

“Its My Life” - A Cry From The Corporate.

- IVNS Raju

When I requested my colleague for some waste papers (used only one side), he gave me a few and as I started using them I found a print out of the Cover Story “The Real Reasons You’re Working So Hard” published in the online version of Business Week dated 3rd October, 2005. A few lines reading from this made me remember the following statements uttered by a 30-year-old software engineer recently in a personal meeting I had with him.

- I leave home at 8.00 am
- I spend an hour or so to reach my office, depends purely on the maddening traffic.
- I leave my office between 7.30-8.00 pm generally. If my Boss is in the office I do not know it would go beyond 9.30 pm
- Reach home with in 45 mts since there would be some ease on the traffic after 8.00 pm.
- I spend some time – say 15-20 mts. with my kids (if they are awake)
- I go to bed between 11.00-11.30 pm
- I wake up at 6.00 – 6.30 am
- I work six days a week some times 7 days a week
- My boss gets irritated when I apply for leave
- Even if he grants leave, he remembers all the pending works and calls me up twice a day and compels me to talk to him.

On my personal front:

- My sleeping time is reducing alarmingly
- My health is deteriorating, I can not eat well
- My relationship with my family is becoming more mechanical and routine.
- When I look at my child I feel I am missing so much and depriving her also of my affection.
- I can not enjoy time with my family as I need rest on Sundays
- I miss many events of my neighborhood and my relatives

Why I continue in the same job is for this:

- It offers very good salary that takes care of all my economic needs
- It enabled my family lead a very decent life.
- In spite of all the problems I get good assignments.

I am sure some of the above statements do apply to us in varying degrees. We do want to yell out these statements.

We do have some problems in our personal lives and we want to be free from them. It is this desire in me that stimulated me to write this article and share this with you.

Consider these facts:

The IT, ITES and BPO organisations are being manned by the generation of early 1980s that constitute about 80% of the total manpower strength of the organizations. Even the FMCG and consumer durables industries employ about 50% of this generation. In the banking and infrastructure industries the entire sales force is none other than from this generation.

The generation of early 1980s know how to work smart and hard to achieve what it wants. You cannot treat any one from this generation like you treat the ones who belong to 1970s. There is a huge generation gap!!

This is what in a nutshell the generation from early 1980s demand:

- Flexibility
- Autonomy
- Humane Treatment
- Challenging assignments
- Global scope
- No bossism!

Imagine what would be the requirement of the generation of early 2000s!! Its really mind-boggling even to imagine about this.

In the light of the above India needs to conduct the following studies immediately among its citizens to create a baseline data asto:

- How the Nation Eats
- How the Nation Sleeps
- How the adults in both managerial and non-managerial categories in the Nation work in the organizations belonging to sectors like FMCG, Manufacturing, IT, ITES, BPO, R&D, NGO, Education, Govt, Banks, Malls, Restaurants and all avenues of entertainment.
- How and what health problems the Nation faces

It is relevant to reproduce the following from the Cover Story in the beginning.

"This epidemic of long hours at the office -- whether physically or remotely -- defies historical precedent and common sense. Over the past 25 years, the Information Revolution has boosted productivity by almost 70%. So you would think that since we're producing more in fewer hours, such gains would translate into a decrease in the workweek -- as they have in the past. But instead of technology being a time-saver, says Warren Bennis, a University of Southern California professor and author of such management classics as *On Becoming a Leader*, everybody I know is working harder and longer.

With so many managers and professionals stuck at work, there is a growing consensus among management gurus that the stuck-at-work epidemic is symptomatic of a serious disorder in the organization of corporations."

In spite of the Globalisation and use of Internet the existing corporate structure still prefers not to give up its control and lose its so called territory for common use. This tendency gives rise to most creative ways of supervising the Professionals - you do not know that you are supervised. This is a typical war between the two generations - the early 80s and early 70s.

Today in all Information Era organizations which adopt 5-day week witness one common fact: Employees are closely guarding their weekends -Saturday and Sunday. In many cases employees change jobs just to ensure that their weekends are protected. As the generation of 80s is slowly taking reins from the generation of 70s there is a very healthy change in the offing in terms of valuing Time as a the most precious resource.

