

The Annual Bash

Behind the curtain...

Dec. 17, 7.15 P.M. *The countdown had begun. I had to hurry. By the time I reached the assembly point, my teammates were edgy and raring to go. But I was not ready. My attire was inappropriate. There was no place for me to change. We were only a few moments away. I hurriedly took off my shirt and jacket. And slid into a flashy red hoodie. Then I scrambled to the center of the raised platform, my back facing the roaring crowds. The lights came on. On stage, and in my head! What am I doing here? Isn't our organization built on the pillars of humility? Then what is this star pretense for? These silent questions stood out amidst a deafening backdrop of music and cheering of the crowds! There was no time to sort out my thoughts. It was show time!*

The Paradox. The Cybage Annual Bash night is a big deal. It is the talk of the town, like a status symbol. It makes us glamorously stand out. But paradoxically, our organization also prides itself for having its feet planted firmly on the ground. This belief stems from the conviction that being grounded is more important than the razzmatazz the world expects from winning leaderships. Considering the scale of Cybage's success over the years, the brand is markedly low-key in the public domain. Why, then, is this contradiction? Why do we continue having this flashy annual display when modest demeanor has always been our natural posture? Perhaps the answer lies in what transpires behind the scenes.

The Run-up. The scale is large. The Bash requires a lot of preparation. The Operations team, along with our vendor partners, has its hands full. It is an unenviable job. Banqueting is always a challenge, no matter how many caterers you change, how much you plan—there will always be a handful that won't be satisfied (for the right reasons). Celebrity musicians come with their own baggage. They need their egos pampered. You can share a list of your preferred songs, but they will still sing to their own tunes. Then there are the cops who come knocking, gatecrashers who get innovative every year, and latecomers frustrated about being delayed or denied entry. The event is not perfect, but the efforts are sincere. Fortunately, I am immune to the backend headaches. I come as a guest, to enjoy my triple act.

Back to 7.15 P.M. The Management Dance, which lasts for 5 to 10 minutes on stage, takes 2 to 3 weeks of preparation. The popular 'item' numbers of the year are chosen. The nonsensical numbers camouflage the quality of the dancers. The practice sessions are held in a secret hideout on the Cybage premises. Participation is open to a little over 100 senior executives at Cybage. Only a quarter of them are willing to make themselves look like fools. All participants can choose their preferred dance number from the available three options. However, no matter the choice, each participant is the emperor of awkwardness. Laughter resonates through the practice sessions. The fiercest of competitors are the best of buddies. Together, we gang up and bully the poor choreographer. These are the good old fun times right from the early Cybage days.

7.30 P.M. My second chore is the annual speech. This is the easy part. It used to be

challenging. Oratory is an innate talent. I don't have it. I used to keep little reminder notes in my pockets. What if I forget? Then I discovered a simple trick. Disregard the speech. Construct a story instead. The talk turns into a journey, a tiny adventure built around the story's characters. The audience's focus shifts from the speaker to the characters. The narrator standing in the spotlight doesn't exist. The lights, in fact, help. They blind me. Without spectacles, I see a blended audience. It feels like I am talking to one entity—the Cybagian. So what's the big deal if I forget something? Making a fool of oneself in front of one's loved ones is not a disaster.



8.30 P.M. to 11 P.M. Once I step down from the stage, I let my hair loose. The rest of the evening is spent jostling and dancing amidst thousands. Raising hands, singing along when instructed. Swaying to the tunes of the celebrity of the night like everyone else. The energy is electrifying. Selfies are fun. But blending into the crowd is more exciting. Tiny groups bonding, perhaps each group has a new member or two. A lot of new stories begin on the Bash night—some friendships, some love, and some goodbyes. And I have the privilege of being in the middle of it all. My legs hurt, my heart pounds, and my shirt is sticky. But my thoughts have tranquility. There is a sense of belonging on the large dance floor.

Midnight. I relive the evening on my drive back home. It is invigorating to watch the performance of my peers from the side stage during the Management Dance. The friendship between the senior cadres of Cybage has taken years to ripen, and those brief moments together on stage evoke nostalgia. The speech forces me to snap back from my reverie into the

present moment. That's the closest I ever feel to the organization, it's like an umbilical cord that is running down from the stage and connecting me with each member of the audience. The subsequent dancing and peeping into the eyes of thousands of aspiring faces offer a preview of the promising future that lies ahead. All dimensions of Cybage's timeline converge into our Annual Bash night. It's a wholesome experience. By the time the cold night draws to a close, there is warmth in the air. It is a strange feeling I share with many of my colleagues, a rich blend of *'pride and humility'* to be called a Cybagian.

A 'stand-alone' humility is not necessarily a virtue. For it may stand in the way of recognizing the person in the mirror. What is wrong about celebrating success with smiles and laughter in the company of your loved ones? Celebration is about pride, not ego. Pride makes us feel nice about ourselves. It's only when pride and humility coexist, that dignity is born. And it's this same dignity that comes to life on every Annual Bash night at Cybage...