



THE LEADERPRENEUR

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INTRODUCTION

For moving from the status of an Entrepreneur to a Leaderpreneur, we must be familiar with the term Kaizen (改善²) which in Chinese and Japanese meant for continuous improvement . KAI = CHANGE, ZEN = GOOD

"You can't shrink your way to greatness" - Arthur Martinez, 1

"Wall street won't pay any more for raising profit margins on a stagnant sales base. The crucial issue has become how far does a company stretch for growth." Pankaj, 2

Hence the voyage from Entrepreneurship to Leaderpreneurship need much home work as well as energetic actions. Complete alertness and commitment only gives necessary aid for this passage.

HISTORY

The global competitive business environment of the 70s to the mid-80s necessitated a quest not only for visibility but for a significant market share through quality products and services. Western Europe and North America were the clear market leaders in almost every dimension of consumer products ranging from electronics to automobiles. Asia came a very distant third - or even fourth.

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

In the automobile industry, it was the age of the Peugeot, Citroen, Renault from France, Fiat from Italy, Mercedes Benz, BMW, and Volkswagen from Germany, Ford, Cadillac, Buick, Jeep, Chevrolet and a few other brands from the United States of America. Two other brands, Moscovitch and Lada from the then Soviet Union were not exactly popular brands in the international auto market. In electronics and other audio-visual equipment, the market was dominated by Grundig, Telefunken, Marshal, Celestion and many such brands primarily from Western Europe.

JAPANESE SCENARIO

From the end of the 2nd World War, Japan was determined to break this seeming lopsidedness by coming out with products that not only competed favorably with others from any part of the world but which would, through continuous re-engineering, guarantee quality with a capacity to literally deliver 'more' for 'less'. This quest birthed the concept of Kaizen. Kaizen comes from a combination of two Japanese words "Kai" which means "to change, amend or reform" and "Zen" which means "that which is good, virtuous or right" .

Kaizen, simply put, means a change for the better. It is used in reference to the philosophy or principles that are directed towards continuous improvement especially in the areas of the processes of manufacturing, engineering and business management.

CORPORATE VIEW

In the corporate environment and workplace, it refers to activities designed to consistently and continually improve all functions in a way that engages all employees from the CEO to the least paid employee. The practice of Kaizen presupposes a concerted approach that demands that all hands must be on deck in ensuring that the improvement process is a sustained and sustainable activity rather than a one-off, transient, 'get-us-off the-hook' event.

WORLD WIDE APPLICATION

Although Kaizen was introduced in a few Japanese businesses after the Second World War, the deluge of products from the West and the opening up of a worldwide market with increasing demands for quality goods and services encouraged an industry-wide application of Kaizen.

TOYOTA EXPERIENCE

This was further boosted by the success of Kaizen in the production processes of Toyota vehicles, a development that saw Toyota taking over a chunk of market share from the hitherto established brands even in their home territories! .



With Kaizen, Toyota vehicles came out more affordable, more durable, more fuel-efficient, and in terms of aesthetics, more visually appealing than its older competitors. Thereafter, the whole world began to take a closer look at the concept of Kaizen.

GLOBAL APPLICATION

Kaizen has since become a global phenomenon that has been employed to give the world durable, quality products. It has been made even more so because it involves everyone in the system. For this reason, it is believed that the practice of Kaizen would result in higher productivity by improving quality.

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It is also expected to deliver a reduction in overhead costs, the benefits of which can be passed to the consumer. Moreover, it is expected to shorten delivery time. In addition, it is expected to enhance inventory control as well as lead to improvements in safety.

Implementation of Kaizen is supposed to be easy and not capital intensive. The training has to do with function rather than formal education. This demands a hands-on approach to training that sidesteps the sometimes laborious processes involved in formal education and enhances competitiveness.

The management of Kaizen makes it possible to have an inspired working environment that results in higher productivity and better quality of products at a price that is highly competitive.

