASK, ASK

At a general level, most of us overestimate the impacts of future events, good or bad. I am not saying don't listen to your *gut*, but the point that I want to make clear is that it is always a good idea to *ask* someone who has been in a similar situation. Moving to a new city? Ask your friends or family members who already live there or ask your neighbour. Making a major business decision?

Call for a brainstorming session in the boardroom and “ASK”.

This philosophy of mine is backed by research that also suggests that one should not assume to *know* how things would turn out. Ask, Ask, Ask.

### **SLICING & DICING**

Slice and dice refers to a strategy for segmenting, viewing and understanding data in a database. Users slice and dice by cutting a large segment of data into smaller parts, and repeating this process until arriving at the right level of detail for analysis.

### **TRIZ**

A Russian acronym:

Theoria Resheneyva Isobretatelskehuh Zadach (Theory of Inventive Problem Solving). One can think of TRIZ as another way of Lateral Thinking. TRIZ is based on two basic principles:

- ⇒ Somebody, sometime, somewhere has already solved your problem or one similar to it. Creativity means finding that solution and adapting it to the current problem.
- ⇒ Don't accept contradictions. Resolve them.

In my experience, the following is the best model for group problem solving:

#### **STEP 1 - DEFINE THE PROBLEM**

Define the nature and scope of the problem. A summary problem statement identifies and clearly defines the problem.

#### **STEP 2 - IDENTIFY ROOT CAUSES**

Determine what factors are causing the problem.

#### **STEP 3 - DEVELOP SOLUTIONS**

Generate alternative solutions, then evaluate these alternatives to determine the *optimal* solution

#### **STEP 4 - IMPLEMENT ACTION PLAN**

Putting the solution into practice. Establish a system for measuring the impact and effectiveness of the solution.

## STEP 5 - EVALUATE

Monitor and evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the solution using the measurement system developed in step 4.

If you are looking for some strategic steps that may help you take fool-proof business decisions, then you can refer to an interesting McKinsey Global survey result entitled *'How companies make good decisions'*. This can be a great source of knowledge in these situations.

To save you time, allow me to give you a snapshot of that global survey. Here's what I distilled from the report:

1. Put organizational goals ahead of business unit goals (*build consensus among business units*).
2. Ensure that the participants in the discussion about any decision are included on the basis of skill-sets and experience. (*Get the right brains at work*).
3. The decision criteria should be transparent and have solid fact base. (*Act on facts*).
4. Ensure that the person who is involved in the implementation process is also involved in the decision-making process. (*Empower, empower, empower*).
5. Finally, pay particular attention to the risk factor. (*Learn from experience*).

## WHAT GOES INTO A GOOD DECISION?

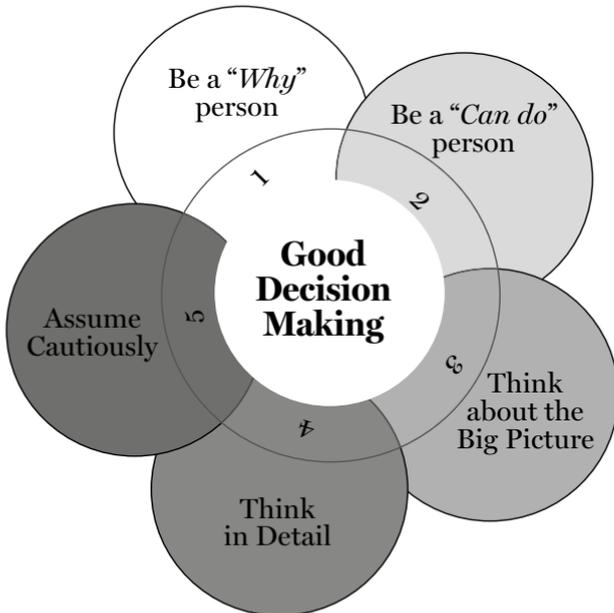
*"From now on I am going to make only good decisions."* I have said this to myself umpteen times. However, I realize that the ability to successfully carry it out is essential. Life is my best teacher. It has thrown me into various instances where I had to call the shots. So, what's my guiding compass?

- ☞ **Commitment** - Simply hoping and wishing for something isn't enough. You need deep down commitment.
- ☞ **Values & Priorities** - Your decisions must reflect what you most care about.
- ☞ **Personal Accountability** - Excuses are a waste of time and energy. I avoid the excuse trap by taking personal responsibility and accountability for all my decisions.
- ☞ **Forward-thinking** - Keep your eyes on the road, always!

This is my *modus operandi*. You may have your own unique approach, but don't ever let a potential idea turn into a missed opportunity. Here are a few more handy tips to ensure that you are right (Most of the time):

1. **Be a “Why” person** - Look to understand the reasons behind other people's requests and actions; then share your findings with other people.
2. **Be a “Can do” person** - Look at all the problems as challenges, and do everything you can to find ways to overcome them. Keep working at the problem until you solve it.
3. **Think about the Big Picture** - Recognize the effect your actions have on current and future efforts.
4. **Think in Detail** - Clarity leads to increased personal motivation and reduced chances of mistakes.
5. **Assume Cautiously** - Take time to find out the facts; the fewer the assumptions you make; the more confidence you can have in your decision.

Below is the infographic:



## **SURPRISE OR SHOCK**

Sunday 28th of August, 2016, was the day HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, chose for an unannounced visit to several government offices. He arrived at the Land Department and Department of Economic Development for a spot check at the start of the working day – to find that no one had turned up for work. Sheikh Mohammed stood in an empty workplace!

Sunday's spot visits showed "senior officials" were absent. He certainly wanted to send a message.

*"Timeliness starts at the top, and we won't go after the employees when their bosses aren't there."*

The very next day, nine senior professionals at the Municipality were retired by Sheikh Mohammed. The media office said these high level changes at the municipality were part of Sheikh Mohammed's *"keenness to give way to a new generation of young leaders capable of bearing responsibility for the next phase of development"*.

## **MY STORY**

Here's an incident that was a tough call:

In my early days at SEWA, I remember calling the HR Manager to update me with a quick overview of the total number of employees. I was surprised at the answer I received. There were over 5,500 employees and many of them were unskilled and unequipped for their job responsibilities and never had a job description, a job specification, and a job skill in their files! They even had no credentials related to their past work experience. Wonder what happened next?

I immediately took a tough decision to significantly *downsize* the number of employees and retained only the competent and skilled ones (it was a tough and heart-rending decision) but I had to look at the bigger picture and work towards salvaging SEWA (well, I was appointed by His Highness to transform the authority from a government body to a corporate body). I reas-

sured myself and said, *“It’s all about assigning the right person for the right job!”* Someone asked me if I had the heart to do this. *‘No, I don’t have the heart,’* I replied, *‘but I have the mind.’* I knew it was necessary for the long-term survival of the authority and the employees who would remain.

Inevitably, this decision was followed by a lot of argument and debate as a lot of pressure was being applied by influential people in society to hold on to my decision as the time wasn’t right. I stayed calm and firm with my decision. Nineteenth-century philosopher Thomas Carlyle once said: *“A man lives by believing something, not by debating and arguing about many things.”* Once you decide to decide, life becomes surprisingly simple. You don’t have to think about certain issues or questions again. You simply get on with things and don’t waste time and energy rehashing/debating and arguing the problems and possibilities. I draw my inspiration from Steve Jobs who said, *“And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.”*

## TYPES OF EMPLOYEES

Identifying and retaining the talent is easier said than done. The following four quadrants are quite helpful. I, usually advise the HR manager to use it to classify types of employees we have in our organization. Two dimensions that you can use to measure and analyze each employee are: Competence and Commitment.

### Four Types of Employees

<p><b>Out performers</b> Accomplish 80% of the results 20% of the people</p>	<p><b>1</b> Competent and Committed</p>	<p><b>2</b> Competent not Committed</p>	<p><b>Don’t “buy in”</b> Source of internal and external problems</p>
<p><b>Nice People</b> They can be trained to move them up</p>	<p><b>3</b> Committed not Competent</p>	<p><b>4</b> Neither Competent nor Committed</p>	<p><b>The worst employees</b> You must get rid of them</p>

Type One (Out-performers) – They *know* and care

Type Two (losers) – They *know* but don't care

Type Three (mediocre) – They care but *don't know*.

And, Type Four (good-for-nothing) – They neither *know nor care*.

The job of an HR manager is critical and complex at the same time. It is, by all means, a demanding job. Among (many) other things, hiring employees for the organization is one of their prime jobs, which means they build the organization. So, now you may perceive how crucial it is to hire the right candidate. The Harvard Business Review points out that as much as 80 per cent of employee turnover is due to bad hiring decisions. So what is the key reason to hire a particular candidate and reject the other? Well, of course there are multiple key factors behind it, but I always tell my HR team, “Hire enthusiasm. Low enthusiasm. No hire. Hire for originality. Fake personality. No hire. Hire optimists. Negative vibes. No hire.” Never compromise on hiring and never hire the B players.

#### **4 As OF HIRING THE WINNERS**

We have a lovely way of hiring winners for SEWA. As previously mentioned, we do not settle for mediocre candidates. So, what's the yardstick against which we measure their competency? We have created the four non-negotiable criteria to assure right hiring:

1. **Active** (Pro-active approach and stewardship)
2. **Attitude** (Positive and imaginative/challenges the status quo)
3. **Aptitude** (Intelligent and proficient)
4. **Alignment** (Compatible with our values and culture)

Once we hire the right candidate, the next steppingstone is to frame them up to perform. We introduce them to:

#### **THE FIVE FRAMES OF PERFORMANCE**

1. **Aspire**

*Where do we want to go?*

The first step in setting an aspiration is to get the facts right. It's about analyzing competitive requirements and benchmarking the trends.

## 2. Assess

*How ready are we to embark on the journey?*

Identify those few strategically important capabilities you need to reach your aspirations. It's the capabilities and mindsets that matter most.

## 3. Architect

*What are the practical steps that will take us to our destination?*

Develop a portfolio of initiatives that combines short-, medium-, and long-term efforts and balances radical innovations with incremental improvements to manage risks.

## 4. Act

*How do we manage the journey?*

To make it happen, organize your initiatives into a clear structure, build ownership, and constantly evaluate progress. Make your act dynamic – It should be a power play.

## 5. Advance

*How do we keep moving forward?*

To sustain transformation, you need to create an era of continuous improvement, stronger problem-solving skills, and switch from silos to collaborative thinking.

In short, implementing the above leads to an insightful journey that unravels employees' strengths and weaknesses. This is how SEWA hires and hones talent. This may be why SEWA has secured the leading position in the LinkedIn Talent Brand Index among other Energy Utilities in the UAE. We treat and track our employees performance with transparency.

## **RESILIENT EMPLOYEE**

Another determining factor is *resilience* (my personal favourite). This era demands resilient employees. Why? Because they have the ability to properly adapt to stress and adversity. They have the spirit to bounce back from adversity. They coolly accept the reality and above all they have this exceptional quality of making the best of whatever's at hand. See the opportunities that lie inside adversities. Everything precious is covered! You find a pearl in an oyster! Having said that, the good news is that you can learn to be resilient.

Here, I would specially mention Hewitt Associates' (A compensation and benefits consulting firm) hiring and promotion tool:

**S.W.A.N**

**S:** Smart

**W:** Works hard and smart

**A:** Ambitious, adaptable, and accountable

**N:** Nice

In my opinion, educational qualification and industry experience is all fine, but at the end we are hiring people. According to my philosophy, *character defines commitment*, and commitment in turn defines *competency* (refer to 3Cs of leadership in principle 5).

So do not rush the process of hiring. Take your time. The *right job will eventually find the right candidate*. The 'Law of Attraction', you see!

**DON'T JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER. SQUASH YOUR BIASES**

As Professor Rolf Dobelli explains in his book *The Art of Thinking Clearly*, one should consider what psychologists call "the base rate" (the likelihood of both positive and negative outcomes). It tells us not to be blinded by our biases, but unfortunately as human beings we tend to get judgmental. Don't fall prey to reckless, unrealistic optimism. As Dobelli says, "*when you hear hoof beats, don't expect a zebra*".

**MENTAL TOUGHNESS MAKES YOU STRONGER**

Mental toughness is a mindset, an attitude. Embrace it. We need wide-angle vision to navigate us through the rough roads that await us when we make big, tough decisions. The journey could be excruciatingly exhausting and tension packed but the show must go on.

When your mind faces trials and tribulations it gets tougher and better. Experiencing failure is advantageous and contributes heavily to mental toughness. The mind has to grow accustomed to foreseeing a crisis to react accordingly. Mental toughness begins when you distance yourself from emotions and remain

focused on what matters most. It's about *acclimatizing* with the surrounding and at the same time remaining unfazed by it. TalentSmart has conducted research with more than a million people, and came to the conclusion that 90 per cent of top performers are skilled at managing their emotions in stressful situations and remain *in control*. That's quite a high percentage!

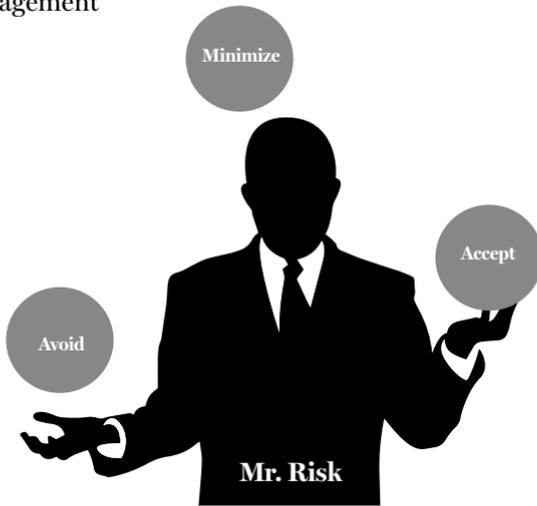
## RISK MANAGEMENT

A layman would think that Risk Management is risk prevention, but aren't we aware of the fact that lower risk means lower returns? Today 'risk management' is about 'daring to seek risks,' or '*intelligent risk*' taking. According to a CEB white paper, "leading companies view every decision they make as a risk decision and choose their risks with great calculation. They use risk management as a protection shield, not an action stopper." My professional experience is dotted with instances where decision making was backed up with high-risk factors. I dared to take risks, but weighed my pros and cons minutely. I would suggest that you always calculate your risk. Also communicate it across the organization hierarchy to guide decision-making. But never let it stop yourself from action.

Your response to the risk matters a lot. Sometimes you have to be courageous and sometimes cautious. To extract the best out of the risk (aka opportunity), managers can consider the following three options:

- ☞ **Risk Avoidance** – This might mean changing the course of your process, changing suppliers, diversifying resources, etc.
- ☞ **Risk Minimization** – This might mean tweaking your process to diminish the risk repercussions (if any).
- ☞ **Risk Acceptance** – This might mean accepting risk as inevitable (part and parcel) and generate an equipped plan to supplant risk.

The below diagram will illuminate the concept of Risk Management



I recommend you read ISO 31000, which will add value to the process you are doing. So what is ISO 31000?

### **ISO 31000 – RISK MANAGEMENT**

ISO 31000:2009, Risk Management – Principles and Guidelines, provides principles, framework and a process for managing risk. It can be used by any organization regardless of its size, activity or sector. Using ISO 31000 can help organizations increase the likelihood of achieving objectives, improve the identification of opportunities and threats and effectively allocate and use resources for risk treatment.

However, ISO 31000 cannot be used for certification purposes, but it does provide guidance for internal or external audit programmes. Organizations using it can compare their risk management practices with an internationally recognised benchmark, providing sound principles for effective management and corporate governance.

### **ZULAL WATER**

Seeking to take risk while keeping in mind the ISO 31000

principles reminds me of one of our subsidiaries, *Zulal Water Factory*. Let me share a story here that is a great example of strong belief in your decision and the courage to proceed with it. The factory was running at a great loss when I joined. I was surprised to see such a beautiful asset lying wasted and underperforming, especially in this part of the world where pure drinking water is in great demand.

### **PRICING STRATEGY**

I didn't have to wait long to decide. I immediately took corrective measures and *chalked* out an action plan. One of the strategies I *focused* on was pricing. My team and I did a conjoint analysis and found that the products were never sold in a structured manner and there was no difference between retail and wholesale prices, plus there was no uniformity in pricing. I created a standard price and publicized it, even though in the beginning there was a lot of external and internal friction from our sales department and the distribution agencies. I decided not to change my decision as I believed in my product and knew for sure that it is 100 per cent natural ground water. It's just about having the right marketing and branding strategy.

For all those entrepreneurs who struggle to find the right pricing points for their products, grab a copy of '*1% Windfall*' by Rafi Mohamed, Ph.D. and Economist. The book is a fresh take on pricing strategies and enables you to build a growing and profitable business.

### **BUILDING A CHAMPION BRAND**

SEWA has dreamed of becoming a global brand. It's evident in our bold and ambitious vision statement: *To be among the best 'authentic' organizations in the world*. This is clearly a challenge, notwithstanding the fact that changes in technology and consumer expectations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have shifted the landscape of corporate branding. A new standard is needed. I would like to call it Champion branding.

So, what goes into making *'the most valued global brand?'*

The following are the four dimensions of the Champion Brand model:

1. **Alignment** – Understanding and exceeding expectations of stakeholder/s. This is the first step, but it is not sufficient to create strong and enduring relationships.
2. **Authenticity** – Aligning actions with vision and values. Creating an authentic/transparent corporate character. Companies with solid reputations that also act authentically ultimately build trust. But trust alone doesn't create enduring brand value.
3. **Attachment** – Making a deeper emotional connection is what establishes loyalty and triggers positivity. Simply think of the very strong set of emotions tied to these mega brands: Disney, Coca-Cola.
4. **Advocacy** – How well a company applies its unique expertise and assets to advocate on behalf of the needs of society and stakeholders. It means building your business while improving society.

When companies find this **Alignment, Authenticity, Attachment** and **Advocacy** with their key audiences, they move from being good brands to becoming Champion Brands.

### IT'S ABOUT SPEED AND EFFICIENCY

To position yourself in a competitive market you need to be fast and efficient and that can't happen if you don't have a business model. To ensure Zula's growth we came up with the following, '*Zula 4M Efficiency Model*'. Below is the summary of the model:

#### ZULAL 4M EFFICIENCY MODEL

**Men:** Equipping the workforce with the skills required for the jobs of today and those of tomorrow is at the forefront of our strategy.

**Machines:** Efficient machines are faster and more accurate. We use world-class, fully-automated machines to standardize mass production with negligible technical lag.

**Materials:** Maintaining buffer stock of raw material, chemicals,

minerals, spare parts and consumables in compliance with the supplier's recommendation.

**Method:** Introducing three shifts of eight hours each, while taking initiatives to boost the positive emotional energy among staff workers.

### **IF IT'S FREE - IT'S NOT WORTH IT**

Trust me, taking all these decisions was definitely *not a cup of tea*. At times, decisions were taken with great subtlety and sometimes I had to keep *a stiff upper lip*.

This brings me to one of the toughest calls I took when I joined SEWA. A surprising fact that I discovered was that the employees at that point in time received absolutely *free* electricity, water, and gas. And what amazed me most was that this so-called facility was *not* included in their salary package (which means it was unofficial!). I dug deeper and found out that it was a practice created by someone over the years that whosoever joined the authority was subject to redemption of their electricity, water and gas bills, irrespective of their designation. This did not make any sense to me. I *immediately* decided to discontinue this practice of free incentives on Monday of July 7, 2014.

Imagine this: There were over 5,500 employees, and the value of their monthly bills was almost \$1 million. That's a major revenue loss! Plus I am a believer in sustainability, and staunchly believe that human beings do not appreciate anything that comes for free. We tend to take it for granted, don't we? Hence, I took this decision to discontinue the practice of free electricity, water and gas for SEWA employees. The result?

### **THE BAD GUY**

Consequently, I became 'the tough and the bad guy' who set out to harm his own people. To make things worse, this decision was not welcomed by society, especially the families of the employees who had been enjoying the free incentive for years. They took some negative action and created a buzz in social media for almost four months. It was a total uproar but I did not give in.

I was *adamant* on my decision and stuck to my guns amid this chaos. Deep within, I knew I was right. This decision was rooted in my belief that we should be the *role models* of conservation. We need to set examples of *sustainability*. Only if leaders think of themselves as builders of sustainable institutions can they master today's changes and challenges. And when things come for free, we tend to squander it away recklessly. This very attitude I wanted to change.

### **THANK YOU SAEED**

It is worth mentioning here that one fine morning my HR Manager, Saeed, came to see me and thanked me for the decision. I was extremely gratified by his gesture. Later, he told me that he discovered an underground water leakage at his house, which he only identified due to his high monthly bill. He had his meter inspected and was right! It was an unseen/hidden water leakage. Had I not taken this decision, the waste of water would have continued for years to come.

