CALIBRATING COMPETENCIES FOR PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

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TOWARDS “THAT”

Making a difference, a huge difference and, a fundamental difference is what matters most to a newly budding profession—the profession of Practising Company Secretaries. The Profession has therefore to ensure that each of its actions, movements, and interactions are like the edicts issued by an emperor. They should carry the message deeply engraved in the sands of fleeting time that percolates through generations and centuries. The message should be a statement full of positivism; of hope; of value; and of cheer and exhilaration that is for the benefit of all.

Excellence will be judged and expected in all its behaviour and attitude and value addition. The need therefore is to think and act to make a fundamental difference and to embed it in the very character and the very core of the existence of the profession. The service rendered will not only be judged for its high quality and speed of delivery and for excellence in value addition; the service should set the served into a dizzy of continued delight and spring him into a string of positive long term actions for his benefit.

Competency is not static; it’s a colossal dynamic. It is not an attribute; it’s the core. It’s not an accumulation; it’s an ever-fresh stream. It is not a fixed point; it’s a flight of the morning bird that delights the hearts of the onlookers, fills them with confidence and hope. The vision is long and high; the path is clear and concrete; the action is full and sure and the targets are ever heightening. The calibration is so subtle and yet so palpable and dynamic that it effuses light of hope and eternal shine for all those who are dependent on the Profession for their survival and prosperity.

The Practising Profession has first to decide that it would like to experience how it can scale much greater heights than what it has done till now. It has to realize that Practising Company Secretaries believe in their True Inner Potential and want to give concrete shape to it. The profession has to decide that it will fulfill the stakeholders’ dreams and needs all the time. It has to desire that the Profession should succeed beyond its wildest imagination and that it would like to learn the art of vertical takeoff in its life.

This Conference should then trigger the profession to action, which is the key and enable the Profession to set visionary goals and proactively help the brethren to accomplish the goals both at the level of the mind and at the action level as well.

What is essential then is the willingness to transform; to streamline the positive thinking ability; to develop an open mind initiative; to develop “do-it-now” attitude; to realize the need to take action; to visualize and create a compelling dream; to convert the vision into workable goals; to identify and overcome barriers to achieving the goals; and to develop a fool proof action plan to convert the goals into result-oriented action.

Calibration is not only improvement or enlargement of the competency. It is the development as well as careful adjustment. It is the change of direction and skilled surfing. It is the measured exposure and calculated polishing of the competency to help it serve the needs and the aspirations of the stakeholders.

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LEADERSHIP SKILLS

In the brave new world, so to say, posing challenges of globalization, it is vital to take, with considerate care, the challenge of leadership. The Profession as a whole, for example, has taken up leadership for good governance in the corporate world, as an overbearing vision. Leadership is an astounding self-challenge. A leader has to show exemplary confidence in keeping with the demands of the times. Sparkle and twinkle must his eyes with overview of the huge vision enthusing himself and the others. Smile must his face brightening up hopes of the great future and inspire his words must with the forte of conviction of destined achievement. His footfalls sure of the success must dance in tune with the changes keeping with the changing times. Nay, the dance in his feet must evoke a new tune for other feet to waltz with. His breath must catch with ease and alertness the floating winds of change. But the emotion of his commitment to the goal must surcharge everyone to walk on top of the change to command cheer. The walk of the leader must inspire the march of others with rhythm and melody. To calibrate this competency one must understand the essence of leadership in unequivocal terms.

Leadership means a domain that consists of four Qs. The traditional one is the Intelligence Quotient. Here you need some basic content knowledge. The second one is Emotional Quotient. This refers to the ability of the leader to lead a team and have the emotional sensitivity required to lead others. Then you add other Qs. One is the FQ or the Financial Quotient. This refers to the fact that it is not good enough to know your content and lead people. You also need to understand the financial dynamics, which leads to performance. There are lot of managers who do not understand the financial consequences of decisions and performance. The fourth Q is RQ - the Relationship Quotient. This refers to the ability of the managers and leaders to build bridges across functions and geographies. Because many companies are global and they work in multiple cultures and regions, to get any corporate initiative implemented you have to pull together people through multiple products lines, cultures and functions and that is because people do not control but will have to pull together. Leadership is a combination of these four Qs.

