

THE POWER TO CREATE – GOD’S GREATEST GIFT TO MAN

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When God created man, He gave him three gifts –

- ✚ He created man in His own image;
- ✚ He gave him the gift of the freedom of choice and
- ✚ He gave him the gift of creation - He gave man the ability to physically create anything that he wants.

While each gift is precious, for me the gift of creation is the greatest gift of all. Of course most of us think that this is a lot of nonsense, which is precisely the reason why we are unable to utilize this most precious and powerful gift given to us!!

We find it difficult to accept the concept that we are capable of creating, most probably because we find it difficult to intellectualize it. We find it difficult to find a logical explanation of how this can happen and so the easiest thing is to reject the concept.

Man is unique because he not only has a mind which can reason, but because he also has been given a soul. Over the centuries, man has depended more on his mind than his soul, with the result that while he has progressed tremendously in the sciences and in technology and medicine, his development as a “human being” has been virtually zero. We are intellectual giants and spiritual dwarfs!! Why?

The reasons are not hard to find:

- ✚ Developing as a human being involves relating with other people and developing as a spiritual being. This is not easy! People are unpredictable and you are never sure how they will react. They are not as structured and definable

as a mathematical equation or a chemical reaction. It is awkward and possibly embarrassing to deal with people, so we tend to avoid such interactions and relationships;

- ✚ The mind is controllable. It can be used to think up an answer or solution which is convenient. In an awkward situation, it can be used to rationalize one's way into a course of action or thought which is convenient and easier to digest. The soul, however, is not so flexible! It always tells you what is right, regardless of the consequences. It is therefore more difficult to follow;
- ✚ The mind follows the path of logic whereas the soul requires belief. One cannot reason with the soul. For many this is more difficult to accept!
- ✚ By using past experiences or by rationalizing, the mind tends to find the most convenient course of action whereas the soul will only spell out the correct course, be it easy or difficult.

For these and other reasons, man has found it easier to listen to his mind rather than his soul.

Creation is a thought process. But it is not merely an intellectual thought process. It involves both the soul and the intellect. One has to truly believe in order to create. One has to use the power of the soul to create. This is why most of us find it difficult to accept the premise that we have within us the gift of creation. Because we can't believe this concept.

We exist in an environment of energy! Not only everything around us, but we ourselves, are energy. Solids are energy with the lowest frequency of vibration, liquids have a higher frequency of vibration and gases have an even higher frequency. Sound has a higher energy level than gases and has a frequency which enables it to travel at 760 miles per hour. It is generally believed that the energy which is most powerful and has the highest frequency of vibration is light which can travel at 186,000 miles per second. However there is one form of energy which is even more powerful than light and that energy is "thought". Thought is so powerful that it can change the

cosmos around us, thereby making it possible for us to create if we can only get ourselves focused enough.

Hindu philosophy talks about the “mantra”. A mantra is supposed to be very powerful and can do great good or terrible harm. The mantra is just a sound. In most cases it has no meaning but the vibrations it creates have an effect on the human mind and body – which as I mentioned before, is also vibration and energy. It is said that the mantra is most effective when it is repeated in the mind, because if it is repeated aloud it only has the power of sound but if it is repeated in the mind, it has the power of thought!!

Many of us have either heard of, seen or met Bhagwan Sree Sathya Sai Baba. Thousands of us have seen him create either holy ash or physical objects out of thin air. When asked how he does it, he says, “I just think about it”. Sree Sathya Sai Baba is not a magician, he is using his powers of creation !!

Innovation and Invention are various aspects of creation. They basically work on the power of an idea (thought), and the implementation of that idea. In Japan, they use a concept called “continuous improvement”, where instead of relying on a few major inventions, the environment or work at hand is improved through constant and continuous small improvements. One may call them “1st level creation” because they are mainly intellectual in nature. Creation at a higher level needs belief and the soul. While it may be difficult for you to accept this concept, I mention it mainly to highlight the extent of power that each one of us has lying within us, untapped.

Rhonda Byrne in her book “The Secret” talks about the “law of attraction”. She says that “the secret” is in fact, the law of attraction. Over the years, it has been hidden from the many by the few who have been very successful. The law of attraction says that if you can focus on and visualize something in your mind, you will be able to hold it in your hand. She cites many instances and examples to prove her point.

