

CHAPTER 9

PLANNING

Dad always said that if you really want to achieve something, you need a decent plan. It may seem obvious, but the key point is that if the first plan that you adopt does not work successfully, replace it with a new plan. If this new plan fails to work, replace it again, until you find a plan that does work. Hill said that this is the point at which the majority of men and women meet with failure – because of their lack of persistence in creating new plans to take the place of those that fail.

In the early stages, coming from Sri Lanka in the war, we would plan to do certain things and they would not work. We tried many, many things, and there were times when I just wanted to give up. Dad continuously stressed the value of persistence, and that is what I am talking about in this chapter.

Most intelligent men and women cannot succeed in any undertaking, whether increasing wealth or studying at school, university or college,

without plans that are practical and workable. Hill believed this and Dad always stressed it too: ‘Just keep this fact in mind, son, and remember that when your plans fail, that is only a temporary setback. Build new plans and start all over again,’ he said. ‘When you fall, pick yourself up, brush yourself off and keep going.’

Thomas Edison is a great example of this in action; it took 10,000 attempts before he perfected the electric light bulb. He met with temporary defeat 10,000 times before he was crowned with success. Hill talked about Edison, and Dad also talked about Edmund Hillary climbing Mount Everest – that he had a desire, a purpose, and he kept going until he won. ‘Temporary defeat should mean only one thing – the certain knowledge that there is something wrong with your plan,’ Hill said. ‘Millions of men and women go through life in misery and poverty because they lack a sound plan through which to accumulate the success they desire,’ he added.

Dad used to say, ‘Your achievement can be no greater than your plans are sound.’ That fairly straightforward statement comes from Hill’s teachings and it is true, there are so many examples where changing the plans and taking action has resulted in massive success. The key thing is that failure is but a temporary defeat. You should keep persistence and rebuild new plans.

Dad said no man or woman is defeated until they give up. Once you have made up your mind, it will be set, and it will happen. The problem is that we are influenced by our senses, our paradigms, our habits and other people’s opinions, so sometimes we give up. But if you have a strong will and you say in your mind you are going to do something, it will happen.

‘It is so easy to take flight at the first sign of defeat. A temporary defeat is never the end of the game,’ Dad said. We see men who have succeeded in sport or in business, but we recognise only their success while overlooking the temporary defeats they had to overcome beforehand.

‘When defeat comes, accept it as a sign that your plans are not sound, redo those plans and set sail once more towards your stated goal,’ Hill said. And my dad believed that if you give up before your goal has been reached you are a quitter. And quoting Hill, he said, ‘A quitter never wins and a winner never quits.’ That is a sentence he told me to memorise, to put it in my psyche and do whatever I wanted to do.

When you select people to discuss your plans with, be careful. If you have people around you who do not understand these concepts, you risk getting into the wrong psyche.

Dad also talked about two types of people in the world – leaders and followers. Hill also wrote about this concept. It is important to decide at the outset whether you intend to become a leader in your chosen calling or remain a follower. The difference in compensation is vast. The follower cannot reasonably expect the compensation to which a leader is entitled, although many followers make the mistake of expecting just that.

Dad spent a lot of time talking about this, especially in the early stages of my career in the United Kingdom, when I was struggling in many ways. I did not go to a UK university; I qualified as an accountant and I was so fortunate to do so, but it was a struggle. I started with Prudential Financial Inc, the US investment house, when

I was 23 and then the career ladder was a struggle for many reasons, but Dad urged me to keep going, not to give up, to have a plan. Finally, before taking up my role as CEO of Regent Group I was the VP at Fortress Investment Group PLC.

‘It is no disgrace to be a follower,’ Dad used to say to me, ‘as long as you are an intelligent follower.’ On the other hand, it is no credit to remain a follower. Most brave leaders began in the capacity of followers and became great leaders because they were intelligent followers. Hill said that with a few exceptions, a man or woman who cannot follow, cannot become an effective leader. A man or woman who can follow most efficiently is usually the man or woman who develops into leadership most rapidly.

Planning is linked to leadership, because when you are planning you must take action and in order to take action, you need leadership. An intelligent follower has many advantages, among them the opportunity to acquire knowledge from a leader. There is an especially important distinction, Dad used to say, between accepting other people’s opinions and intelligently following someone.

Dad believed that when you are looking at someone else, you may not entirely like their way of life, but you should try to pick one or two things to admire. That always stayed in my mind. There are things that I look at in successful people. I might not entirely agree with their lifestyle or their views, but I may like something – the way they walk, the way they express their views. It can be simple things.

Dad told me to take ideas, but not to follow blindly. He even insisted that I should not follow him blindly, because he and I were different

people with different ideas. ‘Take a few ideas from me if those resonate with you,’ he said, and that really resonated. Even now I learn from a lot of people. There are people such as Clay Christensen, who really started to increase my interest in this topic. There are bits I love about Clay, bits I love about Bob Proctor, and there are many others that I follow, including various CEOs.

