



Total Brand Manager

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Total Brand Manager

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For my beloved daughters, Eman, Reem, and Hind



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Introduction

The Impossible Made Possible

The book that you hold in your hands has been written in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. No business, industry, or economy has been spared from the devastating effects of the coronavirus and its infectious disease, COVID-19. While I write this, even North Korea has reported its first suspected coronavirus case. Some industries have naturally taken the impact much harder than others: airlines, restaurants, live event companies, movie theaters, and many more. Each industry is experiencing its own unique challenges that are threatening to undermine once-thriving businesses.

Additionally, societies across the globe are suffering from higher unemployment rates. Millions of people have either lost their jobs or been furloughed. In April 2020, the U.S. unemployment rate was at an extortionate 14.7%, meaning

that around 21 million Americans were unemployed. Most of the big corporations have since either filed for bankruptcy or collapsed.

With people self-quarantining in their homes, sitting back, and monitoring their expenditures, businesses worldwide are dealing with unprecedented disruptions. Moreover, many business strategists have already declared that the effects of the coronavirus pandemic are worse for the commercial world than the 2008 financial disaster, perhaps even worse than the Great Crash of 1929.

Finding Opportunities Amid Crises

The challenges posed by the impact of COVID-19 are truly unparalleled. As SEWA is a utility company, it is being placed under immense pressure by the current crisis. However, its ingenuity, perseverance, and flexibility are precisely the qualities that will help it weather this storm successfully.

Furthermore, I would refer to the 2007–2008 global meltdown, the financial collapse that triggered the full-blown Great Recession, as a comparison. Although the whole world was entrapped in the economic menace, the public stayed loyal to certain brands because those brands were filled with a deep-rooted meaning that was beyond profitability.

Similarly, SEWA is portrayed as a reliable, efficient, and sustainable utility company that believes in cost leadership. When I took the helm of SEWA in 2014, one of my top priorities was to gain a competitive edge by increasing productivity and efficiency, eliminating waste, and controlling costs.

Living in a period of heightened uncertainty causes one's normal decision-making process to break down. To avoid analysis paralysis, organizational cultural fundamental ideals and authentic business philosophies are mandatory. Therefore, SEWA's first and foremost objective was to create its 15 winning principles and 11 cultural core values, which have helped it avoid the endless number of "known unknowns" out there.

It is important to remember that whatever dramatic changes or events occur, there is always the potential for new opportunities. Downturns require individuals and businesses to re-think, retool, reskill, and adapt, often resulting in long-term greater efficiency.

SEWA has held onto its authenticity by relying on its 15 winning principles and 11 cultural core values (as seen in *The SEWA Way*). More importantly, SEWA has demonstrated its built-to-last branding cycle—the 8Ps—to sustain the eye of the hurricane, the impossible made possible.

The SEWA 8Ps are **p**assion, **p**roduct, **p**ositioning, **p**romise, **p**ersonality, **p**resentation, **p**ersistence, and **p**erception. They are the constitutional elements of this book and form the bedrock of the SEWA branding cycle. The elements work in a complex yet seamless way to create SEWA's brand image. The 8Ps cycle can help you overcome yesterday's brand models and transform the traditional organizational branding efforts.

DÉJÀ VU

The mess that you may be going through now, I have been through, full throttle, during my six years of tenure at SEWA:

a sharp fall in profits leading to a financial crisis, cutbacks of full-time workers, halted operations, and uncertainty about the future. I was given SEWA's helm when it was nearing a catastrophic death, biting the dust, beaten and bruised by corruption and the ill-meaning efforts of the previous management. In addition to overrun projects and poor project execution, the SEWA brand had been murdered through mismanagement. I found myself at a historic crossroad, managing short-term pressures against medium and long-term uncertainties, which meant I had to keep the wolf out of the house and keep the business roaring.

This book's unique conversational style will keep you hooked right from the beginning. This book isn't for the faint of heart. It's not about the wistful thinking; it's about the next step—the harder step—*the doing*. It's about taking responsibility for designing your organization's brand. This book will ensure that you begin to think in the realm of the impossible.

This is a seminal book built around an idea that will clarify, energize, and transform the brand of your business. The SEWA 8Ps cycle offers a specific, detailed, and useful way to change the way you talk about your company's brand. I have intentionally kept the book short and succinct so that it can be a cover-to-cover read for all. In only a few hours, this book will demystify the lessons about branding that I've garnered throughout my time at SEWA. My hope is that the brilliant 8Ps cycle becomes the playbook for everything you do that is branding-related.

Unlike my other books, this one is not a fable but rather a comprehensive guide. I've tried to make it as engaging to read

as possible, using real-world examples and partners' stories to illustrate my ideas.

The economic downturn caused by the COVID-19 pandemic might have brought you to your wit's end. Fret not. Implementing the 8Ps will either bring you back on track or set you on the road to recovery. Be optimistic!

What follows is an eight-part cycle that will change the way you look at your brand or tell your brand's story. This cycle will work for you, regardless of your industry.

Respectfully,

Rashid Alleem
Sharjah, UAE
September 21, 2020
International Day of Peace



How to Read the Book

This is an easy-read book; it is not a heavy, theory-based textbook. To get the most out of it, I encourage you to do three things:

1. Read the book in sequence. Comb through it. Don't skip. Understand the SEWA 8Ps cycle.
2. Filter your customer through the cycle. Each element is unique and plays a pivotal role.
3. Clarify your message so more customers listen to you.

The rest of the book will tell you the previously unheard story of my passion for building the SEWA 8Ps brand cycle. My point is this: the 8Ps cycle you are about to discover works, and

because it works, I want you to have it. There are many recipe books for how to write and implement a good brand cycle, and SEWA's eight-step cycle is probably the most well-regarded in the UAE. It's a mix of theoretical and practical.

So, grab a pen, a notepad, and perhaps a highlighter to mark the sentences you want to remember.



Meet the SEWA 8Ps Team

“It’s A Small World” Team

When it comes to team-building, I live by my definition of a team: “A team is a selected group of people with different abilities, talents, experiences, and backgrounds who have come together for a shared purpose. Despite their individual differences, the common goal provides the thread that defines them as a team.”

Remember, when your team is motivated and unified, they’ll do some things differently. They’ll stay passionate and focused throughout the task. When unified people are given a clear, meaningful purpose, they are able to move forward faster, overcoming challenges even when the leaders are absent.

I have always surrounded myself with a team of hard-charging managers who shared both my values and work ethic. I want

people who *dare* to be different. They challenge your thinking, fuel your ideas, boost your competitive edge, and make you and your business winners. By surrounding myself with such competent people, I have been able to focus on the big picture while others helped with daily operations. I experienced higher morale, more enthusiasm, and speedier decision making.

The late American anthropologist Margaret Mead once said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens, can change the world; it is the only thing that ever has.”

I have never been in a big group that worked well; they’re more likely to spark controversy than closeness. Countless studies have shown the benefits of smaller teams. Most teams struggle simply because they are too large. I like what Jeff Bezos said: “If you can’t feed the team with two pizzas, it’s too large.”

What It Takes To Make Them Great

First and foremost, while forming a winning team, I look for twelve basic attributes. Throughout my life, I have formed successful teams by implementing the following twelve tenets of team formulation:

1. Leadership: Inspire teams to accomplish tasks.
2. Leadership Coalition: Determine which capabilities and mindsets will make the biggest difference.

3. Team Leadership: Focus on the emotional skills needed to effectively lead the team; this includes communication and inspiration.
4. Vision and Purpose: Know where the team is going and why.
5. Passion: Identify those with passion and passionate energy. They move and see opportunity.
6. Shared Values: Look for those who feel passionate about the work they are doing.
7. Shared Roles: Hold them accountable. Avoid finger-pointing, misunderstandings, and stepping on others' toes.
8. Goal: Have a clear, common goal.
9. Size: Have the smallest possible number of people on board.
10. Thinkers: Have both right-brained and left-brained thinkers. Left-brained thinkers are mostly analytical and methodical in thinking. Right-brained thinkers are more creative or artistic.
11. Stay Focused: Strive to achieve, and say no to any activity that would divert your efforts.
12. Campaign for Transparency: Have no trouble spreading the word if you go in the right or wrong direction.

While these kinds of attributes seem obvious in retrospect, I see leaders overlooking them time and again. Once you've followed these tenets, rest assured that the team will be primed to hammer away at any obstacle. They can "wring the towel" and get the last ounce of possibility out of any idea.

The SEWA 8Ps Team

Meet the SEWA dream team who made the impossible possible and created an iconic brand.

1. Hasan, Chief Astonishment Officer: Three things define him: a passion for experiences, a bias for action, and a sincere love for all things creative.
2. Fatima, Chief SHEngineering Officer: She provides safety management advice and engages staff in programs that ensure safe practices in the workplace.
3. Syeda, Chief Knowledge Officer: She is responsible for managing the organizational intellectual capital and SEWA's knowledge management practices.
4. Ali, Chief Strategy Officer: He has the vision, tools, and frameworks of a strategist, along with good relationships with the leadership team.
5. Ahmed, Chief Cost-kill Officer: He is known for his cost innovation practices at a very small and practical level.
6. Talal, Chief Listening Officer: His primary focus is on gathering information from customers and employees

to develop ways for an organization to enhance their relationships with both.

7. Boutheina, Chief Branding Officer: Her primary focus is on SEWA's brand image, experience, and promise.

8. Mariam, Chief Technical Marketing Engineer Officer: She works in a cross-functional way to ensure that the products and services we bring to the market are successful in a wide variety of customer engagements.

As you see, there are four gentlemen and four ladies. What does this bring to your mind? Of course, gender equality. I am a proponent of women's empowerment. I ensure that I provide equal growth opportunities for men and women under my leadership. I truly believe that gender equality is critical to the development of any organization, or nation for that matter (you can read more in my book, *I am Committed to 17 SDGs*).

I would cite one of my famous quotes: "The true test of a great visionary organization is not the healthy balance sheet, nor the size, nor quality certificates, no, but the kind of men and women the organization turns out."

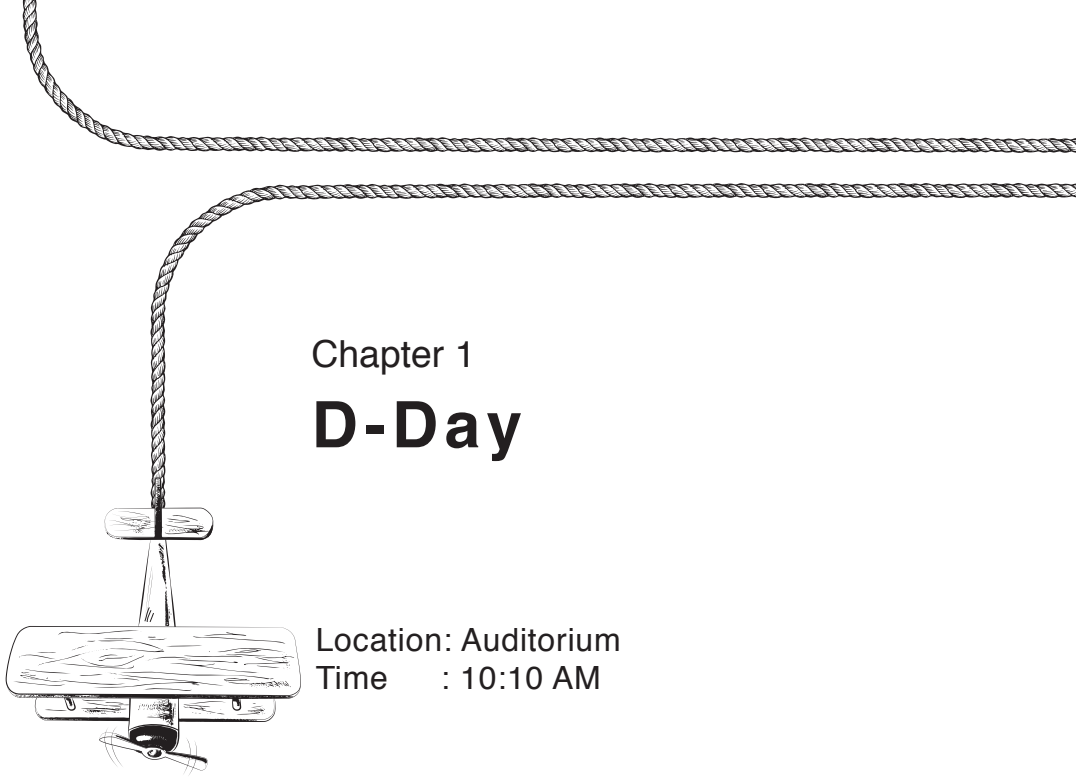
Below are our extended team members—the *Three Musketeers*—whom you will find in SEWA with only one clear objective: "Champion superior customer service." All three are heavily involved in customer experiences and quality improvement. You will meet them on and off throughout this book. They are called the Three Musketeers because they work hand-in-hand towards a common purpose.

The Three Musketeers

1. Safeer, the Customer Engagement Officer, specializes in creating customer loyalty and engagement at each touchpoint.
2. Nissy, the Customer Voice Officer, specializes in capturing real-time customer insights and knowing future trends.
3. Sulu, the Customer Touchpoint Officer, specializes in customer journey mapping and maintaining a positive customer experience.

Let's begin!

Part One



Chapter 1

D-Day

Location: Auditorium

Time : 10:10 AM

It was a bright, sunny day. The sky was painted a bright blue. The scorching heat of the sun could easily penetrate through one's body. Warm winds. High humidity. The unpleasant weather and windy conditions even forecasted dust storms.

It was an important day. It was “SEWA monthly gathering day.” There was a lot on my plate for this month's gathering. One of the best practices that I introduced in SEWA, once I joined as the chairman back in 2014, was a monthly meeting of employees, senior managers, and executives under the theme of “let's get together.”

This “must-do” once-a-month meeting is significant for a plethora of reasons. First, I address the employees with a short motivational speech at the beginning or end of each

event. Second, outperforming SEWA employees are awarded and rewarded for their monthly achievements.

We have a special place to conduct this large gathering. We conduct it in Auditorium. SEWA has an in-house auditorium that can accommodate over 300 employees. This ostentatious place has a raised stage and special lighting equipment to cover different kinds of events.

Usually, I make some vital announcements that day, and we wrap up the meeting with one-on-one discussions with the employees, followed by a corporate breakfast called “breakfast with the chairman,” consisting of traditional UAE cuisine. This is one of the anticipated moments of the day. Apart from the mouth-watering, finger-licking, lavish breakfast that we all savor, the employees grab this opportunity to mingle and indulge in conversations pertaining to their personal and professional lives. I move freely among the crowd, quite accessible to all. I welcome their tête-à-tête as well as heart-to-heart discussions. For most of them, there have been instances when they have shared their dreams and aspirations with me and solicited my opinion. I laugh and tell them my signature statement: “Keep challenging tomorrow.”

I believe in harnessing the power of the “voice of employee” and open communication. I admit that feedback, even negative, needs to be shared. In fact, I am one of the region’s forerunners in implementing an “open-ear” policy for both my employees and our customers through the main website, via a unique initiative called “Communicate with the Chairman.” My personal email is published, and a dedicated team looks

into the emails. This initiative helps us access the untapped resource of employee feedback.

Talent management is about great conversations, and it does not depend on an “open door” alone; it starts with our presence and open ears. The challenge for leaders is to slow down and actually listen—really listen—and *do* something with what they hear.



The Day

Standing on the stage, I said, “Lovely morning, everyone. How have you been doing? I’m sure all of you are excited for the day.”

All eyes were focused on me with a warm, good morning look.

“As you all know, this week is earmarked as the ‘Week of Strategies.’ I have allocated my days from 7 am to 7 pm to any employee, teams, or departments who would like to share an idea or initiative that can help SEWA sail through the turbulent times that the world is encountering because of COVID-19.”

The employees were awestruck.

I continued, “At our last monthly gathering, we launched our SEWA vision 2025. Remember?”

I added, "It was a momentous day for SEWA; we pledged to execute the dynamic organizational vision in conventional and novel ways. Hence, allocating my days from 7 am to 7 pm is a step towards my commitment to execute our SEWA vision 2025. What do you say to that?"

Ali, the chief strategy officer, smiled and said, "Thank you, sir, for being with us today. We look forward to the monthly gathering day to listen to your inspiring words of wisdom. It really keeps us running."

He continued, "But, someone, please pinch me. Did I hear 7 am to 7 pm? When the whole world is self-quarantining and staying at home, contrarily, you are working for 12 to 15 hours a day." He paused for a moment. "I hope it won't be our new working hours?" he asked with a cat-like smile.

Hasan laughed, clapping him on the back.

Mariam interrupted, "Is this going to be our *Karoshi*?" (Karo-shi, the Japanese term for death by overwork.)

I replied, "Hahaha...ok, ok, relax. Let me clarify this point. For most of us, we will still keep working remotely and continue working from home."

I chuckled, "I have too much to do. I am proud to be a non-conformist. I love to be the oddball. Perhaps I believe, now, the world needs more innovative ideas than ever before. Leaders of the world need to join 'hands and heads' to come up with ingenious strategies that are built-in and not bolted on, rendering a higher purpose to their businesses."

Ali answered, "Hats off to you, sir. You are always setting the bar higher. Your responses to challenging situations are exemplary. You are our role model."

"Thanks, Ali. So, as you all know, I will be available from dawn to dusk, lending my ears to your strategic ideas. Please feel free to speak your mind. Have your say. This is your chance to create a difference," I said.

"Shall we move on? I have an important announcement today. Hold your breath, cross your fingers; I will be announcing the launch of an exclusive project."

The audience looked mesmerized.

"At this time?!" someone from the audience asked, with exclamation.

"Dear associates, we remain hopeful, optimistic, and confident about the future of our brand. There can be times when we just have to hang on to our own optimism, keep believing, and keep moving forward. Optimism gives us positive energy during troubled times. Remember what Tom Peters said: 'Chaos and uncertainty are market opportunities for the wise.' It is the launch of the SEWA 8Ps."

The room froze into silence.

"The 8Ps is the new SEWA branding cycle," I said.

The crowd was still catching their breath.

Hamad, the head of the transmission department, raised his hand to speak. I waved back at him to hold his question.

I said, "Wait, there's more to it. I have cherry-picked a special team who will be responsible for executing the 8Ps, and they will be called the SEWA 8Ps Team."

The audience rejoiced at the news.

I spread out my hands amidst the tumult of rejoicing and said, "I have made up my mind as to who all will be the apt star performers included in this vital project."

"Who are those lucky champs? I hope I am one of them!" someone from the audience asked.

"Who asked the question?" I asked.

"It's me, sir; I am over here."

"Oh, it's you, smart Yasser," I said. "I'm afraid you are not on my list this time!"

The audience cracked into loud laughter.

"Keep your eyes glued onto the big screen here," I said with a little laugh. "I want you all to welcome the employees with a thunderous round of applause because they are the champions par excellence. Rather, they are the guardians of the 8Ps cycle, our new SEWA branding cycle."

“So, this eight-part cycle has eight guardians. Are you ready to meet them?” I asked. “Shall I disclose their names?”

“Please do. I can’t take this suspense anymore,” commented Mona, the chief excitement officer.

“Alright, here we go. Let’s join our hands to welcome the first guardian of the 8Ps cycle: Fatima, chief SHEngineering officer,” I said excitedly.

Fatima climbed up on the stage with excitement.

I said, “As we are all aware, SEWA has been supporting the Climate Neutral Now Initiative by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change for our subsidiary company, Zulal Water, for the last four years. It’s the first in the whole UAE, and Fatima is the protagonist behind this extraordinary achievement. With her tireless efforts and commitment, she has played an instrumental role in placing SEWA on the international sustainability map.”

The room echoed with cheering.

I said, “Let’s welcome the second guardian, Syeda, the chief knowledge officer.”

I nodded at her to come up.

A deafening round of applause filled the room.

“You may ask, why Syeda?” I asked.

I said, “Indeed, Syeda has made remarkable contributions to SEWA during her five-year tenure. She played a pivotal role in acquiring the ‘Great Place to Work’ title for our organization. I hope you all remember that Mr. Michael Burchell, the CEO of Great Place to Work himself, flew down from California to hand over the prestigious certificate to us.”

Roaa, the chief lightovation officer, said from the crowd, “Yes, I remember it vividly. The celebration was held in Sharjah Aquarium. It’s a fascinating, hidden world of the deep sea with its amazing creatures. Sharjah Aquarium is the first and largest government educational center in the UAE. We enjoyed a close-up look at the local fish species and learned about Sharjah’s historic coasts and ports. It was an amazing experience for all of us.”

Everyone listened to her. I smiled back.

“The third guardian is very special. Ali, chief strategy officer, please come up on stage,” I announced. “He is the man behind the hockey-stick profits in the history of Zulal Water. He ensured that Zulal became one of the fastest-selling potable water brands in the UAE.”

Everyone rejoiced and applauded.

“Next, let’s welcome the fourth guardian; it’s Boutheina, chief branding officer. She has played an outstanding role in achieving SEWA’s vision and positioning SEWA as one of the best authentic organizations in the world.”

I continued, “Recently, she enabled SEWA to acquire the ‘Excellence in Quality’ certificate from the Socrates Committee in Oxford, the UK.”

“Wow, wow. That’s incredible!” Asma, the chief innovation officer, rejoiced from the crowd.

“Very well, now, it’s time we call the fifth guardian on stage,” I said. “Give a big round of applause to Mariam, the chief technical marketing engineer officer. Indeed, she is the brain behind this creative title. With her creative approach, she has forged her way towards becoming a promising future leader of SEWA.”

The crowd greeted her with applause.

“Moving on, the sixth guardian has an interesting title. It’s a new one in the league. It’s the chief astonishment officer.”

“That’s such a creative title,” someone from the crowd yelled out.

I asked, “Do you want to know why I have picked this star employee?”

“He was conducive to the celebration of the International Customer Service Week in 2018 and 2019 and also helped us get recognized alongside international brands that celebrated International Customer Service Week.”

“Bravo, what an achievement,” Afra, the chief efficiency officer, cried out loud.

I said, "Now, another favorite title. The chief listening officer, Talal. Please come up and join the team."

"So, what makes him our favorite?" I asked the audience.

"Yes, you read my mind. The idea of renaming our call center to the 24/7 listening center was his brainchild. Talal, come on stage; you are the seventh guardian."

There was a burst of applause that lasted for several seconds. I wasn't surprised to see this welcome. Talal was one of the beloved managers at SEWA.

"Here's the last one. Any guesses?" I asked, looking at the crowd. "It's the chief cost-kill officer, Ahmed. Our eighth guardian. I have seen him on almost every local purchase order; I am proud of the negotiation skills he has displayed that have resulted in saving SEWA thousands of dollars. As they say, a penny saved is a penny earned."

Ahmed climbed up on the stage swiftly.

I said, "So, here we are. Ladies and gentlemen, let's congratulate the eight guardians of the SEWA 8Ps with a thundering round of applause."

