

HONY SECRETARY, AMAR SEVA SANGAM, AIYIKUDI

Success Stories - How it was done!

S SANKARA RAMAN

A summary of the talk on 'Success Stories - How it was done!' delivered by Mr S Sankara Raman, Hony Secretary, Amar Seva Sangam, Ayikudi held on 24 August 2009 at Chennai



I am very happy that I am able to give a presentation on 'Success Stories - How it was done!' by Amar Seva Sangam which was established by Mr Ramakrishnan with few friends in 1981, the International Year of the disabled. The founder became a quadriplegic in 1975 when he was in the fourth year engineering following an accident he met with while attending an interview for Naval Officer's Selection. After intense self-rehabilitation, he wanted to serve the society and spent his remaining life meaningfully resulted in the birth of Amar Seva Sangam named after his doctor Air Marshall Amarjit Singh Chahal.

I would like to say that when I was about 23, (I finished my CA in 1985 when I was 24) I was introduced to a book written by an American author - which started the first sentence in that book was

"Life is miserable". When I saw that book, the first thing I did was to close that book and not to read it again. Because I have been under the impression that God has given us life and it is for some purpose and it is for facing challenges and life is only for winning. It is not supposed to be for anything else. Life is for winning and life is for achieving success. Of course success and winner are very relative terms. But whatever it is, the amount of happiness and the satisfaction that you derive is the main origin for success. May be, you win a Ranjit Trophy match and you can be happy. And you are a winner! But you have not won a national trophy! But winning is winning and you have won something. And may be if you try better you can win higher level also. To say that the life is a losing proposition is a self-defeating concept. It should not become an excuse for your life.

For me, my parents have introduced some values in my life from very young childhood. They have never considered me as a person with obstacle or person with constraints.

They have always opened challenges to me, avenues to work in the society and meet the all aspects of life in the society. They have made me to compete in the school and higher-level education. The question is: whether a person with disability - with a proper perspective, I would say, a person facing with "odds" whether such a person should limit his life to such "odds"? I think one should not do so. The difficulties posed to you are only to be overcome. That's what we are all doing in a market environment also.

When you are doing business, you are facing competition, you are facing lot of issues in day to day management - issues with staff, production, environment, government and so on. All these are difficulties before us, the managers. The same way, whenever you are having difficulties, say disabilities, it is a situation that one has to deal with. It is not supposed to be a situation where you can take an excuse. Obviously a manager of a company cannot say that my competitor has worked hard and invaded my business. That's why I lost the

business! The same way, a person in life should not take excuses in times of difficulties and say that I am not able to perform.

Take for example; the life story of Mr Ramakrishnan, the founder of Amar Seva Sangam. He is making impossible things to happen. There are 7000 applicants for the award from 80 countries and there are 18 finalist and there is one winner! He is Mr Ramakrishnan! He has handled all the "odds" that he has been facing and encountering. He has proved that the conditions against individuals cannot become an excuse if he can still perform and life is not all that miserable. It can still be enjoyable, achievable, rewarding and self-satisfying. And Mr Ramakrishnan is not doing this for the sake of getting awards. The awards and recognitions come on his way! Why he is doing? He is the man who has been crippled below the neck. Even for his bladder and bowel movements, he needs support and a life time care giving.

When I was doing my CA practice, I was under the impression that I have achieved great things against all "odds" till I met this gentleman in 1989. Initially I came to know about him through Ananda Vikatan in 1985. It was a cover story. I was a bit in touch with him and later on the contact was lost. But later on in 1990, he came to Chennai it was revived. When the story came out in Ananda Vikatan, I was just about starting my practice. He was always in my mind. He has been severely constrained, but still organizing lot of programmes in the remote villages. I have been going to several villages in my association with the Tamil Nadu Handicapped Welfare Association

in which I was one of the founder members. I have been traveling quite a few districts also. We know what are all the difficulties and constraints in villages, particularly for disabled people. They don't have access to even very basic minimum amenities like wheel chair and so on. In such situations, a gentleman like this is running an organization, it is a matter of great appreciation.

