

IN THE WORLD OF CORPORATE MANAGERS

SHARU RANGNEKAR

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Dedicated to

The participants of my training programmes
— responses to their queries evolved into this book

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A Word to Start With

THE success of my first book "In the Wonderland of Indian Managers" created problems regarding sequels.

The obvious temptation was to write "Return to Wonderland". However, after having chided my friend late Minoo Rustomji for having written the same book (Business is People) twelve times under different titles, I felt constrained. Minoo's rejoinder was: "Managers who read books do not purchase them and managers who purchase books do not read them. So it is essential to bring out new titles - not new books." (Most Managers neither purchase nor read books - and they are the real problem for authors!).

My second book "Managerial Effectiveness" comprising the Lala Sri Ram Memorial Lectures given by me at the Punjab Agricultural University was published by the University. The book was a sell out. But the university had a problem in reprinting it. The printing cost comes out of the "Publications Budget," but the sales are credited to "General Revenue". As a result, although the book was a sellout, there were no funds for reprinting it.

In the meanwhile, I received feedback on my first book. The analysis of the managerial problems was appreciated, but there was a complaint that no "solutions" were offered. When that book was written, I did not have many solutions. When I started my training programmes - particularly on a full-time basis from 1979 — the participants insisted on solutions. The suggested solutions were discussed and became video-cassettes and audio-programmes — and ultimately this book.

Nobody can cover all managerial problems in a single book. For complex questions from the participants, I would cite an Urdu couplet:

Hum umra bhar na de sake jawab,
Woh ik nazar me itne sawalat kar gaye.

(I could not provide replies in all my life — so many were the questions she asked me in one meeting of our eyes.)

Nor can anybody provide solutions that would work in all situations. However, statements like –This is all theory” or “Nothing can work in our organisation” have to be examined carefully as the solutions suggested in this book have been evolved after pooling the experience of numerous managers who have used them effectively.

This book is intended for managers at all levels — from management trainees to managing directors. But it is not intended for their bosses. One frequent comment from participants after a programme is: “Nice programme — my boss should have attended it.” They assume change is required mainly at “higher” levels. Change is required at all levels. Managers have a long list of changes that should take place at higher levels.

There are three ways of thinking: What should happen, what would happen and what could happen. Philosophers concentrate on “should”; politicians exploit the “would”; managers must focus on “could”. This book focusses on the could. It talks of what managers could do in their organisations — by citing examples of how other managers have tackled similar problems. After all, management as we understand it is today is over 200 years old in the industrial world - and over 100 years old even in India. Any situation a manager faces today is unlikely to be the first such situation since Adam and Eve. Many a manager must have faced it; most may have muddled through, but some must have tackled it well. As is said in Sanskrit: “Siddhanam lakshanam, sadhakanam sadhanam” (The symptoms of those who have reached are guidelines for those who want to reach).

The feeling that the boss should improve is universal.

Everybody has a list of improvements for his boss. While bosses may improve over a period, the improvement is bound to be too little and too slow. The reason is that the boss has been (relatively) successful. And success is a bad teacher. It teaches one way of doing things and a stubborn resistance to every other. The basic task for a manager is to improve himself — essentially through introspection. As a poet says:

Mita de apni gaflat, phir jaga arbab gaflat ko,
Unhe sone de pahle khwab se bedar tu ho ja.

(First take care of your confusion - then bother about others' confusion, Let them sleep, first get rid of your dreams.)

When I was teaching M.B.A. students, in my last lecture for the final year students, I often had to answer this questions: "Sir, we are now going to become managers — so what tips can you give us for our success." "The First tip is: do not ask for tips," I would answer. "The second and final tip is: keep a note-book in which you note any good management or bad management practised around you. For example, if a boss appreciated a subordinate in the presence of others, please note it. If a boss shouted at his subordinate or quarrelled with a colleague in public, please note that also. Before going to bed every day, read the notes and check whether you yourself practised any of these "good" or "bad" managements — on appropriate occasions. This will give you, to start with, "hindsight" — understanding after the event. After some time you will acquire "midsight" — realisation of the way you are moving during the movement itself. Ultimately you will acquire "foresight" — the ability to anticipate problems and opportunities and plan your strategies. This is the crux of management."

And this is perhaps a good place to look at what management really is.

