

Getting results

An effective leader is not someone who is loved or admired. He or she is someone whose followers do the right things. Popularity is not leadership. Results are.

— Peter Drucker, writer, management consultant



The CEO's counsellor

The couch may be missing, but corporate psychology consultancy YSC has the power to bring out the best in managers. Venkatesan Vembu reports

Paul B Brown

It takes both a special mind-set and certain skills to build a successful company. But left unchecked, the very things that helped make your enterprise a winner can depress your employees and harm your business. Here are some pearls of wisdom that will help you in the long run.

BECOMING MORE SUCCESSFUL

Marshall Goldsmith, author of one of this year's bestsellers, *What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful*, points out the areas where you could be doing wrong, and what you can do to rectify them.

Being too competitive. Your desire to prove yourself right can come at your employees' expense, and as a result, good people feel humiliated and eventually leave.

Adding too much value. When someone comes to you with a solid initiative, instead of saying "that's great", you tend to say, "that is a great idea, but..." The problem with that, Goldsmith says, is that your contribution could make the idea 5 per cent better, but decrease the employee's enthusiasm by 50 per cent, "because now it is your idea," not hers. If you feel compelled to add value, do it in a way that stokes the employee's enthusiasm.

Losing perspective. "Most entrepreneurs kill themselves, literally," says Goldsmith. "They work themselves to death, they don't get physical exams, their health goes straight to hell. For what? You have to find balance."

MISTAKES BIG COMPANIES MAKE

The list of large once high-flying companies that have stumbled badly is virtually endless. The question, of course, is what happened and why. Jagdish Sheth, a marketing professor at Emory University's business school, offers some explanations in *The Self-Destructive Habits Of Good Companies And How To Break Them*.

While his focus is on big companies, Sheth's explanations serve as a cautionary list for small companies as well. Sheth's reasons can be boiled to what can be described only as the seven deadly sins of business. They are: arrogance; complacency; competency dependency (you have gotten so good at doing one thing, it is hard for you to move away from your core competency); competitive myopia (defining your competition too narrowly: in its heyday GM worried about Ford and Chrysler and not imports); culture conflicts and turf wars; denial (believing a new technology or competitor won't be a threat) and volume obsession (which can destroy your margins).

— NYT

Effective blogging

To blog or not to blog about your business is not a question Hamlet grappled with, but it could be one you have been thinking about. Your instinct might be not to do it, figuring that with 1.6 million blog updates going online every day, there's no way you'll be read. Think again, says Peter Alexander, columnist at Entrepreneur.com who is vice president of worldwide commercial marketing, Cisco. "In a survey conducted by the research firm MarketingSherpa, blogs were voted the No.4 tool for generating sales leads," he writes. You can find Alexander's suggestions on Entrepreneur's blog section



Halfway through my interaction with Gurnek Bains in the plush Hong Kong office of the multinational business psychology consultancy firm he heads, I pop the question that's been uppermost on my mind. "Where," I ask him, "is the couch?"

A quizzical expression plays on Bains's face. "The couch?"

"You know," I sputter, "the couch you put CEOs on and map their psychological profile?"

But the Freudian image I'd formed in my mind — of clinical psychologists keeping tabs as couch-bound CEOs narrate their life experiences — is evidently somewhat off the mark. Nevertheless, it's true that YSC, the consultancy that Bains founded in 1990, helps some of the best and brightest organisations in the world leverage the human resource potential of their teams by using psychology in a pragmatic way to enhance effectiveness.

YSC does this in a number of ways: conducting 'individual assessments' of executives to identify their signature strengths and their weaknesses; coaching executives in times of organisational transition; ushering in culture change in organisations that need them; identifying high-potential executives within organisations; carrying out talent audits; and implementing initiatives that build team effectiveness and unlock 'people power' within organisations.

Today, YSC has offices in London, New York, Hong Kong, Düsseldorf, Sydney and Edinburgh, and a client list that includes some of the world's biggest brands — and over 40 per cent of FTSE100 companies — including HSBC, Royal Bank of Scotland, Barclays Bank, J Sainsbury and Tesco.

It is as part of the 'individual assessment' process that Bains and his team of consultants subject senior corporate executives to a five-hour-long interview that explores the professional (and personal) aspects of their lives, the values that define them, people who influenced them, and in general, their view of the world.

And since these are not issues that come up for discussion often, the CEOs get emotional about certain phases in their lives," says Bains. By the end of that session, YSC knows everything that's worth knowing about them, and in particular about their 'spike', their "world-beating strength".

"The notion of 'spike' came from a research we did of very successful corporate leaders," explains Bains. "We found that each of the people right at the top was distinctive in some way or the other: they all had towering areas of strength. But the flip side was that some of the leaders also had glaring deficiencies in other departments."

