

**First Person**

# GREEN as the new BLACK?

*Consumers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for a product they believe will not damage the environment*

In Hong Kong this year a cotton bag, priced at a whopping HK\$ 120 (RS 600), sold out within minutes of the store's opening. The bag, of unbleached cotton, made in China, was a limited edition eco-friendly bag from the British "Queen of Bagland" Anya Hindmarch. Emblazoned on it was a fashion statement in sync with today's hip, ethical consumer: *I am not a plastic bag*. Never mind that when it started to rain the same cloth bag was tucked into a plastic one for safekeeping and carted away!

An ethical bag for avid shoppers? Therein lies the dilemma of today's marketers. Conventional marketing is built on the fulcrum of consumerism: the theory that increasing consumption of goods is economically desirable. However, drawing heavily on the resources of earth to feed rampant consumerism has brought the world face-to-face with an urgent challenge: global warming. So, how does the average marketing bloke deal with the issue? Since global warming is hot, let's make the consumer who appreciates global warming look cool. Hence, a limited edition cotton bag - the designer can't afford to lose exclusivity and damage her upmarket brand - to make the queueing-up-overnight shopper look intelligent.

Green is the new Black, claim the twin worlds of Marketing & Advertising as they rally to the cause of Green consumerism - an oxymoron. A quick scan of the consumer world will show that the first response of most marketers has been cosmetic airbrushing. The green onslaught consists largely

of slapping products with little stickers of a green-blue earth or chirpy terms such as "eco-friendly" or "earth-smart". The Anya Hindmarch "ethical" bag was made in China and flown thousands of miles to London to retail for 5 pounds!

Recently, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), an independent body created by UK's advertising industry to self-regulate the rules in advertising, discovered many companies were advertising unproven claims of environmental sustainability. Toyota was taken to task for describing its hybrid Lexus 4x4 as "zero guilt" and for making exaggerated claims about the fuel efficiency of its hybrid Prius car. Writing on a product in big green letters "environmentally friendly" means absolutely nothing. Neither does "Does not contain CFCs" on a deodorant. CFCs in aerosol cans have been banned under the Montreal Protocol since 1995.

A big bogey on the horizon is "carbon-offset". The simplistic premise on which it is based is this: if you drive a gas-guzzler, jet-set around the world, consume voraciously on exotic foods - all of which will damage the environment by increasing emissions of carbon-dioxide - you can assuage your sin by paying an offset firm to fund the reduction of CO2 production elsewhere, say by planting trees. A corporate variant on Ganga snaan, the sin-cleansing dip in the holy Ganga! Planting trees has become so good for companies that a calculated number of trees can make them carbon-neutral, leaving them to

continue their indulgences guilt-free. Consumers, however, are looking beyond the obfuscating corpo-buzz and seeking change. A recent global survey, conducted across 21 countries on six continents for the BBC World Service, found that 83 percent of those questioned believed lifestyle changes would be necessary to cut emissions of climate-warming global gases. Their response was to attack climate change through their consumption patterns. More than half

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have bought green products, energy efficient devices, reduced packaging, or saved power.

Good Energy is a UK supplier that supplies only 100 percent renewable electricity to homes and businesses throughout the UK. Its fuel mix comprises wind, wave, small scale hydro and solar power. Good Energy's consumers pay an average of 4 pounds a month more than if they were to buy power from one of the largest elec-

tricity suppliers. Why are they doing this? Because by switching to 100 percent renewable electricity they save an average of 2 tonnes of CO2 emissions a year - the equivalent amount of emissions produced on a 5000-mile journey in a petrol-fuelled car. This underlines a basic premise: consumers are increasingly willing to pay a premium for a product they believe will not damage the planet. It is for marketers to tap into this desire and come up with innovative products. For once, the consumer is not going cheap - time, therefore, for the marketer to think beyond *sasta-aur-tikau*?

Global warming is a mega trend that mandates a transformational approach, one that goes beyond positioning Green as the new Black. Green consumerism is a misnomer, going green is not - the companies that truly understand this will grow. The others, their turf overrun by genuinely green companies, may just be left planting trees. How will this scenario unfold in the Indian market? Watch this space.