CHAPTER 1

What is Management



“MANAGER” and “Management”—these have been suddenly become glorified words. When I was young (which was not very long ago), the glorified word was “officer”. Every bright young man wanted to be an officer—in the government, in business, in the army, or worse comes to worst, in the municipal corporation. The word “Manager” was associated with a restaurant or circus.

But now the word has a halo around it. Every bright young man (and woman) wants to be a manager and is trying hard to get into a managerial career. The last time I was in Delhi, I heard a rumour that army generals want to be called “general managers”!

Although people are attracted to a managerial career, they are not clear what this career involves - people know what managers get, but do not know what they contribute.

Many of my friends who retired as managers complain “After retirement, I have become transparent! If I am standing at the railway station or any other public place and my erstwhile subordinate passes by, he sees “through” me— does not recognise me!” On the other hand, a few of my friends say, “My erstwhile subordinate crosses the street—just to say, ‘How are you, Sir!’”.

Those who consider management as a position of status and prestige find that status and prestige vanish as soon as they vacate the chair. However, those who consider management as a position of responsibility and contribution continue to get status and prestige even after they vacate the chair. The substantive part of management is responsibility and contribution— status and prestige are shadows of responsibility and contribution.

In simple words, management consists of three tasks:

- * Identify your responsibility - and get committed to it.
- * Identify your resources - and ultimately realise your most important resource is yourself.
- * Experiment with the resources.

The best example of this is the housewife.

Every girl, as soon as she gets married, identifies her responsibility and gets committed to it. Her responsibility is: To convert a house into a home. A house is a piece of architecture. A home is a place where one gets psychological support, a feeling of warmth and being welcome. Who gives these? The housewife. That is why it is said in Sanskrit: "Griham grihinihinam Kantarat atirichyate" (A house without a housewife is worse than a jungle). When a housewife is away - even for a few days—the differences can be seen in the atmosphere of the house. A housewife identifies this responsibility, gets committed to it and looks at her resources. In most cases, the main resource is the husband's income. I am sure most husbands have heard how inadequate that is! But do not worry — she has another resource: herself. See how she uses this resource. I am sure you have been in all kinds of houses: low-income and high-income. Have you ever found the "homeliness" of the house depending on the income of the house — or does it depend on the housewife? In some low-income houses, a cup of tea comes to you. As soon as you take a sip, from behind the door comes the housewife's voice, "Do you care for a little more sugar?" — and you feel sweet without the sugar. In a high-income house, the tea comes invariably in a tray: tea in a kettle, milk in a jug, sugar in the mug, silver cutlery and bone-chine crockery. A five-star service! But the whole things comes so coldly that you almost expect a bill to follow! The real impact depends on the housewife and not on the quality of the tea.

Similarly, every manager can identify his responsibility. If the organisation or the immediate boss have failed to define it adequately, it is an opportunity for the manager to use his own imagination to evolve his objectives and get committed to them. With his chair, he will inherit some resources — men, materials, and machinery. He has to add himself to the resources to make a potent combination and experiment with the combination. A successful manager was asked the secret of his success.

"Good decisions", he said.

"How did you make good decisions?" he was asked.

"Experience", he answered.

"How did you get experience?"

"Bad decisions", was the answer.

In his experimentation with his resources, the manager is bound to make some mistakes. If he realises his mistakes through introspection, they can become his experience and can lead to his success.

This is why a thick skin is a great asset in management. When your decision is considered a mistake (rightly or wrongly), somebody is bound to shout. One has to expect it and bear with it. Sometimes I find a subordinate coming out of the boss's room with a red face. "What happened?" I ask. "My boss shouted at me," says the subordinate. "I took the initiative for the benefit of the organisation. My boss did not like that. From now on, I am never going to take any decisions." Stupid manager! In another case, there is a big noise in the boss's room. The subordinate comes out. "What happened?" I ask. "My boss is slightly upset over my decision" says the subordinate. Good manager! He will go places.

In fact, a shouting boss is not a dangerous boss. Very often, he shouts and forgets. The dangerous boss is the one who does not shout, but makes a note in the small black book. He will never forget.

My next door neighbour is a big shouter.

I asked his wife, "What is wrong with your husband - he shouts every day."

"What is wrong with that," she replied. "I have got a dog who barks and husband who shouts. On the day he does not shout - I call the doctor!"