"Let's give them a standing ovation," Isra, the chief techno-savvy officer, commented from among the audience.

The audience rose from the seats and showered the eight guardians with a roar of applause.

I announced, "Congratulations to all. You all are the chosen ones: the remarkable outperformers who will be creating history soon. Your contribution to SEWA has been phenomenal so far, and I have a deep-seated belief that each one of you, with your unique attributes, will add glory to the eight pillars of the SEWA 8Ps cycle. Be proud of yourself. It's your day. It's your moment. Seize it. Live it. Indeed, it's a memorable occasion."

"I want you all to get to know each other more because you will be cohesively working together towards a mission that is larger than life. Mind you! This assignment may bring you sleepless nights and back-breaking days. So, are you ready to embark on this incredible journey with me?" I said.

"After exchanging pleasantries with each other, I want you all to disperse for today and meet me tomorrow at 9 am for a kick-off meeting at Knowledge X."

"Thank you, sir," Fatima said, "On behalf of the team, I would like to extend our gratitude towards you for selecting us as the sole guardians of your SEWA 8Ps cycle."

Boutheina added, "We won't disappoint you. We'll make you super proud."

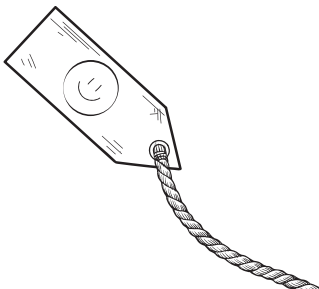
"Very well, then. Let's catch up tomorrow," I said.

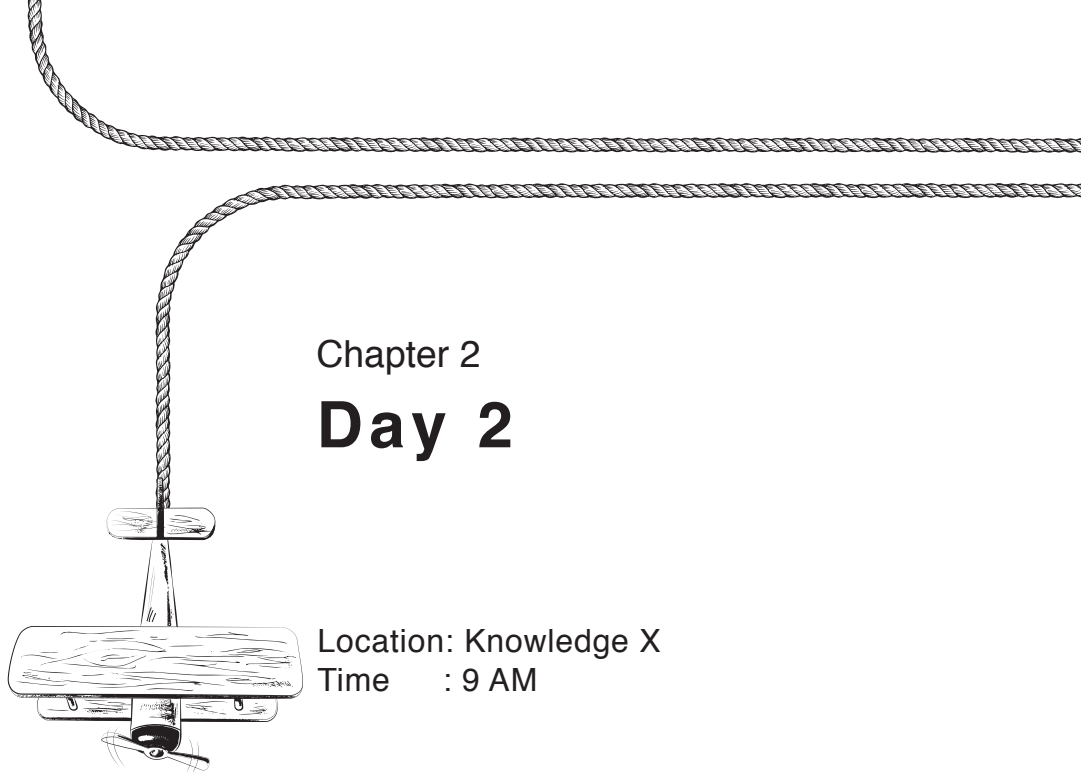
"And for the rest of you," I said, turning to the audience, "Keep up the great work that you've been doing. I am proud of each one of you. I will see you all next month, with more surprises and great news for our organization. Until then, keep challenging tomorrow."

“Sir, what about the breakfast outside?” asked Omar, my office manager.

“Oh, gosh, I have almost forgotten about it. Thanks for reminding me. Please join me, all,” I said with laughter.

I finished up the monthly gathering, and the audience dispersed to their respective offices.





Chapter 2

Day 2

Location: Knowledge X

Time : 9 AM

The SEWA 8Ps team had assembled in the SEWA “Knowledge X” room. Everyone was smiling, debonair, and excited, except Ali; he looked like he had a hangover, looking for his favorite black Americano coffee.

Knowledge X

Knowledge X is the room where sharing tacit knowledge takes place—the knowledge that employees acquire through their work experiences, successes, and challenges at SEWA. This magnificent room creates an intense environment that demands people’s best thinking and drives sound decisions through constructive debate and decision-making.

The English letter “X” also denotes the multiplication symbol. We use this mark to symbolize the increase in produc-

tivity, augmenting the capability of employees by catering to them with a rigorous environment that tethers their mental acumen, thereby meeting our ultimate objective of becoming a continuously innovative learning organization.

I chose this room for the meeting because the main purpose of the Knowledge X room is to connect employees (in any field or discipline) with each other so they can discuss their work, learn from one another, and achieve improvements in results.

One of the highlights of the room is the Einstein corner. This corner has a 3D wallpaper of Einstein sitting at a nineteenth-century study desk. The main attraction is that there's an empty chair opposite of Einstein, and if anyone sits on that chair, it appears that they are sitting with Einstein. Nevertheless, this has become a famous place to click memorable photographs. The corner has become so famous that when we receive local or overseas delegates, the first thing they request is to see the Einstein corner and take a picture.



I began my speech, "Good morning, team. Once again, many congratulations to all of you." I continued, "Each one of you has made extraordinary contributions to SEWA and delivered smashing results so far. Hence, I selected you to execute another exclusive project that is dear to me." I added, "As announced yesterday, you will be working along with me to implement the SEWA 8Ps branding cycle."

I stopped for some time to sip my coffee.

“You are aware of the fact that successful strategies are slow-cooked, *not* microwaved. To ensure the success of my branding cycle, I want you to absorb the nuances and subtleties of the strategy. Grasp it as an apprentice would. Commit to it as an admirer would.”

“In short, I want you all to live and breathe the SEWA 8Ps branding cycle for the next two weeks.”

“Two weeks!” exclaimed Ahmed, the chief cost-kill officer.

“Yes, you heard me right,” I responded, “Two weeks of rigorous training on the SEWA 8Ps. Well, to be precise, it’s eight hours for eight days. Each day will be designated to one part of the 8Ps cycle. We will delve deep into each segment individually at length, and I will personally assign one guardian to each segment for seamless execution and implementation,” I continued.

“However, you will get one day each week to catch up with your department team and other assignments.”

Ali asked, “What day would that be?”

“I leave it up to you all to come to a consensus about that one.”

“How about Thursdays, the last working day before the weekend?” Boutheina asked.

Mariam added, “Hmm. No, how about the hump day, the middle of the week? That’s one of the busiest days, isn’t it?”

I guess we could catch up with our other important assignments on this day, and the rest of the week, we could be engrossed in the 8Ps cycle.”

I smirked and said, “Well, take your time. Come to a unanimous solution and let me know about it. Make your call.”

I added, “So, let’s catch up tomorrow to clarify our priorities. Tomorrow, we will spend time formulating team decision-making structures to help us digest uncertainty and focus our attention on pressing tasks.”

I paused and said, “I want you all to project not only leadership but humanity.”

Syeda asked, “Humanity?”

I looked at the team and said, “By humanity, I mean attentiveness and awareness of others. Individuals do not function in isolation but are part of a network that takes shape; decisions made by one person can directly impact the survival of another person. Our coexistence is codependent. I want to echo that and expand upon it. Each person can contribute in unique, valuable ways to make the SEWA 8Ps cycle successful. The choices you make in the coming days and weeks will contribute directly to the success of our branding efforts, so please take it seriously. But there’s a list of a few attributes that I want you all to showcase.”

Hasan raised his eyebrows.

“Be good judges of character, able to gather and analyze information efficiently, and willing to come up with your own

ideas while having the leadership skills and charisma to engage people.”

I paused and concluded, “In short, you’ll need to think and act for yourself.”

“Whoa, that’s ambitious!” Mariam exclaimed.

I saw the room sink just a little at the prospect of taking in such an ambitious statement.

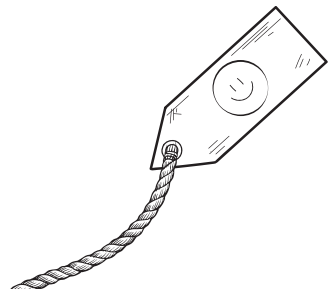
Talal took a deep breath and added, “I look forward to productive meeting days ahead. I like challenging tasks.”

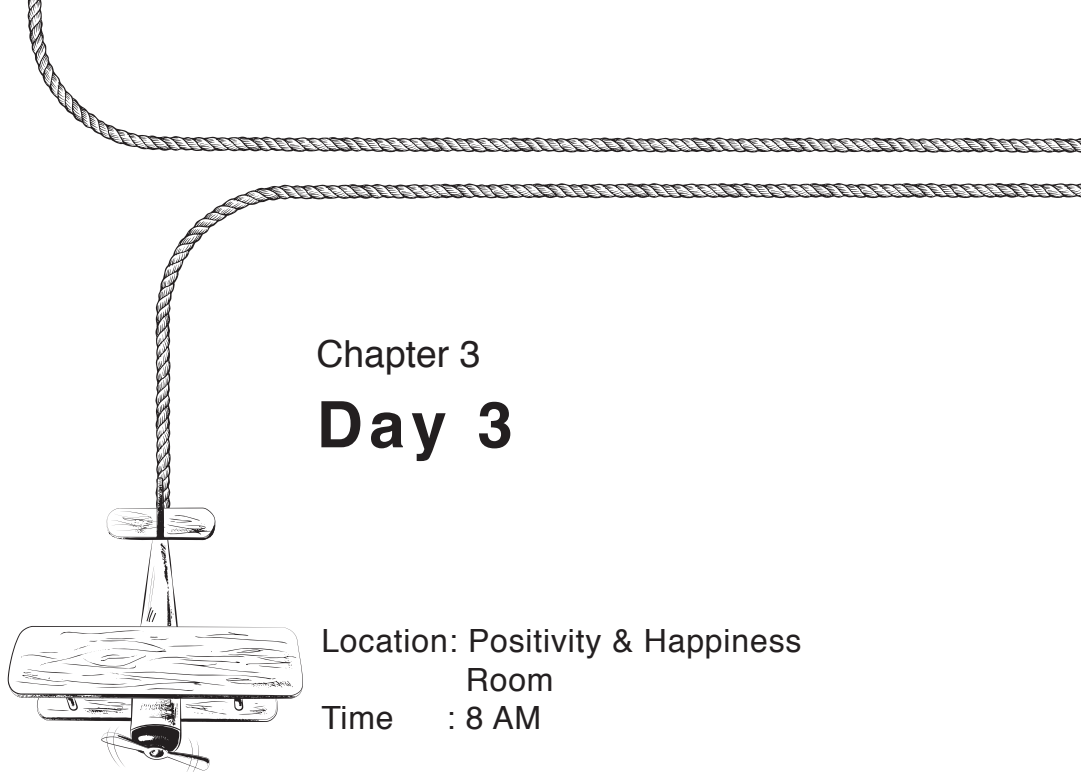
I smiled and continued, “And I’m not joking when I say that. Our ability to engage in passionate, unfiltered meetings about what we need to do to succeed will determine our future as much as any products we develop or partnerships we sign.”

I wanted to end the session early and send everyone back to work on a relative high.

“For now, just be on time, full of energy, positive, and excited to be a part of the wonderful team to turn the dream to reality. The heavy lifting is yet to come. Have a great evening. Stay safe,” I said.

They thanked me and returned to their offices full of positive energy.





Chapter 3

Day 3

Location: Positivity & Happiness
Room
Time : 8 AM

Positivity & Happiness Room: Flashes From The Past

Back on October 1, 2017, I had invited Astronaut Frank de Winne, Head of the European Astronaut Centre Department, to visit SEWA. In fact, I intentionally invited him on this day to inaugurate our “Positivity & Happiness” Room. He gladly accepted my request, and to my surprise, his wife Lena also accompanied him, along with other delegates, such as Her Excellency Dominique Mineur, Ambassador of Belgium to the UAE.

Awestruck by the enthusiasm and positivity around, Frank de Winne was so enamored by SEWA’s new image and the evident brand turnaround that he said, “The positivity around is contagious. Please allow me to take some pictures because

I'm going to steal some of your ideas and implement them back home," which instilled me with pride.

In a truly amazing demonstration, Frank shared his space journey in the form of a presentation to my team. His entire elaboration was so explicit and vivid that we felt as if we were actually with him in the space shuttle. What an awesome experience it was! He showed us some priceless footage taken from his six-month stint in space.



The SEWA 8Ps team gathered in the Positivity & Happiness room. This spacious room flashes modernistic décor with bold colors, unusual chair shapes, and striking artwork, encouraging creative idea-sharing for all employees. The room is built around the theme that "creativity is intelligence having fun." It is an inviting area, open for all employees to break out of established meeting patterns and look at things from a fresh perspective. As the name implies, this area brings a lot of positivity, and it's a hub for developing entirely new approaches for our business.

The room is famous for its recess activities and games, as well. The eight-foot billiards table and the PlayStation consoles are the room's main attractions, not to forget my favorites, chess, Snakes & Ladders, Ludo boards, Rubik's cubes, and Uno cards.

Usually, this room is used for a meeting that exceeds one hour. A plethora of scientific studies state that human concentration depletes after 40–45 minutes. Our minds need a break to

replenish the energy loss. Mona, the chief excitement officer, is in charge of this room. Whenever a meeting exceeds the stipulated timeframe of an hour, she encourages us to play the aforementioned games to regain our focus and attention.

I chose this room for the meeting because I wanted the team to ride high on positivity and emotional energy right from the start. The bright wall colors and wide-open windows create an inspiring, fun, vibrant environment. Plus, the space can be fully customized and features a food and beverage area for quick meeting breaks.



All of their faces were lit with excitement and enthusiasm. I could see that I had successfully built a cohesive team with an attitude of “we-ness.”

I stood up and said in a cheerful tone, “Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. I am glad to see you all in your best spirits today.”

The team smiled at each other.

I began, “It was World Humanitarian Day this week. Anyone remember?”

The team looked a little frazzled.

Fatima, the chief SHEngineering officer, said excitedly, “I do! It’s been celebrated every year on August 19. This is the eleventh year that the world humanitarian community has marked World Humanitarian Day and paid special tribute to

the real-life heroes who have committed their lives to helping others in the most extreme circumstances around the world.”

I said, “That’s right; the last couple of months have been topsy-turvy. The whole world has been engulfed by the COVID-19 pandemic. It has wreaked massive havoc. Not a single soul has been spared. Directly or indirectly, it has sabotaged and crippled the world immensely, the aftermath of which is yet to be felt.”

Talal added, “Nature is sending us a message.”

I responded, “Yes, it’s time we change the way we have worked in the past. It’s a brand new world.”

I chuckled and said, “Or, as Tom Peters rightly pointed out, it’s a new brand world.”

“It’s time; we need a home-run brand building program,” I continued, “But before we proceed towards the agenda for today, let me know which day you have decided as ‘downtime’ day.”

“We have decided that Tuesday will be our day off from the 8Ps training. What do you think, sir?” Fatima responded.

“It’s approved. I’m flexible on this one,” I replied.

I began, “As I always say, the right start is halfway through success. During the next two weeks, I am going to adopt a management style that breaks communication barriers.”

“What do you mean, sir?” Syeda asked.

I answered immediately, “It means that anyone can talk to anyone. This means you all have free access to me, allowing for an exchange of ideas that may benefit SEWA.”

They listened attentively.

I smiled and added, “It’s time we set down the ground rules of our meetings. Have a look at the meeting ground rules,” I said, showing them the slide on the screen. “Take a quick picture of the page here at the flip chart.”



SEWA 8Ps Meeting Ground Rules

All of them took out their phones and iPads to capture the slide.

I continued, “Wonderful. As Rule 3 states to use ‘parking lot’ items, we will use this flip chart for the same.”

“What’s a ‘parking lot’ item?” Ahmed asked.

“As you know, sometimes, our meetings often get off subject, and we end up spending our time on issues outside our agenda. Do you agree?” I asked.

They responded, “Agree.”

I continued, “I suggest that, from now on, when this starts to happen, we chart the tangential issue on a ‘parking lot’ chart for later discussion. That way, we will remember to come back to the issue later but still be able to accomplish our meeting’s goals. What do you think?”

“Very good idea,” they answered.

I paused and said, “I encourage you all to help me note when our conversations are getting off track.”

Ahmed said, “So, it means when the conversation sways off track with an issue worthy of consideration but off the topic under discussion, we briefly stop the meeting, right?”

I added, “Yes, then we write a quick synopsis of the issue, with permission from the group, on the ‘parking lot’ chart. As one of the last agenda items for our meetings, we will go back to

our ‘parking lot’ list and decide, as a group, how to address each item.”

I smiled and looked at them.

“First of all, we would like to thank you for providing us the opportunity to work together in cohesion to achieve a common goal,” Fatima said aloud.

I swelled with pride.

I said cheerfully, “In truth, the past couple of months might well be characterized as ‘return to reality,’ but today is a momentous day that will be chronicled in the history of SEWA. We became more mission-driven than need-driven.”

I moved briskly towards the flipchart and flipped the cover page. The agility and alacrity in my body language signaled the team that something extraordinary was in store for them.

“Here’s a revelation for you all,” I said in a resonating tone while pointing my hand towards the image on the flip chart, as shown in the following image.



The SEWA 8Ps Branding Cycle

The team was struck with awe.

“Sir, as you can see, you have left us flabbergasted,” Syeda replied.

“Don’t be startled,” I said. “Let me explain.”

“What lies in front of you is the key to SEWA’s branding cycle: the 8Ps. It encompasses the crucial elements that will

help us reach our desired destination: the hearts, minds, souls, and spirits of our target audience. As we all know, a brand name on a package is not the same thing as a brand name in a mind. Aim high. You can never achieve more than you aspire to.”

I added, “Don’t you remember what Michelangelo wisely said? ‘The greater danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it but that it is too low, and we reach it.’”

As the words came out of my mouth, I realized that the team swelled with inspiration.

I dove in. “As you can see, I identified eight concepts that serve as missionaries of this project. We need to bear in mind that these eight concepts are so powerful that I will refer to them as pillars over the course of our two weeks of eight-day training.”

“Pillars! What do you mean?”

“Pillars mean stability. Like pillars that support Greek monuments, they support everything that makes SEWA a stellar brand. I have named them the 8Ps. We will stop to evaluate each and every pillar along the way, and at the end of the mission, we will put the pillars together into one giant step to get the results that we want.”

I sensed that the team members, Mariam, Syeda, Ali, Hasan, Fatima, Boutheina, Talal, and Ahmed, received my statement in the sincere vein in which it was intended.

I continued, “The SEWA 8Ps cycle consists of the following:

1. Passion
2. Product
3. Positioning
4. Promise
5. Personality
6. Presentation
7. Persistence, and
8. Perception.”

“The above elements work in harmonious, yet complex, ways to render a unique disposition to the SEWA brand leadership.”

I added, “As declared last week, I will be appointing each one of you as a guardian for each pillar of the 8Ps cycle.”

“Sir, may I ask a question that’s been teasing my mind since Tuesday?” asked Talal, the chief listening officer.

I nodded.

He questioned, “Why did you prefer us over other employees for this mission?”

I looked at him with a small smile and answered, “It’s pretty simple. You love what you do and have a passionate commitment to it. You are all optimistic. It’s part of your job description!”

Talal was head over heels.

I continued, “Not only are you great at your jobs; you also have a deep, persuasive sense of purpose, and you get things done with your actions.”

I could see the sparkle in their eyes. My heart warmed up.

I paused and said, “What I really like about each one of you is that nothing gets in between you and accomplishing your mission, whatever the conditions. And last but not least, you are all well-regarded throughout the organization as much as for who you are as for what you do.”

“Thank you, sir, for so graciously acknowledging our contributions,” Ali said.

I nodded and went on, “You all are my ‘Accelerators.’”

The team got silent for an awkward moment, then Ali responded in his thickest English accent, “Are you playing a ‘pun’ with the UAE Prime Minister’s office, the Government Accelerators Initiative?”

I responded matter-of-factly, “Yes, I am.”

I added, “It’s a special initiative, one-of-its-kind. The UAE has the world’s first government accelerator.”

Ali requested, “Sir, if you don’t mind, could you please tell us more about it?”

I took a deep breath and said, smiling, “The UAE Government Accelerators is an extraordinary initiative to create an impact in 100 days.”

Then, I added, trying to drive the point home, “I am sure you are all aware that SEWA has joined hands in this remarkable initiative. We participated in the sixth edition of the UAE Accelerators recently; we were the only local authority among the other federal authorities.”

The team swallowed the news.

“In fact, we had an all-hands meeting yesterday morning, and I was one of the speakers to address the entire UAE Accelerators team together.”

I let the statement sit there for a moment.

“Isn’t that news that will cultivate a positive brand perception about us?”

“That’s incredible! Your words have infused us with such immense positivity that we can even move the Jais mountain,” Syeda said.

“Oh, the Jais mountains are snowy during winter. I was there last winter; it was freezing,” Ali said.

“Wow, I can’t wait to sink my teeth into the project. So, which part of the cycle do I own?” Boutheina asked.

“I will be disclosing the guardians over the course of the meetings in the following days in a very special way,” I replied.

“Now, tell me, do you all like the 8Ps cycle?” I questioned.

“Sir, we are in love with it,” answered Ali, the chief strategy officer.

“We want to stay ahead of the curve,” Fatima pointed out, “And the 8Ps will be our aid.”

“Sir, you’ve given us an incredible head start,” Syeda added.

I was delighted and ecstatic upon seeing their responses. *This is the beginning and the dawn of the new era of success*, I said to myself.

“So, let’s wrap up here. We’ve enough food for thought for today. We’ll meet tomorrow in the ‘Room of Possibilities’ to discuss the 8Ps further and learn how they are cobbled together to work in synergy.”

“Is that all for today?” asked Hasan, the chief astonishment officer.

“Yes, and if no one has anything else to add, then I think we’ll wrap this up,” I said, smiling.