I read about Steve Jobs; I may not completely agree with everything he said or did, but there are some things that I really like. I don’t want to be him, but one thing he said sticks with me, ‘You can never connect the dots looking forward, you can always connect the dots looking backwards. But you have got to believe the dots will connect themselves.’ That is where the planning comes in.

So, when you are making these journeys, if you are not able to achieve your goal, never give up, keep working towards it. I am an intelligent follower of Steve Jobs. Clearly, I am not interested in some other aspects of what he talked about, but we need to focus on the positive things we can take from people.

Dad said if you really want to plan and execute a strategy, you have got to have leadership and take action. He also believed that you need unwavering courage. You cannot have fear; bravery and courage are critical to leadership. No intelligent follower will be dominated by a fearful leader for long.

Hill set out a list of attributes required for successful leadership, and Dad spoke of these often. ‘A leader must have self-control,’ he said. The man or woman without self-control can never control others.

This is an area where I have done a huge amount of work, where discipline comes in.

I attended a British school in Sri Lanka and there we had a lot of discipline. From the way we did our shirts to the way we wore our tie, all sorts of things. Discipline in this context is about how we give ourselves a command and we do it. That is the self-control. This is a huge area that I do not always follow to the best of my abilities, but I try. You set goals one day at a time.

Dad always thought that a keen sense of justice was important. And this is true. Without a sense of fairness and justice, you are never going to execute your plans. You have got to make committed decisions, as we have talked about in Chapter 3. Definiteness of plans is so important for a leader. A leader who moves by guesswork but without practical, definite plans, is comparable to a ship without a rudder – sooner or later it will land on the rocks.

Dad also talked about the habit of doing more than you are paid to do. He said that he always did more than he got paid for. He always urged me to give my maximum, to give everything I could. When you do that you may not get immediate rewards, but nature will reward you, and I think that is completely right. I could not see that when I was young, but now in everything I do I want to do more than I get paid to do. In our organisation, a student pays us a fee – I want to make sure we give the students more than they have paid for. Obviously, education has more than cash value, but clearly the use value should be far more than the cash value.

A pleasing personality is important. Dad said be relaxed, not uptight. He was such an easy-going guy, he believed that having a calmness of mind was the most beautiful way of existing. Be pleasing, be approachable; that doesn't mean you cannot be assertive, but you need a pleasing personality, with sympathy and understanding, to execute your plan.

If you really want to be able to execute, you also need an eye for detail. Successful executors zoom in on the detail all the time. You need to know what is core and what is incidental.

Leaders need a willingness to assume full responsibility – the buck stops with them. No matter if you are leading a company, a community, a country; at every level, there is a position of responsibility. A successful leader must be willing to assume responsibility for the mistakes and shortcomings of their followers. If he tries to shift this responsibility, he will not remain the leader. If one of his followers makes a mistake and shows himself incompetent, the leader must consider that it is he that failed. This is enormously valuable and a huge lesson that I am learning in our journey at Regent Group. If something goes wrong down the line, the buck stops at me.

Cooperation – the successful leader is a person who can execute and can understand and apply the principles of working together. Obviously, there are two types of management and leadership – leadership by consent and leadership by force. Dad said that leadership by force will never work. 'History is filled with evidence that leadership by force cannot endure,' he said.

The world is entering a new era of a fresh relationship between leaders and followers. It is clear, because new types of leaders, especially in the technology world, are emerging, and a new brand of leadership. I am writing this book in the Covid-19 world and Dad's teaching is spot on; he was a visionary. He was talking about these things many years ago.

Dad talked about the relationship between employer and employee and here, again, there is much alignment with the words of Hill. These ideas come from Hill's exploration of the attributes of leaders. He said you need mutual respect based on an equitable division of profits of the business. Dad always said that without employees, an organisation cannot achieve anything. He believed in an equitable division of profit. He believed in conservative values but responsible conservatism. He absolutely believed that we have got to make our own success in our own life, but we have got to give to the nation, without expecting anything back. He believed in free enterprise, in entrepreneurship, in all of those values, but he also believed in responsible capitalism so that if you are successful, the people who made you successful should also have a piece of the pie.

Dad said the future relationship between employer and employee will be more like partnership than it has been in the past. Many companies now take their lead from organisations such as the John Lewis Partnership, and work like this.

He also talked about not being able to execute plans as a major source of failure. He talked about the importance of the ability to organise details. If you do not know how to do that, you are not able

to coherently think about and execute your plans. At Regent Group we are transforming our human capital strategy.

