

Management Humour

CALL ME TIPPOO

T.S.Nagarajan*

Obsession for titles and other status symbols

Generally I have noticed that Indian executives are very conscious about designations, titles and other status-symbols. Not that executives in other parts of the world are any better. One of the most delightful pieces written on executive ambition was by Stephen Mead, an advertising copy writer who wrote the best seller “How to succeed in business without really trying.” It was a runaway success and was later produced as a hit play.

Designations were always important and separate cabins, even if only six by six, a must. Life would be unthinkable without peons, calling bells and buzzers. We tried to do away with this executive snobbery. Several attempts were made and there was practically a revolt. We also tried the open office plan. It was in vogue in London at that time. We had glass partitions for the cabins to give more light.

Very soon curtains of various hues sprang up. Somehow an executive does not feel secure without cloistering himself up in a cabin, or having a retinue to do his chores. Despite all our claims that we have entered the industrial society, we continue to be waited upon.

Then there is the question of designation. Overnight sales managers called themselves marketing managers. Accountants called themselves finance managers and buyers became purchase executives.

At a farewell function at the Sewri complex of Lever Bros. soap and vanaspati units many years ago, a farewell was being arranged for the great man who had introduced Dalda vanaspati into India. “Times have changed” he said with feeling and nostalgia. “I feel out of touch with things. In my days we sold soap, now you claim to market it. We bought raw materials, you purchase it and we made the soap, now you manufacture it.”

This story is told about a proprietor who had a lean year. Trading results were poor and the going wasn't good. He called his managers in and said:

“Well chaps. It has not been a good year

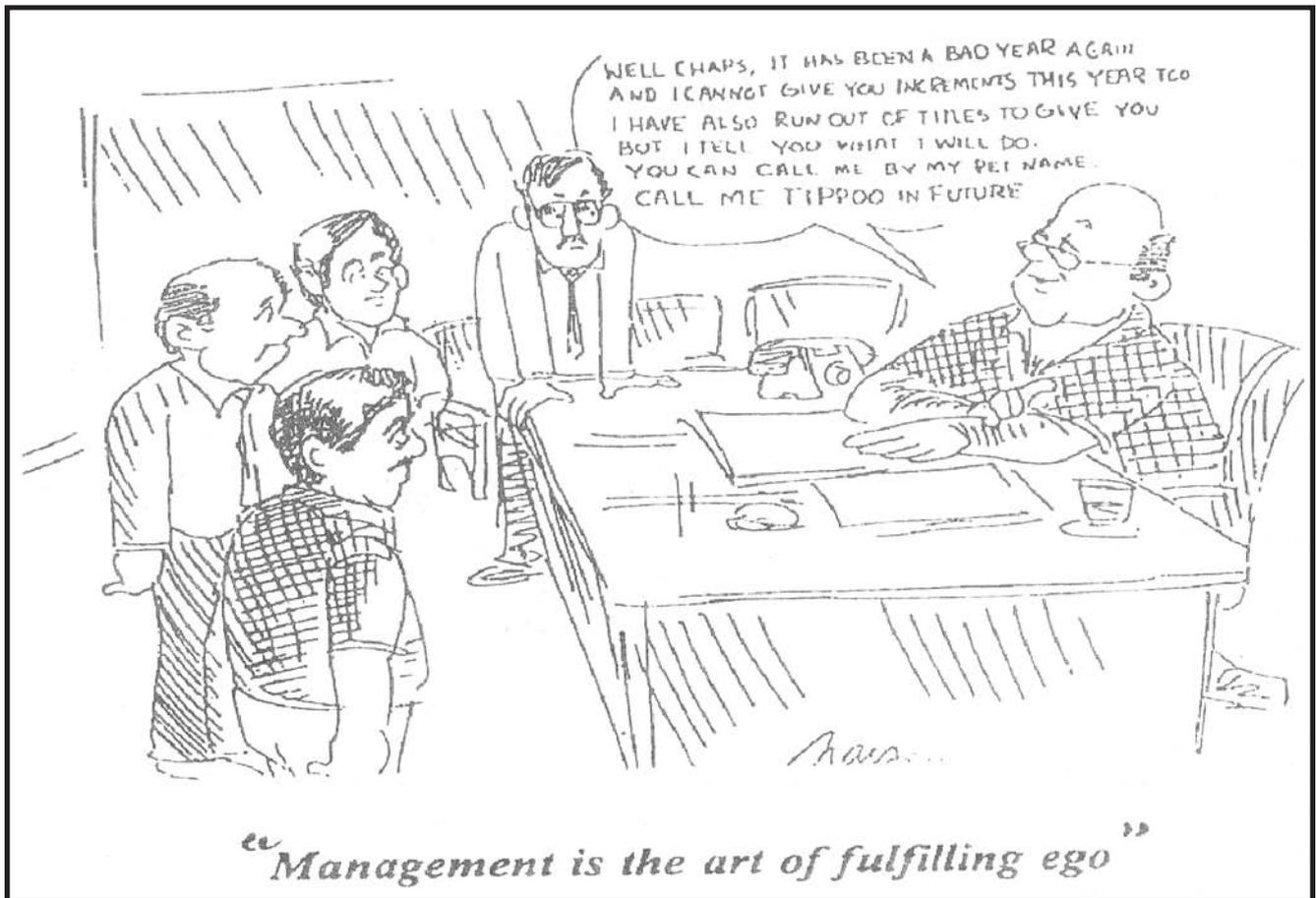
and we have made no profits. I cannot afford to give you any increments. But I will tell you what I will do. I will give you all special titles. You will be Corporate Planning Manager and you, General Manager, Human Resource and so on.”