Let me go back to the Cover Story that aptly relates history with contemporary working patterns:

"If history is any guide, the stuck-at-work epidemic will turn out to be a transitional phase. Historically, as countries and individuals get richer, they work less. Look at the late 19th century, when the U.S. was still a relatively poor country, with a per capita income about equal to that of China today. Back then the typical male household head had precious little leisure time, perhaps only about 1.8 hours a day, on average, after subtracting time for work, chores, and meals. The average factory worker put in about 60 hours a week, with only one day off. Indeed, the first May Day labor demonstrations, in 1886, were driven by the demand for an eight-hour day.

Over time, as U.S. productivity and incomes rose, work hours dropped and leisure time increased. It was no coincidence that the five-day work week was first introduced in 1926 by Henry Ford, a decade after he pioneered high-efficiency, mass-production methods.

By 1970 the 40-hour workweek was the norm. And, at least until recently, European and Asian countries have followed the same trajectory of declining work hours. Since 1991 average annual work hours have dropped by 11% in Japan, 10% in France, 6% in Germany and Britain, and 5% in South Korea. Meanwhile, average monthly work hours in Taiwan are down by 7% over the same stretch. Even work hours in China, while still much higher than in the U.S., may be coming down. "Asians are poorer and still working like crazy," says Alberto Alesina, a Harvard University economics professor who has studied international work hours. "But as they get richer, they are taking more leisure."

Those from the MNCs might argue that to benefit from the faster growth one needs to put in extra work. Now the question one needs to ask is: At what cost we put in the extra work? Stretching of working hours happens naturally when the work itself stimulates that stretch. When the stretch is because of the Boss, it would - in many cases - turn out to be detrimental to the employee and the organization as well.

Good news:

It is evident from various interactions that this author had with different age groups of Professionals that the need for Reclaiming "Its My Life" right is becoming more vocal in organizations. The shift from regular jobs to a consulting job is gaining momentum. The increase in the tendency to outsource the services further helps this shift. There is difference in working as consultant on a regular basis in a consulting firm than working really as a consultant with a choice to choose the number of hours of consulting. This difference is the reason for mushrooming of person based management and software consulting firms in the country.

At the end of the day what matters one much is the joy one gets from the experiencing of living on that Day. Am I living my Life or am I living as an extension of others' life is a question that bothers every one. Who would not like the job that enables one to say: "I love my job because it enables me "Live my Life"

The Corporate Solutions:

The Indian Business Organisations have the potential to provide a viable model to the entire business world by leveraging India's ancient wisdom.

Creation of wealth is the common goal of any corporations. The process of creation needs to be sustainable and eco-friendly. If any business process fulfils this condition, it is bound to become viable. Just by possessing the ability to create wealth the Corporations cannot survive. They can survive only when they can facilitate the logical distribution of wealth among its stakeholders. The sooner the Corporates realize this the better it would be for their survival.

People in organizations form one of the critical stakeholder groups. They need to be treated the way the organization wants to treat its customers and its investors. Here is a simple checklist for all those who are Bosses and who have a final say in the Corporate World; and the HR Professionals:

- Does the company institutionalize Continuous Learning among all its Stakeholder Groups?
- Does the company have well published policies and details of investment for facilitating Continuous Learning and its trend.
- Does the company announce annually the share of its profit - just like the way it does in the case of announcing Dividend to its Investors - to the rest of its Stakeholder Groups in terms of hike in the salary (its people), cut in the cost price (its customers), increase in the CSR budget and its activities (the society at large) along with the provisions it makes for its future growth and to meet any eventualities.
- Does the company's work processes reflect all the positive responses to the above three questions.

These are the four simple checks to be made in any business organization to take care of all the problems that we see today. The pace at which the technology changes and the pace at which the business grows today is not the pace at which *the significant few* in the Business Organizations are maturing. It is this group of *the significant few* that matter much for any change to take place.

.....
Reference:

The Cover Story "The Real Reasons You're Working So Hard" published in the online version of Business Week dated 3rd October, 2005.