

For a literature student, **Terribly Exciting** is an oxymoron, but for today's leaders and leadership aspirants, it is a stark reality bordering on dark humour. Leaders across the spectrum are living in increasingly unknown, unpredictable, unexpected and unprecedented circumstances and much of their focus, intelligence and energy are invested in making sense of the present and attempting to forecast & prepare for immediate next. While the long-term is limited to next minor election for political leaders, for corporate this is end of current quarter, the short term for politicians is today's prime time debate and for corporate, today's stock price. There are many reasons & excuses forthcoming for this confusing, complicated and complex state of affairs but here are my top five:

- More than twenty five **Geopolitical Conflicts** are ongoing in the world, simultaneously and concurrently that have wide spread implications on almost every political or corporate entity operating in any part of the world.
- There is significant **unemployment** and more significant **under employment** across the geographies, from developing to developed economies, from poor to rich nations, from illiterate to scholar societies and from blue collar to white collar workers. To make the matter worse, rate of entry into job market is continuously increasing widening the gap more and more between have nots and have lots.
- More and more nations are getting more and more **regulated** and **restricted**. The pluralistic societies are abandoning pluralism fast, the concepts of co-existence and co-prosperity are becoming more and more alien breeding frustration, haplessness and helplessness at individual as well as collective levels.
- **Polarity** is vanishing from the world that has moved from multi-polar to bipolar to unipolar and is now absolutely nonpolar. While this could and should have been a good development for large part of the population, it unfortunately has led to chaos and lack of order and discipline.
- Haphazard developments in Science & Technology, **rapid urbanization**, perceived economic prosperity has and continue to take heavy toll on natural resources causing unprecedented havoc and **ecological imbalance**.

Given that these trends are unlikely to reverse in foreseeable future, what could be critical do's and don'ts for leaders? Again, plenty of prescriptions from quarters far more competent than I could only aspire to belong to, here are five simple imperatives based on my limited wisdom:

- **Have a purpose**. With conflicting temptations and intensifying pressures, only the leaders and the organization that stick to their core purpose would survive and may actually thrive by grabbing the space vacated by rolling stones. Maintaining purpose does not mean being rigid or not open to exploring broader horizons, actually quite contrary but without compromising on the basics. In the world of cosmetics, only those who / which are inherently strong to the core would be able to navigate. In the words of legendary Warren Buffett, "Only when the tide goes out do you discover who's been swimming naked."
- **Be paranoid** about customer service, ease of doing business and change. In the extremely volatile world where every other new kid on the block is displacing the old giants by introducing revolutionary concepts and disruptive technologies, the biggies would do well by behaving small. With current competitive and competent landscape, every organization, howsoever big, rich or established, had to think, act, behave and lead like Start Up venture, forever.
- In a world where it is easier, and far more profitable, to sell the fear, **offer hope**. Amidst of all gloom, the leaders have to consistently and persistently reassure the stakeholders that all is not all that bad and together we shall overcome. Leaders have to first believe themselves and

then propagate that world has seen worst (World Wars, Great Depressions, Oil Crises, Currency Crises, Financial Melt Down, Terrorism etc.) and has overcome, actually coming out stronger and more competent and competitive.

- **Leverage & Collaborate.** In today's inter-connected, inter-dependent and instant world, the leadership has to capitalize its own internal strengths and seek active collaborations with the very best available in the market. Recent parliament session in India would not have led to complete wash out only if BJP had leveraged its strengths while collaborating with Congress. Similarly, Nestle would have done better if it had capitalized on its global strengths while collaborating with regulators. On the other hand, Iran deal would not have been possible unless US leveraged its relationship with Israel while attempting to collaborate with Iran. Also, Grexit was almost inevitable till EU leveraged its magnanimity while Tsipras collaborated with his home constituency. And these are not isolated examples.
- Continuously and aggressively, nurture a **Culture of Excellence.** In an outcome and results focused environment where almost every parameter could be, would be and should be objectively monitored and measured, this may appear contradictory on the surface but organizations and outfits would do better if the set performance goals rather than balance sheet numbers.
- **Innovate relentlessly.** Innovation, which is sometimes misunderstood with its parent Invention, is THE mantra for success. And here, by no means I am undermining that importance of invention as one is not the substitute of other. While Invention is critical to remain ahead of competition, Innovation is imperative to create or protect and expand the competitive advantage. It also prepares the organization look beyond the immediate and develop solutions whose needs might not have been realized yet but could help either alleviate an existing problem or prevent it from getting worse or fulfil an aspirational need and help it develop futuristic attitude, all of which giving it distinct competitive advantage and preventing Future Shock as and when disruption occur.

I am dead sure that nothing in this article has been written for the first time and worthy readers are very well aware of not only the points mentioned here but other, that are equally if not more, important ones. This is my humble (another critical virtue of leadership but that is a topic in itself and deserves another write up another day) attempt to list what I believe is a realistic and achievable must.

Let me have your take!