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1. If you don't have dreams how can they come true?

Once you have a dream, you need a set of values and disciplines working in harmony to make it come true.

Here are seven such values and disciplines:

1. **Keep on learning new skills:** They will never abandon you until your mind does.
2. **Assume Responsibility:** If you see an opportunity or a problem, you own it.
3. **People and Relationships:** It is people who make things happen, not machines.
4. **Flexibility:** “If you want to be successful in this fast moving world, be ready to change the document before the ink is dry.” (Robert Noyce’s advice to me in 1984.)
5. **Take Risks:** That is the only way to realize your true potential.
6. **Passion:** Do things with passion. It is contagious.
7. **Performance and Results:** In the final analysis, it is the value that you bring to the society.

And Always Remember:

Everything is OK in the end. If it is not OK then it is not the end.

8. Things that matter most

Doing things right is always good, but what matters most is doing the right things right.

Story Line:

National News Release: One big university announced today that they had fired their football coach. The announcement said, “The coach had a win-loss record that was much better than previous three coaches and his players had higher academic achievements than previous teams. His players and assistants loved him and the coach was a great human being with a high level of integrity and work ethics.”

Now one may wonder, “Then why did he get fired?”

The announcement continued, “He did many things right from Sunday to Friday, but failed to win **the Big Games*** on Saturdays.”

Reflection:

1. Having high degree of ethics in any encounter is always important. Having said that:

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2. The process is relevant as long as it produces the expected results for which one was hired.
3. In work situations, if the final report is: “A for effort, F for result,” then one must reexamine the efforts.

*The games against their arch rival colleges are called, “The Big Games.”

12. “But I am too old” ...It is never too late to start something new

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it does not matter.

-Mark Twain

Story Line:

Many times, we hear people say, “I wish I could do that but now I am too old.” Here are the real life stories of some people that will inspire you to think otherwise.

Michelangelo, Renaissance period Italian, creator of the statue of David, the painter of the world famous *Scenes of Genesis* and *The Last Judgment*, was 71 years-old when he designed the dome of St. Peter's Basilica.

Giuseppe Verdi, a great composer of romantic operas, created one of his greatest works, *Falstaff* in 1893 at the age of 80.

George Bernard Shaw, the famous English playwright, who won the Nobel Prize in literature and an Academy Award for adapted screenplay, “Pygmalion”, completed his last work, “Buoyant Billions” in his 90s.

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Jimmy Carter, a science graduate, a farm owner, who later became the 39th President of the United States, devoted his time after the Presidency to serve worthy causes around the world. In 2002, at the age of 78, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. He is a prolific author; and 12 of his 20 books have been published after the age of 70. At 82, he is still serving people and writing books.

My maternal grandmother was 65 years old when my grandfather passed away. She went back to school and got her first Bachelor's degree. After that she tried for a Master's degree in English Literature and failed twice. As a young child my memory of her was that she used to study hard, often late nights, constantly worrying about grades; and on the two occasions when she flunked, she was in tears and needed a lot of consoling by family and friends.

She believed that to go after your dream and fail is never a failure, but to have a dream and not go after it is the ultimate failure.

Reflection:

People do not grow old by living a number of years. They grow old when they start regretting what they did not do instead of thinking about what they can still do.

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20. Doing brain surgery for a headache when an aspirin would have sufficed

“Common sense is not so common.”

-Voltaire

Story Line:

The Time: Late 80s.

The Place: A small company with unique chipset products.

On one Friday morning, while the director of operations (Bill) was chatting with his employee, the CEO walked into his office and said, "Bill, I am on the phone with a potential customer. He is not happy with the performance of his current supplier and has approached us. I need production volumes and availability for our new products." Bill assured the CEO that he had the information and he would bring it to him.

Now, Bill was a guy who was a great devotee of PCs and all the wonderful gadgets and tools that it was bringing to the world. He had discovered "Harvard Graphics," the presentation software, only a month before and had a non-stop fascination for that toy.

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Bill picked up a sheet of paper off his desk, on which there was already all the information about product builds and availability that the CEO needed, and started entering the data in the "Harvard Graphics" software. (Bill was not happy that the original information was written in pencil with few mark-up notes)

A few minutes later, the CEO walked in to Bill's office, with the color of his face as red as a South American Monkey, and said, "Bill, the customer just hung up the phone. I lost the opportunity. No executive in the United States has to put up with the pain that I have with you." And the CEO left.

Fuming, Bill asked his employee to close the door. Bill told his employee, "The CEO is unreasonable, insensitive, and does not get it. All that I was trying to do was to give him the presentation style material since it is for the customer."

The employee being loyal to Bill; gathered all his courage and told him, "Boss, all that you needed to do was hand him the original sheet of paper on your desk when he walked in the first time."

Sequel:

Bill is retired and lives in the woods in Montana. The employee is still working in the semiconductor industry and is doing bigger and better things. The whereabouts of the CEO are unknown. He may have found serenity in the forests of the Amazon (after dealing with more Bills in his career).

29. Breaking a Rookie in to the game

In business or in sports, people are hired based on their good skills. The day of reckoning for a Rookie is when he/she is asked to perform in stressful situations like when the game is on the line and thousands of people are screaming.