Success requires building up relationships. The profession needs to look at this seriously. The relationships are built in the minds of others. It would be a disaster if a leader shows up with one attitude one day and treats people with a different attitude the other day. You have to be absolutely consistent in what you do if your actions are to result in success. Strategies for success are based on consistency, integrity and motivation. It is necessary to make motivation a habit. The basic principle for success is praising performers, not criticizing them. Leader should also recognise that failure is an event and not an individual. Honing competencies for success depends upon the need to understand the other person’s perspective. It is necessary to be genuinely interested in other people and to be generous with praise and miserly with criticism. Relationships with people are extremely important for success. Understanding, communication and appreciating someone else’s point of view are difficult but necessary.

A leader needs to think positively in all situations. Success must never be measured by how much money you have. Success is where you are in comparison to where you began. Try to look at your weaknesses and convert them into your strengths. That will be success. The profession is born to win; but, to win, it must plan to win, prepare to win and expect to win. You cannot change from negative mindset to a positive mindset without changing the input from negative to positive. Therefore, if we think positive, life will be positive. With a positive mental attitude, you learn to respond to life’s problems and challenges. People with negative mental attitude simply react. It is much more satisfying and even more intelligent to respond rather than to react. That will give the profession the courage to follow through the vision.

When your basic job is to market your services, you have to focus on “building customer experience equity”. Calibrating professional competence requires you to define and ensure delivery of experiential promise of service. The success of a service depends upon its experiential promise and the consistency with which the profession meets this for its chosen clientele. The brand equity must be sufficiently supported by customer experience equity. There are zillions of permutations and combinations of customer experience and the actual experience must fall within an acceptable band of customer expectations.

EXECUTION

To succeed in professional services market, the most important competency is the ability to execute. Often this is the most understated competency. Execution must be preceded by a plan with adequate buffers, alternatives and supplemented by the need to keep an eye on the ball at all stages of execution. You might have learnt a lot of law and procedure and a huge amount of theory of management and financial science. Yet the case studies,
presentation, analysis and concept papers do not prepare you for the real world opportunity, which knocks at you not more than once. You need to cultivate the habit of being concise. Your thinking needs to be crystallised and carried around to capitalize on the opportunity.

PROFESSIONALS’ “OFFICE”

The word “office” has its root in the Latin word “facit”, which means “function”. While office with infrastructural facilities is an essential requirement it should be clearly borne in mind that the real work place is in the market and with the market i.e. the client. The entire office and its paraphernalia must be geared to the requirements of the market, sensitive in an empathetic manner to the needs of the client organisations.

Therefore, it must be understood that while the office will be the nucleus and the hub of the professional activities, its tentacles will always be extroverted to imbibe flexibility and responsiveness to the external changes. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that while the office and its facilities should be slimmed and trimmed, they should never be bulky and heavy both on finances and time. Otherwise the competitive edge would be eroded.

Market orientation is the keyword today and the professional and the staff should be on the move to judge, appreciate and react to the changing external needs. In the support facilities, priority will always be to those that give adequate latest information about the changes in the work requirements. The office must be equipped with latest journals in the areas of work chosen by the professional and his colleagues.

The second requirement that is equally important is the communication system, be it telephone, fax, e-mail, computer or a simple typewriter.

It may be kept in mind that one of the American authors [Mr. Pascale] studying Japanese economic miracle had identified one single factor responsible for the outstanding achievement by Japan viz. INFORMATIONALISATION.

It may be obvious to surmise that informationalisation is possible only through the Internet, latest books and periodicals and through efficient communication system. By efficiency in communication, one means quickness, timeliness and presentation. Each individual working in the professional’s office must be trained and tuned to this end.

One measure of efficiency from support facilities in the office would be the time within which any single inward communication (emerging from an outside source) is responded to. The response time should be minimum and the response given should satisfy the originator who is understood by means of the empathy developed. It may be pointed out that even a giant size organisation like IBM responds to any communication from the client within 24 hours. A professional is also in service industry and his performance will only be judged by the quickness of response from his office facilities.

It is also essential that the people in the office are trained, informed, educated and updated on a continuous basis. All these will require colossal patience, infinite response for the other and continuous attempt to inform, explain, enthuse and stimulate the people in the office.

Profession is tough and very demanding. But at the same time it is bound to reward the dedicated professional with great satisfaction, joy and fun as well as monetary surplus. But the last is always the last and later than expected. This will be more so in public practice than in industrial service.

The practising professional must first be happy and cheerful with himself. He must believe in hard and disciplined toil carried out with cheer and positive disposition day in and day out. For the first few years at least he should prepare himself for 365 days-a-year and 24 hours-a-day occupation. He should carry a missionary zeal and relentless patience.

