

BLACKBERRY PUBLISHING HOUSE A CASE STUDY ON LEADERSHIP STYLES AND TEAM BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

Blackberry Publishing House(BPH) is a case study dealing with a sensitive aspect of human behaviour,team building and the effects of Leaders and the leadership process. Working environment in an organisation largely depends on the style of Leadership based directly on the maturity and readiness of the followers. From Telling style when followers are not willing not mature to Delegating, when the followers are willing and very capable,the Leaders have to articulate the style so that the followers remain motivated and are encouraged in achieving their self actualisation. No employee is working for a job alone,but are looking for a career and growth. Leaders usually overlook the aspect of self esteem of an employee and are result oriented for their advancement. BPH has a willing lot of workers, but the malaise of nepotism and strong biases usually dishearten the employees and who in turn loose interest in work. Competence of a boss is well appreciated, but the humane factor in dealing, cannot be overlooked. The higher management has to closely monitor the functioning and set the course right if any deviations are observed,so that a fair deal is given to all. Opportunist

leaders should be well avoided, as their reliability becomes questionable,and can abandon a ship again at the time of peril. BPH has a competent lot of working professional who have a desire to excel and produce quality work. Lack of opportunity to showcase their efforts because of personal differences show poor professional working, and which cannot be compensated by verbal motivation. Challenging job, rewards and recognition, necessarily not monetarily is a shot- in- the -arm of any employee. Worklife balance has also been playing an important role in the lives of employees and if the same is not maintained, it has a retrograde effect on the motivation of employees and results in severe stress,which may culminate in an employee taking an extreme step of quitting the job. Higher Management,quintessentially, plays a pivotal role of ensuring fair play, good working ethics and just that Eustress which makes the employee working and feeling a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION AND BRIEF HISTORY

BPH is well established publishing house with its main office in Europe but in India it is in

Bombay,now Mumbai working successfully from five decades. It has been publishing books of all genre ranging from kids section to fiction, non fiction,motivational and social issues. It is also contemplating to add a section of spiritual books authored by the various Spiritual gurus, which have contemporary issues applicable in day to day life. The company is making good profits and decent salaries are being disbursed to employees,but selectively.

A publishing house usually has a team of Editors who are the mainstay of the organisation and usually encourage and invite new authors also to come to light, besides the old and established authors. There is a team of Designers who are making the jackets for the books. It is a known fact that an attractive book cover draws the attention of the buyer alongside a catchy title of the book. Then, there are other departments involved in production and logistics besides the administrative staff assisting in the compilation of the book. Hence team work is extremely important with all concerned clear about their roles and responsibilities. Leadership is not with one head, but it becomes transferable as the work shifts from one department to another. The set up always boasted of a diverse global composition and was very good in choosing the team members.

BPH has a team of competent people who are brilliant individually, with strong biases of working closely amongst selected people. While the overall progress of the Organisation is healthy,there is general dissatisfaction amongst the team members on various accounts and moreso on professional reasons. Communication was not very free amongst the employees and while a flatter or horizontal functional

was ideal, it was kind of hierarchial, and the intercommunication between the departments was restrictive.

Various administrative and professional issues resulted in ushering of a new set of team members who brought in their skill sets. Organisational climate and culture undergo changes with the influence of Leaders. In the absence of an Ombudsman,the ownership of the Organisational functioning keeps vacillating. Keeping a balance in the style of Leadership motivation and growth of the employees quite essentially results in growth of the Organisation. Competence minus compassion makes an organisation mechanical and hampers the functioning seriously.

CASE STUDY

BLACKBERRY PUBLISHING HOUSE (BPH)

BACKGROUND

BPH was a leading publishing house recognized world over for its quality production of fiction/non-fiction books. The Indian office is housed in the old historical buildings at Nariman Point with three sides facing an open view which is indeed refreshing and invigorating. Ergonomically designed, the office staff comprising of 100 plus employees have little complaints about their physiological needs, which were adequately looked after during the office hours, except taking long leaves, which were always an issue, despite a clear-cut HR Policy. The publishing house for sake of efficiency and effective functioning had designed a clear organizational structure, simple yet effective. The setup had three distinct departments