Story Line:

Most organizations: corporations, sports teams, or studios, normally go through a rigorous screening process to select the right candidate for a job.

But what determines the success of the employee and/or the team going forward? It not only depends on the talent (technical, hard-core skills) but also on the mental toughness (emotional, soft skills).

There is a dual responsibility here: on the employee, and a much more on the manager. Assessing when to break a person in different situations is an extremely important aspect of managing and coaching.

In the early 90s, a baseball team needed to win the final game of the season to get into the play-offs.

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For the most crucial game of the season, the manager had two reliable veterans available to pitch but decided to go with a very promising, hard throwing rookie pitcher.

The manager possibly envisioned headline stories written about the boldness and “genius” of him and the guts of rookie if the gamble worked. But the fans who had watched the rookie’s performances during the regular season were concerned that even though he was impressive and talented, he had not been tested in any high-pressure situations.

For those who watched the game, the rest is history. The opponent piled up a huge lead against the rookie pitcher by the third inning and the team never recovered. The most promising rookie of the year could not recover from the emotional shock and left baseball.

He returned to baseball a few years ago but has never been the same pitcher that his potential showed in early 90s.

With his decision on that fateful day, the manager did not do the right service for the team or for the career of a very promising young man.

Reflection:

This is an important lesson for managers and leaders in any field.

Before promoting a person or assigning him/her to manage crucial tasks in a high-pressure environment, assess if the person is psychologically prepared to handle that level of challenge. If not, give some more time in the coaching and preparation.

35. In Asia, most business is done over a cup of tea

The most important relations are personal ones

Story Line:

In 1980, when I graduated from college, the company that I was working for offered me an expatriate job in Manila, Philippines. I would be working for a senior expatriate who was already stationed at a subcontractor plant. The opportunity to work in a foreign country seemed exciting, and I gladly accepted.

Just before I left, I paid a courtesy visit to Mr. David, the general manager of our division. I asked him if he had any words of wisdom about how to thrive in a foreign country.

He told me, “Young man, in Asia most of the business is done over a cup of tea.” Then he shook my hands and wished me well.

Hmm!! That seemed very profound advice. I spent most of the plane ride trying to debug what he really meant. I even wondered, “If all that it took is a cup of tea to do business in Asia then why did I spend all these years sweating over a

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degree?” Young that I was, I did not grasp the key concept behind Mr. David’s statement.

In the first few days I noticed that, every morning, my boss and the other expatriates spent time with Mr. Chang, proud owner of the very first subcontractor assembly facility in Asia, talking about all kinds of world affairs over their morning coffee or tea. I observed that they were not talking about ‘Real Business’, our company’s business, and I felt uncomfortable about it.

So in the next week, when I requested a meeting with Mr. Chang to go over my agenda and instead I got an invitation to join him for a cup of tea, I refused. I wanted a formal meeting.

I got a call back from his secretary that for the next three weeks, Mr. Chang was busy with bankers, labor union and a visit to the Presidential palace. For a formal meeting, I would have to wait.

Three weeks? That was an eternity for one who comes from a competitive environment and wants to prove his worth to the company right away. I went and complained to my local boss and asked him what to do. Amazingly, his advice was, “Go and have a cup of tea.”

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I thought, “What is wrong with all these people?”

Anyway, I realized that it was the best option under the circumstances. So the next day I went for a cup of tea. The same thing happened in the following two days, a tea and world affairs. By Friday, I was getting impatient. To my surprise, Mr. Chang inquired about my plans. In a few minutes after I started describing the details, he summoned three key managers to his office and told them, “Give Mr. Shah whatever support he needs.” Unconditional support? Wow! No negotiations. I had cut a good deal without much effort.

What followed was a great teamwork with his people and a huge improvement in yields and quality. The word of our accomplishments traveled across the oceans. It was evident on Mr. David’s face when he came for his annual visit to Asia.

Sequel to the Story:

Not long after that, we received a surprise shipment at our home. The sender was a US branch of our company. It contained appliances that my wife and I needed, but could not afford. Those appliances were of a famous brand, made by a subsidiary of our parent company.

Nervous, I called our secretary to ask if she knew anything about it since I did not order them and I did not have the savings to pay for them.

She informed me that they were from Mr. David and there was a telex from him: “In Asia, most of the business is done over a cup of tea. Thanks, for your hard work and great results.”

Note: This story narrates my experience in Asia. However, similar practices do exist in other parts of the world over a glass of beer or over a golf game or while enjoying a hukka.

Reflecting on Reflections

In ancient times, storytelling was one of the major means of education. Elders would pass on their experiences, their triumphs and tragedies, to the next generation by telling tales. In many cultures, the time after evening meals was allocated for stories. The experiences were communicated mostly through fables and real life events. Each story had some moral to instill good values.

In modern busy times, this practice, though not as widely spread as before, still continues in many cultures and families.

Each Friday, on evening rides with our children, I would tell stories from events that happened in the office or in the world; from the books I read, or from the stories from my own childhood, which were told by great teachers or by my own parents during evening rides with them. In some stories, the names of the people are changed out of respect for them and also to protect their privacy.

The proof of pudding is in eating and the value of book is in reading. I hope you found as much value in these stories as the friends who have received *Friday Reflections* over the last several years.

- *Anand P. Shah*

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