“Not really. That’s pretty much it!” Mariam said.

“All right then. We are not meeting tomorrow. We will see each other next week. So, have a great weekend. Relax. Enjoy. Spend some quality time with your loved ones. The forthcoming weeks will keep you engrossed enough. Get ready for the hustle and bustle,” I added.

“What homework do you want us to do before we see you next week?” Syeda asked.

I replied with a grin, “No homework. I just want you all to complete the Myers–Briggs personality assessment test.”

“I know, it tells about different personality types,” Ali added.

I said, “It is an introspective, self-reported questionnaire indicating differing psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions. I want you all to take the test, and we’ll discuss the results when we meet next week.”

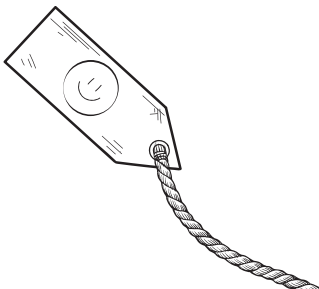
Fatima said, “Thank you, sir. Thank you for your time. And once again, thank you for choosing us for this incredible project. We are all in.”

Then she looked at the team and said, “Please take all of your papers with you and throw out any garbage on your way out.”

All of us giggled and guffawed.

As we were leaving for the day, we saw Hamad standing outside the room, offering us halwat (a traditional Arabic sweet) because he had just been promoted to the head of SEWA’s central stores.

We ended the day on a sweet note!



Part Two



Passion

Day 4

Location: Room of Possibilities

Time : 8 AM

Room Of Possibilities: Flashes From The Past

Before I take you to the “Room of Possibilities” and make you a part of the discussion that we had that day, I’m indebted to share with my readers a proud moment for me! On May 21, 2019, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, launched the world’s first virtual “Ministry of Possibilities” to incubate and develop radical solutions to the government’s most pressing problems. The Ministry of Possibilities represents the next generation of government practices and oversees top-priority national portfolios that require quick, bold, and effective decisions by applying design thinking and experimentation to develop proactive and disruptive solutions to tackle critical issues. Undoubtedly, it was

great news, and I was joyous about it. However, I had more than one reason to be happy.

In 2018, almost a year before the formation of the Ministry of Possibilities, I had renamed one of the SEWA offices the “Room of Possibilities.” I was overwhelmed to see my country in tandem with my thoughts and philosophies. It gave me a great sense of fulfillment.



The Present Moment

The team gathered in the Room of Possibilities. It’s usually where our best ideas are brewed. This is a room where we can allow our minds to “wonder” and “wander” freely. It has an interesting sign on the door that reads “Smarter. Faster. Better. Harder. Quicker.” and has a famous quote by Donovan Bailey: “Follow your passion, be prepared to work hard and sacrifice, and, above all, and don’t let anyone limit your dreams.”

For quick talks, discussions, groupthink, or pow-wow sessions, this room is the ultimate zone for conducting any huddle. Here, we go beyond the low-hanging fruit that SEWA has already identified by digging down to the grassroots level of critical subjects. We can’t forget the ultra-compact, stylized Nespresso machine nested at the corner table—heaven for SEWA coffee geeks! Employees line up here to participate in important presentations, joining conference calls, or simply shooting the breeze. This place has a great reputation for all of the above.



A Strong Purpose Brand

The team members had assembled in the room and stood scattered all around. I signaled them to be seated and said, “At this point, I want to instill a strong brand purpose in you all, which will define the *soul* of the organization, emotionally engage our customers, solve their problems, and earn their loyalty.”

Then, I paused for some time and asked, “I hope you have all completed the Myers–Briggs personality assessment that I asked you to complete over the weekend?”

The group nodded their heads. Only Talal looked a bit low.

“What about you, Talal?” I asked.

“Well, honestly, it just slipped out of my mind. I was caught up in an unavoidable situation over the weekend.”

The group listened in silence.

Speaking sternly to accentuate the seriousness of the task at hand, I said, “I declare that from this day forward, there will be a new SEWA. One that is bigger, better, and faster. Customers need a purpose-driven brand, so we need to give them something to hold on to, something that goes beyond price points and packaging. In short, the organization must establish a brand-nurturing structure and culture.”

“Sir, your last statement was a bit unclear to me. Could you elaborate on that, please?” Boutheina implored.

I smiled and said, “Let me share some examples here. The Volvo brand is positioned on safety, while Bentley is associated with various aspirational jobs. And Toyota has earned connotations on reliability.”

Mariam raised her hand, “Sir, may I add something?”

I nodded.

She said, “Back in 2011, I was in high school, and I very well remember, Steve Jobs passed away that year. Guess what? iPhone customers showed their condolences by placing flowers at the Apple stores.”

She paused and said, “Reverence for the Apple brand proves just how deep consumer loyalty can run. The new generation of consumers no longer thinks it’s odd to self-identify with a brand. Look at my iPad and iPencil. I have always used an Apple product, since time immemorial.”

“I feel it’s a matter of pride for me,” she concluded.

Syeda said, “The best brands form sustainable relationships with their customers. Consumers proudly wear brand logos. We proudly wear T-shirts printed with the Emirates Airlines logo, don’t we?”

“They are renowned brands,” Mariam responded.

I said, “Well, primarily, they are renowned brands with a strong sense of purpose.”

I continued, “I want SEWA to be a purpose-driven brand based on affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water—a brand that people can believe in, evolve with, and be willing to fight for.”

I announced, “A couple of years ago, Unilever announced that its Breyers, Fruttare, Magnum, and Lipton-brand products had all made significant commitments to responsible sourcing.”

“What does that mean, sir?” Ali asked.

I replied, “It means that Breyers would only use real vanilla from Rainforest Alliance-certified vanilla beans from Madagascar. Unilever would also only source milk and cream from farmers who don’t treat their cows with artificial growth hormones, making Breyers the largest packaged U.S. ice cream brand to do so.”

“What about Unilever’s other ice-cream brands, like Magnum, Fruttare, etc.?” Syeda asked.

“Unilever’s additional ice cream brands—Fruttare, Good Humor, Klondike, Magnum, and Popsicle—will also follow suit and cut out milk and cream from cows treated with artificial growth hormones,” I continued. “This shift makes Unilever the largest ice cream manufacturer in the world to make this commitment.”

I added, “And this one is for the ice cream lovers in the room, so now you can enjoy guilt-free indulgence, thanks to new commitments to sustainable ingredients.”

Fatima raised her hand and commented, “Magnum ice creams will now contain sustainably sourced cocoa, and all Lipton leaf tea bags in North America are now 100 percent sourced from Rainforest Alliance-certified tea farms and gardens.”

“This is a great example of a purpose-led brand. Every time I sip my Lipton dip tea, I will feel super proud to be a consumer of a sustainable, meaningful brand,” the chief knowledge officer pointed out.

“Am I clear so far?” I asked.

“Yes, sir,” They replied.



Turn Down the Noise

I smiled and said, “As General George Patton nicely put it, ‘Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what you expect, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity.’”

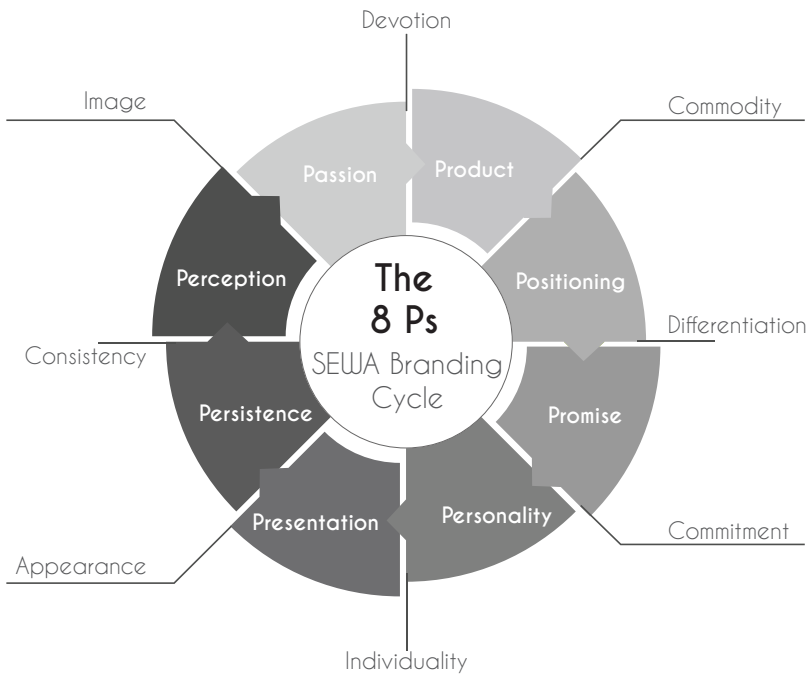
“So, I want everyone to focus on the screen. Everyone needs to be on board and take ownership of the SEWA’s 8Ps branding cycle. Fall in love with it, and show this in everything you do. Everything!”

I asserted, “Remember, branding strategies are not extras; they serve as company health barometers.”

I wanted to grab the whole team’s attention right from the start, so I included the 8Ps cycle image in my first slide.

I asked the group to focus on the screen in front of them.

I began, “The branding process can be simplified to the key steps shown in the infographic here.”



The SEWA 8Ps Branding Cycle

After I showed the branding cycle, a pin-drop silence fell over the room for some time.

After a few moments of numbness, I could hear them murmuring, “Wonderful! Can’t wait to hear the explanation.”

That signaled me to carry on. Then, I moved the pointer towards the screen and went on to explain the SEWA branding cycle to them.

I said, “The image is much more than the creative infographic you see on the screen. Let’s scratch the surface and see what’s within.”

They nodded in affirmation.

“But remember as we continue the cycle, that these are not merely techniques that I have dreamed up. There are years of experience and knowledge underpinning every pillar of the branding cycle,” I said.

Because of my consistent behavior over the past three and a half days and the confidence with which I made my remark, most of my staff seemed convinced about the significance of the training.

I stood up and began elaborating on the cycle. “Here’s an easy run-through for you.”

“Passion—the first pillar of the 8Ps cycle—is the feeling of an emotional and compelling desire or intense enthusiasm for something or someone. As Eric Thomas rightly puts it, ‘No

alarm clock needed. My passion wakes me.” Taking a cue from Eric’s quote, I repeatedly tell people around me, “No reminders needed; my passion keeps me on my toes.”

I continued, “Passion is the primary ingredient for building a brand, and I believe that it must be the first element and relevant to any branding strategy.”

I asked, “If we do not feel passionate about our brand, why should anyone else? It’s about loving what we do. All employees, especially the frontline people representing the SEWA brand, need to have an infectious enthusiasm and a strong passion for the company to achieve the status of a passion brand.”



A Purposeful Passion Brand

I started to sense that a special feeling had captured my 8Ps team. Then, I said loudly, “Want to know more about it?”

“Yes, sure,” the group said in sync.

I continued, “My dream is to see the SEWA brand on a list featuring the top passion brands in the world. This might seem unrealistic from where we sit today. You might even laugh out loud. But it’s happening. I can see it.”

Then, there was a moment of silence.

I took a deep breath and said, “We are talking about a mind-set here, a perspective, a way of thinking. This is our brand vision.” I started to explain, “Put simply, a passion brand is not a brand that consumers purchase purely out of habit; it’s a brand they have an *emotional* connection with and want to be identified with by their peers. Further, it requires an extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioral factors. If a consumer is passionate about a brand, they will engage in a much more emotional relationship with the brand and even *miss* the brand or feel loss when the brand is unavailable. It is contrary to the straitjacketed, old-style, top-down, closed brand management.”

I added, “A purposeful passion brand is built through high brand awareness via word-of-mouth or viral strategies or public relations campaigns.”

I reiterated, “Remember, even the best advertising strategies are ineffective if consumers do not pay attention. Our brand message has to cut through the clutter.”

I paused for a moment and then added, “Thus, the SEWA brand needs to engender strong, emotional, customer-focused bonds that motivate consumers to build relationships with us.”

“Hence, I am announcing the launch of a new SEWA business Instagram account: SEWA_CONNECT. This Instagram account will allow our brand to humanize our content, as well as inspire and engage our consumers. This is a sure-

shot way to revolutionize our brand into a passion brand,” I said with a smile.

The team appeared tongue-tied.

I said, “Moreover, Instagram users aren’t just active, they’re engaged.”

“Now, here’s the big news! I have elected Mariam, our chief technical marketing engineer, as the guardian of the Passion-Pillar.”

Mariam and the team appeared spell-bound.

I said, looking at Mariam, “And Mariam, I would like you to handle the SEWA_CONNECT Instagram account as one of the major tools to accomplish your mission.”

I reiterated, “I want SEWA to become a purposeful passion brand.”

Everyone cheered at the news.

Syeda patted Mariam’s back. All of them congratulated her on this news and said, “Sir, we haven’t seen her as smiling and happy as she is today.”

“Wait. I am not done yet! I have selected your first Instagram post as well,” I said.

“Wow, that makes things super easy,” Mariam responded.

I announced, “Energy Market Company (EMC), Singapore, is going to present me with an honorable ‘Certificate of Appreciation’ and a ‘Certificate of Redemption’ for helping Singapore’s sustainability efforts.”

I added, “Toh Seong Wah, chief executive officer of the company, stated, ‘Dr. Rashid’s reputation on sustainability precedes him, and we recognize him for championing sustainability by redeeming 200 RECs (Renewable Energy Credits). It’s great that he’s helping Singapore’s and EMC’s sustainability efforts.’”

I smiled and added, “So, now, just pen down this post and go live.”

I was sure that she was pleasantly surprised by this announcement, and her sparkly eyes and jovial demeanor assured me that I had chosen the apt candidate.

“Alright, team, we will wrap up our meeting here. But before we disperse, let’s have a quick look at our ‘parking lot’ chart,” I said. “Did we park any idea or discussion topic there today?”

All of us stared at the white blank flip chart together.

“Not really,” I said. “There isn’t anything. So, I was quite clear and understood by all, I guess.”

“Sir, you made everything crystal clear. You have hit the bull’s eye,” Syeda added.

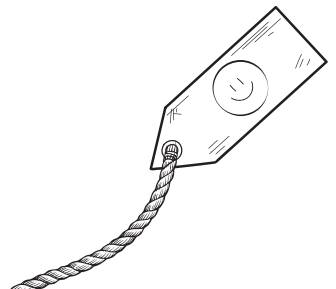
“You’ve specified every single detail and categorically defined your expectations,” Talal added.

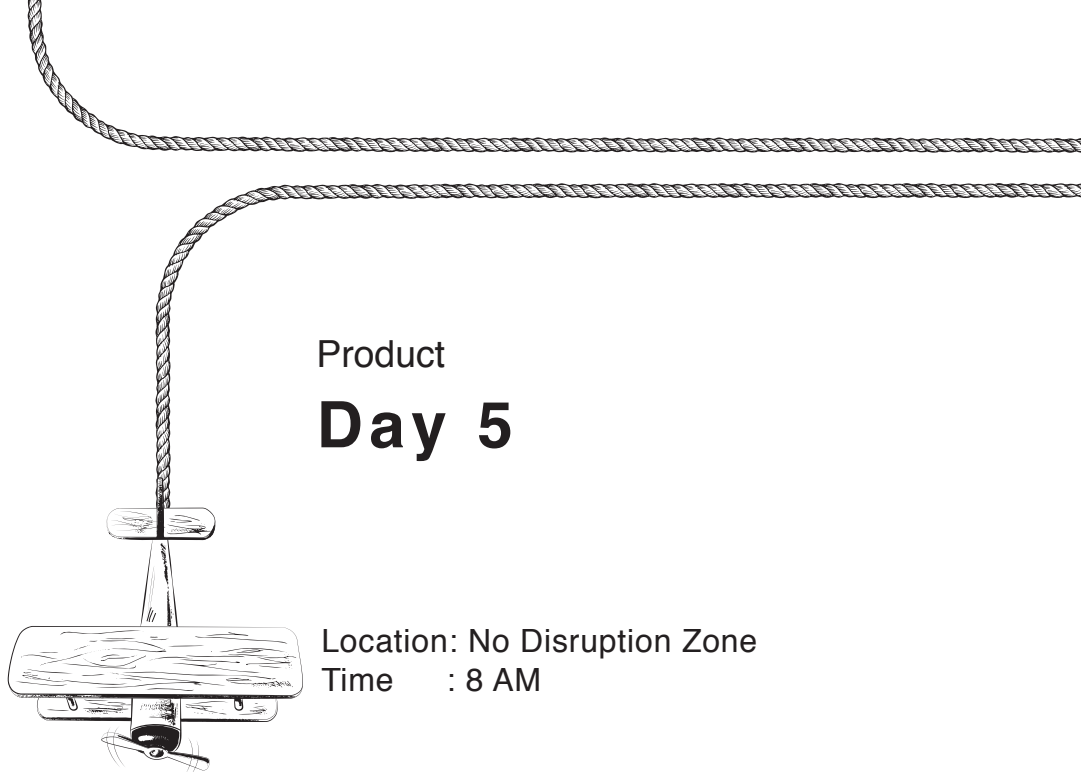
“That’s impressive!” I said excitedly.

“Let’s meet tomorrow at eight o’clock sharp at the ‘No Disruption Zone’ to learn the second pillar of the 8Ps cycle—Product.”

The team nodded and dispersed.

I stayed back in the room to play pool alone.





Product

Day 5

Location: No Disruption Zone

Time : 8 AM

No Disruption Zone

The SEWA “No Disruption Zone” was born out of a need to be free from the complications of the world and allow ourselves to just be simple. As the name suggests, this room is aesthetically designed to disconnect ourselves from any possible distraction or disruption. The room has glass walls that face east, rendering a picture-perfect sunrise view. Not only does it boast breathtaking early-morning views, but it’s also the first place in the SEWA headquarters to see the sunrise. Taking in a glowing sunrise from the horizon of the Arabian Sea, the glass walls of the room turn a soft golden color. Even if you aren’t an early bird, catching a sunrise from this room will be well worth getting out of bed.

Inside, there’s a large feng shui inspired, wall-mounted water fountain that’s, of course, a piece of art, but it also acts as a

natural humidifier while we enjoy the soothing and relaxing sound of running water. The room is sound-proofed and has a smart selection of comfortable, understated, minimalist furnishings. There's a handsome IKEA wingback chair near the sunny nook to sip morning tea or coffee, a comfortable recliner sofa to delve into a book and improve blood circulation, and a horseshoe-shaped Metronome conference table with a white, microbe-resistant laminated top, translucent taper edge, and polished aluminum legs. That's pretty much it!

This room has a whiteboard hung right at the entrance that states:

- ✓ Turn off your devices to listen to the advices.
- ✓ Choose to snooze any distraction.
- ✓ Take a deep breath to uplift your mental health.
- ✓ Smile because it's been quite a while.
- ✓ Choose progress over stress.

As the clock ticked to eight, the team stood around the conference table as close as they could huddle.

I changed the slide to the second P—Product. The slide had only one thing written on it: a question.

“What is it we're trying to brand?” I asked in a rhetoric tone.

They listened in silence.

I added, “Brands and products are not the same things. While brands must be global, products introduced to new markets should be implemented with a clear understanding of the local culture and conventions and advertised, distributed, and priced with local market conditions in mind.”

“Aha! So that’s the reason you keep mentioning the word *Glocalization* in your speeches,” Talal responded.

I said, “Think Coca-Cola, Gillette, Emirates, Colgate, Campbell, Lipton, Goodyear, and Kellogg. Each one of these was—and still is—a *very, very* strong brand, but each one is identified with specific product attributes, aren’t they?”

I challenged them: “Ok. Tell me, why would anyone check out where to buy books on Google when they could go directly to Amazon?”

Ali, the chief strategy officer, said, “The Amazon brand was one of the first to be strongly registered in the mind of the book-buying public.”

“Bang on. Now, I want you all to begin the ideation process right here.”

Noise in the room.

The answers rolled out one by one.

I was amazed by the level of knowledge the team had.

From SEWA's perspective, we wanted to rebrand the entire organization. These were my two questions:

1. What is it that our brand will do differently so that customers will side with it?
2. What are our unique selling points (USPs)?

We figured out that SEWA's USPs needed to be enhanced as much as possible in its marketing communications plan and that we needed to use our USPs as a differentiator.

Then, I asked each team member to write down one to two USPs. I was so happy to see the list the team generated. It contained a number of useful points likely to add unique value to our plan:

- ✓ Listening to customers
- ✓ An affordable, reliable, and accessible energy source
- ✓ Speed, efficiency, and effectiveness
- ✓ 24/7 listening centers across Sharjah city

With that in mind, I sat down with my team and began rearranging and reprioritizing our plan around these four things.

After contributing such productive ideas, I congratulated them by saying, "Well done, team! I am proud of you all."

Agile as Our North Star

“I want SEWA to be an innovative market leader with aggressive growth goals. The *Agile* ideals and principles will serve as our north star from now on,” I announced in a resounding tone.

“We heard you speaking about the Agile principles at your eleventh Annual Project Management Congress last year,” Talal said.

He continued, “Please tell us more about the Agile principles.”

I shook my head and said, “Let me explain. Agile is a structured and iterative approach to product development. It recognizes the volatility of product development and provides a methodology for self-organizing teams to respond to change without going off the rails.”

“Wow, this means this can be one of our USPs or our competitive advantage,” Talal said in an enthusiastic tone.

I smiled and replied, “Today, Agile is hardly a competitive advantage. No one has the luxury to develop a product for years or even months in a black box. This means it’s more important than ever to get it right.”

“From now on throughout this project, I want you to work as Kanban teams,” I said with a sheepish smile.

“What is a *Kanban* team?” Fatima inquired.

I replied, “Don’t worry, I am not using jargon here. Kanban is a framework that helps teams adhere to the Agile principles and get stuff done. It is all about visualizing your work, limiting work in progress, and maximizing efficiency. Kanban teams focus on reducing the time it takes to take a project from start to finish. They do this by *continuously* improving their flow of work.”

The team listened in pin-drop silence, full of excitement.

“Yes, I agree. This is the only way we can become an iconic brand,” Boutheina affirmed.

The team wanted to know, “How can being agile and working in Kanban teams make us an iconic brand?”

I offered an answer: “Let me give you an example. Did you know that Tabasco, our favorite spicy red sauce, celebrated its 150th anniversary this year?”

“Are you talking about that red-capped, diamond-labeled, glass bottle of hot sauce?” asked Boutheina, the chief branding officer. Her mouth was clearly salivating.

“Yes, you got it! Let me take you behind the brand,” I replied.

“Tabasco is one of those rare brands for which the word iconic doesn’t seem out of place. I have childhood memories of sprinkling Tabasco on my sandwiches,” I reassured them.

I continued, “Today, it is sold in more than 185 countries and labeled in 22 languages. The hot pepper sauce hasn’t changed

much since it was first produced in 1868; it's still run by the same family, uses the original recipe, and has the same manufacturing base on Avery Island in Louisiana, USA."

