

Less is More - Focusing on the essence

There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all. ~ Peter F. Drucker

Srila Prabhupada was the personification of "focus on the essence." Although he had over one hundred centers and numerous other projects, his life was not complicated. He spent the majority of his time doing what he did best and what was most needed: enlightening others with knowledge, purpose and vision and inspiring them to be pure.

Our lives tend to be filled with text messages, emails, and deadlines - and with information overload. Srila Prabhupada's life was different. Although he achieved more in twelve years than anyone could even hope to achieve in a lifetime, his life was uncluttered. Not that he wasn't busy; but he was busy with what mattered most. There is an art to living without tinkering with things that are not really important.

Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists of the elimination of nonessentials. (Lin Yutang)

When I was with Prabhupada, I often had difficulty understanding how he managed his huge international organization. Why? Because I rarely saw him do anything other than educate, inspire and give vision. I expected he would be doing the typical things leaders do: attending meetings, being busy with project deadlines, and continually being on the phone with his international leaders. This was not his modus operandi. What he accomplished, and how he accomplished it, were mind boggling to me because it seemed like he really wasn't doing any management.

Yet as I became more familiar with Prabhupada's life and leadership style, it became clear that he was indeed managing, yet managing in a way I had never before seen. He was focused on inspiring his students to overcome personal interests for the higher spiritual good of the world, to sacrifice their lives on the altar of devotion to God.

He traveled the world fourteen times in twelve years for this purpose. The well being of his followers was the essence of his work because the purity of their spiritual lives and their adherence to the principles and practices he gave them were at the heart of the success of his mission. Therefore his real work was to nourish their spiritual lives. When one of his disciples inquired whether she would be taking time away from Prabhupada's work to speak to him, Prabhupada replied, "My disciples are my real work."

Stephen Covey said, *"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."* Prabhupada was perfectly clear on his priorities. He knew what was most important, and precisely why it was important. And he stayed on task.

Italian economist Vilifredo Pareto came up with the Pareto Principle. The principle states that the most important twenty percent of your actions (I would add thoughts as well), produce eighty percent your results. In other words, about twenty percent of what you - and what your companies does - is responsible for about eighty percent of your success.

An aspect of the Pareto Principle is to not spend energy working in areas where we are not well qualified. Rather we should focus on and further develop our strengths. Prabhupada left practical decisions to his leaders in areas where he had little experience or skill. But decisions that only he had the depth, vision and insight to make were never relegated to others.

IN THE NEXT PARAGRAPH THE EMPHASIS SHIFTS TO ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE TOPIC, BUT THE SHIFT DOESN'T SEEM TO FLOW WELL. WHAT DO YOU THINK? A SUB-HEADING COULD RESOLVE THIS, BUT I HAVEN'T USED SUBHEADINGS IN THE OTHER CHAPTERS. OTHERWISE, I AM NOT SURE HOW TO MAKE THE TRANSITION BETTER. MAYBE IT NEEDS TO GO SOMEWHERE ELSE.

Another way Prabhupada saw that we could lose focus and complicate our lives was in our need for constant change. He quoted a Bengali saying, "You must do something new. If you have to put your feet upward and head down, walk on your hands and clap your feet, but do something new!" He commented on this by saying, "This is your American disease. Always changing! Change every few minutes." He saw that the modern trend to change often wasted valuable time and energy despite the promise of efficiency, convenience and making life easier.

He once remarked that the tele-type machine (the pre-cursor to the fax machine), installed in one of his centers will rarely be needed and will end up being used for gossip more than business. Imagine what he would say about Facebook!

Prabhupada did make use of modern technology where appropriate. However, strange as it may seem today, he didn't like telephones. His daily routine was regulated and he felt that phone calls were an infringement on his regulation (and privacy). He preferred corresponding by mail, something he could do at a set time daily. This is a typical higher order approach to getting things done, enabling those who work this way to accomplish significantly more than those who don't.

This created a less frantic and more grounded managerial environment than the way we managed. There was rarely "emergency mode" in Prabhupada's management and leadership style - although there was urgency to expand. When there were emergencies he preferred to handle them by post, working on his mail at his regulated time. He rarely allowed emergencies to divert him from his priorities or upset his daily routine.

MAYBE THERE COULD BE A GRAPHIC STATING "URGENCY, NOT EMERGENCY."