### **THINK RIGHT**

The good part of this story is that The Federal Authority was inspired by my decision and decided to take the same action. Around the beginning of January 2015 they also discontinued the free electricity, water and gas incentive for their employees. Even Abu Dhabi's Executive Council (the UAE's capital) was impressed by the initiative and incorporated it into their system. It was then followed by ADNOC, one of the biggest oil companies in the UAE. I was really proud of being the *role model* and setting benchmarking standards that are *ethical* and contribute towards conservation and sustainability. I want SEWA to think right. This was one of my biggest contributions towards society.

### **SAY YES TO CORPORATE CULTURE**

There's another incident that is worth mentioning here: It is part of the culture in UAE that, most of the time, some people would just walk straight into your office, without any prior appointment or business meeting agenda. What annoyed me most was that people would want to meet 'the top guy' even for a tiny, silly matter. I have

to admit here that I started rejecting meeting people outright, regardless of their position, if they did not have a prior appointment.

I am an accessible person and love meeting clients and people from other companies. But I just have 24 hours a day! I need to intelligently utilize my time plus I need to bring the proper corporate culture into my executive office. My employees who manage my schedules and meetings have been strictly directed to only give appointments to those who have requested a meeting backed up with a clear agenda.

This wasn't an easy decision and it was not welcomed by most of society, but I knew it was right and I was determined to change this culture for good. Remember, when you set out to change something that has been a deep-rooted practice you will face mighty challenges. But if you know in your heart that you are right, don't be afraid.

### **TAKE A BREAK!**

If you are tired after reading the book so far, take a break as what's coming next is so exciting.

Here's a story that will delight you. Another tough decision story? Naturally, but this had a direct impact on the profit margin. According to SEWA's 2020 Strategic Vision, profit plays an important role in carving the roadmap for a brighter future and it's one of my priorities!

This time the toughest decision was taken in regards with collecting the connection fees. Earlier, the practice was the fees would be collected after the completion of the customer's project, which usually took two to three years, depending on the size of the project. On top of that, most customers requested either discount or instalments, which further created difficulty with cash-flow. The process was very clunky and slow and I had to fix it to improve the revenue stream and induce a cash free-flow.

I thought long and hard about it. The decision I took was to collect the connection fee upfront through an easy instalment plan (zero interest fee) throughout the life-cycle of the project. Primarily, I had two main objectives:

1. To improve the cash flow by creating a new revenue stream. As I have mentioned in the beginning of my book that the organization was struggling through a financial crisis.
2. To ensure no further discount and help those who could not afford the full payment in advance.

As I anticipated, the decision faced problems and resistance. In fact, initially, it was not even welcomed by business people... I remember His Highness Dr. Sheikh Sultan called me up and asked me to revisit my decision and try to be easy on people. I was speechless, I couldn't do anything except respect his request.

I was in a dilemma! After talking to him, I reconsidered my decision. I delved deep into the pros and cons of it. Then I told myself, "*Rashid, you have to stick to your decision... because this is right.*" And, I did. I faced a lot of resistance but I tried to keep cool and focused. I asked myself, "*How will I know if it's the right decision, if I never make it?*"

### **EXCEEDING MY EXPECTATIONS**

Some companies felt paying up front, even in instalments, was not affordable, which meant they had two choices:

1. To cancel the project. This was positive as an early exit saved them money in the form of the down payment, and it resulted in savings for our network as well.
2. To revisit the decision and use more energy-efficient devices to reduce load. Moreover, by reducing the load the connection charges were also reduced.

A year has since gone by and this very practice is now accepted by everyone including business people. It has proven to be highly lucrative and systematic. In addition to this, the bottom line has also shown remarkable improvement. I believe and follow what Phillip C. McGraw said, "*Sometimes you make the right decision, and sometimes you make the decision right.*"

**“A key – perhaps, the key – to Leadership is the effective communication of the story.”**

HOWARD GARDNER

## PRINCIPLE 8

# **Use Vibrant Stories that Motivate Others to Reach for a Better Future**

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IN MY PHD DISSERTATION, I emphasized non-monetary incentives as a motivator to people and I gave the example of Japanese culture compared to the American culture, where they emphasize the monetary. At SEWA, we believe that motivation goes beyond money. My own experience and a recent McKinsey survey convinces me that non-cash motivators may be more effective than financial incentives in building long-term employee engagement and loyalty.

A leader's *prime* job is to inspire talent, and I keep a *laser-like* focus on employees' talents and capabilities. Focus should be ingrained in your personality and you need to be a pro at filtering out distractions. Employee motivation is sagging throughout the world. Fallen morale and lack of self-confidence are detrimental for both the individual and the organization. I believe each indi-

vidual is *gifted* by The Almighty Allah and no talent should go to waste or unnoticed and we as leaders or entrepreneurs have a greater responsibility to hone that talent.

### **MAP**

Taking a cue from Daniel H. Pinks' wonderful book *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, I, too, recommend providing the employees with a MAP: Opportunities to **M**aster new skills, freedom to **A**utonomously work towards a greater **P**urpose. These are the big three of employee motivation/engagement. In his book, Daniel Pink skilfully explains what an employee really wants from his boss/manager.

All you have to do is see where innovation can come from, encourage grass-root ideas and utilize social recognition (one of the most powerful motivators for innovation). But the most inspiring method is, as Gandhi affirmed, to "*be the change*."

### **DR. R'S**

Below are a few of my handy, tried and true ways to enchant your employees:

### **USE A VIBRANT AND COMPELLING STORY**

There is nothing more motivating than a vibrant story. It immediately lightens up the mood and lifts morale. This is a sure fire way to connect with the employees and let them know that toils and turmoil are part and parcel of work life challenges, and that I as a leader "*have been there and done that*". I share my experience as it could be used as a step tool to reach a better future. He/she who has the best/most compelling/resonant story wins:

In life!

In business!

In front of the Jury!

### **WHAT IS A STORY?**

A story is the simple and beautiful narrative about yourself and your team, your products/services or your company. How you get the message across to your audience is vital. The story may be delivered in various forms and via different media (meetings,

radio interviews, social media, etc.). What matters most is that it should excite and motivate the people around you.

### **MAKE IT REAL**

I love story-telling. In fact, it is one of my favourite tools to communicate with people. I am of the opinion that real stories can touch the heart of the listener and leave an indelible mark. Facts and figures are easily available, but what is missing in today's era is *real life experience*. For instance, once I came across an interesting write-up by a management guru. Today, I vaguely remember the topic of the article but I very well remember the story as it contained an uphill trip to a destination, and the description of a meandering road by a serene water side!

Real stories, if narrated with enthusiasm and interest, can have a great impact in our professional life as well. We are always reminded by the Holy Quran about the importance of telling stories: *“So relate the stories that perhaps they will give thought.”*

But there is a glitch, there are times when a leader or speaker is *carried away* by his own story and he loses the momentum of his speech. In this situation the purpose of story-telling is lost. Your speech should be engaging and adorned with real life stories, but a leader also has to take control of his emotional quotient and ensure that his listeners connect with him (story-telling being the bridge) and grasp his message. *“If you want to build a ship, don't drum up people to collect wood and don't assign them tasks or work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea,”* said Antoine de Saint-Exupery. What an insightful quote! He correctly points out that focusing on the purpose/outcome is of greater importance.

### **WALT'S PHILOSOPHY**

One of the great management books I have read and advise my friends to read is *The Disney Way* by *Bill Capodagli* and *Lynn Jackson*. It's an amazing read and the concept revolves around Walt Disney's philosophy, which can be summarized by the four principles of Dream, Believe, Dare, Do.

I dream beyond the boundaries of today,

I test my dreams against my beliefs and sound values,  
 I dare to take risks, and make a difference,  
 I do execute my vision to make those dreams come true.

### **OBSERVE AND ABSORB**

I personally do not wait for an occasion, I just fill my daily talk with the interesting narration of events I witness in my daily life. I am a passionate observer of details. I love to *observe and absorb* the world around me. There is so much to *learn and unlearn!* So my advice is to keep your eyes open and an alert mind.

Here's a cool example of a motivation strategy practiced in companies like Google and 3M. I was amazed to find out that they let employees spend 20 per cent of their time working on their own projects. As a result they see much more innovation. My view is that technology alone cannot ensure innovation, training on creativity is vital.

Studies conducted with customer service employees show that if you allow them to do the job *their own way* they do a better job. Amazing, isn't it? But a word of caution here (I advise all my managers): *"Allowing freedom doesn't mean you let people/employees lose, instead it means widening the fences."*

### **THE WOW ROAD OF SUCCESS**

And yes, my stories or a narration of personal experience is always filled with famous highly-motivational quotes from eminent personalities. I feel that quotes have the inherent ability to prepare one for all manner of tasks. Do you want to take this road? Just pay attention to the following quotes:

*"If you can imagine it, you can achieve it. If you can dream it, you can become it."* – (Think Big)

*William Arthur Ward*

*"You're going to go through tough times – that's life. But I say, Nothing happens to you, it happens for you."* – (See the positive in negative events)

*Joel Osteen*

*“You can design and create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.” – (People first)*

*Walt Disney*

These quotes are a source of inspiration to me and they have a wow effect. Can you feel it?

## **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

While some organizations thrive on transactions, the extreme focus on narrow, measurable activities have quite a few negative consequences. In particular, an acute transactional focus decreases an organization’s ability to adapt to new markets, competitors, products or systems.

Transformational leadership is quintessentially about the intangibles required to *motivate* others in the organization, to bring in changes that drive performance. Most employees, especially the *millennial* generation, want more than a paycheque. They want to be enthusiastic about their role, their job. They want their contributions to have resonance. They want to see how their roles connect to the big picture. It’s about employee engagement. People really want to make a difference and they are looking to you, their team leader, for inspiration. Here comes the role of Inspiring/Transformational Leadership. Inspiring leaders understand the need for effective communication. Transformational leadership is directly correlated with the long-term performance of employees.

## **ENCOURAGE THE HEART**

An inspiring leader is a story-teller. He motivates his employees with powerful, vibrant and actionable stories. Incorporating stories in conversations, emails and presentations is an absolute must. A great message, compelling facts and figures can fall flat if it is not backed by a personal story. A motivating story not only adds a personal touch to your conversation but it also effectively communicates your message and leaves behind an indelible mark in the minds of employees. Such is the power of vibrant motivational stories.

As far as my personal contribution towards implementing this principle goes, story-telling is one of my ways to inspire the em-

ployees in SEWA. On almost every occasion, such as weekly leadership team meetings or monthly progress meetings with the executives and the senior team members, I use stories of my own successes (and failures!) or other inspirational stories of great thought leaders. The motive is to inspire them and infuse them with the passion to keep smiling in the face of adversity, and have the confidence in themselves to become future leaders.

### **MY FIRST SPEECH AT SEWA**

This reminds me of the first speech I delivered in front of the SEWA employees when I was newly appointed by His Highness to chair the company. The memory of that day really fills me with emotion as I spoke from the bottom of my heart, and the employees were so touched and engaged by my speech that they expressed their feelings and emotions on a daily TV programme called Good Morning Sharjah by sending messages. I was completely unaware of this and only got to know about it when I received a direct call from His Highness saying: "*Rashid, did you listen to yesterday's programme about your wonderful speech? Your leadership qualities and words of wisdom were appreciated and welcomed by your employees.*" He further mentioned that He was really happy to have chosen me for SEWA. "*I am happy, I have chosen the right person,*" He added. What a proud moment that was!

### **LEADING IN A COMPLEX WORLD**

Leaders need to touch the hearts of people around them, and in today's complex business landscape it's not about numbers and profit but about people and long-term results. Kenneth Blanchard mentions in his book *Leading at a Higher Level*, that extensive research shows that effective leaders have a clear leadership point of view and are willing to share their beliefs about leading and motivating people. I share exactly the same opinion and *The SEWA Way* holds testimony to it.

As a leader you need to focus on enhancing the intellectual capital of your organization: the experience, knowledge and creativity of the workforce. How? Through employee engagement. This process is more *collaborative* than *controlling*!

## EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Do you see the rest of your business life being a never-ending stream of crisis, problems, and dropped balls? What do you do when you can clearly see your employees are uninterested in their work? The clear answer is that you see your business becoming vulnerable. You think it is ruined forever, right? Wrong! There is a way out.

Classic managerial theories like those of Herzberg and Maslow links high job satisfaction with high performance. In the modern world these ideas are manifested in the concept of *employee engagement*.

In my view, the first step for a leader is to create a *climate* that enables employees to *unleash* their potential. If you want to improve your organizational performance you need to change your leadership behaviour first. You need to understand the difference between *compliance* and *commitment*. Leaders cannot *demand* more engagement and stronger performance. You need to set up the system – the combination of right environment and culture that makes employees listen to what *you* have to say.

## THE TEN CS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Here's how you can engage employees' heads, hearts, and hands! There are definitely several other avenues of action, but I came across the following Ten Cs of employee engagement and I found them interesting enough to share with you.

### 1. CAREER

The leader should provide challenging and meaningful work to his subordinates with avenues for career advancement. It is vitally important! You need to challenge employees and at the same time instil confidence in them that challenges can be met. Equip your employees with the tools to be successful and you will never have an employee who is demotivated or not engaged.

### 2. CONNECT

Value your employees. Employee engagement is a direct reflection of how employees feel about their boss and company. If the employees' relationship with their managers is fractured, then

no amount of perks will persuade employees to perform at top levels. When you proclaim that *'employees are your most valuable asset'* – mean it. So connect with your employees, squeeze some time from your busy schedule and *routinely* communicate with them.

### **3. CONTRIBUTE**

Encourage your people to contribute to the organization's success in a meaningful way. Take up all the initiatives possible to provide them the opportunity to participate in the growth of the company, as well as having a say in the decision-making process. Set up parameters that identify, as well as reward, their contribution (like my Bravo card system). Nothing works like a *'growth performance indicator.'* This helps employees align themselves with their job responsibilities and the reward system will hit that push button in them to perform and furthermore be involved and engaged.

### **4. CONGRATULATE**

Great leaders give recognition, and they do so a lot; they coach and mentor. Wooden's surveys show that employees feel they receive immediate feedback when their performance is poor, or below expectation, but the same employees reported that praise and recognition for strong performance is much less common.

### **5. CONVEY**

Taking cue from the previous point, it is imperative to convey praise and equally crucial to convey clearly your expectations to the employees. I personally keep track of small improvements my employees need to make and I work daily to improve their skills. The motto is to create small wins that enable the team, unit or organization to perform at its best.

### **6. CLARITY**

Leaders must communicate a clear goal and vision. Employees need to understand what the organization's goals are and how they can be best attained. So define your goals, keep it simple and achievable, and let them know clearly why the goal is important

to you. Do not create a mess by intimidating fancy jargon. Just sort out common goals and work together to attain them.

## **7. CONTROL**

No! Not you. Let the employees exercise control over the flow and pace of their jobs. You create opportunities for employees to exercise this control. Employees should be able to voice their ideas (a good example is my 'I am creative' initiative). People are more productive when given the freedom to *make mistakes*. This also creates trust. The success of Microsoft, for example, stems in part from Bill Gate's belief that smart people anywhere in the company should have the power to drive an initiative.

## **8. COLLABORATE**

Great leaders are team builders; Surveys indicate that teamwork results in employee engagement. Thus a leader's continuous challenge is to rally individuals to collaborate towards the company's goals and vision. This is a sure-shot way to foster trust and cooperation among employees, thereby leading to good relationships.

## **9. CREDIBILITY**

The employees will care about the organization only when the leaders/owners strive to maintain the company's reputation and demonstrate high ethical principles and clear standards. The company's reputation solely depends on you and your acts. You need to earn that respect and ensure that it remains intact. Once the employees admire their leader, they'll be proud of being attached with a brand. Credibility is the key – earn it!

## **10. CONFIDENCE**

You need to be the exemplar of high ethical and performance standards. Set the benchmark for employees as this will help create confidence in them. And trust me you will have a fan following. Above all, you will have a workforce that will be 100 per cent engaged in their work and committed towards the company's goals and vision.

According to Deloitte's *Global Human Capital Trends 2015: Leading in the New World of Work*, retention tops the chart of

the thorny issues of organizations across the globe. But merely retaining employees isn't enough. Employees would stick around for years without adding value to the organization. They need to be vested in the company's goals and visions. Therefore, apply the 10 Cs of employee engagement to engage your employees' heads, hearts and hands.

Many a time I have mentioned in this book, and I reiterate it here as well, that in my eyes everyone is talented and competent to carry out a task (I have dedicated an entire paragraph to this – Everyone's Gifted). It is the prime responsibility of the leader to nurture that talent and help the person carve out a niche of his own. So let's delve a little deeper into it and gain some insight about it.

Here's an analogy by Bob Meyers, senior vice president of interactive media at NBC (sports analogy) that makes perfect sense to me: *"On a football team, for example, you have to use all kinds of people. Like the little, skinny guy who can only kick the ball. He may not even look as if he belongs on the team. This guy can't stand up to the refrigerator types that play in other positions. But as long as he does his job, he doesn't need to be big. He can just do what he does best. The catch is that the team needs to recognize what the little skinny guy can do – or they lose the benefit of his talent."*

Here I would direct the attention of my dear readers towards talent management. The term gained popularity during the global meltdown of 2008, when companies were struggling between downsizing and at the same time retaining great talent. Clearly, it is this era's most talked about topic.

### **WHAT IS TALENT MANAGEMENT?**

Talent management *is the ongoing process of analyzing, developing and effectively utilizing talent to meet business needs.* It involves a specific process that compares current talent in a department to the strategic business needs of that department. Results lead to the development and implementation of corresponding strategies to address any talent gaps or surpluses and to maximize the human capital of the organization.

## THE MCKINSEY REPORT

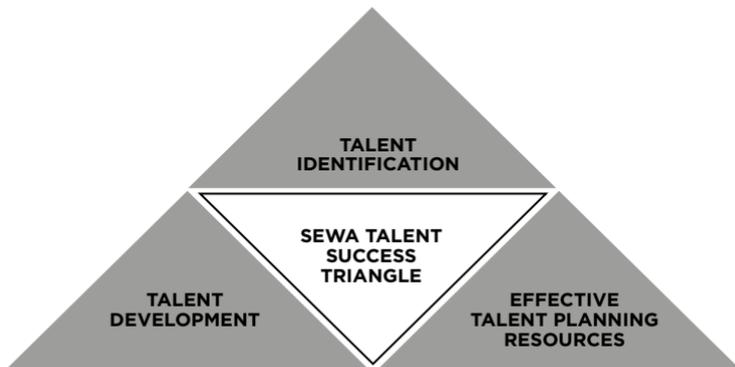
The McKinsey Consulting report *The War for Talent* reported the challenges being faced by businesses and proved how these challenges are intensified by the significant changes occurring with the organization's talent.

What has become clear, and the McKinsey Report clearly shows this, is that the organizations that will prosper under these pressures will be those with intentional and effective talent management strategies, which are delivered through aligned and well-executed processes. In short, organizational (business) success will depend upon how well talent strategies support current and future business strategies.

There have been a number of recent studies, which have identified that expertly designed, implemented and managed talent management will improve strategic performance and business effectiveness, and show great potential to sustain this business success. As such, talent management is a fundamental business strategy that cannot and should not be ignored.

## TALENT MANAGEMENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Every talent management process in use today was developed half a century ago. It's time for a fundamentally new approach to it. It's time to remodel and revolutionize the same. At SEWA we define talent management as a holistic process built around three primary areas:



- 1. Talent Identification** (at each stage of the employment life cycle) – We don't select talent, we identify it. We develop employees for forward-thinking and faster moving enterprises. Identifying the right fit is the catch.
- 2. Talent Development** (assessment of current talent) – Orientation, skill-development and succession planning is done for the employees. Developing global talent competencies.
- 3. Effective talent planning resources** (sustained talent) – We invest in knowledge management, keep our employees engaged, informed, letting them be coached and mentored, even giving them the leverage to choose their own career path.

### **SEWA GOT TALENT**

SEWA houses over 5,000 employees from diverse backgrounds and cultures spanning over 35 nationalities. This multi-cultural identity adds a lot to the unique business culture that we have here. This cultural difference also drives innovation. It came to my mind that it is a powerhouse of craft and talent, and being a connoisseur of talent I just could not help myself from tapping this wealth of knowledge that surrounded me. So, I gave it a thought!

I decided to have a meeting with the Human Resources Manager, Saeed, and came to the conclusion to give him the responsibility of tapping the talent. This is where the idea of SEWA Got Talent was approved. The idea behind this was to provide the employees with the opportunity to showcase their talent so that SEWA can identify the rich and varied talent it harbours. As anticipated, the response was overwhelming. Many employees came forward with their passion to write, sing, paint, cook, play international games and many more.

One such employee is worthy of mention here, Abu Ba Backer, an employee from the water call-centre section. He is endowed with the talent of writing poems and prose. In fact he has also written plays, which have been staged in India. His short poems and proses have been published and have also won accolades. I was so amazed by this. He was armed with such great talent and I really appreciated his effort to find time from his daily chores to keep his passion to write poems and prose alive.

Getting the right mix of talent is important for companies to progress in areas such as innovation, collaboration, customer satisfaction and, of course, technology. I admire people who think and work in highly different ways: All-rounders and deep specialists – those who imagine and also implement.

