

Leadership Grooming through Outbound Training

Introduction

This paper attempts to address the importance of Outbound Training in the grooming of Leadership skills. It is hoped that the article will add value to the abundant material already available in the field of Leadership Grooming

Leadership Traits and Skills

Leadership skills are a set of skills handed over from generation to generation through chromosomes and received by every child to be further honed and shaped through one's experiences in this journey of life and later passed on to next generation. Some of the traits and skills expected of a leader are Courage, Confidence, Team Spirit, Perseverance, Enthusiasm, Integrity, Honesty, Tolerance, Patience, Humility, Communication skills, Problem Solving, Knowledge, Wisdom, Common Sense, etc. But for knowledge, which can be gathered primarily through education, all other traits and skills have to be discovered from within and improved through worldly experiences.

Leadership Grooming – Rural vs Urban upbringing

The rural lifestyle provides ideal environment to trigger traits and skills of a leader. The tough and natural environment, inter-dependence, joint family system, a strict hierarchy amongst village seniors and a host of other factors contribute to enormous opportunities for triggering leadership skills. However, modern urban upbringing in India has led to enormous pressures to joint family system and social inter-dependence. Middle and upper middle class families have comfortable lifestyles and the young child is, in general, protected and provided for more than it is necessary. Comfortable upbringing may not provide the right triggers for kindling the natural traits and skills and such persons are known to have difficulty when moved away from their comfort zones. The symptoms of poor leadership grooming include higher instances of stress, frustration, intolerance, inability to stand up and face issues. Protracted exposure to stress leads to a host of health issues like higher cholesterol, elevated BP, Diabetes and personal issues like difficult marriages, depression, obesity, alcoholism and smoking. It is there for everyone to see that most of these issues are increasing in metros and cities.

How to Trigger Leadership Skills?

Leadership traits and skills are triggered through experiences during the course of one's life time. Let us take the example of discovering our courage, an important trait of a Leader. Courage is defined as the ability to do extraordinary things. When a child begins to learn cycling for the first time, the primary emotion fear will be experienced. The child develops courage over a period of time thanks to the exciting and emotional experience of learning to cycle as well as the encouragement from the trainer. The child can continue to improve upon this experience and hence re-program her DNA for the better.

Likewise, most of the traits and skills can be discovered through exciting and emotional experiences. In general, we can say that through exciting and tough experiences, human beings can improve their strength and character. The strength and character mentioned here directly refer to one's Leadership skills.

Leadership requirements – Corporate Perspective

Modern corporate environment is very dynamic, aggressive, result oriented, demands long working hours and many a time provides for “do or die” situations. Stress is an immediate consequence of high pressure work environment and threatens the physical and mental health of every employee. Senior employees face higher stress and this is well documented in the past. Recent deaths of some young and high profile CEOs can be directly linked to spiraling consequences of stress at work place. It is my belief that stress at work place can be countered with adequate training and counseling. The primary traits of a leader – Courage, Confidence and Team Spirit are, thus, called for in good measure to handle difficult situations.

Experiences from the Armed forces

The armed forces world over recruit ordinary human beings and subject them to a variety of training from basic to extreme, based on the objective. For any soldier, the principle objectives are fearlessness in any given environment, total absence of fear of death and enormous team spirit. Such extreme objectives cannot be triggered in normal settings and

hence the armed forces use extreme environments – some artificial and some natural, to bring out the qualities hidden inside a human being. In order to bring about these qualities, the armed forces conduct training programs, the duration of which varies from weeks to years while the training environment varies from class rooms to jungles.

The results are there for everyone to see – a soldier is trusted for his leadership qualities and people depend on him for immediate assistance, sharing, uprightness, honesty, patriotism and confidence. In general, we can say that, for leadership training, higher intensity and longer duration in a tough environment will result in better grooming of leadership qualities.

Outbound Training for Leadership Grooming

We understand that tough experiences trigger natural strength and character in human beings. For release of positive strength and character, the tough experience must also be exciting. Such an experience can be provided through Outbound Training. Outbound Training or Outbound Training or in short “OBT” is about taking people to remote and unfamiliar environment far away from their comfort zones and subjecting them to tough and exciting experiences. The activities are aimed at confidence building, interdependence, sharing and discovering one’s natural strengths.

Some negative traits such as ego and arrogance increase with power, status and wealth. These traits inhibit team spirit and tolerance for fellow human beings. Insecurity and fear can kill ego and arrogance and forces one to seek help or even rely on others to see through the difficult situation. An OBT program, although very exciting, is designed to cause insecurity and fear which will directly trigger courage, confidence and trust (which leads to team spirit) amongst its participants.

Based on the objectives laid out and environment available, an OBT program can have activities that vary from floor level to adventure level. Floor level programs are good enough for triggering analytical and problem solving skills as a group, negotiation and persuasion skills, interpersonal skills and the like, while adventure level programs trigger

courage, confidence, trust (and hence team spirit), humility, perseverance, patience, tolerance and the like. Adventure level programs can be further sub-divided into land, water and air based. These programs require domain expertise as risk is an inherent part of any adventure program. With right equipment and skilled supervision adventure programs can deliver the objectives as most primary emotions are triggered during an adventure activity.

Conclusion

The concept of Outward Bound training was first proposed in 1941 by Kurt Hahn, a German educator. Since then, OBT has come a long way and has become an important tool in grooming leadership for youth. Of late, more and more companies are including OBT into their training programs as these programs, in addition to improving team spirit, also help in providing an opportunity to improve humility and social values.

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