So I was thinking about him till the day I actually met him. When I met him in 1989, my first impression was that he was a bit over-ambitious but a very positive thinking man. After a couple of years of association, I came to know that he was a man of high integrity and his attitude and meticulous thinking that really made me to go and help him in his own place. That's how I came to him in 1992. In spite of great difficulties a person has changed not only his own life but he was changing the life of many people.

Now what is all in his name? There are a few things we can take from the experience of Mr. Ramakrishnan and the work at our Seva Sangam. In a society like this, where our country is not anyway less comparable with other nations, still, we are not as prosperous and as influencing as the other nations in the world. We have a lot but still we are not fully giving the benefit of what we have. The issue in our society is mainly the value system that has been built in the society for years together because of our tradition and culture. Our tradition and culture are very valuable and they develop a personal character of an individual very well. Our people are law abiding. Our Society is very united. Families are still having the bondages and the inter

personal relationships and hospitality are some of the greatest assets that we have.

But what is that we are lacking? There was a story which I read – a woman who was doing tea-vending in a village. There are lot of bus drivers who stop their vehicles there and take tea. The lady was working in the tea-stall. She was not paid very well. All the bus drivers used to call her "akka" "amma" (to mean sister and mother) and give her lot of respect and take the tea. After sometime, she realized that she should change her job. She went to a big hotel and she became a server there. But what happened was that in that big hotel, all were rich people who did not even bother to see her. Whatever she served, they just looked upon at her as another servant and even if something is spilled or if they were not happy, they used to abuse her. They had no respect towards her. After sometime she thought, it is better to go back to the tea shop rather than serving in the hotel.

The point here is, a person always has an aspiration for dignified treatment and the work of the person should always be recognized. In our country, the recognition is there, but the dignity and the value for service has to be proved a lot. In a similar situation, if we find in an European country or the American country, everyone is treated in the same manner. Whether a woman is working in a tea stall or a star hotel, her treatment will be the same.

So the attitude of the person is the most important aspect. If the attitude is positive and encouraging, a lot better can be done in our society. One day a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Pramahansa asked him "Why all

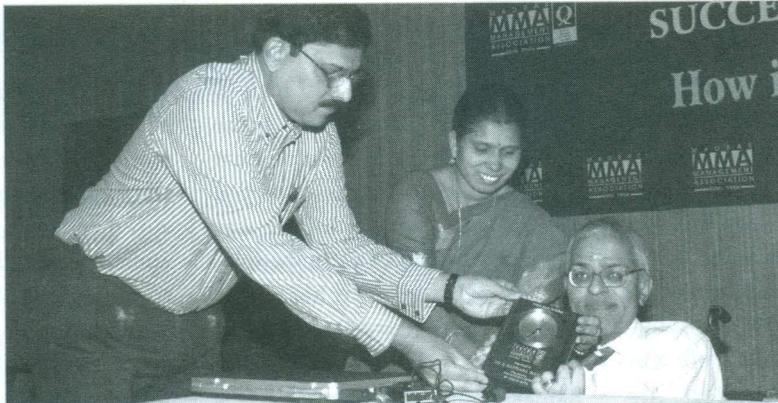
these problems are in this world? Why the God does not give us the solutions? For this. Ramakrishna Paramahansa said, "That is why he has given birth to you. You are the solution. You have to find the solution. You are not supposed to keep on complaining about difficulties and problems".

If our Ramakrishnan is complaining, he would have been lying down in the village. He would have become an issue for his family to maintain him. But he did not become part of the problem and he became the part of the solution. He created an environment for himself and also for others. Like that, every individual can create ways for solutions. The attitude of a person is very important. There is a research in US by Stanford and Howard Universities shows that 85% of the persons who are recruited are

based on their attitudes and not on qualifications. Howard University research says that the success of a person or a company depends on the attitude of the persons associated with the company rather than their capabilities. For example, if you go for an interview, the manager will ask you to sit down. The candidate has no hesitation to sit down. But when the same person gets employed, he goes to the same manager, and the manger asks him to sit down. Does he sit down immediately? He has some hesitations. After some insistence, he takes the seat. Why? What is

the difference? At the time of the interview, he had the self-esteem. But after getting the employment, he has doubts, whether he can be equal with his manager and whether he can sit there. Here comes his self-confidence in his way. So this is where the attitude and outflow that makes you.

