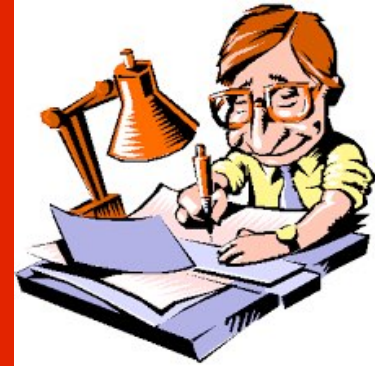


THE WISDOM OF BEES

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OVERVIEW

It seemed to me that the bees were working on the very same kinds of problems we are trying to solve. How can large, diverse groups work together harmoniously and productively? Perhaps we could take

what the bees do so well and apply it to our institutions."

When Michael O'Malley first took up beekeeping, he thought it would be a nice hobby to share with his ten-year-old son. But as he started to observe these industrious insects, he noticed that they do a lot more than just make honey. Bees not only work together to achieve a common goal but, in the process, create a highly coordinated, efficient, and remarkably productive organization. The hive behaved like a miniature but incredibly successful business.

O'Malley also realized that bees can actually teach managers a lot about how to run their organizations. He identified twenty-five powerful insights, such as:

- * **Distribute authority:** the queen bee delegates relentlessly, and worker bees make daily decisions based on local cues and requirements.
- * **Keep it simple:** bees exchange only relevant information, operate under clear standards, and use straightforward measures and feedback to guide their actions.
- * **Protect the future:** when a lucrative vein of nectar is discovered, the entire colony doesn't rush off to mine it, no matter how enriching the short-term benefits.

Blending practical advice with interesting facts about the hive, *The Wisdom of Bees* is a useful and entertaining guide for any manager looking to get the most out of his or her organization.

INTRODUCTION

In Michael O'Malley's book (THE WISDOM OF BEES), the author admonishes organizational leaders and stakeholders to take a microscopic view of how honeybees work in their colony to ensure a protected, secured and sustainable future for honey production and take a cue from it. He outlines 25 lessons worth emulating from the wisdom of bees to ensure an effective and efficient operation of colony (organizations).

LESSON 1: Protecting the future

The bee in its activities, consider future consequences. Naturally, the bee is created with the mindset of what is available today, won't be tomorrow. Bees don't mine all the nectars out of productive flowers no matter how tempting it may be. To ensure continuous flowing of the nectar discovered, continuity in the production of their honey and continual survival of the colony, the bee will rather reallocate resources (pollens from the ripe flower) in an already located productive site. By the time the newly discovered enriching flower is mined out, the reallocated one will be ready for use. This means that bees anticipate the future and make provisions for it. While harvesting, the bee will also be

“...bees give up immediate reward for a long-term adaptation...”

on the hunt for a very productive site for the reallocation of some of the pollen (resources) from the harvested flower though in competition with birds and other insects for the same nectar. Bees give up immediate reward for a long-term adaptation and also to

avoid all-or-none scenarios at all cost. Business and institutional leaders should develop the habit of allocating a given percentage of the available income into researches and investments. They should be heavily involved in researching into the “next good thing” and the best way to ensure the survival of their organizations.

LESSON 2: Keeping the energy level up

In gathering their food source (nectar), bees do not only concentrate on the sugar concentration but also take in consideration the nearness of the harvest to the hive. Bees know that identifying the food source is one thing, getting it to the hive is another. So given two or more identical food source in different location, the bee will harvest the one closest to the hive so as to conserve its energy and also maintain their level of productivity. In relating to business and institutions ethics, the author mentions three “wrong” practice by some organizations:



First, work rules-“often assign the most difficult or heaviest work to the greenest member of the institution” Second, many organizations make their budgets and indicate an increase in their revenue without considering factors like changes in the staff level and operational processes.



Mostly, an anticipated or budgeted increase in revenue will only mean much input will be required of the workers. But the question is, are these workers well equipped and much prepared for the next level of expectations in operations? Depending on the same workforce with the same level of capabilities, competencies, and skills, will only yield the same output or even less as compared to previous years if the energy level in the workforce is not maintained or upgraded. Finally, overtaking workers till they become physically and emotionally exhausted thinking the workers are replaceable. Overburdening workers may seem profitable in the short-run but the consequences in the long-run may be overwhelming.