namely; The Editorial team, The Designer team and the Sales & Marketing department. Roles of each department were well defined, and the personnel were never required to be reminded for completion of duty. The Editorial team were responsible for the contents of the books and its layout. The Art Section was taking care of the book cover designs, the book jacket and sending it for production. The Logistics were handling the coordination with the printers, post printing packing, moving and distribution of the books as per the plan. The finance Department and HR department comprised of just 4 people handling all issues related to HR and finances with quite meticulously. So, while duties were defined and seamless in functioning, the editorial head was defacto the head of the organization calling the shots since the job of the Editorial team was not only confined to preparing the contents, but also to get clientele or generate business, in general terms. Hence, the senior most Editor usually assumed the responsibility of the leader of the Organization. BPH being an old and well reputed set up, practically had all leading authors, Indian and foreigners associated with BPH, much to the chagrin of their competitors. Even the budding writers who showed promise, were encouraged. Some of them shot into fame after their initial efforts. All this was because of the dynamism of the Editorial head, Mr. Suryakiran, and the Art Director Ms. Kamini. Suryakiran, was a very reserved, practically an introvert person, man of few words, but extremely competent and a thorough professional. Popularly called SK, he would deal only with the heads of the department and go by their reports and advice and hardly spoke to the other members on professional

matters. His aloofness gave a signal to others to keep a distance and work within confined spaces of communication. SK loved his work and his good living style. The ambience and the organizational environment in the workplace vacillated between good to indifferent. The Art Director Ms. Kamini, a young petite lady was a good designer, who had graduated from a well renowned college of designs abroad and was very competent. Kamini despite her confidence had a streak of jealousy from her competent juniors. She was happy to create a set of own team members who spoke what she wanted to hear and remained in her good books. So, this set of workforce under the garb of a congeniality and camaraderie were pulling on well, perhaps at the cost of others. Work was assigned accordingly and some competent designers always landed up in poor light. The young designers under them would complain about pay and work but the rumblings of discontent never reached to the top. The CEO, Mr. Smith, a European, was neither an editor, nor a designer, but a figurative head. He was enthusiastic and peppy. He would appear once in a while, throw a party, talk to people; pat everybody's back and disappear into his own world. His appointment was always doubtful, but his networking and closeness with owners always carried his misgivings through. His privileges and perks were quite princely and he enjoyed a good life. His work hours and workdays were uncertain and his involvement in daily matters seemed salutary. Any complaint sent to him would remain unaddressed, or he would prefer to discuss it in open during his visits, much to the embarrassment of the employee. Hence, from the fear of being singled out, employees would hardly lodge their

discontentment and would keep adjusting their working ways for survival.

The setup had an unwritten hierarchy and boasted of paperless office. All communications were by emails. There were bickering and back biting. Pay was low for the junior staff. Performance appraisals was a bone of contention. No counselling for improvement were ever held and the employee would be ticked off for poor work, without any further guidelines for improvement, leaving the employee disheartened. Appraisals would take place regularly, but with little outcome. The employee was heard but no directions or plans for his future growth discussed. The Head would summarily dispose of the meeting by saying "More you work more will be your compensation" Positions were given by strict hierarchy of service rather than competence. Mediocrity seems to be rising over competence. The working hours were quite good with all physiological needs being met. However, there was an uneasy calm in the environment. The employees looked uncertain and were managing to figure out where they stood. Unhealthy competition seems to be getting germinated as every employee wanted to be recognized and rewarded. Employees were hesitant to approach the Administrative head, for fear of backlash in the form of discrimination, and hoped that matters will improve someday. Despite all these drawbacks the employees were holding on to their work profile and working with dedication.

THE CHANGE

Uncontrolled festivities do have debilitating results. The Management on reviewing the outcome and expenditure of CEO, Mr. Smith

decided to relieve him from his services on account of some financial irregularities and so on account of moral turpitude. There were severe rumblings in the rank and file, but no employee felt his departure. However, this sacking was not taken very kindly by Smith who because of his good networking and rich experience in the field, soon set up a separate publishing house with another partner Vishnukant, an experienced hand in publishing house, by the name of Gooseberry, a title very akin to the existing set up. and started his business. Suave and charming, he slowly started eroding the fabric of BPH. Within 2-3 months, the publishing head SK gave his resignation on personal differences with the owner, followed by request from Art Director, Kamini for a long sabbatical on health grounds. Exodus of top three in such a short span destabilized the set up. It was like a ship without a rudder just bobbing around. The void seemed a wide abyss. The set up was riddled with speculations about filling up of the positions from the existing staff. Some temporary arrangements were made by apportioning responsibilities to the existing employees but the positions were kept vacant. However, the situation was far from stability.