PROFESSIONAL WORK

By its very nature it is inspiring, stimulative and challenging. The professional works with knowledge; with people; with organisations and with the self. Professional work has ever increasing possibilities of inter-active stimulation both for the body and the intellect. The professional has to be constantly on his toes and has to develop abilities to think rightly and quickly and solve that variety of problems that may be thrust upon him by client, the laws and the people.
Change and the rapid change is the hallmark of professional environment. This demands constant adaptability and flexibility on the part of the professional. This requires him to develop problem solving abilities without compromising with the ethics of the profession and eternal values of the society. A professional has to be polite and firm without sacrificing his confidence, inspiring ability and well recognised values.

In independent practice, because of the general outlook of pessimism the individual is susceptible to the pressures of the environment around him but the professional has the chance to wield tremendous influence to retrieve the values. This strength must be discovered by the professional for his own long term advantage.

All said and done for success in the profession one should have two inevitable factors which are more of a mental and willpower category, than any physical features like handsomeness or polished manners. These two vital factors are:

(i) **Empathy**: it means ability to put oneself into the shoes of and into the frame of mind of every other person one comes across in the course of his professional work and ability to understand in order to mould.

(ii) **The need to succeed**: Success is not a matter of wishful thinking or a day dream. It is always borne out of the deeply ingrained commitment to succeed. Success should be an inevitable and unavoidable need. There should be in the mind and in the environment around the professional the inviting vacuum to attract success. That alone will help him to succeed whether in convincing a client or in convincing a staunch tax collector or to convince a discerning Tribunal.

Empathy and the need to succeed combined together will surcharge the professional and his colleagues or juniors in the office to sweat both bodily and intellectually to acquire the distinct requirements of a professional life.

Having imbibed these two essential qualities the professional must develop the ability to set realistic goals at three levels i.e. the immediate level; the short term level; and the medium term level.

The long term goal will be like an objective or may be a mission. The goals should be set in the spheres of Personal goals; Knowledge goals; Financial goals; Market goals; Books and equipment goals; and Social goals.

The exercise of goal-setting is a continuous one. It is very essential that progress against each category of goals is achieved simultaneously. In the profession it often happens that the progress is lopsided. In the exuberance of achieving professional excellence, professional may forget or neglect family or social goals. This may create imbalance in the professional’s life. In order to avoid this, time slots should be allocated over week or over a month for different goals set by the professional. Self appraisal of the performance may tend to become convenient or soft. Hence the professional should always keep his mind open towards criticism from different groups like clients, employees and colleagues, the Institute, the family members and the casual visitors. Just as in a factory environment the machinery and the technology will be constantly upgraded, in a professional environment, it is essential to keep on imbibing new skills, manners, attitudes and response mechanisms.

For the purpose of achieving above, the professional must inculcate within himself an extremely supple and flexible attitude. Keeping eyes and ears open may be easy but keeping the mind open is an extremely difficulty task. Patterns of behaviour develop into habits. Habits die hard. Then the mechanism of the professional’s life becomes outdated, dilapidated and obsolete. Watching the habits and initiating process of changing them - whether they be physical or mental or attitudinal should be made second nature of the professional. Just as change and improvement is essential in life, in the world of professional service, the change should be more palpable and perceptible in attitudes and behaviour patterns.

It has now become an ubiquitous practice to judge the person by his manners, and body language. In the professional environment, it is the judgment and perception about the professional developed by the clients or other interested people which assume tremendous importance. Therefore, the professional must continuously watch his ‘self’. Manner of speech, movement of hands, posture of standing or way of sitting in front of the client or any other person are all very important for the professional. He must remember that he is being constantly judged by reference to his outward appearance as a manifestation of his mental framework. Folding hands for example convey a protective and defensive attitude. Sitting with a curved body, with back into the back of the chair indicate nervous temperament. Standing on one leg instead of in a balance manner or two legs indicates that the person is not fully prepared to meet the situation and may run out of it should he get chance. The professional, therefore, must learn etiquettes and mannerisms which point out a vigorous and positive, courageous and optimistic attitude. Such manners alone inspire confidence in the mind of the client or the employees.
But at the same time smartness and cleverness in behaviour should be singularly avoided. Sincerity and truthfulness often pay in the long run than the so-called smart behaviour. In order to change with the changing requirements of the professional world, the professional must develop flexibility of the body and the mind. A certain amount of varied exercise and yoga regularly every day would certainly help.