In our role as leaders, we are so afraid of failing that our negative thoughts become the cause of our failure. Those who succeed, do so because they are able to think positively about their success. If we could just think more positively and believe in our power to create, our successes would be huge. We also go wrong in underestimating the ability of our colleagues and subordinates to create. In them we have a tremendous reservoir of ideas which we usually fail to use, to our detriment. Let me give you a few examples:

Many organizations run “Suggestion Box” schemes. They are an attempt by the management to encourage their workers to give ideas for improvements in the products made, the working processes or the environment. The suggestor is rewarded in accordance with the savings made by the company. In our country, Suggestion Box schemes are not usually very successful because in most instances nobody pays too much attention to them.

When I took over as General Manager of the Telco’s Jamshedpur Plant, I found that the 26,000 employees of the plant were generating 2,500 suggestions each year. The total annual savings to the company through suggestions amounted to a few lakhs of Rupees. At that time the employees of the Toyota Motor Car Co. were generating one suggestion per employee per month. I threw a challenge to my officers to try to achieve “one suggestion per employee per year” or increase the number of suggestions ten-fold. While there was a lot of skepticism initially, by encouraging our men to think of new ideas, helping them while writing up their suggestions and ensuring that they were processed quickly, we were able to increase the number of suggestions generated annually to 21,000 from 2,500 over a period of four years. These were not merely scribbling on paper because we were accepting 40% of the suggestions we received, which is high by any standards and much better than what we were achieving in the past. Apart from the joy and satisfaction among the workers in seeing their ideas being put to work, the savings to Telco, Jamshedpur rose from a couple of lakhs of rupees per year to Rs. 10.00 crores annually. While the benefits to the company were great, I

cite this example to illustrate how much the company had been losing for so many years by not tapping into the creativity of its own employees.

Unfortunately, we in management, suffer from the illusion that one has to be educated and qualified to be able to generate good ideas. Nothing can be further from the truth. We continue in this belief at our own peril. History is replete with thousands of instances where the simplest of folk have come out with ideas which have changed the lives of the people around them.

We hear and read a lot about “empowering” people both at work and in society. Empowerment is another way of motivating people to use their creativity. The main obstacle to empowerment is not so much the fear of unleashing creativity as the fear of losing authority and therefore in trying to preserve the one, one loses out on the other.

In the 1980s, one of the ‘buzz-words’ in industry was “Quality Circles”. It had been imported into the country from Japan, was the flavor of the season and was supposed to be the cure-all for all quality problems. The fact that it was not universally successful in our country was more because it was adopted as a “fashion” rather than as a genuine attempt to improve the product quality of the organization. We decided to work with quality circles in Telco, Jamshedpur, not so much to try and improve quality, as to increase the workers’ involvement in the day to day running of their departments. Our managers were managing their divisions and departments through a system of “Target Setting” and we felt that if the workers would adopt some of the targets of their departments and work on them independently in their own groups, we would be aligning the whole organization in the same direction and would therefore optimize our activities. However we decided to call our groups “Small Groups” and call the campaign “Small Group Activity”. Our workers were encouraged to form small groups of 10 to 15 people in their departments and discuss and work on any problem that they felt would improve the work in their department. They could take up problems related to productivity, quality, safety, housekeeping,

costs or any other problem that they felt would improve the functioning of the department.

We asked them to meet at a fixed time on a fixed day each week. Their managers and supervisors had been instructed that the small group meetings were not to be disturbed for any other work, under any circumstances. In order to help in making their meetings more meaningful, we gave the men training in brainstorming techniques, basic statistical quality control methods, the use of Ishikawa Diagrams etc. Within a couple of months we started seeing the results. Ideas on improving quality, increasing productivity, reducing costs and improvements in many other areas starting pouring in. We devised a system where, when a group finished a project, they would make a presentation to their departmental head, the best projects in the departments were presented once a week to the divisional heads and the best projects from the divisions were presented to the top management group of the plant once a month.

The enthusiasm generated had to be seen to be believed and the quality of ideas was truly amazing. Many of the ideas generated were so good that they went on to win national awards. Apart from the generation of a large number of ideas, the enthusiasm generated made the work joyful. Our men were smiling while they worked, and they were always anxious to show off their new ideas to any visitors to the department. It was a real joy to walk around the shop floors.

In a very short while we had 75% of our men working in small groups.