### **SEWA HIDDEN HERO**

Another hidden hero of SEWA is Iftikhar Ali Zulifajar. He's been donning the hat of an Umpire of Cricket for 28 years (15 years in International Cricket). Quite a veteran!

He has umpired several domestic and international cricket matches and also coached many budding umpires in his life.

An initiative to form The Smile Cricket Club of SEWA was taken by Sayed Tousifur Rahman. He very passionately explained to me that SEWA houses amazing cricketers and he believed that he would get a stunning response for this initiative. He sent out an email on 3rd of January, 2016, inviting interested candidates/cricket enthusiasts and within 12 hours he had responses from over 100 employees who were interested to form and play for the team. It was incredible!

It was in this process that we got to know about Iftikhar and I am proud to say that SEWA recognizes and nurtures such talent. He is definitely an asset to us. I personally met him, and I was amazed to know that he has been in SEWA for 39 years and he confessed that there had never been any extra-curricular activity earlier. His words were, *"I am lucky to have a Chairman who recognizes such efforts."* I was really overwhelmed at this.

### **SEWA WRITERS**

SEWA writers is an initiative created by the Marketing and Communication department, which I supported and approved right away. The idea behind it is to invite all SEWA employees who have writing talent to share their stories with their colleagues. We decided to pick a personal, inspirational story from the various writers and send it to the department to share with the rest of the employees on a weekly basis. I was overwhelmed by the response and happy to see how motivated and

inspired employees are able to share their experiences with the rest of their colleagues. I was told by the marketing and communication manager that he has a long list of employees who are queuing up to contribute to this endeavour.

### **CALLIGRAPHY TALENT**

Have you ever imagined what the world would look like without creative people? Boring! It is my deep seated belief that every individual harbours a unique talent. And talent with a dash of creativity is rare. One such example is calligraphy. We found out that a SEWA employee is a fantastic calligraphy artist. He has organized exhibitions and displayed his artwork/craft in other public forums. In fact, one of his latest exhibitions has been extended for another month on the directives of the Cultural Department of Sharjah.

“Face reality as it is, not as you want or you wish it were.”

JACK WELCH

## PRINCIPLE 9

# Facing the Reality of Where We Are Now

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### **FAKE OR FACE**

BEING FACE TO FACE UPFRONT with reality in the corporate world means to mature and advance as a leader. We all admit that embracing the reality is difficult, that is why most of the time we are *faking* reality rather than facing it. It does take stupendous courage to face the status quo of any organization, especially if the company is going through a rough phase. But the constantly changing and developing corporate dynamics demand that each individual (top notch corporate leaders to small executives) must take stock of their attitude, approach and style and identify ways to improve their performance towards the betterment of the organization they serve. This process starts with being vis-à-vis reality and realizing the need to adopt to new skills and mindsets and shedding off old and out dated traditions or business trends.

## SWOT ANALYSIS

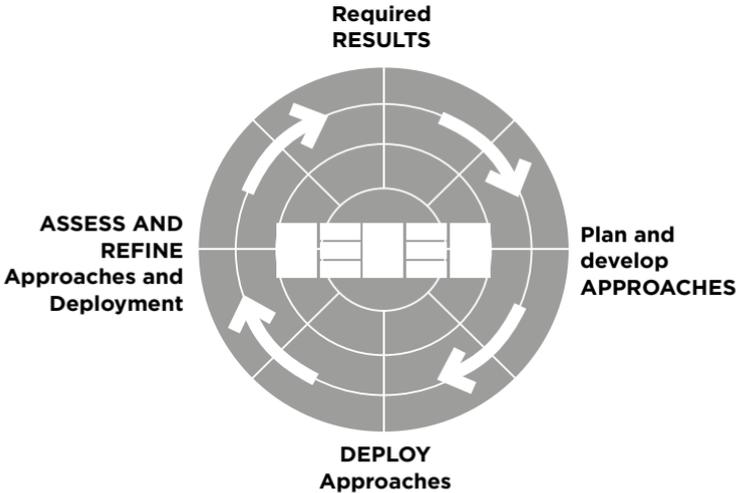
SWOT Analysis is one of the old proven tools for leaders to assess where they are going. Originated by Albert S. Humphrey in the 1960s, SWOT Analysis is as useful now as it was then. It helps you understand your strengths and weaknesses, and identify both the opportunities and threats that are facing you.

We in SEWA use SWOT from time to time to ensure that we are catching up with what's happening within and outside. Now, we have a specific time for it. It is used when needed, and normally we use the following table with questions in each quadrant:

<b>SEWA SWOT ANALYSIS</b>	<b>INTERNAL ORIGIN</b> (attributes of the organization)	<p><b>HELPFUL</b> to achieving the objective</p>	<p><b>HARMFUL</b> to achieving the objective</p>
	<b>INTERNAL ORIGIN</b> (attributes of the organization)	<p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>n What advantages does SEWA have?</li> <li>n What do we do better than anyone else?</li> <li>n What is our Unique Selling Proposition (USP)?</li> </ul>	<p><b>WEAKNESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>n What could we improve?</li> <li>n What should we avoid?</li> <li>n What are people in our market likely to see as weakness?</li> </ul>
<b>EXTERNAL ORIGIN</b> (attributes of the environment)	<b>EXTERNAL ORIGIN</b> (attributes of the environment)	<p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>n What good opportunities can we spot?</li> <li>n What interesting trends are we aware of?</li> <li>n Is our business sector expanding with many future opportunities for success?</li> <li>n Local Govt. wants to encourage local businesses?</li> </ul>	<p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>n What obstacles do we face?</li> <li>n Is changing technology threatening our position?</li> <li>n Do we have bad debt or cash-flow problems?</li> <li>n Developments in technology may change this market beyond our ability to adapt?</li> </ul>

## THE RADAR

Identifying an organization's strengths is important, not only so you don't stop doing the things you're good at, but also because these strengths may help in addressing the issues identified. I believe, complying with a defined standard, is not excellence. Excellence is about going beyond what is expected. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) excellence model "RADAR" is that tool that can help your organization to go beyond expectation. I have illustrated the model for you to have a clearer understanding:



The RADAR logic is a dynamic assessment framework and powerful management tool that provides a structured approach to questioning the performance of an organization. At the highest level, RADAR logic states that an organization should:

- ⇒ Determine the **R**esults it is aiming to achieve as part of its strategy.
- ⇒ Plan and develop an integrated set of sound **A**pproaches to deliver the required results both now and in the future.
- ⇒ **D**eploy the approaches in a systematic way to ensure implementation.

- ⇒ **A**ssess and **R**efine the deployed approaches based on monitoring and analysis of the results achieved and on-going learning activities.

## IMPACT AND INFLUENCE

A mindset shift requires us to free ourselves from our comfort zone and disregard complacency. It's an important step towards reinventing yourself as a leader and ultimately regaining your competitive advantage, impact and influence. Coming vis-à-vis reality means spotting and immediately changing the unproductive behaviours and throwing ego out the door. Corporate dynamics change every moment. Change is good. But one should not wait for the business, clients or the marketplace to shape your mindset, this makes it hard to adapt to reality. On the contrary, one should be able to anticipate and be acutely aware of the surrounding dynamics and be prepared to change.

My observation leads me to point out a few major workplace changes in this century. Here's what to do next:

- ⇒ Skills requirements are continuously evolving. (So update and refresh your skills quite often).
- ⇒ Pure academic skills are not enough. (s-t-r-e-t-c-h out for self-development).
- ⇒ Soft communication, and inter-personal people skills required to build business/client/employee relation (But don't get too married to your iPhone or Blackberry)
- ⇒ Strategy constantly under review (Give it a fresh look, always!).

As we continue our leadership journey in 2016, let me perk you up with the following resolution tips to *remodel our mindset* to face the critical realities of the workplace:

## SEE THE GLASS AS HALF-FULL

Learn to see people through the lens of opportunity. Do not carry a baggage of preconceived judgments and, most importantly, stop expecting people to be your *clone*! Respect them for what they are, and remember everyone has something to offer, and when given the opportunity to reach their full potential, people tend to deliver more than what is expected from them.

## GO RISK IT

Do not dread but dare. This is the mantra of the ‘Change Leader.’ I have learned above all that in adverse circumstances risk is the bridge between opportunity and success. But a word of caution! Take calculated risks. As I always say, *“weigh the pros and cons and then take the plunge.”*

## “LISTEN! WHEN THE LIPS ARE SILENT, THE HEART HAS A THOUSAND TONGUES”

This era belongs to leaders who are great orators yet fantastic listeners. This generation’s employees want their voice to be heard. So empower your employees by listening to their needs, desires and aspirations. Trust me, it is a great step towards employee motivation, I practice it all the time. I give immense attention, feedback and support to all my employees.

## TIME MANAGEMENT OUT, PRIORITY MANAGEMENT IN!

*“If everything is important, then nothing is.”* Everything is a priority these days and I really wish my calendar had more than 365 days listed on it! Today’s leaders need to equip themselves in prioritizing their work effectively. My advice is, *“never lose momentum, and always declutter your mind and table whenever required.”* Know that the world around you is fast-paced and dynamic. Be on par with it. Get control over the timing and content of what you do – this is an appropriate advice for priority management.

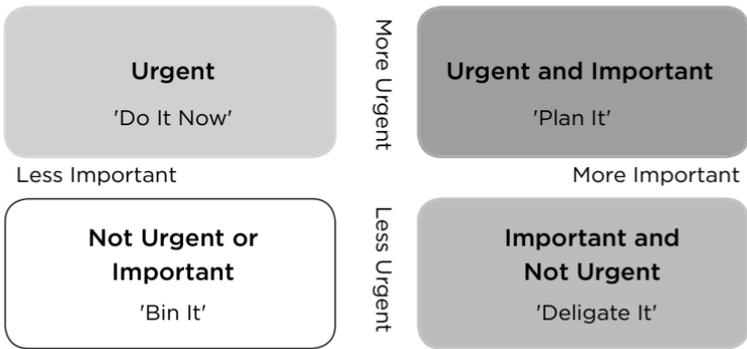
Today, leadership is all about conversation and smart communication. Smart leaders are always on the lookout to find ways to use conversation – to manage the flow of information in an honest and transparent fashion. Therefore it quickly cuts out the nonsense and gets to the core of things.

## WALKING, TALKING, JOKING

I am aware of the fact that a smile can do wonders to people around you. If I have to describe my typical day in SEWA in one word – I would say, *back-breaking* (yes, you guessed it right). Still, I insist on wrapping up my days talking and joking as I walk out of my office. This helps me to unwind and my employees are

infused with positivity and enthusiasm (much needed after a long day's work).

*“What is important is seldom urgent and what is urgent is seldom important,”* says Dwight D. Eisenhower. A similar philosophy was emphasized upon and popularized in Stephen Covey's book, *First Things First*. He came up with a tool that provides simple but effective/powerful time management techniques. If you are someone who would like to control his work rather than allowing his work to control him. Try this:



Urgent/Important matrix

### FACING THE REALITY-LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVE

Jim Collins in his book *Good to Great* highlighted his research findings that *“confront the brutal facts of current reality”*. It is imperative for a leader to define and confront reality and provide hope. University of Southern California professor and leadership expert, Warren Bennis says, *“Only the optimists survive.”* What he means here is that optimism is fine, but living in denial of the current situation, convincing oneself that things are better than they actually are, leads to leadership failure. Vision is necessary, but today's era demands *pragmatic* vision. President John F. Kennedy's bold aspiration, in 1962, to *“go to the moon in this decade”* motivated a nation to unprecedented levels of innovation. A far-reaching vision can be a compelling catalyst, provided it's realistic enough to stimulate action today. Likewise, Mercedes-Benz co-founder Gottlieb Daimler, promised from his company's inception in 1886, that its vehicles would be *“the best or nothing.”*

## BE AUTHENTIC

Especially in tough times, one must demonstrate *rock-solid* integrity and maintain personal credibility. Come out and confront the brutal reality! Be authentic, if you soft-pedal bad news, employees will not trust you and eventually miss the urgency of the situation. Today, the world is about striking the human connection. People respect transparent and authentic leaders. It's a *VUCA* world! Are you wondering what *VUCA* is?

## VUCA

A 2014 report by The Conference Board reveals that organizations whose leaders can operate effectively in a VUCA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous) world are three times more likely to be in the top 20 per cent of financial performance, compared to organizations lacking such leaders. If businesses are to prosper in a VUCA world, the time is now for leaders to face the new reality and press forward with adaptive strategies based on a deeper understanding of human needs.

## DR. R'S TOP 4 SUCCESS PRINCIPLES. THE GOLDEN RULES

You cannot come up with a series of good decisions without first venturing into the harsh reality of your situation. For that you will have to create a climate where truth is heard, and this involves some basic steps. Here are the four basic principles I have seen (best of the best) used to achieve and maintain success and trust. Using them will help you and your team come out with flying colours.

*First*, I lead with questions (use questions to gain understanding and best possible insights).

*Second*, I engage in dialogue and discussion (not debate).

*Third*, I analyse all the possible outcomes of the discussion (no blame game).

*And finally*, I build '*red flag*' mechanisms which targets information that cannot be ignored (the bad news).

Let me share some examples: During the Second World War, Churchill had an office of people who had only one purpose – to give him bad news. His staff had to find the bad news and show

it to him every day. Hitler, on the other hand, didn't know he was losing the war until he crawled into that bunker. Saddam Husain was in a similar position. That's because nobody on his staff would tell him the bad news, which is why it can be a trap for leaders.

### **DOING THE BEST AND LEARNING FROM SETBACKS**

The 2nd Annual Energy Meet was held in January 2016. It was a great hit with over 300 regional and global brands participants, including The World Bank. It had more than 40 TV stations and newspapers covering the event. It was a great success on all accounts, yet the following morning I requested the organizing committee and some seasoned staff to write and focus on what went wrong only so that things can be adjusted for future events and the tough lessons learnt. Here's a piece of advice, a leader should ask for blunt feedback and advice not only from his senior executives but from junior staff as well. In my experience people do like to hear positive feedback most of the time, but ultimately they desperately want to know the truth, the hidden truth. An honest and simple feedback could be a serious wake-up call for him. Two questions a leader should not miss during the feedback process is: Do I give the right people a chance to give me timely, direct, and constructive feedback? And the second question, do I have junior people on my list who will tell me things I don't want to hear, but need to hear?

The upshot: Have absolute faith that you and your company will sail through the tough times, but at the same time do not turn a blind eye to brutal facts/harsh realities and confront them with pragmatic optimism. Have a *plan B* always. As Sun Tzu mentioned in his book *The Art of War*: “*With careful and detailed planning, one can win; with careless and less detailed planning, one cannot win. How much more certain is defeat if one does not plan at all! From the way planning is done beforehand, we can predict victory or defeat.*”

My message to you is: No matter how challenging the constraints of a given problem are, know that one potential solution is better than the existing alternatives. Have a burning appetite for *continuous* innovation!

## NICE TO KNOW

To metough times (a.k.a defeats) are opportunities! Opportunities are born during tough times and challenges. Tough times are the ultimate test of character! In a way, it is the opportunity to bring the best out of our character. It is the test of our mettle. As John Kenneth Galbraith says: *“All of the great Leaders have had one characteristic in common: It was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people, in their time. This, and not much else, is the essence of Leadership.”*

## MAINTAINING A LONG-TERM VIEW DURING TURNAROUND

Having said that facing the reality is imperative, the leader needs to maintain a long-term view as well (especially in times of turnaround). Changing or revamping your organization is a daunting task and entails an intense focus on short-term performance or, as rightly pointed out in a McKinsey survey, as near-term results, but success needn't be at the expense of long-term value.

A leader who's been through a crisis or turnaround is well aware that short-term pressure is intense, so much so that you might just succumb to micro-level decision making, which in turn can make a dent in your company.

My experience tells me that the most successful turnarounds are those where there is a symmetry between short and long term business decisions – both organizationally and financially. It may be hard to pull-off, but if the leader manages to strike a chord of harmony between the short and long-term goals, it will be a smooth sail.

Having said that, getting from where you are now to where you want, or perhaps need to be, requires a conscious effort and intensive brainwork. One of the proven strategies that I use is the ***'3Rs of Renewal'***. The three Rs are:

### 1. RELEASE

Ask yourself *‘What must you let go off to provide room for growth?’* (For example, outdated technologies, obsolete products or services, negative attitudes and behaviours, weaknesses, etc.)

## 2. REAFFIRM

Now ask yourself *‘what existing strengths do you need to reaffirm to promote growth to take your organization to new heights?’* (For example, empowering employees, commitment to lifelong learning, ethics and integrity within the organization, pairing up with star partners or suppliers etc.)

## 3. REINVENT

Finally ask yourself *‘how can you reinvent yourself to assure that you are at the frontline in your industry and simultaneously contributing to your career fulfilment?’* (For example, delight your customers, adapt new management tools and techniques, expand to new markets, etc.)

This is a fantastic approach if you are heading towards modification or a turnaround. This helps you to recalibrate yourself and adjust your growth tangent. Moreover, this simple technique applies to both individual and organizational renewal. So, what are you waiting for? Paint your future in fresh, new colours! Here’s a quote by Zig Ziglar which will undoubtedly motivate you: *“Successful people do what unsuccessful people are unwilling to do.”*

Go ahead, take that plunge! What are you waiting for?

## WIN THE BIG BATTLE

I have always striven to win the big battle and chose not to spend my *‘psychological capital’* on trivial points. Time is of utmost importance to everyone, and I have reiterated several times in this book about *priority management*. So just *line up* the most important/critical agenda at hand and *spruce up* the less important ones (trivial points).

One of my recent reads has been Greg McKeown’s latest book called *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Doing Less*. In his book Greg says, *“There’s a word for trying to do everything all the time. Madness! Do more. Do more. Get more. Fit in more. More more more.”*

The only way to stop that madness is to pause. PAUSE. I feel we need to introspect and see that in the hurry to do everything all the

time we miss out on the essentials, while the insignificant stuff eats up our time. Greg suggests, “*Make a decision based not on external pressure. Make it based on internal clarity of purpose.*”

Be a ‘*pro.*’ Focus on a contribution to the larger good, not just individual achievements or accomplishments of your objectives. Here I have to borrow an interesting quote by Chaviva Hosek: “*If you think you need to be able to do everything well, you are out of your mind and you are very insecure. Just find the few things you can do well, and do them, and then let other people do the things they do well, and appreciate what they can do.*”

### **STOP DOING LIST**

My suggestion is that it is wise to have a *to-do list*, but it’s wiser to have a ‘*stop doing list.*’ It’s easy to feel swamped with a to-do list a mile long. Decide what is absolutely necessary, at that moment, and focus on it. And yes, there are some tasks that you dread tackling, but it’s that ‘*oh-so-important*’ thing. Try this: break that overwhelming task/project into bite-size easy-to-complete actions.

*Imagine this now:* How productive our days will be if we could just spruce up the extraneous tasks that we carry out every single day! We’ll be less drained, and more importantly, we can also set out to accomplish those tasks that we have procrastinated on so far. So pick up a diary and list down your ‘*stop doing*’ tasks and enjoy some free time!

**“Nothing is particularly hard if you divide it into small jobs.”**

HENRY FORD

PRINCIPLE 10

## **Using, Developing & Implementing KPIs**

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MOST ASSUREDLY, THROUGHOUT THE PAST couple of chapters, you have been enjoying every bit of this book. Hence, your handy notebook must contain a decent amount of notes by now and it may either feel a little overwhelmed or underwhelmed depending on your own present situation. Here’s a helping hand for you to organize the thoughts and actions you are capturing; this chapter will deal with KPIs. The SEWA KPIs are a great way to map and track current reality to establish benchmarks.

A KPI is one of the improvement tools used in modern management by leaders and managers to track the performance of the organization in a timely manner to create a *built to last* organization. The KPIs tool was officially introduced by me on August 2015 for SEWA, as I needed accurate and timely information to

make both strategic decisions and operational improvements. I personally started using it during my second month of joining SEWA, but in those days my major KPI focus was on the top eight financial KPIs:

**1. Working Capital KPI** – Immediately available cash is known as Working Capital. It includes assets such as on-hand cash, short-term investments, and accounts receivable.

**2. Operating Cash Flow KPI** – The operating cash flow KPI helps you to monitor the financial health of your business. When analysing your operating cash flow KPI it's important to compare it to the total capital employed.

**3. Return on Equity KPI** – The Return on Equity (ROE) KPI measures your organization's ability to generate revenue for each unit of shareholder equity. The return on equity ratio not only provides a measure of your organization's profitability, but also your efficiency.

**4. Debt to Equity Ratio** – The Debt to Equity Ratio measures how your organization is funding its growth and how effectively you are using shareholder investments. A high debt to equity ratio is evidence of an organization fuelling growth by accumulating debt.

**5. Net Profit Margin KPI** – The Net Profit Margin KPI measures how effective your business is at generating profit on each dollar of revenue you bring in. This financial KPI is a measure of the profitability of your business and is instrumental in making long- and short-term financial decisions.

