

# You Need Not be Paranoid to Thrive

When Andrew S. Grove, Chairman of the Board of Intel Corporation famously asserted that paranoia was the only way forward, he engraved this sound-bite into our collective conscious. Considering what Intel went through, Mr. Grove's reaction is perfectly understandable. By the time Intel realized it was in trouble, tough choices were all they had. It was a fight for survival.

There is an old saying, "A cat that sits on a hot stove won't do it again". Will you say it is an extreme reaction? By choosing never to sit on a stove again it denies itself a cozy, comfortable sleep and condemns itself to cold, uncomfortable nights for the rest of its' life.

*A better option for the cat, before sitting, might be to check how hot the stove is and decide?*

Perhaps Mr. Grove reacted the same way? Seemingly out of the blue he found that competition had chipped away at Intel's lead. And threatened the very existence of the company he had helped build from scratch. On suddenly discovering that the competition

had made the stove he was sitting on too hot for comfort; He deduced stoves are dangerous. And decided to never sit on one again. Perhaps Mr. Grove chose to blame the effect rather than the cause?

What led to the stove getting uncomfortably hot in the first place? Were the changes very sudden? As Mr. Grove mentions fairly often in his book, people in the company knew. The ones in touch with customers knew. But Mr. Grove didn't. Neither did others in the senior management.

So, **the key issue is that Mr. Grove, along with his colleagues, had lost touch with reality.** When it did barge in through the door of the executive suite, quick fixes were not feasible. Till then, there was a fairly large disconnect between how Mr. Grove and his team perceived the marketplace and how it actually was.

As I wrote in an earlier article, *'There are two ways of looking at life. The way it is; Or the way we will like to believe it is'* ("Why You Must Shoot the Messenger?"). In the case of Intel senior management of 80's, theirs was perhaps the latter approach. Unfortunately, it is always the senior management that is the last to accept reality. Intel was no different.

The most important lesson from this experience is about staying in touch with reality, not about getting paranoid.

Being paranoid implies you are driven by fear. "The world is out to get me". Given Mr. Grove's experience, understandable. Most of us when faced with such a situation will probably react similarly. It is also possible that many of us will freeze, some will go into denial & others might try to do "more-of-the-same-that-made-us-successful".

Ask any company which has slid down to mediocrity. It will chant this mantra too. It fits their context. But is it valid for all businesses, all situations? Had he and his team stayed in touch with reality, will they have been overwhelmed? Will he still believe paranoia guarantees survival? Most likely not.

His way says, "I need to be better than you". Perhaps another way is, trying to be better than oneself? Interestingly, both involve the same thing; *trying to be better*. Same thing, **Done differently**. One is about fear. The other about hope. Hope energizes. Fear enervates. Fear destroys. Hope creates.

Bad times forced Intel to change. The tough times force most companies to move out of

their comfort zone. They change themselves to survive in the *present*, driven by fear. How many stay in touch with reality? Try changing themselves while the going is good, to prepare for the *future*, led by hope? Fear is not the key, hope is.

Dictionary.com defines Paranoia as: 'A *psychotic disorder* characterized by *delusions of persecution* with or without grandeur, often strenuously *defended with apparent logic and reason*'. Another definition is; *Extreme, irrational distrust of others*. Will **You** like to work with this kind of an organization? Or, work with this kind of a person?

If you stay in touch with customer realities, competitor realities and your organizational realities, to name a few; Keep course-correcting; Experimenting; Trying to be better. Are you as likely to get to the stage where you don't know what hit you? Paranoia, after all, is a disease. Not a strategy.

**But the most important question is, is your stove also going to get unbearably hot one day?**

---

This article was originally published in **Businessworld**, in *Wide Angle*, the monthly guest column by Anoova Consulting's Strategy and Leadership Practice.

If you will like to receive such articles regularly, you can subscribe to our publication, *Knowledge at Work*, at <http://AnoovaConsulting.Biz>. When you subscribe we will also send you a copy of *Ten Practical Tips to Turbocharge Your Leadership Journey*.

---

### About the Author



A Principal at Anoova Consulting, Mohit Malik heads the Strategy and Leadership Practice. He has more than 17 years of leadership experience, including thirteen years in the Indian Army, across diverse areas ranging from Strategic Planning, Operations to IT Management. He has consulted for Businesses, Government and Not-for Profit organizations and holds an MBA from Indian Institute of Management (IIM).

He can be reached at [mohit@AnoovaConsulting.Biz](mailto:mohit@AnoovaConsulting.Biz).

You can create the future you want,  
Or you can endure the future you get.

We help organizations and leaders create the future.

Anoova Consulting  
Q – 502, Sector 21  
NOIDA, 201301  
India

Tel: +91 – 120 - 254 0917  
Fax: +91 – 120 – 253 2663  
Web: <http://AnoovaConsulting.Biz>