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Context to the nugget

The chain of communication in an organization – from the CEO to the salesperson on the streets- is one of the main factors for its success or failure. What steps can a leader take to ensure this chain of communication is seamless? Listen as Raghu talks about this and also shares an interesting anecdote about why cheaper phones in India have dual SIM facility!

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): On the intent part, because you mentioned the man on the street needs to know the intent of the CEO. Any thoughts on how do you ensure that the chain of communication – two-ways, the CEO has viewership or visibility to what the salesman is thinking and vice versa — any lessons to be learnt on how that chain can be efficient?

Capt. Raghu Raman (RR): Lot of lessons, and they are not necessarily in the component of Z-KITBAG. If you see the fundamentals of leadership in combat, they have certain fundamentals for a leader, and one of the fundamentals is that a leader should be upfront. The reason why leaders should be upfront is basically because then they can spot those fleeting opportunities in the fog of war. They can actually see... the chain of information coming to him is not a distorted and a long chain; it is instantaneous, on the spot. That is why you have what is called field commanders. So, when you say a major and above is a field commander, it means in the field, he can take certain decisions, whether they are promotions, demotions, changing of command, handing over charge — you think someone is damn good in logistics, but he is slotted in the wrong place; on the spot you can make that change and sort of give your directions. It doesn't have to go through a committee and a board and all of that stuff. Now, that is a trait which, I think, we need to encourage a lot more incorporates. Some companies do it. They have this line of control... like Tesco, for instance, some of its most senior management, for two days, they turn into tellers, they stand behind the counter and do the tellers' job and they get some great insights and ideas on how to improve performance.

The second is the entire enterprise must always physically know the leader's location. That's again very important, because when we are trying to create an organization, we are essentially creating a shared reality. The shared reality has to pivot around either a thought or a leader. Now, if it has to pivot around the leader, then the leader's location is important, because otherwise you don't know where the centre of gravity is. So, the physical location of a leader at any given point of time must be known by the subordinates. Similarly, the leader must have his advisors always physically close to him. So, if I have to take a decision, I need to know whether I will have sufficient artillery support for that or will have sufficient logistic support for that. For me to be able to take that decision, I cannot say, 'OK, now my advisor will give me this advice after two days'. Then, that decision cannot be

made. So, these are some of the basic principles using which the forces make sure that the commanders have a very good understanding of what is happening on ground.

There are also, for example, certain portfolios. For instance, in the armoured corps, and especially in mechanized warfare, there are certain officers who are called recce platoon commanders. Now, recce platoon commander is somebody who is responsible for going out into the no man's land or the areas where you are going to advance and actually carry out a reconnaissance. He may be the junior-most officer but when he comes back and gives his report, that report is listened to by the senior-most of army commanders, because they know that it's not about the seniority of this individual, it's about the fact that he has the feel of the ground. He is the man from the streets. Again, sometimes, I see that incorporates. People are dismissive of ground reality. And why? Because they are senior.

I do a very popular exercise now. Sometimes, I ask questions in B-schools. For instance, one of my favourite questions in B-schools is, tell me why is it that the cheaper models of phones in India have dual SIM? You would assume that, intuitively, it would be the more expensive models which would have multiple slots. Why would a poor man who is struggling to pay one bill need two slots? I have found that the people in the class, the students, they proceed on two vectors on this. One vector is that they think about the various possibilities and they postulate those possibilities and they discuss it themselves — and I give them sufficient time; I say, you know what, I'm asking this question and you can answer it after lunch. The second school of thought, which I find very rare, extremely rare, is a kid actually going and asking a security guard or somebody or the sweeper, '*ke bhai, kyun rakhte ho aap,*' why do you have two SIM cards, and get the answer straight from the ground. Very few do that. Most of them want to do the five forces and Peter Drucker, because they have learnt that. So, they want to treat every problem with a Michael Porter's five forces. Whereas the simplest way to get the answer would be to actually ask a poor person, the *chaiwalla* outside, anybody who is affording a phone of 2000 bucks, why do you have two SIM cards? And he will give you the answer. He'll say that one of the SIMs is for incoming calls which is free and that's a number I can't change because you will call me for *chai* every day. I can't change that number. The other SIM is for outgoing calls, because that I will keep doing 'scheme'. If Jio is giving free now, I will use Jio, if Airtel gives a discount, I will use Airtel. So, for outgoing calls, I will use... And that's the reason why they have two SIMs. So, rather than trying to figure it out fast... I mean you can figure it out, but the easier way is to actually go and ask the soldier on ground, 'Why are you doing it this way?' and you probably have a much more accurate actually the accurate answer of why it's being done. So, I think that framework is what allows the seamless communication between the frontline... Of course, by all of this narration I don't mean that the army does it perfectly. There is room to improve everywhere, but that's the underlying framework which allows it to happen.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The key takeaway for me was the notion of rotating some of the leaders through frontline positions so that they have a realistic understanding of the situation on the ground; As Raghu says, the opportunities in the world we live in are fleeting and one doesn't have the luxury of waiting for some of this data to flow slowly through the chain of command in an organization

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End of nugget transcription

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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