

Fascinating how people react to a situation in different ways. One sees it as an opportunity, the other as a problem. The first one grabs it, the other tries to obliterate it or run away. The former is provoked by it, the latter condemns it. Why?

Self-imposed limitations, trapped by disempowering beliefs and seeing the environment as the all-determining, confines us in shackles making us the toughest single barricade in building ourselves. The consequences? Frustration, psychological dissonance, anger, hatred and helplessness.

This trend is seen across the many strata of our society. Rich or poor, educated or not, those who do not want to see, will not. As the Holy Quran mentions repeatedly, there is a veil on the eyes of some, who remain in darkness. To delve into the unknown is inconceivable, to condemn is easier. Fear takes over and self-preservation becomes the only need to survive. Selfishness and anarchy become the norm.

The foundation of our learnings is faith. We are raised in families that educate us in unconditional, unquestioned belief in the Omnipotent. We are surrounded by knowledge of right and wrong. We are blessed by teachings from prophets; role models we can follow as examples of what the highest form of a human being can be. Yet, in our daily life we mostly encounter people, situations and an environment that is hostile, disrespectful and degrading. Walk into the government's tax office to seek help with your tax returns. Upon entering, you will find officers discussing Quranic verses, clarifying meanings and enlightening each other on religious concepts. The moment you request information, they will ask you for Rs 200 (with no receipt) to provide assistance. Go out into the market, and you will see billboards mentioning that half of faith is cleanliness. Beneath this board will surely be a heap of garbage. Those fathers who teach their children respect, who run to mosques at the first call of prayer, and diligently perform other prescribed religious rituals, will not even greet or thank the man in the lift who takes them up to their office. These very people treat their domestic help as sub-human, using a special tone reserved only for them. They claim that is authority, without which 'these people' will cross limits.

What happens to children of these fathers? They are told to respect, but observe disrespect in the behavior of their parents. They are told that bribery is a ticket to hell, but see it institutionalized. They are taught not to lie, but learn to justify their own and their parent's lies. What is the integrity of such a society?

Yet, pride and honor rage supreme. It can never be my fault, so it must be the others. The act of blaming takes root firmly and any other way to conduct oneself is inconceivable.

What are the ramifications of such a way of life; an existence without integrity? Listing them here would mean a reiteration of what is known and clearly visible to everyone anyway. Besides, we have too many religious and political leaders pushing down our throats what the problems are with the other religious and political leaders. Pointing at the other and debasing him seems to be the fastest, easiest and hottest means of gaining popularity. And it works, as no one questions it – on the contrary, the masses are aroused by the condemnation of other fellow humans or fellow Muslims – that species that claims to be the best.

On a more positive note – the opportunities provided by the current state of affairs, the physical, mental and spiritual conditions we live in are challenges not to be found in the developed world. One of the highest income earning ventures is education. It is said that a certain school system's net income is equal to one of the largest industrial groups' gross income – although the group is so humongous that when it raises a request for funds, several banks in Pakistan have to collaborate to meet the demand. Still, they are far behind the school system in their margins.

Similar signs are visible in the training and development industry. Demand by organizations to continuously develop their employees to rise to face tougher challenges of the market place is not only keeping current trainers hectically busy but is seeing the emergence of new enterprises in the training industry. In the process, the learner has become more aware of what to demand from training and settles for only that which enhances his efficiency and effectiveness. Certain training outfits are making a conscious effort to take their modern ideas into schools, colleges and vocational training centers. Sessions are recoded on CDs and cassettes and made available at nominal prices to the public.

The people of Pakistan are willing and able to march ahead into a prosperous future, but there are two dynamics holding them back. One, as mentioned earlier, is denial or non-acceptance of where we are, to see the condition we are in and how long the journey to improvement will take, and secondly, we are mis-harping.

Whether it is the principal of a school, the manager at a multinational bank, a teenage student

or a bureaucrat, we see the problem everywhere except ourselves. We have managed to tighten the 'ego' noose around our neck so firmly that we'd rather hang by it than admit our shortcomings. It is sad to hear educated individuals, so-called emancipated employees of large, multinational companies, making comments such as, "good thing AIDS has started raging in non-Muslim countries. We will be rid of them without having to go to war." Or, as another one said, "The problem is that non-Muslims are unified against Muslims, and we are not." The deathly, cruel and hateful aspiration in the former example and the idea of religion being the basis of unity or enmity (where every religion preaches peace and brotherhood) in the later, shows the premise we construct our beliefs on and the values we live. Yet, the arrogance with which these comments are made is scary, for they indicate a point of no return.

