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NEXT STEP

Why “motivation” might not take you to sustainable success

I will make an honest confession right off the bat: this piece is heavily influenced by Stephen Covey's genre-defining book titled “Seven Habits of Highly Effective People”. However, I have tried to put the learning from this book into the context of our current time and culture. In order to understand the core idea of this article, one needs to get familiarised with two key terms first: character ethic and personality ethic. Character ethic refers to the set of values or principles an individual develops over time and these remain fairly constant over their lifetime.



ILLUSTRATION: EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

The secret of building this character ethic, according to Covey, is practicing certain simple yet effective habits in our daily life. Whereas personality ethic refers to the quick-fix solutions and human relations techniques, which have been preached to be the crux of professional success in our current professional and learning culture. The most visible manifestation of this culture is the plethora of “motivational” speeches we see around us now. A number of habits that Covey teaches us go in quite the opposite direction of what most “motivators” preach to us. Covey states that these techniques might work in the short term by altering certain behaviors, but there is no shortcut to character building if one wants to attain sustainable success.

As the title suggests, Covey proposes developing seven habits in order to build a strong character ethic. These are self-evident and timeless concepts impacting the human race

for thousands of years. The first three of these habits are about private victory, a term coined by Covey for referring to mastery of self. The first of these three habits is being proactive. This means focusing our efforts on situations that are within our domain of control and not being concerned about the things that we cannot impact. This enables us to take control of our own life and accept responsibility for whatever happens to it. After taking control of one's life by being proactive, the next habit is beginning with the end in mind. This resonates quite well with NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) principles too. Every action we take must have an end objective and we need to envision that objective even before starting the activity. This goes completely against the “ready-fire-aim” corporate mantra and tells us to take some time off to ponder the end objective before jumping into action. This can be taken to a much holistic level by

designing our personal mission statement in life. Last habit to achieve private victory is putting first things first. This refers to the idea of prioritisation in life. Prioritising in the right way helps one to work more effectively because it weeds out unnecessary activities, or at least, postpones them until it is absolutely necessary. This allows us to have sufficient time with our friends and family, the people who actually matter in life.

After this, Covey takes the personal habits to a public sphere by introducing three habits of public victory, Covey's euphemism for succeeding in professional world. First of these three is to think win-win while making any decision. Whereas modern corporate culture teaches us to maximise profit at any cost; Covey argues that one party always winning and the other party always losing creates grounds for mistrust, dissatisfaction, and hostility. As a result, the positive outcomes from the decision become unsustain-

able. Hence, any business decision or negotiation should be made with the aim of achieving gain for all parties involved. Next comes the habit of seeking first to understand, then to be understood. This habit is all about developing the skill of active listening. Covey asks us to listen without any intention of replying, manipulating or convincing the speaker of our point of view. This again goes at odds with the “motivation” or “soft skill” culture of today's world where the sole aim of all conversations is to communicate one's own ideas and convince the other person about own point of view. Final habit in public victory is to synergise. Synergy means bringing all the parts of an activity together to create a greater outcome. A successful leader can utilise the unique abilities of each team member to solve different problems and as a result the group's work becomes more effective than the sum of individual performances.

The final habit, called sharpen the saw, is about encouraging all other habits to grow and nurture. In order to cultivate the six habits mentioned above, we need to take care of our physical self, mental self, social self, and spiritual self. Balancing all four of these is critical to achieve the private and public victories. However, most of the human relations techniques prescribed by “motivational” speeches focus on only one or two of these habits. This is why “motivation”, in the current context it is used, might not be conducive to long-term success in life.

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Transforming talent through diversity and curiosity

Recently I visited the Head Office of British American Tobacco, Bangladesh (BATB) to interview the Group Head of External Affairs, Mr. John Clayton. He spoke to me about his career - the kind of work he has been involved in, and his thoughts on talent development at BATB.

Tell me about your career at BAT and your role profile in the group.

I started my career at BAT in 2002. In the beginning, I worked in Japan for two years in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), which was a relatively new concept during that time. Next movement was to BAT's head office in London where I worked in International Public Affairs. One of my most remarkable experiences was during the first global harm reduction program that BAT conceptualised in 2006 to launch a new smokeless tobacco product in Japan, South Africa, Sweden and Canada.