This is delivered through a collaborative effort that involves the spontaneous input of all stakeholders in the process. The direct corollary of this is a self-motivated, proactive workforce that is committed to continuous and consistent improvement. With all the foregoing, how could anything be wrong with Kaizen? For something that has helped Toyota to become a universal brand, how can Kaizen not be the 8th wonder of the world?

THE PEOPLE FACTOR

The people-factor is an integral part of anyone's success story. I once heard popular televangelist Mike Murdock say that if God wants to bless you, He sends people. Conversely, when the devil wants to frustrate you, he sends people! You must be discerning enough to know whose purpose any relationship serves in your life, God's or Satan's. There is no self-made man. Our success story is an aggregation of all the inputs we have received from others over the years viz; family, friends, colleagues, etc.

Here is a quick guide to benchmark your current relationships against so that you can be empowered to know what to do with the relationships you are involved in now. I call it the relationship compass.

Never invest quality time in a relationship where you do all the giving.

It wears you out.

Never invest quality time in a relationship where you do all the taking.

It devalues you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that has no boundaries.

It compromises you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that does not respect your values.

It frustrates you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that is characterized by criticism and cynicism.

It corrodes you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that has no value for time.

It kills the achiever in you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that does not value grace in other people.

It dulls your insight.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that places charisma over character.

It grieves you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that places pleasure above PURPOSE.

It derails you.

Never invest quality time in a relationship that is not characterized by the fear of God.

It will destroy you.



COMPETITION VS INNOVATION

In a competitive market, Kaizen benchmarks competition and tries to add one or two other features which the competing brand does not have - preferably at no extra cost - and then uses those extra features as its Unique Selling Proposition. (USP) This is where the problem is! The focus is always more on competition and the existing brands in the market. The way to go in the emerging market may sound weird but yours truly would like to know a more plausible alternative. Unless of course your goal is not sustainable growth. But if you want to grow sustainably and sustain your leading edge, NEVER THINK COMPETITION. Rather, out-think and out-innovate.

Competition no longer exists. Except in your imagination! What do I mean? Instead of seeing or thinking competition, think ALTERNATIVE! All products that offer similar services in the market are simply a bunch of alternatives available to the customer! The person who is able to create the alternative that solves the customer's problem best is what he settles for! Most of the time, price is not even an issue! Where the customer sees price as an issue is when he has to make a choice among several products that practically offer the same things and with no particular distinction in value presentation. In that case, why buy one at a price far above the others when there is no corresponding enhanced value to justify such investment?

Complemented by management concepts like Total Quality Management (TQM) and Six Sigma with its impeccable standard of 3.4 defects per million parts, (the Six Sigma Concept was popularized in the nineties by Motorola) it seemed that Kaizen would be the cure-all solution to all the problems affecting sustainable business operations. But is it?

The main strength of Kaizen has also proved to be its Achilles' heels. Kaizen's 'forte' is in the ability to improve and deliver quality at lower cost. That in itself seems to be its greatest problem. In time, people began to discover that, as Paul Cook,³ the founder of Raychem, put it, you cannot continue to reduce costs and grow. Why? Most times when companies claim to reduce costs, such measures do not significantly affect top Management whose perks and income are hardly touched. The real fall-guys in the system are those in the lower rungs of the ladder.

While companies focused on improvements in supply, cost, management, production, distribution and pricing processes, they practically ignored opportunities and ideas for growth. It may be very convenient to keep costs low in order to sustain operations. The problem with that is that there is nothing spectacular in cutting jobs. Real growth is driven by the capacity to keep creating jobs! If all you do is keep tinkering with your system in order to maintain or improve status quo, you might soon be on your way to becoming a dinosaur. The pursuit of perfection for perfection's sake may prove on the long run to be an economic disaster.

Incrementalism, the process of making change by degrees, is an essential component of Kaizen. However, this may prove to be antithetical to growth. To experience exponential growth, it is more needful to re-engineer the paradigm instead of trying to improve on it. There is nothing like "New, Improved..." as the manufacturers of a popular detergent in Nigeria would want us to believe. It is either improved or it is new. The two cannot feature in the same product! I laugh my head off when people talk of something as "brand new second hand" Nothing like that exists!

