**Is Obedience to Your Boss (yes sir) Always the Right Way**

Many a time young professionals / executives are confronted with the question ‘should I always agree or should I differ with my boss’ in their initial years of working life. What happens if I differ? Will I lose my job? My promotion? My increment? Get a poor appraisal rating? Get into the bad books of the boss? Be red flagged? My competitor (colleague) will overtake me? Lose opportunities for progression?

Unfortunately, they have no one to ask this question. Not even their educated parents, who may not understand the undercurrents in the organisational milieu and their ward’s context in the work place. Only he/she has to take a call based on his/her own best judgment and personality traits.

*Why personality traits? Every person is designed differently, has his/her unique approach to situations, despite commonalities of education, family, social and economic background. No one is right or wrong. Everyone is right in his/her own way. Don’t mimic your colleague. Be yourself*.

Yes, all above scenarios and much more are possible. Not necessarily each time your dissent goes against you. Boss being who is and how he has become a boss, is intelligent enough to sift the chaff from the corn. And not every boss is the same. There may be bosses who have become who they are, through means that may not be broadcast. Yes, those were days of unemployment, poverty, license raj, sycophancy, favouritism, nepotism and so on in an insulated economy, that India was. Fear of losing / denial overshadowed all logic. No longer now. So come out of the shell.

We are now part of an interconnected global village where competition, competence, openness, integration, cross border movement of men, materials, ideas, capital, labour and information is the order of the day, whether one likes it or not. In a competitive market, the only thing that works and valued is your competence and the value you add to the organisation you are in. It doesn’t matter who you are, your age, colour of your skin, gender, origin, looks, parentage and so on, if you can convince you have the stuff, your approach and argument is logical, demonstrate your capabilities (not just selfies, posturing, foul mouthing your colleagues, carry work place stories and so on) and prove your worth. Your employer / customer (*your employer is also a customer to you*) is just watching, if you can deliver value.

In that sense, we are talking of near perfect competition in the global space; not even local monopolies except in a few businesses, with compulsory micro market characteristics such as *real estate* that you cannot transport / replicate across geographies; though you may still be able to recreate similar experience to near mimic in another location. The internet is a great leveller and symbol of *perfect competition*. One individual can take on a multi-national if you have it in you. Small time gimmicks of yester years such as contacts, recommendation, religious, linguistic, regional affiliation and such considerations are unlikely to work.

I am personally baffled by the response I have received from my boss (in several occasions, different bosses and different kinds of organisations) for speaking my mind unmindful of how it will be taken. In almost all cases, where I have been a contrarian, I have only experienced pleasant surprise for being candid, though I could have taken the easy path of *agreeing* with the boss and *losing* nothing, except not getting noticed! You even earn a distinct identity to your advantage by being candid.

Even in interviews it is expected that candidates participate in the dialogue and not limit to yes / no responses. The interviewer is trying to unravel your social intelligence and communication skills which is only possible if you engage in a conversation, even demonstrating your articulating skills in situations where you have to differ. You need not always think the same as the interviewer.

You never get targeted for being honest if you have a logic for being different, you articulate your case convincingly, you speak from your heart, not be Hippocratic, do not carry a hidden agenda, you demonstrate your subject knowledge on the topic where you differ, you show mutual respect, you are consistent and you hold your ground (test of your conviction to be a contrarian – are you doing so for cheap popularity to stand out..).

In meetings, participants tend to sing in chorus *‘ I agree’* whenever the boss comes up with a proposal or a solution to a problem for discussion and ask for feedback or comments from the participants. Participants think that the boss is looking for *yes men* (or women) to endorse his line of thinking. He doesn’t need it. He is the boss and is entitled to take his own decisions. He is not in a vote counting mission to get his idea passed.

In real meetings, the boss is looking for ideas from participants different from his own idea, to add value, to come up with a different / better solution, forewarn him on potential collateral negatives, point out something he might have missed and so on. The Indian (yours obediently) mind-set has been to always to agree with the boss, teacher, parent and any elder. [https://www.primeconsultinggroup.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/cultural dimensions\_of\_management\_-\_china\_vs\_France-2.doc](https://www.primeconsultinggroup.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/cultural%20dimensions_of_management_-_china_vs_France-2.doc).

It is not a crime to differ with another, whoever that be. What is needed is, to have a convincing reason for differing and being able to articulate the same. In western culture passivity, inability to add value by contributing to ideas is flagged as incompetence. Next time you are in a meeting or someone asks for your views/ comments, spend some quality time on the matter, apply your mind, do some research if needed, give your well-articulated and considered inputs to add real value. You are paid to add value in any and many ways, not just be a passive decorative piece in the office. No employer can afford to keep paid wax models in glass cages.