

[GET THE BASICS RIGHT]

MONDAY OCTOBER 13, 2008

WORK WISE - A fortnightly column by Rahul Kapoor

A decade ago during my B-School Days I was thought that the nature of greatness lies in getting the basics right and I rediscovered this learning while I was on a recent project with a company that is into property development. I saw many people execute this simple yet powerful law and achieve incredible success.

As a part of their Corporate Social Responsibility the company decided to have a public celebration of Dasara festival for 3 days. The idea of this celebration came in a mere 22 days before 'the days' of the event. The target was to reach out to the entire city of Bangalore and invite thousands of people to join them in the celebration. The task was enormous from finalizing the venue, getting tens of permissions from various government agencies, having a tight security in place, putting together various artists from all over Karnataka and Bollywood, inviting the media and other guests, ensuring the food and beverages are in place. Although the opportunity was brilliant, the time frame was very short and the management was strict on issues of quality, safety and ethics.

A lot of people in the team believed that it was impractical to execute an event of such magnitude on a short notice and expressed their views to postpone the event and instead celebrate some other festival. But the leadership team was firm on the decision and they said that will go all out in making the event a grand success. This determination and ferocious resolve to do what must be done got contagious and within no time the entire team was on the same page with one mission.

Lesson 1: 'Nothing splendid has ever been achieved except by those who dared believe that something inside them was superior to circumstance'. Great things are achieved only when leaders are firm and display unwavering commitment to a mission. This really is the first step to motivate and inspire other team members to get onboard and live the dream.

Once the leaders had won the trust of the team members, the next step was to identify the right partners for the event. Vendors were invited for various jobs like media planning, creative and designs, managing the event, catering etc. After an exhaustive evaluation process, the team picked up only those partners who displayed great amount of commitment, passion and determination for the project.

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Lesson 2: 'It is not the ship so much as the skilled sailing that assures the prosperous voyage'. Partner with those who are stronger than or on par with you. Else you will land up coaching people instead of leveraging from their core competence. Great results come in when everyone in the team is a rock star - a person with great skills and brilliant attitude.

The next step for this team was to integrate the vendor partners and move the project on to the next gear. With a quick turn around time everybody prepared their proposals on the project and presented their reports to the leadership team. The team was surprised with facts that projected astronomical figures and complexities in the execution of the project. But the team was absolutely focused on the project and therefore they confronted the brutal facts without losing faith. They made an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of the situation and unanimously chose to reduce the 3 days event into a one day mega festival.

Lesson 3: 'The primary task in achieving great results is to create a culture wherein people have a tremendous opportunity to be heard and, ultimately, for the truth to be heard'. Good to Great by Jim Collins. Never lose sight of the truth; by coercion and blaming others you will never be able to move forward. Accept the reality of the situation and take corrective actions without too much delay.

The readjusted vision was now to see its execution phase. All the stake holders got on to the task and approached it with total discipline. For the next three weeks each one of them worked around a consistent system which gave them freedom and responsibility to operate and get results. These efforts were accentuated with clear communication, status reports, crisis addressing meetings which created unmatched trust between all parties involved.

Lesson 4: 'You and I have no hope for success unless we can honestly and truly focus our attention on the task on hand'. The first sign of failure can be seen when someone takes a system lightly. Only focused people with focused actions can get focused results.

The stage was now set for the grand finale, it was the moment of truth for all the hard work that had gone into the three weeks. Thousands of people walked into the venue, perhaps lot more than one had anticipated, emotions were running high, the team was overwhelmed with the response, there was pressure from those at the venue as everybody had their own needs to be taken care off,

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security threat kept everyone on their toes, the mega festival was on and as expected newer challenges kept rising but with grit and determination the team kept addressing issues to see the event through in all grace and style.

Lesson 5: 'Whatever you do, you need courage. Whatever course you decide upon, there is always someone to tell you that you are wrong. There are always difficulties arising that tempt you to believe your critics are right. To map out a course of action and follow it to an end requires some of the same courage that a soldier needs' Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Difficulties will come, criticism will arise, but when you are determined than nothing in the world can stop you. Respect the power of team and keep the faith. Do not allow minor hiccups to de-motivate you. Accept mistakes, learn from your experience and move on. To summarize let me reaffirm that the nature of greatness lies only in getting the basics right.