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Title: Business Sutra: A Very Indian Approach to Management Author: Devdutt Pattanik Date: 2017-05-11 21:10:29 Dp: 13815 Status: published Image: /img/header-15.jpg

These are my quotations from Devdutt Pattanik's **Business Sutra: A Very Indian Approach to Management** which I have read in March 2016.

In fact, there are cultures, like India, where this goal-orientation is seen as a problem, not a solution. (p. 7)

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Despite the veneer of objectivity and logic, management science is itself firmly rooted in a cultural truth, the subjective truth of the West, indicated by its obsession with goals. Targets come first, then tasks, then people. The value placed on vision, mission, objectives, milestones, targets and tasks in modern business practice resonates with the Greek quest for Elysium, the heaven of heroes, and the biblical quest for the Promised Land, paradise of the faithful. (p. 7)

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Modern ideas may not be religious, but that did not make them universal truths; they were as rooted in cultural beliefs as the superstitions of yore. But there was a problem with the postmodern revolution. (p. 11)

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It also revealed how the truth of the East is always studied in Western terms, rarely has the truth of the West been studied in Eastern terms. If it has, it has been dismissed as exotic, even quaint. (p. 13)

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They were like switches in a circuit board. But humans cannot be treated as mere instruments. They have a neo-frontal cortex. They imagine. They have beliefs that demand acknowledgment. They imagine themselves as heroes, villains and martyrs. They yearn for power and identity. Their needs will not go away simply by being dismissed as irrational, unscientific or unnecessary. (p. 14)

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Indian sages avoided the written word as they realized that ideas were never definitive; they transformed depending on the intellectual and emotional abilities of the giver as well as the receiver. (p. 20)

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[K]olam, patterns created by joining a grid of dots, drawn for centuries every morning by Hindu women using rice flour outside the threshold of their house. \* (p. 21)

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The bond with God is not assumed; it has to be ritually enacted through circumcision or baptism. This reveals the deep-rooted need for documentation and written memorandums of understanding. \* (p. 26)

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Just as Europe was torn between the Greek way and the biblical way and later the Protestant way and the Catholic way, the Islamic world was torn between the Sunni way, with its roots in Arabic tribal egalitarianism and the Shia way, with its roots in Persian dynastic culture. \* (p. 26)

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Those who were firm in their belief in God attributed social wrongs to temporal religious authority, clergymen in particular, for legitimizing the feudal order of kings. The Church became the new Olympus to be defied. \* (p. 27)

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[T]he recommendations of management science resonate with not just a scientific obsession with evidence and quantification but also biblical and Greek beliefs. The vision statement is the Promised Land; the contract is the Covenant; systems and processes are the Commandments; the “fifth” level leader who is professionally ambitious and personally humble is the prophet; the invisible shareholder is the de-facto God. The innovator is the Greek hero, standing proud atop Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, self-actualized, and secure in Elysium. Every advocate of any idea from greed to good governance is convinced they know the truth, hence the moral burden to evangelize and sell. \* (p. 28)

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In the West, nature is chaos that needs to be controlled. In China, nature is always in harmony; chaos is social disorganization where barbarians thrive. \* (p. 29)

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Rather than being theistic (faith in a divine being who intervenes in the affairs of men in moral and ethical matters), the Chinese school of thought is deistic (faith in an impersonal greater force within whose framework humanity has to function). \* (p. 30)

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In line with the Taoist way, the minimalist Zen Buddhism also emerged, but it was less about health and longevity and more about outgrowing self-centredness to genuinely help others. \* (p. 31)

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Sun Tzu believed in winning wars without fighting, and this demanded not overt acts of heroism but outwitting the opponent with patience, sensitivity and discipline. \* (p. 33)

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“In China, roads are built before cities. In India, cities are built before roads. In China, people submit to the wisdom of the state. In India, people do not believe the state has their interests at heart. I find China more organized but am unnerved by its ambitions and lack of transparency. I find Indians exasperating as they have an opinion for everything but decide on nothing. In China, the state controls everything, while in India there is much more freedom of expression.” \* (p. 33)

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Over two thousand years ago, Alexander, the young Macedonian, after having conquered the Persian Empire, reached the banks of the river Indus. There he found a person whom he later identified as a gymnosophist: a naked thinker, sitting on a rock staring into space. Alexander asked him what he was doing. The gymnosophist replied, “Experiencing nothingness. What about you?” Alexander said he was conquering the world. Both laughed. Each one thought the other was a fool. \* (p. 33)

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A child is born with karmic baggage, and not in innocence with a clean slate. Every experience, good or bad, is a reaction to past conduct either of this or a previous life. It means we alone are responsible for all that has happened to us, is happening to us and will happen to us; blaming others is not an option, nor is complacency. \* (p. 34)

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Belief in rebirth is what defines the Indian way, and distinguishes it from both the Western and the Chinese way. \* (p. 34)

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[T]he Indian will respond, “We have one God. We also have many gods, who are manifestations of that same one God. But our God is distinct from Goddess. Depending on the context, God can be an external agency, a historical figure, or even inner human potential awaiting realization. What God do you refer to?” \* (p. 37)

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Vedic texts came to be known as astika because they expressed themselves using theistic vocabulary. But many chose to explain similar ideas without using theistic vocabulary. \* (p. 38)

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For centuries, the word Hindu was used to indicate all those who lived in the Indian subcontinent. The British made it a category for administrative convenience to distinguish people who were residents of India but not Muslims. Later, Hindus were further distinguished from Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs. Thus, Hinduism, an umbrella term for all astika faiths, became a religion, fitting neatly into the Western template. \* (p. 39)

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Sanatan means timeless. It refers to wisdom that has no founder and is best described as open-source freeware. Every idea is accepted but only that which survives the test of time, space and situation eventually matters. Unfettered by history and geography, sanatan is like a flowing river with many tributaries. \* (p. 40)