"That's a great insight," Nissy, the customer voice officer, pointed out while putting on her spectacles. "I have noticed 'Avery Island' mentioned on their packaging."

I smiled and then replied, "Furthermore, you'll be surprised to know that with approximately 150,000 visitors each year, it is also a tourist destination for Tabasco lovers across the world, providing culinary workshops, factory tours, and a Tabasco restaurant and gift shop."

"A tourist destination! I can't believe my ears. People flock to this island to catch a glimpse of Tabasco recipes?" asked Safeer, the customer engagement officer.

I answered, "Safeer, don't be surprised! Even our personal waste dump can be transformed into an attractive tourist destination."

The team sniffed and wrinkled their noses.

I began, "Over a decade ago, during my business trip to Vienna, the capital of Austria, I noticed something really striking. In fact, what was absent from the city's streets was as striking as what was present."

"Certainly, you must have noticed the endless slabs of hefty baroque and historic architecture," added Sulu, the customer touchpoint officer.

I smiled and said, “But you’ll also notice something just as striking: trash! Yes, trash! Because there isn’t any.”

I continued, “Vienna’s spic-and-span appearance isn’t just the product of an obsessive interest in public order. It’s also the result of the most innovative garbage management systems in the whole world.”

Their eyes opened wide.

I continued, “You’ll be amazed to know that unlike any other major world city, Vienna manages its residual waste entirely within the city limits and even turns trash into a key resource that keeps hundreds of thousands of citizens warm through the tough winter.”

As I was speaking, Hasan began his Google search about Vienna City.

“How do you know these facts? They sound too good to be true!” he pointed out, flashing his phone at everyone.

“I know this because, during my business trip to Vienna, I was invited to visit a waste recycling plant,” I answered.

The team looked enchanted.

“This is what I learned during my visit; during the 1960s, the growing economy and population, as well as the new packaging system, led to the volume of waste starting to rise. Faced with this steep climb, Vienna started burning trash in the 1960s and separating it for recycling in the 1980s.”

I continued, “In the summertime, about half of Vienna’s district heating energy comes from waste incineration. That’s a period when demand is pretty low, of course, and is needed mainly for hot water, a very small amount of heating, and some district cooling systems. In winter, when demand is much higher, the proportion of district heating from waste drops to a third.”

“That’s the best of both the worlds,” exclaimed Ali, the chief strategy officer. “That’s impressively large savings for the city. Viennese homes are being kept warm solely on trash that would have been destined for incineration anyway.”

Fatima, the chief SHEngineering officer, interrupted, “Trash incinerators, like any form of combustion, produce carbon emissions and add to pollution, don’t they?”

“And lead and mercury contamination,” Safeer added.

I sighed and then replied, “Well, that’s what I thought as well when I was in Vienna, listening to this story.”

I concluded, “But Vienna claims its incinerators produce 90 percent less than the legal annual limit for emissions. The system is also climate-friendlier than leaving waste unburned in a landfill site.”

The rest of the team smiled.

I added to their enthusiasm by saying, “Now, here’s the interesting part: Vienna’s power plants not only provide clean

energy but are also a part of the city's skyline, with their artistic and innovative design. A popular photographic motif in Vienna is the *Spittelau* waste incineration plant, whose façade was redesigned following a major fire in 1989 and given its present colorful, irregular structures by eco-architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser."

"That waste incineration plant is a tourist attraction?" Nissy asked.

I continued, "Since then, the former utility building has combined the topics of waste, energy, and art in a fascinating way. Tours are offered to let visitors take a peek behind the scenes of this technology and learn more about environmental and climate protection measures."

I recalled, "I vividly remember that on my tour of the plant, I got an insight into Vienna's waste, recycling, and disposal system, as well as the environmentally friendly generation of thermal heat and hot water."

Safeer confirmed with a smile, "Aha. Now I realize what makes the recycling plant a place worth visiting."

"As they say, don't judge a book by its cover," I concluded.

I cleared my throat and said, "Now, let us come back to our takeoff point—Tabasco's 150th anniversary."

"This is what Betts Theriot, the head of international said in a recent interview: 'We've had to modernize some of the facilities, but the way that we make the product—by aging our

pepper mash in oak barrels for three years before its bottled—is the same.’ However, ‘the biggest thing that sets us apart from our competition and accentuates our brand is that we are 150 years old and still family-owned. It’s not just the family that owns the company; it’s the multiple families that work here. There are generations of employees at Tabasco, which gives it a real sense of camaraderie.”

Boutheina responded, “Yes, I am sure now that the single reason behind the long-term success of Tabasco brand is its choice to be true to its roots.”

I nodded in consent.

I responded, “I will conclude by sharing what Tabasco wrote on its website earlier this month.”

“That would be great. Please tell us. You’ve vetted up our appetite for spicy recipes!” Fatima replied.

“Well, honestly, I didn’t know that the Tabasco bottle lying in my refrigerator for days now had such a rich cultural heritage,” Ali added. “I’m surely going to talk about this story with my family over dinner tonight.”

“Sir, please tell us; what did they write on their website?” Boutheina asked.

I concluded, “Here you go: ‘A 150th anniversary is a huge milestone for any brand, but for Tabasco, which has managed to remain culturally relevant without constantly rejuvenating

the brand, it is a huge success. We are a fun brand with a great story and heritage; we aren't just a product that was created ten years ago. We're the real deal."



CNN 100 Club

"By the way, Tabasco is also one of the 100 Club—centuri-on companies," I said, and after pausing for a few seconds, I asked, "Has anyone heard of the 100 Club?"

"Not really," Safeer quipped, "I have heard about *The 5 AM Club*, though."

"Aha, that is a book by Robin Sharma, one of the top leader-ship experts in the world. It's a nice book," I replied.

"But the 100 Club is different. It's an exciting new editorial business narrative aired on CNN International, storytelling some of the planet's greatest centurion companies—compa-nies who have completed a centennial. The 100 Club only has exceptional members."

"Let me guess, is Coca-Cola a part of the 100 Club?" Syeda asked.

"Yes, Coca-Cola is there, and so is the very tea that we drink now. Twining's, a 313-year-old company, is one of the most revered companies of the 100 Club," I answered.

They seemed mesmerized by this piece of information.

“With this, let’s go for a mini-break, but adhere to the ground rules of today’s meeting. Stick to your time slot. Come back soon; I have a lot in store for you all,” I announced.



Technical Marketing

As instructed, the team returned on time. Some of them came back before time.

They had just begun to settle on their chairs when I changed the slide. They were startled to see a slide that read “Technical Marketing Engineer.”

I said, “One area I find fascinating is the variance in the marketing role across industries and firms. Some tend to view marketing as the strategic profit and loss driver of the business. Others view marketers as communication specialists.”

I sat down at my desk. I stopped for some time, then continued, “Another area that has especially interested me is the tech industry. So, I’ve been curious about how the marketing role in tech compares to that of other industries. Marketers are the insight machine and customer voice for the entire company. Currently, I am seeing more and more people with engineering and quantitative science backgrounds entering the marketing role. Recently, even Facebook declared that it hires only technical employees for marketing. I would like to

conclude here that this has everything to do with the need for analytical rigor. It's not science versus art, though; it's science feeding art. I'm of the belief that if I can solve a problem and effectively capture and analyze data, then my insights will most impactfully inform all market messaging, marketing content, and even product development. For this reason, we will continue to see more quantitative backgrounds in marketing leadership."

I continued, "As I've mentioned earlier, SEWA is a purpose-driven organization. When a company is mission-centric, they care about connecting the company with the world—or customers. This focus can be a leading indicator that the company values the ability to solve a problem more than the product they're developing and will, therefore, need a strong technical marketing engineer to connect their products to that overall purpose. Also, look for companies that have tremendous insight into their customers and put customers at the center of the product development process. Finally, seek out tech companies that view marketing as the growth engine of the business."

"What does 'technical marketing engineer' mean in this context?" Fatima asked.

I signaled Mariam, the chief technical marketing engineer, to come forward.

I said, "Mariam, you already have this interesting job title; why don't you elaborate your job description to the rest of the group here?"

She smiled and said, “Surely, why not?”

She continued, “First, let me begin with the concept of technical marketing, then I will elaborate on the technical marketing engineer bit.”

I nodded.

She said, “Technical marketing simplifies the complex content and visualizes it for customers, focusing on the technical specifications and key features of the product. In short, it means using technology as a tool for marketing.”

The group shook their heads.

She dove in, “And a technical marketing engineer bridges the gap between the marketing side and the engineering side of things.”

Syeda said, “This means they are a technologist who works as a part of the product marketing team.”

“Yes, correct,” Mariam responded.

She laughed and explained, “Isn’t it my job to explain to both marketing and engineering groups exactly what both sides should do by extracting data from customer surveys and market research?”

Everyone smiled at her.



Beyond Prices

I began, “Over the last three years, SEWA has lowered its prices by five to eight percent a year on average. Every aspect of SEWA’s operation is subject to ongoing scrutiny to see where further costs can be taken out.”

I added, “This is not a matter of hunch but of hard, organized work. Let’s have some good examples here.”

“Safeer, please call Afra, chief efficienology officer, to join us in the meeting here.”

In a few minutes, Afra joined the group.

“Afra, why don’t you tell us all about the SEWA lamp story?” I asked.

Sewa Lamp

Afra stood up and said, “When we first launched the energy efficiency program, our goal was to promote the concept to our customers by introducing, qualifying, and commercializing efficient equipment—devices that can supply the desired power but with less energy consumption—and to ensure that the concept of energy efficiency is delivered to most, if not all of our customers. What better way to do so than by delivering it through a product that is used practically every single day—a lamp? After going through several specifications and standards lists of different LED lights, we partnered with a supplier, Jan Bouter, the managing director of Omega-lite BV

from the Netherlands, to produce three types of LED bulbs. Each comes in two color tones: warm and cool.”

The team listened in silence.

“This is an ultimate example of co-innovation, also called open innovation,” Afra concluded.

Hasan looked a little confused.

I dove in, “Co-innovation happens when a company works directly with its customers and partners to solve business problems.”

Hasan asked, “What’s the point that you want to drive home?”

I smiled and elaborated, “The whole point of open innovation is to encourage and enable companies to look beyond their internal resources and capabilities and engage with external sources of ideas and solutions.”

I continued, “It means faster problem solving and improved business agility for customers and for partners. Co-innovation enables new business streams, driving brand visibility, growth, and development of innovation-led alliances.”

“Does anyone have any other example?” I asked.

Afra responded, “Well, I am not done yet. I have another great example.”

Sewa Solar Heater

“To continue our journey of introducing new efficient equipment, the SEWA energy management and audit team and I flew all the way to Greece to witness the full production process of one of the world’s highly efficient solar heaters, SOLE s.a. This partner was selected in particular because the founder Vangelis Lamaris invented the system in the 1970s. The young engineer and team had the privilege of meeting the inventor and founder of the company and had a tour at the manufacturing facility and was even involved in the installation process of one of the solar heaters in Greece.”

Ali was listening attentively.

He quipped, “Well, the timing couldn’t be more perfect. Last night, I saw a video documentary of Mercedes-Benz’s most futuristic car.”

Hasan prompted, “Oh, I’ve been waiting for it since the beginning of 2020.”

“Yesterday, Mercedes released the actual driving footage of its *Avatar*-inspired electric vehicle in partnership with *Avatar* creator James Cameron. The car, Vision AVTR, utilizes biometric controls to help the driver and vehicle merge into a ‘symbiotic organism.’”

Hasan didn’t accept the explanation. The group looked at him poker-faced.

“I mean, instead of a conventional steering wheel, the multi-functional control element in the car’s center console allows the human and machine to merge.”

The group nodded their heads in confirmation.

I pressed forward, “Now, hold your breath; I am about to announce the guardian of our second pillar.”

I said, with a sense of conviction, “I appoint Ali, chief strategy officer, as the guardian of the Product-Pillar.”

The team cheered in excitement. Ali looked tickled pink.

I said, “Ali, I’m convinced that you will turn our products into passion products that will bring remuneration as well as set the long-term vision and strategy for our company’s products.”

Ali responded, “Will give my best at it.”

“Let’s keep the energy going and move on to the third P—Positioning—tomorrow at 8 a.m. in the Brain-Tethering Room.”

“Wow! Can’t wait for it. It’s one of the Deep Diver team’s wonder rooms,” Hasan said in excitement.

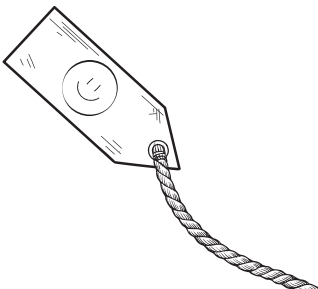
“Yes, gear up for some brain-tethering sessions tomorrow. We will be thinking out loud! Lots of food for thought to binge on,” I said.

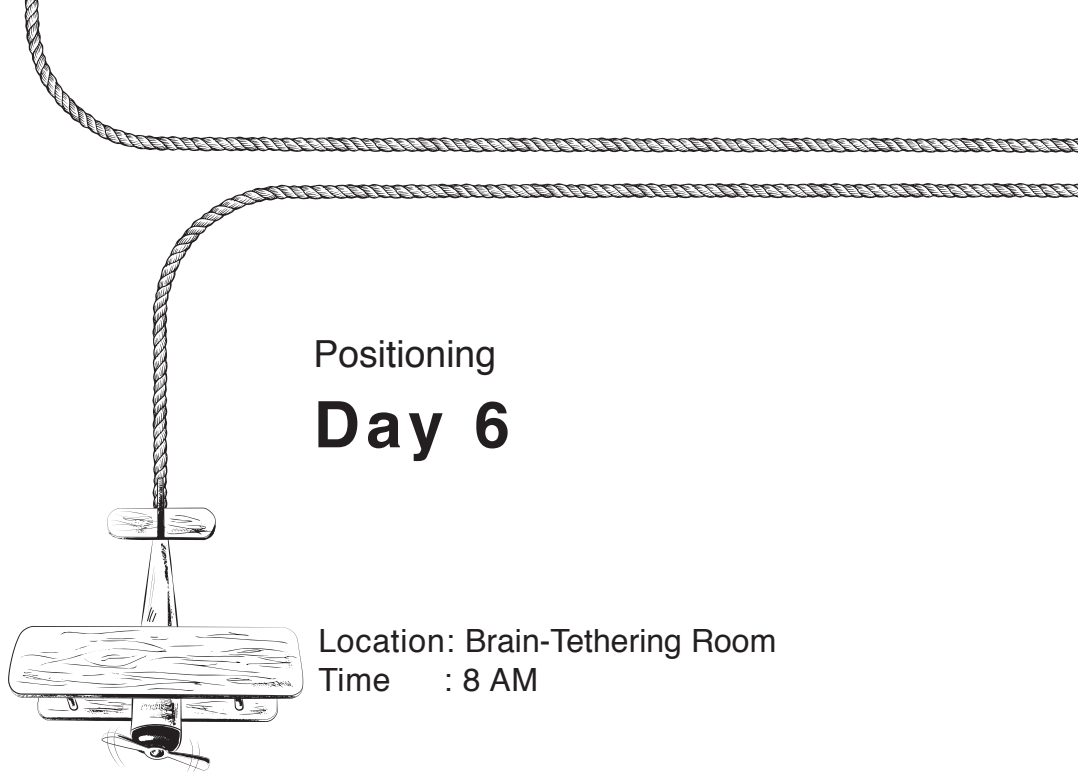
All of them nodded.

Fatima said, “Thank you, sir, for an incredible day, and we look forward to tomorrow.”

“Keep challenging tomorrow,” I smirked.

The group had a hearty laugh and dispersed for the day.





Positioning

Day 6

Location: Brain-Tethering Room

Time : 8 AM

Brain-Tethering Room

The “Brain-Tethering” Room is the beating heart of the Deep Divers’ (SEWA’s IT infrastructure team) workplace. Technically, tethering means using any data-enabled device as a modem or router so that one can access the internet with devices that aren’t able to. In simple terms, it means transferring the internet or data from one device to another. This meeting room is the place where brain-tethering decisions are made and new ideas come into being.

The room is a far cry from other meeting rooms, with a wall turned into a whiteboard, a smart screen with wireless connectivity option, and a Bose sound system with surround sound. The room also has smart, motion-activated AC control, video conferencing solutions, LED lighting features throughout, and various pre-programmed mood lighting.

No one volunteered immediately. Everyone was looking around—some hoping that one of their peers would volunteer, others seeming to ask permission to step forward.

“I feel down. My excitement is dying. Don’t know why,” Hasan said.

“No worries. It’s normal, but we need you to keep going.” I said.

I smiled and said, “No worries, we will discuss that later, if time permits.”

I said in an ecstatic tone, “Now, let’s begin our lesson for the day—positioning. Let me remind you all about my early days in SEWA. I began the *positioning* journey of SEWA with repositioning—renewal.”

“Repositioning! How is that? And why?” Syeda exclaimed and asked.

I smiled and said, “Oh, you’ve brought back some horrific memories. When I took over in 2014, SEWA was viewed as a *transactional* organization, *selling* electricity, water, and gas, and *collecting* payments for the same, with no customer focus at all. It was a customer service nightmare organization.”

I continued, “I wanted to reposition SEWA as a living, transformational organization. One that cared for the customers and the community at large.”

I added, “And that is the paramount reason I have hand-

picked you all to achieve this ambitious, larger-than-life vision.”

I said loudly, “To be among the best authentic organizations in the world.”

I paused and added, “The SEWA vision 2025 states my bold ambition loud and clear.”

Fatima raised her hand to say something.

I nodded.

Fatima said with a sense of pride, “By the way, I am delighted to announce that SEWA has received an award from the Emirates Environmental Group for the highest number of toners recycled in the corporate category. There were over 140 candidates nominated in this category. This is our third year in a row.”

The team reveled in the great news.

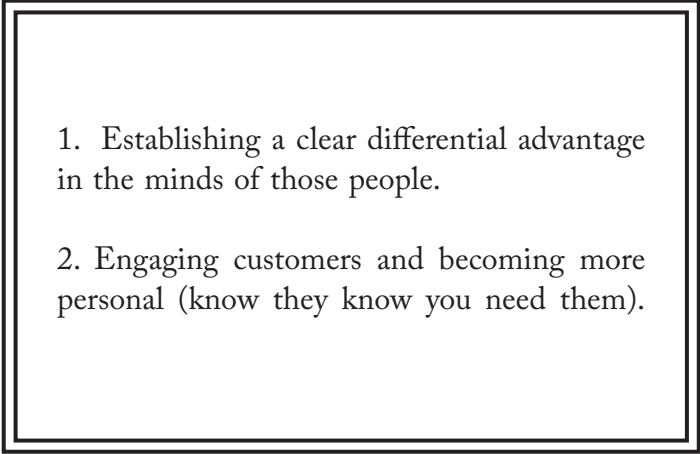
I said, “Bravo. This is amazing news, but this is just a drop in the ocean. We live in the age of differentiation. Positioning is about creating a *unique* position in the marketplace and defines where the product resides in consumers’ minds. This bit is tricky and involves two essential elements.”

Hasan asked, a bit nervously, “What are they?”

Moving towards the whiteboard, I said, “Take note of what I am writing on the whiteboard.”

Heads around the table nodded.

I wrote the following on the whiteboard.

- 
1. Establishing a clear differential advantage in the minds of those people.
 2. Engaging customers and becoming more personal (know they know you need them).

I added, “These are challenging times. The world is engulfed by the deadly COVID-19 virus, but we can face this tough time with enhanced solidarity.”

“So, these two elements are critical to cut through this upheaval,” I said, pointing at the whiteboard.

I continued, “The pandemic has affected many businesses, especially the small ones. Personally, I can vouch for daily wage earners, like the street food vendors who operate roadside eateries. They have either closed shop or are running with a hope to get back to earning a decent living once the things get back to normal.”

Mariam raised her hand to share her views.

I nodded.

She began, “Recently, a widely shared video of a small eatery run by an elderly couple in New Delhi, India, went viral, prompting an outpouring of support. It all started with a post on Instagram.”

The group affirmed with a nod.

“The small eatery, called Baba Ka Dhaba, is run by an elderly couple who have been selling home-cooked food for the last 30 years.” She continued, “They were two of the many who have been struggling to earn due to the ongoing COVID-19 situation. Their plight could be seen in the video shared by a food blogger, showing a crying old man who was lamenting his woes.”

Ahmed added, “The video, which went viral within hours of being posted, has been shared across multiple social media platforms. I also saw it in a late-night tweet.”

Ahmed concluded, “I was surprised to see that there was a queue outside Prasad’s eatery even before they could finish cooking the day’s menu.”

“Talking of social media reminds me of today’s meeting with Ms. Sirin Tekinay, the head of the engineering department at the American University of Sharjah,” I continued. “She was spellbound to see our beautiful offices around, especially the Einstein corner in the Knowledge X room.”

I looked at the group.

I continued, “I made her sit opposite of the 3D image of Einstein and took a picture for her from her phone. When she saw that the picture appeared as though she was sitting with Einstein, she was awestruck. She said, ‘Usually, I don’t post much on social media, but this picture will go on my social media right away.’”

Syeda added, “SEWA is committed to creating exceptional experiences for every customer, every time. In order to meet the increased SEWA customer demands, all of our customer service processes have undergone a digital transformation to serve our customers 24/7, including our customer engagement, customer touchpoint, and customer voice officers.”

Fatima added, “SEWA will be taking precautionary measures to ensure proper hygiene at the workplace as the world continues to battle COVID-19. The Customer Care Centers have been disinfected and sanitized throughout the lockdown, and we will continue the sanitization process on a regular basis.”

Talal said, “We have even gotten rid of our old fashioned finger-punching attendance system by replacing it with the advanced technology of facial recognition. It’s incredible to see our attendance checked in a nanosecond.”

“That’s wonderful news.” I voiced my agreement.

I was impressed by my team’s remarks and their willingness to participate in the discussion.

I turned to the rest of the team and said, “Now, let’s begin our lesson with our simple understanding of positioning.”

Talal said, “You may say that product positioning is a word or a couple of words that come to mind when people hear the name of a given brand. For example, the UAE-based, low-frill airline, Air Arabia, resonates with service, while the elite automobile brand Porsche means performance.”

Ali added, “Some companies favor building multiple positions. For instance, Audi is sophistication and progression, while Apple is simple and intuitive.”

I was glad to see the discussion going in the right direction.

“Good. This is exactly the kind of thing I’m looking for. Who’s next?” I asked.

Boutheina went next.

She added, “I want our customers to perceive SEWA as an efficient and sustainable utility.” She paused, then added quickly, “One that provides affordable, reliable, and accessible energy and water to all.”

The group smiled in a supportive way.

I couldn’t believe that the first three people to step forward had done so well. For a moment, I began to entertain hopes that the momentum would continue and that the day would be a runaway hit.



