

Without Discipline, Most Plans Tend To Unravel In Time.

As developing countries strive to achieve a better quality of life, there are some obvious lessons in the history of developed nations which leaders would do well to emulate. That should also include leaders in business, CEOs and managers alike.

While it is essential for all businesses to have a plan, it's quite another challenge to execute, monitor and manage it over time. One of the universal characteristics of success is that key facet, discipline. Without it progress meanders, frittering away time, energy and resources. With it, plans have a better chance of being achieved faster, with a greater degree of satisfaction for all concerned. We do not have to look too far or too long to recognise the beacons of success. Across the waters lies Singapore, a rat-infested little lump of mud not so long ago. Leadership and collective will have made it what it is today, and discipline had a lot to do with their collective success as a people.

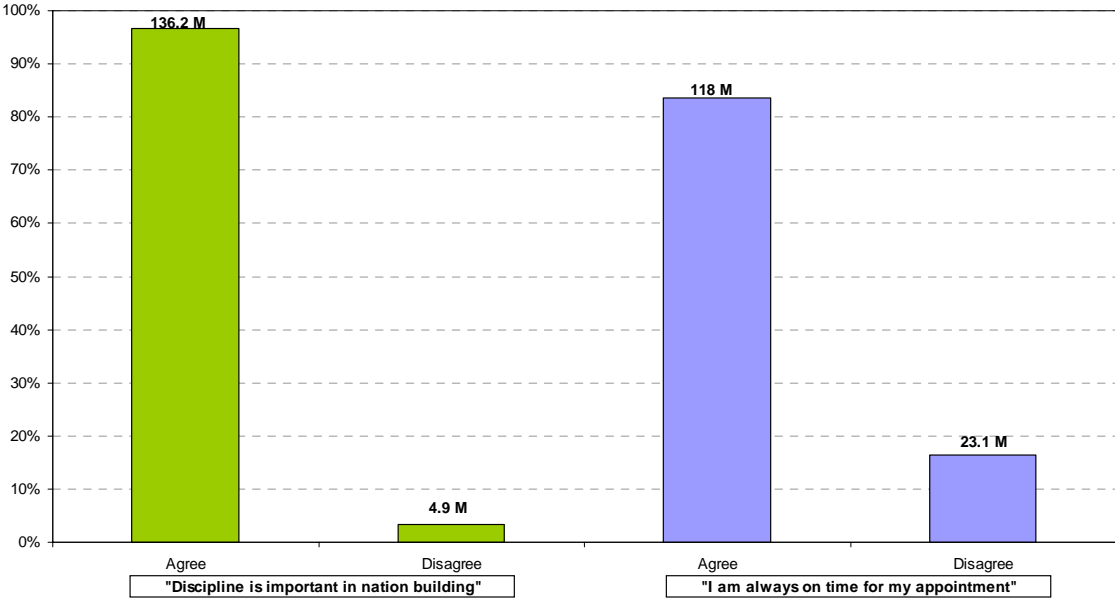
Even their detractors will agree that the parts have all added up to the sum, rather well. With good reason, Singapore Airlines has for many years now been a brand that others envy, respect and emulate. There is a consistency in the standard of service you expect and receive, on the ground and in the air. Across the spectrum of airline management, they have set new standards and continue to raise the bar. The impact they have had on other Singaporean businesses, on the spirit and work culture of an entire people, is incalculable. At the core of that success, lies discipline. It isn't by accident that they usually arrive on time. But continued success and burgeoning wealth tends to breed arrogance, a human failing that often leads to decline. It is a characteristic that all successful businesses and managers, not just Singaporean, would do well to recognise.

It would be childish to dismiss Singapore as an irrelevant example, by dint of the fact that it is a small nation-state. There are many other examples. From an economic perspective, post-war Germany and Japan are worthy of emulation. As is China. The one to watch today is Putin's Russia, whether we like his heavy-handed moves or not. Then there are the Scandinavians, perhaps the most evolved species of all humanity: economically, politically or socially.

So how is Indonesia doing with regard to discipline, in the eyes of it's own people? How many value time? Recently, a special poll was conducted across the country in tandem with Roy Morgan Single Source, Indonesia's largest syndicated survey spanning the Top 20 Metros, other urban centres as well as the rural population. Respondents are at least 14 years of age and older, random sampled without bias.

Asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "Discipline is important to nation-building", almost all of the 2010 respondents agreed. The 3.4 per cent who disagreed were primarily some rural folk. Why then do we see queue-jumpers, errant drivers and late arrivals, all of the time across all of Indonesia? Asked if they agreed or disagreed with the statement "I am always on time for my appointments", 84 per cent agreed. Of those who disagreed, many were women most of whom are not part of the workforce. Why then do most meetings in Indonesia usually start late?

DISCIPLINE AND TIME



Discipline and time are two vital building blocks for success. One helps cement the other. They are inseparable. Without due respect to both, plans amount to little more than wishful thinking. This is true for both nation-building and corporate success. Leadership, or the lack of it, is at fault here. It is the age group 35-49, the group that comprises senior managers, who are most guilty of being late. They are the age group who manage departments, lead meetings and take decisions. They are the age group that is usually late, they are the people who keep everybody else waiting.

Bad examples can be habit-forming. Bad leadership sets the trend. This has little to do with punching the clock and everything to do with respect, team building and achieving goals together. Doing the same thing over and over again can be tedious, but discipline requires doing all the same. Imagination, passion or impatience cannot be used to disregard market realities.

Researchers for example cannot invent facts to please their clients. Not the most exciting of occasions, a quarterly review of each line of business requires patience to wade through the same old key performance indicators, over and over again. As long as the business is performing in tune with goals set and within competitive pressures, there is reason to be satisfied. Market share miracles do not occur every quarter, nor do new behavioural discoveries. Patience and discipline are key prerequisites for managing brands. If working towards long-term objectives isn't exciting enough, the boardroom is perhaps not the best place to go looking for thrills.

Developing a sense of discipline takes time too. But taking that first step in the right direction does not.

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