

❖ **The Poet : A sculpture by Ramkinkar Baij**



❖ Interview with philosopher Peter Koestenbaum

Do you have the 'will' to lead ?

Who hasn't stared out an airplane window on yet another red-eye and thought, What exactly is the point of this exercise? Or sat through a particularly senseless meeting and wondered, How in the world did I get here? Or wrestled with a set of strategic choices -- all of which seem hard and unpleasant -- and said, What happened to the fun part of being in business? According to Peter Koestenbaum, those uncomfortable questions -- those existential quandaries -- are at the root of issues that great leaders deal with all the time, and they influence every decision that must be made.

More than 25 years ago, Koestenbaum traded the cloistered halls of academia for the front lines of the global economy..... His agenda: to apply the power of philosophy to the big question of the day -- how to reconcile the often-brutal realities of business with basic human values -- and to create a new language of effective leadership. **"Unless the distant goals of meaning, greatness, and destiny are addressed," Koestenbaum insists, "we can't make an intelligent decision about what to do tomorrow morning -- much less set strategy for a company or for a human life. Nothing is more practical than for people to deepen themselves. The more you understand the human condition, the more effective you are as a businessperson. Human depth makes business sense."**

Q. Why does being a leader feel so hard today?

Because reckoning with freedom is always hard -- and the powerful paradoxes of the new economy make it even harder. We're living in a peculiar time the acute alienation that occurs when the global economy hits the average individual. What I call the "new-economy pathology" is driven by impossible demands -- better quality, lower prices, faster innovation -- that generate an unprecedented form of stress. People feel pressure to meet ever-higher objectives in all realms of work, wealth, and lifestyle -- and to thrive on that pressure in the process.

This condition is exacerbated by the pornographic treatment of business in media and culture. The message is - you have an amazing degree of freedom to do what you want, along with an unprecedented opportunity to build immense wealth and success -- and to do it more quickly than ever before. Of course, the average individual has as much of a chance of launching a skyrocketing IPO as he or she has of becoming a movie star. What's even more disturbing is that the ascendancy of shareholder value as the dominant driving force in business has resulted in a terrible insensitivity to basic human values. That's the real "stuck point" for leaders: How do we cope with a brutal business reality and still preserve human values?

Resolving that paradox requires something like an evolutionary transformation of who we are, how we behave, how we think, and what we value. We've reached such explosive levels of freedom that, for the first time in history, we have to manage our own mutation. **It's up to us to decide what it means to be a successful human being. That's the philosophical task of the age.** Nothing happens unless you make it happen. As a leader, everything is your responsibility, because you always could have chosen otherwise.....In some sense, of course, that has been the task of every age. The new economy just happens to be the form that our existential challenge takes today. **As always, the real obstacle is existence itself.**

Q. That's a heavy burden to place on leaders. They must not only guide organizations but also wrestle with basic philosophical questions.

There's a terrible defect at the core of how we think about people and organizations today. There is little or no tolerance for the kinds of character-building conversations that pave the way for meaningful change. The average person is stuck, lost, riveted by the objective domain. That's where our metrics are; that's where we look for solutions. It's the come-on of the consulting industry and the domain of all the books, magazines, and training programs out there. And that's why books and magazines that have numbers in their titles sell so well. We'll do anything to avoid facing the basic, underlying questions: How do we make truly difficult choices? How do we act when the risks seem overwhelming? How can we muster the guts to burn our bridges and to create a condition of no return?

There's nothing wrong with all of those technical solutions. They're excellent; they're creative; they're even necessary. But they shield us from the real issues: What kind of life do I want to lead? What is my destiny? How much evil am I willing to tolerate?

Reflection doesn't take anything away from decisiveness, from being a person of action. In fact, it generates the inner toughness that you need to be an effective person of action -- to be a leader. Think of leadership as the sum of two vectors: competence (your specialty, your skills, your know-how) and authenticity (your identity, your character, your attitude). When companies and people get stuck, they tend to apply more steam -- more competence -- to what got them into trouble in the first place: "If I try harder, I'll be successful," or "If we exert more control, we'll get the results we need."

The problem is, when you're stuck, you're not likely to make progress by using competence as your tool. **Instead, progress requires commitment to two things. First, you need to dedicate yourself to understanding yourself better** -- in the philosophical sense of understanding what it means to exist as a human being in the world. **Second, you need to change your habits of thought:** how you think, what you value, how you work, how you connect with people, how you learn, what you expect from life, and how you manage frustration. Changing those habits means changing your way of being intelligent. It means moving from a nonleadership mind to a leadership mind.