“Preserve the future ability of the company to perform”

Organizational leaders should be able to refresh and conserve the physical human resources at any given time so as to it harness when needed. To do this, the author suggested giving sabbaticals, special assignments, seminars with interesting colleagues, periodic restorative breaks, provision of independent study and the likes may go a long way to help.

LESSON 3: Let merits be your guide

as drones. Drones are kept in the colony for one reason only-to mate with the queen. This mandate of the drones is a suicidal, yet they do it in serious competition with other male counterparts in a wild flight chase after the queen when the time is due. Drone who succeed in the chase, die instantly after mating the queen and the rest retune to the hive and they become expendable during summer without hesitation, since they do not contribute to the production of the honey. Bees are performance-centred and instinctively, the efficiency and

Bees are result oriented creatures. The correlation between the survival of the bee and its benefit to the colony is direct, especially the male bee also know



longevity of the colony comes first in all that they do. Even aging queen and worker bees are not spared when deemed nonproductive after two to three years and are swiftly replaced with young and productive bees. Favouritism and compassion do not have a place in the bees’s decision-making table when faced with efficiency and survival of the colony. organizational leaders should take a cue from the bee’s intrinsic nature by rewarding, maintaining and firing base on performance and not favouritism, ties and cronyism.

LESSON 4: Promote community, sanction self-interest

what they gain in an organization and what organizations gets from their efforts. Egocentrism, no mater how its been looked at, is something that exist with humanity. It cannot be eradicated, but can be managed. The desire for worker bees to reproduce is inherent though responding to this desire do not largely serve the common good of the colony as it only result in an increased number of drones with one only one mandate-to mate. This inherent feeling of the worker bees cannot be destroyed but the outcome is properly managed for the common good of the colony. A portion of the worker bees function as security workers and as part of their functions they control the number of drones in the colony by destroying eggs laid by worker bees with functional ovaries.

organizational leaders can properly manage regulate self-centred actions among workers by setting a well defined and achievable short-term goals alongside consequences for noncompliance and also be ready for swift

implementation of those consequences. Again, though the queen bee plays her part as a leader by releasing chemicals meant to aid in the worker bees’s resistance to reproduce, she still needed the help of her subjects for proper management of an ever-present destructive situation. Managers should be able to create an organizational culture that promotes a high sense of belongingness to the point that workers will be ready to frown on any self-centred action of coworkers for the common good of the organization. To do that, teamwork and collaborations should be highly practiced. No one person

should be allowed to execute a given task and a high sense of inter-dependancy among workers and department should be established.



“...everything is done for the good of the whole, and the community is central to the operations of the colony.”

LESSON 5: Distribute authority

out all the decision and perform all this, delegation of authoring is very By means of an airborne chemical face contacts, starting with the pass down informations to the very task. Besides, bees on the site, by experience can, be more informed evaluate and take corrective action distributes authority in an practice the principle of delegation.

“...bureaucratic controls that can stifle action and discourage employee initiative”

The size of a given colony in usually big and condense in relation to the size of one bee. It will be very tedious if not possible for the queen to carry the task by herself. In view of critical in honey bees daily life. transmission and or face-to-closet bee, the queen is able to floor bee to carry out a given virtue of their positions and and well equipped to assess, than the queen. To be able to organizations, leaders should Doing so brings about

innovation, creativity, empowerment on the part of workers as they aspire to take the leadership roles. It also gives leaders ample time to concentrate on other vital task. Distributing authority do not only get the job done on time but brings about inclusiveness in organizations and definitely promotes community. It is worth noting that for this to work effectively, leaders should provide the right resources needed t get the job done, avail themselves for assistantship and support, and taking feedbacks developments of the sign task.

LESSON 6: Make good enough decisions

Bees take decisions by brainstorming a large number of scout bees. Bees do not treat incomplete information as insufficient when it

comes to decision making. Though decisions are taken by considering so may option and may be in a rush, they still are able to make “almost” perfect decisions due to the unbiased nature of the bee in the evaluation process.