Above all, it is necessary to develop a cheerful and positive outlook if one has to withstand vociferous demands of professional life.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

Any business entity needs basic facilities called infrastructure. The extent, the variety and the quality of the facilities will vary according to the size of the firm, needs of operation, area of operation and finance available.

In order to identify, choose and install infrastructural facilities one must have a possible list of such facilities:

1. Office space with flexibility to expand in foreseeable future.
2. Adequate furniture with work tables and chairs, shelves/cupboards for books, files, computer and stationery.
3. Telephone connection with fax if necessary.
4. Own vehicle
5. Books and Law Reports, where necessary
6. Typewriter/s
7. Dictaphone
8. Telephone answering machine, if necessary
9. Computer, E-mail with the Internet if necessary
10. Facility to have confidential discussions
11. Black board or acrylic writing wallboard for use in discussions or training
12. Office manual giving information regarding timings, nature of work, nature of clients, organisation structure, rules and norms of conduct, control over expenses, time-reporting, work progress reporting methods, performance evaluation methods etc.

The professional should have a plan to acquire the required items from the above over a period of time. For example, telephone connection may not be available immediately. Therefore, telephone booking must be done well in advance and till one’s own telephone arrives some alternative arrangement must be made.

The professional must also have a plan to suitably upgrade the infrastructural facilities over a period of time. He must be on the lookout for the changes taking place in these and make financial provision for such upgradation over a period of time.

**CUSTOMER ORIENTATION**

This is the demand of the new age of competition and of increasingly intensifying competition. Competencies do need honing to make the attitude and the culture of a practising organisation customer and stakeholder oriented.

This also requires a change in lifestyle and the style of management in the organization. It is necessary to accept new ideology in managing our work and relationships.

The new ideology in management brings forth a postulate of power, based on humanistic and democratic values operating inside a framework of collaboration and cooperation, as against previous management model based on coercion and compulsion. The new breed of managers is keen to have a new authentic and abiding relationship, than what has been hitherto possible in the command-and-control syndrome in the commercial constituency. Employees are learning to manage themselves in small and compact teams—better known as self-management teams within which both responsibility and trust are commensurate with empowerment.

The author, Mr R Devarajan in Hindu Businessline, November 24, 2004, predicts: The day is not distant when
the old style manager will become persona non grata and a kind of dinauser in 21st Century. The era of traditional management is withering like autumn leaves.

Customer centric culture includes:

— understanding what customers seek;
— mapping competition;
— evolving a positioning strategy;
— bringing the value proposition alive;
— keeping track of changing needs.

We must realize that customers alone pay costs and provide profits. No longer is a product differentiator from a competitor, but it is human touch in the interaction with customers that matters.

From an organization’s perspective [in connection with internal customer culture], it is important to create leadership at every level. Mistakes have to be tolerated and differences [of opinion] within an organization must be appreciated. Organizations also have to manage their daily processes, as they [the processes] were actual villains in creating dissatisfied customers.

Feedback is an integral part of services and complaints were like gifts—the option is to effectively manage them in order to survive, sustain and grow.

**TEN [CUSTOMER] DEMANDMENTS**

“Customer is the king”. “Customer always comes first”. “Customer is always right”. “Customer is the reason for our existence”. These are no more mere overused expressions. The times have come where we have to live with them, live by them and live for them.

Let us understand how these Demandments that have shaken the marketing world and the business world today came about.

Kelly Mooney, the author of Ten Demandments, has given the marketing world a new paradigm of customer satisfaction. The Ten Demandments are today’s rules to live and sell by. They are an essential guide to understand customer motivations. Her book brings out the undiluted voices of consumers, candidly expressing their expectations. We need to measure our efforts against the Ten Dmandments of customers, viz, “Earn my trust; Inspire me; Make it easy; Put me in charge; Guide me; 24/7; Get to know me; Exceed my expectations; Reward me; Stay with me”.

In the world of the Internet more information is more power. This leads to demanding consumers with ever-rising expectations. That is the essence of today’s economy. And we cannot run away from it.

**Nirvana**

If practising professionals are incredibly informed, passionate and service oriented, they will be “inspiring” the customers about their services and the Company Secretary brand. This is the path to customer nirvana or “mukti”. The edge of a razor is difficult to walk over; so the wise say the path to salvation is hard. The path to customer nirvana of today’s world is also not easy to walk through.

