



Feb, 2000
EuroBusiness

Management 21C

Subir Chowdhury has brought together 26 top management thinkers in a collection of pieces designed to elucidate from where the management trends of the 21st century will come. In his own piece he describes the dream manager's mentality—inspiring, amiable and 'peoplistic'.

By: Subir Chowdhury

Search the dream, act the dream, and make the dream real. That's what we must do. In the summer of 1998, while I was roaming Silicon Valley in the company of 20-something CEO's, an idea struck me —'dream-searching leadership'. Twentieth century leaders have been evolving into 21st century leaders by adopting this way of thinking. The 21st century leader's most valuable asset will be the ability to dream, just as it is for entrepreneurs. These leaders will make it real. But dream is just another word unless the idea is implemented effectively. Successful leaders act on their dreams using good communication, inspiring everyone in the organization to believe in their dream too. As soon as one dream becomes real, these leaders go for the next one. The constant search for new dreams and taking effective action to make them real is at the heart of dream-searching leadership.

Rather than becoming individualistic, become peoplistic. You can have the best communication systems, but if you are individualistic as a leader the organization suffers. Peoplistic communication is the key. Internet and intranet are effective communication systems, and management spends large amounts of money to make such communication systems effective. This is fine, but most of the time managers make the mistake of not identifying the difference between the art of communication and its medium. I have seen CEOs of several large and mid-size US companies introduce the Internet to make sure there is effective communication from the top to the bottom. The Internet does not communicate with people; people communicate with people. The Internet is only a medium, and even a wonderful-Internet system does not by itself guarantee effective communication. Everyone knows the Internet makes communication faster, yet 70% of e-mail receivers do not respond immediately. How many of them are using the Internet as a fully effective communication tool?

A peoplistic communicator provides a friendly atmosphere in which everyone communicates quickly. In large organizations, communication can fail due to layers of bureaucracy and people might receive only 10% of the information intended for them. Effective communication helps break down traditional organizational hierarchy. It also encourages communication of both good and bad news, so that any type of news can travel from one end of the company to the other, and through all levels. The 21st century leader will be a firm believer in such peoplistic

communication, which is fast and all enveloping.

You should touch the heart, touch the mind, touch the emotion. While I was working at a General Motors plant as a consultant, my first assignment was to solve a complex paint problem. From the start, I realized the root cause of any such problem would lie beneath the surface, and the solution would be known to the workers who have daily involvement in that area. Generally, management ignores such workers' recommendations, does not value their judgement, and does not even try to understand them. Management questions their capability, and believes in outsiders rather than insiders. Furthermore, it does not consider how detrimental an outsider's presence may be to an insider. I was one of those outsiders and, alas, I solved the problem. The only thing I did was, rather than focusing on the problem; I focused on the workers who had been involved with it. I touched their hearts, I touched their minds, and I created an emotional bond with them. I assured them they would not be penalized for giving me information. Whatever they told me, I told the management. Based on my recommendation, immediate action was taken to solve the problem.

Management must understand that employees' emotional commitment is extremely valuable to an organization. To get them committed to a new strategy, the challenge that management typically faces is to reduce the time between the conception of an idea and its implementation. One way of increasing that commitment is to get people throughout the organization fully involved in creating the strategy.