

“Underutilization of Talent around the Globe”

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There was once a sturdy woman with piercing eyes and solid rough hands. She exuded only strength despite standing at a mere five feet tall. She was a successful entrepreneur with a business that lasted for about forty years. Her trade - selling white rice, brown rice and paddy¹ in the most visited outdoors market on the East Coast in Guyana. When I hear the word "prosperity", I often think of her. She had survival entrepreneurship. This woman was able to build a whole and virtuous life and run a small business despite being illiterate. Notwithstanding, she was one of the most successful, generous, happy and yes, prosperous woman I ever encountered. Why was this? As I reflect on fading memories, she seemed to have a complete life - a deep connection with her community, a large family and a practicing Hindu to name a few. She also had other talents and skills such as farming and sewing; and was one of the most sought after women in her community for her wise council on alternative healing practices. She was filled with purpose and contributed to common endeavours in the community. Are these the things that make one realize their true potential? In other words become prosperous? What makes a person become engaged with society? What makes them become filled with purpose?

Peter Drucker said that "If we want to know what a business is, we have to start with purpose". I would take this sentence a bit further and reword to "If we want to know what our human capabilities and potentials are, we have to start with purpose". I suspect this blue-eyed woman gave herself purpose. She could mentally account for her accounts receivables and accounts payable, cash flows and even calculate the change due to her customers. This is highly impressive in my opinion for someone who was unable to recognize her own name, much less spell it. Can you paint this image in your intellectual minds - an old woman with a couple bags of rice, sitting in a busy crowded market, showing up to life every Saturday well into her seventies.

¹Rice that is still in the husk. It is often used for feeding chickens and animals in third world countries.

She often wore floral prints to accommodate to the South American tropical heat. The dresses she made herself. She gives each of her customers a big smile, remembering to ask about their children. Rapport and maintaining relationships were important to her. This is precisely what she did for all those years. Purpose – she had it; Human energy, engagement and creativity- she had it; and dignity – she definitely had it!

Human resource is the biggest natural resource on the planet. This is not surprising considering that there are seven billion of us. For me, it is mind blowing to think that there are seven billion potentials to be realized with active creative contributions to society. Seven billion people are like the equivalent of seven billion dollars and that is a lot of money to be had. I saw a TEDTalk by Chris Arnold a while back. He talks about social mobility and the responsibility each of us have towards the next generation. This is in regards to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. One of the most profound things he actively describes is CUT- “Catastrophic Underutilization of Talent” in the world and in particular among young people. I am the prime example of CUT. This analogy is relevant to human aspirations and opportunities for meaningful lives.

Confidence – what does this have to do with management? Let me tell you. Confidence is a major part of CUT. Confidence is one of the obstacles holding people back from meeting their true potential. At an individualist level, confidence contributes to a better self-image, self-esteem and ultimately our aspirations. Lack of confidence is like a disease that refuses to go away. For example, in Guyana, job securement follows a traditional path of applications then interview. In North American, there is a concept called “Networking”. I have struggled with this since it can be very intimidating. You are in a room filled with Managers, C-Level Executives and Directors and are expected to make a “good” and “professional” image to impress. It is quite difficult to strike up a conversation with an Executive with an end purpose of

making a prospective job contact. Dustin, my friend confided to me the other day about wanting to become the in-house java expert at his company. Dustin does not know how to open up the dialogue with his manager. Peter Drucker's advice to us might be to "Start building your self-confidence yourself, purposely, improving in wherever you decide". As you can see his teachings are very relevant to us in these times.

Poverty is another determining factor that limits if one's human potential will ever be met. According to the World Bank "10.7 percent of the world's population lived on less than US\$1.90 a day in 2013". What can \$1.90 buy for you? It would be the equivalent of purchasing a single muffin in North America. The rice-selling vendor was also poor. She recounts that her family was so poor that she went to bed without food many nights. She recalls drinking the water that was used to cook rice to ensure that nothing was wasted. On the other hand, in North America, it is normal for children to have after school activities such as swimming, dance, music and karate. "Extracurriculars allow for the development of critical life-skills...building of solid relationship especially in team-oriented clubs and development of working skills, in addition to interpersonal and people skills" (Wong, 2013). I never had extra curricular opportunities. My families were part of the working poor. I lack some of these skills hence my I struggle with confidence. Skill building is an essential part of our younger life that prepares us for work life in later years. If because of poverty one does not build these skills, then you are already at a disadvantage of contributing to society especially in organizations and institutions. Finally, picture this – you do not know your purpose; you lack confidence and are poor.