THE NEW GUARD

Within three months, a new CEO Mr. Collins came as replacement of Smith. Short stoutly built, his experience in publishing house was inadequate but was a maverick in administration. Paradoxically, head of any institution should be an able administrator as administration is the backbone of any organization. However, the technical void remained. Soon a publishing head, Tejaswani

breezed in and she brought along an Art Director Mr. Antonio, a French national who had worked in several Publishing houses in Europe during his experience of 15 years in various appointments. Ms Tejaswani was a dynamic lady, a bundle of energy, full of beaming ideas but a bit of scoffish attitude. She carried herself with an air of pride, followed a strict diet regime and was a fitness freak. She was earlier the head, of small publishing house owned by her family and thus had some experience. Her penchant for foreigners, was well known because of her training abroad. Antonio, 32-year-old was a visiting consultant, and her old friend, was suddenly promoted the Art Director, a position usually given to an experienced designer. This sudden promotion took many of the deserving employees off guard as some of them were hopeful for coveting the position because of their long innings and their competence. Characteristic of any change which is associated with windfall of new results, the duo seemed to be in a hurry. Surgical changes were made in the functioning procedures and the work load on the young designers almost trebled. Work was being taken without much quality, to promote and generate business. Antonio was capable, but haughty and was only interested in results. He was desirous of changing the work culture which had been on for five decades. It was traditional, with an air of modernity, as the bulk of the work force were Asians with sprinkling of others. His dislike for slow learners was very obvious, by his sarcasm in correcting the people. He considered himself straightforward and would not think twice in ticking off in public. The young Art Director just wanted the targets to

be met. Lacking the basic cultural knowledge of the Indian authors and their themes he would just assign the work to junior designers without thinking twice. His designs were unlike what the authors wanted, but he just pushed for compliance. Any suggestion from juniors was paid little attention. The authors were getting disillusioned and unhappy as they were hardly consulted before finalizing the jackets.

Tejaswani had her own style of functioning. While pushing everyone she would insist that all work produced by the designers to be openly discussed and displayed during weekly meetings, a practice never followed earlier. The incapable and protected got exposed. Positions were shuffled with few losing out their earlier portfolios though without effect on pay. The young designers suddenly found their work coming up in recognition but the work load was high. Targets were being achieved much before the deadlines. However, resignations from all quarters started pouring in and were being accepted. She was of strong belief that there is on dearth of talent outside. Without giving a hearing she would relieve the concerned employee, leaving others more vulnerable. The editorial and art team suddenly started dwindling. Some editors, few designers found the pressure unbearable.

Meanwhile, at Gooseberry things were not moving as expected. SK and Kamini had some differences with the Owner on numerous issues. However, the work was going on. The news of SK and Kamini joining Gooseberry came as whiff of fresh breath. A number of reputed authors who were unhappy with the functioning of BPH and because of their old acquaintance, withdrew their future

assignments from Blackberry, since they were in good relations with the earlier team players. However, the duo developed some personality clashes in the new set up amongst themselves as well with the Management.

SITUATION AS ON DAY

Continuous flow of resignations at Blackberry is making matters difficult.

An air-of uncertainty prevails and the environment is bit tense.

Some young designers and Editors are in decision dilemma, whether to continue or quit.

Gooseberry is still not settled and facing teething issues.

SK and Kamini have given feelers for return to Blackberry, individually, but on better pay and perks.

QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the various personalities, their traits and leadership styles.
2. Comment on the work environment, the culture and motivational levels.
3. Analyze the team synergy. How is Leadership handled in a Team?
4. As Collins the CEO, what option would you exercise? How would you consider the return of Old players back into the Team to restore stability?

CLOSING COMMENTS

Leader is a person and Leadership is a process. Any organization without a suitable Leader will always find it difficult to survive and grow. Many a competent Leaders have derailed from the meteoric rise of career,

because of over involvement in themselves or career and neglecting their teams. Choosing the appropriate style of Leadership is equally important, as it is of dealing the group of people as Individuals. As per Dr Belbin Meredith, each individual in a team has its peculiar strength and innate weaknesses. A leader who fails to identify these can never give job satisfaction to the individual and will also fail to encourage him towards self-actualization. Maturity and Readiness of followers is a very important aspect which decides the style of Leadership. Using a single template to run the team is a definite process of disaster. It is academically interesting that a Leader can exercise more than one style of leadership in the same organization depending on the employees.

Bestowed with this intelligence and coupled with the interests of employees first a leader can sail his team through any adversities.