Leaders need a willingness to render humble service. Genuinely great leaders are willing, and occasionally demand, to perform any sort of labour that they would ask another to do for them. My father said many times, ‘Son, if you cannot do a particular piece of work, do not go and ask somebody else. If you do not have the technical ability to do it, that is a different matter. But if you believe that you are bigger than somebody else, you are never going to be successful.’

Expectation of pay for what you know instead of what you do is an issue. ‘If you think that just by knowing rather than doing you can be successful, you will be shipwrecked,’ Dad said.

Dad believed in creation, not competition. ‘If you ever want to compete,’ he said, ‘compete with yourself. The leader who fears that one of his followers will take his position, will never become a leader. The able leader trains everybody, makes everybody perform and wants everybody to become successful so that the whole organisation becomes successful.’

Dad also said that if you do not have imagination, that is the end. He said imagination is key; without it, nothing comes. I am recording this book and sharing it with colleagues to turn it into text. I am writing during Covid-19 and all the technology that is bringing it to fruition is enabled by somebody else’s imagination.

Dad said the leader who claims all the honour for the work of his followers and has selfish behaviours is not a leader. It is interesting to

talk about selfishness. I was an only child and my parents gave me everything. Dad was aware that I had grown up a bit selfish because everything was given to me. This was an area of development that I needed to work through.

Dad said disloyalty never gets us anywhere; perhaps this should have come at the head of the list. A leader who is not loyal to his colleagues and followers marks them as being of less value than the dust on the earth. Disloyalty is something Dad had no time for at all; if someone was disloyal, that was the end of that relationship. That does not mean he was angry with them. He used to say loyalty is like a glass, and once it is broken you cannot put it back together, you are better off moving away from negativity. If you pick up disloyalty from anyone, or if you feel disloyal, you must walk away.

The emphasis on title... I am this, I am that, I am a leader... this does not mean anything. In all organisations you need titles, but that does not mean anything to the execution of plans. Dad said that in order to execute plans, you need the tools of application. You should be able to apply yourself and you should be able to take advice from people and find new ways of promoting yourself, that is the only way you can achieve the path you want to achieve.

Some other ideas he explained, especially coming from Sri Lanka, included his view that if you have an unfavourable background, that should never stop you, but you cannot ignore the fact that it will have an impact. That is something he talked about and said to make sure those things do not come to hinder you. I do not want to dwell on this, but he said that to me, and it had an impact.

If you do not have a well-defined purpose it is exceedingly difficult to execute a plan. He came from an extremely poor family. He could not do his A-levels until he was 40, and yet he continued to study. He did law and wanted to become a lawyer, but eventually the war started, and he could not do that. He talked about the idea that the value of education was not so much in the knowledge it delivers, but in the knowledge effectively and persistently applied.

Men and women are paid not for what they know but for what they do with what they know. I am now undertaking my own research about the knowing versus doing gap. I am about to embark on my PhD project to really understand why half the undergraduate students who are taking business disciplines are not able to create business in an entrepreneurial manner. The people taking marketing degrees will understand every law about marketing but will not be able to achieve and see results. Why is that? That is an area of interest I am exploring.

Lack of self-discipline is something else Dad talked about. He mentioned eating proper food, maintaining good habits, and proper breathing, among other things. Then I never understood, but he used to tell me the importance of breathing. Now, when I do more research, I can understand these ideas; we can live without food, but we cannot live without proper breathing. ‘Anything that is wrongly used is bad,’ Dad said, ‘just as being at school and spending too much time with friends is an issue if things get out of proportion. Then you will not be able to achieve your plan,’ he said. ‘Procrastination’ is a word he used many times.

Lack of control is also something he believed wrecked many people’s experience. Many people have lost their positions, their

wealth, everything, because they were not able to control their emotions. Some human emotions are incredibly difficult to control if you have setbacks, but they must be managed.

Dad talked about the wrongful selection of associates in business. This is an area where we spent a lot of time and now I have come to understand. You have got to believe you will have the right associates; if you attract the wrong ones it is because you are thinking in a particular way. You also need the ability to cooperate with others; you must be able to work with people.

Finally, you should never have ego. ‘Ego,’ Dad said, ‘is incredibly bad and with it you are not going to make any progress in your life. These qualities serve as red lights that warn others to keep away for the sake of their own success.’

To wrap up this planning chapter, the message is that once you set a goal, once you want to achieve certain things, you have got to take action. Dad never gave up; when he came up with a plan, there may have been many setbacks, but he would always say, ‘Let us make another plan,’ then, ‘Let us make another plan.’ Sometimes Mum would tease him and ask what next. He would say his previous plan was not good, so he was coming up with another.

Dad said he was never able to come up with the right plan because he was imperfect. ‘If you are perfect,’ he said, ‘you create perfect plans, but clearly when you are imperfect your plans will be imperfect. Over time, as your awareness increases, your plans will get better and better, you will achieve better results, and you will reach your goals.’