**6. Gross Profit Margin KPI** – The Gross Profit Margin measures your profit on each dollar of sales before expenses. This ratio is calculated by looking at the difference between production costs.

**7. Budget Creation Cycle Time KPI** – The Budget Creating Cycle Time includes the number of days needed to research, produce and publish the firm's budget.

**8. Customer Satisfaction KPI** - CFOs often consider budget and time targets as benchmarks for successful project delivery, and while those KPIs are important, the ultimate test is customer satisfaction. The Net Promoter Score is a simple and effective measurement of how well you are serving your clientele.

### **WHY?**

To enable the finance function to shift from being the passive reporter of the past to a proactive influencer of the future products, services, and customer relationships.

### **WHAT IS A KPI?**

It stands for Key Performance Indicator. There are many definitions of KPI but I personally like David Parmenter's view, "*KPIs represent a set of measures focusing on those aspects of organizational performance that are the most critical for the current and future success of an organization.*" To put it simpler, KPIs should tell you what action is needed. KPIs, if implemented whole heartedly, should bring a sea change in a company's performance. But it is easier said than done. "*There are really few organizations that really monitor their true key performance indicators (KPI), because very few have explored what a KPI actually is,*" says performance consultant David Parmenter in his book *Developing, Implementing and Using Winning KPIs*.

When I started developing KPIs for SEWA I kept the following five areas in my mind:

#### **1. Timely**

KPIs should be monitored daily or perhaps weekly. I use daily for the finance and account department, weekly for the rest of the organization. A monthly, quarterly, or annual measure cannot be a KPI because it cannot be key to our business if it is not reviewed/monitored regularly. Therefore, KPIs are current or future measures, and not past ones.

#### **2. Chairman Focus**

I always believe that, "*we shouldn't hide the facts*". All KPIs make a difference and they should be under the chairman's constant

scrutiny and attention all the time. It should mean *business* to us. I personally encourage my staff to update me with any update (big or small).

### **3. Simple/Straightforward**

A KPI should be short and simple. It should be definite and easy to comprehend and implemented upon. My challenge is to have all the senior staff and employees understand the measure and what corrective steps need to be employed. Simplicity is the key, the more convoluted/confusing the KPI, the more the delay in performance will be.

### **4. Team-Based/Oriented**

Our organization is not a *'one man army'*, so the KPIs should be formulated keeping teamwork in mind. Involvement of employees is vital and so is responsibility and accountability on the employees' part. A KPI should seep deep down within the company. It should not be tied to the managers or top executives alone. It should permeate into the different strata of SEWA.

### **5. Significant Impact**

The KPI developed should have major impact on the organization, it should affect most of the critical success factors. The KPI should affect the big picture and the ultimate goal and vision of the organization.

## **KEY STEP FOR EMPLOYEE COMMITMENT**

Remember, nothing is ever sold by logic. People nowadays are more psychological than logical. You sell through emotional drives. Thus, we have to focus on the emotional drivers that matter most to the employees. Start by asking questions such as: *Do you know which of our success factors are critical?* Then as part of the sell process, point out to the employees that the previous performance measures have not changed anything.

## **BENEFITS OF KPIs**

KPIs are an invaluable form of business intelligence in SEWA. A KPI tells us, *"What action needs to take place"*. KPIs are for-

mulated, developed and implemented in SEWA to measure, monitor and manage performances that are most critical to the organization for its present and future success. Managing and analyzing KPIs takes a lot of time and effort, therefore it is important that the right and apt KPI is chosen to target the exact need of the organization.

According to me an actionable and effective KPI should be formulated keeping the above mentioned characteristics in mind. If a KPI has been correctly assigned to a company, it will have an immediate *flow-on effect*, which in turn will facilitate benefit to the company.

In addition to this, KPIs also create a type of *benchmarking* within the business. The person can see and assess the current scenario of the business and can foresee the future moves he needs to act upon or implement.

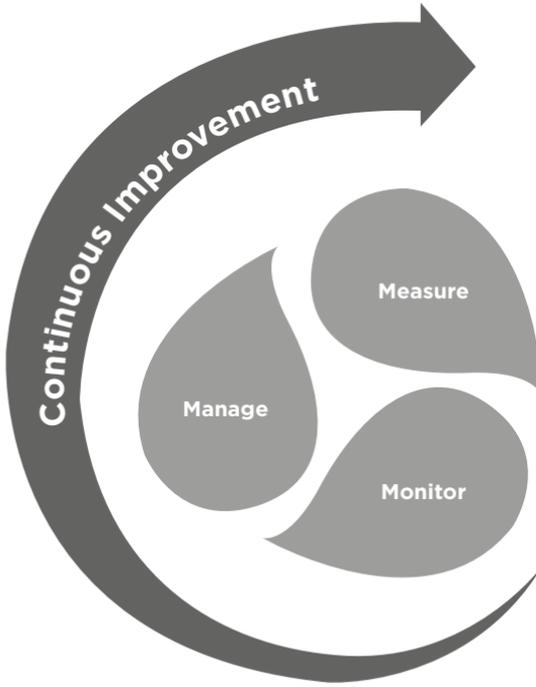
### **PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD**

Performance dashboards are generally used to facilitate easy monitoring of a company's KPIs. The dashboard checks the rate at which the chosen KPI is succeeding or failing and accordingly measures are taken to either facilitate a successful KPI or corrective measures are taken towards a failing KPI.

We decided to use performance dashboards as they are meant to facilitate getting *“the right information to the right users at the right time to optimize decisions, enhance efficiency and accelerate results.”*

### **3Ms OF KPIs**

I hereby have formulated a three step management method for control and continuous improvement of our KPIs process. It is called the 3 Ms of KPI in SEWA as follows:



### **1. Measure    2. Monitor    3. Manage**

#### **1. Measure**

KPIs can be used as a measuring unit of performance leading to tangible results.

#### **2. Monitor**

KPIs can monitor the progress timely/frequently and help to proactively plan accordingly.

#### **3. Manage**

KPIs can facilitate managing the success rate of performance and make more effective follow-up decisions.

KPIs are definitely the cornerstone of a company's success. Any decision or process if measured, monitored, and managed will eventually yield extraordinary results.

Remember that goals help a team keep track of progress, while a broader purpose supplies meaning and emotional energy. The *'goal/vision'* of any organization is a cumulative outcome of small milestones (KPIs) set out and achieved (measured/managed/monitored) frequently at fixed intervals, and how you go about accomplishing that becomes your mission.

Who enables and accelerates your mission to accomplish your vision? Who is the torchbearer of the business and organizational practices? It's the huge *talent pool* that you as a leader has brought into existence.

“Leaders become great not because of their power but because of their ability to empower others.”

JOHN MAXWELL

PRINCIPLE 11

## Pour Our Creative Energy and Dedication into Everything We Do

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### ARE YOU THE POWER BANK OF CREATIVE ENERGY?

I PERSONALLY BELIEVE A HALF-HEARTED approach to anything cannot take you far. One needs to be either *‘in or out’* of an ideology or responsibility. Success comes to those who pour 100 per cent of *‘heart, mind and soul’* into their business. It is about complete dedication and commitment towards your goals. Whether it is a small start-up or a well-known brand, the organization loses its essence the moment the dedication of its employees dips. Pure dedication and an approach that utilizes the creative energy within us are required to attain the success that we truly desire. We need to continuously cultivate the creative energy within us to procure dedication towards our organization. A high level of dedication leads to a high level of success and happiness. As Franklin. D. Roosevelt rightly said, *“Happiness lies in the joy of achievement and the thrill of creative effort.”*

## SEWA PROMOTES WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Technology has made our life easy but it also has its downside. It has made workers accessible around the clock, seminars have transformed to webinars and boardroom meetings have extended to cafeterias and coffee shops! According to a survey conducted by Harvard Business School, *“the compounding stress from the never-ending workday is damaging”*.

At SEWA, we encourage dedication towards the job but it's not so intense as to incur deteriorating effects on relationships or health. Work life balance is disturbed when one starts seeking perfectionism at work. According to executive coach Marilyn Puder-York, PhD, who also wrote *The Office Survival Guide*, *“As life gets expanded, it's very hard both neurologically and psychologically, to keep that habit of perfection going.”* I agree with her, and believe that we should strive for excellence and not perfection.

## THE FIVE FS

In my book *2016 Resolutions to Succeed*, I have mentioned ‘*Find the balance*’ as one of the resolutions for my readers. It talks about striking the right balance in life, and here's an excerpt, Keep Balancing the Five Fs:

**Faith** *The substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen.*

**Family** *Ironically, family is everything.*

**Fitness** *When you've got your health, you've got just about everything.*

**Friends** *Tell me who you hang out with, and I'll tell you who you are.*

**Finances** *I don't want to be a millionaire. I just want to live like one.*

## SELF-MOTIVATION

Now that we know the importance of work-life balance in our lives, let me share some ways how SEWA facilitates dedication in the work environment. External motivation is important, but *nothing* comes close to self-motivation. A self-motivated employee will know by himself how to tread the right path. He will, in fact, push himself every day and actively look for ways to expand

his skill set. At SEWA, I personally do not miss any opportunity to motivate employees and further ignite the fire in them to be self-motivated by giving them milestones to be achieved and rewarding them for doing so. According to an old adage, “*wake up with dedication and go to bed with satisfaction*”.

If an individual can assimilate the beautiful blend of dedication and discipline in his work, as well as personal life, no dream will be unachievable.

At the same time, be prepared for things not happening the way you want them to. Remaining humble when things do not turn out the way you want them to is of paramount importance. Here’s a true motivating story: Sami Jo Small played goal for the 2002 Canadian Olympic Women’s Hockey Team. She made sacrifices. She trained for years. When coaches told her that she would not play for gold in the finals she was torn apart, she was devastated, but she decided to not to waste her energy feeling sorry for herself. Instead she cheered her team on to the best of her abilities. She said, “*In life, you don’t always get to choose the role you play, but you do get to choose how you play it.*”

Great motto to live life, isn’t it?

## **CREATIVE LEADERSHIP: NAVIGATING COMPLEX CHALLENGES**

We are the *next-gen* leaders, yet we are humans too! We tend to get into a *comfort zone*. Thanks to the encompassing frequency of competitions and challenges around we are kept going! I love challenges! It is *the sure-fire test* of your mettle. Plus it also equips you with the latest *know-how’s* of the industry as a complex challenge definitely *jostles* you out of your comfort zone, and in turn you embrace the new norms of the industry to *outflank* the competition. The following quote by Marcel Proust sums up my opinion. “*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.*”

Now let me introduce you to *Creative Leadership*. Seven years of research with over 500 leaders made David Magellan Horth and Charles J. Palus come up with the term, *Creative Leadership*.

According to them, *Creative Leadership is about making shared sense out of complexity and chaos and the crafting of meaningful action*. At its heart, it is about building/creating – building/creating knowledge, building/creating products, building/creating leaders and building/creating institutions. Constructing something requires two great engines of human creativity – analysis and artistry. Doesn't this remind us of CRITICAL- designed format thinking?

Furthermore, their research reveals six identifiable creative leadership competencies (which are elaborated in their research article), namely: *paying attention, personalizing, imaging, serious play, collaborative inquiry and crafting*.

My personal favourite is *paying attention*. I love being detail-oriented. When faced with situations of high complexity I usually apply the disciplined technique of taking time for a 360-degree view – observing the depth, breadth and detail overview of the issue. My advice is to *freeze* out the shortcut that claims *I already know what I see.* “*Have new eyes!*”

It might be a little confusing at times to get into the granular level of things, but Tom Peters provided the necessary insight when he famously declared, “*If you are not confused, you are not paying attention.*”

### **ASK ‘WHAT IF?’**

IBM recently asked 1,500 CEOs from around the world this question: What is the most important leadership skill for these complex times? Their answer: Creativity. Now, we live in a world of *hit-or-miss* businesses. A missed opportunity can be the death of your organization, thanks to the surrounding cuthroat competition.

Successful leaders have a nose for opportunity and a knack for knowing how to optimize it. Here's a ray of hope; if your organization has the ability to innovate (or create) then you will *thrive* instead of surviving or perishing. Question the unquestionable! Think like an outsider. Mary Kay Ash questioned the general notion that *women only want to buy in stores.*

Start by asking, “*What if?*”, then move on to “*why not?*” and “*why*

*not now?*” What if your refrigerator could talk to your phone and say, “*Hey, want to pick up some milk?*” or your tires could talk to the dashboard and say, “*We are low on air.*” So break free of stereotypes and have the guts to ask.

So, have you asked yourself lately, “*How can your company improve its performance? What should be your contribution towards it?*” If so, then you might want to read this:

### **UNLOCK YOUR ORGANIZATION’S POTENTIAL**

Today’s complex, volatile and fast-paced business environment is constantly posing threats to our organization in one form or the other. No wonder that today an average youth leads quite a stressful life! Stress is undoubtedly the most stressed about word of the millennium. So, who is at the receiving end? The answer is obvious: It’s ‘we’ and our ‘organization’ that suffers. But the good news is that we can reduce (if not eliminate) stress in our lives. So how do we go about it? How do we unlock our potential? How to bring a positive energy into our workplace?

I love to read. I read a lot of business books, along with self-help and various other books. Sometimes, one book seems to be the *recycled version* of the other one. It distils down to the same message over and over again. The fact is no author or book can guarantee success. It can just show the path and guide you through. Do you agree?

Similarly, here I would share four dimensions of leadership which can enable you to unlock your and your organization’s potential. This would help you to enhance your leadership performance and life satisfaction in general.

First, *follow your intuition*, your inner voice, and connect with something higher and greater than yourself. It’s about your spiritual development programme and inner peace. This will help you to discover or re-discover your divine self. I say, “*When your inner self is at peace, you are more emotionally intelligent and make better decisions.*” Not a bad way to start the day.

Second, *find meaning at work*. This is of paramount importance. You have to enjoy your work, be thrilled about your pursuit of goals. (This has a significant impact in both work and life.) And,

share meaning to inspire colleagues by story-telling, touching hearts as well as minds. Have a meaningful purpose attached to your goals and leverage your employees to feel the same. Ask yourself, “*Are you a purpose maximizer or a profit maximizer?*”

Third, *move on*, have a positive frame of mind as psychologists claim that optimists often have an edge. When faced with stress, fear or insecurity humans have a tendency to *fight, flight or freeze*. Optimists choose to fight and shift the fulcrum of their mindset towards positivity. Learn to see opportunity in uncertainty. Once you have mastered this, you can help others to learn this skill, thereby seeding the conditions that result in a safe environment for employees. Encourage innovation and creativity and make it OK to fail!

And finally, *identify toxic people* around you and *keep them at bay*. It is often said that you are the product of the five people you spend the most time with. Toxic people are those pessimistic and negative people who hold you back. I call them energy vampires, they suck out your positive energy leaving you drained, exhausted, and unhappy. They wreak havoc in your life. The flair to manage emotions and keep calm in times of tension/pressure has direct influence on performance/productivity. So turn a blind eye to those negative elements in your life and you will eventually see them disappearing.

Leadership is a journey, not a destination, and it starts with a highly professional decision. Transformation starts with you and your willingness and ability to transform yourself. This way you can tap a broad constellation of internal and external constituents, which can help your organization in the long run. But do you know what dampens all these efforts? Not having enough time at hand, but have you ever thought of...

### **WHO ROBS YOUR TIME?**

When was the last time you ran out of time? I am sure you don't have to wrack your brain for that. We, humans are always behind time. So who is the culprit? Time is precious, we all know. And, especially in a business scenario, every second counts. Every minute of your day has to be strategically scheduled in order to meet the requirements of a productive day.

But more often I have seen leaders complaining of not having enough time to accomplish their goals. Well, we need to understand that it's a universal fact that everyone has precisely 24 hours in a day. So who robs your time? One of the top culprits is *procrastination*. Let me explain: Procrastination is an automatic problem habit of intentional delay of relevant or priority activity until the next day or time.

Psychologist Robert Woodworth said it well, "*We are psychological, not logical.*" Our emotions and impulses rule our reason. Instead of searching for a job, you play computer games. You keep gaining weight and swear that you will exercise, someday, but not now. I always keep saying, "*Tomorrow never comes.*" By putting off things for tomorrow, we enter into a vicious circle of never-ending lapses and delays to the point that you are under such pressure to either finish the work or quit the work. Research shows that most of the time humans end up quitting the work they had been procrastinating.

Although procrastination has earned a bad reputation not all procrastinations are bad. On the contrary, *strategic procrastination* can prove to be beneficial and productive. For example, Leonardo Da Vinci set aside the Mona Lisa after starting it in 1503 and didn't complete it until nearly 16 years later. Historians now recognize that the creative brainstorming during those years is what allowed him to create a magnificent original piece of art – a masterpiece.

However, the fact is that the world has very few people who can strategically procrastinate, and those who can, move the world. Adam Grant, in his book, *Originals*, has dissected the idea of procrastination and thrown in some great insights.

I have a simple remedy here – Track your procrastination. Now this is a task that requires conscious effort: Ask yourself, "*Why do you want to delay an activity?*" You will be amazed to find that most of the time the delay is just by default. Next ask yourself, "*What will be the consequences of the delay?*" This procrastination log will help you nip it in the bud. I personally practice the '*do it when you think it*' technique. The human mind has short-term memory, so why not just do something the moment it popped up in your head?

## MY PRACTICE

For example, if I am in a meeting and a team member points out we need to call upon another department or a person for some info, I would stop and call that department and have the person needed for the info right away. I wouldn't wait for the meeting to finish. This has become a culture in SEWA. I have been seeing a lot of my staff doing it and enjoying it.

## REPLACE YOUR 'TO-DO LIST' BY 'DO IT RIGHT NOW LIST'

Here's another tip, replace your *'to-do list'* to *'do it right now list'* (trust me, you will not regret doing this). I have heard people saying, *"I will do it once I come back from vacation."* Or *"I will do it once my daughter gets married."* Well in the truest sense, the moment, this moment, is the only thing we ever have. Grab it (right now) and make the most of it. It's now or never.

And yes, if you are really pressed for time, it is always wise to have a team of highly-efficient professionals who you can delegate your work to. So, now we do not have any excuse to procrastinate. Either do it (now) or delegate it (now).

This chapter talks about pouring our creative energy and dedication into everything we do. But delaying an important task piles up negative energy and dissipates our dedication towards creativity. So manage your way to prioritize and get the maximum out of your only 24 hours a day. Will you take on the challenge?

**“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader”**

JOHN QUINCY ADAMS

PRINCIPLE 12

## **Continuous Generation of Leaders**

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LEADERSHIP IS ONE OF THE most talked about and debated terms in the corporate world today. Everyone talks about leadership. Every individual aspires to be a leader. It has been an area of interest for researchers and has long, beautiful articles written about it, powerful talks on leadership are been given at international seminars and it is definitely one of the most *tweeted, followed or tagged* terms in the world today. So what is the *buzz* about being a leader?

Well... There is no *all-inclusive* answer to this. Leadership scholars have conducted thousands of studies in an attempt to determine the definitive styles, characteristics, or personality traits of great leaders. None of these studies has produced a clear profile of the ideal leader. Yet researchers have narrowed it down to different leadership styles, and amongst them

*Transformational Leadership* is identified as the single, most effective style needed in the current competitive environment. According to researcher Bernard M. Bass, “*the key characteristics of this style of leadership are the abilities to motivate and inspire followers and to direct positive changes in a group.*”

I am personally very fascinated by this trait of leadership. I believe leadership is about touching the lives of people, it's about bringing about a transformation, a turnaround not only in business but also in the lives of people who are your colleagues/subordinates/followers.

Yet in the turmoil of 2008/2009 people developed a deep distrust of leaders. It is increasingly evident that we need a new kind of business leader to lead *authentically*.

Bill George's book, *Authentic Leadership: Rediscovering the Secrets to Creating Lasting Value*, sketches out authentic leaders' virtues. Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads. They establish long-term, meaningful relationships and have the self-discipline to get results. They know who they are.

## **PEOPLE MANAGEMENT**

What is the defining contribution of great leaders? Great leaders are those who manage people well. Trust me this is the toughest one of all. Why? Because unlike machines, human beings cannot be programed to run commands exactly the way you want. Plus it is much easier to troubleshoot a crashed machine than an overtired employee.

Gone are those days when command and control was a management practice. It's all dead now. Now companies and organizations empower their employees. And how do you do that? It's not a cake walk!

The Gallup organization's research suggests that engaged (aka empowered) employees lead to organization success. Great leaders need to boost the engagement levels of the people who work for them. Employees determine the company's growth curve as well as long-term profitability.

