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What can you do with a grape?



The future depends on leaders getting more from ourselves and our people.

“What can you do with a single grape?” asked Professor Richard Wolfson of Middlebury College, arguably the best physics instructor in America. Back in 1998 I was still a premedical undergraduate student.

I have since tried the question with corporate participants in leadership training rooms.

The usual answers remain the same “*You can eat it*”, “*Make wine*”, “*Dry it into a raisin*”, or “*Plant it*” etc.

Dr Wolfson then gave his answer “*One grape can run the entire New York City for a full day.*”

What did he mean?

Everything runs on energy. For thousands of years, humans have been perfecting ways to ‘extract’ as much of it as possible from resources. This is just like an organisation trying to get as much ‘useful work’ from its assets, including people.

Eating the grape is obviously one way to extract energy. But turning that same grape into electricity for hundreds of skyscrapers? That’s another level of efficiency.

Some key questions to ponder are; How much energy is there in everything (and everyone)? Have we gotten all that we could get?

Or is there more?

In 1905, Albert Einstein published the most well-known equation in the world: $E = mc^2$. Energy and matter convert – and within small mass lies great energy. It challenges mankind to think of energy conversion in a whole new dimension.

For example, energy extracted by an average power station needs 1,000-1,500 train bogies of coal each week. A nuclear plant, however, only needs a starting mass of 1 truckload per year to generate the equivalence.

That is 10 million times more efficient.

$E = mc^2$ tells us that if we could extract ‘everything’ from the grape, it could run the whole city for an entire day. Following that same logic, could we get even more from our people? Is there some ‘hidden’ potential within us?

What can a single person do if we only knew how to unleash our leadership energy?

Here is a recent example of such phenomenon.

- A single Person helped 67 million people to lead a good life with sustainability
- A single Person led 67 million people to focus on good deeds; instead of grabbing whatever and whenever they can
- A single Person turned 67 million people from fighting to embrace each other
- A single Person united 67 million souls into one

What lessons could we learn from His Majesty King Bhumibol of Thailand and his 70 years of leadership?

Unleashing Leadership Energy:

1. Leader as a catalyst. The King’s leadership is very simple ‘lead by example’. My western friends find it difficult to comprehend what monarch in current era of capitalism would journey the land for 70 years to visit the poor? Why touch people on individual basis when you could command attention of the entire nation? In one recount, the King

literally ‘ducked through barbwires’ to find water for an unknown remote village.

Some may think it was position power. “*Oh, He is the king so leading was easy. Just give orders and people would do them. That’s how top-down authoritarian system works anyway*”.

If being a leader were that easy, then wouldn’t the world be full of them?

2. Resonance effect. The King caused waves of good deeds. When a person takes on tasks with fearless purpose perseveres against obstacles and resistance – it affects people. When we see good deeds, they inspire us to do good things. Like how yawning spreads a room, the mirror neurons inside our brain begin to imitate.

King Bhumibol’s quote in 1996:

“...Honest people can make others become honest. Goodwill is infectious. It is true that dishonesty may corrupt honest people. But if honest people are steadfast in their honesty, it will be difficult for dishonest people to turn them. It is therefore imperative that honest people remain strong...”

3. Nuclear reaction. There is greatness within all of us. Dr. Wolfson explained Einstein’s secret of using a single grape to feed the whole city of New York. “Shift your focus from ‘extracting’ to ‘igniting’”, he said. “*Einstein revealed that within small mass there is great energy*”. Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela and His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej the Great of Thailand, all are leaders who ignited the nuclear power inside their people.

With His passing on 13th October, I have a friend who recently stood in line for 15 hours straight from 5:30am to pay respect inside the Royal Palace. She finally got in at 8:30pm.

The first person in line was there at 6pm the day before.

That is the kind of human energy that can run entire cities for days – and organisations for years.

A single person initiated chain reactions that created better futures for almost 70 million people.

That is what the King of Thailand did with his ‘one grape’.

What are you doing with yours?