The 4Cs

By now, the 8Ps team had become engrossed and engaged in the discussion. To grease the wheels, I posed the following question:

“Has anyone heard of the 4Cs of successful brand positioning?”

Some of the employees lifted their hands half-heartedly, whereas a few were gallant enough to murmur a word or two, trying to attempt an answer. The rest of the employees ducked their heads into the laptops in front of them.

“Still thinking?” I asked.

“Would you give us some more time?” Syeda requested. “We are sure we can come up with something.”

Silence. No comments. No questions. Nothing.

As I was expecting this response, I showed them the following slide.

- 1 **Clarity** : The idea must be clear in both target market and differential advantage.
- 2 **Consistency** : Don't change your message, consistent message is required.
- 3 **Credibility** : The differential advantage must be credible in the minds of the target customer.
- 4 **Competitiveness** : It should offer something of value to the customer that the competition is failing to supply.

“Here are the four keys—the 4Cs to successful brand positioning,” I said, pointing at the screen.

“I thought your CRITICAL Thinking philosophy would be one of the Cs,” Fatima said.

“Why not?” I said. “That’s great input. We can think about that. Let’s add this point to the parking lot list.”

I smirked and added, “As Jeff Bezos, Amazon’s CEO, rightly puts it, ‘The most common question that gets asked in business is “Why?” That’s a good question, but an equally valid question is, “Why not?”’”

“In fact, I was under the impression that ‘connection’ would be one of the Cs. What do you think, sir?” Boutheina asked, scratching her head.

After she finished, Hasan jumped in. “I think you mean that while positioning a brand or a product, one needs to ensure that it connects with its targeted customers. Isn’t that right?”

A number of others voiced their agreement.

Talal nodded his head and made a note.

Then, I said something that brought the room to a roar: “If the emotional connection is missing, the brand may be regarded as insipid or bland. Tasteless!”

I chimed in, smiling, “Proud of you, team.” Exhilarated, I said, “I am impressed with your answers. Pats on your back for thinking out of the box.”

I continued, “The list may go on and on and on.”

I said, “Ladies and gentlemen, the aforementioned list looks a little incomplete to me.”

Hasan looked up from his laptop.

I continued, directing my comments to the entire group: “Successful positioning requires an iconic character. If a brand fails to have an impactful identity, then it soon gets lost in oblivion.”

The excitement in the room began to mount.

I pulled back my chair a little and said, “Hence, I add an extra element to the above list—Character.

“Yes, character. That’s a good point.” Ali said.

“I agree.” Mariam was reeling Ali in now.

I was pleased that she had agreed with him.

I went on, “Brand character can be defined as the sets of attributes and characteristics associated with a brand that give it a unique personality and recognition in the market and in the minds of the consumers.”

Boutheina interrupted politely, “Character is going beyond being unique and showing differentiation. In short, it’s about transforming a brand into an icon.”

I nodded and smiled.

When it was clear that everyone had finished jotting down their notes, I began the discussion. "The character is the soul of the brand. It adds life and makes any brand a living, breathing, and tangible thing. Let me explain with a vivid example," I added.

Have you ever thought that an organic fruits and vegetables grocery store could have a character of its own?" I asked.

The group nodded in a supportive way.

"It's zany to even think of it!" Ahmed exclaimed.

"Did I hear 'grocery' store?" Hasan asked.

Silence. No comments.

With every second that went by, the group quietly begged for someone to break the silence.

I began, "This is not a regular grocery store. A long line forms early on Saturday mornings every week from April to November in Matthews."

Everyone seemed to wait to see how Hasan would respond, but he just nodded his head and wrote a note. "Okay."

"Matthews? Never heard of it. Where is it?" Mariam inquired.

"In North Carolina, the States," I replied.

“What’s so different about it?” Syeda asked.

“Well, it’s not different for the sake of being different,” I answered with a smile.

I took a deep breath and said, “Matthews is a small, historic community that has been engulfed by the city of Charlotte’s metropolitan sprawl. Part of its charm is the farmer’s market that runs in a small, empty lot.”

The team had started to contemplate.

I added, “You’ll see a line of twenty to thirty people in front of Sammy’s, waiting to buy the fresh produce.”

For the first time all morning, Fatima chimed in, smiling, “But, why do people get out of their warm, comfortable beds at daybreak on Saturday morning to stand in line to give Sammy their money?”

“Simply because Sammy gives them an encore performance every week with fresh produce that is out of this world,” I replied immediately. “But it’s more than just fresh produce; it’s also about the quality of Sammy’s performance.”

“Whoa, incredible!” Fatima sighed.

I smiled, then replied, “Yes, the produce is less than twenty-four hours old, from growing in the field to being available at the stand. Compare that against the seven to twelve-day-old produce you’ll find at most grocery stores.”

I continued, “Sammy’s customers count on him to be there every Saturday. They know not only what they’ll find but also who will be there. He is available for any questions customers might have.”

I said, “His regular customers are like his extended family, and they are also invited to visit his farm.”

Moving towards the whiteboard, I wrote the phrase, “People buy from people.”

Fatima remarked, “So, you mean his personality and his way of doing things is the difference creator?”

Ahmed asked, “And how much does he spend on marketing and advertising?”

I was expecting this question.

Talal laughed. No one else did, except Ahmed, who seemed embarrassed by his remark. Inside, he was melting.

I concluded, “Sammy sells everything on the basis of satisfied customer referrals and repeat business. He’s a living example of the encore effect: deliver a remarkable product in a remarkable way, and you’ll have people coming back for more.”

The atmosphere in the room had transformed into a serene and serious state of affairs. Everyone sat at the edge of their chairs and became glued to the screen. To get the dialogue going, I moved towards a flip chart in the far right corner of

the room, picked up a marker, and wrote in big, bold letters, "THE NEW NORMAL."

"Let me turn the discussion back towards the current scenario," I said grimly.

"What is it that you want to share?" Fatima asked.

Some of the levity in the room seemed to evaporate.

I was almost amused at the predictability of what was unfolding before me.

"Although Sammy's story fits perfectly here, we need to do a reality check with the current state of affairs in the world. The media is replete with stories of successful, customer-oriented companies running into humungous losses due to COVID-19," I added.

While showing them the news notification on my phone, I said, "A very recent example is Jollibee, a multinational Filipino chain of fast-food restaurants, which is closing 255 stores worldwide after losing \$336 million during the first half of 2020 due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic."

The looks on their faces said, "Oh, no."

I added, "No worries. The company is optimistic that Jollibee will be profitable in 2021 due to its strong positioning in the market."

"Wow. That's being jolly about the future," Ali added.

The group seemed to like the discussion.

“Wow, it was a great day! Sir, with your permission, shall we disperse now?” Hasan asked.

With a serious look on my face, I objected, “Hasan, I’m not sure we can do this.”

Caught off guard, everyone waited for an explanation.

“I haven’t appointed a guardian to this pillar yet.”

Everyone, including Hasan, laughed at my good-natured teasing.

I eased my facial expression and said, “I appoint Boutheina as the guardian of Positioning-Pillar.”

To her excitement, she was quite pleasantly surprised.

She stood up and said, “To be a reliable, efficient, and sustainable supplier of electricity, water, and gas services and to delight each customer every single time.”

I proudly added, “With 100 percent dedication.”

I continued, “Remember, we want to be the thought leader of the utility industry in the Gulf region.”

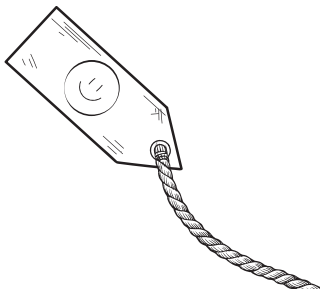
Fatima and Syeda responded in unison, “Yes, indeed.”

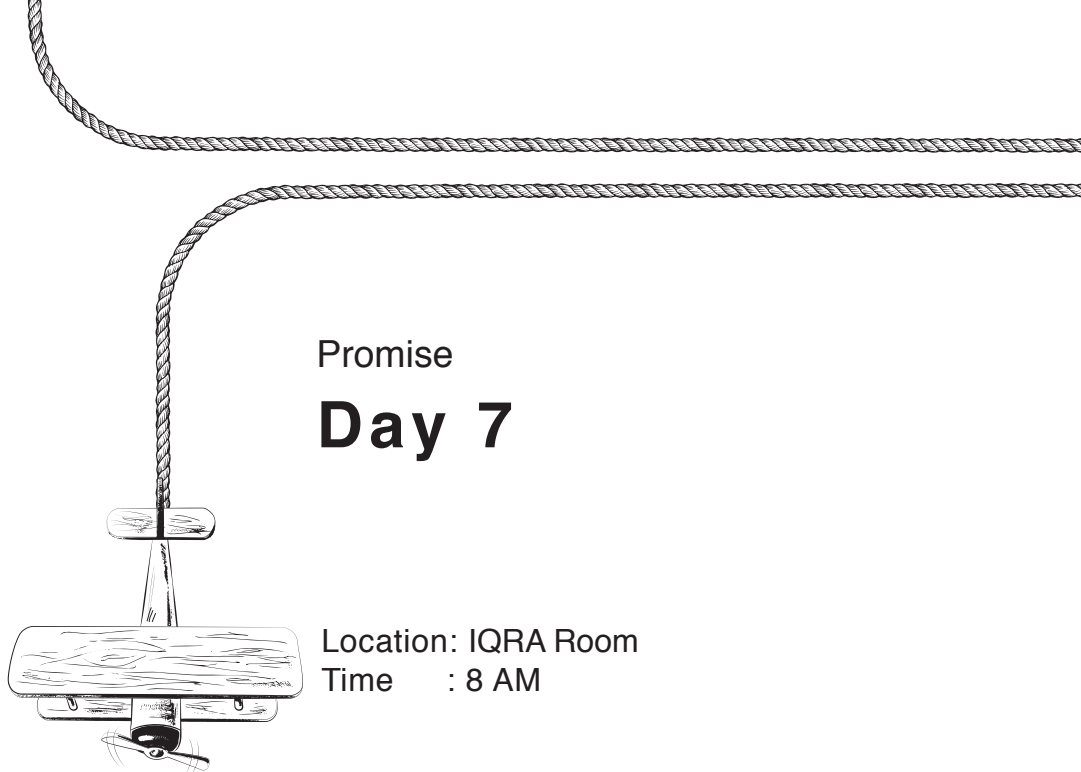
Heads around the table nodded.

I concluded, “Perfect, let’s call it a day now. We will meet tomorrow at IQRA room to discuss yet another important pillar—Promise.”

“Thank you, sir. We are hugely benefitting from these trainings and interactive workshops,” Boutheina responded.

I smiled and asked them to leave for the day.





Promise

Day 7

Location: IQRA Room

Time : 8 AM

IQRA Room

The “IQRA” (an Arabic word meaning “*to read*”) room is our fortress of solitude. It’s a bookworm’s ultimate den. It’s a library-come-shared space—a quiet space that is filled with books. It has a library so large, so bright, and so quiet that one could spend days buried in books. It’s a place free from prying eyes and the needs of others—a safe place—where concerns and obligations can melt away, and where SEWA employees, for once, can truly get lost between the pages. A true hideout.

The comfortable seating comprises big and perfectly cushioned chairs. Also, the room has couches against the walls, so the employees can lay out fully and take short naps at their leisure in between chapters. The room has a machine that plays white noise from a playlist on YouTube; personally, I love listening to the sounds of the wind blowing through trees and

of crickets. The white noise blocks out any distractions. The walls have inspirational aesthetics with built-in bookshelves. The room has vintage over-head lighting and free-standing lights that are placed at either end of the couches.

If you happen to visit this room, one important thing that might catch your attention is the intimidating free standing desk, which eliminates the need for more chairs, frees up a lot of space, and also alleviates what I like to call “reader’s neck” (the pain at the base of your neck caused by always bending over a book).

Coffee?

Yes, even your caffeine needs are covered here; there’s a coffee machine that brews fresh flavors of coffee—whether you are a latte lover, an espresso expert, or just coffee curious.



I glanced at the group. Most of them were comfortably seated. Ali was flipping through a book near the library, and Fatima and Syeda were having a tête-à-tête. Mariam was missing!

“Good morning team,” I said articulately.

The room echoed, “Good morning, sir, how are you today?”

I glanced around the room and said, “I want to share with you the results of an interesting visit by Mathias Kasproicz, the managing director of Trox Technik, the leader in indoor air conditioning and ventilation. He was so impressed with the

SEWA tour that he couldn't help but say that he was deeply impressed and speechless."

The group nodded their heads in agreement.

I looked around and said, "Mariam seems to be missing today. Does anyone know where she is?"

"I am sure that everyone's aware that I am very particular about punctuality. Punctuality is the first step towards success," I stated.

The group shrugged their shoulders. No one had a clue where Mariam was.

Talal replied, "Ahh. This younger generation doesn't value time. I would prefer to be three hours too early than a minute too late."

He had just finished his sentence when Mariam entered the room flashing a smile.

"Being on time to appointments and meetings is a part of self-discipline and is evidence of self-respect," Talal chided her.

Her smile didn't fade.

I smiled and asked, "Mariam, can you explain the reason for your late arrival to us please, and of maintaining your smile in spite of Talal's comments?"

“First of all, I apologize for being late,” she said out loud, “but punctuality is not just limited to arriving at a place at the right time, it is also about taking actions at the right time. Do you agree with me, Sir?”

I commented, with a little laughter, “I sense a family feud here.”

“Not at all sir, I was preparing the presentation for you on *The SEWA Ten ways of Fostering Creativity and Innovation Framework*. I got so engrossed in it that I lost track of time,” she explained, “I didn’t intend to just skive off, Mr. Talal.”

“Here’s the best part. During my research, I stumbled upon a novel term called ‘cost leadership,’” she informed us.

“Did you say, ‘cost leadership?’” Ahmed beseeched her. “I am the chief cost-kill officer here. Tell me more about it.”

Mariam added, “The purpose of this strategy is the company’s low-cost products offerings in an industry. Cost leadership strategy takes place through experience, investments in production facilities, conservation, and the careful monitoring of the total operating costs.”

Ali, the chief strategy officer added, “Then the Zulal Water Factory, our subsidiary that manufactures bottled drinking water, is the ultimate example of cost leadership.”

He had obtained the group’s attention.

“We reduced our operating costs and eliminated waste dras-

tically. Hence, we were able to leverage the price-point of our product.” He continued, “Zulal water is the most preferred bottled drinking water in the UAE now. We have expanded our distribution to outside Sharjah, to all the emirates of the UAE.”

“That’s incredible,” Syeda emphasized.

I had been silently listening to this conversation during this time.

All of a sudden, Fatima, the chief SHEngineering officer, interrupted, saying, “Also, as we are all aware, SEWA has been supporting the Climate Neutral Now Initiative for Zulal, the water subsidiary company, by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, for the last four years. It’s the first in the UAE and in the whole Gulf region, too.”

She continued, “This makes Zulal the legit example for cost leadership.”

Fatima responded, “May I say something more, sir? We have been offsetting carbon dioxide by supporting certified UN renewable energy projects around the world. We have offset a total of 12,562 tons of carbon dioxide emissions and have received a total of five certificates over the last four years.”

She paused.

She then asked, rhetorically, “Isn’t this incredible news?”

I smiled and said, “Fatima, you’ve done a remarkable job here.

This is one of our significant Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives at SEWA; we are responsible for our emissions and we show we care by compensating for the unavoidable emissions.”

I continued, “Pat yourselves on the back, everyone. It’s wonderful news, guys. And there’s also something extra-special about this news—can anyone tell me?”

After a pause, I added, “Doesn’t this UN certification stand witness that SEWA is also an organization that is a green giant. Getting recognized by the UN throughout four consecutive years tells a story of a brand that exudes all the presentation traits of a green giant organization.”

A unanimous “yes” was voiced by the team.

I smiled and said, “Alright, Fatima, please be seated now, and let’s dive into the ‘Promise-Pillar.’”

She pulled her chair out and sat. The rest of the team looked at the smart board.

I asked, eloquently, “Can anyone explain why we need to make a promise in our branding cycle?”

The group did not seem to have expected this question.

I went around the room, giving every person a chance to respond.

Fatima said, “A brand promise is an extension of a company’s

position. It's the tangible benefits that make a product or service desirable."

Hasan reported that "By maintaining a consistent brand promise, we can build better awareness with our customers and ensure that our brand is contributing to our organization's growth."

Mariam proudly announced, "A brand promise is about delivering a meaningful offer to its customers." She continued, "Here's the best part: customers aren't buying Michelin tires; they're buying safety. Customers aren't buying Disney tickets; they're buying fun for the whole family."

I now saw an opportunity to throw more light onto the discussion, so my new question to the team was: "What's the meaningful offer or the compelling promise of the SEWA brand?"

Talal was still curious as to the answer to this question.

I added, "The promise we make and keep is the backbone of our brand and the basis of our reputation. By not getting this right, we'll miss the boat regarding our customers' long-term loyalty. Therefore, my advice is to 'brand the buzz, not buzz the brand'."

I immediately enquired, "Does anyone know what that means?"

The group seemed to have no clue. But I knew that, if I could tolerate the silence for just a moment, soon enough, someone

would come up with the answer. This time it was Ali.

“Becoming an irresistible brand.” As usual, Ali provided little context for his answer.

“Explain,” I commanded.

He elaborated, “By promising the right customer experience, we become a cool and an irresistible brand.” He paused for a moment and looked around the room, as though the answer was somewhere on the white walls, before concluding by saying, “Memorable branding is promising to deliver an experience that is so compelling and so alluring that our customers cannot ignore it.”

I replied, “Great answer, Ali. For some brands, the brand promise can be so strong that they proudly create a cult or club to symbolize unity and loyalty.” I paused to think of a good example.

“Harley Davidson is a good example of this. When I see Harley bikes roving around the streets of the UAE, I notice that most Harley Davidson buyers are over fifty, wealthy—many being executives—and that they consider buying such an expensive bike *not* for transportation purposes, but for recreation.”

Heads around the room nodded.

I continued, “The Harley became an American icon, but it has since exploded into the international arena as a symbol of free-spiritedness and of sharing a passion for the open road.”

At this point, I paused abruptly. Then I added, “Now, listen to this: ‘We’re committed to creating a better, more sustainable future for our people, planet, and communities through the power of sport.’ Have you ever heard of this promise? If yes, can you name the brand?”

I could see all the group gaping at me.

“Surely it’s a sports brand that cares for the planet,” Ali suggested.

“You’re quite close. Give me the name?” I inquired.

Hesitatingly, he replied, “I would guess that it’s Nike.”

“You are absolutely correct,” I replied.

The rest of the group applauded Ali.

Again, I asked, “Now, I guess that from these examples we can understand the meaning of the SEWA brand promise? So, can anyone in the room state our brand promise? Can anyone come forward and write it on the flip chart for all of us?”

I could see some of the team members sifting through their daily journals and notebooks searching for the answer while the rest of the employees looked down at the floor. I began to think that my question had put them in a fix. To coax answers out of them, I turned the question around, asking, “What makes SEWA desirable to society at large?” This question seemed to brighten their faces; everyone began sharing their

answers with the person sat next to them. This gave me confidence that I had framed the question in a positive way.

I told the team to write their answers on the notebooks on the table and then to compare their answers with what I was writing on the flip chart.

I wrote the following statement:



“Go ahead—take note of it. I want each and every one of you to remember it by heart. It should be at the top of your mind and on the tip of your tongue.”

All of them took out their notebooks and jotted down the SEWA brand promise.

I was about to wrap up this slide and move onto the next ‘P’, personality, when Jose, the chief FinTech officer, entered the room. He looked stunned. He was excited with eagerness to tell me something.

Jose, gasping for breath, said, “Sir, I’ve news that will fill the room with nervous anxiety.”

“What is it? It seems as though all hell has broken loose,” I said.

He responded, while panting, “Mr. Markus Braun, CEO of Wirecard (a German financial services provider) resigned and was arrested on the same day.”

The team looked bewildered.

“Tell us the scoop. What has happened exactly?” Mariam asked.

In one breath, he explained, “In January 2019, the Financial Times, which I’ll shorten to ‘FT’, reported that ‘Wirecard’ had forged and backdated contracts in a string of suspicious transactions in Singapore. The company denied the report, which was produced with the help of a whistleblower, but its shares plummeted.”

He paused, before continuing, “Then, in February 2019, authorities in Singapore said that they would investigate.”

“Next?” I asked.

Jose added, “Another blow landed late last year, when the FT published a report and company documents suggesting that Wirecard’s profits and sales had been inflated.”

He continued, “The fall from grace accelerated last Thursday, when auditors at Ernst & Young announced that they could not locate \$2.1 billion in cash, which was supposed to be held in Wirecard’s accounts.”

Syeda, the chief knowledge officer said, “Unbelievable! I can’t believe my ears. More than \$2 billion has gone missing at one of Europe’s most vaunted tech companies! If it’s not found quickly, the digital payments firm may never recover.”

“Yes, you all heard me right. Wirecard delayed the publication of its 2019 financial results on Thursday, saying its auditors couldn’t account for \$2.1 billion in cash,” Jose said.

“You said that the CEO has resigned. Why so?” asked Mariam.

Jose turned and said, “This is what his resignation letter states: ‘The confidence of the capital market in the company I have been managing for 18 years has been deeply shaken. With my decision, I respect the fact that responsibility for all business transactions lies with the CEO.’”

The chief branding officer pointed out, “This is clearly an ugly example of failing to maintain the trust of customers and of not delivering on brand promise.”

I interjected, “Calm down everyone. It is shocking news. But it’s not *new* news. I have listed examples of Enron, Lehman brothers, and Volkswagen scandals in my books. These companies also failed to live up to their brand promises.”

Ahmed couldn’t wait to express his opinion. He added, “Also, lately, the UAE-based healthcare provider, NMC Group, led by Dr. B. R. Shetty, said the company will probably be dissolved or put into liquidation due to the fraud performed by B. R. Shetty. He has since fled the UAE. Isn’t this scandalous news?”

I sighed. “Overall, branding is about creating and sustaining trust, which means delivering on promises. The best and most successful brands are completely coherent. Every aspect of what they do and what they are reinforces everything else,” I explained.

“Brand is not about product or services, but about personalities—people,” Fatima added, “and being an avid reader of books about freedom fighters and civil rights icons like Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther, and others, with a heavy heart I would like to share the news of the death of another great civil rights icon—John Lewis. He was known as one of the ‘Big Six’ civil rights leaders, which included Martin Luther King Jr., and he helped organize the historic 1963 march on Washington.”

The room was filled with sorrow.

By now, the team was gripped by the SEWA branding cycle’s presentation and appeared both amused and convinced. I felt

that I was doing all the right things. Though the session started off with a heavy dose of information, important decisions were made, which left the team feeling inspired and motivated. However, I know that humans can have short attention spans. Science tells us that the maximum duration of concentration for the human mind is forty-five minutes. Once we hit that threshold, the human mind can't register further information or signals. Considering this, I announced a light snack break for 15 minutes. "We are running a race against the clock. Eat good, healthy food, and come back on time. The action is yet to begin!"

