

Happiness and Excellence Arises from Imbalance

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Future competition between nations will not be between competing political ideologies and economic systems, but competing education systems. The school landscape across all countries is similar: disengaged students who are part of an education system that encourages fierce competition through standardized testing. All are struggling to score high grades to get admission in high label colleges. Schools are not preparing them to succeed and be happy in life.

I don't think parents alone can fix the problem. In several cases children are being micro-managed by parents at home, while others need to be rescued from hyperactive parenting. They are either too busy with their lives to parent their children, or have left it to schools. What are schools meant for after all?

There is no Superman we can wait for.

The problem has to be fixed by teachers, or else we will *Race to Nowhere*.

The single greatest reform in education is not curriculum, it is leadership – we need teachers to be transformational leaders to inspire students to be able to lead themselves. To be leaders teachers will have to be happy and seek excellence despite all odds.

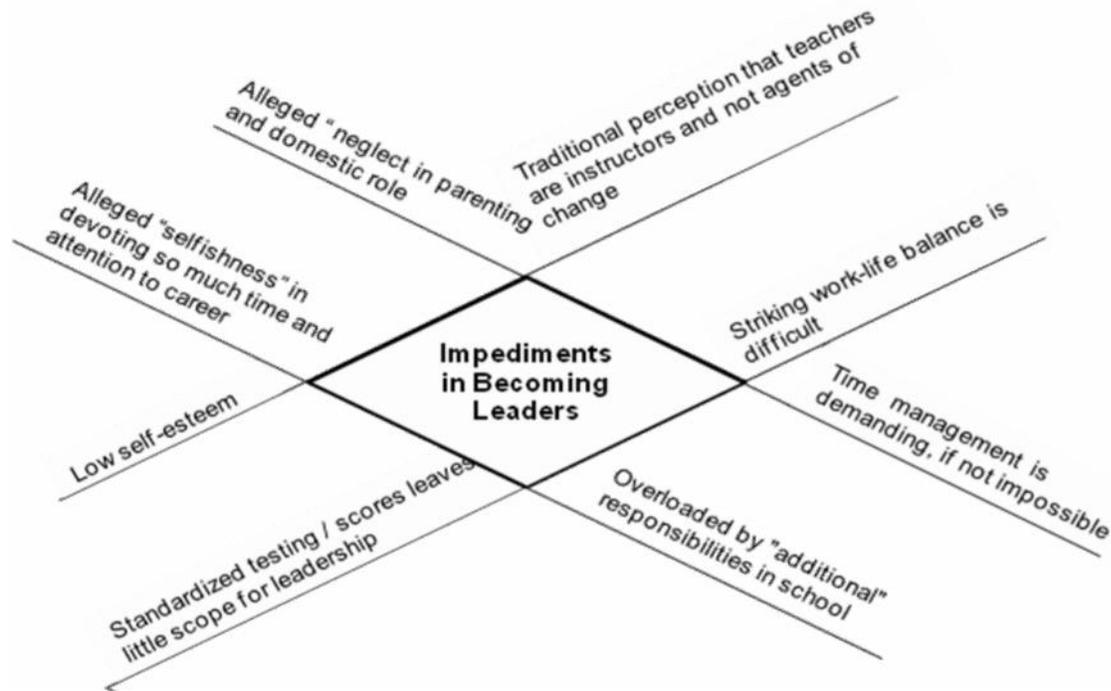
In order to be a leader, the teacher must facilitate learning – her learning and the learning of the students. In her second role, she has to bring about transformation in herself first, then the students, the school, and even the community. To be a leader she must serve first and then lead.

Happiness is a dynamic state – not a static goal/state of mind.

What is preventing anyone from becoming a leader? This is the central question.

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The various reasons advanced by teachers are shown schematically.



The first challenge is to intellectually **accept the change of role** from instructing in a class to transforming oneself, the child, the school, and the community. Teachers have to rid themselves of traditional mindsets of being mere repositories of knowledge, in favour of being transformational leaders.

The second challenge is to have the courage to **pay a price**.

