

In praise of the 'karma yogi'

The 'karma yoga' talks of performing 'dharma' without being worried about the consequences.

G. Naga Sridhar

With the present economic slowdown, it is apparent that top managers and executives are under considerable stress and yet have to drive their teams towards greater efficiencies with cost-effective operating models. But how are they to achieve this goal?

If this question were posed to Frederick Winslow Taylor who propounded the theory of 'Scientific Management' over a 100 years ago, he might have suggested that what was required of management practices then was totally different from what it is today.

However, the experts at the Indian School of Business (ISB) in Hyderabad envisage that the modern manager could rise to the demands of the corporate world by being a '*karma yogi*,' to borrow a concept from the *Bhagavad Gita*, and synchronise the concept with existing theoretical models of management practice.

"We call this an integral leadership model combining the wisdom perspectives from India's spiritual traditions, existing management practices and the scientific principles of theories of management," said Prasad Kaipa, Director, Centre for Leadership Innovation and Change (CLIC) at ISB. He was speaking to *The New Manager* on the sidelines of an international conference on 'Igniting the Genius Within' organised by ISB recently.

CONTEXT and NEED

According to Kaipa, the dynamic nature of the corporate world and the growing diversity of a CEO/manager's role, among others, calls for a new leadership model. "In the present day 24/7 culture and the rapid cycle-times of product creations there is no need for external competition to cannibalise your product. A manager might do it himself/herself if there is no holistic approach," he says.

The multi-polar nature of leadership cannot be addressed by the existing, traditional management/leadership models alone. "A top manager should act as a change agent, a leader of leaders (not of followers) and as an innovator. Our integrated leadership approach advocates a combination of all the three traits in a single leader," he explains. All three roles are vital and mutually reinforce each other.

SPIRITUALITY

An essential component of leadership should be drawn from the Indian spiritual tradition. ISB has been working on integrating leadership roles with the wisdom perspectives in the Indian tradition to deal with stress and strain and by performing *nishkama karma*.

"The message in the *Bhagavad Gita*, for instance, is relevant to modern day managers. The '*karma yoga*' as preached by Lord Krishna, is interesting because it talks of performing your own 'dharma' without being worried about the consequences. A top manager or CEO should also be a '*karma yogi*,' focussed on efficiency and apt decision-making without being stressed about the outcome," he says.

The teachings of Valmiki, Vyasa, the Buddha and Jesus Christ too have messages for different leadership roles. The real role of a leader is to make his team members think out of the box and cause change. "As rightly pointed out by Prof V. Krishnamurthy, former deputy director of BITS Pilani in his presentation, if this change roller-skates into further changes in future generations then that becomes the unique legacy of a leader. The legacies of the Buddha and Jesus, for example, have been transmitted for the longest period of time to the largest number of people," said Kaipa.

Around 200 national and international delegates attended the three-day meet, organised to stimulate debate on the new leadership model.

"There has been very good response and our model has generated a lot of debate. Over 65 per cent of the delegates are senior executives to whom our model appealed instantly," Kaipa adds.

The CLIC plans to work with industry, Government and non-governmental organisations to create awareness about its new management model and create new knowledge. In addition, it will bring out a series of management perspectives gleaned from ancient wisdom in the form of four books.