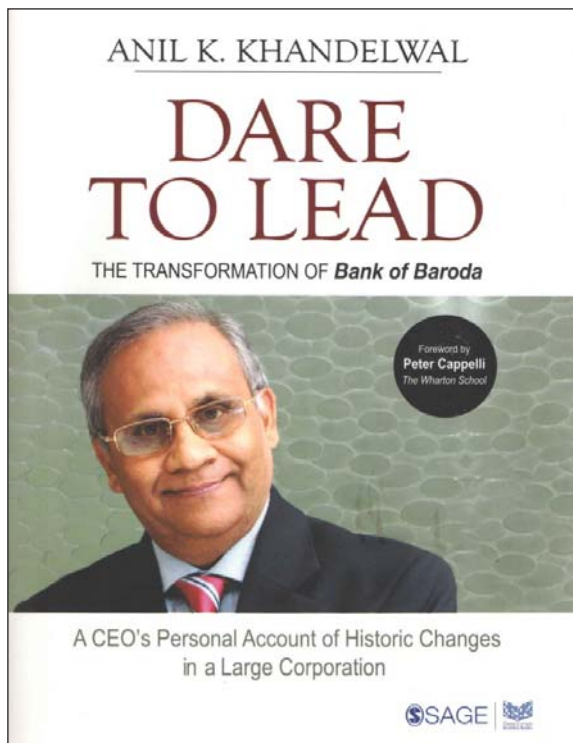


Visionary Leadership for Creating and Sustaining Competitive Advantage

Mr. Ravishankar*

Dare To Lead: The Transformation of Bank of Baroda: Anil K Khandelwal, Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd, New Delhi, 2011. Pages: xxviii + 403, Price: Rs. 795.



Bank of Baroda is not an easy task. It not only requires a clear vision but also needs a will and courage to put that vision into practice. Making a behemoth to be customer centric and friendly especially when you have to deal with employees whose average age does not represent Indian demography is a challenge many would not like to take. The transformation process is easier said than done. But the effort to achieve exactly that is the tale of Dr.Khandelwal.

Issues in leadership

Dealing with difficult and often tricky situations is one of the important facets of leadership. The action that the leader takes has a bearing on the organisation or a unit of the organisation. The motivation that the leader has and his ability to motivate the employees under him play an important role in the functioning of the organisation. In fact, the book provides an interesting study of leadership style/s adopted by Dr.Khandelwal in the discharge of his different responsibilities. What one gathers is that **any one leadership style will not bring in desired**

Tom Peters, Co-author of **In Search Of Excellence** writes that “Dare To Lead” is a personal tale from a very wise man, I was captured and captivated; and the feeling of those who read this book will not be any different.

Undertaking transformation in a geographically well spread organisation like

* Senior Manager, Corporation Bank, Bangalore.

results. One may have to adopt different styles to suit the situations and handle accordingly. One thing that should be common in all situations is that any action taken should be justifiable from the point of view of achievement of goal and should not be morale basher for the employees concerned. What an aspiring leader should remember is that while you cannot be popular all the time, if your decisions are fair and transparent, there will not be any personal heartburns and you will be respected, albeit grudgingly.

HR in action

In most of the situations, today, you will find HR being lectured as an important activity by all and sundry. There are so many HR trainers with little or no knowledge of action oriented HR but talk about what one should do and should not do. Little importance is given to what one has been subjected to. Without understanding this, if any one expects to bring in attitudinal changes or behaviour modification in an individual, it would be an exercise in futility. Dr. Khandelwal's experiments in HR where he tries to involve all the people who are going to be affected speaks volumes about **Action HR** and that is what is the need of the hour. To go a little further, his opening up a contact point for truly distressed employee is an example of **Action HR or affirmative HR in action.** It tells in clear terms that change cannot be brought about in the target group by words but by concrete action. His words "everywhere I produced results through people" leave an echo in the ears of all who care about HR.

The book gives an impression that according to Dr.Khandelwal, HR is no more a support function but a **business function** itself.

