

Need to follow human leaders and not machines : Crishna

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“In today's world, we need to follow human leaders rather than machines or computers. For practical reasons, in certain issues we have to work with and for other people; our evolutionary past has proved an equation between personal relationships and survival. Deeply essential human abilities of empathy, social sensitivity, collaborating and negotiating help us to make important decisions in situations when goals are changed” implied Vijay Crishna during his lecture on leadership : Leading from Behind, recently delivered at The International Centre Goa. The programme was part of the ICG Lecture Series by Eminent Persons initiated by The International Centre Goa.

Crishna, executive director of Lawkim Motors Group (Godrej & Boyce Mfg. Co. Ltd.) elaborated further “a few years ago, I read this extraordinary story of an expedition an explorer had led to Antarctica over a century ago. The story was of Sir Ernest Shackleton, a man ‘who failed in the every objective that he set himself in life to’; and yet when he was supremely tested, beyond all known levels of challenge and adversity, he came up trumps and inspired the people with him to work together as a team to survive all the hurdles that came into their way”, he said as he narrated with the help of original expedition maps, photographs and videos.

“Nothing in our comfortable world prepares us for Antarctica. For centuries it has been the least understood place on earth and even today it is just more extreme; and its remoteness makes it so sensitive” explained the mountaineer and member of the prestigious Himalayan Club, having himself visited the cold continent in 2012. “The early 1900's was an age of the greatest rivalries in polar exploration. In 1914, Sir Ernest Shackleton embarked on an ambitious expedition in which he endeavoured to walk across an uncharted Antarctica for the first time. Sir Shackleton was a young merchant marine officer, an experienced master mariner and whose crucial decisions won him both; fame and a knighthood. For the expedition, he personally hand-picked a team of Antarctic veterans; among them a navigator, a photographer, Cambridge scientists, and interestingly he also chose a banjo player whose music was to keep the team in top spirit. He made no difference between officers and sailors; and on his ship everyone; irrespective of position, had to do everything including washing the decks”.

Within few days of the expedition, his ship 'The Endurance' hit ice. Yet he never showed disappointment to his crew, rather he shifted his original objective from going to the pole to ensuring a safe return for his men. Another key change came nine months into the expedition, when the ship sank, and the one chance to sail away was gone. Yet he did not show any shock, rather he showed calmness and kept his men positive and inspired, by having kept their minds occupied and on the job all the time.

Sir Shackleton made crucial decisions to overcome near life and death situations that kept emerging and changing at every moment. His conduct during those two years in the wilderness, far from any external influence was outstanding. He related to his men and he moulded them as a team to face the most horrendous conditions on earth. It was commendable that in an era with no technology and proper information, these brave men stayed alive first for 14 months, then crossed the worst waters in the world in winter; and that too in a 23 foot boat; then walked across a treacherous unmapped island. Despite all the odds, Shackleton brought all his men back home alive. This story still ranks as the greatest adventure story ever told and the greatest survival story of them all” Crishna exclaimed.

“It was only when South Georgia was being mapped for the first time in the 1950's; decades after his death, did people begin to realize how extraordinary Shackleton's expedition had been. It is noteworthy that today this incredible story is a Harvard University case book study and his courage, heroism and

leadership has even won him the admiration of the commander of Apollo 13 mission and founders of various Wall Street investor funds” Crishna concluded.

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