

Your Ego Could Ruin You (and your company)

Successful people know the art of listening, even to those who disagree with them. Unfortunately, too many of us get stuck in our own way of thinking, and the more we hear ideas we don't like, well, the more we don't like them.

People only see what they are prepared to see. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

Being right can be more important to our ego than knowing what's right - or doing the right thing. The ego says "I am smarter, I know better, I'm more experienced."

We can sometimes be dead wrong, even despite "evidence" to the contrary. Unfortunately, we often just believe what we want to believe. Yet we pride ourselves in being objective.

You don't see the world as it is, but as you are. ~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

If we think we objectively look at facts, we are exactly like those who disagree with us. We both think:

1. My beliefs are based on a relatively dispassionate, unbiased understanding of the information.
2. Other rational people will share my opinions provided they have the same information and they are thoughtful and intelligent.
3. Others don't share my views because they either:
 - a) Don't have as much information as I do
 - b) Are irrational and thus unable to be objective and reasonable
 - c) Are biased, ill-motivated, self-interested, or insincere.

We both read the Bible day and night, but thou read black where I read white. - [William Blake](#)

Srila Prabhupada did not think he had a monopoly on good ideas. He encouraged his disciples to be creative, to, as he said, "strain your brain" for ways to reach more people. And he listened to and appreciated his disciple's ideas.

Of course, he wouldn't entertain ideas that were not aligned with the core principles of his mission. But on practical details and strategies he was very flexible. He knew that God in the heart gives intelligence, creativity and genius to everyone. Prabhupada told us, "If we simply sincerely work, Krishna (God) will give us intelligence, everything. By His mercy everything is available."

Prabhupada taught his leaders to not be upset if others had different opinions. Rather, he said, this is normal because we are all individuals. He asked his followers to adopt the principle of "unity in diversity," recognizing that we were actually unified if differing opinions were aligned with the aims of the organization.

He also taught that we should not be upset by those who point out our mistakes or faults. The greatest help often comes to us in the form of criticism. Our critics shine light in areas where we may be blind. If all we hear is praise, or agreement with our ideas, it will distort our reality. However, the problem is that human beings would rather be acknowledged, appreciated, and praised, not corrected.

The trouble with most of us is that we would rather be ruined by praise than saved by criticism. ~Norman Vincent Peale

In the *Gita* Krsna says a sadhu is "situated equally well in praise and blame, honor and dishonor. (Bhagavad-gita 14. 22-25) Why? Because he is not attached to being right or getting the credit. He is attached to what is best for the overall good.

It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit. ~[Harry S. Truman](#)

But what if the feedback we get is not valuable, even wrong? Or what if a person is simply upset and is irrationally complaining? We show respect to, and serve others, by listening to them, even if we don't agree with them, or even if we think they are just being emotional. Prabhupada personified this kind of empathy and humility because of his spiritual consciousness.

One universal principle is: Each Individual is an Energy of God. As you interact with people, view each of them with concern and affection, remaining undisturbed by any abrasive personality traits. Perceive the God-essence in every person and see yourself as an emissary of the Divine in charge of nurturing the God-essence in others. ~ Bhakti Tirtha Swami

The following story teaches us one important way to be "an emissary of the Divine."

In the third century, king Ts'ao sent his son, Prince T'ai, to study under the great master Pan Ku. Pan Ku was to teach the boy the basics of being a good leader (and we are all leaders because our actions are lesson to others.). The master sent T'ai alone to the Ming-Li Forest. For one year he was to listen to the sounds of the forest.

When the prince returned, the Master asked what he had heard. "I could hear the cuckoos sing, the leaves rustle, the hummingbirds hum, the crickets chirp, the grass blow, the bees buzz, and the wind whisper and holler." Pan Ku replied, "Go back to the forest. You did not hear everything. Listen to what more you can hear." The prince was puzzled. Had he not discerned every sound already?

He returned to the forest, and for days and nights on end he listened. But he heard no new sounds. Finally, one morning he heard something different, faint sounds unlike those he had ever heard before. The more acutely he listened, the clearer the sounds became. "These must be the sounds the master wanted me to hear."

When prince T'ai returned to the temple, he said, "Master, when I listened more closely I could hear the unheard: the sound of flowers opening; the sound of the sun warming the earth; the sound of the grass drinking the morning dew." The master nodded approvingly. "To hear the unheard is a necessary discipline to be a good leader. For only when a leader has learned to listen closely to people's hearts, hearing the feelings, pains, and complaints not spoken of, can he inspire confidence in his people, understand when something is wrong, and meet the deepest needs of his citizens."

In addition to hearing what is not said, we need to acknowledge what is said. This is especially important when we disagree with someone. But this can be extremely challenging.

As we go "up the corporate ladder," we start to notice there are more people "down the ladder." Because we tend to respect those above us more than those below us, it makes it difficult to listen to those we see as lower. A sadhu doesn't notice more people "down there." In fact, the higher he goes (higher in consciousness) the more he respects others, and thus the more he sees himself as their servant. This is why Prabhupada could patiently hear and serve anyone.

If we have an open ear and mind, are brave enough to have our assumptions challenged, and serve others with humility, we will achieve the kind of amazing success and satisfaction only possible for those who live the life of the "Corporate Sadhu."

The Principles:

- Listening to other's ideas broadens our perspective.
- Listening nourishes others. It is a service we do for them.
- To listen well to another person, we must respect them.

- The ego has a stronger need to be right than to know what is right.
- Feedback sheds light on our blind spots.
- Different ideas are unified when we share the same aims.

The Practices:

- Be open to ideas you don't agree with. Don't allow your ego to control what is allowed in your mind.
- Don't build teams only with those who agree with you.
- Listen to what is not said, the feelings and needs. And acknowledge what is said.
- Nurture the God-essence in others.
- Be humble enough to accept criticism, admit faults, and correct them.
- As you go higher, go higher in consciousness. Become more of a servant.

The Lessons:

- A big ego is dangerous. It can bring you and your company/family down.
- The greatest ideas may be the ones your most disagree with at first.
- The more we hear new ideas, the more we tend to believe in our own.
- Those who give critical feedback are real friends.
- Proving our point is often more important than doing what is right.
- Going up the corporate ladder demands greater humility.

The Benefits:

- Awareness of valuable viewpoints you wouldn't normally consider.
- Better decision making (because of your ability to hear other's views).
- The ability to work better with those who don't agree with you.
- Inspiring, nurturing and supporting others (through hearing what is not said).
- Better and closer and relationships. (resulting in better working relationships)
- Spiritual growth

The Quotes:

The greatest motivational act one person can do for another is to listen. ~ Robert E. Moody

All you see in your world is the outcome of your idea about it ~ Neale Donald Walsch

People don't care what you know until they know that you care ~ John Maxwell

If you give a fool good instructions, he becomes more and more angry. ~ Chanakya Pandit

A man must be big enough to admit his mistakes, smart enough to profit from them and strong enough to correct them. ~ John Maxwell

One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me—such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me. (Bhagavad-gita 12.13-14)