Q. What are the attributes of a "leadership mind"?

Authentic leaders have absorbed the fundamental fact of existence -- that you can't get around life's inherent contradictions. The leadership mind is spacious. It has ample room for the ambiguities of the world, for conflicting feelings, and for contradictory ideas.

I believe that the central leadership attribute is the ability to manage polarity. In every aspect of life, polarities are inevitable: We want to live, yet we must die. How can I devote myself fully to both family and career? Am I a boss or a friend? A lover or a judge? How do I reconcile my own needs with those of my team? Those paradoxes are simply part of life. Every business interaction is a form of confrontation -- a clash of priorities, a struggle of dignities, a battle of beliefs. That's not an invitation to wage an epic battle of good versus evil or right versus wrong. (Chances are, your boss is less of an SOB than he is an agent of the cosmos.) My point is, you have to be careful not to bang your head against the wrong door. Polarities are in the nature of things. **How we act, how we respond to those polarities -- that is where we separate greatness from mediocrity.**

That doesn't mean that we don't have to make decisions. Tough choices are a daily requirement of leadership. Leaders have to hire and fire, to sign off on new strategies, and to risk investments -- all of which can lead to stress and guilt. The presence of guilt is not a result of making the wrong choice but of

choosing itself. And that is the human condition: You are a being that chooses.. **What matters is not what you end up choosing, but how. It often requires courage , to** redefine from the inside out, who you truly are. The how is what gives you character. The what, which at first appears paramount, is ultimately of no emotional significance.

Managing polarity teaches us that there are no solutions -- there are only changes of attitude. When you grapple with polarities in your life, you lose your arrogant, self-indulgent illusions, and you realize that the joke is on you. To get that message makes you a more credible human being -- instantly.

Q. It's one thing for a leader to embrace the contradictions of the new economy. But how does he or she persuade colleagues to go along with this kind of thinking?

The best leaders operate in four dimensions: vision, reality, ethics, and courage. These are the four intelligences, the four forms of perceiving, the languages for communicating that are required to achieve meaningful, sustained results. The visionary leader thinks big, thinks new, thinks ahead -- and, most important, is in touch with the deep structure of human consciousness and creative potential. Reality is the polar opposite of vision. The leader as realist follows this motto: Face reality as it is, not as you wish it to be. The realist grapples with hard, factual, daily, and numeric parameters. A master in the art of the possible, the realist has no illusions, sees limits, and has no patience for speculation.

Ethics refers to the basic human values of integrity, love, and meaning. This dimension represents a higher level of development, one ruled not by fear or pleasure but by principle. Courage is the realm of the will; it involves the capacity to make things happen. The philosophic roots of this dimension lie in fully understanding the centrality of free will in human affairs. Courage involves both advocacy -- the ability to take a stand -- and the internalization of personal responsibility and accountability.

The real challenge of leadership is to develop all four of these often-contradictory modes of thinking and behaving at once. Leaders tend to operate on two dimensions at most -- which has more to do with a lack of insight into human nature than with corrupt intent. Reality dominates, and the second-most-common attribute is ethics: Consider the statement "People are our most important asset." Unfortunately, those are often empty words -- not just because too few people make the connection between profits and human values, but also because there is no adequate understanding of what it means to be a human being in a brutally competitive environment. "Vision" might be one of the most overused words in business, but in fact vision -- in the sense of honing great thinking and fostering the capacity for ongoing inventiveness -- is rarely practiced. And courage is demonstrated even more rarely.

When we talk about courage, we usually mean having guts or taking risks. But you talk about courage as if it were an almost mythic quality -- one that lies at the heart of leadership success.

It goes back to the beginning of our discussion. **Aristotle believed, correctly, that courage is the first of the human virtues, because it makes the others possible.** Courage begins with the decision to face the ultimate truth about existence: the dirty little secret that we are free. It requires an understanding of free will at the archetypal level -- an understanding that we are free to define who we are at every moment. We are not what society and randomness have made us; we are what we have chosen to be from the depth of our being. We are a product of our will. We are self-made in the deepest sense.