Interestingly, even Toyota that popularized Kaizen has not used it as the major platform of driving the exponential growth of the brand worldwide. True, Kaizen may have brought Toyota into global reckoning but it has long ceased to be the reason why the whole world still roots for Toyota products. Kaizen has ensured that quality is assumed in Toyota brands. However, the driver of the brand's growth is the very antithesis of Kaizen. It is called INNOVATION. Even when the brand name is the same, year in year out, the models have witnessed such startling changes that have continued to appeal more to the customer's aesthetic perceptions than product fortification!

The real problem with Kaizen is that it constantly uses status quo as its raw material of operation. It looks for better ways of solving an existing problem. Innovation on the other hand, starts its thinking at the fringe of status quo and instead of enlarging the box, seeks to break it. How? Through disruptive thinking that acknowledges the boundaries but goes ahead to imagine that they don't exist! Because he sees no boundaries, the disruptive thinker feeds on the ashes of prevailing thought patterns. In today's world, not to innovate is to be suffocated and eventually decimated!

THINK DIFFERENTLY!

A man who made caskets had an emergency order for one of his products. Considering the extra charges involved and the urgency of the situation, he could not wait for the driver of his delivery truck to report for duty. He decided to drive the truck himself and personally make the delivery. Unfortunately, a few hundred meters to the point of delivery, the truck broke down.



Every attempt he made to get someone to stop and help was abortive as no one wanted to put a coffin in his vehicle. Not wanting to delay the delivery, he knew he had to do something fast. Pronto, he managed to convince some people to assist in putting the coffin on his head and walk to his destination. After going about one hundred meters, he came to a police check-point. Seeing someone carrying a coffin, the officers were more than convinced that they were going to get a handsome sum as gratification before they would let him pass.

“Stop there!” yelled one of the officers, “where are you taking this to and where is your receipt for it? You must be one of those people who go to exhume dead bodies and steal coffins from the cemetery down the road.”

Remembering that he had actually seen a cemetery not far from that point, the man put on his thinking cap and did a few calculations. Then he spoke;

“Yes officer. I am actually coming from that cemetery. The thing is that I died last week and I was buried there. But I don’t like that particular cemetery because the other corpses are not too friendly. So I decided to relocate.”

In a matter of seconds, the policemen were nowhere to be found!

The world belongs to those who can think on their feet. The world around you may be confusing but if you want to ride the waves well, you must not be confused. Strategic thinkers rule their environment. To be effective in thinking your way out of a crisis, the following tips would be of great help:

1. Do not panic. In a crisis, what happens IN you is more important than what happens to or around you. For most people, the natural reaction to crisis is to panic. Panic upsets and completely undermines your thinking process. Consequently, knee-jerk reactions become norm. In trying to fight fires, we may end up creating more or amplifying the scope of what already is.
2. Be at peace within yourself. The peace of God is the harbinger of productive thinking. Jesus gives us an assurance in John 14:27: "Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. [Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed; and do not permit yourselves to be fearful and intimidated and cowardly and unsettled.]" (AMPL.),⁵
3. In a crisis, focus on the solution, not the problem. A crisis is the peak of a problem that has hitherto defied solutions proffered. Such a situation cannot provide needed motivation. You must therefore learn to keep your eyes on the expected outcome and start your thinking process from there. Once you have decided what the desired end is, fix your mind on it. Strategic thinkers work from the answer to the problem, not vice-versa.
4. Visualize a worst case scenario and overcome the attendant fear. In most problems that we face in life or as leaders of enterprise, our worst fear whether we admit it or not, is that of death. We dread that more than we dread possible failure. As long as you are hostage to fear of the unexpected outcome, you can never productively and positively engage your thinking faculty.
5. Become a box-breaker. Go beyond the out-of-the-box thinking when you are faced with a serious dilemma. Break the box and give yourself a “tabular rasa” that sets no limits whatsoever on the possibilities of your thought process. If you continue to think like the problem, you cannot solve it!

REFERENCES

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