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Leadership Lessons from Lord Krishna- February 2020 | Aparna Sharma | Senior HR Professional & Certified Corporate Director | Editor's Collection

The Bhagvad Gita, an ancient Indian philosophical scripture, transcends religion, race or time.

In spite of it being ancient, it holds relevance even in the 21st century, as its teachings enable us to get a true understanding of life. It also offers practical ways to overcome challenges and hurdles. The Bhagvad Gita has been predominantly studied in the contexts of philosophy, theology and literature. Scholars throughout the ages have studied the Gita with great interest. International scholars such as

Albert Einstein, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Aldous Huxley, Herman Hesse, Carl Jung, Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Henry David Thoreau have quoted the Bhagvad Gita in their writings. Peter Senge, one of the most prominent management thinkers, has quoted the Gita in his famous books, "Fifth Discipline" and "Presence." Indian thinkers such as Sri Aurobindo, Ramanuja Adi Shankara



and even legendary personalities such as Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru have drawn inspiration from this epic text.

Many contemporary leadership topics such as emotional intelligence, situational leadership, character and integrity were discussed in the Gita thousands of years ago. These topics were discussed in a philosophical context, since management science did not exist then. It is also intriguing to find other management concepts embedded in the Gita. Thousands of years before Frederick W. Taylor defined work and worker, and Peter F. Drucker defined knowledge and knowledge worker, the topics of work and knowledge were already in the Gita. The wisdom of Gita contains many leadership lessons that are akin to contemporary leadership theories and practices. I have culled out the key lessons post my reading and reflection of this magnificent text with my Sanskrit teacher and guide.



Here are the significant ones for each one of us trying to make our mark in the Corporate Battlefield.

- Leaders achieve lasting power and glory by exercising compassion and service.
- Leaders should embrace rather than avoid formidable challenges because they bring out the leaders' greatest strengths.
- Leaders should be resilient in their actions and should not be swayed by pain and pleasure.
- Effective leaders do not lead by fear or anger
- Selfish desires and animosity obscure the purpose of leadership.
- Leaders need to be aware of the self and the surroundings.
- Renunciation- the ultimate leadership challenge: Renounce negative thoughts, words and actions; renounce inequality; renounce arrogance and ignorance; renounce indiscipline, dishonesty and laziness.

In the Gita, Krishna defines three specific disciplines that are required for effective leadership: discipline of learning, discipline of speaking effectively and discipline of equanimity. All of these disciplines are important for effective leadership.

Discipline of learning: Today's leadership authorities also agree that effective leaders have to be effective learners. Leadership is not only about teaching people to follow a certain path or to do a certain thing, but it is also about learning things to be taught.

Discipline of speaking effectively: Without effective communication skills, leadership cannot become effective. Krishna says, the most important part of communication is to communicate with honesty and with respect toward others. For leaders to be effective, they must be able to motivate their followers when they speak, so they can guide them toward the common vision and goals. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, J.F.Kennedy became known as effective leaders mainly because they communicated elegantly at all times. In the business world, we know leaders like Jack Welch, Andy Groves and John Chambers as great communicators. When these leaders communicated to their people in their respective organizations, they were always consistent on the vision and goals they presented.

Discipline of equanimity: This suggests that we have to keep steady composure at good and bad times. The Gita says that we should not be overly excited in good times and overly depressed in bad times. Keeping a composed mindset at all times, help us to achieve more peace and happiness in our professional and personal lives.

Practicing renunciation for effective leadership

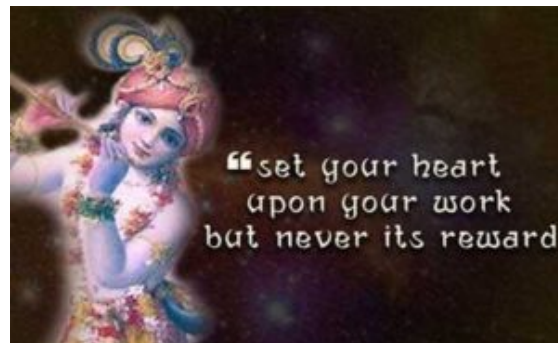
Practicing renunciation requires focusing on people and demonstrating compassion towards them. Today, we know servant leadership as a popular leadership concept. Servant leadership is similar to the concept of leadership renunciation. Servitude and compassion enable leadership renunciation, and also enable effective leadership.

Lord Krishna says, true renunciation is one that is undertaken with courage and without selfish attachments. By acknowledging one's responsibilities and doing everything in his or her capacity to fulfill those responsibilities, a person performs true renunciation. When leaders acknowledge their responsibilities, there is no judgment of the nature of work. They do not worry about the pleasantness or unpleasantness of the nature of work.

If we look at the lives of effective leaders, they have demonstrated leadership renunciation. Mother Teresa left her homeland to serve the poor and needy people of India. Albert Schweitzer left a good life in France to serve the poor people in Africa. Henry Dunant gave up his wealthy business to serve the war victims, and established the Red Cross movement. Nelson Mandela spent twenty seven years in prison to fight against South African apartheid. The 14th Dalai Lama became the

messenger of world peace and harmony while remaining in exile away from his homeland Tibet. And there are many more to recount.

To conclude, “You have the right to work only but never to its fruits. Let not the fruits of action be your motive, nor let your attachment to inaction.”



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