



Calling Card

An Integral Part of Work Identity

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For a lot of people, 'who they are' is determined by the 'work they do'. In other words, their 'work' determines their 'identity' and defines them. I'm sure you would have noticed or observed this or maybe you are also in the same boat. Whatever may be your experience, it is important to take cognisance of this, especially since the drivers here are external. The 'relational identity' of how one is known by society or the world at large!

I have been reflecting on this for a while now as I witness people, their behaviour and also situations shared or encountered by friends and fellow professionals.

Are you also suffering from 'The Calling Card' syndrome? I coined this term listening to experiences shared by numerous people from

different walks of life. Let me recount some of these experiences to explain the nuances of this bug that has bitten many people.

A 'Calling Card' in other words is a 'Visiting Card' or a 'Business Card' which has your name, name of the company, logo & designation (if applicable), address, email id, contact numbers-landline, mobile etc. While organisations have their own standard formats approved by the Corporate Communications function, Entrepreneurs or Freelancers can get very creative with them depending on what they are trying to convey through this Card.

Extending the logic of ‘work’ and determining one’s ‘identity’, the ‘Calling Card’ works as the ‘identification mark’. Drawing a simple parallel, while making a new passport or renewing one, the passport application form asks for your ‘identification mark’, and is sometimes also cross-checked by the official during the personal interview at the passport office. Similarly, have you participated in a seminar or conference where the first thing a fellow participant asks you or hands over to you, either before or after shaking hands, is the so called ‘Calling Card’?

In fact, the need and demand for ‘The Calling Card’ starts from the Registration Desk of the conference/seminar. You would find a bowl kept where you would be requested to drop your ‘Business Card’ in spite of having registered online or via email.

Then, during and after, the ‘Networking over Tea’ time...you will find people walk up to meet you with their ‘Calling Card’ and asking for yours in return. While some seem to be in a card collecting spree, others would only give it out to people selectively. The common excuse would be ‘I forgot to carry mine’ or ‘I have run out of cards’.

Post event, you will find some people would religiously use the card and send you a ‘Thank you’ or a follow-up mail. Others would either trash most cards or hand them in to their assistant to organise for the purpose of sending ‘Diwali Greetings’ or ‘Seasons Greetings’.

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So, just as an ‘email id’ nowadays is your virtual address and identity, the ‘Calling Card’ has been known for one’s identity for a long time, especially in the professional domain.

What irks me is that all the experiences shared by people, is that one’s value increases or decreases based on the ‘Calling Card’ you possess. If you’re employed by a Corporate, your value is directly proportional to the Name & Brand of the Organisation and your Designation. The more known the company & brand is, and the bigger, more fancy your designation, the higher your value is in the eyes of the fraternity or audience. Isn’t this bizarre?

Is one’s worth and value, reduced to the ‘Calling Card’ you carry? What about all your achievements, accomplishments, experiences which are not depicted through the ‘Calling Card’? Does one demean oneself or doubt one’s self worth in the absence of one? Have our standards and measures of success become so hollow that we dismiss ‘the person’ and ‘their experiences’ over the ‘calling card’.

For most entrepreneurs and freelancers, the ‘Calling Card’ is their creative expression of the expertise they possess, including the logo, name of their firm; so it is with pride that they create and carry this identity. However, for people in the Corporate Environment, it seems like demonstrating an act of one-up man-ship and getting the better of others.

Just as ‘work’ is only a subset of our ‘life’s identity’, the ‘calling card’ becomes an integral part of our ‘work identity’. It is unmindful to use it as a barometer to measure and to judge a person in a limited sphere. Here’s for us to pause and ask, if we are ‘missing the woods for the trees’!

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