“Bee” advise

Corporate practice



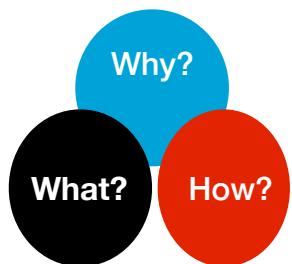
LESSON 7: Order and innovate through fuzzy constants

Constants could mean anything that is very pivotal in an organizational culture. Something that connotes meaning and influences

people in a given community. The activities of the bee is filled with constants. It is a form of values and standards that affects their way of life.

“Constants keep the bee from literally losing their ways.”
Organizations should not be run haphazardly. There should be that core value serving as a guide in the actions

of workers.
“Meaningful progress and creativity requires fixed points of reference...”



Constants of a consulting firm

LESSON 8: Stay in touch

Staying in touch mean not loosing connection and ensuring that relationships are not disconnected no matter what. Effective communication is a key ingredient in the performance of this function. Bees stay in touch by effectively and constantly communicating among themselves the external and internal affairs for a corrective action. By this means, bees are able to know when and when not to deploy more foragers for nectar gathering. organizations that stays in touch, never loses feedbacks which is a vital element for corrective actions. The author outlines five(5) checklists for a good feedback. It should be a able influence managers for the following corrective actions:

**LESSON 9: Keep it simple**

The author points out three ways by which honeybees keep their activities simple that organization can learn from though not exhaustive. First, informations exchange among bees is relevant. Over elaborations has no place in the hive as they are time bound. To keep it simple, honeybees ensures that informations are kept clear, brief and easy to understand by all. Honeybees cannot afford a breakdown in the communication channel. Second, bees have clear standards that regulate their behaviour. These standard serves as a point of reference that strictly answers - the how, why and what. Finally, bees are extremely careful in expending their resources. Bees do not entertain “cross-train” foragers and receivers for switching of tasks when need, they rather take from a reserve workforce so as to save time and avoid training cost. organizations be out of lots of trouble if feedbacks are on point, standards are clearly set and solutions made simple.

“The best plans often are the simplest, involving clear, direct and uncomplicated communications and actions”

LESSON 10: Find your zeitgebers

Finding your zeitgeber is finding the opportune moment to act. The right time and moment that is advantageous for a given action. Honeybees organize their harvest time in a way that coincide with that time or periods of the year where nectar and pollen are in abundance. They organize their activities in a way that best rewards them. Organizations should know their strengths and weakness in relations to

“Honey bees have daily rhythms that connect their activities to the environment in ways that yields functional advantages”

their short -term and long-term goals. Business activities should be organized in a way the prepares all their energies towards that opportune time to act. That moment that they are most likely to succeed when acted. The *when*, *what* and *why* should always be a key to finding zeitbegers. Organizations should know *when* to produce *what* and *why* it should be produced by considering the time and season of the year and the readiness of available resources.

LESSON 11: Design “flexigid” systems

A breakdown in the production process or the activities of the bee is disastrous. Consequently, bees have created a system of operations to be somewhat “flexigid.” A system of operation that is flexible and rigid at the same time. It is rigid because division of labour is purely and clearly practiced as each bee is inherently assigned to a given task. But honeybees has evolve and one way of retaining flexibility in a rigid system of operation is by having some other bees (especially foragers) perform other task when need. Foragers per their maturity level and experience can perform the function of nurse bees if needed. This kind of flexibility is very applicable in a rigid environments if organization would have manager to be willing to fill the gab of short falls in human resource when need temporarily. *“Organizational responsiveness is best fulfilled by staffing plans and deployments that can be stretched and adapted as conditions warrant.”*



LESSON 12: Preserve a positive workplace

Literally, honeybees preserve a positive workplace by creating a healthy hive. Bees avoid the spread of diseases by means of the following:

following:

- 1. *“...bees detect, uncap and discard infected brood...”*
- 2. *“Bees have no difficulty in requesting for assistance when afflicted...”*
- 3. *“Most sick and infected bees have the good sense to drag themselves from the hive before they become nuisance to the colony”*

The author linked this to ridding of negativity and cynicism in organizations. Managers should create, protect and preserve a positive workforce by being able to detect, uncover and removing any worker with negative infectious behaviour or attitude. organizations should create a healthy corporate environment that promotes optimism in every sector.