For instance, recalls Bains, Archie Norman, who took over as CEO of British food retailer Asda in the early 1990s, when the business was in trouble, had immense strategic clarity and imaginative thinking; that was his 'spike'. "But he would be the first to admit that his capacity to energise people was rather less strong," says Bains. To compensate for that deficiency, Norman brought in Alan Leighton, "a man of the people", and together they formed a tremendous double-act, and engineered a spectacular turnaround at Asda.

Organisations also draw on YSC's strengths in 'individual assessment' when they want to hire

a CEO or other senior executives from the outside.

"Senior hires are some of the most risky decisions that companies make," says Bains. "Statistics show that externally hired CEOs have a frighteningly high rate of failure, and it's often extremely expensive to undo a bad selection decision." YSC's intensive assessment procedure de-risks the selection decision for these companies, he adds.

I ask Bains if it's possible, based on his experience of working closely with many successful CEOs, to draw a "mental map" of winners, some distinctive traits that characterise the leaders. "One thing you'll find about highly successful people," says Bains, "is that they all have some sort of compensatory drive, which arises — in most cases — from some deficiencies, some issues that they've had to work through."

In his just-released book *Meaning Inc: The Blueprint For Business Success in the 21st Century*, Bains identifies other such winning traits. "We've got a model of *Meaning Inc* leaders," he adds. "It's called the judgement-drive-influence model." Judgement is about how an executive thinks: you must use your intellect to simplify the world by cutting through the complexity."



In *Meaning Inc*, author Gurnek Bains says, "A person might be driven by personal ambition to attain a role, but successful executives are driven by the vision of the difference they can make in that role."

Successful leaders also have a drive for impact, rather than for a role. "A person might be driven by personal ambition to attain a role, but the more successful executives are driven by the vision of the difference they can make in that role." Finally, says Bains, there's influence, which is the ability that leaders have to co-opt other people to their agenda, using a range of influencing styles.

As Indian companies go about acquiring assets overseas, are there elements of 'culture change' that they should be sensitive to?

"You should make acquisitions only of companies that can be culturally assimilated — that's part of the due diligence," says Bains. "It's also important for the parent company to drive its own culture and values — to imprint their DNA — into the new organisation strongly, and not erode its corporate cultural identity in any way."

Dealing with the corporate devil

What do you do when your beliefs clash with those of the company you work for? Elizabeth Doty finds out

I had my first moment of truth with an organisation back in 1985, when I realised I would have to either leave my job or compromise my own integrity. I ultimately left that job to enrol in business school.

In 2005, I began a project to see whether others experienced tension between their work personas and their values. I interviewed 38 businesspeople from a range of industries, organisations, backgrounds, beliefs and career stages.

I expected to hear cynicism mixed with arguments for separating work from "what really matters". Although I did hear some of that, I also heard people express a deep commitment to

high ideals and a strong desire to believe in their organisations, even in the face of moral ambiguity.

PLAYING TO WIN

Of the 38 people I spoke with, 18, at one point or another, had adopted a strategy focused on proving themselves. They put their faith in drive, intelligence and free markets. Says Dave, a 34-year-old technology entrepreneur, "It took us five years of driving, but when we sold the company last year, we made it big." The playing-to-win strategy sometimes has a downside. When Dave cashed in, he left behind a partner who hadn't benefited on the same scale. "I succeeded, but it ended my closest friendship," he says.

PLAYING TO LIVE

For the 15 interviewees who followed this strategy, work became primarily a means to an end. They remained committed to their jobs, but their real satisfaction came from life outside work. "Because somebody doesn't like the re-



Code of conduct: Most employees express a deep sense of commitment to high ideals and a strong desire to believe in their organisations — Getty Images

sults they get on a survey, that's a frigid emergency?" declares Roberta, a human resources director at a Fortune 100 computer software company. "I care about my work. But mostly, I'm going to go home on time. I have a life outside of here. And that means saying no."

PLAYING FOR THE GOOD GUYS

This was adopted by 18 interviewees at some point — they sought out employers whose mission they could believe in. Alex, a young product manager for a consumer software company, loved his job finding. Yet his passion got him into trouble. "My team was designing a product to meet the needs of our business, not the needs of our customers. I felt I had to speak up, which they saw as making trouble and going against their 'quick fix' of turning around the business."

LEAVING THE GAME

Twelve people had left their organisations to preserve their integrity. This often happens when organisations

with the highest aspirations contradicted themselves. After Jim, the sales director of a carpet company, joined the company, it changed its portfolio approach. "I believed in our commitment to environmentally sustainable products," Jim says. "But now they've changed their tack and I have to sell the normal product line as well, which is the worst offender in terms of landfill." Later, he left the job and went to work for a competitor.

Playing a bigger game doesn't require us to take on our organisations in a confrontational way.

Instead, we have to "deal with the devil" more personally: to acknowledge the all-too-real pressures to compromise while simultaneously strengthening our ability to move past them and by recognising that it could take months or years to accomplish some of our goals.

Elizabeth Doty is an organisational consultant

— NYT