

SOME THOUGHTS RELATED TO PRODUCTIVITY ENHANCEMENT

Within this article I will endeavour to use a popular Barbadian rally driver – Paul “The Surfer” Bourne – as a model of the behaviour that is necessary within the pursuit of productivity and quality.

Productivity has been interpreted (Gray & Jurison, 1995) as a measure of how efficiently an organisation manipulates its resources/factors of production (human, capital, materials, energy, knowledge etc) within the production of goods and services.

Training/Skills Development: Most of us cannot jump into a rally car and successfully manoeuvre it along a course, at speeds in excess of 80 mph, without damage to life or limb. Like any profession/vocation, rally driving requires a certain level of mental and physical acuteness that can only be fully harnessed (all pun intended for those rallying minds out there) through significant practice and learning from the good examples of others. The skills development process often warrants particular conditions. Within this vein Mr. Bourne believes that better motoring facilities must be developed in Barbados, if there is to be any significant improvement in rallying.

From a corporate perspective, management scientist – Donald E. Westmore – articulates, “If any of us continues to do what we do the same way, within five years most of us and our organisations will become obsolete. Why? Because our competitors are helping their people to become more effective through training. If we look closely at companies that are doing well in the long run, they almost always have in place a well thought out and executed training program for their people. They understand that the price for not training is the real expense of training”.

Utilisation of Quality Assets: A high-performance, reliable automobile is an important foundation upon which the rallying success of “The Surfer” is built. A fundamental issue that is highlighted by the rallying scenario is the necessity for a maintenance programme that guarantees the sustainability and quality of organisational assets. The quality, suitability and sustenance of one’s assets (whether financial, human or physical) impose a significant influence upon the level of productivity, customer satisfaction and competitiveness that is achievable.

Financial Procurement: Like all business initiatives, the adequacy of funding greatly determines the ultimate ability of the rally driver to pursue and reap success. The purchase of the rally car, the maintenance programme that is necessary to ensure that it delivers peak performance and withstands very intense operating conditions; all require substantial financial resources. The rally driver can satisfy some of these financial obligations via sponsorship; in the case of ‘The Surfer’ such help comes from Banks, Texaco, Pirelli/Michelin, Williams Industries Inc., Sikkens and BS&T Motors (agents for Subaru).

Awareness of Your Environment: The rally driver must be keenly attuned to the course and have an intimate knowledge of its twists and turns; such is fundamental not only for

beating the competition but also for ensuring the preservation of one's life. Similarly, to at least survive within today's highly competitive business context, leaders must position their firms to be cognisant of and responsive to the externalities (political, environmental/ecological, economic, socio-cultural and technological) that impact upon the successful and sustainable operations of said enterprises; as well as to the effects that the business has upon the environment in which it operates. The business must implement a system that facilitates an appropriate response to eventualities by its complement of skilled employees and managers.

Knowledge of Your Competencies and Limitations: During a rally, Mr. Bourne has to determine how to push himself and his Subaru Impreza to a level of peak performance, which at the same time does not unjustifiably jeopardise his safety and that of others. 'The Surfer' enjoys being pushed to perform better, as occurs with strong competition. Within a similar vein, the business should conduct a situational analysis that allows it to determine 1) its current competitive context; 2) what it wants to achieve; 3) the opportunities and threats posed by its competitors; 4) the inherent strengths and weaknesses that its capabilities render vis a vis the competition and 5) how to proceed in light of the aforementioned issues.

Professionalism: I cannot recall the source but I agree with the concept, which proposes that the term 'professional' represents someone, regardless of his or her field, who carries out his or her calling with such skill and competence that it look effortless, despite the obvious fact that everyone could not duplicate such results. 'The Surfer' controlled his car on the Vaucluse track with such an appearance of ease, that if my brain did not have difficulty computing what my body was undergoing through the twists and turns, I may have actually thought that such (what he and other rally drivers do on a regular basis) was easy. However, I think not! Businesses must also seek to dazzle customers with their performance (the "wow" effect). It is not easy, but if the organisation satisfies customer needs by the appropriate tailoring of its products and services, it too can speed ahead within the race for competitiveness.

Teamwork: Like any business, rallying requires the contribution of many people, working as a team towards the achievement of success. Sponsors, rallying associations, course officials, medical officials and rally team members all play important roles. Paul Bourne's life rests in the hands of his mechanical team, and likewise the sustainability of the firm depends on the efforts and commitment of all employees (managerial and non-managerial).

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