

CHAPTER 10

A UNIQUE MANAGEMENT
BLEND



Nanik in his office at Nariman Point.





Everyone dreams of success, yet only a few make it to the top. What is it that sets Nanik Rupani apart from the rest? What is his management *mantra* that can provide an insight to upcoming businessmen?

A Six-Step Formula to Success

Looking back on his years and accomplishments, Nanik discerns a pattern — based on which he offers a six-step formula to success:

1. Dream
2. Think
3. Plan
4. Organize
5. Implement
6. Supervise

“Everyone dreams, but for many, dreams are not fired by the power of faith and perseverance on the part of the dreamer, so they fail to take off; and eventually wither and die,” Nanik states. His heart has always been brimming with dreams. Most of them have taken wing because he propelled them with unwavering determination and guided them with vision until they reached their destination.

Nanik asserts: “A person is not poor if he has no money, but is certainly so if he has no dreams. Dreams give you the freedom to envision just about anything you wish for. In dreamland there are no barriers, no obstacles — your mind and imagination can stretch even to the stars. To have the freedom to dream is an exhilarating feeling that enthuses and encourages. But dreams are simply starting points. For example: Humans have long dreamt of flying, but it was the Wright brothers who persevered in the face of heavy odds until they realized their dream. Since then, man has walked on the moon; now he even dreams of sending the first manned mission to Mars; we know it’s just a matter of time before this dream becomes a reality!

“Coming back to my early years, I would dream of being at the helm of my own company. I dared to dream even though I was a college dropout. Oh, I was labeled a dreamer by my family, accused of building castles in the air, as it were, of being hopelessly detached from the harsh realities on the ground. A lot of displeasure and ridicule was heaped on me when I announced my intention to leave India for a job in West Africa. Though this brought me intense heartache, I knew I had to pursue my dream, even if it meant starting my career in Ghana as a low-rung employee in a big company. Far away from the comforts of home, in a foreign land and culture, in rocky professional terrain, it was

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easy to let disillusionment creep in and shatter my dreams. But they were made of a different substance; they were never meant to fill in empty spaces of my time, they were never meant to be a crutch or a prop to my ego. I fervently believed in their power to materialize, even when no one else believed them; I *knew* it was my destiny to fulfill them!

“Having discovered your dream, chisel it. Work as a sculptor who has a chunk of marble before him, and in his mind he beholds his finished creation. As you chip away the rough edges of absurdity and impracticality in your dream, you will see the contours of your goal emerging, slowly but surely. For example, it is extremely pleasurable to dream about being the richest man in the world, but,” Nanik chuckles, “that could be overshooting the boundaries of practicality. Chiseling this particular dream would mean realizing that while you may not become the richest, you can definitely become rich! Now your dream becomes your goal, one worthy of time and pursuit.

“Let the dream illuminate the roadway leading to your goal. Contemplate the path that must be taken. Understand the practical aspects of your journey. Familiarize yourself with the terrain, take time to study and understand the nature of possible impediments along the way. Realize that all impediments are surmountable, every problem comes with a solution — your job is to find that solution. Some problems may seem very daunting and even after a lengthy search, may not yield readily to a solution. But never give up! Do not give ear to people who say it is impossible. Look at every outstanding figure in history, and what do you find? — All of them dreamt the seemingly impossible, and with faith, tirelessly worked towards their destiny.

“Put everything down on paper. Define it as clearly as

you can”, is Nanik’s counsel. The dream thus migrates into the planning stage. Nanik believes fervently in *macro* as well as *micro* planning. “Macro planning involves large-scale and long-term activities like bidding for projects, expanding market share, collaborating with other companies, etc. These have to be done keeping in mind the current status of resources like networks and infrastructure. For example, one may want to be the Indian distributor for a leading MNC, but before that he should take the necessary steps that would qualify him to be a capable distributor.”

“Micro planning means strategizing and structuring activities around targets, namely, working out the minute details. In my case, my macro plan was to earn enough to live a comfortable life and then devote a lot of time to social activities. The micro plan was to set up profitable businesses which I did with Enkay, Neutron, Adino and the newly formed Architectural Audio,” he explains.

Nanik emphasizes the need for perseverance in planning, which should give birth to effective organization. The perfect plan on paper can go awry and unforeseen problems are bound to crop up. In such situations Nanik’s motto is — *Never Give Up*. “Continuity is the most essential factor. Something that looks difficult now will actually turn out to be very simple later on. Patience and perseverance are inseparable virtues. Keep chipping away, keep trying, and the results are bound to be positive,” he assures with full conviction.