LESSON 13: Keep your balance

The temperature of the hive, according to the author is kept relatively constant at about ninety-three degrees Fahrenheit. The question is how are they able to maintain the balance in temperature despite the ever changing environmental weather conditions.

Honeybees by way of reproduction differ in terms of patrimonies. They are of the same mother (queen) but different fathers thereby differ in behaviour and for that matter different sensitivity to climate changes. For this reason, the honeybees is able to keep the balance in temperature of the hive by altering it behaviour in response to climatic changes.



Similarly, organizations will do better in all conditions if it diversify its workforce. Hiring liked-minded personnel will tilt the business in one direction and suffer when the tide turns to a different direction. To keep the balance in the workforce, organizations should also consider people who are naturally inquisitive and have varied interest.

“Reliable and steady organizational activity depends on the smart merger of diverse talents and ideas”

LESSON 14: Discover and use the specialized talents of your employees

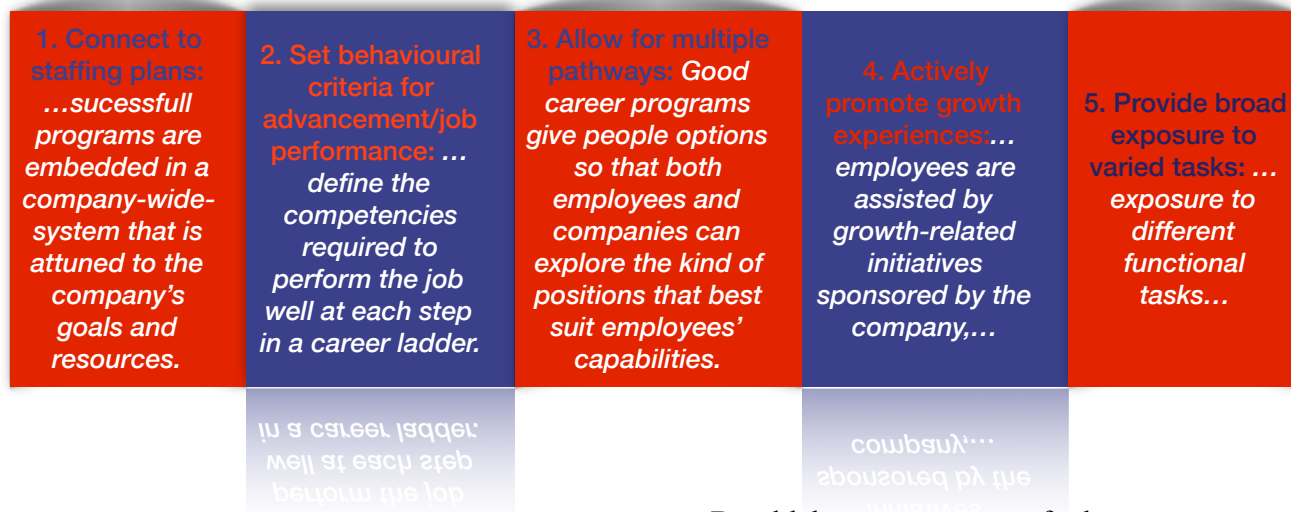
Division of labour promote efficiency only

if it is done on the merits of special talents, strengths and abilities of the workforce. Leaders will get the bet out of their followers if they will carefully and properly identify the talents, skills, abilities, preferences and tolerance, strengths and weakness of their followers and assign tasks to match these qualities of the followers. Some individuals do perform really well in a given talent mix, others don't. Some perform better when alone, others become better off when paired with a given individual skill. Leaders should discover these special talents in their workforce, identify what they lack and concentrate on getting that skill hired, determine the best mix of talents for a given task so as to get the best outcome. Honeybees do this perfectly at all times. They naturally have the ability to deploy the right number of bees a the right time for the right task. They have the workforce for almost every task for every conditions thereby getting the best outcome of almost all their undertakings.