"Oh, yes, you'll be announcing the guardian for this pillar, right? How exciting!" Mariam exclaimed.

"Yes, after the break," I persisted, shaking my head.

Fifteen minutes later, the group seemed jovial and their energy levels seemed to have been replenished.

"Now, here comes the interesting part, team, I am about to appoint the guardian for this pillar," I announced.

Hasan sighed deeply.

"I guess you saw it coming! Did I think out loud, guys?" I said in response.

"Hasan, you will be the guardian of the Promise-Pillar," I said in a resounding tone.

He winced, as though he didn't want to prolong the conversation.

“I don’t know; I’m not sure.”

He paused while he decided what to say next. “I think, being an engineer, that I might as well work on statistics, machines, gadgets, complex systems, and things like that.”

“Want to join me on the Product-Pillar?” Ali asked.

“I don’t think so,” Hasan responded, but not in a defensive manner.

I looked into his eyes. “Listen, you are the undisputable guardian of the Promise-Pillar. I know you can pull it off. Period. I have intentionally put you all in areas out of your comfort zones. I know that you all will finish with flying colors. And if you can’t, then your colleagues will.”

“Sir, how do you think that he will be a guardian when he is so reluctant?” Fatima asked.

I smiled. “Yeah, I can see that. Team, why not pay a visit to the ‘happiness wall’ and see if you can find some reasons to make Hasan smile?”

“Oh no, not now. Today is not my day. I want to have my space—give me some space,” Hasan exclaimed, twitching.

Fatima pressed on. “This is the right time to go. It’s for people who are deeply hurt or frustrated. It’s your turn to go. We don’t want happy people to go there.”

The group looked at each other and started calling Hasan’s name and clapping for him.

Hasan smiled like a cat—subtly but willingly.

He conceded. “Okay, okay.”

“The wall is ornamented with positive quotes and smiley faces. And joke jars. One of those fun, pun-intended jokes will cheer you up,” Mariam suggested.

I nudged him and said, “You know what guys, let us go for a ten-minute break. By that time, Hasan will have gone and had his happiness experience.”

Ten minutes later, Hasan returned. “Guys, guess what—I am glad I followed your advice, I picked up this joke from the joke jar. I was in fits of laughter.”

“Would you like to share it with us?” Talal asked.

“This is a technology joke. Here goes...” Hasan began to read the joke card.

“Question: What do computers eat for a snack?”

Answer: Microchips!”

“So funny and lame.” Ali added.

Mariam, who happened to be the chief technical marketing engineer officer, rolled her eyes and said, “It’s not funny. It’s stupid!”

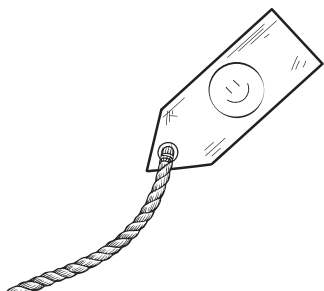
The entire group burst into light-hearted banter.

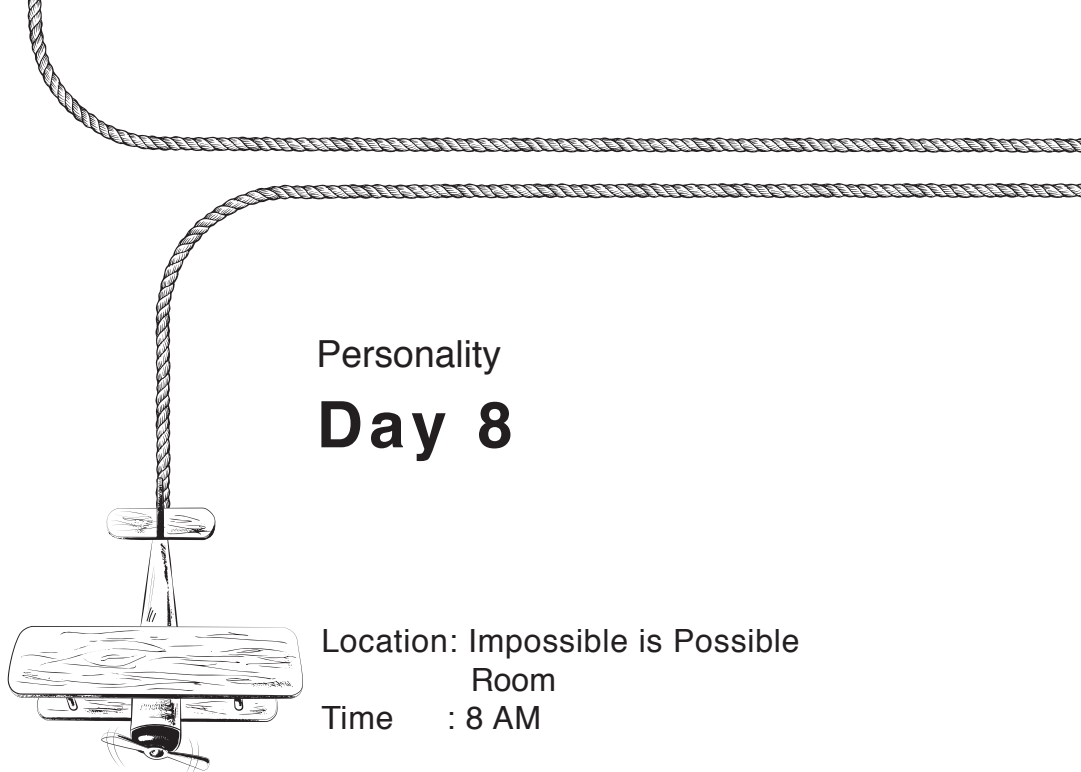
“Count me in, sir. I am more than happy to be the guardian of the Promise-Pillar,” Hasan announced.

“Now, let’s meet next week, in the ‘Impossible is Possible’ room. It’s going to be an exciting day,” I assured them.

“Thank you, sir,” Hasan responded, “have a great day. See you next week.”

The group left.





Personality

Day 8

Location: Impossible is Possible
Room
Time : 8 AM

Impossible is Possible Room

Unlike the “Room of Possibilities”, which was a predecessor to the UAE’s ‘Ministry of Possibilities’, the “Impossible is Possible” room was created based on the new incredible slogan of the UAE government, which states: ‘Impossible is Possible’. The message is clear: we stand together. The impassioned slogan encourages UAE citizens and residents to put their unequivocal trust in the leaders of the nation.

This room is a tribute and an ode to the overarching leadership that the UAE is proud of. The room boasts a modernistic office design that offers employees a soothing, welcoming environment to work from. It is a breezy, sunlit work area with lots of natural textures and an indoor small marble statuette of a cheetah (the fastest land animal), symbolizing agility and speed. The space has been acoustically designed for optimum

privacy. It is a perfect hide-out for employees who are victims of “Zoom fatigue” and digital burnout. The room has a wall-mounted shelf that houses the remarkable evergreen book, *The Impossible is Possible*, authored by John Mason, and the wall is calligraphed with a famous line from the book: “Almost everything we enjoy today was impossible yesterday.”

In short, this is the place where we witness new beginnings, build our dreams and our hopes, and say out loud that the *“impossible is possible”*.



The Piecemeal Approach

The team was gathered in the room on time. They were all beaming with energy. I smiled and thanked them for their enthusiastic attitude. Once they had settled into their places, I opened the next slide, which was titled “Personality”.

I knew that I was about to begin a deceptively critical part of the session and one that would give me an idea as to how things might unfold during the months ahead. So, I wanted to take things step by step—the piecemeal approach.

As I was about to begin my presentation with the team, when Sayed, the chief technology officer, knocked the door and asked permission to enter the room.

I nodded with a smile.

His face was calm, but I sensed excitement beneath the surface.

He entered the room and showed me a few papers. Then, he sprang up and took my hands in his with his eyes sparkling.

“Sayed, would you tell us what this excitement is all about? What has made our chairman smile so broadly this morning?” Talal asked.

“Let me tell you before you guys continue your in-depth discussion. Believe me, it is related to what you guys have been doing for the last few days. Yet, I would love for Mr. Chairman to disclose the exciting news himself.”

“All right team,” I began, “let me share this exciting news with you all. The news is about the ‘Rashid Alleem Premier League’, which I’ll shorten to ‘RPL’, my non-profit initiative for all UAE cricket lovers that successfully completed its sixth season in March 2020. The RPL has been recognized as the Gulf Cooperative Council’s biggest cricket tournament. Most of the international, as well as regional, brands have proposed joining hands with us, and endorsing their products during our tournaments.”

I pushed my chair forward and said, “In previous seasons, Red Bull, the world’s number one energy drink, has willingly sponsored us. And this year, guess who?” I paused for few seconds. “Coca-Cola has chosen the RPL as its platform to launch their newest product, Coke Energy, for the first time in the UAE.”

Chief branding officer Boutheina looked curious.

“What great news! Congratulations, sir,” Hasan said.

Sayed added, "Today, we will be receiving a top delegation from Coca-Cola headed by Mr. Nanda Kishore, the regional trade marketing director at the Coca-Cola Company. They will be officially confirming the news of the launch of their newest product, Coke Energy, in the UAE during the RPL tournament next year. Also, they will be offering the audience over 4,000 cans of Coke Energy to quench their thirst."

The room echoed with the sound of the team's cheers and applaud. "Well done, sir," everyone repeated.

"It is called 'brand association.'" I paused for a couple of seconds, looking at the team, and continued, "One of the biggest benefits of brand association campaigns is the opportunity to expose your product or service to a brand-new audience. I smiled and continued, "On the one hand, the RPL celebrates sportsmanship and the uninhibited performance that brings happiness and positivity, and on the other hand, Coca-Cola also supplies happiness."

"Let me share with you another relevant example of brand association and its benefits. Car manufacturer BMW and designer Louis Vuitton appear to have nothing in common, but they recently did a brand association campaign called 'art of travel'."

I continued, "This may not be the most obvious of pairings. But if you think about it, they have a few important things in common. Both value luxury. Also, they're both established, traditional brands that are known for high-quality craftsmanship. These shared values are exactly why this brand association campaign makes so much sense."

“Isn’t this a perfect pairing, especially with those surrounding action sports?” I asked.

“In fact, this collaboration epitomizes the companies’ shared values, and these values, in turn, shape the brands’ personalities. Hence, let’s move on to one of the most critical elements of our eight ‘P’s—personality.”



A Difference that Matters

“This is about interacting more *authentically* with our customers. The moment that organizations lose their personality is when their employees become ‘people’ rather than individuals. I wanted SEWA to become a brand with personality—one where customers put little or no emphasis on price due to other emotional benefits that the brand offers them. I decided to achieve this by connecting with our customers periodically to see what their needs were, where the trends were heading, and to be first in line for them; this is part of the game.”

“Isn’t that what a brand’s character is all about?” asked the chief strategy officer. He added, “A brand’s first job is to be interesting.”

I hissed, boring my eyes right into him. “While that is true, there is more than one objective when it comes to building a brand. I contend that brands must also deliver on their promises.”

Boutheina raised her hand and said, “Do you mean that a brand’s personality and a brand’s promise are connected?”

“Let me explain to you all. I’m talking about brands like Vaseline, Xerox, and Kleenex. In these cases, the brands may have hit the jackpot; people say things like ‘pass the Kleenex’ instead of ‘pass the tissues’.”

“That’s brand recognition, right?” Boutheina asked again.

I smiled and replied, “When a brand gets to the point of being omnipresent, it kind of fades into the background. Though Xerox and Kleenex both made it onto the Forbes list of top brands last year, they do very little to stand out. They have very little personality.”

Ali added, “That means that it is vital more than ever to inject some personality into such *house-hold* brands.”

He continued, “I’ve got a glowing example of good brand personality. We wouldn’t dare confuse an Apple with a computer because Apple computers stand in a league of their own regarding performance and aesthetics—they are not necessarily better than other products, but they do have their own edge.”

The chief technical marketing engineer blurted out, “Yes, I agree with you—no one ever says, ‘I have a Mac’ when in fact they have a PC.”

We could all clearly tell that she was an Apple evangelist.

Fatima, the chief SHEngineering officer, said, in an affirming tone, “But I think that personality is more than just appear-

ance; it's an experience—the emotional experience a customer goes through once they're in touch with your brand. It involves more than just visual appeal; it requires thinking about human characteristics.”

I appreciated her convincing, impressive, and vivid portrayal of the SEWA brand personality.

She looked at me and breathed an inaudible sigh of relief.

I removed my laptop from its case and put it on the table in front of the team, leaving it closed for the moment. Determined not to distract the team, I smiled at them and addressed them calmly and gracefully.

“Let me share an interesting example here, has anyone heard of the ‘In-N-Out’ fast-food chain in the USA?”

“No, not really, is it the one situated in the exclusive hamburger lane in California?” Ali asked. “What’s so striking about it?”

“A plethora of things. Lessons to be drawn to support our branding cycle,” I said.

That last comment got everyone’s attention, especially Hasan, who raised his voice and asked, “why?”

I continued, “Let me take you back to the summer of 2018, when I was spending my summer vacation in California, Los Angeles. I was driving on the highway, and I stopped at a gas station to refill on gasoline. I noticed a long queue outside a

burger joint. The queue was so unusually long that the waiters were having to come out and take orders from the customers. That caught my attention, and my curiosity compelled me to park my car, walk into the fast-food restaurant, and ‘check-out’ the mystery behind the never-ending queue.”

I paused to give everyone time to become immersed into my story. Then, I stood and walked towards the glass window and looked outside. Sometimes, when you’re looking beyond your threshold, you’re not actually trying to look at the outside world, at the traffic, crowds of people, etc.... No, to me it’s like a journey in reverse. This action tugs at my brain like an anchor in the deepest depths of my thoughts and pulls me into self-reflection.

After a few moments of silence, I said, “When I entered the fast-food joint, I pulled out a chair and sat down. The place echoed with the hustle and bustle of customers. The space was filled with the aroma of freshly baked buns. I looked at the tray in front of me and read the incredible story of the food joint.”

Enthusiastically, Talal asked, “What did you read?”

In one breath, I explained, “It stated some astonishing facts about the place. I clearly remember reading that it was founded in 1948 and that it hadn’t evolved much since Lynsi Snyder’s (the current owner) grandparents founded it. Buns are baked with slow-rising dough each morning. Three central facilities grind all the (never-frozen) meat. Nearly all its restaurants are in California, and all are company-owned. Heat lamps, microwaves and freezers are banned from the premises. The

recipes for its burgers and fries have remained essentially the same for 70 years.”

The room was silent, until Ahmed, the chief cost-kill officer asked, “So how does In-N-Out maintain its margins?”

I smiled and clarified, “Their limited menu results in reduced costs for raw ingredients. The company also saves money by buying wholesale and grinding the beef in-house. By doing its own sourcing and distribution, it likely saves in food costs. They own most of their properties—many bought years ago—so they don’t pay rent.”

“I remember reading an interview of Lynsi Snyder, where she proudly stated, ‘I like that we’re sought after when someone’s coming into town. I like that we’re unique. I’m proud of our tag-line: “No Microwaves, No Freezers, No Heat Lamps.” At In-N-Out, our goals are not to be the biggest, it’s about maintaining the legacy of our family and a family environment.’”

Talal nodded and smiled as if to say, what an amazing story.

Syeda added, “That’s an inspiring brand personality. What an incredible way to connect with the customers! It’s really a ‘wow’ story.”

Emotion Beats Reason

“Finally, since it is so fitting,” I continued, “Answer me one last question: How does our brand connect with customers?”

I knew well enough that this question would incentivize the team to churn out as many brand characteristics as they could muster.

Hasan, the chief astonishment officer, suggested, “To ensure that we aren’t completely off the mark, let’s start by understanding our customer’s emotional journey with us.”

I smiled and added, “An anonymous quote rings a bell here: ‘Big brands need to invest now in storytelling and emotional marketing because, in the human brain, in its decision-making capacity in particular, emotion beats reason.’”

Syeda added, “This seems fairly simple; our customer engagement officers are constantly mapping customer journeys.”

Respond with H.E.A.R.T

“Do you mean our three musketeers?” Mariam asked.

“Yes, indeed. They follow the H.E.A.R.T principle. Have you heard about it?” Syeda asked.

“Yes, I have,” Mariam answered.

Ahmed and Hasan said together, “No. Never heard of it.”

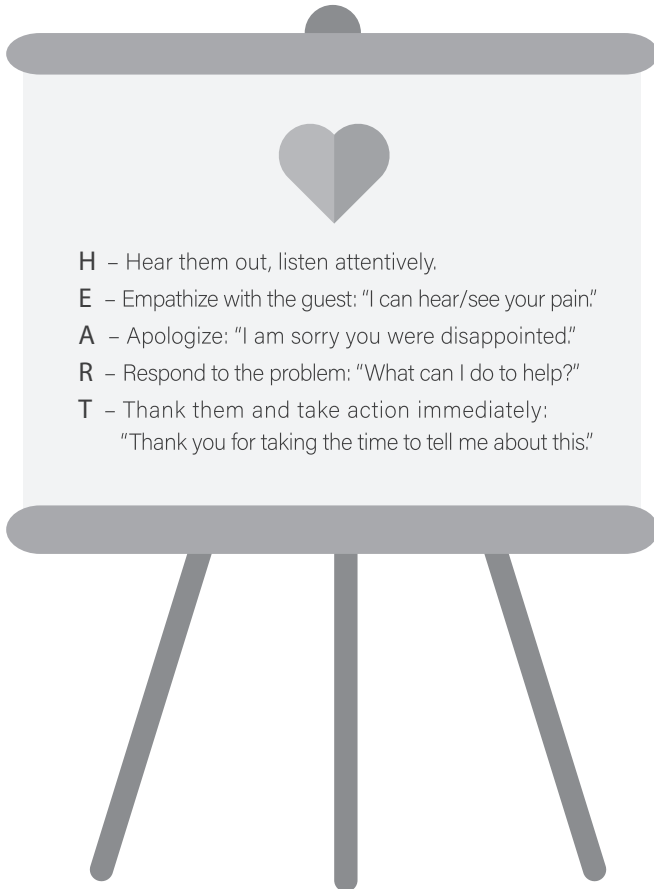
“Let me explain. We follow the H.E.A.R.T principles to address any customer complaints,” I explained.

“What does H.E.A.R.T stand for?” Ahmed asked.

“H.E.A.R.T is an acronym here, which denotes a process of empathizing with our customers,” I responded.

“Please tell us more. This sounds interesting,” Hasan requested.

I went to the flip chart and wrote the following:



I requested Mariam to read it aloud. She accepted.

The team listened in silence. Suddenly, Talal took a photo of the sheet.

I smiled and said, “No worries, I will share this with you all later today.”

The group nodded.

“Thank you, sir.” Boutheina concluded.



Passionate Soul

Syeda raised her hand, “Sir, since we are discussing an important pillar here, ‘personality’, I would like to share a real story about a spectacular personality a.k.a. the ‘Bridgeman of India’—Girish Bharadwaj. May I?”

I nodded with a smile. I knew what news she wanted to share.

“Girish has been building hanging bridges for three decades in the rural suburbs and hamlets of India to enable rural connectivity,” Syeda explained.

“Wait! Did I hear three decades?” Fatima asked.

“Yes, that’s right. Thirty years,” Syeda replied.

“There is dearth of easy connectivity to isolated villages in India, and it has been a major impediment to its development.” She added, “But this passionate soul, for the last 30 years, has been constructing hanging foot bridges, 139 so far, that connect the mainland to remote and inaccessible villages. Today, in this pandemic, the hanging foot-bridges built by Girish and his team for rural connectivity are proving to be a godsend.”

The group listened in silence.

“Wow. What an inspirational story! What a great man!” Fatima exclaimed.

“He deserves accolades and awards. His contribution shouldn’t be ignored,” Mariam added.

Syeda added, “He has won many accolades and awards, the most significant one being the Padma Shri, which is the fourth-highest civilian award in India. This award was conferred upon Girish on Republic Day of India in 2017.”

The team was awestruck.

I added, “See, the world is replete with such passionate souls, but we speak about him because the bridges built by him and his team have helped to empower poor villagers, often connecting them to a world of opportunities.”

I continued, “This makes him stand out as a personality that serves the world. Now, it’s time to appoint a guardian to this pillar—who do you think it will be?”

Welcome KPMG

At this moment, Omar, my office manager, stepped in to remind me of my KPMG meeting.

I said, “Guys, there will be exciting news later. Stay tuned. We’ll know who the guardian for this pillar is once I’m done with this meeting.”

At this point, I was interrupted by my executive secretary because I had a visitor. Mr. Nader Haffer, chairman and CEO of KPMG visited me for the first time.

“Excuse me, team, I have an executive guest. So, spare me for some time. He has visited SEWA for the first time today, and I have to ensure that he becomes the brand ambassador of SEWA by the time he leaves this place,” I said with a smirk.

“Meanwhile, do run through your notes and wrap your head around the Personality-Pillar.”

Mr. Haffer was waiting for me in the “Majlis” (an Arabic word that means “guest room”).



Thirty Minutes Later

I finished the meeting and rejoined the group.

When the team returned from a short break, they were brimming with energy.

“So, what did you all do?” I asked.

Boutheina answered, “I spent most of the break reading e-mails on my phone. Ali, Ahmed, Hasan, and Talal played foosball, and Syeda and Mariam met in the lobby to talk about their current projects. Fatima sat by the water fountain and read her favorite novel, which she bought last week.”

“How was the meeting, sir?” Fatima asked.

“The meeting was very fruitful as we discussed topics from various walks of life. He was astonished with the SEWA customer-centric model, SEWA A—the SEWA Academy—and the Hall of fame.”

I added, “Nader commented that he had been to many renowned universities and corporates around the world but hadn’t seen anything near to what SEWA has created when it comes business strategies and management philosophies. He jokingly said, ‘Trust me, even *Google* doesn’t have the management philosophies and business strategies that I have seen today in SEWA.’”

Ali jumped in, “I am so proud to be part of this successful organization. It is really great place to work for.”

I smiled. “So, we’ve come to the exciting part of the day. It’s time to announce the guardian of this pillar.”

“Sir, with your permission, may I volunteer?” Syeda asked.

Before I could answer the first question, she asked another one: “What do you think, sir?”

I could see that she couldn't hide her excitement.

I smiled and said, "First, I would like to say that yes, you can volunteer, and second, I think you would be an amazing guardian for this Personality-Pillar."

"I'm thrilled by this news. But I would really like to request that you tell me why you think I am suitable for this pillar," Syeda requested.

"I'll come back to that question. But first, you tell me why you nominated yourself in the first place. What traits make you fit to be the guardian?"

The team teased and shouted, saying, "Yeah, good question."

