

## CHAPTER 5.2



### ROUGH STONE AND MARBLES

Albert grunted. “Do you know what happens to lads who ask too many questions?”

Mort thought for a moment.

“No,” he said eventually, “what?”

There was silence.

Then Albert straightened up and said, “Damned if I know. Probably they get answers, and serve ‘em right.”

—Terry Pratchett, Mort

**Stage Characteristic: Not all the questions asked by the child can be answered. The father knows that questions from the child are an indication of thinking and curiosity to learn, and that habit has to be kept alive for the child’s growth.**

*Have you encountered a supersmart, overzealous colleague who always asks incisive questions? The Father Manager has only one answer for him—that managers are not expected to know answers of all the questions.*

Vishy was a contrarian in the corporate world. It is where saying “yes” is glorified or simply staying quiet when in disagreement earns comfort. Vishy was sharp and usually asked incisive questions, driving Arnold, Martha, and Freddie scrambling for answers. On a slightly hectic afternoon, the team had assembled to discuss using a chatbot for customer satisfaction. Vishy couldn’t fathom how the chatbot would be able to help customers.

Before Vishy joined, Freddie team’s meetings were a quiet affair. That day, Vishy was asking quite a few questions for which none of the fifteen team members had answers. Martha

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countered them with, “We will take it offline,” every time a Vishy-question came up. Vishy couldn’t be convinced about the chatbot despite Arnold and Freddie’s best efforts and the meeting closed. One more discussion was needed.

Jeff from Martha’s team told Vishy, “We’ll have to assemble again for this meeting as Freddie had to rush. Why don’t you say ‘yes’ or remain silent? What will your managers think about your grilling? You were disrespectful.”

Vishy started thinking if his interventions were having a negative effect and sought to clarify it with Freddie. So he was anxiously hovering around Freddie’s office for over twenty minutes. He stepped in as soon as Freddie hooked up his headset on the Cisco IP phone.

Vishy apologized and said, “I shouldn’t have opened my mouth so much.”

“You know why cookies are served in the board room?” asked Freddie with a wink and added, “So that people open their mouth at least to eat cookies. Your questions made us better in reasoning and well equipped. Millennials are expected to be 75% of global workforce by 2025. Every leader has to adapt to young guys like you.”

Vishy felt happy and said, “Makes me feel good. I took your time and the purpose didn’t get met.”

He went on to add, “The first question may be a stupid one from your team. When that’s turned down, your organization loses a big fortune. How? The next ones could’ve been game-changers.”

“You couldn’t answer a few. That embarrassed me,” admitted Vishy.

*“Leaders are not those who have answers to all the questions. They are those who ask the right questions,”* replied Freddie. And he began to sketch on a paper, even as he continued the conversation. That was his usual thing.

Freddie continued, “The Greek-Roman biographer Plutarch once said, ‘Know how to listen and you will profit even from those who talk badly.’”

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“I’ve got warned before. My previous managers saw me as a time-guzzler and spoil-sport,” recalled Vishy.

Freddie added, “To me, you’re a skill-sharpener. Team members like you sharpen leader’s reasoning skills and the precision of execution. You’ve prepared me to answer such questions from my boss or anyone else. I see it proudly as sign of thinking, not resistance. *A smooth marble is useless to sharpen a knife, Vishy. A rough stone can do it wonderfully.*”

Vishy responded. “I was really worried. I feel relieved now. I thought you may’ve wondered why you recruited me?”

Freddie laughed, patting Vishy on his shoulders. “Recipe strategy is also important to me as recruitment strategy,” hinted Freddie as he continued to sketch.

Vishy was intrigued. “Didn’t get you. What’s that recipe strategy?”

Freddie began to explain. “You know Thomas Alva Edison wasn’t just an inventor. He was the head of fourteen companies. Interview wasn’t the final step to recruit staff reporting to him.