After a few more role changes and great work experiences at different divisions of the organisation, I was appointed as the Global Head of External Affairs in 2015.

I learnt that this is your first time in Bangladesh. How do you perceive Bangladesh as a country and as an economy?

This country is full of energy - a mix of youthfulness, positivity and resilience.

According to Goldman Sachs, Bangladesh is classified among the next eleven emerging markets. The country has sustained a steady GDP growth and the recent graduation from Least Developed Country (LDC) to middle income country is a testament of remarkable progress.

However, the export earning of Bangladesh is skewed within 82%-85% earnings primarily dependent on the RMG sector. To ensure sustainable development and create more skilled human resources, Bangladesh needs to invest in respective areas. Since you have been in the BAT Group for around 16 years now, can you give us some insights on BAT Bangladesh and the talent here?

I have found BATB to be a great company in terms of size and capability, not just by Bangladeshi stan-



dards, but by BAT global standards. The company is one of the first to be enlisted in Dhaka and Chittagong stock exchange and is currently ranked amongst the top 3 companies in terms of market capitalisation. Currently over 50 Bangladeshi managers are holding various leadership roles in various functions and markets like UK, Japan, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Korea etc.

In the past, foreign technicians trained our floor-shop workers. From January 2017, we have sent 15 employees abroad to train technicians in Poland, Singapore and Fiji. The next batch is scheduled to train in Papua New Guinea in October.

We groom talents, which has been at the forefront of developing leaders who continue to serve BAT and other organisations here and overseas.

Those who work at BAT have extreme resilience and a ‘can do’ attitude. Curiosity is an integral element, as this constitutes an essential spirit to be a successful leader because some questions and complex problems still exist in the tobacco industry.

What advice would you give to young people looking to harness their talent well?

