

Welcome to
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Don't Shoot The Messenger...



G.D.Sharma

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G.D.SHARMA

GDS is President-HR, BGR Energy Systems Ltd, Chennai. He holds a Post Graduate Degree in Personnel Management & Industrial Relations from the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Mumbai, and has over 30 years experience in the HR field.

A good friend and fellow professional, Mr. Roy George, who was the VP-HR of Pricol Limited, Coimbatore, has been mercilessly and mindlessly killed. While this incident took place on the job and inside the factory premises, it is brought out into the open some thoughts, which are disturbing, for the HR community in particular and management in general. Below this episode lies a deeply rooted malice that Indian management suffers from, despite all the 'progress' and 'development' that we claim.

Lack of Ownership

The first thought that comes to my mind is that in many of the companies today, issues are still viewed on a functional or compartmental basis. There is no 'ownership' of these issues as common organizational or business issues, with the result, issues such as those relating to rationalization of manpower, productivity improvement and the like are relegated to the HR function. This is not new, since in the past, we have always seen that when it comes to announcing rewards, the boss or the higher management prefers to take the credit, while if it is handing out a warning or a suspension order, the HR Manager has to 'carry the cross' and pull-off this 'dirty job'. As a result, like it is said in a classic anecdote, the messenger is shot. In what way, is this justifiable that the HR Head is placed on the altar of sacrifice, when the issue that the management wants to solve is an enterprise-wide or an all pervading business issue?

Is Violence the solution?

It is unfortunate that extreme violence, which is mindless and insane, is resorted to, for putting an end to issues and problems. All around us, we witness innumerable incidents, where innocent people become the butt of revenge and vendetta. Even TV serials and soaps seem to reflect this harsh reality, perhaps with an overdose. Violence in industry, we thought, was a thing of the past. But the incidents, in Noida recently, and now in Coimbatore, seem to be bringing back this unfortunate and gory trend. Industrial Relations professionals were considered to be an extinct species, thanks to prevalence of industrial peace and a 'progressive' outlook of both Management and Unions wanting to hasten progress and development. But with the formation of Union by IT employees in West Bengal, and with such violent incidents recurring in industry, perhaps the Industrial Relations function will reemerge out of sheer necessity to play its legitimate role.

Is human life so inconsequential as to be sacrificed at the altar of industrial conflict which can be resolved through mutual dialogue and negotiation? Why do we have to resort to violence? It is an uncivilized form of expressing dissent. It shows lack of discipline, and application of a sane mind for

resolving conflicts. Conflicts are an essential part of our life. Anything in life - whether in business or social or family situations, do have conflicting stances to be taken arising out of our varying perspectives. That in itself is the beauty, that the same thing can be perceived in very many different ways.

But, then through dialogue and debate, we can appreciate these conflicting points of view, and mutually agree to resolve the issue in the best interests of both sides. It is when we try and attempt to be 'one-up' on the other that leads to exploitation, and a feeling of being cheated. However, once again, this is no justification for violence which causes loss of human life and property.

HR Professionals are 'Missionaries'...

In my view, HR professionals are like missionaries, who take up the cause of the employees, and strive to resolve them in a holistic manner, balancing both organizational / business imperatives with individual / group aspirations & needs. If in doing so, his life itself is at risk, it is indeed a sad commentary. We are 'progressing', but at what cost?

Taking all Stakeholders along...

How are such situations tackled? What should organizations do to take their people along when dealing with major Change Management issues?

We must consistently and continuously communicate with our employees about the Business imperatives, and the changes that we need to make in order to tide over the crisis or to respond to the changing business scenario. The manner in which we respond internally in order to address the issues happening externally will greatly determine the success of the Organization. We have to explain the problems and the ramifications by showing them the 'bigger picture'. We also need to help our employees appreciate and understand the goals of the organization, both short term and long term in order that the actions needed to be taken are viewed in the right perspective. Finally, the openness and transparency with which, issues and

problems are discussed between the management and unions will ensure that all the stakeholders are carried along. Managing a business or addressing an organizational issue requires the close and seamless involvement of all employees and higher management must ensure this as an essential element for success.

Today, more than in the past, there is a great need for sharing and transparency between the management and other stakeholders, in the overall interest of the corporate governance. There is no need to shed human blood, but rather to channelize the human sweat for achieving common goals.

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About the Author : G.D. Sharma

He can be contacted at gdsharma@bgreenergy.com

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