## HEARD OF HALOCRACY?

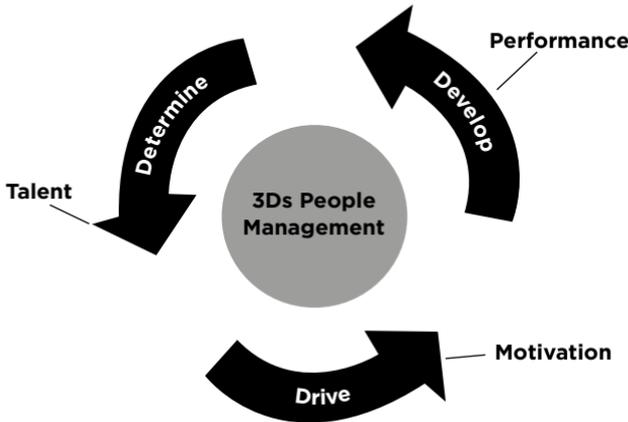
According to Holacracy.org, Halocracy is a comprehensive practice for structuring, governing, and running an organization. It replaces today's top-down predict-and-control paradigm with a new way of achieving control by *distributing* power. It is a new *operating system* that instills rapid evolution in the core processes of an organization. A case in point is the online retailer, Zappos, which is siphoning its traditional hierarchy off with Halocracy.

Surely, it sounds like the next big thing! But pause! Before you adopt it in your organization, ask this critical question, "Are your employees ready for a flattened organization structure?"

## THE 3Ds OF PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

So how do you extract their full value? My experience has helped me to formulate the 3Ds of People Management:

1. Determine (*Talent*)
2. Drive (*Motivation*)
3. Develop (*Performance*)



The above image simplifies the 3Ds of people management. Below is the detail:

### 1. DETERMINE

Most leaders select employees according to their skill sets, but great leaders select people for their *talent*. Determine the talent first as it is rare and valuable, skill would eventually follow. It is

very rare that an employee's profession crosses over into passion. But when this happens the employee is at his/her creative best. Only great managers make it happen. Go for those people whose talent will redefine how the job is done.

## **2. DRIVE**

Be the driving force for your employees. Motivate them by all possible means to perform better every single time. Help them to *outdo* their own performance. Conventional leaders focus on fixing the weaknesses of employees. In contrast, great leaders emphasize the unique strengths of their subordinates and *fine-tunes* them in order to help recalibrate their genius. Know that weaknesses can be transformed to strengths.

## **3. DEVELOP**

Conventional leaders rate the person and develop the performance; great leaders rate the performance and then develop the person, so realize that every person is different and should be treated as such. Spot the right fitted job for the person's talent, and then work together to further develop his talent by assigning him more challenging and meaningful assignments.

My quick advice to all those managers and leaders (and aspiring leaders) is, "*an effective influencer should also be an effective teacher. Good teachers realize that communicating knowledge is often a greater challenge than possessing knowledge.*"

## **TRUST: A CORE VALUE**

Trust is one of the most important core values at SEWA. Trust is the biggest investment an employer can make into his employees' credit. To trust in an employee's capability is a definitive way to long-lasting motivation. It is my responsibility to generate future leaders and it can only be possible if I delegate big tasks to employees and trust them that they will fare well, thereby infusing them with the confidence to come out with flying colours. In addition to this, I also coach my employees to live up to the trust I have in them. I always use the following quote by David Horsager, "*Trust is like a forest. It takes a long time to grow and can burn down with a just touch of carelessness.*"

At SEWA, I aim at higher performance and improved group satisfaction and I facilitate the employees to achieve this by utilizing the skills of transformational leadership. It's about being emotionally intelligent, energetic and passionate about bringing the best out of the people I work with. I am totally committed to helping the organization achieve its goal, but I am equally dedicated to help group members fulfil their potential. I am particularly passionate about generating future leaders. It is definitely a valuable learning tool for me as well.

### **SEWA INVESTS IN FUTURE LEADERS**

Today, the long-term success of any organization rests not only on great leaders, but it also needs great *future* leaders. To maintain success, the organization has to invest in '*generating future leaders*.' Obviously this takes time, focus and a generous amount of financial investment. However, trust me it's worth it. To me, investing in people is an asset and not a liability.

A McKinsey article published in April, 2015 on '*long-term view during turnaround*,' stated that *investing* in people is one of the best strategies towards creating a company's long-term health. Further it also stated that there were companies who dramatically reduced hiring of entry-level leadership talent during the 2009 recession and now they struggle with a gap in future leaders at the middle levels of the organization.

I witnessed the financial meltdown of September 2008 that resulted in the crash of the global economy. By that time, I was managing and leading the Four Big Sisters (The four big departments in Sharjah Government). Contrary to the prevalent view of companies and leaders at that point of time I took up the cudgels and went about creating fresh benchmarks for the industry in an effort to mentor and prepare the future industry leaders to withstand crisis.

### **10X YOUR CAREER**

I have found no magic formula or recipe to get you there, but there are some key leadership principles that anyone can aspire too and learn from, including the following: Five global strategies I usually use in this prospect are listed below:

1. First, *identify* and target only employees with the most potential for leadership positions. Competency, character and commitment are the benchmarks. See to it that the employees are a balanced and a beautiful blend of all of these.
2. Next you need to ensure that you assign roles, responsibility, and the accountability to the employees that will push them out of their comfort zone. Leaders need to stretch. There may be setbacks or failures. Be prepared for it. Just step back and watch how the employees manage in adversity.
3. Third, invest in executive development programmes such as coaching and mentoring initiatives, global exchange workshops, and international leadership programmes, etc. This gives the high-potential employees the time and space they need to really focus on building and acquiring new skills, new knowledge and new capacity for judgment.
4. Keep challenging tomorrow and never say impossible. François de La Rochefoucauld said it rightly: *“Nothing is impossible; there are ways that lead to everything, and if we had sufficient will, we should always have sufficient means. It is often merely for an excuse that we say that we say things are impossible.”*
5. Finally, a throw spotlight on the *paradigm-shift* of mindset, encourage the employees to see things in a new and different way that can add novelty to their thinking approach and behaviour.

### **NURTURE THE YOUNG FOLKS!**

I see leadership as a *legacy*, it is our prime duty to pass it on to our next generation. It gives me immense pleasure to see people under me flourish and become the leaders of tomorrow. They are the torch bearers of the millennial age and we, as leaders of today, must equip them to be our successful descendants/progenitors. A testament to this is the *Alleem Knowledge Center*, a non-profit organization founded by me to promote leadership potential and enrich the tenets of knowledge sharing.

## NATURE OR NURTURE: WHAT MAKES A STAR?

My observations may help tease out some common myths about the star performers of your organization and help us recognize their puzzling qualities, not all of which come naturally. Leadership is an off-shoot of effort and focus, it doesn't happen by title.

As a caveat, I would like to add that successful executives come in many different shapes and sizes. Although highly successful people have many qualities in common, context matters. Stardom depends very much on the highly complex interface between stars, i.e., the kinds of people they work with, and in what context (such as the political situation in a country, the national and organizational culture, the nature of the industry, the life-cycle of the organization, even the state of the economy).

Although many leaders claim to be able to intuitively identify characteristics that differentiate stars, they often assume stardom is somehow innate.

Having listened to the narratives of thousands of highly successful executives, I have noted that stardom is not merely a matter of luck; it's a *question of choice*, and beyond that, of cause and effect. Although chance can be a factor, it is not a sufficient explanation. Indeed, the old saying "*the harder I work, the luckier I get*" contains more than a grain of truth. Often this "*luck*" is a combination of preparation, persistence, and opportunity. As one star confided to me, "*it took me 20 years of hard work to become an overnight success.*"

Neither is stardom merely a question of having the right connections. It can be very helpful, but many very well-connected people turn out to be highly unsuccessful. Most stars achieve stardom because they possess an intuitive understanding of *how* to make it happen.

As a tribute to my acumen and contribution in the field of Training & Human Capital Development, I was awarded the *Middle East Business Leaders Awards in 2012*. A friendly fact that I would like to share with you here is that I am quite popular within society for identifying and developing young and talented leaders. In fact, I am known for my contribution towards the gen-

eration of future leaders and I am really proud of this. Some of the people who have become great leaders under my wing are the Chairman of Tourism Department, Director General of Tourism Department, Sharjah Charity International General Manager, Chairman of Sharjah Health Care City, Director of Hamriyah Free Zone, Director of Sharjah Ports, Director of SAIF Zone, Director of Customs, and the recently appointed University City Director General.

I have also authored a book called *My Leadership Secrets*, wherein I have delved deep into the Leadership arena, and this book spans an impressive range of leadership traits and empowers the reader to inculcate the qualities within. It is a must read for all aspiring and existing leaders. Hence my leadership secrets are no longer secrets! I have revealed them all in the book and you can download a free copy from [www.alleem.com](http://www.alleem.com).

The fact is that being a first-time manager is a daunting task. That an effective worker will automatically become an effective manager is not always true. But with intelligent moves the transition becomes smooth. Here are few tips that I often hand down to first-time managers:

### **THE CHANGE LEADERSHIP**

Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist, famously wrote, *“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”* There’s leading through normal times, and then there’s leading your organization through *change*. Putting it in perspective, you might think of it as the difference between *peacetime* (normal) and *wartimes* (change) leadership. The Change Leadership demands and requires a different mindset and an extra set of skills. It concerns the driving forces, visions and processes that revolve around large-scale transformation.

Trust me, *change leadership* is here to stay as I truly feel that the era of sustained economic uncertainty has already dawned upon us. I sum up my opinion in Mark Sanborn’s quote, *“Your success in life isn’t based on your ability to simply change. It is based on your ability to change faster than your competition, customers and business.”* It’s about speed and efficiency.

Some say leadership is an immutable endeavour, some say it changes with the changing times. So is leadership timeless? This ageless question forms the basis of an interesting debate and it is one of those issues where it is easy to say both yes and no. Having said that, I will state that leadership changes (and should change) with changing times. There are a few elements of leadership that remain timeless, but the overall model/framework of leadership does evolve (depending on the external context) with changing times. Your leadership identity can and should change each time you move on to bigger and better things.

## LEADINGSHIP

It's quite trendy to say we live in hypercompetitive and fast-changing times. So what does the framework of future leadership behaviour in changing times look like?

Great leaders never stop evolving! Today's global economy demands visionary leadership. Nonetheless, leaders need to change and evolve their way of *leadingship* to meet the demands of the rapidly changing and non-static business environment of this era. However, re-evaluating their strategy or merely keeping pace with change will not serve the purpose for long. You must have heard of the phrase: *New ideas hurt some minds the same as new shoes hurt some feet*. The only way to grow as leaders is by stretching the limits of who we are – trying new things that make us uncomfortable/queasy but teach us through direct experience what we want to become. So what do we do now?

In the introduction of this book, I had mentioned the title given to me, 'The Change Leader.' I believe now is the time I should share my breakthrough mantra of being the change leader. Some say *'leaders are born,'* some say *'leaders are created.'* I say both, *"leaders are born creative and made with the right development and training programmes."*

Creativity and uniqueness, the awe-inspiring approach to ordinary things, and seeing the world through an unconventional lens is what it takes to be the change leader. Believe me, it takes time, patience and a lot of your energy (emotional and physical) reservoir! But I can assure you, the fruit of it is the sweetest! So below I share some of the tips on being the change leader:

## CONVERT EMPLOYEES INTO CHANGE AGENTS

Employees are the driving force behind any organization. So the first step towards bringing about a transformation is to use employees as the catalyst to bring about the change. I made my employees feel like *change ambassadors* and assigned them tasks according to their expertise and areas of interest. I believe that excellent results are an outcome of assigning *the right person to the right job*.

So, *first*, get the right people on the bus (and wrong people off the bus) and then figure out where to drive. Why? The simple logic behind it is that if you have the right people on the bus, the problem of how to motivate and manage people largely disappears. Contrary to this, if you have the wrong people onboard it doesn't matter whether you discover the right direction as you still won't have a great company. The choice is yours. Start right!

## A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

A learning organization is the term given to a company that *facilitates* the learning of its members and *continuously* transforms itself. By doing so leaders are created. Learning organizations develop as a result of the pressures that challenge modern organizations and enables them to remain competitive in the business environment. In SEWA, we strongly believe that we are on the right path in converting our organization to a learning organization.

The main motive of a learning organization is to enable employees to get skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge. This, in turn, helps the company to instil tolerance, encourage open discussion, and think holistically and systematically. All in all, learning organizations are adept at adapting to the unpredictable faster than their competitors/peers.

Communication Management is key while leading a change management campaign – the leader must ensure that the organization maintains strong, regular and transparent communication. I aimed at building a bond on the bricks of truth and trust. As they say, “*You do not get a second chance to make a first impression.*” Keeping the organization and stakeholders apprised

of priorities, changes in direction, success stories, and more is essential.

### **TRUST DRIVES LEADERSHIP**

The command-and-control management approach has become redundant now. Traditional corporate communication must be adept at handling the flow of information to, from, and among their employees, essentially, in crystal-clear form. Transparent communication is crucial to cultivate trust over the long term. It should be a high-priority responsibility of leaders to provide its constituents information in a timely manner and in an understandable and usable form.

### **CHIEF LISTENING OFFICER**

We can all learn a lesson from A.G. Lafley, the retired CEO of Procter & Gamble. He was a relentless communicator who constantly told his colleagues four important words: “*The consumer is boss.*” He was a great listener too. Do you know an interesting fact about him? Apart from being the company’s CEO, he established himself as the company’s *Chief Listening Officer*. He knew the power of being a careful listener. The upshot: We should all be the Chief Listening Officers in our organizations. That means spending time listening and learning. An effective manager will ensure that he listens actively, allows time for reflection, focuses on performance and behaviour rather than individual personality, and ends the meetings positively with *agreed* plans of actions.

However, do bear in mind that there is no *one-size-fits-all magic mantra*. And there is always *work still left*, but with the right attitude and approach, a leader can certainly be the *game changer* and create the *ripple effect* “I did it, and so can you!”

### **BE VIGILANT**

You need to *anticipate the trend and proactively* define innovative strategies. Things are changing at lightning speed around you. The leader who can spot change on the horizon, anticipate the *next big thing* and develop future strategy to match up the evolving market demands will make it to the winner’s circle. Period.

### **ESTABLISH CLARITY**

It is fundamentally essential to be authentic and clear. Why? The reason is that in times of change and instability, there is already a lot of chaos and confusion. So if the leader lacks confidence or fails to paint a clear vision of the company, it adds to the anxiety of the organization as a whole. So be clear and genuine and set a clear cut vision and goals for your people. You should ooze confidence both in your personality and speech.

### **BUILD THE RIGHT TALENT POOL WITHIN YOUR ORGANIZATION**

With the talent market shrinking worldwide, I believe in empowering my own employees, enabling them to harness their talent and skills and develop new ones. This further adds to the employee engagement quotient. They feel leveraged and motivated. Isn't this exactly what you need in times of crisis and change?

### **MODEL THE WAY**

I believe the efforts to undergo an overhaul fail either because the top management doesn't act as role models for the change or the employees have gotten into a comfortable cocoon with the status quo. I feel, if the revamping starts at the top, it will eventually percolate down. So, just be the role model and set the example by changing thyself first. People will follow you soon. Genuine self-discovery and self-development on the leader's part, according to me, is an important step towards fruition of his company's vision.

### **LEARN TO LEAD YOURSELF FIRST**

Interestingly, most of us are not aware that the choices we make are an extension of the inner dynamics of our heart and mind. Our inner world is populated by our thoughts, beliefs, prejudices, experiences, priorities, fears, etc. And all these completely dictate our outer self. Our decisions/choices/actions are a repercussion of the inner world dynamics.

Leading yourself means being in tune with what's happening on the inside, not later but right now. Think about it. People who don't notice that they are becoming annoyed, judgmental or defensive in the moment are not making real choices about how to

behave. We all need an inner lookout – a part of us that notices our inner state – much as all parents are at the ready and watching for threats to their young children.

### **EMBED SUSTAINABILITY**

This one is my favourite. We need to balance our business actions and approaches with social accountability. This enables us to think long-term, which is definitely a major factor in deciding tomorrow's leaders. And yes, sustainability is beyond environmental issues, in addition to it we need to address issues related to health, safety, and other such areas of concern. Trust me, sustainability is here to stay, and it is going to be the major differentiator for a leader's success in the future. There will be a call for sustainable leadership.

So, by now, I can rest assured that you are well-equipped with the star qualities of the future leaders (change leaders).

What excites me most today is that business is dynamic and progressive. The world has evolved a lot in the past decade. With the *internet of things* automating our lives (both personally and professionally), there's a lot to look for. The increased machine to machine interaction has revolutionized the world and the way we humans interact. We are definitely more fortunate than our ancestors.

This brings me to share my art of business strategy. These are the key factors that underline any business process (that I undertake). They may not seem money-oriented but it's definitely a worthwhile investment! So, invest in the following tactics/pieces of advice and you will be amazed at the overwhelming return. I call them:

### **THE (HE)ART OF BUSINESS STRATEGY**

(number 3 will surprise you!)

1. Say "thank you" several times a day. Yes, several times.
2. Smile, always (at least most part of the day).
3. Apologize. Put that ego aside and do say sorry if you are mistaken (Even if you are the boss).
4. Appreciate, always. Do not miss a single opportunity to praise others. Punish yourself if you did.

5. Listen. Listen. Listen. Become a pro in listening skill (Remember the Chief Listening Officer).
6. Hire or promote for commitment to continuous learning.
7. Pay attention to first and last impressions.
8. Celebrate “small and quick wins” too.
9. Commit to employee satisfaction as much as customer satisfaction.
10. Work on your Ego-System (Be people’s people).

This is how you create a strategy for your life.

However, do remember: Any strategy will fall short of its potential if it fails to address the underlying mindsets and capabilities of the people who will execute it. Right attitude comes first!

These require little (very little) effort and practically no monetary investment. So go for it. These have the power of Midas’s touch.

The choice is all yours: Smart talented employees or solid strategies? What is your approach? In this chapter, I have discussed the importance of getting the *right* people in the right roles on board – and at the same time I have reiterated the fundamentals of great business strategies. But the catch is, can we have both in practical life? In a real life business scenario this is not the case. *Life is not all roses, you see!*

But we can fix that bug! Align your business strategies with the talent you already have at hand (your employees), as ultimately people are the key to positive, sustained results in high-performance organizations. Talent management will bring your solid business strategies to a lifetime of proliferation.

“The improvement for understanding is for two ends: first, our own increase of knowledge; secondly, to enable us to deliver that knowledge to others.”

JOHN LOCKE

PRINCIPLE 13

## **Foster a Culture of Continuous Improvement**

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I MOSTLY VALUE EXPLORING THE power of ordinary people to do the extraordinary. It attracts my attention to see someone follow his/her passion and make it a reality. I believe it is all about connecting your inner world with the outer world. It is about nurturing your inner passion, values and then striving to bring it forth as a tangible benefit for the world so that it becomes sustainable. I strongly agree with what Ty Warner thinks, “*Even perfection has room for improvement.*”

This is what defines continuous improvement for me, to be able to equip oneself with the ever changing workplace dynamics, to be keen to learn and improve and be updated/competent with the practical knowledge of the outer world. How I love to see people transform their enthusiasm into a product or business with continuous improvement in their competence, knowledge and skill! I love what Winston Churchill said once, *“To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.”*

### **USING KAIZEN AND GEMBA MANAGEMENT**

Kaizen is a Japanese business philosophy of continuous improvement of working practices, personal efficiency, etc. According to Kaizen *“Big results come from many small changes accumulated over time.”* Kaizen is an idea that one need not wait for something to be broken in order to fix it. Rather one should grasp the opportunity to improve upon current processes. It promotes incremental improvement that eventually leads to breakthrough innovation. Learning involves *constant* re-evaluating of how we do things and thereby taking small steps to improve things incrementally. Below are the elements of Kaizen:

- a) Improvement (for the better and ongoing)
- b) Change (continuity)

### **GEMBA**

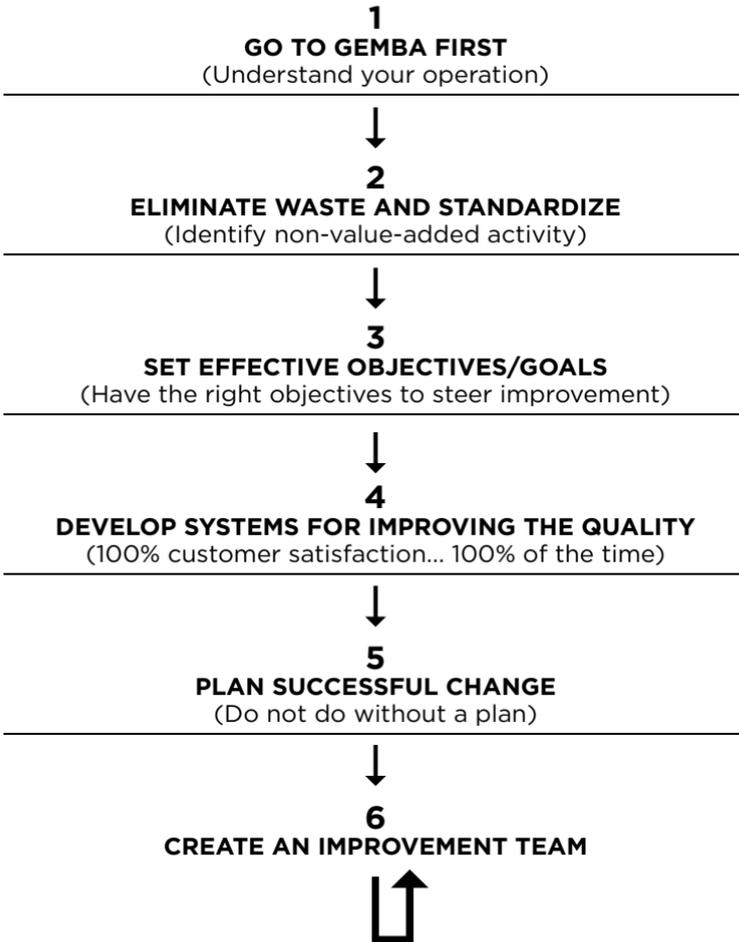
Now let us come to Gemba. This is a Japanese word meaning ‘real place’, where the real action takes place. So, in business terms, Gemba is where the ‘value-adding’ activities to satisfy the client are carried out.