It is a widely held conviction that failure is the first stepping-stone to success. Nanik has always drawn immense inspiration from the story of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln experienced many hurdles before he stepped into the White House as President. Success finally embraced him when he

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ascended to the highest office in 1860 as the President of USA. Obviously, *try, try again and never give up* was his maxim.

“When it comes to big business ventures with high financial stakes, a detailed blueprint is critical.” Nanik cautions against rushing into something based on a mere whim. To state the obvious, the bigger the venture, the more laborious the spadework becomes, and nothing can be left to chance. All Nanik’s ventures have the hallmark of his management style — thorough groundwork, consultation with experts, confidence building within the team, advance projection of results, and setting realistic targets. Everything is worked backwards so that most of the creases can be smoothed before the process gets underway. Nanik likes to look at the bigger picture and work out the details with precision.

“Pay utmost attention to building a reliable team. I simply must restate this point: Putting together a splendid team — one that will work with you towards the destination — is your responsibility. When I started off, I handpicked a small but dedicated team. With our combined efforts, the business grew and the team grew and expanded with it. Teambuilding is always an ongoing process — the team needs to be trained, conditioned and inspired to implement the plan. As the Chairman, I communicate my vision to my teammates and thereby make my vision *theirs*. Next, I delegate powers to them to enable them to implement *our* plan. This is an art which requires time, patience and understanding.

“I must add that I never look upon my colleagues and staff as means to an end. They are not robots, and I cannot and do not feed my wishes to them. I aim for a good relationship with all who work with me. Each member of

my team is a unique person with the ability to make valuable contributions to the company, so I strive to treat them with dignity and fairness. In motivating my business partners, colleagues and staff, I take into account the makeup and ambitions of each individual. At the same time, I also impress upon them the vital need for cohesion under all circumstances.”

Motivation, he feels, is the lifeblood of any successful endeavour. “The motivation of your team depends upon how good a leader you are. *Ek aur ek gyarah hote hai* (one and one make eleven) and this is how the team should be motivated.”

In difficult situations, Nanik always remains positive and he is hardly known to lose his composure. “With power comes a corresponding degree of responsibility. I have to keep in mind the welfare of not just the business, but also of my employees and by extension their families. Even in trying circumstances, I never make my team members feel as if they are part of a losing proposition. Again we can learn from history. Smaller armies have defeated larger armies because they have been led by brilliant generals. Take the example of a dashing Greek prince in his early twenties, who set out with nothing more than a burning ambition and a relatively small army to conquer the known world. How did Alexander the Great motivate his armies to battle enemy forces that were vastly superior in numbers? Alexander was a brilliant strategist. For example, he perfected the art of the phalanx¹ formation, which gave his army an unbeatable edge in the battlefield. Similarly, those at the corporate helm should always inspire confidence in the ones they lead in every way they possibly can.”

1. Phalanx — formation of infantry carrying overlapping shields.

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Nanik believes implicitly in transparency within the organization. “Transparency fosters an atmosphere of trust in an organization. When there is transparency, team members feel free to come up with good ideas. Good ideas are the mother of revolutions. Transparency also means keeping your goals clear and visible. Is there any harm in saying that you want your company to be number one? Success, as I so often point out, is not the monopoly of a few people — it is every human’s birthright. Transparency eliminates deceit, allowing truth to be seen — this implies that you don’t promise anyone the moon. Your track record should be accessible to all. Let people form their opinions based on what you have done. Don’t try to project a false image because sooner or later, the truth will be out in the open.”

Every company comes across people who are not interested in contributing to the organization’s growth, who may even seek to promote their careers in a self-centered and fraudulent way. How does Nanik deal with such people? His policy has been to avoid messy public confrontations. He calls the person for a private meeting and explains to him that his actions are against the philosophy of the company. The parting of ways should be cordial and done in a cool, professional manner.

“Once the project has left the harbour and is sailing smoothly towards its destination, the captain still needs to supervise. At this stage, other projects can be planned, executed and supervised simultaneously. Today, I have delegated the day-to-day running of the companies to my trusted team members. They have comfortable leeway to operate, and they come to me only when a major decision has to be taken,” says Nanik.

The Law of *Karma*

Integral to Nanik's management philosophy is the concept of *karma*. "One of my cherished principles is taken from the *Bhagavad Gita* which says: One must do one's *karma* to the best of one's ability and not worry about the gains, as the result lies in the Lord's hands alone," he elucidates.

