

Why HR is better than IR!

There are interesting reactions of people to violence.

Violence in Industrial relations is on the rise. Manesar violence was followed by another attack on a manager of a retail stores in Delhi, and we also have a report about an assault on Everest managers at Nasik.

HR fraternity denounced it; they are coming up with a code of conduct. Employers' organisations are reportedly supporting it. Trade union leaders blamed it on the management policies. Government officials blamed it on trade unions. The only community remaining was the academicians and they are thinking of including Industrial relations in their syllabus - the news report says that IIMs are considering it. If so, lesser brothers will follow the suit.

The fact is that IR got de-emphasised completely in the past few years, or about 15 years. A very reputed HR manager advised the Director of one Institute in a seminar of students, that he should change the curriculum and drop IR subjects since they were irrelevant. I listened to it with a shock. Fortunately the Director ignored the ill-thought advice. In another instance, I was interviewing a candidate at a premium management institute when he told me that I should not discuss any labour law question with him as he had not read the subject. And I also know that an institute of repute in Pune was considering offering labour laws as an optional subject for MBA-HR course.

But the 'clincher' came when I interviewed a young manager who was leaving the organisation to join a consulting firm. At the end of the interview he said, "I will be dealing with educated people now, not workers!" He considered it to be a matter of pride and importance to deal with the educated [whether they were 'learned' is a different matter] and clearly implied that it is a work of a 'higher order' than dealing with workers. Management institutes can provide knowledge to young managers but right attitudes? That's a tall order.

The problem is that this attitude of certain work being better than some other exists in the minds of management graduates and this is generally true, though there could be exceptions. They think that to do Finance is better than doing Accounts, Marketing is better than Sales, Materials is better than Manufacturing, and yes, of course, HR is better than ER!

Take a look at the people you will be dealing with: in Marketing you will deal with ad agencies [and meet some models!], or people working on branding, but in Sales you will meet the shop keepers who don't speak the management jargons, perhaps don't speak English fluently. In manufacturing and IR you meet workers who belong to lower strata of the society; they are probably not well educated lot.

Essentially it also discloses a very negative attitude towards a certain section of the society. And that these managers might make it to the top where they are supposed to define and practise 'values' is not exactly an encouraging thought.

IIMs can teach students the subject of IR, but will they succeed in imbibing good values of respect for people as well as dignity of work at all levels? A tough call, but they must take it. No choice.

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