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This is the Indian differentiator: the value given to imagination, to the human mind, to subjectivity. While truth in the West exists outside human imagination, in India, it exists within the imagination. In the West, imagination makes us irrational. In India, imagination reveals our potential, makes us both kind and cruel. \* (p. 40)

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Since every human is potentially God—hence god—every subjective truth is valid. Respect for all subjective realities gave rise to the doctrine of doubt (syad-vada) and pluralism (anekanta-vada) in Jainism, the doctrine of nothingness (shunya-vaad) in Buddhism and the doctrines of monism (advaita-vaad) as well as dualism (dvaita-vaad) in Hinduism. \* (p. 41)

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The argumentative Indian did not want to win an argument, or reach a consensus; he kept seeing alternatives and possibilities. \* (p. 41)

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What matters is the reason why rules are being followed or broken. This explains why Indians do not value rules and systems in their own country as much as their counterparts in Singapore or Switzerland, but they do adhere to rules and systems when they go abroad. \* (p. 41)

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Every time a local tried to explain the best of their faith, the European pointed to the worst of Indian society: caste, the burning of widows, and idol worship. \* (p. 45)

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Gandhi's writings, and his quest for the truth, do show a leaning towards the objective rather than the subjective. Gandhi's satyagraha was about compelling (agraha) on moral and ethical grounds; it called for submitting to what he was convinced was the truth (satya). \* (p. 46)

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With a typical Western sense of urgency, one expects a problem that established itself over the millennia to be solved in a single lifetime. \* (p. 48)

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The chandala clearly belonged to the brahmana varna. But because he belonged to the shudra jati, he was shunned by society. Society chose to revere the teacher instead, valuing his caste, more than his mind. Observing this, the teacher realized society was heading for collapse, for when the mind values the fixed over the flexible, it cannot adapt, change or grow. \* (p. 50)

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[T]he Manu Smriti, once an obscure text known only to Sanskrit-speaking brahmins of North India, became the definitive Hindu law book in the eyes of the world. \* (p. 51)

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Rules are being designed, and rights are being enforced, to establish diversity, eco-friendliness, and corporate social responsibility. But these are never at the cost of shareholder value, revealing the cosmetic nature of these changes meant to satisfy the auditors and charm buyers and voters. \* (p. 51)

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Professionalism, which involves the removal of emotions in the pursuit of tasks and targets, is seen as a virtue. Incredibly, scholars and academicians actually expect corporations designed on dehumanization to be responsible for society! \* (p. 52)

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Fear has enabled us to survive for three billion years; imagination has been around for less than a million. In doubt, we naturally regress towards older, more familiar emotions. \* (p. 53)

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Even though every culture and every organization bases itself on lofty ideals, when crisis strikes, everyone regresses, relying on age-old fear-based animal instincts of aggression, territoriality and domination. Imagination is then used to rationalize one's choice, ex post facto. \* (p. 53)

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He of tamas-guna is too frightened to have an opinion of his own; he is dependent on the opinions of others. He of rajas-guna, is too frightened to trust the opinions of others; so he clings to only his opinion and those of others that favours him.. He of sattva-guna, trusts other people's opinions as well as his own and wonders why different people have different opinions of the same thing. Sensitivity, introspection and analysis help him discover and outgrow his fears. \* (p. 55)

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Economic growth does not lead to intellectual and emotional growth; if anything it can amplify fear. The rishis saw economic growth without personal growth as a recipe for disaster for then Lakshmi would come along with her sister, Alakshmi, goddess of conflict, and create enough quarrels to ensure Lakshmi could slip away from the grasp of the yajaman who was unworthy of her. \* (p. 58)

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His work is published around the world and he is a recipient of many grants, all of which he has refused, much to the annoyance of his wife. "With grants come obligations," he explains. He values his freedom and his simple life in his ancestral home more than anything else. He nurses no ambition and has no desire to live a lavish lifestyle. \* (p. 69)

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Without violence, there is no nourishment. Unless the mineral is consumed, the plant cannot grow. Unless the plant is consumed, the animal cannot grow. Physical growth demands the consumption of another. Only mental growth is possible without consuming another; but it is a choice humans rarely make. \* (p. 98)

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With an assured and sustainable source of food, the cow is able to give a sustained supply of milk. This makes the cow and grass symbols of sustainable and regenerating resources, which makes them sacred and an integral part of Hindu and Jain rituals. It is very easy to see this story literally: as an appeal for a vegetarian lifestyle, or as an endorsement for protecting cows. But the message is more symbolic: it reaffirms the need to secure a sustainable livelihood. This is why the gift of the cow, go-daan, is the greatest of gifts. It makes a man autonomous; he depends on no one for food (milk) or fuel (dung). People are advised to give so many cows that the depression left behind as a result of the dust kicked up by the gifted cows turns into a lake which sustains more life. Go-daan is an appeal to create more means of livelihood that sustain more households. Go-hatya, or killing a cow thereby destroying a man's livelihood, is the greatest of crimes. \* (p. 112)

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In the jungle, all animals, both predator and prey, come to the pond to quench their thirst. Business is about becoming the water body that attracts talent, investors and customers towards us. \* (p. 119)

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An organization is made up of various forces: production, marketing, sales, audit, legal, finance, logistics and so on. There are times when each force has to dominate and times when each has to submit. In a churn, one needs to know when to let go otherwise the act of churning turns into a tug-of-war where the organization becomes a battleground. \* (p. 133)

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The difference between an organization and an organism is that the organization is a thing that is insensitive to the world around it, while an organism is a living being that is aware of the world around it. The organization is a set of rules that people follow whereas the organism is a set of people who follow rules. \* (p. 148)