* Reproduced from the author's book 'Meet Peter Drucker'. The author is former Vice - President and Managing Director of Brook Bond India later merged with Hindustan Lever e- mail: teeson1@gmail.com

Everyone felt happy and reassured and the proprietor was pleased with the way things had worked. Next year again results were poor and there were no profits in the kitty.

He called them all again. They trooped in rather sheepishly not knowing what he was

up to. "Well chaps" he said, "It has been a bad year again and I cannot give you any increments this year either. I have also run out of titles to give you. But I can tell you what I will do. You can call me by my pet name. Call me Tippoo in future."



What problem, No problem

Rajendra Menon*

I could hear the ticket collector's loud voice and his laughter.. He seems to be finding great joy in his work, for many, a very monotonous job. What is he doing, I have a problem here with my seat and at this rate he will not reach

me tonight. I walked up to him and said 'I have a problem...', before I could complete he guffawed, ha ha... don't call it a problem saar, only aappartunities..' I said, you can call it what you want, there is a lady sleeping in

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the berth allotted to me, number 60 and I am travelling to Bangalore. Everybody around laughed and my anxiety simply melted away. He came to my seat, bend down and exchanged some whispers with the lady, turned towards me and said 'Saar, you are young and strong, you can easily occupy the upper berth, the lady is not well'. I was holding a senior citizen concession ticket and with joint pains and a boosted spirit, I went up with silent oohs, aahs and ouches. This jolly man converted a problematic (my perspective) situation to an opportunity to serve a lady who needed help. Give it a thought, what is a so called problem? As long as life is there, there is a solution to every situation, quite often many. Once there is a solution, it is no more a problem. The end situation in life is death. Once we die, there goes the problem, what ever.

A manager walked into my room. "Sir, I have problem with my mother in law'. By the way, the manager is a female.
 "Please sit and what is the problem?"
 "She gets very angry when I return home, late"
 "Why do you return home late"
 "I stay back in the office, an extra hour or two, to meet our schedule"
 "Why cant you complete the job in time, after all you are the one who is scheduling it"
 "Still, sir, sometimes, it happens"
 "Have you told your mother in law the reason for the late coming"
 "Yes, she says she does not care, be home early"
 "Are you ok to stop working"

"No, Sir"

"Why"

"I need the money, after all I have my husband's mother, father and college going sister at home and single member salary will not suffice"

"Tell your mother in law, you will have to give up the job"

"She says you can leave the job, no coming late, she cannot tolerate me coming home late"

"In that case you leave the job and please your mother in law"

"No. sir"

"Go home and tell your MIL that I have asked you to stop coming to office from next week, that is from the first and you stay back home tomorrow and tell her you have decided to leave with immediate effect. Buy something nice for her and gift it from me and tell her I lectured you about the importance of giving priority to look after old people."

The mother in law was touched by the gift and my concern for her, what worked was her non acceptance of being bracketed into the old age group. She came to the office the next day with her daughter in law and I said 'wow, she is your mother in law, she looks younger than you'.

The daughter in law continues to work till date, while I have moved out. The treatment will vary from mother in law to mother in law.

There are no problems, only situations to deal with. Accept the reality as it is, stop whinng, do not resist. All our stresses are the result of resistance to reality. Respond, not react to a situation, take action. You cannot undo anything in life, you can only redo.