One of the gravest problems in life is self-limitation: We create defense mechanisms to protect us from the anxiety that comes with freedom. We refuse to fulfill our potential. We live only marginally. This was Freud's definition of psychoneurosis: We limit how we live so that we can limit the amount of

anxiety that we experience. We end up tranquilizing many of life's functions. We shut down the centers of entrepreneurial and creative thinking; in effect, we halt progress and growth. But no significant decision -- personal or organizational -- has ever been undertaken without being attended by an existential crisis, or without a commitment to wade through anxiety, uncertainty, and guilt.

That's what we mean by transformation. You can't just change how you think or the way that you act -- you must change the way that you will. You must gain control over the patterns that govern your mind: your worldview, your beliefs about what you deserve and about what's possible. That's the zone of fundamental change, strength, and energy -- and the true meaning of courage.

Does developing the will to transform mean that you can actually will others to change?

Taking personal responsibility for getting others to implement strategy is the leader's key polarity. It's the existential paradox of holding yourself 100% responsible for the fate of your organization, on the one hand, and assuming absolutely no responsibility for the choices made by other people, on the other hand. That applies to your children too. You are 100% responsible for how your children turn out. And you accomplish that by teaching them that they are 100% responsible for how they turn out.

So how do you motivate people? Not with techniques, but by risking yourself with a personal, lifelong commitment to greatness -- by demonstrating courage. You don't teach it so much as challenge it into existence. You cannot choose for others. All you can do is inform them that you cannot choose for them. In most cases, that in itself will be a strong motivator for the people whom you want to cultivate. The leader's role is less to heal or to help than to enlarge the capacity for responsible freedom.

Some people are more talented than others. Some are more educationally privileged than others. But we all have the capacity to be great. Greatness comes with recognizing that your potential is limited only by how you choose, how you use your freedom, how resolute you are, how persistent you are -- in short, by your attitude. And we are all free to choose our attitude.

❖ Selected gazals by Mehdi Hassan

http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL4710A707B2CA8818&feature=view_all

This is the compilation of my favorite Mehdi Hassan gazals. The particular rendition of 'Ranjish hi sahi' included in this YouTube list is spectacularly beautiful.

Ranjish hi sahi dil hi dukhane ke liye aa
Aa phir se mujhe chod ke jaane ke liye aa
**Let it be anguish, even to torture my heart, come
Come even if only to abandon me to torment again.**

Pehle se marasim na sahi phir bhi kabhi to
Rasm-o-reh.e.duniya hi nibhane ke liye aa
**Come, if not for our past commerce,
Then to faithfully fulfill the ancient barbaric rituals.**

Kuch to mere pindaar-e-muhabbat ka bharam rakh
Tu bhi kabhi mujh ko manane ke liye aa
**Respect, even if only a little, the depth of my love for you;
Come, someday, to offer me consolation as well.**

Ek umr se hoon lazzat-e-giriya se bhi mehroom
Aye raahat-e-jaan mujh ko rulaane ke liye aa
**Too long you have deprived me of the pathos of longing;
Come again, my love, if only to make me weep.**

Ab tak dil-e-khush faham ko tujh se hain ummiiden
Ye aakhri shamme bhi bhujaane ke liye aa
**Till now, my heart still suffers some slight expectation;
So come, snuff out even the last flickering torch of hope!**

Maana ki muhabbat ka chupaana hai muhabbat
Chupke se kisi roz jataane ke liye aa
**Agreed, silencing your love is the real form of love
Some day, come to silently express your love**

Jaise tujhe aate hain na aane ke bahaane
Aise hi kisi roz na jaane ke liye aa
**The way you find excuses to not come,
Some day, come with an excuse to stay forever**

❖ **BBC Natural World Documentary on Zambezi river in Africa**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwjPo8ilxMo>



The mighty and wild Zambezi is undoubtedly one of the greatest rivers of the earth – supporting amazingly rich wild life across many countries including Zambia , DR Congo, Botswana and others - it is also the source of the majestic ‘ Mosi – oa- tunya’ (i.e. ‘ the smoke that thunders’ - what the locals call ‘ Victoria Falls’ in their language, Lozi) . Watch this documentary, produced as part of BBC’s Natural World series for brilliant coverage of the annual journey of this river and the great wild life supported by it.

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About ‘Treasures’

It’s a compilation that I put together every once in a while, of things that I have found to be beautiful and meaningful.

Do share it with others who you think will enjoy it.

Drop me an email at shaileshd.email@gmail.com if you want to add someone to the circulation list.

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