

## Reading room

Wiser: Getting Beyond Groupthink to Make Groups Smarter by Cass R. Sunstein and Reid Hastie

We've all been involved in group decisions—and they're hard. And they often turn out badly. Why? The authors shed light on the specifics of why and how group decisions go wrong—and offer tactics and lessons to help leaders avoid the pitfalls and reach better outcomes. They explain in clear and fascinating detail the distinct problems groups run into and then turn to straightforward methods and advice for making groups smarter. With examples from a broad range of organizations—from Google to the CIA—and written in an engaging and witty style, Wiser will help you make better team decisions.

# “STUDENTS HAVE TO BE CLOSE TO REALITY”

**PROF. DR. VIJAY PAGE**, Director General, MET Institute of Management talks to Shradha Kamdar about cultivating skills and embedding them forever in the students' psyche

A distinguished educationist is called by a colleague to talk to a media person (me) who is in the building. Even though he was stepping out for some work, he comes back and welcomes my colleague and me, and fondly narrates his association with The Free Press Journal. As a young boy, he was enrolled in a nursery by his mother, but he created so much ruckus there, that the parents decided to coach him in a few skills at home. Slowly, he learnt the alphabet, and then his father insisted he read the newspaper to improve his language skills and vocabulary. And that's how The Free Press Journal entered his life. He admits that it took a while before he understood fully what was published, but he persevered, and the habit is still with him, after so many decades. His belief in reading and looking up difficult words in the dictionary binds us instantaneously in the conversation. And that's how Prof. Dr. Vijay Page, Director General, MET Institute of Management (MET IOM), engages us with his enigmatic work.

“When I entered the field of education in 1997-98 with MET, I had a singular motive in mind. I wanted my students to lead a life like the one I had led when I was a student. In my days, commerce was not that pressurizing, but today, with a postgraduate programme, especially in management, students are a bit restricted,” says Prof. Page, indicating that they have to study 40 different courses (subjects) in four semesters. In that too, he says, it is expected that they understand fully the principles of business and much more! But in fact, by the time a student settles into a course, the semester comes to an end. But he says that business demands other skills, which can be built with special activities.

It is the reason why he introduced 'Launch pad' at MET IOM – a 10-day programme for new students at the beginning of the programme, where they interact with professionals and the alumni and learn things which are beyond the textbooks. Things like



what marketing really is – when a person has to sell electrical appliances in Assam in parts where there was no electricity! Or perhaps what it means to be a CEO, and what those responsibilities entail. They learn perhaps, how to handle failure and take up responsibility. In addition, those with a finance or accounting background engage in technical activities whereas as those with a technical background learn aspects of accounting. It culminates with an outbound programme where students develop skills working with each other in groups.

During the regular semesters, students often go on field visits where they can learn differently. Perhaps a day in the village that they have adopted and towards the end they work on live projects, since they are now on

the threshold of moving to the industry after graduation. “The effort comes from both sides. Sometimes the institute drives them, and sometimes they drive the institute,” Prof. Page says, commenting on the various activities taken up by the students of MET IOM, the latest being playing their role in the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, where faculty and students have started cleaning up at Bandra railway station. They received a huge positive response from commuters as well. In the past, students have worked with the United Nations as well, and have played an instrumental role in digitization of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) documents. Students have risen to the challenge on several occasions, be it volunteering for the Tsunami hit villages near

Nagapattinam, or the floods in Bihar. They actually designed a special relief kit for each family with necessities to tide them over for two or three weeks, comprising 14 essential goods, seven food and 11 first aid and utility items, since the families were uprooted from their homes. About 400 such kits were sent, with students sourcing everything and organizing as well. In Uttaranchal, they have adopted a school where students are provided with funds to pursue their higher education.

Within the frame of the two years that students spend at MET IOM, they learn a lot apart from the management training they receive. Prof. Page, the mastermind behind Vidya Setu, a plan he devised for building a knowledge bridge for societal bonding as part of the sesquicentennial celebrations of the University of Mumbai. “The idea was simple. How can the youth become the link between the needs of society and the opportunities that exist, or the knowledge they have?” he explains. In his document, Prof. Page has enumerated fifteen areas of need which the students can take up as part of this programme – The principal missions. These include mission to eradicate hunger and poverty; mission to reduce child mortality; mission to promote universal primary education and mission to promote gender equity and women empowerment, to name a few. For each mission, he has also listed 10 sub-missions for student teams.

With each of the seven lakh students of the Mumbai University contributing a few hours every Saturday afternoon, Prof. Page thought Vidya Setu could be implemented with immense results. Whether the University implements it or not, he has definitely done it within MET IOM, where students work with about 1800 identified impoverished families around the institute's campus in Bandra. “With this, students are brought much closer to reality, and they understand the meaning of work and responsibility way better than any lecture could teach them in a classroom,”

he explains.

Apart from that, they also arranged Vidya Shakti – a job fair for those who are from these identified families and are unemployed and can be employed for the skills they have. “When within the first few hours a well known company recruited four youngsters, I knew that we had done something right,” Prof. Page says with a gleam in his eye. By sundown, about 650 people had got jobs, and the mission was accomplished. That's what he says, matters in the end.