Edison would take the candidate out. He’d order a dish for both of them. Edison would taste the dish first, frown and say, ‘God, This doesn’t taste good! They’ve forgotten to add salt.’ Edison would add some salt and declare, ‘Wow! Now it’s OK. Why don’t you try?’

If the candidate adds salt without tasting, chance to work with Edison is lost. If the candidate tries out and then decides if salt is really required, the candidate gets through the recipe test. That was Edison’s way of identifying if his team member has the characteristic in him to think, question, and air his views independently. Edison as the inventor can go wrong. His organization cannot afford to go wrong.”

Vishy smiled and nodded in agreement.

Freddie continued. “Your team members may be conditioned in their previous environment not to ask questions. More importantly, as a leader, learn to read the body language and

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tap the doubts of your team members. Remember, *successful ideas are built over ideas that failed*. Find your unique way to discover what your team members hesitate to say,” said Freddie as he came back to his seat and resumed sketching. Finding his sketch not to his taste, he simply threw them into the dustbin.

As if he suddenly found something, Freddie asked excitedly, “Trash bins have been a source of creativity. You know that?”



“What?” Vishy turned curious.

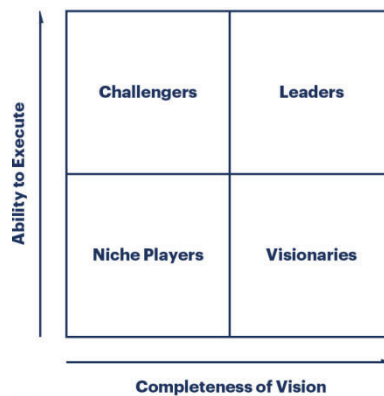
Freddie explained. “Walt Disney had his style of creating characters. His staff hesitated to show him cartoons different from his liking. Disney knew this could happen. He discovered a means to identify what his team thought originally. After every team member left, Disney opened the trash bins and took the crumpled papers out.

These rejected ideas by his team members were more important to Disney than those they brought up to him.”

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“Maybe that’s why the desktop icon in Windows Operating Systems is named ‘Recycle Bin’. Everything is worthy of being recycled,” remarked Vishy jokingly.

“Good one, Vishy!” Freddie gave a high-five and added, “Organizations start to lead when the habit of engaging more minds is formed. You heard of the Gartner Magic Quadrant, Vishy?” Freddie flipped open an old business journal and moved his silver century classic pen around “Gartner’s magic quadrant.”



Freddie began to point out what this quadrant meant. “You’d get a wide-angle graphic view of the relative positions of competitors from this. Gartner categorizes companies in fast-growing markets as leaders, visionaries, niche players, and challengers. The difference between leaders and visionaries lies in execution.

When people like you ask the right questions, more projects will get executed right. This way, our organization’s ‘ability to execute’ shifts us to an industry leader. Take my word, Vishy. Habit of employees that’s encouraged determines culture. The culture of the organization determines ‘ability to execute’. So get better with your questions.”

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## CHAPTER 5.3



### COMPLEMENT TO COMPETE

In an interview to Salon.com, life coach Matthew Hussey told Amanda Stern who he wants to be.

**What are you not good at?**

Singing.

**Me neither. Who would you like to sound like?**

Jamie Cullum. If I could do any other job in the world, that'd be it. If I could be anyone else in the world, I'd want to be Jamie Cullum. I've always wanted to play the piano. I always wanted to be able to sing, and the way he performs with such passion, the way he jumps around on stage—I'd be him if I could be anyone else.

**Stage Characteristic: As the child learns, the child tries to learn simple things over and over again without getting bored. It could be simple acts like switching on and off the fan at home.**

***When the colleague lacks in confidence, the Father Manager just injects him with doses of inspiration until the right confidence level is achieved.***

When you are in an organization, you always have to do more than your job. You tacitly acquire many new skills for which you don't have to exert much. If you were to be taken to a customer meeting and asked to give a presentation, are you good at it? Maybe not. The problem is if you are good at something and don't let the world know, you are always in the backstage and never in the limelight.

