When You Change The Way You Look At Things, The Things You Look At Change



The Executive of the Year Awards Ceremony was introduced over three decades ago to encourage and honour the backbone of the Capital Maharaja Organisation. The event focuses on the People, Performance and Plans of the Organisation while honouring the Executive of the Year for the past financial year. At the event held recently, the winners for the financial years 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 were awarded. The Chief Guest for this event was R Maharaja, who has been a pillar of strength to the Organisation. Having witnessed the birth and the growth of the company, his insight of the journey is inspirational.

Speech by R Maharaja

I am proud to have been invited to address an audience of which I was an integral part before I retired a few years ago.

Let me commence by asking you to bear in mind the truism;
When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at….. CHANGE.

I would like to repeat,
When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at…. CHANGE.

The father of the Executive of the Year Award Ceremony is Mr Rajamahendran. Not in my wildest dreams did I envisage, it would become what it is today – a magnificent annual feature, a “look forward to” event in the calendar of the Maharaja Organisation.

It is my intention to share with you the perspective I gathered through years of observation of the human mind, and through it, the difference I see between the successful man and the pathetic defeatist.

When Rajamahendran and I assumed the mantle of authority previously carried by Mr Mahadevan and Mr Rajendram, we were young and inexperienced in the World of Commerce. But we took over the reins fearlessly and focused on a smooth transition. The group of companies we inherited was not large. So we were able to personally oversee and supervise the day to day tasks quite adequately.

Once we were comfortable with the management of the business, the most natural interest overcame us. We began looking outwards, and saw around us opportunities which stirred in us the urge to exploit them. We did not hesitate. We decided to act, and we did so with our own style of Management.

The one great advantage we had was our spirit of fearlessness.

We realised that, if our dreams were to be made real, we needed competent and talented executives and staff who, like us, had the hunger to race ahead of competition. We were a relatively unknown group of companies. So, our

advertisements for recruiting Executives were often met with poor response. The talented and the qualified were looking elsewhere, for openings in foreign held companies.

It was at this point that Mr Rajamahendran’s innovative leadership qualities came to the fore. He decided to enter the arena of sports and to compete in the Mercantile Sector. We assembled a cricket team, a netball team, a hockey team, a football team, a basketball team and an athletics team. Within a very short time, we won practically every trophy and title on offer in the sports that we competed in. In the process we created an image of ourselves as a young and energetic organisation. And, through these sporting efforts and victories, team spirit was inspired throughout the entire organisation.

We followed up by consistently promoting the name of the company in a variety of ways. We designed a logo and devised promotional material to bring the Maharaja Organisation to the attention of all in Sri Lanka, especially the youth graduating from prestigious universities and colleges.

What became very clear during this short period was that, in order to be recognised we had to be different. We also understood the futility of competing in fields that were already saturated. Therefore we decided to become true entrepreneurs. We had already established this mindset, when we were first taking an active interest in promoting Sports, when we were the only private sector organisation to capture on film, the first Presidential Election and, when we initiated the earliest infrastructure projects under the newly opened Economy following the change of government in 1977.

The staff we built around us and the team of senior executives were by now equally smitten by our enthusiasm. They themselves became entrepreneurs, scouring the market both here and abroad for opportunities, bringing these to our attention and then working to materialise them.

You could see that each step we took to build ourselves flowed logically and naturally. Our aspiration was to be recognised as a dynamic organisation, and it was this motivation that stimulated our growth.

The success of a unique organisation can be sustained only by a very special kind of leadership, the kind that Mr Rajamahendran has been providing over the years.

Sometimes it is just the putting together of the right mix that achieves the desired results. The American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie was regarded as the richest man in his time with considerable influence and prestige. He was an ordinary mortal, much like most of us, and could not have built his steel empire with his own brain power alone. He had one extraordinary gift – the skill to put the power of a thousand brains to work, in tandem with his leadership.

He believed that, to run a successful business, there were two kinds of people needed, the promoter and the caretaker, what's commonly called the entrepreneur and the manager.

Likewise, Mr Rajamahendran has repeatedly succeeded in matching the right entrepreneurial spirit with the right managerial talent. That's not all. He has often inspired the manifestation of both these qualities in one human being!

Many are also the occasions on which Mr Rajaramahendran has exhibited resolute leadership and indomitable courage in the face of dire adversity.

The Success Of A Unique Organisation Can Be Sustained Only By A Very Special Kind Of Leadership, The Kind That Mr Rajamahendran Has Been Providing Over The Years.