Are there any contradictions between the demandents? For example, “Put me in charge” and “Guide me”? Not really, says Mooney. “They are two different sides of the same coin. First and foremost consumers want to be in control. They want companies and sales people to realize that: they don’t want to be talked down to, and taken advantage of, they want to shop at their own pace in their own way. At the same time there is a point where consumers would like to make a more informed choice; have a list of the pros and cons in which case the sales services should be available. The trick here is to ask questions about the customers’ needs than to push the product/service.

Mooney herself makes practical use of the demandments. In a recent project for Hewlett-Packard, a window pops up if a customer is spending too much of time on help web page. Then the customer is asked if he would like additional help and if they can chose “yes” and interact in real-time with a sales person.
24/7 is a demandment particularly hard to negotiate. Obviously 24/7 can mean the Institute is open for business everyday all day. It needs to look to the phone and to the web to provide the types of information or access that most customers are looking for. Many times there is failure to update the phone message to include holiday hours.

**Vital Trust**

One of the easiest demandments to ignore is “Earn my trust”. Trust is something that must be earned and can never be bought. It can diminish quickly if we fail to apologize for an error, handle a situation poorly, fail to disclose price early in the process, or communicate using fine print.

Yet the most overlooked demandment is “Inspire me”. We normally believe it is no part of our jobs to inspire customers. Many companies reorganize themselves by including ‘customer advocates’ in senior management with designation like Chief Customer Officer. Yet the actual interaction people have with the products sold is seldom fulfilling. Executives speak about being customer-centric but still fail to deliver on the rhetoric. The three common themes for success are:

— Leadership with a sense of urgency;
— Role-modeling customer-centric behaviour;
— Accountability and rewards.

Most of the customer culture has to shift from the boardroom to the field. The middle management in most companies lacks the experience or the mindset to initiate the change. We fail to regard marketing as a separate silo and integrate it with customer service, operations and database management.

Effective customer oriented strategy has also to be taken to markets. One size does not fit all. Everyone wants the customer experience to be easy but it is difficult to define what is ease. It is necessary to work on the field, interview customers and spend time with them. We will have to devote time for this if the demandments are to be met.

Customer orientation is really not new to Indians. The essence of living in Indian culture and teachings is sacrifice and you-orientation. The offering of berries by Shabari to Lord ShriRaam is the best example of quality control and pursuit of excellence in the Indian tradition.

In the world of competition that is going to intensify more and more in the years to come, we have to shake and move ourselves to deliver satisfaction and delight to our customers. By this alone we will be able to ensure that we do not grab the money of our customers. Not only will we have to stay competent, knowledgeable, prompt, and on our toes; the customer has to feel inspired that we are in fact so.

“To live and survive you must be active and busy; so busy that without any illness or tiredness you will live for hundred and more years [not literally, but your full life]. This way only and not any other [shall you be liberated]. No the action does not bind a man. No the action does not bind a man.”

The above message from, for example, the Ishaawaasya Upanishad is very clear. All negative tendencies of inaction, indolence, frequent leaves, illnesses are born out of failure to follow our own richest treasures and they cause irreparable loss to ourselves only. We exist for work; the work does not exist for us. Globalization is now forcing us to go back to our own glorious teachings. To work harder and harder and forget externalities of attachments, except the attachment to work better and better, more and more, and more competitively. The work (actions), as the Teaching emphatically declares, does not bind the man (in fact, it alone liberates him from bondages in this world and the next). To delight the customer by our actions, professional knowledge and competence, and to win his confidence and then our bread and butter to live long and healthily as the Teaching beholds us is the only way for us.

In fact the Upanisahd warns us:

“Asuryaa naam te lokaah andhen tamasaawrutaah Taan ste pretyabhi gachhhanti ye ke cha aatmahano janaah”

“If we do not act and live like this, we go to lightless, dark and horrifying worlds as, by inactivity and indolence and negative, meaningless living, we kill ourselves in this world itself.”
Therefore, customer oriented activity that makes the professional productive and loving instead of economically killing to the customers is the teaching the ancient scriptures and Indian tradition that the professionals are dictated to follow. The Ten Demandments of customers that Kelly Mooney speaks of also act as the practising professional's God-given Commandments to acquire, retain and delight customers.

If the Profession wants to take a global leadership position as an Institute of education and practice for corporate governance and we know that leadership is learnership, we will be more proactive to learn to stay ahead and guide our clients in the most customer oriented way to stay ahead. Then only we can stay true to our own glorious ancient teachings.

That then and therefore appears to be the path to understand, calibrate and hone the profession's competencies to strive for excellence and achieve unfathomable glories that will forever stay and enrich the Practising Company Secretaries.