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The fragrance of pizza wafted through the hallway. Freddie's room was aroma-filled that overcasted afternoon. Martha had ordered barbeque chicken pizzas to celebrate her son Noel's selection in his school team for a basketball tournament.

Henry was feeling uncomfortable and told Freddie, "Why don't you allow me to do what I am good at? You should've asked our presentation celebrity Martha. You know, I'm not the best in delivering. Even a recent *Forbes* article stated that we should work on our strengths," remarked Henry taking a bite.

Freddie gently rolled the pizza cutter on his palm and asked, "Tell me a reason why I should give you what you're good at? When I give you assignments in what you are good at, I gain from you. What do you gain from me? Skills that complement your strength increase your edge quotient over others."

Freddie brought the Italian seasoning sachet close to Henry's nose and asked, "Why do you think this comes with pizza?"

Henry quipped, "It complements the pizza perfectly."

Freddie went on. "Good, Henry! Your skill in creating presentations will get complemented with impactful delivery to the audience. Do you see people wonderful in coordinating, but bad in representing coherently in an email? Haven't we come across guys with awesome mindset in serving customers, but fail in making customer feel their commitment? Don't you see staff with tremendous information, but confuse audience with their communication?"

"Yes. There are many, Freddie," affirmed Henry.

Freddie asked, "Have you seen how leaders typically handle them, Henry?"

Henry thought for a while and said, "Maybe they give feedback on the weakness, Freddie, or they allow them to become stronger in what they are. In most cases, the weakness is unattended."

"In other cases, the managers use an adaptor," commented Freddie.

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“What? Adaptors?” quizzed Henry appearing perplexed.

“We simply use an adapter for a 15 amp device when we have a 5 amp socket. Right? Do we realize what happens to employees who don’t develop the complementing skills or fail to realize them? They get stunted. The credit of their work goes to someone else. I’ve seen the guy presenting in front of the customer for twenty minutes getting celebrated and the one who worked on that presentation for twenty days going unnoticed. One who declares news becomes a winner, but the one who collects the news stays unknown.”

Henry sounded relieved. “Got that, Freddie.”

Freddie went on to advise him. “Henry, it’s not enough if you are good at something. You have to develop the complementary skill to showcase your work to get due recognition. That’s why I wanted you to do the presentation as you had burned the midnight oil on that. Continue using the ‘power words’ list to your advantage.”

“Thank you, Freddie!” answered Henry biting a slice.

Freddie then narrated how he helped Anna in his previous job to become good at what she was not comfortable with. She was a good writer, but she wouldn’t speak. She was always afraid of taking the stage.

Freddie asked her, “When you want to buy a new car, where do you go? Not to the warehouse. You go to the showroom. Why? The warehouse has lot more to offer, not organized and not visible. The showroom is more organized and more visible. Be organized in your delivery and your visibility in the organization will shoot up.” Freddie told her in every intradepartmental meeting she would be the one who would introduce the topic and the purpose of the meeting. Even for events in the organization, she would be introducing the speakers. Slowly she shed her inhibitions and became good at speaking what she wrote. This took about a year but at the end of it she added a complementary skill.

“Be at it, Henry, till you get it,” said Freddie as he finished off his pizza slice. Henry nodded. “Sure.”



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As Henry was getting ready to leave, Freddie told him, “*Getting a new skill demands patience, focused attention and tenacity of purpose.* Once you are at it, you will search resources and practice to become a master at it. That is how you develop cutting edge at a new skill. Having a role model would definitely help.”

Freddie turned his chair toward Martha, Arnold and said, “Your job is not to paint the lilies white, but to sharpen your team’s complementing skills.”

Martha smilingly took the pizza cutter from Freddie, showed the sharp edges to Arnold and said, “We will make them gain the ‘cutting edge!’”

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