

Consistency, Patience & Perseverance: What I look in my Successor

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In this edition of 'CEO Insights' we have Mr. Sandeep Sabharwal, Group Chief Executive Officer of Sohan Lal Commodity. In his conversation with me, he opens us about the values and principles he follows as a leader.

Rahul: What's your style of leadership style?

Sandeep: My leadership style is autocratically democratic. The process is democratic, but at the end of the day you have to take a call. The baggage of right or wrong decisions is always with the leader and this can sometimes lead to going up against the popular will. I do not like to take no for an answer. I like it when people come to me with problems, but I really appreciate those who show up with solutions. The solution may not be a perfect one, but only once we practice it, we'll understand the efficacy and that's what I follow in my organisation.

'Some action is always better than no action act at all'

Rahul: Who are some of the key mentors in your life?

Sandeep: My biggest mentor would be my Dad. Even though he's not part of this organisation, from a mentorship perspective I still look up to him. His experience in dealing with people is what I aspire to have. He is my constant mentor and has influenced me a lot with his interpersonal skills.

I've had a few mentors within the industry as well, but they keep changing. It's situational. Some of them have been on the board and some of them are my colleagues. Their style of leadership and interaction with people has had a huge influence on me. With the changing industry, I believe our mentors also have to change. Even if I don't interact but follow their leadership style of management, I still consider them as my mentor.

Rahul: How do you go about cascading down the vision in your organisation?

Sandeep: The dissemination of Vision depends on the industry. It's easier for the software industry because the genre of people they're employing is skilled. But the industry that we are in has both blue and white-collar people with varying skills. We have people who have not done their primary schooling to people who have MBAs and PhDs. So there cannot be one mantra to cascade down the vision or mission. The vision, mission will be the same for all, but the way of communicating it varies. The set of communication for top management will be different from that of middle management. The gist of it remains the same, just that the method varies. We need to talk to people on the ground in the form they understand.

'Communicate the vision in the format they'll understand and not the way you want the public to read'

Rahul: What are some of the qualities you want your leadership team, particularly your one-downs to develop to thrive in the new normal?

Sandeep: What I desire for one-downs is the ability to take a decision. A lot of people who are leading, voluntarily delegate those decisions to be taken by someone else. These leaders may generate the idea, but he/she will pass them down for execution and ownership. This is where I find the biggest fault in the system. I've noticed that as a leader you only strategize. But you should also be able to take the responsibility of ownership and execute the decisions you make.

Rahul: If you have the opportunity to ask only one question in an interview, and decide basis that whether to hire the candidate or not, what could that question be?

Sandeep: I would ask,

'What do you value more growth versus continuation?'

So are you going to aspire to me for growth or perpetuity? I don't think there's a perfect answer to this. But that's the whole point. I would rather gauge the response of the candidate on what he measures it with. There's no black and white answer to this question.

Rahul: What do you think are the critical competencies of a great manager?

Sandeep: I believe the most critical competency would be the ability to manage time within finite skill sets. Middle management sure does have a lot of tasks, they need to understand their ideology of prioritising and executing. They report to the top management yet at the same time dig into the accounts of productivity of people who are far junior to them. They're the ones who actually get the work done and report the same to somebody who at times doesn't even know how it is done. So, the ability to manage from an educational point of view and how they prioritise and meet deadlines are the few essential skills that are needed.

Rahul: What do you think would be the top qualities that are required for your successor?

Sandeep: *'Consistency, Patience, and Perseverance'*

The organisation will be in a difficult situation if you're not consistent or patient. There will be a lot of diverse voices telling you how to do "your" business without even understanding how the business works and that's where perseverance comes into role. You need to stand your ground to withstand all of these and to drive your organisation.

Rahul: What's your most common piece of advice to the younger generation?

Sandeep: I believe this generation is very distracted. They need to be consistent and should have a follow-up methodology built into their system. All of them are brilliant, but they're either not consistent or focused. They just get distracted and move on. Brilliance alone won't get you where you need to go. You need to focus on one thing and stick to it. My other advice to them would be to be patient. They want quick results and unfortunately, they miss out on good opportunities as tangible results builds over a period of time.

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