### **WHAT IS GEMBA KAIZEN?**

Simply put, Gemba Kaizen is to make continuous improvement at the real place, where the action is going on, and that can make your organization better.

### **KAIZEN AND GEMBA MANAGEMENT**

I have introduced to SEWA a performance management system based on the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen and Gemba management, which is structured in the following steps:

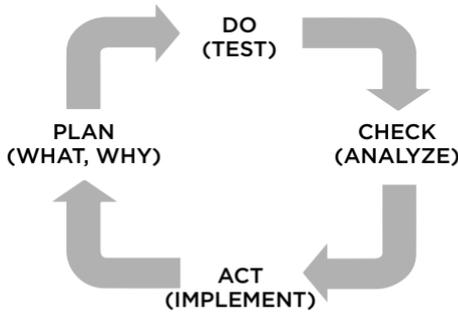


*“To know ones strengths, to know how to improve them, and to know what one cannot do are the keys to continuous learning,”* said Peter F. Drucker. At SEWA, we encourage a culture of continuous improvement/learning through employee involvement. I believe it’s imperative for any organization to provide opportunities to its employees to participate and get involved in its growth process. I, personally, empower employees by giving them big tasks to head and manage. This instills in them the responsibility to own the project and thereby creating the competence in themselves to execute the given task. I ensure that every

small advance/achievement is awarded and praised and a hurdle/problem/failure is considered as a steppingstone to further improvement and learning.

**LET’S DO PDCA-PROACTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING**

When faced with a problem, I encourage my employees to adapt the PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Act) cycle of problem-solving technique. This tool is adapted in companies worldwide and is a proven strategy, which leads to effective problem solving as well as continuous improvement. The cycle looks like this:



PDCA is a continues improvement cycle

**THE PDCA - THE SEWA WAY**

In SEWA, we use the following four quadrants to solve a problem or to challenge a situation.

**PDCA - The SEWA Way**

<p><b>Plan</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formulate a specific problem statement to clearly define the problem.</li> <li>• Set measurable and attainable goals.</li> <li>• Brainstorm potential causes for the problem.</li> <li>• Collect and analyze data to validate the root cause.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Do</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish experimental success criteria.</li> <li>• Design experiment to test hypothesis.</li> <li>• Implement the experiment/ solution on a trial or pilot basis.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Check</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather/analyze data on the solution.</li> <li>• If YES go to act.</li> <li>• Else go to plan, revise hypothesis/problem statement.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Act</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify systematic changes and training needs for full implementation.</li> <li>• Plan ongoing monitoring of the solution.</li> </ul>

The reason I love the P-D-C-A cycle is that it is a *systematic* and fact-based approach to continuous improvement. The reason it is called a cycle is because it is a *never-ending* process, as I believe no matter how well a process is operating it can always be improved upon using new tools and techniques.

### **CHANGE IS GOOD: ONLY IF YOU KNOW WHAT SHOULD NEVER CHANGE**

Any institution resting on the shoulders of humans should be underpinned by its core values and timeless principles – this should never change. It's like a legacy: It should be just *handed over* to our forthcoming generations. All the great companies have one thing in common: Over the decades they have successfully equipped themselves with the rapid changing world and its business dynamics *without* compromising their core values and fundamentals.

And how did they do this? In Jim Collins's words, "*They have done so by grasping the difference between timeless principles and daily practices.*"

Disney, for example, has always diligently preserved a core ideology of bringing happiness to people, yet it has continually changed its product strategy – from cartoons, to feature films, to the Mickey Mouse Club, to Disneyland. So you see how they have maneuvered to adapt to the ever changing customer demands, but the driving force behind that change remains intact.

### **YOUR CHALLENGE**

Now, how do you tell the difference between timeless principles and daily practices? Well, at face value, the former refers to eternal *intangible* beliefs and the latter hints at things that change with time, ephemeral and tangible. Yes, that's right. Just ask yourself: What is the reason of your company's existence? Why do you exist? The answer is your timeless principles and core values. And the daily chore that fulfils your reason for existence is your daily business practice.

Now, on one hand you just need to adapt and advance along with the ever changing trends and business practices (strategically switching gears from one to another) and on the other be deep-

seated in your core values and hang onto them as they form the cornerstone of your organization. To sum up in one sentence: Any daily activity should be an offshoot of your timeless principles.

## **BENCHMARKING**

This is another useful tool that I employ in my day to day business practice. It could be defined as a systematic and continuous measurement process of identifying, understanding, and adapting outstanding practices *anywhere* in the world to help an organization improve its performance.

### **WHY DO SEWA LEADERS DO BENCHMARKING?**

- ☞ Know '*where they stand*' versus other leading utility companies in the world.
- ☞ Focus on '*what should be done.*'
- ☞ Take '*the right decisions.*'
- ☞ Provides '*insight into the gaps*' to achieve desired goals.
- ☞ Recommendations to '*close the gap.*'
- ☞ Understand what drives '*best performance.*'
- ☞ '*Developing a strategy*' to move forward.

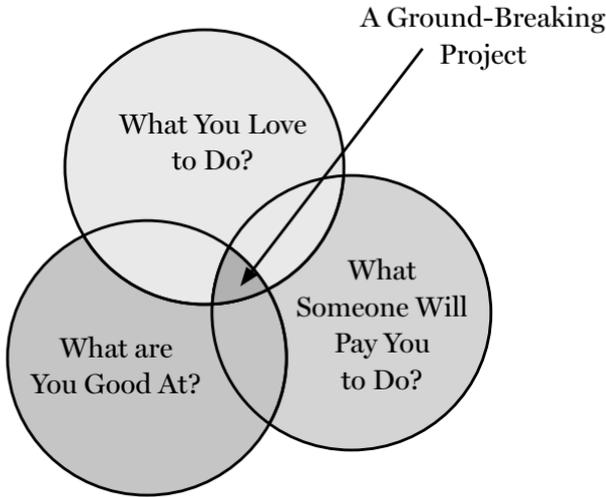
### **WHAT TO BENCHMARK?**

We believe that effective benchmarking focuses on areas that are critically important to performance. These include:

- ☞ Financial comparisons.
- ☞ Information technology.
- ☞ Areas strongly affecting employee or customer satisfaction and expectations.
- ☞ Development cycle times.
- ☞ Quality and service performance.

The outcome of the benchmarking process is great and can be greater if at the end of the process you find the answers to the following three questions, which will lead you to what I call a groundbreaking project:

1. What do you love to do?
2. What will someone pay you to do?
3. What are you good at?



### A WORD OF CAUTION

Blindly lifting *best practices* may lead you to a cul-de-sac. Not convinced? Learn from *GE's Rank and Yank* system. This system involved rewarding and promoting the high performers, and firing (or providing remedial training for) the bottom 10 per cent. This same process when adopted by Microsoft failed, as it ended up pitting employees against each other and competing among themselves. Broadly speaking, there are two ways of borrowing from innovative companies: Observe-and-apply, and extract the central idea. Each offers benefits, and each has its own challenges. Do your own bit of research before jumping into something.

### GROW IN LIFE

It is certainly primal to grow in life. Why stop learning ever? You don't really have to enrol yourself into a degree course for this! Just be a connoisseur of knowledge. The world is your stage. The people around you are the living characters, just study them and have interest in the circumstances that surround these characters. You just need to have that passion for knowledge, that hunger that never satiates. What is the reward for this? The more you learn, the more you give. It is so fulfilling and self-motivating.

## **IGNORANCE ISN'T BLISS, ANYMORE**

I remember a personal story here, while I was writing this book. Kumar, the SEWA designer, came to me with the final design of the utility bill for my approval. What caught my eye was that the design contained a fax number. I smiled to myself and thought who uses fax these days, it is outdated! Immediately I suggested that the designer strike it off and replace it with an email ID. Furthermore, I noticed that the same design also had the Main Office telephone number under the contact heading. This really made me laugh, and I suggested it should be replaced by the 24/7 call centre facility as people should know about their bills whenever, wherever they are around the clock!

The moral of this story is to have an eye for details. I am a very detail-oriented person. The smallest/tiniest of things do not go easily unnoticed by me. I believe it is those small things that build up the bigger picture. The beauty lies in details. Huge/big machines rests on tiny nuts and bolts! Palaces are built up of small bricks!

The other lesson that we learn from these stories is that human beings have a tendency to get into a comfort zone very easily, but we need to jostle ourselves up and make a conscious effort to adapt with the growing and ever improving world. We all have heard of *Darwin's Law of The Survival of the Fittest*. Huge and powerful animals like dinosaurs could not survive as they could not adapt themselves to the changing environment/climate of the world. We definitely need to learn a lesson from this instance.

## **IMPROVEMENT VS INNOVATION**

Today's breakneck pace of change has made continuous improvement mandatory, yet at the same time creativity should not be compromised. Improvement paired with innovation is the need of the hour. My philosophy rests in striving for the best of both. It is difficult to choose one over the other as both are equally critical for the modern corporation. I am a firm believer of continuous improvement, but I do realize that we need to customize this philosophy according to the requirement – the kind of rigor required in a manufacturing department could be unnecessary

or disruptive in a research or design department. Ultimately, it is important to inject discipline but not at the cost of creativity.

Here's what I say (and believe and follow);

*“When faced with the lack of competence and knowledge, do not ever doubt your self-worth. Simply understand that you need to put in more effort, do more research and create potential/competence to transform your dream into reality.”*

**“Coming together is beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.”**

HENRY FORD

PRINCIPLE 14

## **Grow Together with Our Suppliers and Partners for Mutual Benefits**

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HUMAN BEINGS ARE NATURALLY MOTIVATED by self-interest. Business, trading and commerce have been there since time immemorial. Whether under the garb of *barter system* or in the name of trade exchange, humans have always been in a *give and take* relationship. All associations are mutually beneficial and I strongly believe that in any business or corporate set up the suppliers and partners are of utmost importance. We should aim for *growing up together*.

A business leader should take initiatives to ensure sustainable relationships with the suppliers and vendors.

Following here are some initiatives we have been taking in SEWA to manage and sustain our relationship with suppliers:

## **SEWA ENERGY TEAM**

One of the great ideas that I am proud of and which will have a lasting success in SEWA is creating the SEWA Energy Team with our suppliers and strategic partners. The SEWA Energy Team is a local and inclusive forum for strategic thinking, collaboration and action by energy thought-leadership in private and public sectors who have an interest in advancing Sharjah's energy future.

The team's driving force is its mission: *To promote the sustainable supply and use of energy for the greatest benefit of all people living in Sharjah.* I feel this a great contribution towards energy conservation, thereby leading to its sustainability. This is particularly pertinent in light of the newly released Global Goals for Sustainable Development on 25th September, 2015, by the UN General Council, with an emphasis on goal number *six* (clean water and sanitation) and goal number *seven* (affordable and clean energy) – both related to energy.

## **SHARJAH - THE CITY OF CONSERVATION**

The idea behind creating this team is that I have set a target of reducing the consumption of electricity, water and gas used in Sharjah by 30 per cent over the coming five years to position Sharjah globally as a city of conservation. This goal cannot be achieved without having partners who buy-in and give full commitment towards energy efficiency and conservation building on ISO 50001 of Energy Management.

Usually we meet once a month, whenever we have new suppliers and strategic partners joining us to achieve our conservation target and make Sharjah the city of conservation.

## **A VISIT BY UK UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS**

On 24th of April, 2016, SEWA received a delegation from seven UK universities. A discussion was held regarding cooperation in the fields of scientific research. SEWA was preferred for the visit, considering its stature as the best model in the region in the field of sustainable development and environmental conservation. Moreover, SEWA is the first among the Middle East's Electricity

and Water Authority bodies to procure ISO 50001 – Energy Management certification.

I briefed the visitors about the various initiatives that SEWA has undertaken in the field of research and energy studies, water management, renewable energy and the environment. They also learnt about the SEWA way of energy efficiency and its effort in the application of *The 15 Winning Principles* in all its endeavours. All in all, it was a prestigious occasion and I was filled with pride because they chose SEWA and me for their research studies. “*Pat on your back, Rashid!*” I said to myself.

### **RISE WITH THE WORLD BANK**

In alignment with the Sustainable Energy for All (SE4ALL) initiative, The World Bank Group has developed ‘Readiness for Investment in Sustainable Energy (RISE).’ On May 17th, 2016, I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Charles J. Cormier, Practice Manager, Energy Middle East and North Africa Region. In the middle of our conversation, he mentioned about RISE, and that really got my attention. I was really impressed with the initiative and decided to give my full support to it.

### **SEWA SUPPLIERS MEET**

SEWA is a quality-driven organization. The registration process of the vendors and suppliers is based on quality, sustainability, and exceeding expectations. As a matter of fact, we came up with an idea to hold an annual event with suppliers and partners called “*The SEWA Supplier Meet,*” where we recognize them and award them with certificates of appreciation and trophies.

### **SEEKING A STRONG PARTNER**

The relationship with our suppliers and partners is built on intense loyalty and trust. It’s like a feeling of ownership for them. We offer each other transparency and accurate information so that negotiations can happen in an environment of trust and clarity.

SEWA works closely with its suppliers to form partnerships, which deliver tangible benefits for both sides. Plus, SEWA



The above model is a *must-have* for any partnership. The advantages of the SEWA approach in this area are:

- ⇒ **Each company** – SEWA and its suppliers – can focus on what they do best – meaning the partnerships ends up generating better outcomes than would have been achieved by working independently.
- ⇒ **Problems can be solved jointly** – allowing SEWA to benefit from the expertise of its supplier partners.

As a result, SEWA has an extraordinary relationship with its suppliers and partners. We are co-ideators. Our goal is to keep productivity our top most priority and adhere to the ethical business model. Our attitude is we should work together for the betterment of the company. We respect each other's values and principles and ensure that we have a great time working together.

### **CO-CREATION - LET'S BUILD IT TOGETHER**

As a strategy I started using co-creation during 2009 when we had very little access to financial resources and we had no other way than to do less and get more and this can only happen by using the philosophy of co-creation.

### **WHAT IS CO-CREATION?**

It is a management practice/a form of economic strategy that brings different parties like (1) Customers (2) Managers (3) Employees and (4) Stakeholders together to produce a mutually valued outcome.

### **THE STARBUCKS STORY**

The benefit of *co-creation* is manifold. I really value this management practice and I always refer the *Starbucks case study* to my managers and subordinates in this context. This case study deserves a mention here too:

In 2007, Starbucks was a \$10 billion company serving 50 million customers a week with some 10,500 stores in the United States and more than 4,500 stores internationally.

But in the process of the company's rapid expansion, the management gradually ceased to live up to the ultimate Starbucks

experience. Plus it also had to contend with the ‘low cost’ coffee that its competitors provided, thereby losing its loyal customer base. Then CEO, Howard Schultz, sadly pointed out, “*Starbucks stores no longer have the soul of the past.*”

In 2008, in an attempt to revitalize the Starbucks customer experience, CEO Howard Schultz launched MyStarbucksIdea.com website with the following words, “*Welcome to MyStarbucksIdea.com. This is your invitation to help transform the future of Starbucks with your ideas – and build upon our history of co-creating the Starbucks Experience together... So pull up a comfortable chair and participate in My Starbucks Idea. We are here, we are engaged and we are taking it seriously.*”

Ideally this was the platform where everyone was invited to help *co-shape* the future of Starbucks with their *ideas*. You must be wondering what the result was? In the first year alone, more than 65,000 ideas and 658,000 votes were cast and in late 2009, the company announced that 50 distinct ideas drawn from the site had been approved and will be implemented soon.

### **MYSEWAIDEA.COM**

What a genius idea! I was so inspired by this initiative that it encouraged me to launch *MySewaIdea.com* wherein the users/customers were invited to drop in their query, idea or feedback of any kind by just filling out a simple form. Feedback keeps us engaged and tells us about our progress. In fact, goals without feedback have little effect on performance of employees. Feedback serves as the vehicle of motivation for them.

My Excellence Department manager heads a team who look into the ideas submitted and rush me with on time reports and updates. They are empowered to handle each submission (query, idea or feedback) promptly and effectively. It is all about customer experience for me. It immediately builds up the brand value.

### **WELCOME MICROSOFT**

Well, talking about trust and building lasting relationships reminds me of an interesting story, I call it the Microsoft Story:

## **NOT MY WAY OR YOUR WAY - SEWA TAKES THE ETHICAL WAY**

Couple of months back, I received a call from the Microsoft representative office in Dubai stating that SEWA and some of the other sections are not complying with the intellectual property rights. They further mentioned that SEWA has been using the copied version of software rather than the original ones. Their Legal department was not pleased with SEWA.

I endorse fair play. I believe that ethics and integrity should not be compromised at any cost. I immediately called the Microsoft office and requested them to put me through to the regional director. They were so cooperative and professional, that Mr. Jawad Al Redha, Regional Director, Public Sector, Microsoft, personally rang me up and decided to come to my office to solve the issue.

In three days time the meeting was scheduled, he came in and we had an excellent meeting. It was decided that Microsoft will serve us with the latest technology and updated *know-how* and in turn SEWA will sign an annual maintenance contract to ensure that genuine/authentic programs are made available for SEWA. I said, *“I aim at forming a long-term relationship based on continuous growth and trust. I discuss the present and future prospects of our partnership and churn out new prospects and opportunities to make the most of this relationship. It benefits both of us to encash our assets and enjoy the fruits of success together.”*

A month later, I received an email from the Microsoft office in Dubai, stating that Microsoft is recognizing me for the protection of intellectual copyright and will be awarding me with a certificate of appreciation.

A week later, Mr. Jawad came to my office with a certificate of appreciation, took pictures and the following morning it was a news in the local media well-received by Microsoft.

## **BRAVO ROLLS-ROYCE**

Most of the time, companies attend only to customer satisfaction. Which is fine, but alongside it we need to maintain a healthy

camaraderie with our partners and suppliers too. After all, they are our *extended family*. Here is an anecdote from my personal experience, see how I dealt with a reputed global brand, 'Rolls-Royce'. When I joined, to my dismay, I found out that two Rolls-Royce gas driven generators had not been commissioned for the past two years due to the technical issue of fuel gas valves that were feeding the turbines and another reason was late payment by SEWA.

I was shocked and equally sad to see such globally recognized branded machines lying redundant. I immediately dug deep into the root cause of the issue and my research and analysis brought me to the real concern. It was SEWA's failure to adhere to the payment plan and as a consequence Rolls-Royce took a stand to discontinue their services.

I immediately called for a meeting with the company's officials and related to them that I had been appointed by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Mohammad Al Qassimi, the Ruler of Sharjah, as the new Chairman of SEWA and expressed my desire to revisit the issue and ensure that the machines would be up and running. I reiterated the fact that it would be beneficial for both of us to join hands again.

As a matter of fact, I promised the company that the pending payment would be received in a week's time. The professionals gladly accepted the offer and as they say *the rest is history*.

Today, we have both machines up and running since summer 2014. This is an ultimate example of growing together with our partners for mutual benefit. And it is worth mentioning here that I also received a call from His Highness recognizing me for my effort and hard work.

Trust me, it was my sheer passion for maintaining friendly relationships with everyone, whether professional or personal, that led me to even out the partnership with Rolls-Royce. I truly endorse Oscar Farinetti's statement in the Global CEO survey, 2015, "*The competitor theme is a very interesting one, because I don't believe in competitors, I only believe in colleagues that act together... to bring us more business opportunities.*"

### **SEWA-SHELL TEAM**

One of our sustainable goals is to diversify the fuel system in SEWA, to sustain the fuel supply, and to continuously optimize our assets. One of the best global partners we found was Shell for their rich and historical experience in fuel supply and management. I personally contacted Mr. Mounir Bouaziz, Country Chairman Dubai and Emirates, and discussed with him our future plan. He was kind enough to visit me with his team and the idea came forth to create a focus group from both sides under the banner of SEWA-Shell team. The team was assembled and conducted a two-day workshop that resulted in using the LNG capital as a source of fuel for our turbines and we are still working with Shell Upstream International to achieve this goal.

