

When work's **delight**

It's better to do what we love doing, even if rewards are greater elsewhere

BY HIREN SHAH

IN addition to my previous article on concentration that appeared in the May issue which made it to the *Times Wellness Book*, another article titled *Emotional intelligence and life purpose* I had written for the *Times of India* also made it to the *Times Wellness Book*. This is the elaborate version of that article:

"There was once a salesman, who because of his predisposition to be authoritative hated his job, as he had to be continually subservient to customers, which revolted against his primary nature. After he opted for a career switch and became a policeman, all his complaints vanished because in the new occupation, he was calling the shots.

"Research has revealed that our emotions, more than anything else, make us tired and cause serious health problems. Daniel Goleman, in his book Working with Emotional Intelligence, says 'Great work starts with great feeling.'

"Psychologists use the word 'temperament' to describe the emotional aspect, which can be a reflection of the person's personality. Type A personalities by their very nature strive for achievement and personal recognition, and are aggressive, hasty, impatient, explosive and loud in speech. They should be careful because they are prone to stress and heart disease."

Since the title and thrust of the article is emotional intelligence and life purpose, it is preferable to focus on this part. In my personal opinion, if the person concerned is

struggling hard with himself like the example of the salesman above, any further analysis or expecting emotional intelligence out of that person is useless unless one gets to the root of the problem and solves that first, which in this example was to a drastic change in profession. Emotional intelligence and life's purpose inevitably form a virtuous circle in the sense that if you are engaged in your life purpose for a majority of waking hours, you are in a better position to be emotionally intelligent, which in turn can rebound and result in high quality work or fulfilment of your life purpose.

Daniel Goleman's book is virtually considered a Bible on emotional intelligence. His views on the same are worth reflecting:-

"Except for the financially desperate, people do not work for money alone. What also fuels their passion for work is a larger sense of purpose or passion. Given the opportunity, people gravitate to what gives them meaning, to what engages to their fullest commitment, talent, energy and skill. That can mean changing jobs to get a better fit with what matters to us"

I once came across a site called http://www.careerspice.com/emplo_yee_search.html, where they had actually listed the options in the order of passion, strengths and skills. Though earlier, a list of passions, skills and strengths were listed on the website in that order, they have made the passion module more specific while maintaining the overall order, which only goes to

show the wisdom of Mr Goleman's words. In the previous decades, strengths and skills used to matter more. Another site worth mentioning in this context is www.passion-catalyst.com which again makes passion the main focus.

Though flow is a term introduced by psychologist and social scientist Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi who described it as being totally absorbed in whatever one is doing at the moment, Goleman's comments on it in the context of management are worth noting:-

"Flow blossoms when our skills are fully engaged... by work that stretches us in new and challenging ways. The challenge absorbs us so much that we lose ourselves in our work, becoming so totally concentrated that we may feel out of time. In this state, we seem to handle everything effortlessly, nimbly adapting to shifting demands. Flow itself is a pleasure. Flow is the ultimate motivator. Activities we love draw us in because we get into flow as we pursue them. When we work in flow, the motivation is built in — work is a delight in itself. Though there are rewards in terms of salaries, bonuses and stock options, the most powerful motivators are internal, not external. It feels better to do what we have passion for, even if the rewards are greater elsewhere."

Though the above contents of the book *Working with Emotional Intelligence* were first published in 1998, even now, 10 years later, one keeps bumping into new sites which reveal the wisdom of those

words. One recent site that I came across is www.careershifters.org, a UK-centric site, where more than 15 career coaches have come together to inspire and facilitate lateral career shifts. The very fact that so many people have come together on one platform indicates that it is a serious problem in that country.

There is one more thing that Daniel Goleman has said which deserves a mention:

“By midlife, there are many many corporate executives and lawyers pulling down seven-figure salaries who wish instead that they were doing social work or running a restaurant. People who feel that their skills are not used well on the job or who feel that their work is repetitive and boring run a higher risk of heart disease than those who feel that their best skills are expressed in their work.”

Goleman's above extract brings to mind an American consultant, Craig Nathanson of <http://www.thevocationalcoach.com/> who specialises in helping the kind of people that Goleman has mentioned in his article, who maybe facing a midlife crisis in their early Forties. The irony in all this is that despite it being such a problem in the western world, despite their comprehensive recruitment systems, one wonders how bad the situation in India is. When one talks to HR consultants on lateral career transition or mid-life crisis, one gets an indifference response. It is almost as if the problem does not exist.

The book *The Art of Happiness at Work*, which Howard Cutler has co-written along with the Dalai Lama, mentions several other psychologists who have done research on the subject, which again reflects the magnitude of the problem. As for the work being repetitive and boring, even if one is in the profession of one's liking, some of it is inevitable. Professor Debashis Chatterjee quotes Mother Teresa in his book *Break Free*, “When you do small work with great love, your work will automatically become great.” Chatterjee advises ‘watch as you work’ and says that to be fully alive is to be fully functional in

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mind, body and spirit. The real motivation is to be fully alive and to be fully absorbed in the work. This is a kind of voluntary forced flow and even if the work does not become great, one can at least feel great if one is able to do this successfully. One has to face a reality that a lot of work is repetitive and either one tries to do them with full attention or makes games out of them as some management books suggest. The Dalai Lama also suggests that if one thinks one's work is boring and repetitive, one should see things in a wider perspective and see how one's work benefits a lot of other people. This shall enable one to pursue one's work as a calling if it is not so. If it is, all this can be managed but if one feels completely out of place in the major activity itself, this can be an additional burden. It is like that expression in Hindi- *aate me namak ya namak me aata*. It is the matter of a sense of proportion. The Dalai Lama says that certain kinds of fruits have a bit of sourness in them and the sweetness cannot be separated from the sourness as they are bound to be mixed. Therefore, one has to brace oneself for repetitive tasks.

As for the state of flow, the Dalai Lama indicated that while it may be possible to achieve flow by meditation and engaging in the work of one's liking, one should remember that it is not possible to remain in that state throughout the day. One can improve upon one's emotional intelligence in this context if one tries to apply what all is written above. India seems to be on the threshold of an economic expansion but if countries, which have achieved material prosperity, are

talking about non-materialistic fulfillment to such a degree, one wonders what is in store for us, especially considering the articles that keep appearing from time to time on how executives face stress and burnout. The Dalai Lama pointed out that a career orientation with primary focus on promotions, job titles and designations can be an acute source of misery. In his book *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman while asserting that personal satisfaction is rapidly gaining on financial rewards as a determining factor for choice of work, says, “Our economy is rapidly changing from a money economy to a satisfaction economy” which is actually a paradigm shift in emotional intelligence.

With achievement of 9 per cent growth rate achieved in the past few years and bright prospects envisaged for the future, the Indian economy is becoming a money economy all right but whether it becomes a satisfaction or happiness economy is the moot point. Since prevention is better than cure, we have a lot to learn from the developed western world. When Japan prospered economically, it also faced a lot of social problems. The Japanese term *Karoshi*, implying death from overwork, and *Pokuri Byo*, meaning sudden death, are a reflection of that time. They actually indicate a deeper malaise — a distorted emotional intelligence; Goleman has indicated above how people not fully engaged in work are more prone to heart disease and it is a well-known fact that the impact of negative emotions are manifested in the body in one form or another. With our size and population, we cannot afford to miss the wood for the trees. One wonders what is in store in the long run. Will the collective emotional intelligence of a country known for its spiritual legacy go hand in hand with economic progress?

Will Individuals flow and India glow, or instead of a truly prosperous boom, will it turn out to be some kind of doom?

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