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Manreet Sodhi Someshwar

# Work at Fun to Have Fun @ Work

*The more mundane and repetitive work is, the greater is the importance of having the fun element during the workday*

Abhijit Bhaduri



Fresh out of Business School, MBA in hand, the taste of toast and mixed fruit jam still fresh in the mouth, when we joined the work place, life was very simple. You came in to work and bust your guts trying to work. We all hoped that the big boss would get impressed with our dedication. That had the potential of a generous appraisal rating for that year. Even when that did not happen, all of us gnashed our teeth, wrote his name on paper and shred that up to express our point of view (to ourselves). There was no such thing as fun at work.

Then the dot com boom happened. Young kids showed us that it was OK to be a dreamer. They quit jobs at blue chip companies and abandoned potentially hefty 12% pay hikes (that was the maximum you could get those days in my firm) in favour of an unknown world. A world where they would have the corner office by the time they were hitting twenty five. The "corner office" meant the CEO's Office and not the cubicle in the corner where the photocopier was kept. One of them had told me casually while quitting, "I want to have fun." That was blasphemous. I was no idea that we were supposed to have fun in the office. I asked the lad very apprehensively, "We are not supposed to do those fun things on the office desk? You could get sacked if you get caught." That reckless lad gave me a look that was hard to define. My logic was clear - work was meant to be making you miserable. To get away from the agony called work, we hung around with friends and had fun.

Six months down the line the young lad came back to visit us. He came in a car that I had only seen my CEO drive. Over dinner, he told us that they had a lot of fun in the office. The dress code was non-existent. He could practically come to work in diapers if he chose to. Every Friday they drank beer and danced in the office which would be converted to a make shift dance floor. The directors who were in their twenties, danced with other twenty

some things who were employees. This was truly democratisation of the workplace. Everyone travelled First Class if Business Class seats were not available. Everyone claimed they were having fun, until one day many of those places went belly up and closed shop.

Then for the next few years, everyone went back to accepting the notion that work and fun were not designed to happen at the same time and at the same place. Can you really have fun with colleagues? After all the English language has two different words to describe a colleague and friend. To complicate matters people have different definitions of fun. Sticking a "kick me" behind your classmate in school may not be appreciated by a colleague at the receiving end.

Then Outsourcing happened and a different profile of employees barely out of school and college joined the BPOs and KPOs. The workplace had to change to reflect their presence. The older employees

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got replaced by the millenials. The workplace again had to have prominent elements of fun because that became a retention tool. Elements of fun were designed around making the office culture as close to a college campus as possible. You don't need to leave college when you come to work because the format of fun at work.

The more homogeneous the em-

ployee profile is, the easier it is to have one activity that fits in to a common definition of fun at work. If the primary task is not enjoyable, the importance of providing fun as an additional component at the workplace becomes important. Can the task have an inherent piece of fun built in? The more mundane and repetitive the task is, the greater is the importance of having the fun element during the workday. It has to be an activity that rejuvenates and refreshes the employee.

Fun has a connotation of informality and playfulness. So any activity that lowers the hierarchy - especially in a society that is deeply hierarchical, provides an element of fun. Hence watching the senior manager's clumsiness at a sports event during the annual day celebration provides much mirth. The annual day is by definition annual. With shorter attention spans, having fun more frequently becomes a great driver of satisfaction. So wearing business casual clothes on Fridays cannot be defined as your original contribution to livening up the world of work. Think harder. I have always been amazed how big a deal wearing casual clothes to work is made out to be. It is supposed to enhance productivity I am told. Then hippies should have been the most productive generation, Rascal Rusty would say.

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Recent research shows that the Millenials like activities that let them learn new skills. Pure buffoonery is not what they define as Fun at Work. So let them learn a new language, learn salsa dancing, learn magic tricks... just let your imagination flow. Ask them about hobbies that they wished they could pursue and skills they could and should learn but do not have the time to pursue. They might come back with weird suggestions - be prepared. Having fun at work is not easy after all.

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## What is corporate America reading?