Syeda, who was caught off-guard, answered, "Well, primarily, I believe that everything that you have shared in this pillar connects with me at a deeper level. Also, I believe that brand personality is what makes our organization human in the eyes of our customers. I am 100 percent ready to create this experience consistently for them," before excitedly continuing, "and I am thankful that you gave me the opportunity to be the head of the SEWA Customer Experience Unit, also called the 'CXUnit', alongside being the chief knowledge officer."

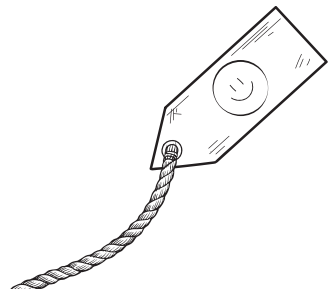
"The CXUnit is dedicated to producing exceptional customer experience at every opportunity," She affirmed.

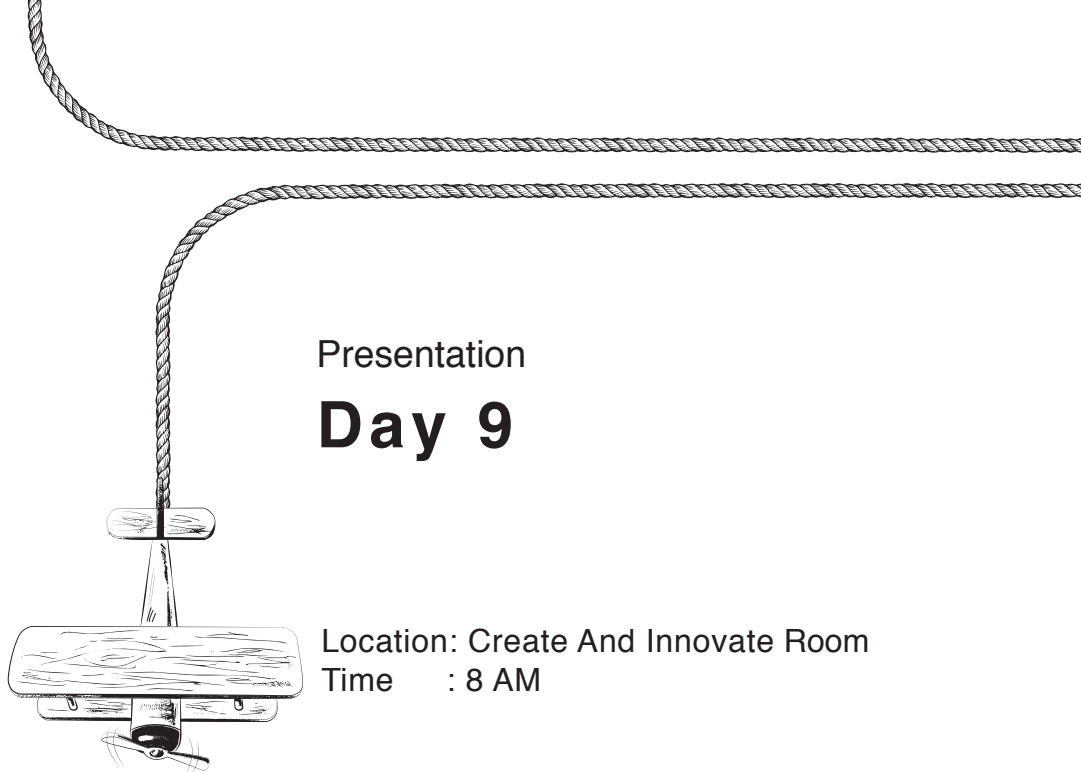
The team gleamed and showered her with congratulations.



I said, “All right team, disperse for today, and let’s buckle up for tomorrow. We are only halfway through; we have three more pillars to cover. So, gear up. I’ll see you all tomorrow at our newly inaugurated ‘Create and Innovate’ room.”

The team left gladly.





Presentation

Day 9

Location: Create And Innovate Room

Time : 8 AM

Create And Innovate Room

Only Ahmed and Fatima were in the room when I arrived the next morning. The room was soaked in the scent of Oud oils, which are derived from the precious Agarwood tree. The team had prepared the flip chart for me. The room looked spick-and-span, the ultra-functional style-chairs were in the proper posture with rainbow-colored cushions on them, and the reed diffuser was near the giant Chinese water bamboo plant, with decorative shells that complemented the decor! However, the icing on the cake was the soothing music by Childish Gambino (an American stage artist) being played, which resonated with the mood in the room—the following lyrics in particular:

“Keep all your dreams, keep standing tall
If you are strong you cannot fall
There is a voice inside us all
So, smile when you can
When you can”



I stood and soaked the room's atmosphere in for a while.

The others had also arrived by this point.

I kicked off the meeting by saying, “Wow, the room looks incredibly beautiful this morning. Very presentable. Big thank you to Ahmed and Fatima who arrived earlier than all of us to show their commitment to keeping to time, or perhaps I should say to their excitement for the program.”

Mariam added, “Presentation—the sixth ‘P’ of the SEWA branding cycle—that’s what we are going to learn today.”

My face lit up with smile.

“That’s the spirit I like about this team,” I said to myself.

I smiled and said, “Well, today, we will begin our day with an interesting mental exercise. It’s called check-ins.”

I paused to see their reaction. They were listening very closely, waiting for clarification.

“Just as you ‘check-in’ your baggage prior to boarding a flight, today we will ‘check-in’ our *emotional* baggage prior to discussing today’s pillar of the eight ‘P’s of the cycle,” I explained, “which means you can share whatever is on your minds—whether it is related to the meeting or not.”

I went on to say, “I acknowledge that we all have other things going on in our lives. Hence, I want to create a space for everyone to be able to unload what’s on your minds at the moment and then to put those thoughts or feelings aside.”

I brought their attention to the little shredding machine that lay in the corner.

“You see this?” I asked.

“Aha...this is a new kid on the block,” Talal joked.

“Yes, you are right. This is a ‘just shred it’ corner.”

Handing over a pen and a paper to him, I told him, “Just jot down on this paper what’s currently bothering you—if anything.”

Talal looked at me.

I reiterated, “Don’t overthink it, and just scribble what’s been pestering you today or recently.”

He wrote something indecipherable.

“Now what?” he asked.

I smiled and said, "Just shred it!"

He chuckled and did as directed.

The room filled with the sudden squealing sound of the shredding machine.

I said, "Watch the shredder blades ripping your paper into pieces."

I then added, "Close your eyes and take a deep breath. As the noise of the machine diminishes, imagine your negativity fading away."

The machine stopped.

"How do you feel?"

Talal replied, with eyes beaming, "Lighter. Yes guys, I feel lighter. I feel relaxed, as if some heavy weight has been lifted from my chest. Big thank you, sir."

"See, it works!" Fatima said.

"Wow, it's unbelievable that such a simple exercise can produce this much positivity," Boutheina noted.

"This will help us take the 'temperature' of the room," Syeda remarked.

The team shot a glance at her.

She clarified, “I mean, it will give us a quick assessment of the emotions and thoughts in the room.”

I smiled and said, “Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated. I just don’t know why!”

There was silence in the room.

I smiled and said, “As they say, a question opens the door for responses. Let’s come back to our ‘check-ins’; let me begin with this question: what’s on everyone’s mind at the moment?”

I began so as to get the ball rolling. “Let me be the first one to ‘check-in’. With a heavy heart, I would like to share the sad loss of Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, the former president of India, who passed away on the August 31, 2020. My condolences to his family, friends, admirers, and supporters across India and abroad.”

The group listened in silence.

I added, “I am proud to say that I was the first Arab national to meet him in person right after the announcement of his appointment as the president of India.”

“Where was that, sir?” Hasan asked.

“It was in Mumbai, in the Sofitel hotel in Bandra,” I replied.

I paused and said solemnly, “May his soul rest in peace.”

The room filled with sadness.

Mariam, the chief technical marketing officer came forward. "Sir, it's my turn to 'check-in' now. I would like to 'check-in' my guilt of 'revenge spending' last weekend. I purchased this Chanel lambskin with onyx and pearls little flap bag," she said, pointing at her beautiful bag.

"It cost me a bomb. It dug a hole in my wallet. I paid \$4,356 for this small bag."

She sighed silently.

"Wait. What did you say? Revenge spending? Tell us more please," Fatima asked.

"The term, 'revenge spending', first coined in China, refers to a situation where shopping-deprived consumers embark on spending sprees after quarantines and social distancing restrictions are lifted," Mariam explained.

"And now, since we know that COVID-19 restrictions have eased a bit, foot traffic has begun to increase at physical stores, and the mindset of spenders like me has bounced back," she scoffed.

The group acknowledged her pain.

"Now let me move the needle to news that will change the atmosphere in the room," I said, buoyantly.

The group relished my words.

Enthusiastically, I announced, “On my mind right now is the great news that I’ve been recognized as one of the top-performing chairmen of the year 2020 by the Europe Business Assembly, which is an international, non-governmental organization, based in the UK.”

I added, “This award came like a breath of fresh air amidst the turbulent environment that the world is currently facing. I am glad that the business world is recognizing my dynamic transformational efforts, contributions to the development of national economy by introducing modern technologies, innovative breakthroughs, and visionary decision-making skills.”

“That calls for a standing ovation,” Syeda said.

All the team stood up, cheering and clapping.

At this point, I stood up and said, “I just can’t wait to explain the importance of the upcoming up ‘P’—Presentation.”

“Give your product a cool and compelling name. I remember an excerpt from an article I read once, which said: ‘Start with a great name and logo, and then launch your compelling packaging and communications.’”

However, I also advised the team, “Logos are important because the human brain is wired to recognize icons. Yet, an eye-catching logo isn’t everything.”

Primarily, consumer behavior and its dynamics needed to be understood. I warned the team of this. “We are all proud of our product or service inventions and are excited to get them

to market, but if there's little or no need for our product or service, you can stop trying to turn it into a brand—it will fail!”

I said, “Let me share with you a ubiquitous quote by Ingrid Srinath: ‘You are a brand, whether you like it or not....you’re going to leave some impression in a person’s mind [and] it’s your choice whether you want to actively manage that impression or whether you want them to come to their own conclusions of what they think about you.’”

“What do you understand by this quote?” I questioned the team, who subsequently murmured and whispered.

“Let me lend you a helping hand,” I said. “Can anyone name the previous ‘P’s that we have discussed over the last few days?”

“Promise!” the chief strategy officer exclaimed.

“Personality!” the chief branding officer cried out aloud.

“That’s great,” I said, “presentation is all about the fact that in all forms of communication, your ‘promise’ and ‘personality’ should shine through.”

In a resonating tone, I explained “So, it’s not about getting all hung up on what shade of green to use for our logo or what tone we’re going to use when engaging with people on Twitter; we need to step back and take a look at the big picture.”

I continued. “First, let’s clear up the biggest misconception about brand presentation: our brand is not our product, our logo, our website, or our name. In fact, our brand is much more than that; it’s the stuff that feels intangible. But it’s that hard-to-pin-down feeling that separates powerhouse and mediocre brands from each other.”

I added, “Let me share an interesting anecdote here, on February 7, 2020, a delegate from Yokogawa Global paid me a courtesy visit. During the meeting, Mr. Norinao Sato, the director and senior executive vice president, mentioned their trademark logo and elucidated the significance of it. He said, ‘The corporate symbol reflects our values and ideals, and is the emblem for all Yokogawa employees. It symbolizes that we are a dynamic, yet balanced corporation that provides real value. The image is inspired by the sun, which is the main source of energy for all life on earth and is an affirmation of Yokogawa’s commitment to benefitting humankind through the development of the industrial sector.’”

Mariam sighed. “Wow, it’s incredible to see brands putting so much thought into their logo design.”

“All global brands ensure that their logo is catchy and meaningful,” I answered.

“Sir, our brand promise serves the purpose of separating us from the mediocre brands,” Bouthaina responded.

“Every brand makes a promise,” I explained, “but in a marketplace in which consumer confidence is low and budgetary

vigilance is high, it's not just about making a promise that separates one brand from another, but of having a defining purpose."

"Don't we all admire brands that emphasize their willingness to achieve more than just profitability?" I questioned.

I then asked the chief SHEngineering officer: "Can you name a brand that you admire?"

"I admire IKEA," she advised, "simply because, IKEA's vision isn't just to sell furniture, but rather, to 'create a better everyday life'. This approach is appealing to potential customers, like me, as it demonstrates their commitment to providing value beyond the point of sale."

Excitedly, I responded, "Bravo. This brings us to the point that presentation is more of an art and less of a science; we have to dig a little deeper."

I continued, "Persistence or consistency is the key here. Consistency contributes to brand recognition, which, in turn, fuels customer loyalty."

Looking at the team's grim faces, I said, "I hope I'm not putting too much pressure on you."

"Sir, can you give us a living example of consistency in brand presentation?" the chief branding officer quietly asked.

"Hmm, a great example of consistency?" I said to myself. I paused for a couple of seconds before proceeding.

“Let’s look at Coca-Cola. As a result of its commitment to consistency, every element of the brand’s marketing works harmoniously. This has helped it become one of the world’s most successful brands. Even on the surface of its social media accounts, for example, the seamlessness of its brand is very apparent.”

The team listened and kept taking notes.

Moving On

“Now,” I continued.

The team looked at each other as if to say, “we know what’s coming.”

“Time for the guardian appointment,” Mariam declared.

I nodded.

I looked at Talal, Fatima, and Ahmed—the remainder of the team yet to receive a guardianship.

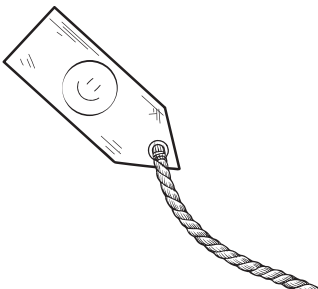
“Fatima, you are the undisputed guardian of this pillar,” I announced. “You’ve been working arduously to paint a positive picture of SEWA, rendering it a presentable aura and demeanor.”

“Thank you, sir. I am delighted and I am in. I have a lot to offer,” Fatima said excitedly.

“Sounds great. Now, let’s call it a day! We will meet tomorrow at the “Rise & Shine” lounge to learn about another important pillar—Persistence,” I told them.

I ended by saying, “Go home and get some rest, because we meet tomorrow a little earlier than usual. I have some important errands to run later tomorrow.”

The team dispersed.





Persistence

Day 10

Location: Rise & Shine

Time : 8 AM

Rise & Shine: Flashes From The Past

The idea of this space began with a request for a space to be as open and flexible as possible. Flowers are scattered everywhere—literally and figuratively; the chandelier at the reception desk casts a floral shadow and is interpretive, while dainty details such as floral-patterned tiles, rugs, and customized cushions are more of a literal representation.

The first aspect of the room that attracts your attention is the simple, unique, and minimal furnishings—just like you would see in IKEA or 2XL showrooms. The room includes one short wall made up of windows as the only source of natural lighting. One of our main goals was to brighten up the space using light and colors, while still maintaining a cozy and warm space.

This aesthetic space consists of warm, natural colors—creamy yellow, clear rust, hairy brown, dusty pink, and matte black. The dining area is located closest to the windows—with a view! However, the USP of the room is a wall painted by a local artist, which depicts one of the famous landmarks of Sharjah—The Al Majaz waterfront.



I entered the room and saw a couple of the team members slouching with their shoulders hunched forward.

I smiled and said to myself, “*What a coincidence!*”

Walking towards the whiteboard, I said to the team, “Stand up everyone.”

All of them stood up.

I added, “Now, chin up, shoulders straight, and flex your arms.”

“I have a guest for you all today,” I said with a calm face.

They looked around.

I signaled for the guest to enter and explained, “The past couple of days have been like heavy-weight lifting for you all—stressful and tiring, indeed!”

Mariam nodded.

“So, I thought of introducing you all to one of my favorite forms of stress-busting,” I said.

“Sure. That would be nice,” Ahmed replied.

“Tai-chi,” I said in a base tone. “Has anyone heard of it?”

“Sounds like a Chinese martial art,” admitted Syeda.

“I will let the expert explain it all,” I said, pointing at our guest Tai-chi instructor. “Just keep your notebooks and iPads away for the next forty-five minutes.”

Hasan, adjusting his glasses, asked, “What about the eight P’s of the brand cycle?”

“We will have enough time for that. That was the reason I asked you to come in early today,” I chuckled.

“Please, familiarize us with Tai-chi,” I requested of the instructor.

The instructor explained, while smiling, “Tai-chi is an ancient Chinese tradition that, today, is practiced as a graceful form of exercise. It involves a series of movements performed in a slow, focused manner, and accompanied by deep breathing.”

“It’s another physical exercise,” Boutheina retorted.

The instructor answered, “Tai-chi is low impact and puts minimal stress on muscles and joints.”

I smiled and added, “It requires no special equipment. You can do Tai-chi anywhere, including indoors or outdoors. And you can do Tai-chi alone or in a group class. In fact, that’s the very reason we are having it here.”

The team listened on in silence.

“Okay, you may all continue with the session. I have something really important to catch up on,” I explained, and I left the room.

On my way out, I heard the instructor saying, “Decreased stress, anxiety, depression, and improved overall well-being are the benefits of Tai-chi.”

I smiled and told myself, *“They will thank me later.”*



An Indescribable Feeling

I hurried back to my main office, where I wanted to witness the live telecast of the first Arab space mission to the planet Mars, which was called “Al-Amal” (an Arabic word that means “hope”). Although the objective of this super-ambitious mission to Mars was to provide a comprehensive image of the weather dynamics in the red planet’s atmosphere, the probe was a foundation for a much bigger goal—the building of a human settlement on Mars within the next 100 years.

I pulled out my chair and sat in front of the TV screen, holding my breath to take it all in.

The countdown began. I could not help but revel in the fact that, for the first time in history, the countdown for the UAE's Hope Probe to Mars' space mission was being done in Arabic.

My heart skipped a beat. It was a peculiar feeling and beyond words.

Absorbed in the moment, I stood up and repeated in a thrilled voice, "Magnificent, magnificent, magnificent!"

In that great moment, I remembered when Armstrong, the first to land on the moon said, "*That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.*"

After some time, I decided to return to my team, who had been practicing Tai-chi.

I smiled and said to myself, "*Time to get back to the grind.*"

I entered the room and saw that they were in the middle of a breathing exercise.

"Breathe in. Breathe out. Breathe in. Breathe out," the instructor repeated.

After a couple of minutes, the instructor told them, "Now slowly open your eyes."

All trace of stress and strain had left the room and was replaced by inexplicable calm.

The instructor added, "After this short session, you may eventually feel confident enough to do Tai-chi on your own."

“While you may gain some benefit from a Tai-chi class that lasts a couple of weeks or less, you may enjoy greater benefits if you continue Tai-chi in the long term and become more skilled.”

“We have to be consistent,” Hasan responded.

I smiled and added, “Or rather persistent. As Benjamin Franklin wisely said, ‘Energy and persistence conquer all things.’”

I paused, then added, “Hence, persistence is our next element of the eight ‘P’s.”

They all laughed.



Close to Close

“Guys, let’s keep going, we are close to closing our branding cycle presentation. As they say, ‘slow and steady wins the race.’ Be patient. Never give up. Consistency is the hallmark behavior of any brand and is crucial to gaining clarity and confidence in the marketplace,” I advised the team. “After all, all brands need *constant* make-overs.”

“We must consider that, in designing a brand, people should recognize it, connect with it, and be willing to make it their own. Branding should be looked at as an opportunity, rather than a restriction. Consistency is the key!”



As I mentioned earlier, brands cannot be built in a day or overnight. I take note of a famous quote: “Branding takes just a few hours of a day to learn. Unfortunately, it takes a lifetime to master.” Building a strong brand is a long-term activity. It takes time—not weeks or months, but years—years of toil and sweat. Although it may take us five to seven years, we understand the importance of time in building our *reputation*.

In addition, though, the second meaning of a longer-term perspective is that current success may not guarantee long-term success. Therefore, I suggested that the SEWA brand would require longer-term activities if it were to survive.

My presentation was going just as I had planned. Of course, I didn’t want to leave any stone unturned. I wanted to sound convincing enough to convince my team. You could say that I had done my homework well!

Until now, things had progressed as planned and everything was under control. According to my plan, it was time to break for lunch. However, I felt that a lunch break would fizzle out or dissipate the positive energy in the room. Hence, I thought I would wrap up the presentation at hand before breaking for lunch.

However, before proceeding to the last phase of SEWA’s branding cycle, I wanted the team to recap what they had learned so far.

“All right then, get ready for an activity,” I announced. Since most of them were not expecting an ad-hoc activity, I could see some jaws dropping. I continued. “I have a question for

you all. Who is ready to answer? So, here is the question: Who remembers what SEWA's eighth principle states?" Some shuffled their feet and looked up at the window. "No one? No one is able to answer?" I said, while sitting down at my desk waiting for a response.

The 'voice of customer' officer jumped off her chair and declared, "That's easy. The eighth SEWA principle stands for 'using vibrant stories that motivate others to reach for a better future.'"

Focus on the future

"Perfect, well done," I told her. "So, would you like to listen to an interesting story of Coca-Cola's persistence in the face of adversity?"

"Of course," they all responded.

"One of the interesting examples I would like to share here is the story of Coca-Cola in Japan. Coca-Cola withstood losses in Japan for 15 years before building its market to become one of Japan's most profitable businesses today. The story of Coca-Cola's growth in Japan is one of innovation, new products, strong marketing, and resilience. From 1910 to the outbreak of World War II, nearly a million servings of Coca-Cola were sold in Japan. During World War II, Coca-Cola sales ceased and did not resume until after the war. However, between 1960 and 1970, sales more than doubled every year. How? The 1964 Tokyo Olympic Games offered the perfect opportunity to showcase the drink to both the Japanese market and global visitors. The company and bottlers provided billboards,

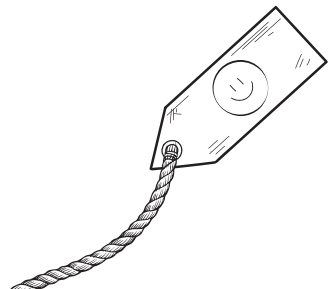
guide maps, and a robust marketing campaign. It worked very well and exceeded the sales expectations.”

“Wow, it’s a really good story,” Syeda responded.

I said, smilingly, “The fundamental lessons here are simple but of paramount importance for brand leaders like you. First, you must accept the things you cannot change and have the courage to change the things you can. Second, you must understand the competitive forces in your industry. How to respond to them is your branding strategy.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” asserted Ali.

“All right team. We will wrap up our meeting here. We meet tomorrow to discuss our last pillar—Perception,” I concluded.





