

Mid Career Training Program (MCTP) 2013 - The value of Training
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THE nation is on the fast track to progress, hence the need to look for new directions, seek wisdom and experience from far and near. The need to change and do what we can to promote change, by merely changing our thought patterns and by shedding some conditioned mechanicalness can bring about significant changes in the workplace. Anita Roddick, writer and humanist and founder of the Body shop organization correctly observed - **"The workplace should primarily be an incubator for the human spirit"**. Hence, the need to reach out to new encounters and experiences, seek energy in new philosophies and ways of thinking. **'Let your highest aspiration organize your life'** said the Mother of Pondicherry Aurobindo Ashram. Not only an individual's life, but, the life of an organization and indeed of the nation itself, should let this simple but powerful line be the new motto.

To seek out these new philosophies and energies, our Hon'ble Finance Minister Shri P. Chidambaram must have had two overwhelming thoughts in his mind, first the trenchant remark of Albert Einstein that **"we cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them"**. Second, to achieve this new level of thinking, **"Train everyone lavishly, you cannot overspend on training"** (Thomas J. Peters). Thus, must have born the ambitious scheme of MCTP.

Decades back, on the last day of leaving school, our Chemistry teacher wrote a blessing for each student and read it out, when my turn came I was amazed to hear her blessing me that I will go abroad to get a higher qualification. I was just a plain ordinary student, there were innumerable brilliant students who were targeting GRE and IIT's and foreign varsities and the teacher was aware of their ambitions, yet this blessing was thrust on me. Many a time, I was intrigued about this blessing and would ruminate about it in vacant or pensive mood. Several decades have flown by, did the blessing fail, sometimes I used to think like that. Whenever I found my colleagues going abroad to U.K., Australia, Japan for acquiring MBA degree, I used to think maybe that blessing had withered away, in my case, without blooming. At 58 years, it is a forbidden thought, to seek to go abroad for study. Yet, the impossible happened.

Rumours were galore about a MCTP and a study at a prestigious University abroad. However, no confirmation was forthcoming, no doubt a proposal was on the anvil, but no assurances were available from any quarter.

One day, my Secretary Ms. Flavia Barua dashed into my room with a fax message. I was one of the officials selected in the first Batch of MCTP scheduled to be held at Indian School of Business (ISB) Hyderabad and thereafter at the Maxwell School of Syracuse University, U.S.A. (acknowledged as the world's premier institution in the field of Public Administration). The program was to be conducted from April 8th to May 5th 2013. My mind raced to thank my Chemistry teacher - Ms. Susheela Narayan. So many many thanks, your blessing materialized and my dream fulfilled.

22 nd April 2013, 1.30 a.m., Flight AI 191 from Mumbai Chhatrapati Shivaji International Airport took off for Newark Airport, U.S.A., aboard the flight we were around 17 officers, part of the MCTP first batch. Is was a historic milestone in the annals of the Department, as 30 officers in this first Batch would get a comprehensive overview of latest Management practices at ISB, Hyderabad, and thereafter at Syracuse University, New York, and exposure to Customs work methodologies at U.S.A. and Canada.

Credit for this path breaking initiative goes to three women - Ms. Praveen Mahajan,

Chairperson, Central Board of Excise & Customs, Ms. Shobha L. Chary, Member (P&V), CBEC and Ms. Rasheda Hussain, Director General National Academy of Customs Excise & Narcotics (NACEN). In the history of the Indian Revenue Service, officers at different levels were being sent to premier institutions in India and abroad for management study programs.

In the luxurious ambience of Air India's Business class, stretched out, the Brahmamuhurtha time of 1.30 a.m. set my mind contemplating on the events of the past few weeks.

These three respected women officers have spearheaded a bold and dynamic undertaking, never before attempted. Getting a new project approved through various layers of bureaucracy, can be a very daunting experience and but for their perseverance, tenacity and strong determination, the MCTP 2013 would never have become a reality.

Of course, the Hon'ble Finance Minister Shri P. Chidambaram had the perspicacious foresight to support this venture at every stage and carve out a new chapter in the profile of IRS officers training charter. Hats off to our Finance Minister's administrative acumen and vision.

The Hon'ble Revenue Secretary has ensured the smooth passage at three levels - Administrative Clearance, Financial Clearance and Political Clearance.

The staff and officers at NACEN and Ministry of Finance deserve special mention for their untiring efforts to ensure that the entire project went ahead without any hitch. Procuring official Passports, obtaining visas from U.S. and Canadian Embassies, arranging air tickets, all formalities were got approved with clock like precision without any physical intervention from our side. The team of officers at NACEN, Faridabad Ms. Rasheda Hussain, Director General, Shri Ashok Mehta, ADG, Shri B.B. Gupta, A.D., Shri Lalan Kumar, A.D and Shri. S.S. Rawat were burning the midnight oil to make the program a thundering success.

The first leg of our training commenced at Indian School of Business (ISB) Hyderabad -



The main campus of the Institute is an amazing edifice built on Vedic architectural principles. The energizing academic environment was brilliantly supplemented by a host

of well acclaimed Professors comprising of Prof. Atul Nerkar, Prof. Porus Munshi, Prof. S.Ranganathan, Prof. S.P.S. Dalal, Prof. Alexander Zak, Prof. Aquil Busrai, Prof. Nirmal Gupta and Prof. Rajeshwar Upadhyaya.

The efficient and affable ISB team of Director Dr. Pramod Mantravadi, Senior Manager Dr. Ajay Singh and Ms. Mamtha Reddy Program Manager Mr. G. Vignesh ensured that every minute detail of our training requirements, boarding, lodging and educational visits were meticulously planned and executed.

I took the opportunity at Hyderabad to pray at the famous Chilkur Balaji Temple about 40 kms from Hyderabad.



The Temple is also known as Visa Venkateshwara, as the presiding deity is often invoked to obtain a U.S. Visa without hurdles. At the temple, long serpentine queue of engineers, young boys and girls were seen fervently praying for their visas. The only offering in this temple is 11 time circumambulation at the time of praying for fulfillment of a desire and 108 times after the wish fulfillment. The temple has also the unique distinction of having no hundi, no payments are accepted. The priests only exhort the devotees to chant the holy name of the Lord Govinda! Govinda!.

Hyderabad NACEN staff led by A.D Ms V.Sangeeta were full time at ISB to attend to us. Chief Commissioner Hyderabad Shri B. B. Prasad had deputed his staff to attend to our airport formalities. He gifted all participants with his two publications, the book on meditation, penned by him, which is superb and a valuable addition to my library. He also gave a memento of the Charminar, the symbol of Hyderabad, to every participant.

The Commissioners of Hyderabad, Customs and Central Excise, Shri S.N.Saha, Shri.M.Srinivas, Dr.S.L.Meena, Shri.M.K.Singh, Shri.J.S.Chandrashekar and Shri.G.V.Krishna Rao, were also extending all their hospitality and courtesies to all the

participants. All their efforts made our stay memorable and happy.

ISB was special to two participants - Ms. Jagjit Pavadia, Chief Commissioner, Nagpur Zone, and myself as we had occasion to celebrate our birthday there. ISB made it a memorable occasion by ordering special cakes, and I was fortunate to receive the cake from Ms. Rasheda Hussain's golden hands!



The Captain's announcement of the impending touchdown of our flight at Newark's La Guardia airport awakened me from my rumination. As the flight taxied, it was the beginning of the next phase of training.

(to be continued...)

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