Of course there are those firmly connected to their ideals; connected to themselves and their reality. These are the people who lead their lives with a purpose. Included in this category would be those who work on daily wages on construction sites, the mazdoors; Maulana Edhi's team of empowered personnel; corporations injecting huge funds into improving the quality of education; organizations such as The Citizen's Foundation, Layton Rehmatullah Benevolent Trust, the Kidney Centre, people involved with building the Civil Hospital to becoming a world class public health service provider. There are young boys and girls coping with studies, work and teaching others, all in one day. With God's grace there exist innumerable examples of such heroic and idealistic acts and entities of greatness.

The second reason, mis-harping, implies focusing on factors that are not really causes of a problem. Coming back to people in organizations, or students in schools and universities – working or learning seems to be about making money (the monthly pay-cheque after graduation). When money becomes the end in itself, it is the beginning of mental and spiritual stagnation. Like stagnated water accumulates bacteria, insects and moss that spread diseases, and disable growth and freshness, so do people, communities and even nations who are driven by self-sustenance only. Ultimately they stand alone.

It is ironic that senior managers at companies talk of designing reward systems to acknowledge employee contributions – something they are paid for anyway. Or, to put pictures up on walls or in the company newsletter of the 'employee-of-the-month'. Or to hear that annual conferences are organized on massive scales and millions spent to 'motivate' teams. Prizes are being given to departments for 'cleanest environment'. It seems managers are mainly earning their large salaries for having to motivate others. Why is that still such a need exists; one that was established as necessary along the assembly lines during the industrial revolution. Trust, respect and honesty are high on training agendas. Too much effort and resources are being spent on symptoms and not causes of the problem.

The industrial revolution brought about quantum change. Management theorists and practitioners advocated means of growing businesses by manipulating people. People willingly gave away their control. At that time, management was defined as “getting work done through people.” We have allowed ourselves to be controlled by others, and become dependent on appreciation, rewards, bonuses, perks etc. for our motivation. Psychologists call this ‘toffee motivation’. We do it all the time, even to our children, those who may bring a good academic report get an object as a reward instead of higher responsibility.

Sadly, the same definition of management is still held by management practitioners of the 21st century. The need of the time is to change it to, “management is about getting people done through work.” Here, the primary focus is people – while the work will get done, once the people are ready. This definition implies that the manager’s job is to inspire rather than motivate.; to influence rather than push. When managers start inspiring, people will be sustainably self-motivated.

Insights into work culture in Germany, for example, reveal that motivating others is unheard of. If you are not self-motivated by your job, you can go home and stay there. That is your personal responsibility and the first pre-requisite for accepting a job. Anything less is disloyalty to the job itself and undeserved earning. The word respect has no direct equivalent in the German language. How can one even perceive having no respect. That is the most basic human requirement and there is no need to even talk about it let alone make it an academic issue.

The only way to break free from the rat race of man-chasing-money, is for man to chase an idea. It is only then that money will chase man. Think of any business, enterprise, organization, product or service, it was first an idea. Someone had the idea, made it his life’s dream, chased it and ended up with money chasing him. Anytime this sequence is reversed, man will become the slave and money the master – as in the case of Enron or Arthur Anderson etc.

The second factor under mis-harping relates to quite the opposite of what is espoused above and may seem contradictory at first. Role model institutions mentioned earlier, like The Citizen’s Foundation, Edhi etc are also mis-harping. Conceptually, they are chasing an idea, and money is chasing them. However, generating funds requires too much effort and dependency on external sources, making the process inefficient and unreliable. To sustain the idea, the source of funds must become self-generating. The idea must contribute to the growth of money on its own accord as well. This implies that NGOs and non-commercial entities must build-in commercial elements in their philosophy, not only to sustain themselves but to grow naturally and exponentially.

Although there is no single antidote for all ills, such a panacea is yet to evolve, the much needed, logical and practical shift involves integrating desire, capability and purpose. This demands first knowing what one wants and enjoys most. The urgent, driving desire and natural capability will lead to the discovery of purpose. Easy said than done; the quest for purpose and its identification is achieved by very few – while others don't even know such a thing exists. This is primarily the job of parents and schools. Imagine university graduates accepting a job only because they enjoy it, because it helps actualize their higher purpose in life. After this, they will never have to work another day, as work becomes fun. Their inherent, preferred capabilities will be fully utilized, thus satisfaction will be a natural consequence. The job itself will be the motivator as it will coincide with the individual's values. The challenge of self growth and the desire to take others along towards a goal will build organizations to an extent and at a speed not deemed true before. This will not only foster economic growth, personal and social connection, expand human capability to heights befitting it but also liberate us from the shackles we have so blindly entwined ourselves in.

-----