Excellence needs constant practice – remember the 10,000 Hour and 10 Years Rule. Excellence requires sacrifice and dedication. To achieve excellence in any walk of life, and to realize your full potential and break a new path with a powerful vision, you will have to promote yourself to what you are capable of becoming – you must **imbalance yourself**. Walking the middle-path and trying to balance is reserved for mediocrity. Imbalance does not imply losing a foothold. Imbalance means a reevaluation of focus in your life, and varying it from time to time as the needs of other require.

If you desire mere contentment, go for 'balance.' If you want happiness, then go for 'imbalance.' This is the price tag that comes with excellence. Are you prepared to pay it?

Too much balance can be frustrating because it often leads

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to:

- Increased loneliness – alienation of the self, and the inability to give or receive love.
- Loss of individuality and independence of thought, leading to mediocrity
- Despair, as a result of not being able to seek one's passion in life.
- Greater interest in *how* I am, rather than *who* I am
- A feeling when we look back on life that we haven't lived, that we haven't made a difference to other people (except possibly our blood relations).

It may appear heretic and subversive to recommend a strategy of imbalance. But I have spiritual and psychological reasons to put forward. We seek identity and fulfillment of five spiritual and human needs. These are:

- Relatedness or love in its deep sense
- Creativity
- Rootedness
- Sense of identity our individuality and how we are different to others.
- Meaning in life.

We have two choices as appropriately suggested by Erich Fromm in the title of his book, *To Have or To Be*. *To Have* is the pursuit of materialism – the possession of power, property, wealth and pleasure. The idea is clear: "*I am what I have.*" On the other hand, if I have nothing, I am nothing. The second choice, and that is the leaders' choice, is *To Be*. *To know about* and *to be* are two different things. *To know about* is to be inquisitive; *to be* is experiential, transformational. For example, to know about religion and to be religious are again different. Another example is love. In the having mode, to love means to possess, to imprison, and to control the object of love. *I love you* means I possess you on my terms. In the being mode love aims at making the other free, and to be able to develop her full potential. In order *To Be* there has to be imbalance.

To be is experiential, to love, to renew oneself to give, to sacrifice, to forgive, and to share. The mode of being exists only in the here and now. The New Man, the Being Man's Portrait is as under:

Love
Identity coming from giving
Purpose and meaning to life
Self-awareness
Realization of one's full potential

The leader's challenge is, therefore, to develop strategies to cope with imbalance the leader's first step is to convince those who matter to him the most, about the **'why' of leadership journey** he is embarking upon. Like Michael Maccoby's *Gamesman*, the leader explains the rules of the game of his leadership manifesto. If the leader is unconvincing, or he is overcome by a sense of guilt, then he is the wrong candidate. He had better give up at the earliest.

Second, we can only reach our self through **aleness**, and therefore, the leader must seriously practice the virtue of aleness and solitude. These are specific times of the day or week or month, when he breaks contact with routine and devotes quality time to study, practice, reflection and contemplation. This is called as leisure time.

Solitude is required for:

- Resolution of one's inner and outer conflicts
- Self-appraisal of one's performance over self-set goals
- Reflection on crucible experiences

Third, the most practical and effective strategy in finding quality time for self-development is by effective **goal-setting**. Managing goals gives one the capacity to

manage oneself. Indians are culturally not goal-oriented because of society's hierarchical structure and non-linear sense of time.

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Leadership reform in schools is daunting and will be an uphill task. Teachers can't become leaders by reading books and attending workshops, seminars and retreats. They need to be happy. Only happy teachers can be teacher-leaders.

School leaders ought to focus their attention on raising the happiness levels of teachers. Most teachers are driven by extrinsic motivation – habitat, hygiene, and money. This would clearly place them in levels 1 and 2 of Maslow's pyramid of hierarchy. The challenge before principals will be on developing strategies for moving teachers to the next higher levels of love/ belonging (level 3), self-esteem (level 4), and self-actualization (level 5). Strategies to sustain happiness are meaningless unless their progress is monitored and measured. Goal-setting in professional development, formal and informal feedback, implementation of findings of research teams, and student achievement, are effective measurement tools.

There is widespread belief that Maslow's hierarchy of needs dictates that, an individual cannot move to a higher level until the basic level of needs are met. This is not true. Terrorist can go without food, shelter, and security of life, and yet remain happy and optimistic, ready to die. It is possible, therefore, to transcend levels.

Excellence and self-actualization arises from happiness, and the two are not possible unless teachers imbalance themselves.