

THE CAVEMAN DIARIES



THEJENDRA B.S.

**THE
CAVEMAN
DIARIES**

**Some Raw Advice for Modern
Executives**

THEJENDRA B.S

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Dedicated to the Stressed out Modern Executive

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Other books by the author

Disaster Recovery & Business Continuity

A Quick Guide for Small Organizations and Busy Executives

Practical IT Service Management

A Concise Guide for Busy Executives

Top Secret Business Humor

The Immaculate Worthless Collection

God is No Angel

A Mile & Wild Chat with the Brilliant Cosmic Machiavelli

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PREFACE

The Caveman Diaries is a bunch of raw advice on management, leadership and self improvement for the modern business executive. Ancient humans survived by eating food and fruits in their raw, natural state. But the modern human has become largely dependant on processed, packaged and highly contaminated food. Similarly, the modern business executive today has limited access to natural unadulterated advice, and has become accustomed to canned management fodder. This lack of clean advice is leading to constant stress, unrealistic demands, impractical expectations, etc., on modern executives. This, in turn, is leading to rapid burnout and various personal problems.

If you think you are also caught up in such a rat race then this book hopes to change your thought diet through multiple usable ideas and concepts. Essentially, there are two ways to lead one's life. The first way is you can either slog through life, waste time, energy, and make endless mistakes trying to discover things from your own experience. And the second way is you can profit from the knowledge and wisdom gained and documented by others. This book shows how you can benefit from the second way. Like a banquet containing an array of delicious healthy fruits this book contains a bunch of diverse chapters that can change the way you look at yourself and the world around you. Though there is no promise of revolutionary magic here, you will definitely see improved results if you use the advice within to guide your future actions. Give it a try. You may be pleasantly surprised.

Happy Reading

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1. How to ask Beautiful Questions

Sometime back I was watching a program on a business TV channel where a bunch of reputed CEOs, CFOs, COOs, etc., were judges for a young business entrepreneur program. Each young participant was to present to them a business case study for the winning entry. However, the program was going nowhere as the judges were not allowing any participant to complete the presentation or go beyond a couple of sentences, and would constantly bombard them with questions after questions. And the judges were even firing questions at each other, and answering every question with another question. Every young participant half their age were being ripped to pieces with their incessant and often cynical questions. Finally, one of the participants was awarded a ceramic pot of undefinable shape with something inscribed on it, while the others walked out dazed and gasping for breath. Mercifully, the program ended soon.

What the above incident teaches you is the world today is full of people who love to ask tough questions. Interviews, talk shows, blogs, corporate seminars, meetings, vendor discussions, business strategies, IT support, journalism, service level agreements, etc., are all about bombarding someone with truckloads of smart and intelligent sounding questions. Today, asking questions that others cannot answer is the favorite hobby for many people. Hence, many executives nowadays take great pride in asking complicated and smart questions that can make others squirm, shut their mouth or run away from the scene. Also, many people believe just asking a tough question settles the matter without the need to get involved to solve the issue. A

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large percentage of people ask tough questions just for the heck of it, especially in meetings. Of course, it is not necessary for the asker to know an answer (or what should be the correct answer) for his or her own questions.

Often, many people ask tough questions mainly to satisfy their ego of making others uncomfortable, or cover up their lack of knowledge, or to impress others. Most discussions and arguments you observe are all about how someone outsmarted someone else by firing a smart question. Watching someone squirm gives a self congratulatory sadistic pleasure to many people like, '*Hah, you should have seen that bozo's face when I asked him that tricky question.*' But it does not mean people will be using tough and rude questions with everyone, but they will definitely not miss an opportunity to fire it on someone they can afford to be rude with. Anyway, nowadays with the amount of information overload it is very easy to ask plenty of good, bad, tough, smart, rude, tricky, vague, stupid, dumb and rubbish questions. And a large percentage of those questions just don't have answers.