LESSON 15: Deploy your team

Deploying your team in this contest, from the authors point of view is to bring or prepare your team into effective action. It is more of empowering the workforce for various task for the good go the organization. Honeybees do this perfectly in the colony at each stage of the bees' life. Bees at the various developmental stage, are properly drilled to take up various task for individual empowerment and for the good of the colony as they are given **“root”** when young, and **“wings”** when grown. Taking lead from bees, the author referred to Stellar development programs with the following components:



LESSON 16: Outcompete by outfinessing rivals

Bumblebees are one of the greatest rivals to honeybee when it comes to the world of bees. The honeybee has over

the years has been able to outplay the bumblebee interns of the search and the supply of nectars and pollen due an effective and efficient application of a given technique or system. Honeybees always get the competitive advantage over the bumblebee by forcing the bumblebee to alter its foraging behaviour in order to reduce its fitness to compete. The author listed seven lessons for corporate leaders to emulate and to have competitive advantage over their rivals:

- # 1 **Set clear goals and direction:** Honeybees know exactly what needs to be done and when to do it.
- # 2 **Define assignments and accountability:** Honeybees have mastered division of labour and bees are assigned specific task to execute.
- # 3 **Practice active discovery:** Scout bees never stop searching for new bounty through exploratory flights.
- # 4 **Encourage learning:** Honeybees' proficiency at being at the right place at the right time is partly due to their ability to associate the seasons with the type and locations of a given flower at the greatest yield.
- # 5 **Build effective team:** Honeybees spontaneously form dedicated groups with the know how for a given task as and when needed.
- # 6 **Leave some room for enterprise:** Honeybees allows for ingenuity among the various worker bees; as in the case of scout bees and recruits.
- # 7 **Empower others:** Honeybees highly practice decentralized form of decision making thereby allowing worker bees close to a given situation to immediate corrective action for the good go the colony.

LESSON 17: Prepare for leadership changes

Like any other organization, colonies will eventually fall without a queen (leader), so honeybees avoid this and its consequence by

preparing in advance a successor before the incumbent becomes out of date. Honeybees knows

that the colony cannot survive without a queen, so they start taking steps for a replacement while the hive is still in good shape. They do not wait till the existing queen starts to show signs of decline in its productivity. According to the author, the colony knows also that replacing a queen takes a long time (sixteen days for development, next six days

“...prevent costly voids in leadership by planning for successors well in advance of the obvious need.”

to reach sexual maturity and six weeks after matting for eggs laying). To avoid this, they start the transition ahead of time and in gradual manner so as not to have a queen-less (leaderless) colony at any point in time. This also ensures that there is no stoppage in production as continuity is ensured.



Managers should increasingly assign some of their core tasks to subordinates so as to equip them gradually for possible succession. This will create a whole “bank” of ever-ready take-overs and a leaderless situation will be a thing of the past. It is worth noting that getting a new queen can be done internally (natural process called “supercedure”) or externally (re-queening: normally done by the beekeeper).

LESSON 18: Bring in new blood for new life

Sometimes, the best and only way to save the colony is by “re-queening” (a situation where the beekeeper replaces a new queen into the

hive from outside). According to the author, the new queen has an estimated equal chance of being accepted or rejected. To increase the chance of acceptance of the external replacer, the beekeeper will have to cage the new queen to protect her from an instant attack, thereby giving her time to gradually settle in or may bring in an already mated queen. In either case, the incumbent queen should be removed from the hive in order not to confuse the bees. This act becomes a necessity when bringing in a new blood is the only means to save the colony.



In organizations, hiring externally for a given position can be as tricky and dangerous as re-queening and it might send out wrong signals to already existing workers as well as market segments and may create problems for the newly recruit’s acceptance. To increase the chances of acceptance, leaders should ensure that their actions are justified by hiring someone with the know how for whatever predicament that the organization is facing, and the existing workers do not have antidotes for, so that his or her contributions can be felt. Again, he or she should give recognition and respect the skill set of the existing workforce and be ready to be “a people” person kind of leader.

LESSON 19: Merge to make good organization better

A doomed colony is one that has little or no chance of a replacement queen. This can be caused by a

decline in the productively level of the already existing queen as a result of development of



certain traits in the colony such as, infirmity, uncleanliness, aggressiveness on the part of the bees. Adding blood from outside of the hive is meant to inject new traits and culture in the hive so as to correct complement and make better the colony. Some times, this act can go beyond just adding only a queen, rather and entire colony to form an entirely new and better one.

