

Driving Change: Do It Now!

Sai Prasad Vishwanath

“We will get back to you.” These six words are the dreaded response in any interaction between a corporate and a not-for-profit institution. These six words have so many different meanings – “we cannot do this,” “not now,” “we are sorry for you” or “you are asking for too much.”

Truth be told, the corporate is well within its rights to say so. Each company has its own priorities, deadlines, and constraints. Within such limitations, a not-for-profit organisation pushes for a ‘community-driven’ vision that may or may not have a direct impact for the company. “We will get back to you” becomes a tool for many corporates to respond to this situation. They use it to move the mountain of change by a mere inch or in some cases, not at all. However, if there is one good thing that the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us, it is the simple truth that mountains of change can be moved overnight.

For years, I have heard the corporate world ramble about how “change takes its time,” “accommodations need to be made,” and “senior leadership is considering this seriously.” Other favourites are “we need to consult with our diverse stakeholders” and “we will evaluate and get back.” All these phrases come flowing in when the company has to accommodate a change or push inclusion.

Take for instance recruitment of Persons with Disabilities. Apart from a few pioneering firms, too many organisations operate from the comfort zone of these responses. Such a comfort zone unknowingly delays doing the right thing.

If you ask anyone for their honest opinion on how difficult it is to recruit without bias only on

the basis of skill and passion, I often wonder what the answers would be. As of today, the standard answer is that it is not easy. Yet I argue, by that logic, nothing is ever easy. However, when the country went into lockdown for 21 days last year, change came overnight. Zoom, Google Meets, Microsoft teams and many other technology tools were set up for communication. Senior leadership, middle management and project leads in almost every other organisation were ready to adapt from Day 1. No one was trained for it. No mindset was especially developed. No meetings were scheduled in preparation. Everyone did what was needed to survive without any questions asked. No one told the pandemic that they were “looking into it” or “would get back to you.”

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In the face of the pandemic, nothing mattered other than doing the right thing. Processes were invented, people were identified, metrics were established, freedom to thrive was given, and tolerance of failure increased. As a result, corporates evolved into a new, agile, lean and lovable machine. It proved that organisations were capable of overnight change without major disruptions to business. Employees could rally around their leader’s will and vision to sustain and drive change. Passion to meet a challenge can by itself put processes in place for change. So, what are we waiting for?

The next time a corporate leader says 'this will take time,' I want to point out that the greatest change happened overnight in March 2020. If the leader says processes need to be put in place, I want to remind them that it is only a question of choosing change; now, today. If management says they are not geared to scale at that level, I want them to remember that when there is a will, there is a way.

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