However, the habit of asking questions is basically not a bad habit, but deliberately asking questions that you or others cannot answer is dumb. You can keep asking such questions to eternity, but you will not get any correct answers or solutions. Rude and rubbish questions, even smart sounding ones, often create a lot of problems. Very often people ask tough questions because they think a tough question will get the necessary answer. But the fact is people avoid people who ask tough questions. Bombarding anyone with tough questions is a futile exercise, because you will

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never get the right answers. It only makes people avoid you, or give you evasive, defensive and incorrect answers. Besides, a shoot the messenger approach will make people tell lies and cover up bad news to prevent their head from being chewed off. Secondly, rough and tough questions simply create stress, anxiety and fear to a lot of people. Such questions make people commit more mistakes because the brain goes numb with fear. Toughness prevents truth from being said and people will invent excuses. And the list can go on and on. Maybe rough and tough questions are useful in police interrogations, but rarely necessary in business life. As Bob Parsons said, *'Every business everywhere is staffed with imperfect human beings and exists by providing a product or service to other imperfect human beings.'* So if you are a sensible person you will understand the limitations of our species. To get correct answers or solutions from others you need to ask *beautiful questions*. Now you may ask a question as to what is a beautiful question, and how do you ask one? But a beautiful question cannot be exactly defined, nor is it possible to give you a specific list of beautiful questions that can be used in every situation. However, a beautiful question can be described in many ways. Here are a few ways to learn how to ask beautiful questions.

1. A beautiful question does not have any toxicity, cynicism or tricky content into it. It is a question that does not trap people or put them in an awkward position. A beautiful question can be a straightforward or direct question, but it is asked in a non-threatening or non-intimidating way.

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2. A beautiful question does not hurt sentiments, make people defensive or point fingers at them in an accusatory manner. People make mistakes and will continue to do many mistakes in their lifetime. It is quite possible for someone to have completely goofed up on something, lost a major account or did something really stupid. Except in rare cases there will always be a valid reason for it.

3. Beautiful questions create pleasantness and collaboration. It removes fear and extracts right answers even if the answer is bad news. Successful managers know how to get the right answers from employees by not being intimidating in their approach. Their objective is to solve an issue or a problem, and not get a mischievous pleasure by making people uncomfortable. Beautiful questions help you achieve that.

4. Beautiful questions do not have a '*Shoot the messenger*' approach. If you develop the habit of asking beautiful questions people approach you openly for help and advise, instead of thinking, '*Here comes the ogre to chew our head off.*'

5. People who know how to ask beautiful questions do not thump their fists on tables, or demand an explanation right away, or try to find a scapegoat.

Finally, to summarize, the challenge for each one of us is to frequently pause and observe ourselves to see if we are asking the right questions. And we can conclude this chapter with a quote from Dorothy Nevill who said, '*The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing in the right place, but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.*'

2. When Good People become Bad Bosses

As soon as the words '*bad boss*' is mentioned most people start imagining pictures of a wicked person, a crook, a tyrant, a scheming backstabbing individual, a selfish ogre, etc. And typical textbook definitions of a bad boss is one who screams, threatens, intimidates, grabs credit, fires people, throttles people's necks and so on. While such gory imaginations could be true in a few cases, in reality it is not so in a large percentage of cases. Actually, it is not necessary to be a wicked person at all to be called a bad boss. Ironically, a good natured or normal person can also fall under the category of a bad boss without exhibiting the standard boorish behaviors. To understand how here are a few common mistakes good people do to slowly transform themselves into bad bosses.

Lack of Knowledge: A good person can become a manager of a department for various reasons, but may have no knowledge necessary to run the department. Often, many employees get promoted to stratospheric levels too fast, but without the required knowledge, maturity or skills to run a bunch of diverse departments. And this is unavoidable in many cases as modern managers often have to swim in un-chartered waters in today's chaotic business world. However, this can become a catastrophe not only for the manager but also to all his peers and team members who look at him or her for guidance, help or coaching. If managers lack the required knowledge and advisory skills to coach, mentor and supervise their department they can agitate their team members to death. In addition to stressing

