

Nadeem Chawhan,
Navitus
December, 2004

Ever heard of the circus elephant analogy? For the benefit of those who have not, it's about a circus elephant tied to a stake. A huge 6 ton creature tied with a flimsy rope to a wooden stake. Think about it, if the elephant sneezes, the stake would probably be flung miles. Then how is it that the largest land mammal can be in captivity because of a rope? Answer, the rope ties the mind and not the body. When the elephant is young, let's call him Pappu, he is tied to a stake. Pappu tries with all his might to break the rope, to no end. He sees all these free elephants frolicking and wants to join them, but he can't break free. Pappu then starts believing that the stake is unconquerable. He grows up and sees other baby elephants trying to break free from the stake and says to himself "Hehehe, a sure sign of immaturity, they will learn soon enough." A tragedy, right? Oh, but it doesn't stop there. You see, when Pappu can not break free, his mind starts to accept his current state. He starts rationalizing to himself that he has it good. He sees free elephants and thinks to himself "I have it good, look at those beasts, they don't know where they will get their next meal from. When it rains, they have no where to hide. Hey, I might be in captivity, but the circus people give me food two times a day, and even throw a blanket on me when it is cold. Thank God, I am not a free elephant!!!"

After some time, Pappu gets married and has his own little bambinos. Question, what do you think his advice to his children will be? A. Break the rope and go find freedom, be the animal GOD intended you to be, be the master of your fate, captain of your destiny! Or B. Son, find a very strong stake and tie yourself in, I just hope you don't get tied to a stake that breaks someday. Trust me you will understand my wisdom once you have grown up.

In Pakistan and the subcontinent we have witnessed so many generations each teaching the next about how to live life. How have they been doing it? Unfortunately like Pappu, teaching generations not to take risks. To find employment or slavery with institutions that act like very strong stakes, and in return salary and existence is guaranteed. With mindsets prevalent like this how can we expect entrepreneurial flare to surface? Interestingly, everyone wants economic success, but no one is willing to take the risk. Studies show that the only factor that can be directly correlated with economic success is the ability to take risks. Take a look at our education systems and tell me we are producing risk takers. The one skill needed for good marks on board examinations is Ratta or memory. Anyone who does not conform does not get rewards. Same thing is true with our culture and family environments. Generally, we ask children to conform, and not take risks. When they do take risks and fail we snub their faces in it. They feel there only way to gain social acceptability is through joining the giant companies, or going into the medical profession. It's no wonder we don't have too much entrepreneurial fervor in Pakistan.

If a young graduate gets a job at an average multinational company, he makes around Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 60,000 per month. A pan

shop that is situated in a good location makes double that amount!!! So why don't our brainy people go and try their hand at fate. They would rather be tied to a stake for stability. It is great for those who crave the mundane.

 Companies can learn from these pages, and try to inculcate an atmosphere in their organizations where people are encouraged to take risks, not slapped on the wrist for different thinking. In your organization when people take risks and fail, are they applauded and celebrated, or are they the targets of ridicule.

 This country has scores of executives who think and do what is considered Pappu behavior. If entrepreneurial spirit is to be inculcated in tomorrow's superstars, we need to ensure they don't get caught up in group thinking and become Pappu.

 I am not sharing anything spectacularly different from what has been said many times, but how many organizations throw their money where their mouth is? How many companies have set aside budgets for risk and dreaming departments? The advantages are tax write offs!! The even bigger advantage is that if one of those ideas turns out to be the next big paradigm, the company becomes a legend. With such budget allocations, employers will present employees an opportunity to rise to the challenge. Try this formula, at least 35% of net income to be set aside for entrepreneurial projects. This would be a great growth and grooming platform for high potential employees and a source of spectacular endurance for companies with guts and wisdom!!!</p><p style="text-align: center;">-----</p>