So, the ultimate success is, how you are creating the opportunities. Even in a calamity you can make an opportunity. Again I take the example of Ramakrishnan. It is a calamity for him. It is a situation, when he was 22 years old, he was doing his 4th year of engineering and the next year, he was going to become a full-fledged engineer.



There he met with an accident and he lost his entire life for future. All his opportunities were lost. Now it is for him to take a decision. What he did was, he converted the calamity into an opportunity. His mentor, Air Marshal Amarjit Singh Chahal played a very important role. Dr Amarjit Singh said "Don't think, "why me?" Start thinking "Why not me?" That made a lot of difference. That changed his life. That changed his attitude.

There was a shoe company and there was a sales man. The sales man was asked to go to a village and asked to start a sales shop there. The man went there and

reported that it is not viable to open a shoe shop there because the people there were not putting on shoes. Another sales man was sent by the competitor company. He came back and said that immediately a shop should be set up there as there was a great potential for shoes as there are lot of people did not wear shoes. This is how the attitude that plays a most important role in creating opportunities and success and creating the difference between being successful and not being successful. Nothing is failure. There is success and non-success. There is nothing called a failure.

Recently a friend of mine told me, "If there is a failure, there is always a success waiting for you and if there is a success, there is always a failure waiting for you" So, it is not alternative and relative and I will not accept that there is a failure waiting but there

may be challenges waiting for you!"

If there is a success, there are definitely challenges. If there is no success, still there are challenges because you have to achieve success. That is why we also call ourselves as "physically challenged". We don't call ourselves as "disabled" persons. We have to face the challenges of certain odds and constraints to achieve success. There are lot of challenges. We don't consider our physical disability as constraints or a limiting factor. It is only a condition and if we work properly, we can get along for a person like

me. If my father had allowed me to sit idle, then I would not be sitting here and talking to you. My condition was a slowly deteriorating. Whenever I was facing a problem, my father came out with a solution. But I resisted the solution because I never accepted that I was in any way different from others. So when the class room was brought down from first floor to ground floor, I refused. But after a couple of times when I fell down and broke my teeth, I learnt a lesson. When I face with challenges, my father let me face the challenges and come out with my own solutions.

As far as my education is concerned, I did not want to be left behind of my peers. So when I wanted to grow up in my career, I started realizing that I need to be supported. Even for bathing, I needed support. Slowly I accepted that situation also even though I resisted every support. My story was "non-acceptance" all the time. Ultimately I undergo the situations and I accept the situations. I will rather say, it is not a blind acceptance, it is an acceptance after realizing the need. That is how I realized that the life for me is going to be a life dealing with challenges only. It is not a life that I can take it for granted. Since I was a child, I was not fully aware of the implications of muscular dystrophy till I became 14 or 15. Till that time I always assumed that I was totally under control. It is the question of facing the reality. You totally subscribe or submit to the difficult situations. Then slowly try to adopt yourself.

I would say that adopting to my situation or need rather than accepting the situation. Even today, I would never accept that I

am a disabled person. I am adopting myself to my condition. That is how I am looking at it. I don't know how far I am correct.

Coming back to Seva Sangam, we found that lot of people in the villages were not given any rehabilitation and other amenities. We found that people were not given the basic privileges viz. people were not even given admission in the schools. Those children were not even affected very severely. They were only polio-affected children. Those schools, which did not accept such disabled children, say in 1990-92. At that point of time, we introduced the concept of "Integrated Schools". Now you see lot of children coming to the school- both disabled and normal children. Because the disabled children were considered to be a stigma in those days and when they get admitted in other schools, the parents and teachers thought that the admission for other children in that school will get affected. That was one of the reasons why the disabled children were not accepted. But now you see in our school there is a total strength of 160 out of which only 100 are disabled and the rest is non-disabled. Now the children who are non-disabled are automatically coming to our school. Here happens the integration of disabled and non-disabled children. We have seen that change in the attitude of the people- the people who thought that the disabled children are a stigma, realized it is no more a stigma.

