

Article – 7

Note: The following article was put together for a magazine some time ago. It was not written with special reference to any service organisation. Be that as it may, I would like to believe that it has a bearing on our movement as well.

Service to the community

I have a proposition to make for your consideration regarding the work that we do either individually or collectively. The proposition is that service should not be primarily a thing from which one expects to gain a reward, but the thing one does for its own sake; for the sheer satisfaction of having done your best. If you extend this principle to the activities of your organization, one could say the work that you do as a corporate entity should be the medium through which you find satisfaction spiritually, mentally and if need be physically without any thought of reward. In others words, it should be **‘SERVICE BEFORE SELF’**; **that is**, our sole duty is to do full justice to the work that we do.

There is much well-meaning talk nowadays about service to the community as a spare time activity, which mostly consists of talking and not much else besides. Real service to the community consists in doing good honest work. **The right way to serve the community is to forget about the community and serve the work.** You cannot do good work if you take your mind off your work to see whether the community is appreciating it or recognizing it. Can you score a goal in a game of football, if you take your eyes off the ball after having deftly dribbled it past the defenders to look up at the spectators in the galleries for their applause?

Rather than serving the work that you do, the moment you begin to think that you are serving other people, you begin to think that other people owe you something for your pains; you begin to think that you have a claim on the community. And you feel a grievance if your work is not recognized and applauded. The only reward you must expect from your work is the satisfaction of seeing that it is good. The work takes all and gives nothing in return, and to serve the work is a labour of total dedication. And when the work is collective, it calls for selfless leaders to give the team a sense of direction.

The concept of leadership is a necessary factor in ensuring the success of community service in general as a collective effort. To make sure that our objectives are fully achieved, we choose leaders to co-ordinate our activities and channel them to achieve optimal results. Ideally, such leaders should have analytical skills to think through problems that they are likely to face in terms of time, effort and resources. Besides, they should have initiative and commitment. But, why is it that some leaders prove to be better than others? In the next breath we must ask why things tend to go wrong with the others. To answer that question we must look at two models of leadership.

In the first model there is a hierarchy and, therefore, there is a chain of command. This system prescribes that the leader should be the person who must be the most senior in

service, having been elevated to take his appointed place when it was his turn to do so. The question is, “Does long service have anything to do with the ability to lead?” Dr. Lawrence J. Peter, the famous Canadian educator, in his thought-provoking book, ‘**The Peter Principle**’, satirically conceives that individuals in hierarchies tend to be promoted to the level of their incompetence, but by the time the ranks get to know their inefficiency, it is too late to dislodge them. That is why things always go wrong. On the rare occasions when things do go right, it is only because they have been done by people who have not reached the level of their incompetence. I.e. those in the lower ranks.

The second model suggests that a large organization can function effectively together only if the leadership shows a willingness to identify and employ the talent in others and form teams from among them without feeling threatened by the fear of being upstaged by them. This can only be achieved by a team leader who is also a team member; a commander and a foot-soldier rolled in one. He is merely *primus inter pares*, the first among equals. To such leaders, the sole criterion for service should be, ‘**SERVICE BEFORE SELF**’. This is an egalitarian model.

However, such a leader can sometimes be led astray after he has acquired a taste for the colourful rituals of protocol and privilege that go with his position. And, what is more, by and by, he is conveniently persuaded to draw his team from among a chosen few whose presumed experience as past office bearers is the excuse for their choice. In effect, this is an old-boy network in the making, by which they stubbornly continue their hold on the organisation as advisors or resource persons. In so doing, they knowingly exclude from their teams more dynamic members who they might feel is a potential threat to their entrenched positions.

In such a situation, according to ‘The Peter Principle’, what happens is, ‘**the downward pressure of the seniority factor nullifies the upward force of push**’ (Page 52) thus preempting potential leaders with fresh ideas from assuming leadership. This is in fact a deviant form of the egalitarian model that has regressed back in the evolutionary chain to the primordial hierarchical model. And the old consensus leader goes down the perilous path of self-seeking to his eventual undoing by his own hangers-on.

In conclusion, a community of self-seekers and sycophants would be hard put to find from their ranks unselfish persons to lead them. If anyone claims otherwise he speaks with a forked tongue.

E. Joseph John, Nadavallil, Kumbanad 689 547

Tel: 0469 2664253

Mob: 9495053050

Email ammoose2@yahoo.co.in

Web www.memoriesandmusings.com