- "Influencer: The Power to Change Anything"** by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, David Maxfield, Ron McMillan, Al Switzler; McGraw-Hill. A thought-provoking book that combines the insights of behavioural scientists and business leaders with stories of high-powered influencers from all walks of life, Influencer will help you learn how to have more influence in your own life.
- "Toxic People: Decontaminate Difficult People at Work Without Using Weapons Or Duct Tape"** by Marsha Petrie Sue; Wiley. In Toxic People, Marsha Petrie Sue offers unique and practical solutions for dealing with difficult people and the conflict and miscommunication they often aggravate.
- "True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership"** by Bill George and Peter Sims; Jossey-Bass. Former Medtronic CEO Bill George and coauthor Peter Sims share the wisdom of 125 outstanding leaders of today and describe how you can develop as an authentic leader.
- "The Speed of Trust: The One Thing that Changes Everything"** by Stephen M.R. Covey, Rebecca R. Merrill; Free Press. Leadership expert Stephen Covey uncovers why trust is vital in professional and personal relationships.
- "Basic Black: The Essential Guide for Getting Ahead at Work (and in Life)"** by Cathie Black; Crown Business. No matter where you are in your career, Basic Black offers invaluable lessons that will help you land the job, promotion, or project you're vying for.
- "QBQ! The Question Behind the Question: Practicing Personal Accountability in Work and in Life"** by John G. Miller; Putnam Publishing Group. QBQ!, already a phenomenon in its self-published edition, addresses the most important issue in business and society today: personal accountability.
- "Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High-Impact Nonprofits"** by Leslie Crutchfield, Heather McLeod Grant; Jossey-Bass. An innovative guide to how great nonprofits achieve extraordinary social impact.
- "It's Your Ship"** by D. Michael Abrashoff; Warner Business Books. Business managers will benefit from Abrashoff's guiding belief that focus should be on empowering your people rather than on chain of command.
- "What Got You Here Won't Get You There: How Successful People Become Even More Successful"** by Marshall Goldsmith, Mark Reiter; Hyperion. One of the nation's most sought-after executive coaches shows how subtle changes can make all the difference when climbing those last few rungs of the corporate ladder.
- "Unlock Behavior, Unleash Profits: Developing Leadership Behavior That Drives Profitability in Your Organization"** by Leslie Wilk Braksick; McGraw-Hill. Fortune 500 thought leader Leslie Braksick provides powerful tools to help you, whether you're an executive, entrepreneur, or manager, in any field, to unlock behavior and unleash unprecedented profits.

Source: 800-CEO-READ

## Syllabi synergy works

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The company hires more than 60 students from these institutes each year.

On the other hand, existing employees from Pantaloon are allowed to take a sabbatical and do a programme on retail management with any of the 18 institutes, which is funded by the company. Technology services and outsourcing company Accenture had approached the Jamshedpur based Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI), for a programme in human resources (HR) for its employees. "We entered into a tie-up with Accenture for a two year certification course in HR which is wholly customised by us. The company approached us as they were facing a dearth of good HR professionals and wanted us

to impart training to those employees who are at the entry level and to some extent have shown an inclination and interest towards human resource," claims XLRI's Prof. Madhukar Shukla. The institute also has similar a tie up with construction and engineering major Larson&Toubro for a course in HR. Shukla adds that companies believe that such an agreement is a solution to their HR problems as they find it difficult to get people to work in their HR departments.

Likewise, Kotak Mahindra has an agreement with IIM Bangalore for a 24-month course called 'Kotak STAR', a programme on portfolio investment management for the employees of Kotak. The programme is conducted and imparted by the faculty at IIM-B. Seema

Shendye, head-organisational learning, Kotak Mahindra, says this programme is mainly for those employees who are expected to provide investment advice to customers. "We have jointly customised the programme with the IIM and about 40-45 employees participate in it at a time. Employees pay only a nominal amount while the rest is funded by us."

The bank is also looking at developing leadership programmes with management institutes for its employees and is currently in talks with a few of the IIMs.

Thus, the academia-industry partnership is here to stay for another innings. With ever growing manpower needs, more companies and business institutes will explore the idea of a tie-up to address their immediate requirements.