

Swami Vivekananda: A Management Guru

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda's concept of development of personality is very much influenced by this philosophical notion. Vivekananda believes that evolution in human personality during recorded time has been social rather than biological; it has proceeded not by heritable variations in the species, but mostly by social, intellectual and moral innovation transmitted to individuals and generations by imitation, custom or education. This paper focuses on the Swami Vivekananda's orientation towards the concept building of modern management. The Indian tradition provides a very rich of concepts and ideas in the domain of personality development. These ideas have been presented elaborately in the Vedas and Upanishads which are the richest sources of understanding personality development in ancient Indian thought. The issues of self, soul, human nature, human existence, and human experience in terms of what they are, what they mean, how they are determined, their manifestation in the human being and their role in mediating personality development from the core themes around which personality development can understand according to the ancient philosophical tradition.

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Introduction

Think of some great leaders in the history. What is common in them? It is their charismatic personality which is influencing generations. What is personality? It is not physical appearance or strength. It is not brain power or intellectual capacity. According to Swamiji, personality is deeper than that. Personality is related to will power, soul or *atma* of human being. There are lots of personality development courses today. Behavioral science is an important area of discussion in modern times. We read lot of books on this subject written by western management gurus. Can you believe that Swami Vivekananda wrote on personality development 100 years ago? Management gurus and researchers should understand the approach of Vivekananda. Today, I would like to share some of my learning from Vivekananda on personality development and his management capacity.

Supreme value of youth period is incalculable and indescribable. Youth life is the most precious life. Youth is the best time. The way in which you utilize this period will decide the nature of coming years that lie ahead of you. Your happiness, your success, your honor and your good name all depend upon the way in which you live now, in this present period. This wonderful period of the first state of your life is related to you as the soft wet clay in the hands of the potter. Skillfully the potter gives it the right and correct shapes and forms, which he intends to give. Even so, you can wisely mould your life, your character, your physical health and strength, in short your entire nature in any way in which you make up your mind to do. And you must do this now.

Swamiji tells us that it is easy to understand body and brain. But the soul or *atma* is deeper one and also finer one. This is the root of everything in human being. Controlling this root is important to control everything. He who knows and controls his own mind knows the secret of every mind. Vivekananda says that the body and brain are temporary. Souls are immortal. Swamiji says that everybody is searching for God and divinity outside. But divinity resides in every soul. If we understand this spirit there will be harmony around us.

While speaking about personality Swami Vivekananda has emphasized on physical, mental and spiritual personality. He said, "Be strong my friends, you will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the *Bhagavad Gita*."

This should not be miss-understood that he was against the studying of any religious scripture.

To develop our personality, we need to learn from both happiness and pain. Sometimes we learn more from pain. Man's character is the collective expression of past experiences. These experiences result in habits. Swamiji says that we need to have *vairagya* to change our habits to develop a better character. Swamiji also teaches us how to control our negative emotions.

But he was against the nature of so-called religious practitioners. He was against the nature of people, who sleeping in lethargy under the name of *satvik* (pious and balanced) nature and wearing the garb of religion proclaim themselves as the sole defenders of dharma. In another place he said, "Strength is life and weakness is death. Strength is felicity and immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery." The strength which Swamiji was expecting is physical, mental and spiritual.

Speaking about mental personality Swami Vivekananda strongly emphasized on mental freedom. This simply means everybody has to strive hard to gain mastery over mind and better the power of concentration. Further he added that difference between animal and man is the difference in their power of concentration of mind. Along with concentration of mind, will power is another important facet of mental personality. The remedy to destroy weakness of anything is not by brooding over it but by thinking of strength and through positive and constructive activities. The effort for creating our personality has to continue for a long time without any lethargy or frustration. It is like avoiding any stain on a brass vessel otherwise one has to clean it every day. Or if we want to dig a well and get water, then we have to dig at one place constantly and deeply and not by shallow digging at several places.

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or workshop or psychic control or philosophy - by one or more or all of these - and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines and dogmas, rituals, books, temples or forms are but secondary details. It is not confined to any form of god or different styles of prayer and it is not the rules and regulations written in religious holy books. But these are means to unfold our spiritual personality and not the goal in itself.

The spirituality means manifestation of the potential divinity within us by work (*karma yoga*) or worship (*bhaktiyoga*) or philosophy (*gyana yoga*) or psychic control (*raja yoga*). The characteristic of this manifestation is the mastery over the inner and external personality and the result of it is total freedom.

This is what Swami Vivekananda, the patriotic and revolutionary monk of India envisaged in the human personality. He inspired and motivated hundreds and thousands of young minds in India before independence and still his thoughts are not reduced in their intensity even by an ounce to attract people from all over India and from rest of the world.

Swami Vivekananda: Leadership and Organization Building

This incident took place in 1895. The place was London. Swami Vivekananda was to give a public lecture and he had come to London with Swami Saradananda. When it was time to stand up and speak, Swami Vivekananda suddenly announced that Swami Saradananda would deliver the speech instead of him. Though taken by surprise, Saradananda did an excellent job that day, and thereafter too. Swami Vivekananda had realized that all Saradananda needed was a little push to bolster his self-confidence. This incident in isolation may not say much, but we need to see it from the perspective of the leadership and management style of Swami Vivekananda.

Swamiji was not only an inspirational leader, but was also a very pragmatic one. He not only believed in 'Servant-based Leadership' but constantly endeavored to empower all those around him. In dealing with his brother-disciples and followers, he evoked what is today popularly known in the management world as the 'Pygmalion Effect'. Management expert J. Sterling Livingston describes it as the effect of enabling subordinates to excel in response to the leader's expectation of them. Swami Vivekananda had a high expectation of his followers and he communicated that to them clearly, thus eliciting a high level of performance. Leaders empower their followers by believing in them, and they rise to greatness as a result. The leaders make themselves larger by enlarging others. The leader constantly aims at moving people around him from dependence to independence to the state of inter-dependence. Swami Vivekananda had chosen 'empower and facilitate' philosophy over 'command and control' long before modern management realized its potential. Trust plays an important part in the process.

