

26/09/1999

Find it within yourself

ONE secret why the Japanese have been, and still are, so successful in many industries is their intense sense of duty.

This sense is prevalent across the board - from the President right down to the guy assigned to direct traffic at the carpark.

It is this guy who best exemplifies Japan's remarkable work ethic: he would be there at his station waving cars in and out under all sorts of weather conditions, giving each driver the same attention, and a little bow.

He does this unwaveringly, from the start of his shift to when he is relieved by his colleague, who would show the same level of dedication to the task at hand.

Likewise, the chauffeurs and drivers whom they greet, as well as the office ladies, salarymen, and the factory workers.

Everyone accepts his station in life and is dedicated to doing what is expected of him. He becomes a cog in a well-oiled machine that is the Japanese society.

Now, while sociologists may argue that such a sense of dedication is more appropriate for lower lifeforms, those of ants and bees, for example, there is no doubt that great things can be achieved by such a cohesive workforce.

And that is exactly what prompted Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed to exhort us to Look East. He was not planning to turn us into a nation of worker ants; he merely saw the need for a more responsible attitude towards our jobs.

In the course of nation-building we have the means to acquire any hardware that is available. It is in the software department that we are lagging far behind. And I am not talking about the rocket scientists or designers of killer applications.

The big divide is the problems posed by people who do not live up to their job descriptions: the managers, executives, receptionists, technicians, line workers, drivers, despatch riders, and even the carpark attendant.

The problem is attitude. Whether the person is an executive or the lowly attendant, there is this prevalent belief that he is destined for bigger and better things, that he is trapped within an environment not of his making.

With enough time spent mired in this train of thoughts, he invariably becomes insolent, unwilling to carry out the tasks that are part of his job, or does them badly.

In the process he becomes a poor functioning part of a bigger scenario, and ends up with an unfavourable review from his supervisor, both of which leads to even more negative results, for the company as well as the individual.

There are very few winners in an environment like that. The dissatisfied becomes insolent and ineffectual, and disruptive, and finally castigated. Without a change in attitude, he would likely end up even further down from the lofty aspirations that he dreamt about.

There need to be an acceptance that one is a part of a bigger picture, a cog in a machine that can be driven to great speeds and glory. But only when every part performs as expected. If that acceptance is impossible to come by, then it is better to go and live on an island.

By stating outright that one is unwilling to be part of the team, there would at least be no expectations.

To accept the position and the salary and not deliver one's end of the bargain should be made a crime. It is cheating.

(END)