



Striving for Excellence

Let me open today's essay with two profound sayings that I consider two sides of the same coin. First is Michael J. Fox's: I am careful not to confuse excellence with perfection. Excellence I can reach for; perfection is God's business. On the flip side is Ken Blanchard and Don Shula's: If you don't seek perfection, you can never reach excellence. Trust me, there is nothing contradictory about these two sayings, rather they are complimentary, reinforcing one another.



I dare say upfront that excellence is a moving target. No sooner have you achieved a masterpiece or so you thought than you are overwhelmed with the thought of you either begin on an improved version or you are forced to. I love to be self motivated most of the time rather than being forced by external stimulus.

I came across the above Michael Fox quote during my 360° leadership assessment training some years back where we were vehemently advised to play to our strengths and pay less attention to our weaknesses. It worked wonders for me. It reinforced what I have always believed that I should give any assignment my best shot and with God on my side I will accomplish the task, no matter how small or how big. I guess you are familiar with this Nigerian saying: Do your best and leave the rest to God. One thing is constant - I cannot leave out the God factor. I urge you not to leave Him out as you strive for excellence.

Blanchard and Shula's challenge is no less dynamic, it buttresses a fact of life that people's level of expectations has a lot to do with the results they achieve. It is a you-get-what-you-expect kind of mentality. This is even truer when you consider Don Shula's record in the football teams he coached. He had this sense of excellence, or perfection if you so wish to call it that he wanted to win all matches he played. You may want to scream impossible! In the 1972 season, the Miami Dolphin team Don Shula coached achieved that feat. The record is still unassailable. Also not too long ago, Arsenal FC of London won the Premier League playing thirty eight matches

undefeated. They actually extended the number of matches undefeated to forty nine. Their record is still waiting to be equalled. Unassailable achievements come from people who have such as their aim, that is, to perform excellently either as an individual or as a team.

Excellence is pushing the boundary, going from good to great, believing that the enemy of the best is often the good, it is taking the battle to the doorstep of that enemy called Mr. Average, it is moving from greatness to significance. It calls for sacrifice to resist distractions, and temptations to cheat. Winners never cheat. I love the way Apostle Paul admonished Timothy in 2nd Timothy (NKJV) – no one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier and also if anyone competes in athletics, he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. Peradventure anyone thinks he could cheat and be crowned in error, it is only for a while, eventually his sin would find him out. The case of Lance Armstrong is still very fresh in our memory.

Striving for excellence is a mindset of pursuing something bigger chasing a vision beyond the mundane and it involves a lot of ‘can do’ ethos. It is a philosophy predicated upon the assumption that if you are shooting at a target, you are better off aiming at the bull’s eye because if you miss it, the chances are high that you would still be on the target. If however you were just aiming at the target broadly, you might miss and land nowhere. It is the same philosophy of shooting for the moon if you miss you might land among the stars.



Striving for excellence? Do not forget ducks quack and eagles soar. Quit whining, quit complaining. Stop focusing on self, reach out to help someone and make the customer the focus and work for the team. It was Abraham Lincoln who said you would be amazed how much you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the

credit. When you share the credits, people around you are excited and they produce good results. You’ve got to soar like the eagle. Talking of the eagle, I was in one of our clients’ ultra modern production facilities in the South East when I saw the following characteristics of an eagle conspicuously displayed as part of their strategic core values: Eagles have strong vision, they fly alone, they do not eat dead things - they feed on fresh prey. The eagle tests before it trusts, the eagle prepares for change, the eagle loves the storm, and they know when to rejuvenate.

Jim Collins in his in-between (Good to Great and Great by Choice) small book, How the Mighty Falls of an excellent (the job or a right talent on demonstrate the maturity. By this he well, the right people giving credit to factors



identified a key quality (the right) candidate for a the job. He said they ‘window and mirror’ means when things go point out the window, other than themselves.

They shine a light on other people who contributed to the success and take little credits themselves. Yet when things go awry, they do not blame circumstances or other people for setbacks or failures, they point to the mirror and say: “I’m responsible.”

Do not forget excellence is a moving target. A bird in my folklore says that since the hunters have learned to shoot without missing she has learned to fly without perching. They keep moving the cheese. They keep moving the target, do not give up, don’t be tired, keep aiming, keep firing on all cylinders and keep excelling.

Till next week, be a blessing.

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