Decision Making

Can a leader take a decision sitting in his comfort zone? This is a vital question aptly answered in the book. He has quoted umpteen instances where decisions have been taken without understanding the realities. Unless one has the pulse of the situation, the decision would not really bring in the desired outcome. The book gives ample examples of decision making styles in public sector banks where office notes fly thick and fast only to be modified and re-modified several times without any regard to **time sensitivity** and **people sensitivity.** The book also tells about the training given to the employees in decision making process and the authority given to them to execute those decisions. The book highlights the fear phobia prevalent in public sector banks in decision making due to the sword of accountability. The attempts to dispel those fears by providing adequate support from the corporate office have been highlighted by the author. He has given his own example of being posted to places/zones without any experience of working in a branch till then. How he managed to achieve the desired results in spite of adversities is a lesson for all nay-sayers.

Visionary Ideas

Can a leader be a leader if he has no vision? If he cannot see the future, can he plan? If he cannot plan, can he set goals? If he cannot set goals, can he ensure growth? If growth is not

there, what is the purpose of the organisation's existence? The book answers all this and much more by highlighting how a long term vision changed the whole perspective of the stakeholders. The sincerity of the vision brings in support at all levels and funniest thing of all is that while the officers in Bank of Barods individually were supportive of Dr.Khandelwal's actions, it seems that the association office bearers were not! His determination to bring around the rival unions to agree to transform the bank from its stodgy image to one brimming with enthusiasm and willing to go extra mile won the hearts of all.

The implementation of core banking or bringing in Rahul Dravid as brand ambassador of the bank showing the image of the bank as a reliable, consistent and solid performing bank was a winner both for the bank and its employees.

Training as a tool

The author tells in no uncertain terms that training as a HR initiative will succeed only if it is buttressed by relevant operational job rotations. Training at different stages of one's career is essential but often these remain unplanned interventions. Posting on a key position, especially at higher levels, is generally not preceded by any prior training. He says that ideally the process of identifying talent for the top must start as a systemic intervention in building large organisations, duly followed through a planned training and placement strategy.

Developing leaders

The book discusses the efforts made by the

management of Bank of Baroda to develop future leaders. The improvement in training facilities, counseling in promotion processes, identifying talents and traits, posting people to the best suited places as much as possible are some of the actions that have been taken by the management so that the employees assume the leadership positions with a positive frame of mind. The stress on ethical leadership has been the undercurrent of his management philosophy and rightly too. Banking being the business of integrity has been highly stressed at all appropriate places. The book brings about the truth that learning organizations deliver at all times and it is necessary that the organization identifies and nurtures future leaders. This enables them to this process when these employees assume positions of authority at all levels. In fact, as has been rightly brought out in the book, in a public sector bank, growth of the second line is, more often than not, treated in a shoddy manner.

Communicating through performance

The book brings out the importance of communicating through performance. In a business setup like a public sector bank, actions speak a lot. There are customers to be attended to, targets to be met, decisions to be taken or employee to be counseled; and a leader's only job is to ensure all these are achieved with proper care and concern to ensure growth of the organization. Dr.Khandelwal's view that the employee should be enabled to perform is to be remembered and the process of enabling the employee by means of actions would send

right signals to all in the organization. This will make the employees perform better and also responsive to the call of the organization. A channel for communicating the issues on a regular basis with key action points would greatly add value to the development of the employees and it should be free and frank.

Bank of Baroda is a shining example of resurrection from a mammoth and still elephant to a dancing elephant quite possibly due the “dare to lead” attitude of Dr.Ahil Khandelwal. It is not often that you find a chemical engineer thrown into the ocean of banking for his survival transform himself into a frontline player due to sheer determination and hardwork. The learning atmosphere was hard and hot without any formal classroom like structures. The young man, perhaps, had not thought that he would become a career banker even in his wildest dreams, but destiny had other ideas and thus Dr.Anil Khandelwal the banker, was born.

More than the personal account (because

it cannot be termed as an autobiography in the true sense) “Dare to Lead” is really a fascinating tale of a hard pushed and hard pushing banker who made it a mission to stand ahead and apart, challenging the status quo at all times. One thing that stands out in the book is the fact that Dr.Khandelwal has narrated without any hesitation his failures too but how he got over them is the lesson that is there for all to study. The travails and trauma of leading a public sector bank are beautifully brought out in the book. His encounter with various stakeholders at different points of time and their attitude really throws light on the issues and dilemmas facing the banking industry. It is not necessary that you agree with all his actions and reactions; but you cannot help appreciating the missionary zeal behind those actions to make Bank of Baroda a shining sun. The book is a good read for all bankers and management students alike for getting a taste of public sector management as it happened from a seasoned banker.