

Nowadays we are frequently approached to run sessions on leadership. The question that keeps coming up in these sessions is, “What is leadership? Is it to get the task done, or is it to win the hearts of people, or both?” The answer remains debatable, however for the context of this story, let's narrow down the definition to: “A leader is someone you would die for!” The famous Australian cricketer Justin Langer was asked to describe Steve Waugh as a captain, and his remarks were “If Steve asked me to run into a brick wall at full speed, I would do it, because I know he would only ask me to do it if he was sure I could break through it.” Is a leader is someone you would die for?

It is true that leaders can be made, and are not just born. But one thing is for sure, we sometimes underestimate the value of emotions and being nice to each other. Our story today is about Mr. Muhammed Saleem. Saleem owns an aluminum extrusion set up (Perfect Engineering) in Lahore. He is the only one in Pakistan who can do die casting and extrusion. A true, ‘one-stop’ shop for people looking for aluminum solutions. He started all of this by his own hands and has grown it into a respectable business. A couple of years ago, Saleem took some financial risks that did not deliver the payback expected. Left with a cash crunch, he tried to borrow money from other sources.

Things got worse. His business was threatened. He admitted defeat to himself and assembled all of his labor and staff together to let them know that the company was being shut down due to a lack of funds. All of the 30 people listened to him intently and then asked why he was giving up. His response was that he did not have money to pay them or to finance production. They listened to him and after an emotional farewell, they went away.

Saleem was and still is someone who will fight for the rights and honor of his people. You can make fun of him in jest, and he will laugh along. However, any thing that seemed even slightly contemptuous for his people, and you will see a very different side of Saleem. This characteristic of unbreakable loyalty to his people paid off for him.

The evening after his speech to his people, there was a knock on Saleem's door. It was the entire staff of 30 people who worked with him. They were carrying in their hands jewellery and other valuables taken from their wives and daughters. They implored Saleem to take it and use it. They said they were willing to work for free, because they loved him and did not want to see his fall from grace. They knew he could make things work, the belief was unshakeable.

Saleem reopened the engineering concern. The workers and staff worked without salary for seven months. The company bounced back and is in great financial shape now.

What would it take to motivate a person with a meager salary to work for no money, and that too, for seven months by risking the well being of his own family for the belief in one person? Hats off, Saleem, there are a very few people in this world that can inspire people the way you have.

By the way, this story was narrated to us by Saleem's brother-in-law who had tears in his eyes as he shared this.

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