Cultural barriers are another factor that prevents people from realizing their true potential. As the world is becoming a cultural melting pot it becomes increasing complex in work environments. I was brought up in a collective society (Guyana) and subsequently moved to an individualist one

(Canada). What were the challenges in my work environment? For example, I wanted a salary increase in 2016. It took me four months before I could overcome my traditional cultural views surrounding this. Speaking directly with my superior about a salary increase was a stressful situation. In Guyana, salary increases are usually decided by senior management; after a careful performance assessment. This is how a collective society with an authoritarian traditional hierarchy undertakes this. Canada has a more democratic leadership style; after all it is a pluralistic society. An employee usually opens a dialogue around pay increases and this is acceptable. Moreover, multicultural teams are not a new concept and there are many benefits to this. Communication styles can differ from culture to culture, as can traditional views of hierarchy and decision-making processes — and, of course, there can be language barriers (Holland, 2007). I believe that cultural differences are a pivotal contributing factor towards human potential. Finally, picture this – you do not know your purpose; you lack confidence; you are poor; and there are differences in culture where you are currently living.

My sister got married when she was seventeen years old. This was the norm for girls her age. Another factor that determines how an individual becomes an engaged and productive member of society is where they are born in the world. To be more specific, there is an imbedded inequality in certain parts and countries of the world. If you are unlucky enough to be born in one of these countries, then chances are you will never truly reach your full potential. There are certain parts of the globe where being born a female has already put you at a disadvantage even before you make it outside of the womb. Guyana is one such place. There is nothing inherently wrong with societies that have certain customs and traditions. However, when it puts a certain group of individuals in a society at a disadvantage, then it become dangerous. Education for women and girls, opportunities to do the same

things as men and become productive members of societies is key in an inclusive society.

As the patriarch of our family, my father's role was breadwinner and my mother's was housewife and child bearer. There is nothing wrong with this traditional kind of family structure. However, where it became dodgy was when my father forbid me to venture into the city of Georgetown for office work. This was after I completed high school. To dissect this further, my father's beliefs were informed from his cultural upbringing and the masculine societal views on women in our small community. As a collective society, the cultural norm was for women to not work outside the home and this was going back several generations. To give some context: my sister did not finish high school, my brother dropped out of school to work in our family business and there was no one in my extended family (female to be precise) that went farther than high school.

There are things in life that you cannot change such as being born a woman. There are certain cultural traditions that stop us from reaching our true potential. I was born into a society that does not attribute equal rights to women as they do to men. Notwithstanding, even countries that have a long history of feminism and are seen as open still face challenges. Take Canada for example, there still exists a glass ceiling and gender wage gap. According to the Canadian Women's Foundation "compare the annual earnings of full-time workers. On this basis, women workers in Canada earned an average of 74 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2014". How are women supposed to contribute to the human potential fully if there still exists a gender wage gap in organizations? Peter Drucker had proclaimed Frances Hesselbein "the best CEO in America" in 1990 (Edersheim, 2017). I wonder if there has been another "best CEO in America" since who is also a woman. Finally, picture this – you do not know your purpose; you lack confidence; you are poor; there

are differences in culture where you are currently living; and you are a woman.

Peter Drucker said, "I don't predict. I just look out the window and see what's visible but not yet seen". To me, this statement speaks so profoundly about the human potential that everyone has. I strongly believe that despite the circumstances, human beings have the power to constantly reinvent themselves. It's what makes us human at the most basic level. The blue-eyed rice vendor never went to school; wore her first pair of shoes on her wedding day at age thirteen and could not even recognize her name on a piece of paper. She did however raise seven children by becoming an entrepreneur and giving herself purpose. This rice-selling vendor was my grandmother and she funded my education in high school. She was able to leverage her potential to contribute to her community in a meaningful way. My most vivid memory of her was teaching her to draw her name. Many a times after school, she would ask me to teach her how to draw her name. She is no longer with me today. Finally, this quote rings so much truth even in 2017, Seneca, born in Hispania in 4 BC "The greatest blessings of mankind are within us and within our reach".

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