The author made it clear that merger, in most organizations becomes successful when the parties involve understands and accept the mutual benefits brought fort. Members of the various organizations must understands that they need each others piece (competencies and skill set) to augment theirs for an entirely new and a better piece. According to the author, for the beekeeper to facilitate the merger of the two different colonies, the scent of the two hives is gradually spread on the surface of a comb that will be placed in the receiver hive prior to the introduction the bees. This is to give both bees a fair scent in their new home thereby making each party feel welcomed.

“concentrate on combining companies where there is obvious mutual benefits”

LESSON 20: Divest to renew

Like every organization, the colony when formed, it's meant to split up at some point. A point where the number of bees turns to be more than what the hive can contain, a point where some of the worker bees become idle and redundant. The colony splits in almost equal half called swarm. The swarm splits from the old hive to form a new and independent colony with all the resources needed to function just like the old one. It goes with enough food (honey), worker bees (the young ones) and the old queen to ensure continuity. This is to point out that a colony do not split up until it has enough resource for the swarm to survive just like the old one. So it happens at the point when the colony has enough resources (honey, queen, worker bees) to share. When the split is done, the swarm holds no allegiance, whatsoever to the old hive. The swarm is completely on its own and operates independently.

organizations should take cue from the honeybees way of splitting up. It should be done when the company knows that having a branch will be more beneficial than to hold all in one. Owners and leaders should also make sure that the break is done at the time where there is enough resource to share. Finally, to allow for creativity and ingenuity of the part of the newly formed company, the parent company should allow a level of independence in operation on the part of the newly formed business.

“...when bees produce a swarm, the swarm is provisioned and set completely free”

LESSON 21: Handle your valuables with care

Pollen is everything in the hive. It is the source of life and the honeybee is handles it with much care. Having too much of it will affect storage space which may be need during winter; having too little may also affect

production in the near future as there may not be enough worker bees due to a break in pollen supply to feed broods or to hatch larvae. For this reason, the honeybee handles pollen with care. For proper management of this valuable item, honeybees take into consideration the following:

1. Set growth goals based on realities: *“...the availability of pollen based on existing flower sources and competitions, the maximum foraging force that can be deployed, capital limits such as storage space...”*

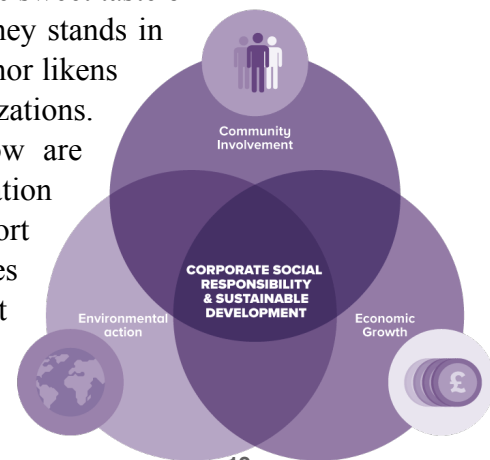
2. Bees do not regard all pollen(resource) to be of equal value: *“Honeybees...do not fool themselves into believing that pollen is pollen. ...higher quality pollen is preferred.”*

3. *“ The colony takes aggressive steps against severe shortages of pollen only as a last resort.”*

Organizational lessons learnt from the above are: First, organizational leaders should set realistic growth goals by considering possible competitors, available resources interns of money, effective and active workforce, storage space for raw materials and so forth to avoid the cost associated with over or under spending on valuable resources. Second, Managers should consider the source of every penny and channel it to the right part of operations. They should not assume that the consumption value of a currency equates its worth. The only source of income that organizations can fully depend on for operational activities is income earned. Third, during recession period, leaders should not be quick to fire, rather they should consider the cost associated with re-hiring when the recession is over and maintain a sizeable number of workforce who can be trusted to assume leadership roles as the organization maneuver the setback period. This will eventually empower these workers to take up leadership roles when the recession is over thereby becoming great assets to the organization.

