



## Hanuman

There was this massive project of crossing the ocean to find Sita. The entire army of monkeys knew what needed to be done – namely cross the ocean and reconfirm the presence of Sita there. The recognition to be got if the project was successfully completed was enormous – recognition by the Boss's (Sugriva's) Boss (Rama) himself! Obviously there were a lot of bidders: Knowing fully well that they **cannot** accomplish the task, some of the monkeys **still** volunteered: One of them said "I can cross the ocean but may not have the energy to come back!", kind of similar to what some project managers say "I have completed the project in the lab but the product cannot be used in live environments!". Another monkey said, "well, I will cross 80% of the ocean in the next ten minutes". "And what about the remaining part?", asked the commander-in-chief of the army and the reply was "It may take another couple of months!" Sounds very familiar to the project management rule of "90% of the project gets completed in 10% of the time and the remaining ten percent takes forever!".

Amid all these vociferous claimants to glory, there was one silent monkey who never aspired for any publicity. But his talents were well known to the commander-in-chief. That silent monkey was Hanuman. The low-key Hanuman never knew his own strength. It required a motivating commander-in-chief to stir Hanuman up and make him realize his own potential and make him venture into the challenging and daunting task ahead. Often, the difference between success and failure of a project lies in the boss identifying the right talent even if the person having the talent does not volunteer.

It was not just the local commander-in-chief that recognized Hanuman's potential. While potentially Sita could have been found anywhere by anybody, Rama had the confidence and vision that it is most likely that Hanuman who would do the job. It is no wonder that Rama gave the Kaniyazhi to Hanuman instead of to anyone else. The CEO is usually right about identifying the right go-to guy!

Crossing the ocean met with very familiar obstacles and constraints. Firstly, the mountain Mainaka came up from the ocean and hindered the progress. Was Mainaka an enemy? Far from it, it was a very close friend. Were the intentions malafide? Not at all; It wanted Hanuman to rest for a while and then head off to Lanka. This is typical of any new and lofty venture taken: There will be people within an organization (or family) who will want to go slow because they think they are doing you a favor by not putting you through trouble! Whenever you embark on something new (and adventurous), haven't you heard objections from your close kith-n-kin (spouse, mother,...) "Why do you want to do all these and exert yourself? We have enough as it is and why don't you enjoy what you have?"

The next obstacle Hanuman encountered again was not set by the enemies. It was set by the Devas – allies of "the bosses" if you wish. The Devas wanted to check Hanuman's mettle. So they sent a monster who posed tough challenges to Hanuman. Only when he overcame these challenges, was he allowed to go further in the "project". This again is typical in any organization. Once you move out of your comfort zone (the barriers created by you and your closest well-wishers), your bosses will play the Devil's Advocate. You should have the wherewithal to be able to overcome your boss's objections before going ahead and facing the outside challenges from competitors and enemies. Often times, the first two barriers are even tougher to cross than the external barriers.

The final barrier that Hanuman faced was truly an external barrier, someone in the ocean dragging his speed down. Hanuman overcame this with tact, aggression and ruthlessness. That is how we should deal with the outside enemies and competition.



Even after going to Lanka, Hanuman's execution strategy gives us a lot of lessons to be learnt. He used impeccable **timing** to contact Sita – just as she was about to hang herself. He approached her in the right **method** – chanting Rama's story. He spoke of topics of interest to Sita and did not blow his own trumpet – again another lesson in communication to customers by highlighting what is of interest to them. Finally, he gave the kaniaazhi to her only after convincing her that he was indeed Rama's messenger. In other words, he applied the final closure punch (of giving the kaniaazhi) **only** after the correct build-up of confidence in Sita's mind. Most unsuccessful people either don't take the matter to completion or display their trump cards too early to lose confidence.

The "stated requirement" was just to confirm the presence of Sita on the other side of the ocean. Hanuman achieved not only the stated requirement, but also achieved other "unstated" requirements: He ascertained the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy camp; like a true sales person, he sowed "FUD or Fear Uncertainty and Doubt" in the minds of the enemy; he gave them a real scare about the power of Rama and his army; he did some preliminary damage to the enemy; and most importantly, he left Sita with a state of confidence that all shall be well soon. This is a trait of a truly great project manager: To be able to envision what is needed in the long run, without being given micro-instructions; To win over the confidence of the "customer".

Finally, after his successful mission, Hanuman led the team on a massive partying spree in Madhavana – perhaps that is the origin of the IT culture of "pizza and beer party" at the end of a successful project!

#### ***Hanuman's lessons in management***

- A good boss looks everywhere for talent – especially not discounting people who are quiet and unassuming and not volunteering
- People are more capable of scaling greater heights than they think they can – a good boss brings out this confidence and motivation
- The first challenge when you embark on a project is to get out of the comfort zone created by your close people and yourself
- Bosses should balance encouragement with playing devil's advocate. A successful employee is one who passes this tough test
- People executing any project should not be too "task oriented" and expect micro-instructions. They should go the extra mile
- Taking a moment to savor the victory is very essential. This will bring in the rest of the team to co-operate better.