### **EXCELLENT JOB ORACLE**

Now let me take you through another story, it's the Oracle story: June 1st, 2014, a new Oracle software program called Customer Care and Billing (CC & B) was commissioned and used by SEWA. This project was in the pipeline before I was appointed, unfortunately, when it was commissioned, a huge havoc was created as most of the employees were not trained enough and some of them even rejected training, especially those who had been working on the old HP/IBM program for the last 20 years. Plus the system had leaks/bugs and needed immediate attention.

This resulted in frustration and dissatisfaction amongst the employees, customers, and even our partners/suppliers. Customers had to face the inconvenience of standing in long queues to pay their bills, even social media took advantage of the situation and created negative publicity for SEWA. All this really saddened me. I acted as a firefighter trying my level best to reach the root causes and stop the problems.

I decided to take charge of the situation. I had to come up with a quick fix solution, so I called for a meeting with Oracles' head official to gain visibility and control over transformative infrastructure projects. Hence, we agreed upon the following three strategies:

**Strategy #1:** Quick Wins

**Strategy #2:** Short-term Wins

**Strategy #3:** Long-term Wins

To date we have been able to come up with the first and second strategy and we are working with Oracle on the third strategy. Here I would mention a word of thanks to the Oracle Vice President Mr. Sami Rejeb who travelled all the way from Sweden to help us overcome the program challenges.

**“Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.”**

VINCE LOMBARDI

PRINCIPLE 15

## **Achieve Our Common Objective Through Teamwork**

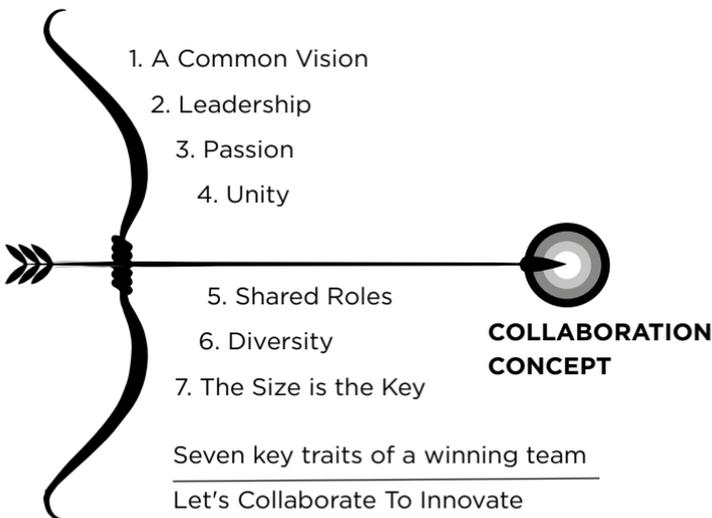
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*“TEAMING IS THE ENGINE OF ORGANIZATIONAL learning,”* says the Harvard Business School Professor, Amy C. Edmondson. This aligns with my Philosophy of Teamwork (refer to my book, *The 13 Critical Traits of Team Dynamics*) according to which the critical success factor of teamwork is not the methodology or tools but it’s about PEOPLE. It is about putting effective teaming into practice. It is very interesting to see people come together, work together, create together, solve together and ultimately grow together. This is a quintessence of the SEWA way.

## LET'S COLLABORATE TO INNOVATE

Managers have one pressing need today, it's to find ways to make teams work better and more effective. Let me share some excerpts from my book *The 13 Traits of Team Dynamics*, "What does it need to be a high performing team?" I have listed down seven key characteristics that define a winning team:

- 1. A Common Vision** - The team members should work towards a set goal and should pull together in the same direction to achieve that goal.
- 2. Leadership** - A leader should constantly be motivating the team members and boosting their morale.
- 3. Passion** - The team members should be passionate about working together.
- 4. Unity** - The team members should be united by a common objective.
- 5. Shared Roles** - Every human being is unique, and bestowed with extraordinary expertise, select the right people for the right job.
- 6. Diversity** - Diverse and varied team members with both creative and intuitive thinkers results in a rich and winning team.
- 7. The Size is the Key** - The smaller the team, the more focused the team members.



The above image states the 7 key characteristics of a team that work in synergy to hit the bull's eye.

### MAKING TEAMS CLICK

Happy collaborators are more productive and less likely to look elsewhere for employment. Here the challenge is how do you help your employees to collaborate more often? First, you need to understand that people collaborate when they *share* the same interests, values, background, age, etc. Precisely, collaboration is a result of a lot of commonality. Second, you need to *create* opportunities for them to understand each other more.

At SEWA, the employees go for a '*coffice*' (coffee out-of-office) to discuss a task at hand, organize lunches and other team building outings/gatherings, etc. All this helps them to strengthen their relationship and know each other to collaborate in a more productive way. These practices enable brainstorming and not blamestorming, where the focus is on *how* to fix, and not on *who* fixes it.

### THE NINE CHAMPIONS

I always advise not to have more than nine knowledgeable, skilful and smart members in a team. Throughout my business life the maximum team members I used is nine and I love calling them the nine champions. Each has a unique role, accountability and responsibility.

Countless studies have shown the benefits of smaller teams. Focus and responsibility are more challenging with too many people – which is how you end up with folks staring down silently at their laptops for an entire meeting. Hence, three conditions are essential to the nine champions to be effective: Trust among members, a sense of identity, and a sense of efficacy. Following are the champions:

- ☞ The '**sponsor**', who provides resources, removes road-blocks and determines when to disband the team.
- ☞ The '**leader**', who ensures the team has clear objectives and makes sure everyone is involved and committed.
- ☞ The '**challenger**', who questions effectiveness and presses for continuous improvement and results.

- ☞ The **'doer'**, who urges the team to get on with the job in hand and does practical tasks.
- ☞ The **'thinker'**, who produces carefully considered ideas and weighs up and improves ideas from others.
- ☞ The **'supporter'**, who eases tension, helps them cover personal agendas or conflicts, makes things easier, and maintains harmony.
- ☞ The **'organizer'** maintains schedules and makes sure all members stay on the same page.
- ☞ The **'advisor'** advises the team about the risks that may come along the way.
- ☞ The **'energizer'** provides inspiration. He can view situations and opportunities with innate simplicity.

### **TUCKMAN'S TEAM DEVELOPMENT MODEL**

This classic model, published in 1965 by Dr. Bruce Tuckman, is the ultimate step-guide to teaming. I have said this before, and I will reiterate here, teaming is an art. A lot goes into the process, even before you form the team. It's a gradual process.

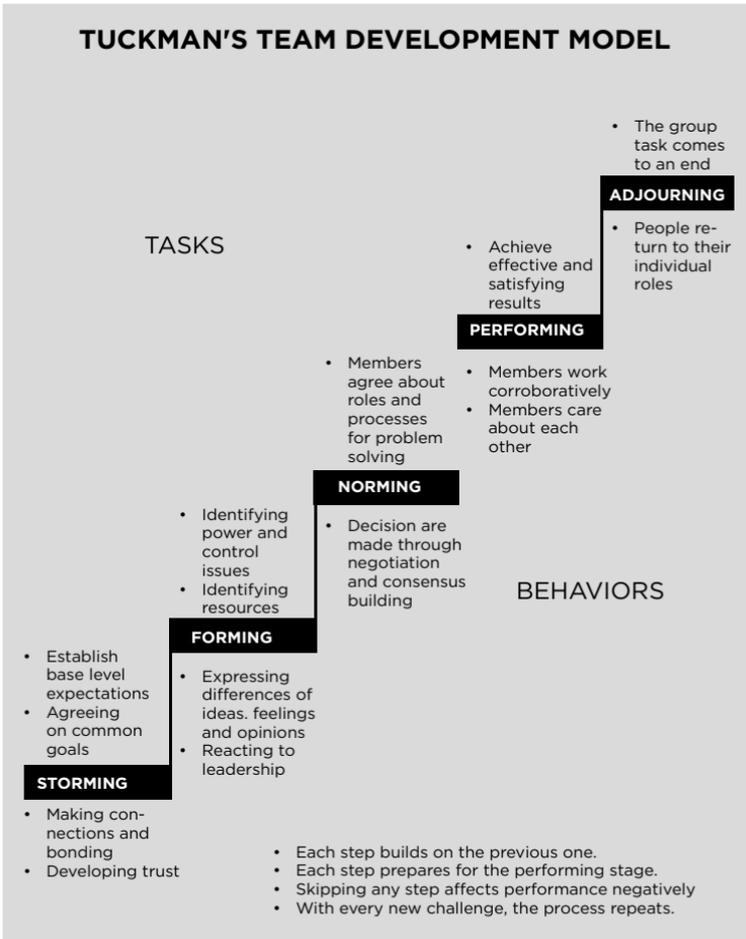
The progression is:

- 1. Forming** (getting to know each other).
- 2. Storming** (beginning to challenge each other).
- 3. Norming** (agreeing with each other).
- 4. Performing** (achieving objectives together).

### **TUCKMAN'S FIFTH STAGE ADJOURNING**

Dr. Bruce added the fifth stage, *Adjourning*, (getting back to individual roles) in the mid-1970s, after a review of his theory.

Let's check it out:



### TEAMWORK KILLERS

I came across this interesting African proverb, “*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together*”, and I fell in love with it. What makes the difference between a team that performs and one that doesn’t? The *discipline* of teams. Being good at teamwork is such a desirable trait and is incredibly important to organizations. Yet too often, teamwork *fails* and there could be many root causes behind it. In my observation, the essence of a team is common commitment (purpose): A shared purpose. And what hinders team members to align themselves towards that shared

goal is *lack of communication*. It is one of the devils that destroys effective teamwork. Overall, communication volume should be greater and more frequent. People with different expertise should be galvanized by a common goal, if not, the team is sure to bite the dust. Here's what I preach, "*Teamwork makes Dream work.*"

In SEWA, I do pay attention to the team killers – mainly communication and stereotyping/no shared purpose. We manage communication and we love calling it communication management. We have a code of ethics such as not speaking ill about each other, encourage listening and responding constructively. We always remind each other with the saying, "*Speaking ill of others is a dishonest way of praising ourselves.*"

At SEWA teamwork is appreciated and awarded. It is my way of fostering unity amongst the employees and facilitate "*teaching and learning*" (refer principle # 2). When individuals come together to work towards a common goal, it forms a family rich in creative intelligence and skill sets. Now it is the leader's job to take the best out of that team every single time.

## **EFFECTIVE TEAM DYNAMICS IS ESSENTIAL TO BUSINESS SUCCESS!**

Team dynamics can be characterized in numerous ways. However, based on my personal experiences in business management for the past 20 years, I believe that the following 13 critical traits best categorise the issues that teams need to tackle to be successful:

### **1. Safety and Security**

The team should provide a platform for candid conversation. It should be *okay* to disagree. Freedom of speech and the spirit to speak one's mind should be appreciated and encouraged. This is what forms the basis of a healthy team camaraderie.

### **2. Inclusion**

I always say, "*Everyone's invited*". A team is all about togetherness. Every team member has his/her unique identity, it should *never* be a one-man show. So bring every brain into the game. That's the way to success in business because every idea counts. You never know the

idea that you thought to be insignificant could be the *'next big thing.'*

### **3. Free Interaction**

There should be the free flow of information and ideas within the group members. Facts and figures should not be hidden nor restricted to particular team members. Enabling each other to *think* out aloud is fundamental for the entire team's creativity quotient.

### **4. Valuing Diversity**

Diversity is the biggest strength of a team. The more diverse the group, the more creative it is. Plus it also adds to the uniqueness of the team. The team members may face few challenges in the beginning but once synergised, the team becomes a high performance team.

### **5. Cohesiveness**

Often the old adage "*a champion team will always beat a team of champions*" holds true in cohesiveness. Keep in mind that most people in a team want to be heard and understood. To achieve cohesiveness, teams need to share a common vision and have common goal(s) for their projects. With that commitment comes belief – belief that through good days and bad, winning or losing, the team will stick together and stand by each other.

### **6. Foster Trust**

Trust is one of those characteristics of life that seems to fit the old adage "*I know it when I see it*". Trust is the key to all relationships. It involves both honesty and congruence between words and actions. If you say one thing and do another, you'll confuse everyone. Be consistent to build trust. Dr. Stephen R. Covey wrote in his latest book, *The 8th Habit*, "*When trust is present, mistakes are forgiven and forgotten.*"

### **7. Have a Good Charter**

My advice for any new team has always been: "*Don't just set up a team, charter it.*" When you assemble your team be sure to address with them: Why are they here? (Mission) What will they be doing? (Goals) How will they recognize progress? (Planning the milestones communication and feedback) What happens when

they need help? (Support) What's in it for them? (Recognition).

### **8. Care & Dare**

Teammates caring about each other's wellbeing is a primary component of strong teams. In a caring environment, I've found that each member may feel more secure in his or her decisions because the responsibility for a bad decision is shared with others. No single member of the group is solely responsible for the group's actions. No one *wants* to be the bad apple (or stupid or pig-headed).

### **9. Goal Accomplishment**

Teams need to have the knowledge, information skills (social and technical), and tools to perform what is required of them. Their minds must be challenged. Goals must be clear to everyone and must be committed to – by the people who must accomplish them. Focus intensely on a few crucial goals.

### **10. Provide Room to Grow**

Functional teams are constantly busy looking for better ways of doing things. They take criticism in their stride, focus on solving problems, and learn from their mistakes. Futurist Toffler writes of a new need for people in the modern workplace: “*an ability to learn, unlearn and relearn.*” Teams must have “Team Development Strategy” which is a process through which a team prepares for the future in terms of the competencies (e.g. skills, knowledge, and experience) it will need to meet business challenges.

### **11. Communication**

Communication is a two-way process. That means listen, make sure you understand what you hear correctly and haven't translated it into “*what you wanted to hear!*” I feel the more team members communicate with each other, the easier it is to communicate effectively with their leader and avoid pressing each other's buttons.

### **12. Culture of Blame**

I strongly believe it is important to realize that in a culture of blame, when something goes wrong, people hear the question “*Who's in charge here?* or, *Who did it?*” rather than “*How do we fix*

*this?*” You are sure to find some serious finger pointing rather than effective problem solving. Clarifying roles and goals, responsibility and accountability in advance will not only help prevent team members and leaders from stepping on one another’s toes due to confusion over roles, but also will ensure smooth operation.

### **13. Express Appreciation**

It’s a cost-free tool. Giving someone an honest compliment on work well done or a good idea makes them feel appreciated and valued. It is critical that organizations celebrate success and reward those who helped to achieve it. In fact, research on motivation consistently shows that what really pleases people is being noticed and complimented for a job well done.

### **TEAM ENGAGEMENT**

Our success is dependent upon the collective energy and intelligence of all of our team members. We strive to create a work environment where motivated team members can flourish and succeed to their highest potential. We appreciate effort and reward results. To get the best out of our team meetings and cause members to engage wholeheartedly in different tasks we believe that working to accurately hear and understand one another’s feelings and concerns improve member morale and willingness to cooperate and deploy efforts to whatever task required the most attention. And emotionally engage with everyone, we keep asking at the end of each meeting, *“Are there any perspectives we haven’t heard yet or thought through completely?”*

### **MICROMANAGEMENT - A NECESSARY EVIL?**

I straddle two worlds. Most of us do, don’t we? I am highly analytical, detail-oriented and love getting into the nitty gritty of business processes. Alongside this I am a big picture innovator who loves to dream, think strategically and then make it all happen. So I *zoom in* and *zoom out* when required (it comes with practice though). But as my venture becomes increasingly complex, I have realized that it is no longer feasible for me to be alone on top of everything (at least at the most granular level.)

I would like to state here that, as a leader, one has to both mi-

cro-manage and macro-manage. I wonder why the world is so against *micromanagement* and has defamed this practice. I see no harm in having control over things, but at the same time, I know where to *let go*. From a close focus perspective, I believe you can't successfully manage a business if you do not deal with details. However, if you are always in *close focus* mode, you miss out the *big picture* and you cripple growth – both your company's and your team's. For me, it is about striking the right balance and here comes the role of a good team.

A competent team enables a leader to effectively operate from both perspectives. The leader, in turn, needs to ensure that the team is well-trained, and well-aware about *his* way of functioning and that the team members have a crystal-clear understanding of *his* business objectives.

Thanks to the wide range of responsibilities that I have undertaken throughout my professional career I can certainly say that the world keeps evolving (changing) every now and then. *Today's hot selling idea becomes yesterday's trend* in no time. For instance, during the 80s and 90s, companies and multinationals only revolved around monetary profits, *numbers, numbers, and numbers everywhere*. They emphasized profits and share prices over people and ethics. The consequence: Shocking corporate scandals

Next came the 21st century. In the beginning of this millennium the corporate world talk was around employee motivation, leadership styles, etc. But now, the buzz is about sustainability principles, such as lifelong learning, CSR and cultural innovation (I am really happy about this!).

I agree with Jack Welch's quote, "*The world of the '90s and beyond will belong not to managers or those who make the numbers dance, as we used to say, or those who are conversant with all the business jargon we used to sound smart. The people will belong to passionate, driven leaders – people who not only have an enormous amount of energy but who can energize whom you lead.*" And how do you do that? Obviously there are numerous ways to *energize* your team. I trust most in public recognition and honest self-evaluation and feedback drills. Assessing strengths and weaknesses builds capabilities.

It is easier said than done, a competent team is the outcome of assembling the right people *'intelligently and strategically'* in the right team. You need to hand-pick your team members. Gauge their competency and expertise and assign them the task accordingly. It's worth it, because only through teamwork is long-term success viable. Henry Ford beautifully said *"Coming together is beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success."* Nothing short of this is the route to success. So let us all join hands. And *let's get together*. It is definitely better together.

## **THE SEVEN Cs OF CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM BUILDING**

Legendary Boston Celtics basketball coach Red Auerbach once remarked *"Some people believe you win with the five best players, but I found out that you win with the five who fit together best."* While talent is definitely important to be successful, the most talented team does not always win the tournament or championship. Talent without teamwork is trouble.

I came across these 7 Cs of championship team building, and I thought I should share it with you here in a brief summary. My advise is as you delve deep into them, take a moment to assess yourself and your place in the team. See how you can shift your attitude for the prosperity of your team:

### **1. Common Goal**

Championship teams have a singular, common focus. Obviously, for many teams the common goal is to win. Everyone understands that this is the direction and destination that the team is moving toward. The players understand that their individual goals must fit within the framework of the team's goal.

### **2. Commitment**

Commitment is probably the single most important factor that differentiates championship teams, coaches, athletes, businesses, schools, marriages (you name it) from the mediocre. Championship teams buy into the mission at every level and make the mission their own. The players feel a sense of responsibility and obligation to give it their best.

### **3. Complementary Roles**

Each player is assigned specific positions and responsibilities that help determine the entire team's success. Championship teams however realize that all roles are critical to the overall team's success and willingly accept and value their individual roles.

### **4. Clear Communication**

A fourth characteristic of championship teams is clear communication. Players need to continually monitor the team's effectiveness, modify things when necessary, and celebrate successes.

### **5. Constructive Conflict**

Along with effective communication, championship teams have the ability to keep conflict under control. Often, coaches and players are able to use conflict constructively to further develop and strengthen the team.

### **6. Cohesion**

A sixth characteristic shared by many championship teams is that they genuinely like and respect each other. While it is not absolutely necessary, cohesion is a factor that will often help your team perform at a higher level.

### **7. Credible Coaching**

Finally, it takes a credible coach to develop, orchestrate, and monitor all the other 'Cs' of Championship Team Building. You as a coach play a critical role in helping the team arrive at a common goal, monitoring and maintaining your players' commitment, assigning and appreciating roles, communicating with the team, keeping conflict under control, and promoting your team's chemistry and cohesion.

## **IN A NUTSHELL**

My advise: You need to surround yourself with right and like-minded people to ensure a high-performing team. There's an economic theory out there that if you take the incomes of your five closest friends and average them, the resulting number will be pretty close to your own income.

## Final Thoughts

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THIS IS THE END OF our journey together, but the beginning of *your* journey. If you have patiently worked your way through this book, I hope you've experienced an incredible journey. You should now have a profound understanding of the higher purpose of your life.

This era is marked by quick-fixes, overnight fame and short-cuts to the million dollar club, but this book is just the opposite! One of its hallmarks is enduring, permanent transformations and not half-baked, one-dimensional remedies. It's about facts, not fads.

Throughout this book, my central theme has been to instill the cardinal significance of timeless principles and core values of your organization. These are indispensable: If you set out to create a built-to-last organization with authentic leadership as its linchpin, you just can't do without them.

If this journey has required you to explore the very depths of your being and brought you a tad bit closer to your inner self, then I have achieved my aim. By pursuing what you've learned, I am confident you'll enjoy long-lasting, positive change.

**“Most people fail in life not because they aim too high and miss, but because they aim too low and hit.”**

LES BROWN

And some people don't aim at all. I encourage you to aim as high as you can and not just endeavour to hit the target – aim for the bull's eye. The world is your stage! Forge your path, create your legacy!

