"Continuous self-improvement"- 12 May 2015.

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Anil joined the company at a young age. He was the youngest executive and was doing well. Many were jealous of him. But he was soon beginning to realise his limitations. He was assigned the job of marketing and sales which he trying his best to cope with. However, he knew that it was not his field of liking as he had been quite an introvert in his school days. He may have become more open now but was still quite an introverted fellow. That is where he needed more skills he was beginning to worry about. He needed to communicate better with people, work on boosting his negotiating skills and consolidate his business network. He also needed to become more comfortable on stage doing public speaking and making his presentations more lively and full of fun. He was fairly competent according to his age. Yet, if he had to rise, he better gear up his learning.

Risabh, a bank officer, found himself refusing an offer of promotion due to the inherent weaknesses in his personality. He was extremely shy and anxious about meeting people and talking to them. If he took a promotion, the job would entail addressing meetings of his subordinates and that was a scary thought! He was socially anxious and fearful. He, in fact, avoided people as much as he could and only did what was absolutely essential. He would rather not take the promotion and be comfortable in his current niche than vice versa. What a peculiar situation! Generally people would be vying for a promotion and here was a man who was shying away from his due raise and in fact denying it!

For slightly older people, learning the latest technological advancements is quite a tedious proposition. Many of them have learnt only reluctantly the essentials and declined to improve upon those skills further. That holds true for me, too, personally! But where most old offices are being computerised, you see the staff struggling with the computer programmes of their company, many making terrible mistakes, many not knowing what is happening and many seeking the help of younger staffers who are certainly more efficient and quicker to pick up newer programmes. Keeping up with the times is becoming a major challenge as newer methods get evolved. So continuous skill development is part of the self-improvement agenda.

As awareness grows, the demands and expectations of the consumer also changes. You cannot fool the consumer, especially the ones who are aware of their rights and also know exactly what they want. Many times we see people selling their products without knowing the details of the product and hence lying or just saying whatever suits them.

These, of course, are the proper and modern ways of doing things. Times have changed and there is no alternative to acquiring newer skills, no matter the personal reluctance and difficulties. It is this aspect that needs to be handled correctly by managements. In fact, it is the need of the hour to have special training programmes for senior staffers to get them acquainted with modern technologies and make them useful to organisations.

Unfortunately, such an awareness is not visible in adequate proportions even in the corporate world where the stress is more on hiring younger people whose exposure to newer technologies is almost a given. This eliminates or negates the possibilities of older staff -- belonging to a generation earlier -- being used appropriately. When the managements reject older staffers in favour of younger lots, then they are only reducing their talent-pool. Older staffers are aware of the company traditions and history and also have the right bend of mind to understand the

organisation's needs. Their difficulty is in learning newer skills and facing up to newer challenges. If they are helped to come out of their fear syndrome, the older staffers, too, can be made very useful.

Older staffers, too, are needed to make themselves useful and wanted by the managements. That would ensure that they are wanted by the organisation for multiple utilities. Continuous skill-improvement, thus, is the only way for the older staffers and managements to ensure that a vast experience base is not wasted in the wilderness of newer technologies.

This is, of course, a challenging task. Skill-improvement programmes require some money and quite a lot of purposeful action in training. Managements would be needed to spend quite a bit of their energies in evolving skill-improvement programmes. That may not require much money, but would need a goal-oriented vision.