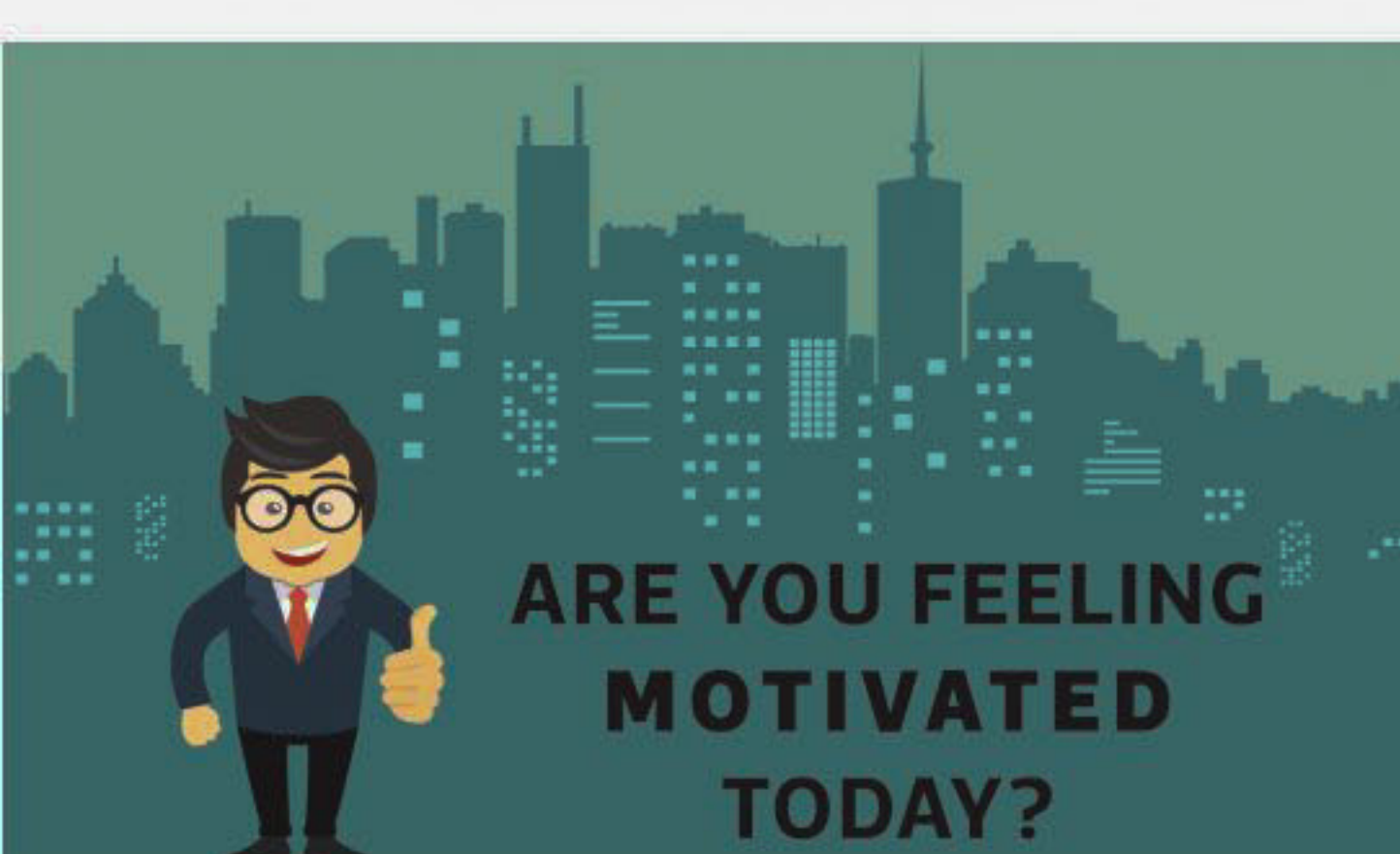
In any company, you must own and drive your own career. Our company and I believe that you get the best when you draw from a diverse spectrum of experiences. So, I advise people to seek diversity. Successful people manage the critical balance between individual delivery and collaboration very well. You must, therefore, personalise your role while maintaining a shared vision with your team. I came across the term “Transforming Tobacco” on the BAT website. Could you elaborate a little on what it is? We have made significant progress from the conventional tobacco product to potentially reduced health risk products through innovation. BAT wants to be at the forefront of this change.

In our global product portfolio, we are currently trialling a heated tobacco product, vapour products or e-cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco in number of countries. We understand that all consumers are unique, with different preferences and choices. Our approach to transforming tobacco is to move out of a single combustible product offering and offer a range of products to choose from.

Could you give our readers a window to who you are beyond work? What are the things you enjoy? Are there any principles you follow in your personal life? I love to travel. In many ways, I have a great job which allows me to experience new countries and cultures. I am an enthusiastic foodie and am very excited to try out some of the street food here in Dhaka. In any country, I love to experience the culture through the food.

Photography is a passion too. I love sports of all kinds. In university, I played baseball. I was a big fan of sumo in Japan. I am yet to feel the same way about cricket but if I stay longer in Bangladesh, that might just change, says John Clayton with a smile.

INTERVIEWED BY TASMIAH HAQUE



ARE YOU FEELING
MOTIVATED
TODAY?

There are about 40 motivational speakers popping up every day in the corporate and professional scene. At some point, we'll have more motivational speakers than the number of people who need motivation. If you're an active user of social media like me, then I'm sure you've come across “life-changing” tips and tricks given by random motivators on the internet. This little checklist will help you determine whether or not you're motivated enough to tackle every challenge life throws at you, from dealing with a pet's death to slipping on a banana peel.



Have you smiled today?

Research has shown that a smile is the best curve one can have. All you have to do is bottle up all your emotions and force yourself to smile 24/7.



Do you have a positive attitude?

If you find it hard to drive away your negative thoughts, you could consider getting a bone marrow transplant to change your blood group to B(+ve). After all, your attitude matches your blood group.



Does your profile picture on Facebook and LinkedIn perfectly capture your go-getter attitude and beautiful smile?

If the answer is no, you should definitely arrange a photoshoot. Hire the best corporate events photographer you know.