In 1983, at the height of our success, upheavals in the country reduced us literally to ashes. It was Mr Rajamahendran who took on the responsibility of rebuilding the Group. His relative youth, fuelled by righteous outrage, drove his vision and transformed the disaster into a challenge. No effort did he spare. It was an exciting time. His enthusiasm was infectious, and we too soon became fearless in tackling the obstacles, and each set-back made us discover fresh potential in ourselves. The Maharaja Organisation was rebuilt, to emerge stronger than ever before, ready to take on fresh challenges and to break new ground.

If there is a leader showing the way, it is not difficult for any follower to tap into his or her own reservoir of leadership and achievement potential.

What is behind Rajamahendran's success? Or for that matter, what factors and imperatives keep entrepreneurs like Richard Branson riding the crest of the wave of triumph in all their undertakings?

One of the primary misfortunes of mankind is the average person's ready acceptance of the word "Impossible". The extraordinary person on the other hand, dares to make the impossible, possible; dares to lead, dares to inspire, dares to act, and dares to blaze new trails. And through it all, he or she is constantly and acutely conscious of success, and most importantly, of how that success benefits others.

To succeed, one must have clarity of purpose, the knowledge of what one wants, and an intense desire to possess it. If what you wish to do is right and you believe in it, go right ahead and do it. Strive all you can to make your dream a reality, and don't mind what others have to say if you meet with temporary failure, for they perhaps do not know that every failure creates the seed of an equivalent success.

What are the lessons to be learnt from all this? Firstly, all of us are, or must strive to be, multi dimensional. There is potential in each one of us that we must first discover, and then nurture. Secondly, even if you are not yourself a leader by nature, you can draw on your own special individual potential, if there is a leader to show the way. Remember that we need both promoters and caretakers.

And, ultimately, there are only two mind sets any one of us can practice. We either want something or not want it. It's as simple as that! All successful men and women have their sails set in the direction of their intended destination. Like the mariner, they are moving towards their port of choice – not chance, and unforeseen hindrances do not deter them. In their minds, they are already visualising the success of their dreams.

Beethoven was deaf, Milton was blind, Helen Keller was deaf, dumb and blind. But their names will last as long as time itself, because they didn't just dream. They transformed their dreams into organised thought and concrete, fruitful action. Their setbacks did not still them. Instead, the setbacks drove them with determination to express their talents to the world. Determination backed with faith and personal initiative gave them the power to break their shackles.

Hold Firm The Thought In Your Mind, And Work With A Single Mindedness Of Purpose To Reach Your Goal, And Nothing Can Stop You From Achieving Your Dream.

In every sphere of life, thought precedes action. Everything seen around you was first conceived in the mind before it materialised.

Ralpb Waldo Emmerson said, “The key to every man is his thought. Every person today is the result of his thoughts of yesterday.” Let us analyse the tall Bank of Ceylon building. If I inquire of what material the building is constructed, immediately you would say “it is built of brick and steel girders and plate glass and lumber”. You will be partly right.

The brick and steel and other material that went into the physical portion of the building were necessary, but before any of these materials were laid into place the building in its entirety was constructed of another sort of material. It was first built in the mind of the architect, out of the intangible stuff known as thought.

The British philosopher James Allen coined the aphorism “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he”. In other words, a man is what he thinks, his character being the sum of all his thoughts. Always remember, you are, without a doubt, what you think.

Tha Maharaja Organisation too – the envy of competitive forces, and therefore the target of criticism and attack – was first crafted in the minds of its founders before it took physical form.

This Executive of the Year Ceremony, which has been conducted for the past thirty one years, is also the result of a concept first visualised in the mind of Mr Rajamahendran.

As I have said earlier, if your thoughts are backed with unwavering faith, perseverance and determination, anything is possible.

This reminds me of a passage I came across in a book titled “Think and Grow Rich” by Napolean Hill. I would like to deliver that inspiring message now,
“I do not choose to be a common man. It is my right to be uncommon if I can. I seek opportunity, not security. I want to take calculated risks to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed. I refuse to barter incentive for a dole. I will not trade freedom for beneficence or my dignity for a handout. I will not cower before any master nor bend to any threat. It is my heritage to stand erect, proud and unafraid to think and act for myself, to enjoy the benefit of my creation and to face the world boldly and say “This I have done.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr Rajamahendran is made from this very mould of courage.

In conclusion, my message to you is… Hold firm the thought in your mind, and work with a single mindedness of purpose to reach your goal, and nothing can stop you from achieving your dream. Inspired by great leadership, employing qualities of both astute entrepreneurship and professional management skills and bringing into play the full potential of your rich, multi-faceted personalities, anything and everything is possible. After all, your reality is what you create with your thoughts. Therefore…let us always remember:

When you change the way you look at things, the things you look at … CHANGE.