Not only here, all over the country, there is lot of improvement. There are lot of corporates who are giving

employment to the disabled people nowadays. There are employment melas for the disabled. There are portals also for the benefit of disabled. So the opportunities are now available much better than it was a decade back. There is a lot of change in the social attitude towards the disabled persons. There are also cars and vehicles which are now available for disabled-friendly usage.

There was one instance where one of my ASS candidates, who went for an interview and they asked him a question as they would ask with anybody else. At that time, NASA was facing some problem with a ball point pen, which was not flowing in the space. The astronauts were facing a problem in using the ball point pen in the space. They asked him the question as to what is the solution for this problem. He answered the question correctly and he got an employment also. The answer he gave was that the astronauts could use pencil!

Similarly, I have also heard of the stories of a Japanese Company who are having problems of soap-boxes. The soap-boxes should have soaps inside. But some of the soap-boxes go empty in a production line. There were complaints that some of the soap-boxes were coming out empty. They went for a solution and I told my fellow that your response should be correct. Because the Japanese people have done a lot of scanning, x-ray etc., and came out with a solution so that empty boxes are captured. One of the retail vendors in Japan came out with a solution: Put a blasting fan. If the fan operates, the empty boxes fall away during production. You don't need to use any

expensive equipment to find out empty boxes. I always tell my other fellows to answer intelligently when somebody asks such questions.

Ultimately it is the question of how you find solutions to the problems. You can find complicated and expensive solutions. But in the same way, if you can find some easy and practical solutions, it will be very helpful. The same way in our office, when we have a problem of bringing out the Key performance indicators (KPI), as we are into ISO certification processes. There are lot of data being captured for this purpose. When they came and asked me "What are the key performance indicators that you think for the organization and how do you evaluate the performance of an organization over a period of years?"

I said it is a very simple answer. I will go to a village and I will ask the person whether he has the disability ID card issued by the Government. The disability ID card is the most difficult thing to get. For this purpose, the person has to undergo through a series of formalities with the respective authorities.

For my question whether he has the disability ID card, if the person says "Yes", it means that the organization has done a good job.

Before I close, I would like to share with you a funny story told by my father, who is also my mentor. He told me that "Don't copy anybody. You should do

things in your own way". He told me the story of the man selling caps and the monkeys.

The man went with caps to sell them. Suddenly lot of monkeys came and took all the caps away and put it on the heads. The man wanted the caps back. So he put the caps on his head one after another and threw them down. All the monkey also put them down and all the caps were put down and the seller took them back.

I told my father that I already knew the story and why should he tell again. He said, "There is a chapter 2 for you". He said, again the cap seller experienced the same



situation when all the monkeys took away the caps. He used the same technique of wearing the caps and putting them back. But this time, one of the monkeys came down and took away that cap also! Now the seller asked the monkeys "Hey monkeys ! Why are you all behaving differently? You are supposed to put the caps down! But the monkey said "My father also told the story!" Monkeys have become really clever.

My father used to tell me another thing which is about integrity. Integrity is the most important aspect of a person. A person whom you are supposed to trust undergoes a test. The test is

that suppose you are left alone with nobody to help and there is another person along with you, do you feel that you are safe with him? If that is the situation, you can always trust such person.

Again, many of you would have heard this story. A woodcutter went with an axe to cut the woods. He dropped the axe into the river. In this story also my father said that there are two chapters and I should listen without asking any questions. The woodcutter lost the axe. God came and gave him a golden axe. The woodcutter refused that it was not his and the God gave a silver axe. He refused this too. God was too pleased with his honesty and gave his own axe. God was so happy about his honesty and hence gave all the three axes to him with which the woodcutter became very rich.

Then after sometime, he went with his wife. Here comes the second chapter. His wife slipped into the river where he lost his axe. He prayed to God. God brought a very beautiful looking woman. This time the man said "Yes! She is my wife!". The God was wondering to see how this man becomes so dishonest. The man said, I cannot manage with three! The God brought his own wife. The man went away and enjoyed his life.

With this note, I finish my speech. I invite all of you to our Amar Seva Sangam and make our endeavour a grand success.