

How Do Successful People Become More Successful? - Jyotirmoy Bose, CEO, White Spaces Consulting

Within 18 months of starting his career with a respected MNC in the Consumer Goods industry as a Sales Representative, Raghu became an Area Sales Manager. Handing over the promotion letter, the Divisional Vice-President said, *"Raghu, you have earned this based upon your outstanding sales track record, commitment and drive. You are the youngest ASM in the country! Congratulations!! I am confident you have a great career ahead of you, with us!"*

Six months into his new role, Raghu was summoned by the Divisional Vice President, who said: *"Sales for your territories have been steadily dropping. Three reps under your charge have quit, citing you as the prime reason. I observe your energy levels flagging. The reps also say you lose your temper quite often these days. Is there something I can do to help, Raghu?"*

Raghu broke down and requested *"I don't enjoy this work at all and am deeply stressed. Please, please let me go back to being a Sales Rep."*

What causes someone like Raghu, so successful at one level, to falter at the next level? An obvious, yet often overlooked reason is that promotion decisions are invariably based on past *"track record halo"*, disregarding requirements at the next level. This is akin to driving a car looking at the rear view mirror. Rear view mirrors have an important though limited role, in successfully navigating the road ahead!

Is there something one can do to improve chances of success at the next level or, are we doomed to learn the Peter Principle about *"level of incompetence"* the hard way? Is there something that successful people do that makes them even more successful?

An expected answer is *"added relevant skills"*, either by oneself or with organisational input. This is, by no means, adequate.

A promotion, where a change in role is involved, places you at a critical career crossroad to the next level. If you continue walking in the same direction, armed with additional relevant skills, you are likely to falter. Key to success here is to change direction at this crossroad with a change in work values.

Let me elaborate: change in work values is not about changing core values like integrity or dignity. Simply put, work values determine what you value at work.

Raghu had spent so much time mastering the art of selling and experienced success as a crack salesman. He valued selling more than managing a team of sales reps, with its attendant operational tasks. Whenever a sales rep experienced a difficult sale, Raghu would jump in to close the sale. Soon the sales reps started resenting this *"interference"* and Raghu was not able to devote time to the non-sales aspects of his position.

Change in work values is necessary as we take higher level responsibilities across levels. A marketing professional, who becomes a head of the business, may value marketing as the most important part of the job. Having achieved success in marketing, it becomes very difficult to value something else as more important. So he does not apply himself with skill and energy to the non-marketing parts of the new role like business strategy and appreciating the contribution of other functions. Inevitably, as Business Head, he continues to think and act like a Marketing Head.

Walter Mahler, who pioneered this Critical Career Crossroads approach, is insistent that shift in work values is key to success at the next level. Once this new mindset is internalised, the manager's perspective on what is important changes. Consequently, the manager makes the time for these activities.



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Instead of trying to reinforce his “super” salesman image, Raghu would focus on new ASM activities of sales planning, delegation, prioritisation and team development issues. Now, adding relevant skills makes for better impact.

Management skills and capabilities are developed by activity at the workplace. If you internalize enough of those activities, you actually get good at them, and they give you a sustainable advantage for a certain period of time.

The real challenge then is best summarised in Leadership Guru, Ram Charan’s words: *“To start doing something new, you have to stop doing something old.”*