LESSON 22: Do good by doing well

The benefits of honeybees to nature and mankind by virtue of going about its primary business is enormous. The very existence of mankind is dependant on the primary activities of the bee. Should bees seize to pollenate, the greater portion of mankind’s source food would seize. The author makes it clear that honeybee saves the world by performing its functions to a near 100%. From the production of honey to the provision of pollen which not only replenish harvested flowers but also starts the productions cycle for most of our food source. *“ Bees do what they do well and we benefit”*. From the sweet taste of honey on our lips through to medical and skin products, honeybees honey stands in the ingredients just by going about its business in a genuine way. The author likens this act and art of bees to that of corporate social responsibility of organizations. How are societies gaining from businesses in the communities? How are organizations giving back to the society? according to the writer, organization should intensify their social responsibilities in a form of grand and support in social developments. They should allow their managers and employees to be involved in volunteering projects and assisting in the management and running of nonprofit organizations. Most importantly, Organizations



should focus on producing high-quality product with the society in mind and not only the money to be generated.

LESSON 23: Treat yourself well

The honeybee naturally do have a well structured life that make them ever ready for action. Their way of life is structured in a way their well-being are naturally taken care of. The bee becomes busy during summer giving out all their might and strength to gather all that they will need during the winter time, then go on a “hibernation” the moment winter sets in. The bee is able to regain their strength and replenish all the energy used during the summer time as they relax and treat themselves well with the stored food in the hive during winter. This life-cycle of bees keeps them in good shape for the next summer unless they are interrupted by men. The lesson learnt here is that organizations should be structured in a way that human resources are treated well. Workers should be given timeouts in a form of vacations and trips;

provided with a well balanced meal at the cafeteria; have a workout centre with unlimited access to workers; give them health benefits; consider the workloads assigned to workers by not pushing all to them (especially the newly hired ones), give them a sense of purpose by creating a sense of care and belongingness and assigning a more realistic and achievable goals.



“...create environments that filter out unnecessary stresses”

LESSON 24: Create beautiful, functional spaces

The hexagonal shape of the bee’s comb is not just for beautification but also for a given purpose. The questions is, why not any other shape but hexagonal? This is so because the hexagonal shape serve a specific function for the bee’s honey production. According to the author, regular hexagon is one of the three perfect polygons that can fit a given surface without leaving a gap. So what better shape could the bee choose to store its honey?

In view of this, the author admonishes organizations not to just follow the crowd when it comes to setting up offices for work. It should not be done just because it looks good that way or because it saves apace, rather organizational set up should be made in a way to promotes, sells, educates and serves the core values, ethics, and culture of the organization. It should be made in that brings out the creativity of the workers. The physical settings of organizations should depict what the organization believes in. It should be able to influence workers behaviour and thinking level. What is the core values of your business? How can it be portrayed in the physical setting of the business?

“Design workplaces that inspire and fuel imagination”

LESSON 25: Give people something to care about

Have you ever wonder how much you mean to some people? Has it ever

occurred to you, that your absence creates a huge vacuum that no one can fill but you? No matter how little one may think of himself or herself, there comes a time, that their absence are felt. This normally happens when that individual did whatever he or she did genuinely. It happens when that individual simple went about doing what he does most with all that he or she has got without being distrusted by what others or the “world” threw at him or her. When we going about minding our business in the best of knowledge, we simple end giving those around us something to care about without knowing. The author in the last chapter urges each and everyone of us to make it psychologically worth showing up for work. We should do what we ought to do as workers in the best that we can and our unique pieces will fit to form an entirely new piece.

**“Make it
psychologically
worth showing
up for work”**

CONCLUSION

I will close the curtain on this book summary by sharing the author’s view of regrouping the lessons in this book into four competing demands that the honeybee must deal with, namely:

- Short-term versus long-term gains
- Individuality versus community
- Stability versus flexibility
- Similarity versus change

If we could also consider these and learn to know when to have more of what (ie: *the competing demands*), we would stand the chance of having a near to 100% efficiency in our operations just like the bees. However, I do not fully share his view the third point in lesson 21. In my view, sometimes hiring experts in crisis management to steer the affairs of the organization during recession and also downsizing the workforce to save the coffers of the business will be very much advantageous to the organization than to throw the fate of the business in hands of a few subordinates. That notwithstanding, leaders should consider the situation at hand as well as past experiences of the organization as far as crisis management is concern.

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