

**ADDRESS BY VIVEK PATWARDHAN
AT MAHARASHTRA INSTITUTE OF LABOUR STUDIES, PAREL, MUMBAI, ON OCT 8, 2005**

I would like to share some of my thoughts with you. The first thought is about the institutes and the competitive advantage. It is unfortunate that when people refer to management institutes they talk of premier institutes and second rung institutes. And even third rung institutes. This only gives a complex to the non-IIM students. Many students think that it is a comment on their innate talent and many others think that if institutes do not give them good inputs they will be at a gross disadvantage.

I think that both are completely untrue. My young friends, have no complex at all. Do not underestimate the ability of people to learn, to improve their competence. If you do not make it to IIMs, I do not think that it is a comment on you.

What those so called premier institutes do is to give their students a head-start, a good initial advantage.

We need to appreciate that this advantage does not last throughout their career. The career span is of 30-35 years. Once he has spent five six years in the industry, nobody will ask a high performer which institute he graduated from.

While on the subject of initial advantage, I must tell you the story of Napoleon's soldier. A soldier in Napoleon's army complained to him that his sword was one-half a foot shorter than those of other soldiers. 'How can I fight?' he asked. 'Take a step half a foot ahead of others' Napoleon answered.

There lies the solution. Initial advantage can be matched by imaginative work, with dedication and with commitment. We all know Mohd. Kaif did not play for Mumbai Ranaji Team. He perhaps played what they call the second rung team, but look at what is happening today - people are questioning why he is not in the team!

If we want to succeed, we will have to be like Napoleon's soldier, and like Mohd. Kaif.

My young friends, you are exceptionally well placed; unlike my generation. Internet has made available the knowledge at no cost. Today it is possible for a student to quote the latest research on the subject. You have access to Harvard articles, McKinsey's, Hewitt's, name the consultant, name the university and you can access their knowledge base.

And that is why you will appreciate the observation I made: the competitive advantage of the so called premier institutes is lost because now anybody can access the latest thoughts on a subject. All that we need is perseverance. There is ample evidence that it works. My classmate Manohar Gajare is Joint Labour Commissioner today, and Pradeep Pandey who is here on dais with me as the Chief Guest today has been the chief of HR at Hoechst and at Lupin. These are only two examples to substantiate the point I am making.

The second point I wish to talk about is about competition. We need to ask one very important question to ourselves: with whom are we competing? Are we competing with fellow classmates? Are we competing with fellow HR professionals? Or with our peers at work?

I beg to submit, my young friends, that if you answer any of these questions in the affirmative you are on the wrong track!

We compete with ourselves and we should compete only with ourselves! When we talk of competing we talk of 'winning'. We associate images with each word, we think in polarities. If you are not winning then you must be 'losing'.

Think of any tournament. Whether it has 64 players or 128 is immaterial, tell me how many winners it has? Only one! So obviously you have 63 or 127 losers. Nobody would ever like to enter a tournament like that where you have such a dismal chance of being a winner. Quite obviously the players do not think in conventional way of winning, or for that matter, losing. Their framework is different. They are there to give their best. In doing so they will make every effort to win the tournament, but they are focused on their game and not so much on their winning in a conventional way. Otherwise they would not participate in tournaments.

I must tell you a story here. A consultant was asked to organise a tennis tournament for one of the highly successful sales teams of a company. He reversed, or better word is inversed the rules of the game. Under his tournament, the loser proceeded to the next round and winner had to drop out of the tournament. The salesmen grew uncomfortable; they had spent lifetime thinking in terms of winning and losing; and now they had to answer a basic question to themselves: why were they playing the game at all? The answer was in concluding that they played for the pleasure of it. You enjoy the game when you test yourself, test the limits of your abilities. Not when you think in terms of winning and losing.

So give your best, test your potential, discover it, or rather uncover it. If you manage to play to your full potential you win - win in a different sense.

My young friends, I would request you to consider about these two thoughts.

I am a proud alumnus of this institute. I passed out from here in 1973, got a job and the Indian economy simply collapsed. Not because of me, but in spite of me! The oil cartel was formed which played havoc with oil prices and the world economy.

You are entering in the industry when India has moved from diffidence to confidence; and from fear to hope. You have a very bright future and I wish you good luck. You have indeed very high chances of achieving success, my best wishes to you.

*Vivek S Patwardhan
MILS, Parel, Mumbai
Oct 8, 2005*