

GUEST SPEAKS : DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP ABILITIES IS NOT AN IMPOSSIBLE TASK - PROF B M PEERZADA AS A LEADER

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Prof B. M. Peerzada rose from a modest background but emerged as a leading academician, visionary, institution builder and a leader of prominence, in the academic world. By his own intelligence and persistence he broke two myths about Leadership. The first one is that leadership is in one's genes. Leadership is not genetic or innate but is acquired. More specifically, a research says that cognitive ability and personality traits are only partially innate and can be developed by one's own effort. A certain kind of study and training can improve a person's ability to learn the critical lesson of Leadership from experience. Prof Peerzada's early experience at school and college indicate that he had unique cognitive abilities and personality traits, one of which was generosity for all those with whom he came in contact. This helped him to be a leader of Man and Institution. The formative experience of Mr. Peerzada led him to empathise with the Deprived. In this, he transcended Class, Creed or Religion making him a true Socialist. He used his talents to enhance education and expand its standards as a long time Dean of the Faculty of Commerce in Gujarat University.

There is another myth that good Leadership is all about Common Sense; but Common Sense is very uncommon. The interpretation drawn by a number of persons from the same observations and experience differs according to their perceptions and values. Prof Peerzada is not merely a product of his common sense. If it were so, he would have been a routine administrator, a colorless principal and a boring person. He arose, awoke and gained long lasting reputation because he was unflinching in his commitment to the highest academic values. His selection of teaching staff was always based on the criterion of academic abilities and innovative mind. Now we know that one of the important trait which made him a successful academician and a first rate Institution Builder was his intuitive ability to select the best people for his team and once these people were woven in a coherent team, his readiness to delegate full powers to the team (insisting on occasional consultation of the team members with him) so that the team could carry on the tasks of academic excellence delegated to its members. An excellent team builder based on mutual trust, Prof Peerzada has never been a soft or easy- to-please leader, prone to flattery. He is a tough leader. Toughness matters because you need a leader who has the inner resource to stand up for the values he believes in, as well as stand up with others to achieve team and institutional goals. More importantly, toughness matters when things are not going well, when the hidden enemies try to sabotage your plans and projects. I have seen Prof Peerzada in the most tense and anxiety-provoking situation when adversaries attempted to wreck his dream project. However, he withstood the difficult situation like a rock and defended the situation by giving confidence to his task force.

This is not true in tough academic situations only but also in Electoral Political situation. Prof. Peerzada was active in electoral politics and was a think tank for several of the candidates who got nervous and rushed to Prof Peerzada for moral and emotional support during elections. There are very few people who can equal Prof Peerzada in political acumen and astuteness. This ability does not fall from the sky. This ability, which we call acumen, intuition and power of judgment in critical situation, comes from a capacity for reasoning and capacity for Abstract Thought. This capacity of abstract thoughts and logical reasoning, to untangle abstract thought, to break it in comprehensible but logical categories, is a rare gift which Prof. Peerzada possesses but he would have been boring with the above abilities without an excellent sense of humor because of which his company is most delightful and instructive.

Many people may have a small part of the qualities mentioned above but very very rarely charismatic power. Besides his knowledge power which keeps him well informed about what is going around in the world and what the current trends in the world are in terms of economy, politics, ecology, and academics, Prof. Peerzada has charismatic power. And that is indeed a rare gift of Nature. Charisma refers to magnetism, allure and is a type of authority or influence based on exceptional characteristics of an individual, which is also a special influence that attracts people to him. By virtue of this power of positive attraction or devotion, he gets admiration from others. This power helps the subordinate understand the value of a leader and the mission of his life. A person who may merely be greedy and money loving, never gets this love and admiration from others.

Lastly, I have found in Prof. Peerzada the ability to see the big picture which is his predominant intellectual trait. He also has ability to communicate the big picture to us but our poor grasp of reality falls short of his expectations and makes him impatient. However, he has given us enough opportunity to grow and challenge and has never in his life imposed his ideas or opinions on others.

For his countless students, Prof B M Peerzada is an iconic figure. But he is also a symbolic lesson that anybody can be a leader in his chosen field if he is relentlessly committed to whatever he believes in and pursues it as a mission of his life.

