

# Invoking The Organizational Consciousness: Insights from *Bhagvad Gita*

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## Introduction

The Bhagavad Gita has been in the news recently. This ancient text, understood by the Hindus as a treatise on how to live life meaningfully, was almost banned in Russia. They believed that it propagated the message of aggression and war and termed it as "extremist literature." Readers of this sacred text, on the other hand, argued that the essence of the text is in its interpretation. A literal translation is too narrow and does not describe the extraordinary depth and wisdom contained in the book. In fact, an individual would interpret the Gita differently at different times in one's lifetime depending upon the various life stages, experiences and circumstances that occur.

## Lessons Drawn From *Bhagvad Gita*

The Bhagavad Gita imparts lessons to its readers on every aspect of life. Not surprisingly, a management student or professional can also apply these invaluable lessons to the study and practice of management in organizations. Some of the lessons which we can learn from the Gita are:

**1. Mentorship:** The Bhagavad Gita is the ultimate treatise on the criticality of effective mentorship. Lord Krishna, Arjuna's Charioteer on the battleground of Kurukshetra, was his greatest asset, friend, philosopher and guide. It is Lord Krishna's wisdom, guidance and support that ultimately won the war for the Pandava's. Without being directly involved, Krishna encouraged Arjuna and gave him the strength to fight.

An ideal mentor serves the same purpose in the organizational context. One example of a successful company that advocates the concept of mentorship is General Electric (GE). Jack Welch, founder of GE, personified mentorship. A hard taskmaster, Welch believed in leadership that aimed at grooming high potential individuals to take up positions of greater responsibility in the future. Succession planning is an intrinsic part of the work culture at GE.

A mentor plays a crucial role in providing the necessary inputs, guidance and encouragement to foster growth and development of individuals within organizations. Arjuna, the most skilled amongst the Pandavas was chosen by

Krishna as his most able disciple. Arjuna, in turn, surrendered to Krishna with utmost devotion and trust. Similarly, high potential individuals are chosen as mentees in the organizational context. The essence for the success of the mentor – mentee relationship is the mentors' belief in the mentee's potential and the mentee's trust in the mentors' intentions. Both of them have no vested interests and only work towards the achievement of the ultimate organizational goals. In chapter 11, text 55, of Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says, "My dear Arjuna, he who engages in my pure devotional service, free from the contaminations of furtive activities and mental speculation, he who works for me, who makes me the supreme goal of his life, and who is friendly to every living being – he certainly comes to me."

- 2. The importance of goals:** Setting specific goals and displaying an unflinching commitment to the achievement of such goals was one of the most important lessons imparted by Krishna to bewildered Arjuna who was overwhelmed with the thought of killing his own kith and kin on the battlefield. As an answer to Arjuna's dilemma, Krishna emphasized on the importance of performing one's duty. The duty to work towards a predetermined goal without being overly concerned about the fruits of labor is the essence of this tenet. This is an important lesson for management students who seem to be caught up in the race for the best paying job. To choose a career /job based on one's interest and ability is the first step to achieving success. The next step is a single minded effort towards the achievement of that goal. Patience and perseverance are the qualities of greatest significance in this context. It is seen that the rewards invariably follow. In today's fast paced world, this lesson seems to have lost its relevance and needs to be understood all over again.
- 3. Steadfastness and courage:** Our professional and personal lives are fraught with uncertainty. The fluctuating economic conditions, the change in the social order, technological and other advances, cause their shares of anxieties and worries. An individual who is ruled by emotions would forever be falling into the depths of despair or rising up to peaks of euphoria in these times. The key to achieving success in this context is to attempt to remain steadfast in the face of all calamities and victories. Detachment from the fruits of ones efforts is the key to reaching this state of mind. Often, certain corporate situations may seem daunting for a manager and the only way to resolve such situations is to keep a cool head and make informed rather than emotional decisions. In chapter 12, text 15, Krishna says to Arjuna,"he by whom no one is put in difficulty and who is not disturbed by anyone, who is equipoised in happiness and distress, fear and anxiety, is very dear to me."
- 4. Ethical conduct:** In today's times, the issue of ethical conduct is a hot topic of discussion. The reason for the complete dissolution of large and well established corporate organizations like Arthur Anderson, Enron, Satyam and Lehman Brothers to name just a few, is the gross ethical misconduct on the part of the managements of these companies. Another ethical dilemma faced by many of us in our work lives is when we come across friends and colleagues engaging in wrongful acts. The question that arises is," do we keep up the friendship or do we choose do what is right?" The Pandavas chose the path of righteousness. They had the almighty God as their most powerful ally. Their success over the corrupt Kauravas, was therefore, a foregone

conclusion. The age old principle of "victory of good over evil" is emphasized time and again in this sacred ancient treatise. Texts 11 and 12 of chapter 16 state that unethical conduct stems from those who believe that the "gratification of the senses is the prime necessity of human civilization. Thus, till the end of life, their anxiety is immeasurable. Bound by a network of thousands of desires and absorbed in lust and anger, they secure money by illegal means for sense gratification."

**5. The futility of false ego, pride, anger, harshness and ignorance:** Lord Krishna describes the said qualities as "demonic." This is an important lesson for managers who may be tempted to wallow in these base emotions. Office gossip, slander and unhealthy excessive competition are some of the outcomes of these emotions. Chapter fourteen, text 7, states "from the mode of goodness, real knowledge develops, from the mode of passion, greed develops and from the mode of ignorance develop foolishness, madness and illusion."

## Conclusion

The Bhagavad Gita, a part of the Mahabharata and essentially a dialogue between Lord Krishna and his favorite disciple, Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra was written approximately 5000 years ago. It remains to this day, one of the finest and most insightful classics of world literature. It is seen as the main literary support for the great religious civilization of India, the oldest surviving culture in the world. Yet, the enduring wisdom, simplicity and practicality of its content are relevant now more than ever in the context of today's corporate environment.

## References

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