If the leader does not trust his followers, he will use control instead of empowerment. Swami Vivekananda while exhorting his disciples to the highest levels of work had the fullest trust in them and their abilities. His urge to motivate people around him to aspire for higher levels of performance can be seen from this letter of his to his direct disciple Swami Shuddhananda in 1897. He writes, "...Lastly, you must remember I expect more from my children than from my brethren (his brother disciples). I want each one of my children to be a hundred times greater than i could ever be. Every one of you must be a giant – must, this is my word. Obedience, readiness, and love for the cause – if you have these three, nothing can hold you back."

This also shows Swamiji's interpersonal skills and the ability to motivate and develop people. One can even say that Swamiji's call, "Arise, Awake and stop not till the goal is reached" was nothing but an attempt to empower people en-masse. J Carla Nortcutt had once said, "The goal of many leaders is to get people to think more highly of the leader. The goal of a great leader is to help people to think more highly of themselves." This is perhaps the best description of Swami Vivekananda, the greatest leader of our times.

Swami Vivekananda as a leader also needs to be measured and assessed from the point of view of these criteria. He not only created an extraordinary institution for growth of spirituality but also made sure that the welfare of the people would be the centerpiece of the organization's work. This is clearly evident in the motto that he gave the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math – '*Athmano Mokshartham, Jagath Hithayacha*' - where the realization of the personal self had to go hand in hand with the betterment of humanity.

Swami Vivekananda as the founder of the organization had to create the larger vision and constantly work towards building not just the organizational processes but also the people to man these organizations. He had to lay down the rules, set value systems and ensure that it was well communicated to his colleagues and team mates. He had to inspire people to not just take on the vows of poverty and chastity but also engage themselves in meaningful social work. He was the trainer, visionary, organizational behavior expert and the charismatic inspirer of men – all rolled in one. One also needs to understand that a leader's work cannot be measured merely from his immediate contributions.

Much of the good work that he has done will be evident years later. The Institution that Swamiji has left behind is proof of the extraordinary leadership that he gave it during the years of its inception and infancy. John Maxwell, a Christian pastor and leadership expert writes, "If you develop yourself, you can experience personal success. If you develop a team, your organization can experience growth. If you develop leaders, your organization can achieve explosive growth." The fact that the Ramakrishna Math & Mission achieved explosive growth long after Swamiji's death is testimony to the fact that Swami Vivekananda helped create great leaders too.

Swamiji was conscious of not making the organization too dependent on him or becoming 'Vivekananda Centric'. He never lost sight of the 'work at the center' which was of far greater importance than either himself or his image. He never assumed any formal office for himself and made sure that from the inception, there were others to take on the mantle and lead the organization. His primary role was to mentor, guide and train these leaders. The Ramakrishna Mission is respected for the work that it does not just in India, but all over the world. They spend close to Rs 2 billion in various welfare activities and communities, governments and donors have immense trust and faith in their transparency and fiscal responsibility. Swami Vivekananda undoubtedly has left behind an enormously positive legacy – not just an organization that any nation can be proud of, but also successive generations of positively charged up young people who share and believe in his vision and message. His loudest and greatest legacy is the millions of inspired people who dream of building a better nation and a better world.

Learning from Adversity: Lesson for Modern Management

Swami Vivekananda often related the experiences of his time and Swami Sharadananda recalls him saying once, "Even before the period of mourning was over; I had to go about in search of a job. Starving and barefooted, I wandered from office to office under the scorching midday sun with an application in hand, one or two intimate friends who sympathized with me in misfortunes accompanying me sometimes. But everywhere the door was slammed on my face. This first contact with the reality of life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world – there was no place in it for the weak, the poor and the destitute." Swamiji's legendary concern for the poor and the downtrodden was born out of these experiences and possibly shaped his thinking and future actions. Studies in modern management have many lessons to learn from him.

Many complexities arising out of diverse institutional mechanism can be solved through his approach to the practical life. Only 'get done the job tactfully' is not going to ameliorate our quality of daily management practices in institutions but we need to think vastly through non-material approach with philanthropic ideas as narrated by Swamiji.

Concluding Remarks

No doubt management education is needed an infusion of professional ability but the given value to society is equally important. Unfortunately, Management education in India has been so distorted and diluted in its execution as to lose nearly all the social intent. In whole spectrum, the role of intuition, value and social recognition gets short shrift in the Management education. Emphasis is only on the knowledge content, on which examination is conducted. All other useful knowledge areas and skills are vastly neglected. Like spiritual knowledge does not find an appropriate place in the curriculum. Therefore students have no opportunity to know about their faith, culture and values. The knowledge they gain is mainly bookish and is not backed by practical experience. About a century ago, Swami Vivekananda had envisioned a vision on education and had categorically pointed out that true education is not the amount of information that is put into one's brain. The human mind is not a bottomless dry well, which has to be filled in with buckets of information by the teacher. He had said that education has more to do with assimilation of ideas and developing 'a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made'. He suggested, was to be done with the help of 'Western science coupled with Vedanta ... and faith in one's own Self'.

What type of management education will provide this enlightenment? According to Swamiji, 'The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education'. He wanted a man-making education 'by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet'. In era of globalization people are coming closer than ever to each other. People of different languages, beliefs, religious faiths, political convictions and ways of life have come to live closely. Everyone has a right to his way of life. Dogmatism and bigotry have no place in globalized world. Therefore management education must instill these qualities in students.

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