Perception

Day 11

Location: Tea-M Corner
Time : 8 AM

The TEA-M Corner

This place is as homey as can be. The SEWA “Tea-M corner” boasts Bohemian, rustic, minimalist, and vintage décor styles. It has warm settings for some blissful team time. A great deal of its charm is derived from the delicacy of the design. As a set, it provides a relaxing, comfortable ambiance that ensures tranquility. At the same time, it’s the perfect hideout for small team meetings; hence, the name “Tea-M corner” was given to this peaceful area. We chose a simpler approach for this room, decorating with our tea set alone—a set of little spoons, some tin cans, and a wooden chest that held our tea assortment. Next to the tea set, we have fluffy material, a rocking chair, and beanbags that fit in with our decor style. Finally, we have a wall-hung chalkboard as a message board, which has a nice phrase: “Tea is to the body as music is to the soul.”



Everyone arrived early and were engrossed in discussion.

I Can't Breathe

I said “Brand perception is important. It’s sums up our feelings toward, attitudes of, and experiences with a product or service. Brand perception is what moves the needle for companies, taking a common product and giving it elements that evoke emotions. Put simply, SEWA brand perception is how our consumers feel about our brand.”

“Why does it matter?” Ahmed asked.

“It matters because it reflects what consumers think about our company’s culture,” I answered.

“Emotional feelings. I like that. Is anyone aware of what is currently happening in the US?”

“Yes, I am aware,” Syeda answered.

“What is happening?” Ali asked.

“Dear team, let’s begin the day by dedicating a few moments of silence to mourn the death of Mr. George Floyd,” I said, and in a low voice, I continued, “George Floyd’s killing, which was captured on video, has caused outrage and sparked a wave of protests in cities across the US”

“I beg your pardon, sir, but I am a bit confused here. What actually happened to Mr. Floyd?” Ali asked.

“George Floyd, 46, was stopped by police who were investigating the purchase of cigarettes with counterfeit money on 25 May 2020 in Minneapolis. A video showed Mr. Floyd being arrested and a white police officer kneeling on his neck for several minutes—even after he pleaded that he could not breathe.”

I continued, “Protests erupted and have continued since, across many US cities and also internationally, with rallies occurring on Wednesday in Australia, France, the Netherlands and in the UK, where thousands gathered in central London.”

Fatima added, “This shows how, even in this modern era, societies are still grappling with demons like racism and discrimination.”

Aunt Jemima

I proceeded to speak to the team. “Now let me read a news article from the *Guardian*, published on June 17, 2020. ‘One of America’s most recognizable but unreconstructed household brands, Aunt Jemima pancake products, will change its name and image in an effort by the brand to distance itself from racial stereotypes.’”

“The logo of the brand, familiar to shoppers on every supermarket shelf that features pancake mix and pancake syrup—a staple of the classic American breakfast—features an African American woman named after a character from a minstrel show from the 19th century.”

“We recognize that Aunt Jemima’s origins are based on a racial stereotype,’ said a statement obtained by NBC news from Quaker Foods North America, a unit of PepsiCo that owns the Aunt Jemima brand.”

“The company has long been criticized for the logo and name of its product and made the announcement as Black Lives Matter protests against racism in the US continue to grow amid a fresh surge in anger following the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis last month.”

I concluded, “This clearly shows that a brand’s packaging should be designed responsibly in a way that doesn’t offend the sentiments of any human society.”

I added, “Let me share another recent story that highlights the sad story of racism. In the UK, Somali-born Rakhia Ismail, who was councilor for the Labour Party, resigned from the Labour Party due to alleged ‘racism’, ‘discrimination’, and ‘white man oppression’.”

“It is extremely saddening to see that the first Somali-born, Muslim woman, who was set to become a mayor, quit the Labour Party as a result of racism.”

I continued, “She mentioned that she was marginalized in a system that allows white men to have what they want.”

The team sighed.

Fatima added, “Sir, I have great news, but I want to share it at the end of the day—when you choose the guardian for this pillar.”



Profoundly Disappointing

I addressed the team, saying, “Let me share with you all what I saw on TV last night. Nestle, the Swiss-owned food giant announced that it will now source the cocoa for its famous KitKat candy bars from farmers on Rainforest Alliance terms instead of those working under Fairtrade accreditation.”

Fatima commented, “That decision is a huge blow. Thousands of farmers will be hit by this move, won’t they?”

I added, “All the Fairtrade farmers have protested the decision and have called it ‘profoundly disappointing’.”

“In fact, Simon Billington, the global technical manager for Nestle Confectionery, has said that the firm is aware that the move will have an impact on some farmers, but it is working hard to mitigate this. He also mentioned that this move underlines their commitment to achieving sustainable cocoa sourcing throughout their global supply chain.”

“But what will the poor famers do now? Especially now—when the world is facing one of the worst health crises imaginable,” Fatima questioned.

The group groaned in anguish.

“So, you see, the lesson to be drawn from this incident is that sometimes a good move can backfire and change a brand’s perception,” I said.

I turned to the group. “So, this is a tricky business. The KitKat situation is an example of a brand going extremely tone-deaf.”

The team seemed puzzled.

I went on, “Warren Buffett’s well-known statement: ‘It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently’ fits perfectly into how to build brand perception.”



Shocking and Distressing

“Sir, with your permission, I would like to share another example that is very much relevant. May I?” Ali asked.

I nodded.

Ali recounted, “China has stepped up its measures to reduce food waste after President Xi Jinping called the amount that was being wasted ‘shocking and distressing’. President Xi highlighted that COVID-19 had ‘sounded the alarm’ on food waste.”

The group listened to Ali in silence.

He looked around and proceeded, "Hence, the 'Clean Plate Campaign' was born."

He continued, "Here's the interesting part, following President Xi's message, the Catering Industry Association urged restaurants in the city of Wuhan to limit the number of dishes served to diners, implementing a system dubbed 'N-1', where groups had to order one dish fewer than the number of diners."

Fatima exclaimed, "So, under this system, a group of 10 people could only order nine dishes!"

"What if a person goes to a restaurant alone? How many dishes can he order? Zero?" joked Talal.

Ali added, "Another restaurant, a beef restaurant in the city of Changsha, placed two large scales at its entrance this week. It then asked diners to enter their measurements into an app that would then suggest menu items accordingly. However, the policy caused uproar on Chinese social media."

"Okay, what happened next?" Hasan asked.

"The restaurant posted an apology online, saying that they were 'deeply sorry' for their interpretation of the national 'Clean Plate Campaign'."

"I am sure their original intentions were to advocate preventing waste and ordering food in a healthy way," Hasan added.

Ali answered, “Yes, you are right, they mentioned that they never forced customers to weigh themselves.”

“Thanks Ali,” I responded, “for sharing this example, which clearly states that even our most carefully laid out plans and tactics may backfire.”

“That would surely lead to a change in perception of your brand,” Talal concluded.

Finally, I explained that great brands continually monitor brand perceptions to see that they’re in alignment with the brand owner’s aspirations and are in sync with consumers’ wants and needs. One needs to measure and track what is working and what is not. I explained that the best way to become a memorable brand lies in keeping a brand’s promise by respecting the brand’s DNA and utilizing emotional positioning as a strategy. It’s this top-of-mind association that breeds brand success. We need to understand our customer’s perceptions and be in the customer “universe”. The customer being delighted is the aim of the game.



“So, what’s the news that you wanted to share with us, Fatima?” Talal asked.

Fatima smiled and stood up to speak.

“We all know that the environment doesn’t have borders, doesn’t have boundaries, is unconfined, and is infinite.”

The group listened attentively.

She continued, “Now, I would like to highlight an extraordinary achievement of our dear chairman that imbibes his support for clean energy.”

“He has received a ‘certificate of appreciation’ for showcasing his support for a clean energy transition by donating 200 RECs, which equals to 200 KHW to the Energy Market Company that operates Singapore’s wholesale electricity market—Asia’s first liberalized electricity market.”

“What do you mean by RECs?” Mariam asked.

Fatima promptly replied, “It stands for ‘Renewable Energy Certificates’. They are also known as ‘green tags,’ or ‘green credits’.”

Mariam looked perplexed.

Fatima elaborated, “In simpler terms, an REC is a certificate that indicates the generation of each megawatt hour (MWh) of electricity from an eligible source of renewable power.”

Ahmed, the chief cost-kill officer asked, “But why the need to buy them?”

Immediately, Fatima answered, “Buying RECs allows you to support the renewable energy market without having to install solar panels on your roof or invest in other more involved methods of generating renewable energy.”

She went on, “Depending on what type of RECs you buy, you can help local renewable energy projects or even future projects that haven’t yet been built. RECs provide businesses a means to support renewable energy generation and meet the demand for clean energy.”

The team smiled at her.

“What are the pros of buying them?” Ahmed questioned.

Fatima confidently answered, “Well, there are a plethora of them. Buying RECs has many benefits—just one is that it reduces the carbon footprint, thus contributing less to pollution and climate change.”

She added, “Also, in a way, we support the renewable energy market.”

Ahmed nodded his head in agreement.

Fatima continued, “Here’s the interesting part, by doing this, you are promoting our company’s commitment to attaining clean energy and, most importantly, building stronger relationships with the community and encouraging dialogue with them.”

“Now, let us all give a standing ovation to our chairman for this great achievement,” Fatima concluded.

The room filled with thundering applause.



We decided to take a short break in the “Recombination of Ideas” room.

I had told the team, “Let’s move to our ‘Recombination of Ideas’ room.”

“Whoa, it’s the same place where different people from different sectors and departments merge, discuss ideas, and then assess possibilities that emerge, isn’t it?” Hasan asked.

I replied, “You see Hasan, the majority of important innovations actually spring from collaborative team efforts.”

Syeda added, “I totally agree, sir; this room creates conditions that facilitate innovation by encouraging collaboration.”

“We can brainstorm in the room while playing ping pong, strolling around, or lying on the couch. The only rule that SEWA has is that we must share our insights with others,” she continued, before smiling with a wink.

After a few minutes, Manini, our chief matter catcher officer, entered the room with a jovial smile and handed a sheet of paper to me, pointing at the paper as she did so.

I took a sip of my green mint tea and said, “Manini has some great news to share with us.”

Looking at her, I said, “Yes, Manini, please go ahead and share this news with the group.”

Manini said, “I have received an invitation from Mohammad S. Mohaisen, president and CEO of the MENAT region of GE (General Electric), stating that Crotonville Virtual University, which is a GE-branded university, is offering SEWA employees two complimentary virtual workshops.”

The team listened in awe.

She continued, “These are no ordinary workshops. They are led by the Crotonville faculty and GE thought leaders and are offering to catalyze continuous improvement. They have designed the workshops to accelerate personal development, create connections with other industry-leaders, and provide inspiration for implementing new ideas.”

I responded by saying, “A big thank you, Manini, for the marvelous job you’ve been doing lately with GE deals, which has resulted in such an offer from GE that is in line with our 14th principle: Grow together with our suppliers and partners for mutual benefit.”

I had finished my explanation of the branding cycle, but the team was still engrossed in it; they were all starry-eyed and the room was brimming with enthusiasm. I could clearly feel the positive vibes around me. I knew for sure that I had nailed it, and not even the hard way! I had hit the jackpot. I hadn’t just told them what they should be doing, I had explained why, too. Sometimes, I call it “how and wow”.

However, I knew that I had only shown the tip of the iceberg. There was a lot to achieve and much more to actualize. The atmosphere in the room looked favorable, and the team ap-

peared convinced. I felt that we had had enough discussion and that a lunch break would be well-received.

I wrapped up the meeting by saying, “Once this branding cycle is put in place, it can be applied to our web presence, content strategy, and social media plan. And remember that it’s a cycle, not a one-time activity. Always be ready to rinse and repeat so that we can stay up-to-date as to who our customers are and how our brand can best serve them. Be hands-on and minds-on with this cycle. It is not enough just to preach these principles. How you practice them is vital.”

I continued, “That’s enough food for thought for your mind, now it’s time to feed our bodies. Let’s break for an hour’s lunch. There’s an appetizing buffet laid out for you. Let’s reconvene after the break because I have much more exciting things to share with you.”

The lunch hour quickly evaporated. With lunch over, we reassembled in the room. The employees looked refreshed and in high spirits. I told them to be seated.

I cleared my throat and, in a cheerful tone, said, “This may sound like a Cinderella-like transformation. That’s not a bad thing though! However, this isn’t a fairy tale. We will have our own share of gruesome days, but the outcome will be splendid. Don’t panic, we will do it brick-by-brick.”

“Are you ready?” I asked.

“Yes,” they responded.

I replied with equal enthusiasm, “As St. Jerome’s personal mantra goes: ‘Good. Better. Best. Never let it rest till you’re good is better and your better is best’, I have decided that there will be monthly progress meetings to ensure that every guardian is doing their job efficiently and that we are working together to reach our goal.”

“So, we will meet on the first Sunday of each month to discuss progress and the way forward,” I concluded.

“Oh, no. Meetings again! I thought this was going to be last one,” Ahmed exclaimed.

“Come on Ahmed,” I replied, “you know we have more than ten types of meetings. One type is progress meetings. The purpose of a progress meeting is to align, synchronize, and motivate the team, to address any problems that prevent you from making good progress, and to discuss any opportunities for making even better progress.”

The group listened.

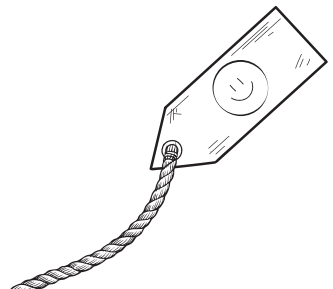
Fatima raised her hand to speak.

I nodded.

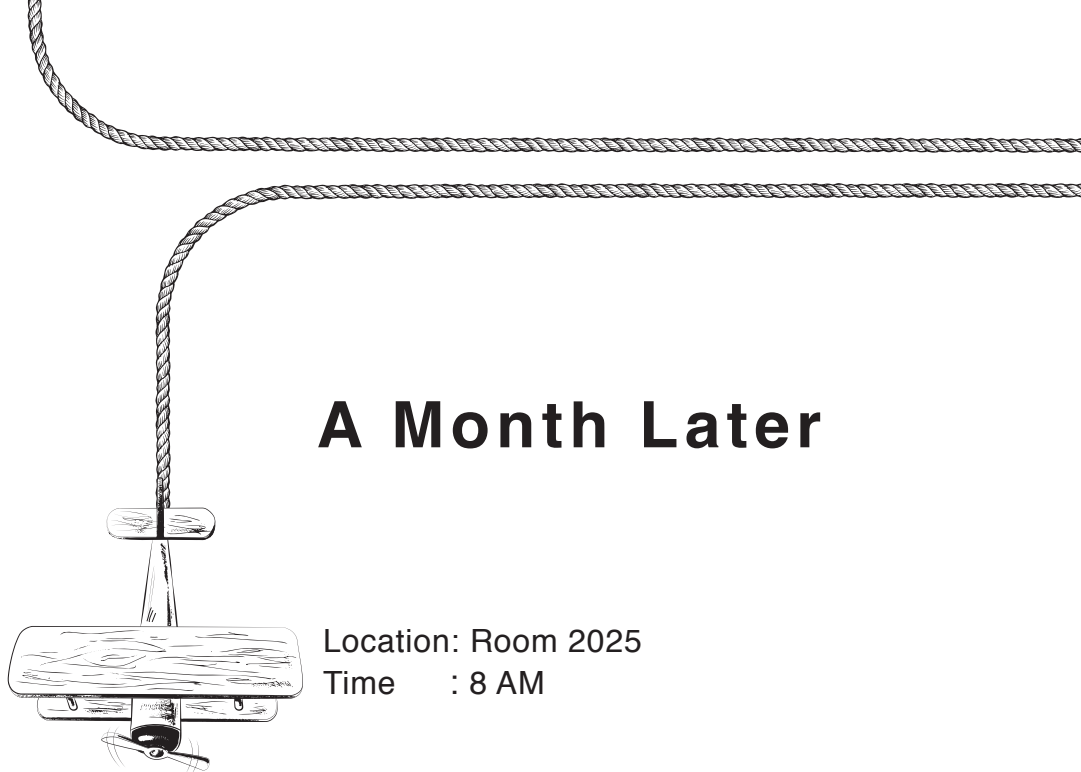
“Thank you, sir, for showing us the importance of the 8Ps of the branding cycle and choosing us to be the guardians to implement it successfully. We will not let you down,” she assured me.

I concluded, “Go ahead. Now you are all equipped with the tricks of the trade. I am sure you will all come out with flying colors. We will meet in exactly a month’s time.”

They all left the room with happy faces, energized to implement their ideas with their teams following the 8Ps of SEWA’s branding cycle.



Part Three



A Month Later

Location: Room 2025

Time : 8 AM

Room 2025

This room has been renamed after the SEWA Vision 2025; our vision for the upcoming five years. The room sits on eight pillars, just like the eight “P”s of the branding cycle. And guess what—they are also called the eight “P”s of Vision 2025. In fact, my next book is about the SEWA Vision 2025. Stay tuned!

This room is futuristic. The walls of the room are decorated with the stories of the eight pillars of the vision: people, performance, planet, projects, positioning, partners, prosperity, and profitability. In this room, there’s ample room for productivity in all forms. We can conduct small meetings, individual one-on-one sessions, collaborative projects, and teleconferencing, too. This place is designed to assist with “smart working”, making use of a central coffee bar.

I had assembled my eight “P”s champions in Room 2025 to get an overview of their initial phase of being guardians of the eight “P”s of SEWA’s branding cycle, to understand what their challenges were, and to listen to their stories.



“Good morning, ladies and gentlemen,” I said with enthusiasm. “How have you been doing?”

“Good morning, sir,” the group said out loud.

“The last month has been an eye-opening phase,” said Ahmed, “I faced challenges that I had not foreseen.”

Fatima added, “I have some great stories to share.”

Syeda continued, “I have interesting anecdotes, too.”

“I have lots of questions,” Talal commented.

I smiled. “It seems that you all have been thoroughly enjoying your new roles. No worries, I am all ears.”

At this point, my phone rang with a meeting alert, notifying me about an upcoming meeting with His Excellency Nicola Lener, the Ambassador of Italy to the UAE. He had decided to pay a courtesy visit to SEWA to discuss the dynamics of business in the post-COVID-19 era and to explore the plausibility of joint ventures with Italian companies.

I said, “Dear team, we will now take a 30-minute break, His Excellency Nicola Lener, the Ambassador of Italy to the UAE, is visiting me. In the meantime, you may all grab your favorite beverages and munch on some snacks, check e-mails, exercise, or do whatever else you want to, yeah?”

After the meeting, I returned to the group.

“How was the meeting, sir?”

“Oh, it was amazing—no doubt about that,” I replied.

I said, “We discussed how businesses have suffered due to COVID-19 and the repercussions that the deadly virus has had on the world’s economy. Then, I personally took him on the SEWA facility tour and showed him our leadership and business philosophies and our smart spaces.”

“Yes, we overheard you when you were passing by this room with the guest,” Fatima said.

I shook my head.

“Would you like to know what the guest had to say about us?”
I asked smilingly.

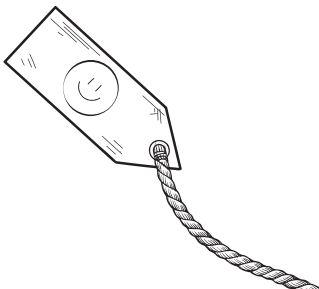
All of them nodded.

“He was immensely impressed with my explanation of the SEWA Vision 2025, which was followed by a quick run-through of our SEWA branding cycle—the eight “P”s,” I said, enthusiastically.

“So, now you may all begin to speak—one at a time,” I said.

“Everyone will have an equal opportunity. And remember, this is going to be every month. So, take it as a ritual, not a routine.”

We spent the whole day discussing the initial stage’s challenges and the future steps to be taken.





Acknowledgments

Writing a book is an incredible undertaking. It takes years of research and experience and then months, if not years, of writing and rewriting. This book has emerged from the thousands of hours of seminars I've had the opportunity to give, as well as the countless suggestions and observations from the thousands of men and women I've had the privilege of working with over the years. As Tennyson says in his novel "Ulysses," "I am a part of all that I have met." I have been influenced by more people than I can even count, but I want to thank some of them for making this book possible.

First and foremost, I'd like to thank SEWA's customers, employees, strategic partners, and stakeholders. Without you and your support, none of this would have been possible. I acknowledge the efforts of Syeda, my chief knowledge officer for her wisdom, insight, and skills as a wordsmith that have

added charm and enriched the conversations and dialogues contained in this book. Also, I would like to extend my gratitude to Maryam Attai, who designed the book with her artistic flair.

I would like to give special thanks to my family, who have been so supportive and encouraging in many ways—especially by creating a foundational and loving environment for my joyful living.



About the Author

Dr. Rashid Alleem is an internationally recognized author, speaker, philanthropist, and a sought-after transformational thought leader; He is ranked third among the 25 most influential CEOs in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and is considered one of the 100 most influential CEOs in the Middle East. He was awarded 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 is an authentic visionary leader who has crafted the UAE's Vision 2071—a centennial plan for the UAE to fortify its reputation and its soft power.

Every year, Dr. Alleem speaks to a diverse audience of global companies, international government leaders, global university students and multinational ambassadors.

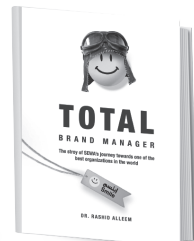
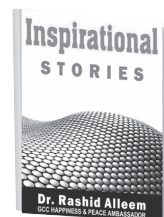
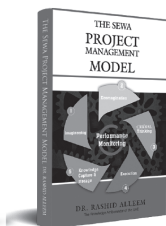
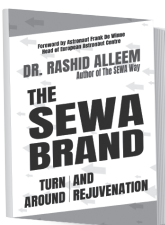
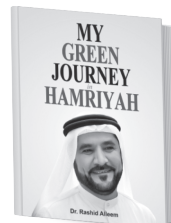
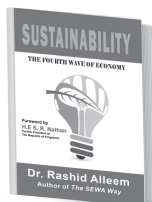
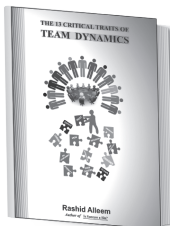
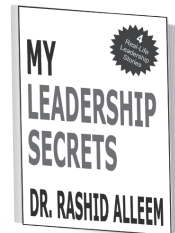
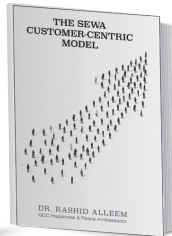
Dr. Alleem was recognized as “The Knowledge Ambassador of the UAE” by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (the vice president and prime minister of the UAE and ruler of the Emirate of Dubai) and as the “Environmentalism of the Year 2012” by the prime minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir Bin Mohamad.

Having earned a PhD from the University of Salford, located in Manchester, UK, Dr. Alleem has also received five honorary doctorates from different universities. Recently, the Academic College of Oxford, UK, honored him with the title of “Honorary Professor”.

Being an expert in leadership and management, Dr. Alleem has authored many books in both the English and Arabic language. Some examples of his recent books are: *Alleem Sustainable Development Goals*, *Total Brand Manager*, and *Fostering Creativity and Innovation*.



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