Consistency and continuity are the pillars on which Nanik has founded his ideas. He does not like to leave things half done. "Everything must be accomplished to perfection in accordance with one's capabilities and strengths. Sometimes the results may go against the projections because certain external factors are beyond one's control. Never mind. Your *karma* is to go on. If you keep doing good, something good will definitely come back to you," he believes.

"In this connection, I often remind myself of the years when I worked as a door-to-door salesman. There were umpteen occasions when I could not sell my product, to my dismay. Still, I refused to give up hope. I went on trying, contacting the concerned person again and again. All I wanted was to be given a chance to prove myself. And whenever I got that chance, I gave it my best shot," recalls Nanik.

Timeless Principles

Observing his Japanese business partners at close quarters for long has left a lasting impression on Nanik's mind and his style of functioning. He keeps in mind the principle of *kaizen*, or continuous improvement — an on-going process

to do better and better. Another principle revolves around building permanent and long-lasting relationships to bring a humane touch to professionalism. Doing business with the Japanese has also taught Nanik the importance of teamwork. Teamwork, in Japan, is defined as effectively delegating responsibilities for collective effort. The Japanese go to such an extent that no one takes individual credit for himself, and this trait has rubbed off on Nanik.

Indian management has grown by leaps and bounds because of the positive effects of globalization. “Earlier, there was a nonchalant *chalta hai* (it’s okay) attitude prevailing due to lack of competition. The liberalization and globalization process introduced world-class players who had their management philosophies firmly in place, whose products could far outweigh local products on the quality scale and who valued customer service. Thus we were forced to introspect and change for the better.”

Nanik is full of praise for traditional Indian management practices as well. He points out the well-run management systems of some family-controlled Indian businesses that have successfully steered their companies, modernizing and upgrading along the way, as per the requirements. Indian management has its own unique style because it places a lot of emphasis on long-term relationships. It is much closer in concept to that of Japan.

What else shapes the mind and course of Nanik Rupani? He answers: “The ancient treatise, *Kautilya’s Arthashastra*. Today we talk about corporate governance. I think *Kautilya’s Arthashastra* has already laid down the ground rules on financial management, taxation, social work, resource creation, etc. *Chanakya Neeti* has covered all these subjects exhaustively. This includes the concepts of *saam, daam, dand,*

bhed i.e. negotiation, money, punishment and overthrow. Everybody thinks this is an American philosophy, and so it finds wide acceptance immediately. But in reality, it is *Chanakya Neeti*. Another concept, CSR — Corporate Social Responsibility, this supposedly American management term, has been preached in India since a long time. The Tatas, I feel, have been the pioneers in CSR.”

The philosophy of accepting change too is Indian, Nanik points out. “Change or perish. *Parivartan hi sansar ka niyam hai*. This has been taught to us for generations. If you look at the history of corporate houses, only those with strong R&D departments have been successful.” Nanik believes that India is a storehouse of knowledge, but we don’t recognize this till it is acknowledged and praised by the West. There is an urgent need for Indians to reconnect to and research our ancient knowledge.

Nanik feels that Indians may be very intelligent and multifaceted but are not always good team players. “I always tell everybody that we should drop the terms *I* and *me*. It should always be *we* and *us*. ‘*I*’ has limitations, but ‘*we*’ is unlimited. My mother taught me *Daya dharm ka mool hai, paap mool abhimaan*, which means in part — pride will always lead to downfall. I feel this is a great lesson when it comes to the effective functioning of a team.”

Nanik attaches a lot of importance to information and know-how. He believes that professional standing depends on your knowledge. This applies to the product, administration and competitors. “Today, all possible knowledge is available practically at our fingertips. So, one must keep learning for continuous improvement and to stay ahead. I have always been a student, constantly learning from others. The end of the road for yourself and your

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business can be in sight the day you start thinking that you know everything,” he cautions.

Does Nanik ever feel he could have done differently in business? “Yes, I do. When I reflect on my decision to enter trading and not manufacturing, I honestly think I made an error of judgment. But my finances were limited then. I was still recovering from two major business setbacks after my return from Africa, which derailed some of my plans. I rearranged my priorities to make money quickly in order to tide over the crisis. Trading offered that opportunity, so I had to take it. Also, I had my goals set. My goal was not to be a multi-billionaire. I had wanted to make enough so that I could then focus on my social activities. Manufacturing is a tough, on-going activity and I wouldn’t have been able to give enough time and effort to manufacturing.” Besides, as he often points out, the lean periods in trading gave him the time and opportunity to set up Priyadarshni Academy.

Nanik, in every way, lives and practices what he preaches, as all his colleagues, family, employees, friends and associates will vouch for.