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their team members daily, managers will also stress themselves more as they will be unable to lead effectively. For example, a good person can be a car service supervisor, but can never effectively manage his mechanics if he himself does not have prior experience in servicing a car, or at least a generous dose of the practical hardships of it. His lack of knowledge can often lead to conflicts as he may make unrealistic demands on his mechanics, commit to impractical requests by customers, overload his mechanics, etc. Soon it will become an ego conflict between the *'Knowledgeable and the Clueless.'*

Avoiding learning: It is understandable that a manager cannot be expected to have an accurate knowledge from day one. To gain knowledge one must get into deep water to understand the nitty-gritties of a new department's work, irrespective of their earlier experience. And no matter which department you manage there will be some amount of new learning every day to keep abreast of latest trends and happenings related to that particular industry. But too many managers avoid doing this and don't make any effort to learn the work hands on, or at least an essential percentage of it. They never bother to understand the *'Nuts and bolts'* or roll up their sleeves to get involved. Instead, they run their departments from a high level by viewing the world through status reports, metrics, statistical gymnastics, asking tough questions, etc., and soon become an object of ridicule. Very soon this will lead to problems like inaccurate estimation, procrastination, unable to take independent decisions, workload issues, staff shortages, endless meetings, email wars, improper budgeting, and various daily

conflicts. By refusing to learn or get involved they distance themselves from understanding any practical issues and difficulties of a department. Instead of being in a position of confidently saying, *'Let me show you how or this is how you do it,'* they will start covering their lack of knowledge through devious means as they become insecure and incompetent. Obviously, that means entering into dirty waters like indulging in cheap politics, surround themselves with *yes men*, shoot the messenger and find scapegoats.

Unable to shield their team: Often, for many managers maintaining the status of a good and diplomatic person who will not antagonize customers and clients becomes more important than being right. So they may not be able to shield their team from hostile situations, unfair accusations or demands. They will start saying yes to every demand and put their team members in trouble or excessive workloads. Also they cannot take the heat for their team when required. Very soon team members will stop going to them for help like a certain Jeff Rich, the CEO of ACS says, *'I think the day that your people stop bringing their problems to you is the day you stop leading. They've either concluded that you don't care about their problems or that you cannot help them. And leaders have to be in a position to help.'* For example, continuing the example of a mechanic, he will often not be able to shield his mechanics from aggressive and impatient customers who pressurize them with unreasonable demands, invent faults or expect unrealistic services.

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Distorted view: Customers and clients don't appreciate a plain exhibition of good nature. Just because a person is good, customers will not take things easily or dilute their demands. They need value for their money, solutions, answers, guidance, etc., for their problems. And if a person cannot provide that, he or she automatically becomes a bad manager. A good nature and lots of smiles cannot be used as a shield for delivering bad results. For example, will you go to a doctor who is very friendly, but is unable to diagnose your fever or prescribe the right medicines? Will junior surgeons depend on a friendly senior surgeon who cannot teach or oversee complicated and delicate surgeries? Would you go to a lawyer who talks well, but gives you bad legal advice? Would you go to or recommend a tax consultant who talks well, but can't give you proper tax advice? Similarly, a good natured person who is unable to help customers, clients and team members can get into trouble by being branded as a bad manager as their credibility will take a nosedive.

Finally, we can conclude this chapter with a quote from Thomas Arnold, '*Real knowledge, like everything else of value, is not to be obtained easily. It must be worked for, studied for, thought for, and, more than all must be prayed for.*'

3. Beware of your Super Performers

If you have the habit of reading popular business magazines, management books or articles you will definitely encounter countless references about various super performers (or hyper efficient employees) that exist in various organizations, departments, teams, etc. Of course, the definition of a super performer is a subjective term that can vary from manager to manager or from company to company, and can be quite varied based on their personal experiences. And that picture can range from someone who is super fast at everything, a noisy person, a flamboyant person, a someone who has all the answers, a management's blue eyed boy, a jargon emitting person, a go-to person, or even someone who always comes to office very early and leaves very late, and so on. Or going by the job advertisements of organizations today, a super performer is someone who meets (or claims to meet) the fancy criteria like below (based on real sentences picked from some newspaper advertisements).