**“Man needs his difficulties because they are necessary to enjoy success.”**

APJ ABDUL KALAM

**“Knowledge is power – if applied correctly”**

DR. RASHID ALLEEM

ALLEEM KNOWLEDGE CENTER:

## **My Brainchild for Knowledge Sharing**

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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE) IS A melting pot with citizens from 150 nationalities living in harmony. The country is vibrant with a lot of new ideas and concepts. I felt an increasing urge to learn and share with other people. I also saw a need to capitalize on the intellectual community and bridge the communication gap among the business community living in the UAE and my own people.

To give a nod to the rich diversity of this nation, the Alleem Knowledge Center was set up during early September 2001 and has been promoting the concept and value of lifelong learning. The Center believes that learning is a continuous, collaborative, positive and fulfilling process that can enrich and promote one's professional as well as personal life.

Hence, in keeping with its overall objective of promoting the development of general management and strategy skills amongst its members, the Alleem Knowledge Center has set up six Strategy Clubs to enhance skills acquisition, improve overall industry knowledge, create awareness of key management issues, deliver operational excellence, and leverage technologies amongst other key benefits.

Initially, it began with a few of my friends who actively contribute to society by utilizing their knowledge and skills, so we called it 'a Professional's Club.' We would meet every Tuesday afternoon to discuss different topics related to communication and leadership. Over a period of time, we thought of bringing together members of varied industries and ranks onto a common platform. And that's how the 'Alleem Strategy Club' was formed whose main aim was to help create an environment of lifelong learning by the sharing and exchange of ideas and best practices that empower professionals in the current competitive business economy.

I feel that, *"The challenge is not to have the best strategy but an effective strategy that can be implemented successfully."*

# Alleem Strategy Clubs

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THE VARIOUS STRATEGY CLUBS THAT have sprung up as a result of the Alleem Knowledge Center are:

## **1. ALLEEM PROFESSIONALS CLUB**

Organizations today are under intense pressure to be better, faster, and more competitive. At the Professionals Club, innovative learning solutions and opportunities are imparted, empowering members to improve personal and organizational performance. The Professionals Club helps guide members to be more proactive, flexible and progressive with the changing times.

## **2. ALLEEM SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CLUB**

The Sustainable Development Club calls for an inclusive approach to action, which recognizes the need for all people to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. Sustainable development is not just the responsibility of environmental specialists alone, but it requires contributions from people across all functions of an organization.

## **3. ALLEEM LEADERSHIP CLUB**

Here, people can unlock their potential that will help them to understand the principles of leadership and provide development opportunities to promote personal growth and leadership

excellence. Ultimately, a leader doesn't just build a business; a leader builds an organization that builds a business. According to me, "Leadership is about change; it is about making things happen. Everything changes so fast today that the key is often not what you've learned, but how fast you can learn and apply that learning."

#### **4. ALLEEM BOOK CLUB**

Reading enhances a person's character, intelligence, and critical-thinking skills. Alleem Book Club is a forum for members to discuss a book they have read and express their opinion, likes, or dislikes, thereby offering an exchange of ideas and a healthy discussion on a wide range of issues outside the purview of selected titles.

I always like to remind my club members about an old saying: "Today a reader, tomorrow a leader."

#### **5. ALLEEM HUMAN RESOURCES (HR) CLUB**

Human capital is an important component for the success of any organization. Apart from helping develop vital people management skills, the Alleem Human Resources Club will also enable members to gain insight into current HR trends and keep abreast of emerging HR developments. The HR Club is for knowledge sharing and helping each other.

#### **6. ALLEEM INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) CLUB**

Participation in this Club gets the attendees updated with the emerging technologies that can unleash a new wave of online experience, creating challenges and opportunities alike. Prepare yourself for the impact of these technologies on your business model and the opportunities they present for your organization to grow.

While these strategic clubs enable participants to strategize one's own potentials, I felt that the strategies need to be supported by sound education programs. So I came out with the 'Alleem Executive Program' concept.

**“Formal education will make you a living;  
self-education will make you a fortune”**

JIM ROHN

ALLEEM EXECUTIVE AND  
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

## **Honing Hard Skills and Soft Skills Development**

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THE MISSION OF THE ALLEEM Executive and Education Program is to build leadership skills and enhance the capacity of individuals and organizations to address local and global challenges.

I believe in the adage – ‘Leaders are made; not only born’. It is critical to invest in the next generation of leaders to sustain the competitive advantage and achieve higher corporate growth. The next generation leaders need to be developed with advanced decision making and execution skills in the globally competitive scenario.

Alleem Executive Education Programs include several hard skill development programs that will help employees emerge with a fresh approach to sustainable development and inclusive growth; strategic planning for managing successful projects; marketing management and branding; and sustainable idea management. Executives without financial education background can also gain expertise in finance and accounting.

While technical skills and know-how may help you in getting an entry into an organization, it is people-oriented skills that help

you climb the corporate ladder. Business organizations are increasingly focusing on people with good soft skills. Companies are looking for people with good work ethic, great attitude, excellent communication skills and high emotional intelligence to foster great team performance and thereby contribute strongly to the organization's vision and strategy.

The Soft Skills Development Programs initiated by the Alleem Executive Education Programs help not only work on developing these essential skills within but also encourage their development throughout the organization. Some of the key areas that are focused on include personal accountability, interpersonal negotiation skills, conflict resolution, creative thinking and clarity of communication amongst others.

ALLEEM BUSINESS CONGRESS

## **Where Leaders Make Decisions**

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WHEN THE FINANCIAL CRISIS HIT the world, I wanted to take the role of the Professionals Club a notch higher to focus on financial planning and financial systems. I felt a more comprehensive two-day program was needed. And since this was a large-scale project, I consulted close friends, professors, and associates on how to execute this idea and make it a real success.

I was overwhelmed with the feedback I received and advice came from my professor Dr. Mohammad Arif, from the University of Salford, Manchester, UK. He suggested that I focus on sustainable development. At that point of time, honestly, I did not have much of an idea about this concept. So I researched sustainable development and was surprised to see how many publications and white papers had been published on the subject. Moreover, the UNDP had taken upon itself to spread the idea of sustainability globally. So I decided to conduct a two-day sustainable development program.

I shot off emails to my friends announcing that the '1st Sustainable Development Congress' would be held on 22nd-23rd February, 2009. I was overwhelmed with the keen response; some friends

were even willing to travel from overseas to attend and speak. Since the participation seemed high, I decided to name it a ‘Congress’ instead of the ‘Program’, because to me a congress is a place where strategic thinkers, thought leaders and decision makers sit together to take important and strategic decisions.

The feedback we received after this first Congress far exceeded everyone’s expectations, including my own! Participants agreed that the Congress must be an annual feature. Other subjects were proposed – strategic planning, leadership and management, inclusive growth, marketing and branding, project management, innovation and creativity. I zeroed in on four areas of interest to all and termed it the Alleem Business Congress whose mission it is to improve social, economic, and environmental living conditions worldwide, thus helping to improve the quality of life for hundreds of millions who have not yet seen the benefits of sustainable development.

Despite the fact that I had taken on the project voluntarily, and with limited financial and human resources, I accepted the challenge and decided to conduct five such events annually:

- ☞ **Water & Energy Congress Week (WE Week)**
- ☞ **Sustainable Development & Inclusive Growth Congress Week**
- ☞ **Project Management Congress Week**
- ☞ **Marketing & Branding Congress Week**
- ☞ **Leadership & Management Congress Week**

Today, Alleem Business Congress is a platform wherein more than delegates participate every year, which includes diplomats, top leaders of businesses, CEOs and 2,000 young professionals. I made a conscious decision to keep participation free of charge. Tuesday happened to be my favourite day to conduct these events, as it reminded me fondly of my initial idea of conducting such forums midweek, during the professional’s club time.

Alleem Business Congress has witnessed phenomenal growth in its last seven years with participation from various cross sections of society. Today, the participation level in this congress

has grown tremendously and has exceeded over 2,000 delegates from every branch of business annually. After successfully conducting 30 editions of the congress so far, Alleem Business Congress decided to expand its horizon by conducting a '5-day Executive Certificate Program' of various titles such as Project Management, Marketing and Branding, Leadership and Management, and Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth. Each course title comprises of two-day intensive classroom sessions, live workshops – consisting of case studies, role plays, management games, etc, Congress and Award Ceremony/Gala Night.

I hope that the Congress will continue to receive good support in the future as well. While cherishing the stupendous growth of the ABC, I need to make a special mention of Dr. Mohammad Tariq, Chairman & Managing Director, Paradigm Pioneers Group, UAE who has been instrumental in supporting me in this endeavour. He is reliable and ensures that he makes things happen. As an effective networker, he has the sincere desire to help others. I should say that as a good friend of mine, he understood my aspirations, dreams and helped me realise my ideas. Many people do not possess these traits of patience and persistence. But with these special attributes aplenty in him, coupled with a positive attitude, enthusiasm, motivation, and sincerity, Dr. Mohammad Tariq is undoubtedly a foundation stone and strong pillar of the Alleem Business Congress success story.

## Alleem Excellence Awards

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TO RECOGNIZE THE CHANGE MAKERS who have made a notable difference in their respective areas, Alleem Business Congress has instituted the Alleem Excellence Awards which are distributed during the Alleem Professional Development Weeks – Water and Energy Week (WE Week), Project Management Week, Leadership Week, Sustainable Development and Inclusive Growth Week, and Marketing and Branding Week.

Business organizations, which are agile and are able to change gears at short notice are the true survivors in today's world. As Goldratt said, "It is not just luck!" These successful businesses have managed to get their act right and achieved enviable status. How did they accomplish it? What were the best situational factors and best practices adopted to create an impactful outcome? What was the unique learning from the entire program? What is the ingenuity of the management and the company that has boosted them to the pinnacle of success? The recognition is aimed to create awareness and exchange of expertise within the industry.

The awards will recognize our strategic partners, our mission supporters, Alleem Business Congress speakers, volunteers,

knowledge partners and financial supporters and will be given on the 5th night of each Week.

The selection process will be through my executive office in its capacity as the Founder and Executive Chairman of the Alleem Knowledge Center. We give emphasis on originality, innovative-ness, economic creativity, environment concerns, health and safety compliance, sustainable processes and outcomes to name a few. We look for mission, clarity of ideas and the ability to execute them with utmost precision.

Our core focus is on learning and knowledge sharing. We believe that every day there are a handful of people who are doing exceptionally well and progressing rapidly. We are constantly acting to create a healthy and fertile network of experts, professionals and practitioners to come together in a joint forum and share their insight. Our belief is to spread the knowledge far and wide thus touching a million lives.

“Experience is not what happens to a man; it is what a man does with what happens to him.”

AL DOUS HUXLEY

## ALLEEM BRILLIANT NETWORKING

# Cultivating Connections

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BUSINESS NETWORKING IS A POWERFUL tool for creating mutually beneficial business environments. Networking is a highly recommended marketing tactic enabling oneself to make connections and build enduring relationships that can accelerate and sustain success for your organization. I strongly believe what is said about success: *“To succeed – whether at a personal or professional level – one must continually connect with new people, cultivate emerging relationships and leverage your network”*.

Networking is an invaluable business skill and is a critical component in any individual’s toolkit for career success. Alleem Brilliant Networking was conceived with the aim of providing business leaders, entrepreneurs and management personnel with dynamic opportunities, expertise and strategies to develop valuable relationships that are needed to succeed in the modern competitive business environment.

Alleem Brilliant Networking has created a two-way flow of value by serving as a resource and helping others succeed. It is an opportunity for both to give and receive targeted leads and referrals. Successful networking is created on the grounds of mutual

trust, shared knowledge and valuable relationships. People do business with those they like and trust. This allows them to grow their business by dealing directly with other firms or by referring one another. Networking is clearly an individual's or firm's best marketing strategy. Alleem Brilliant Networking's face-to-face networking events enable participants to create lasting impressions in the minds of people you meet. The advantage of cultivating personal relationships helps set you apart from the crowd. In addition, it inspires one by boosting self-confidence to take the plunge and start your own business or just expand your industry knowledge.

I always say that, "Ultimately, it is not about who you know; but who knows you". Our dynamic and structured networking events consist of insightful keynote addresses focusing on how to do effective networking and training and how to use social media education as well. The strategy behind Alleem Brilliant Networking is to empower professionals and organizations forge meaningful and relevant relationships that will help propel their success.

“Great hopes make everything possible”

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

ALLEEM FOUNDATION

## **A Mission to Make a Difference**

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ONE OUT OF EVERY FIVE people currently lives on US\$1.25 a day or less, according to a United Nations report. One in every two children lives in poverty around the world and they live each day as though it is still the 1929 Great Depression! Over one billion people will go to sleep without food every night and over 600 million people don't have access to clean water.

On the other hand, around 1.6 billion are suffering from overeating and obesity. It is an absurdity that such an abnormality exists! I have always felt that I should do something positive in my effort to change this anomaly.

I am a firm supporter of individual social responsibility. My commitment to see a more socially responsible world and a desire to share my knowledge of the noble principles of sustainable development, inclusive growth, global peace and national pride led to the formation of the Alleem Foundation.

The hallmark of Alleem Foundation is its focus to strive for and support these principles, rising beyond the barriers of cast, creed,

colour, religion or nationalities and to support and enlighten all with a mission to put a smile on each of their faces! The logo of the Alleem Foundation best exemplifies this philosophy with its image of four happy faces represented in varied hues of the four primary colours. These colourful happy faces drive home the message of how the simple act of being socially responsible brings about happiness in others' lives and creates an environment for efficiency and growth.

The Alleem Foundation also serves as the platform that financially and morally supports the endeavours of the various knowledge and networking units of the Alleem Knowledge Center, such as Alleem Library and Alleem Brilliant Networking, Alleem Business Congress, Alleem Strategy Clubs and Alleem Executive Education Programs.

## About the Author

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DR. RASHID ALLEEM IS WIDELY known as a visionary and thought leader in the business, socio-economic, academic and cultural fields. Known for his strategic thinking, he is respected by peers as a man with qualities of mind and heart.

Dr. Alleem dons many hats and hones various skills and passions. He is currently Chairman of Sharjah Electricity & Water Authority – UAE. He served for over a decade as Director General, Department of Seaports and Customs and Sharjah Free Zones Authority. He was the driving force in transforming the zones into a strategic commerce hub empowering thousands of businesses in the region, thereby contributing to the development of the UAE economy. He has been instrumental in bringing on board over 12,000 companies from across 157 nations and attracting a whopping \$40 billion in FDI.

Dr. Alleem's leadership has helped create business excellence on other fronts as well. His participation as Vice Chairman of World Association of Small and Medium Enterprises, as well as other organizations such as Sharjah Charity International, Sharjah

Medical Zone, German Emarati Joint Council for Industry and Commerce and World Trade Development Council in Hong Kong, has seen his contribution enrich the business ecosystem in a noteworthy manner.

An honorary that visits faculties in numerous local and international universities, addressing almost 15,000 people a year, Dr. Alleem truly believes that excellence can only be achieved through sustainability by aligning commercial, social and environmental objectives.

A prolific writer both in English and Arabic, Dr. Rashid Alleem is the author of several books on management and leadership. His recent book *My Green Journey in Hamriyah*, a candid account of his endeavours in improving the environment and distributing his green message not only to entrepreneurs, but also organizations worldwide, has been well received. The book has been praised for its professional and practical approach on many knowledge platforms. Another book he authored, which is sought after in some circles, is *My Leadership Secrets*, written in English and translated into Arabic and German. He frequently addresses diverse audiences on the development of human capital and socially responsible business empowerment initiatives.

In 2001, he founded Alleem Knowledge Center, a none-profit organization, which is a testament to his numerous initiatives and relentless efforts to promote leadership potential and to enrich the tenets of knowledge sharing.

When the financial meltdown happened in September 2008, resulting in the crash of the global economy, Dr. Alleem took up the cudgels and went about creating fresh benchmarks for the industry in an effort to mentor and prepare the industry captains to withstand crisis. Alleem Knowledge Center chalked out an elaborate agenda for organising various events under the banner – Alleem Business Congress – and addressed various key issues through this unique forum.

Alleem Business Congress has set lofty benchmarks against the best international practices. Alleem Business Congress provides a wide platform where business leaders meet and work together

to address survival strategies as well as the economic, social and environmental challenges of sustainable development by deliberating on Energy and Water, Leadership & Management, Project Management, Sustainable Development & Inclusive Growth and Marketing & Branding.

A commentator par excellence, his contributions on benchmarking overall excellence are much sought after in local and international publications. His thought-provoking articles have been the topic of discussion in various socio-economic events at national and international platforms. A popular persona with the local and overseas media, Dr. Alleem's interview with, the BBC World English Channel for its Middle East Business Report segment, which is broadcast to an international audience, created a huge response from home and abroad. More recently, he was interviewed by Deutsche Welle (DW) a German international broadcaster, for the 'Made in German Report'.

Thanks to his leadership experience gained over two decades in the international business arena, Dr. Alleem is today acknowledged as a 'Change Leader' who strives relentlessly to usher in a new business ecosystem.

Dr. Alleem earned a Ph.D. from the University of Salford, Manchester, UK, and received an honorary Ph.D from Atlantic International University (USA) in recognition of his achievements in the socio-economic fields. With honorary doctorates from Somalia University for Humanitarian Services, and American Global International University in the US for his global business contributions and numerous academic achievements, Dr. Alleem is the embodiment of lifelong learning and harnessing intellectual capital.

Testament to his efforts are the various accolades he has received, including an Achievement Award by the League of Arab States in 2007, Gold Medal from the Mayor of Cannes for environmental efforts 2007, Excellence in Leadership award from ASSOCHAM in India 2008, and Celebrity of the Year by Khaleej Times newspaper.

As a tribute to Dr. Alleem's administrative acumen, The Leading

European Architects Forum (LEAF) award 2008 honoured Hamriyah Free Zone for its support and for recognizing best practices and promoting excellence. He's been endorsed as a Maritime Personality for 2009 by Marine Biz TV and the bagged Global Champion of Climate Change 2011 award.

Dr. Alleem has been named the Global Champion of Climate Change at the opening of the 'Youth & Climate Change' conference organized by Youth Exnora International at the prestigious IIT Madras campus, in India.

Acclaimed for his unique leadership qualities, Dr. Alleem has been conferred with the Middle East Business Leaders Awards 2012 as a tribute to his acumen in Training & Human Capital Development. He has also been decorated with the Jewels of Muslim World Award 2012 in Jakarta in recognition of his achievements as one of the top nine movers of Islamic economics. He was bestowed with the honour of Environmentalist of the Year 2012 by the Prime Minister of Malaysia Dr. Mahathir Mohamad in recognition of his contributions towards a sustainable environment. Dr. Alleem was recognized as one among the 100 UAE nationals who have contributed immensely to the 'happiness' of the UAE, on the eve of the United Nations' 'International Day of Happiness' 2013.

In 2013, he was conferred with the 'Certificate of Knight Award' for his outstanding contribution in the field of 'Leadership & Development' by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and also bestowed with the Arab Organization Award for Social Responsibility from the Arab Organization for Social Responsibility in recognition of his CSR initiatives in Hamriyah Free Zone. Dr. Alleem has also been decorated with the coveted '2013 Extraordinary Human' Award by the United Nations World Peace Organization in Washington, United States, on the occasion of the international day of people with disability.

In early 2014, Dr. Alleem was conferred with an 'Award of Excellence' by Daimler-Mercedes Benz Germany for his efforts in protecting the Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) of Mercedes Benz in the Emirate of Sharjah, UAE. Later in May, Dr. Alleem

received the prestigious 'Global Economic Development Leadership Award' in Cochin, India.

In a rare tribute to the wisdom reflected in 'Management in the whole of the Arab World', Dr. Alleem was honoured with the 'Golden Arrow Award' on 18th February 2014 in Dubai. On 3rd April, 2014, he was recognized as 'Goodwill Ambassador for Peace, Care and Relief in GCC Countries, Middle East and North Africa' by the International Organization for Peace, Care and Relief and Member of the Economic and Social Council of The United Nations. Many people also recognized him as the 'Green Ambassador of the UAE'.

Dr. Rashid was recognized as "THE KNOWLEDGE AMBASSADOR OF UAE 2015" by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.



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### The Sewa Way

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DR. RASHID ALLEEM

In *The SEWA Way* Dr. Rashid Alleem, the transformational Chairman of Sharjah Electricity and Water Authority (SEWA), shares the vast experience and knowledge he has accumulated at the helm of major organizations in a passionate, concise and informative manner. His 15 winning principles provide a comprehensive road map for achieving success both on an organizational and personal scale in today's complex world. Dr. Alleem candidly shares his real life experiences to illustrate the importance of skills development, networking, appreciation of diversity, effective knowledge management, communication, empathy, continuous innovation and maintaining a work-life balance. *The SEWA Way* is unique in focusing on sustainability as a core value, as well as introducing the concept of CRI<sup>T</sup>RAL – a unique combination of 'critical and lateral' thinking. Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of *The SEWA Way* is that it imparts knowledge and information in a positive, jargon free, and easy to read format that highlights the importance of doing the rights things and doing things right in a sequential manner.