

“Find a Way!” - Jyotirmoy Bose, CEO, White Spaces Consulting

One day, a junior colleague of mine walked into my office and said: “Something’s bothered me for a while now so I want to check with you. My job involves operational duties as part of my daily routine, interacting with others to coordinate or follow up, besides attending to e-mail, calls and visitors. Most days are hectic without much time to spare, yet as I leave office every evening, I feel I haven’t really accomplished anything. On a day-to-day basis, I get some feedback on tasks and activities from my boss but rarely about my contribution and career. *How do I know if I am adding value to the organization or even to myself?*”

I was instantly reminded of a Peanuts comic strip, where Charlie Brown reflects: “*Another complete year gone by and what have I accomplished this year that I haven’t accomplished every other year?*” Charlie answers “*Nothing!*” going on to add “*How consistent can you get, Charlie Brown?!*”

Many employees complain that they work very hard and are as competent (if not more) as the next person, yet get ignored during reward and promotion decisions. As a boss of mine told me in the early days of my career: “There’s nothing wrong with your *matter*, but the same cannot be said of your *manner*.”

It is your “*matter*”, or domain expertise, which usually gets you a job, but it is your “*manner*” which determines where you land. We come across “*gyan*” accountants or lawyers and bureaucrats who will be able to quote the chapter, section and verse of every rule or statute that stands in the way of our proposal, application or case. We meet cynics or pessimists who do a brilliant job of compiling a laundry list of problems, or loopholes, which would make the marketing or sales plan fail. We have people, with Biblical faith in the BOM (Branch Operations Manual), who go “*That’s how it’s been always done here*”. Such people will often hoard information, or knowledge acquired over the years, refusing to share or teach others. These are “*gyan paapis!*”

Sure, procedures and processes are important, nay key, for sustainable organizational growth and past practices have their value, but there is simultaneously a critical need to be responsive and flexible to adapt to dynamic market conditions. Identifying issues and problems, or “poking holes” in a plan or an organizational initiative is required, in fact expected. That’s why we get paid.

What gets rewarded or recognized is your contribution in finding a way out of these problems. It’s a mindset. Valued contributors steadfastly stay the course from “**problem identification**” (*what you get paid to do*) to “**solution orientation**” (*what gets you rewarded and recognized*). I draw a distinction between “*problem identification*” and, what management gurus term as, “*problem definition*”.

Those with a problem identification mindset see problems as the justification why something can’t be done, almost as an end in itself. In sharp contrast, “problem definition” is a starting point for those with solution oriented mindset, to gain better understanding of the context and constraints, resulting in a crisp and sharp definition of the problem to be addressed.

People who solve problems, or demonstrate persistence or tenacity in finding a way forward, will be valued as contributors by most bosses in an organization. Employees may feel that their value to an organization lies in consistently raising objections or pointing flaws in business plans. They may believe that information they have hoarded over years and their subject matter expertise makes them indispensable. In a progressively flat world, barriers to knowledge acquisition are falling and information is widely available, at little or no cost. A “*gyan paap*” runs a clear risk that the boss will call him in one Friday evening to say, “*We don’t know how we will manage without you, but from Monday, we are going to try!*”