1. We are looking for high value employees dedicated to delivering innovation to assist our clients in high performance delivery. The employee must be a class of his own and raise his or her sights above the horizon. We are looking for super efficient leaders who have the challenge to outdo themselves, and be a winner all the way.

2. We are looking for a person to lead, motivate and create a high performance team capable of continuous innovation and excellence in working for a global leader.

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3. *We are looking for candidates who are bubbling, energetic and invigorating to join a sales team of a global winner who can swim in an ocean of opportunities.*

Every manager will unquestionably agree that having a gang of such super performers in their teams would be a great thing. However, while having some performers may seem great, you may be surprised to know that they can gradually become your worst nightmare. Over time, and often unknown to you, they can do more harm than good and can slowly curdle or ruin an entire team consisting of normal to good performers. What I am saying may sound ridiculous or stupid, but wait till you hear me out. Some of the top hidden reasons why a super performer can turn a team into a snake pit rather than work as a collaborating team are as below.

1. While being super efficient is not a crime, a hyper performer can often make other team members (who work quietly without fanfare) look bad and inefficient, either intentionally or unintentionally. To understand this, just go back to your school and college days. Remember in school where a couple of smart kids would quickly shout answers before the other kids could even understand the teacher's question. They were the class '*Know it alls.*' And slowly those speed kids would become the teacher's pets, and the rest of the students would constantly be compared with them leading to an icy jealousy. Similarly, a super performer in a team can corrode the manager's opinion of others as they will invariably be compared against the team's hero. But people hate being compared with others as it will make them look inferior and dull. This in turn kills

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teamwork, collaboration and can lead to various internal politics.

2. Many may argue that having a super performer in a team can be great source of inspiration for other team members. But the reality is far from this assumption. Constant success is actually a guaranteed way to gain unpopularity. Just like the omnipresent sibling rivalry among kids, a super performer in a team of co-workers will soon be viewed as someone who is hogging all the limelight and the manager's attention or affection, while they are automatically viewed as morons being unable to do work as efficiently as the super performer. Apart from the usual feelings of envy it can also lead to fear among coworkers. So team members will start viewing the super performer as a danger to their survival rather than an inspirational soul.

3. Managers will intentionally (or unintentionally) start diverting all the juicy jobs to the super performers and the routine/mundane work to others thereby depriving them to get ahead or get involved. Other team members will start feeling they are getting unequal amounts of a manager's attention and responses.

4. Appreciation can be intoxicating and addictive. Once a peak performer gets continuous attention and appreciation the natural tendency is to seek activities and tasks that can earn them more and more limelight or rewards. So they will start invading into other team member's territories like finding fault in the way others work, or showing off how they could handle the same job better, start giving smarter suggestions, etc., thereby

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making the other team member look stupid. And in many cases, super performers in their desire to remain at the top will start grabbing ideas and pieces of work (or even entire work) from others thereby depriving others of their rightful share of the workload, or maybe even make them lose their job.

5. Like a child that gets bored of every toy within hours or days and expects its parents to buy a new toy, super performers by nature are restless individuals constantly seeking new activities that will excite them. But a manager or an organization cannot find or invent exciting work perpetually to keep their super performers happy. And because of the halo surrounding them and the holy throne they sit, they will be unwilling to do ordinary, mundane and routine work that is essential in any department. Hence, super performers will refuse, avoid or quietly offload such activities to their coworkers as they start believing such menial activities are to be done only by the lesser mortals of their team. This can lead to various workload conflicts.

So as you can see from the above you have as much to fear about super performers as you have to fear about inefficient and troublesome workers. And such things could be happening right under your nose just waiting to explode at the most inconvenient time. However, if you can recognize the smoke signals early to apply the necessary brakes periodically then you can ensure that everyone in the team can contribute to their strengths and weaknesses without stepping on each other's toes. Finally, at the end of the day one should understand that super performers can shine and bloom only because bad, normal and good performers exist around them.

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And we can conclude this chapter with a quote that says, *'Either super competence or super incompetence may be offensive to an establishment.'*