What about multitasking? Prabhupada was definitely not one for multitasking. Although it may seem counterintuitive, multitasking is not productive. Research shows that a person who multitasks will even be less productive than a person intoxicated on marijuana (ganja) if such a person simply sticks to one task at a time!

Along with multitasking, another challenge we face is being "busy doing nothing" by wasting valuable time in frivolous distractions. As the saying goes, "The problem with doing nothing is you never know when you are finished." Prabhupada was too focused on his goals and mission to waste time.

It requires self-discipline to be on task and not be distracted by the allurements of activities that are not essential at the moment (emails, text messages, phone calls, conversations, and the internet) - or may not be essential at all. This kind of discipline is indicative of the what the Bhagavad-gita calls the mode of goodness, or *sattvaguna*. The mode of goodness is characterized by peacefulness, self-control and focus. Unfortunately, today most people are in the mode of passion, or *rajaguna*, characterized by a passionate desire to do too much, or in the mode of ignorance, *tamaguna*, which causes people to become lazy and distracted. The point is that if we cultivate goodness we will accomplish more and we will be happier.

The *Bhagavad-gita* teaches that these modes are forces of nature that influence all our activities.

Material nature consists of three modes—goodness, passion and ignorance. When the eternal living entity comes in contact with nature, O mighty-armed Arjuna, he becomes conditioned by these modes. (Bhagavad-gita 14.5)

However, it is our actions and consciousness that become the catalyst that determines which mode affects us the most. The more we live in goodness, i.e. the more we live lives of simplicity, knowledge and spirituality, the better off and more successful we will be in all areas of life.

YOU COULD PUT A CHART HERE OF THE THREE MODES. SOMETHING LIKE

MODE OF GOODNESS - <i>SATTVAGUNA</i>	FOCUSED, CALM, DISCIPLINED
MODE OF PASSION - <i>RAJAGUNA</i>	DOING TOO MUCH AT ONCE
MODE OF IGNORANCE - <i>TAMOGUNA</i>	LAZY AND DISTRACTED

This is why the spiritual purity and peacefulness meditation brings also help us succeed materially. Multi-billionaire Ray Dalio, the guru behind Bridgewater Associates, says this about mediation:

"It allows you to clear your head and bring an equanimity to everything."

The equanimity that meditation brings enables the mind to focus on God. Because this brings more goodness, more calm and peace, those who meditate are also more focused in their daily activities (because of the absence of the mode of passion and ignorance). This is why I recommend companies have a regular morning meditation session (at least once a week), and offer yoga to their employees. If we can't find fifteen minutes a day to mediate, we are probably working too hard.

The lure to do many things at once goes against the very grain of productivity - and of sanity. If we don't control where we place our attention, we will not create the reality we prefer. Rather, reality will create us.

By focusing on what was most important, and thus setting limitations on what he would and wouldn't do, Prabhupada was able to accomplish more in the last years of his life than even the most productive people achieve in a lifetime. Setting limitations enabled Prabhupada to maximize his time and energy working on what was essentially important, and thus to be incredibly successful.

By following Srila Prabhupada's example, you or your organization can achieve greater results with less effort, all while remaining within your circle of dharma.

The Principle

There are a few thing we can do that will be responsible for the majority of our success. However, we are either not aware of what these actions are, we tend to get diverted from them because we impatiently try to get too many things done at once, or else we become distracted by various diversions.

The Practice

Connect with your core (dharmic) principles, focus on them, and live them. **And be aware of what is outside your circle of dharma, especially the distractions. Remove the clutter. Seek the essence. Set limits on what you do.**

The Lessons

There is power and amazing success in a life or mission aligned with and focused on core principles.

The Benefits

The ability to accomplish more in a few years than most people accomplish in their entire lives. To be true to yourself and your mission. To live a dharmic life. To be happy.

The Quotes

Ekaç candras tamo hanti na ca tārā sahasrasaù. "If there is one moon, that is sufficient. What is the use of millions of stars?" (Chanakya Pandit)

O son of Pāthā, that understanding by which one knows what ought to be done and what ought not to be done, what is to be feared and what is not to be feared, what is binding and what is liberating, is in the mode of goodness. (Bhagavad-gita 18.30)

There is no being existing, either here or among the demigods in the higher planetary systems, which is freed from these three modes born of material nature. (Bhagavad-gita 18.40)

O son of Bharata, the mode of goodness conditions one to happiness; passion conditions one to fruitive action; and ignorance, covering one's knowledge, binds one to madness. (Bhagavad-gita 14.9)