Having worked with small groups and assessing the benefits that the company was deriving from them we decided to move forward towards greater empowerment of our men and formed them into “Self Managed Teams” (SMTs). While the small groups were voluntary, informal groups, the SMTs were more structured. They were about the same size as the small groups, 12 to 15 people per SMT, but the teams were selected by the departmental heads and each team had a team leader and five functional leaders. To prevent any social stratification in the SMTs we didn't call the

lead people as “Leaders” but called them “Coordinators” and made it clear that each one of them was merely a ‘first among equals’. The functions specified were:

Quality,

Costs & Wastes,

Output & Productivity,

Training & Development, and

Safety & Housekeeping.

The job of the Functional Coordinator was to collect information relevant to their function, as it applied to the SMT, and present this at team meetings for further joint action. They also followed up on the decisions taken in their function with the SMT to ensure that those decisions were implemented.

Our managers were initially very apprehensive about giving responsibility for production and quality to the workers, but the workers very quickly took on these responsibilities and surpassed the targets that had been set for them in virtually every area of work. They came up with new ideas on how to achieve results and took a real pride in keeping their machines and work areas clean. Material which used to be thrown around was invariably kept neatly and was completely accounted for and inter-departmental material shortages were negotiated by them with their colleagues and were reduced considerably. Quality improvements were dramatic! In our Steering Section we had been trying to reduce customer complaints for months, without any substantial results. As soon as the workers took on the responsibility for quality, they brought the level of customer complaints down dramatically.

Problems, when they surfaced, were not technical in nature and in fact came in unexpected areas. The Worker’s Union started feeling insecure since the bond between management and the workers had strengthened so much. As soon as this became apparent, we took special action to ensure that they were included in all the improvements made and in the target setting discussions. By giving them enough importance a potential conflict situation was averted. The second problem area needed

a lot more work and sensitivity. Our supervisors, engineers and junior managers started feeling very insecure. With the workers taking on so much responsibility, they felt that they would have no work and would become redundant. Fortunately I had visualized that this may happen and so had already taken some action to counter this insecurity. The SMTs could not have functioned effectively without technical support. So many of the supervisory staff were retrained and made into technical support teams which had the responsibility of solving technical problems and arranging for the manufacture of new fixtures and tooling which the teams required to carry out their work or new material handling facilities to ensure that the material could be kept in an orderly fashion, as thought up by the SMTs. Many others were retrained to help improve the quality of vendor items or improve the manufacturing processes used by the vendors. There are many such jobs that tend to be neglected by the pressure for more production. These we could take care of more effectively.

All this made it necessary for us to restructure the organizations in those departments and divisions where the SMTs had started working. In doing this, we were able to reduce the reporting levels between the divisional head and the workers from eight (8) to four (4), thereby improving communication in the divisions.

Training was a major management intervention in all this. The SMT members needed to be trained to take on their new responsibilities; supervisors and managers needed to be trained to take on new jobs and responsibilities and even many of our senior managers had to be trained to work effectively in the new reorganized divisional structures. We devised an SMT Quality Continuum by which the SMTs could assess how they were progressing in their maturity as teams and their responsibilities varied in accordance with their growth.

In spite of the many problems that were faced, we were able to get over them because of the trust that had been built up over the previous years. The men trusted their managers to work in their interests and the supervisors and junior managers

trusted top management to ensure that they would be given meaningful alternate responsibilities.

An organization may use the finest technology and employ the most brilliant men to man its positions, but without “trust” to act as the glue to hold the whole system together, things start unraveling very quickly. Trust is the greatest bond to hold an organization together and in a trusting environment people start creating and giving of their best.

Mr. Moolgaokar, Telco’s Chairman always used to tell us, “Don’t increase the size of your family, increase and improve the quality of your family”. While we grumbled when we thought we needed additional men and he wouldn’t approve of our proposals, we thanked him in the end because with lesser heads we could keep working on improving them and their contribution to the organization.

Our potential for creativity is unlimited. I say this because we are using so little of our potential at present that we could be ten times more creative than we are at present without coming anywhere close to the potential that we have within us.

Man merely has to stop doubting himself and convince himself that he has within him the power to create anything that he wants. And then he should just go ahead and do it!!

Man is God’s greatest creation! It is unfortunate that we don’t believe this fact!!

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