

Living Life On Your Own Terms

I am an Electrical and Electronics engineer and graduated in the year 1981. Soon after graduation i joined an MNC in Mumbai. I served there in the shop floor of a 600 strong workmen and to start with I was on probation for 3 months. I got an appointment letter at the end of 3 months, getting appointed as “Junior Foreman” in the shop floor. My posting was in the maintenance department where I had to look after the electrical, electronics and instrumentation – operation and maintenance of Electric motors, AC and DH plants, Boilers, Kilns and ovens, forklifts. Since it was a factory we worked 24 X 7.

About 35 electricians, technicians and pump operators were reporting to me then, and I was reporting to the Superintendent of maintenance department. My work included both breakdown maintenance and preventive maintenance, besides supervision of operators and technicians who were to start and stop the boilers, kilns and ovens as per the need of the production department. Monitoring the pressure, temperature on an hourly basis in the boilers, kilns and ovens were part of our department’s responsibility. We had our department people working in shifts to ensure continuity of service provided to ensure continued and nonstop running of the plant.

All was well and with the passage of time I got promoted with an increase in salary and was given more responsibilities that I very happily took. I was given a quarters inside the factory premises which also had accommodation facility for some staff. Our factory was located in a vast area with trees and foliage and it’s quite nice during the time of the southwest monsoon. From the window of my cabin in the shop floor as well as my bachelor quarters I could see green all the way till far away.

It was during July in 1984 the monsoon rains were at its peak and it was quite moist and cool outside. It was also the time for some snakes to enter the boiler room and curl around the boiler to its length to feel the warmth and be comfortable. One night at about 3.30 am the boiler operator along with

another 2 staff came to my quarters and told me about what he had seen a few minutes earlier. At about 1 am the operator had climbed to the top of the boiler to note the readings of the pressure of fuel injected, temperature inside the boiler and the indirect heat on the thermic fluid which take the heat to the ovens and when he was getting down the iron ladder from the top he noticed a cobra that was coiled and was ready to strike and it lay between the foot of the ladder and the boiler. The operator was petrified and climbed a few rungs up. The cobra remained in that place, the operator also remained on the top of the ladder. Since the operator had not returned back to the maintenance office another 2 from the department went in search of him. They saw the petrified operator sitting on the top rung of the ladder and the cobra that was actually enjoying the warmth having escaped from the torrential rain finding refuge near the boiler. They chased the cobra away and the operator climbed down to safety and together they all directly came to my quarters to narrate the incident.

I listened to their predicament and asked them how they wanted to address the issue? Their answer was quite plain; they wanted a pair of shoes each and they were 6 of them. I said that's quite simple and would have it resolved soon. The next day morning I met our Superintendent and told him about the cobra incident and further added that the boiler area is so slippery and it would be in the best of interest to provide shoes to the 6 operators who were operating in that hazardous area. Our Superintendent went and represented this matter to the Plant head. The answer he got from him was very shocking to me. He said that if we buy shoes for the 6 workmen all the other 600 workmen would also ask and we are not interested in providing shoes to all. Let them manage. This is a one off incident where a cobra had come and such an incident might not happen in future. I was not convinced and so I went to the plant head and represented the same incident to him and requested him to consider getting shoes for those operators. He told me to buzz off and warned me that I would lose my job if I persisted on hankering for the shoes.

I conveyed this matter to the operators. They were very unhappy. They felt that I had not made a serious and sincere attempt after all it doesn't cost much to

get 6 pairs of shoes. It started reflecting on their work. The duration of breakdowns became more and I was cutting a sorry figure to the production department. It reached the ears of the plant Manager and he reprimanded me for running a sloppy department. It was a paradoxical situation for me. For no fault of mine I was sandwiched between the Management and the workers. Neither relented but I thought that accidents should not teach us about safety. Prevention is better than cure. I thought about it for a long time over the weekend and this is what I reflected upon - The workmen needed something for their safety, not for showing off the shoes to anyone. Anyone who works with heavy machinery in a hazardous area should definitely be entitled to wear safety shoes as shoes protect the feet and provides protection from electrical risks, slipping because of oil spills. With snakes around it is even more important to wear shoes. When the head of the company did not comprehend the concerns from the other man's perspective and did not exhibit proper empathy and consideration, I was beginning to think of leaving the job if it came to that. The matter then got resolved in my head. The next day I took the 6 workmen to a shoe shop and got them shoes and socks. They were very happy but went on to tell other workmen that I got it for them. This information reached the ears of the Plant Manager who called me to his cabin, gave me a nice dressing down and told me that I was fired.

I could not believe my ears. I requested him to be more understanding but he had made up his mind. He told me to leave the place in a week's time. At that point of time even I had made up my mind, that is not to go for employment in the future but to become an entrepreneur. Today, as I reflect it's an act of Spirituality that I had executed. Living life on your own terms with your own highest ideals with a wide open heart and a well developed mind as I executed my choice of doing the right thing of buying the shoes, that time.

I recall Mahatria saying

Change the changeable

Accept the unchangeable and

Remove yourself from the unacceptable

I took the train to Madras with a clear mind after a week since I could have never been with the unacceptable. To start with I was working as an electrical engineer and doubling up as an electrician too that time since I was fairly good with my hands and I could not afford overheads!! My first billing was Rs 250. Thirty four years later as I look back I have done electrical/turnkey interior projects for most of the big companies in Chennai and many works pan India. Incidentally the interior of Alma Mater was also done by our company. Since then I have been associated with Mahatria and have been living a service oriented life filled with success, happiness, peace and bliss. As Mahatria says, "God upsets your plans so that He could execute His. His plans are always better. It indeed was in my case.

P.S: A few months on my leaving my job in the factory the factory inspector had visited the Works and made it compulsory that all the workmen wear shoes – not for just the 6 but for all the 600. It had cost my job then but I had earned the love and respect of the people in the shop floor.