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DIPLOMACY: A FINE LINE OF TRUTH

The word 'diplomacy' may conjure many thoughts; and certainly the manner in which it is applied today may not be that different in our rapidly changing world, as compared to times gone by. Reflecting upon earlier times, one recalls the ancient travellers -- such as Marco Polo (1254-1324), Vasco de Gama (1460-1525) and Francis Drake (1540-1596) -- who travelled to other continents without any accurate understanding of their route, neither the manner in which they would be received by the people they would meet in foreign countries. As history revealed, more often than not these brave pioneers met fierce and hostile nations, yet on other occasions they were welcomed with awe and cordial invitations. And from these early beginnings, the true *diplomat* was born. These diplomats played a key role in connecting different countries, to foster relations between the different people and their values with their main goal of opening trade between their countries through dialogue and good relations.

Of course, whilst the beginnings of diplomacy was born out of people bartering and exchanging discussion and viewpoints, the success of these activities was in all likelihood dependant upon the diplomat's ability to respect different cultures, customs and values and then knowing how to *skillfully* achieve their trade objectives through diplomatic means. Moreover, these diplomatic skills -- which are as important and necessary today -- could not be offensive, meaning that a good diplomat throughout the ages still understands the art and importance of dealing with people in a sensitive and tactful way.

Similarly today, being a true diplomat in an organisation, whether in a business for profit or any other non-profit or governmental environment, requires that the person uphold various values, has specific communication skills with networking experience amongst other. Expectedly, in a modern and highly complex globalised economy, the art of diplomacy has become quite critical in order that trust and credibility be established with the aim of transacting at multiple levels, be this internally of the organisation, locally and or internationally. Needless to say, diplomacy includes the art of negotiation as a means of building consensus, concluding agreements or resolving disputes. The key principles which capture the essential, intrinsic nature of diplomacy are generally agreed to be the prevention of conflict, ethical conduct and cultural sensitivity.

Drawing relevance then to workplace diplomacy and corporate governance; a lot of good has resulted when organisations have combined their efforts to truly understand its own practices and behaviour and the impacts these have upon its workforce and other stakeholders. There is clearly a correlation between those organisations and their leaders who demonstrate diplomacy, and those who don't. In the case of the latter, typically these organisations may be regarded by its employees as dictatorial, infused with excessive internal office politics, inappropriate or unacceptable workplace practices and working conditions, and a general lack of respect between employees and the organisation's leadership. Such situations -- caused through poor diplomacy -- often leads to mistrust and ultimately may cause organisational dysfunction and collapse.

Conversely, where a diplomatic ethos is actively developed throughout an organisation, supported and practiced by the board, the organisation is likely to become more sustainable, but furthermore guaranteed of happier stakeholders where differing values may be understood and negotiated where there's a win-win situation. A diplomatic culture may indeed be more sustainable if it is also systematically promoted through Human Resources policies and practices; such as cultural sensitivity training, business protocols and etiquette, including codes of workplace wellness, ethical conduct and behaviour. Understandably, whilst governance measures and organisational policies tend to be prescriptive, these may be 'softened' by 'diplomatic language' which need not undermine their gravity or content.

Finally, one needs to be quite clear upon the meaning and applied use of the words 'diplomacy' or 'being diplomatic'. Being diplomatic does not mean being deceitful, nor quietly disregarding one's own value system, nor those of the organisation one serves in order to 'maintain the peace', and forcibly keeping the relationship in tact. This thinking clearly then extends to the point that a diplomatic person should not lie, but may tactfully discourage discussion on matters considered 'taboo'. That being said, a good diplomat who is honest to their personal and organisational values will distinctly know how to express the truth, particularly if such matters infringe their ethical viewpoint, or where the rights of humans, animals and the environment are being violated, not least also non compliance with the law. To the latter examples, the diplomat should in no uncertain terms, respectfully and clearly inform the opposite party of the manner in which they have been offended and that their value system, code of ethics or any other legal parameters have been compromised. Naturally, should the offender not retract their position -- which could be diplomatically (and politically) incorrect -- such a relationship may then become doomed to failure, furthermore incurring other forms of damage to the organisation, institution or country being represented by the offending party.

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