



SUN - The Destroyed Village!!!!



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While in a walk-meeting in the lovely Menlo Park downtown with a Stanford professor the other day, there came a brief memory lane snapshot visit to "Sun Microsystems" - the company that once was in forefront of both software and hardware innovations. The snapshot did not last long but it reminded me of a story I had heard from my parents while growing up. This is how it goes ...

Once upon a time, there was a sage. He visited a village with one of his disciples. People in that village were very selfish and mean to each other. Everyone was for himself. They thought of short term gains and were willing to do harm to fellow villagers for small gains. The sage stayed there for few days and did everything possible to spread his good words. They did not really care much for his wisdom. They treated him just like a beggar. Sage being a sage - when he left, he still blessed the village and wished that the village flourishes and grows and always remain intact.

After a few days he reached a second village. This village was different. People were very nice to each other. They helped each other in all small and big matters. Everyone cooperated and explored together. All disputes were settled by elders with meaningful debates. They invented and made new discoveries and inventions often as part of their progressive lives. They were very advanced, intellectual and innovative. The sage stayed there for a few days as well. They treated him like the learned he was. They listened to his wisdom, asked lot of questions and invited his criticism and insights. He received lot of respect and gifts (which he simply refused).

Here also the sage stayed for a few days. When leaving the village they requested him for his blessings. He said "I wish this village is destroyed and people be forced to disperse." The villagers took this gracefully and said goodbye to him respectfully.

After they left the second village, the disciple asked his sage - complaining - "You actually blessed the bad (first) village to be prosperous and intact which in fact deserved your curse. And you cursed the nice (second) village to be destroyed which actually deserved to be blessed. Why?"

The sage replied "When the good village gets destroyed, its citizens will spread in other areas and set up other good villages thus spreading the good around. The mean village should remain intact because we would not want evil to spread". The disciple bowed to his master - humbled.

I don't know which sage cursed Sun Microsystems but one look at the re-born semiconductor industry especially in Silicon Valley and it becomes clear that destroyed village of Sun Microsystems spreads its good wider and deeper.

I for one owe big part of my learning from that destroyed village called Sun Microsystems!

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- Khanh Le** 2w ...

Well said, GP. It's always good to hear from you. To my previous Hornet and Cheetah team members, and all other former colleagues at Sun, best wishes for 2022!

Like Reply | 1 Like
 - GP Singh** 2w ...

You are right. A good village can turn bad. Especially in high tech world. There are many examples of this in past and a few in making at present :-)

I have my opinions but want to abstain from passing judgements. As the saying goes "How did the empire collapse? The answer - Slowly at first and then all of a sudden". All giant failures have this pattern - "slowly at first and then all of a sudden". The journey always starts slowly. The roots of failures are in the beginning of that journey. Unfortunately, what comes to light is generally the tail end which is mostly too late. In the end, there are only desperate actions of people with hard choices based on mostly erroneous data and lot of conflicting opinions. Obviously, those actions are very risky. As you have mentioned - infighting and incompetence makes it worse. The risk is even higher when the new commander-in-chief is a well polished, smooth talking executive without solid substance underneath. In those difficult times, only the leadership of people with their feet on the ground and their head on their real shoulders and quite a bit of luck can turn things around. Else the results are mostly negatively. Again - many examples in past and some in making right now :-)

Like Reply
 - Chuck Patton** 2w ...

Very wise words. 😊

Like Reply
 - Chuck Patton** 2w ...

Ah but what you fail to recognize is that Sun Microsystems was the bad village that was spared destruction only to fall under the weight of incessant infighting of its myopic leaders. I joined in 1987 and witnessed to truly amazing technological achievements. And while I admired the company founders, I now realize that instead of hiring sound business minds who knew how to monetize great ideas, they took on a bunch of second rate bean counters. In the very end, the last CEO tried to peddle the tattered company to IBM who would have completely dismantled the it and cast its good technology to the winds. Scott McNealy interceded and brokered the deal with Oracle. Unfortunately, Oracle couldn't figure out what to do with the remnants, Solaris, SPARC, Java, etc.

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 - Michael Sebrée** 2w ...

Your remarks really take be back on a trip in space and time, Chuck. Sun was bringing in huge profits but probably could be said to have suffered a failure of vision when they needed it most.

Like Reply
 - Utpal Shah** 2w ...

Very insightful GP! I find many veterans of Sun in leadership roles across the semi ecosystem.

Like Reply | 1 Like
 - GP Singh** 2w ...

Thank you for reading Utpal. :-)

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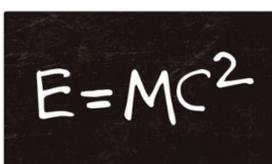
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