



# Winning A Yearlong Triathlon

## The 4 Aces-Affect, Adapt, Agile, Accelerate!

By Prashanth Achar



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**C** OVID-19 caught everyone off guard! It will be a lie to say that we were visionaries, and we were fully prepared to handle the situation with our Business Continuity Plan. It was like a tiger leaping at you around the bend, and you had to decide the best course of action at the spur of the moment.

Looking through the rear-view mirror, the journey comprised of four key elements – ABCD: Addressing Anxiety, Business Sustenance, Cash Generation and Driving Austerity.

As the whole country went under lockdown, 'Leading by maximising empathy & minimising anxiety' was the mantra. In short, the heart was lovingly commanding the head! Building a tribe by deploying informal channels such as WhatsApp groups, town halls, and informal calls helped soothe the nerves. Regular activities on business engagement coupled with fun elements, ensured that the motivation was at an all-time high, as proven by in-house scratch research.

A tribe can survive only when every member adapts and contributes. Driving the 'performance culture', the black swan moment was created by offering

increments and bonus disbursement while the industry was going through restructuring and salary cuts. Every employee was offered performance-linked increment and the running year's remuneration was redrawn to include Variable Pay, with the opportunity to earn in multiples of the component. This fired up the whole team to a different level.

The variable pay structure demanded that the tribe's delivery be put ahead of individual performance, which seeded a new 'team-culture.'

As the blend plant, supply chain and sales system were brought back into operation with the utmost caution, communication was taken to the next level with leadership going silent and the bragging rights being passed on to the ground-level teams. This allowed the team to showcase their creativity through digital content with some of the videos going viral.

Every adversity offers a unique opportunity. The freed-up time of travel helped build capability through online training and adopt newer ways. Between April to December, an unprecedented number of 60,000 hours of interaction with employees and customers alike got accomplished. The outcome is a capable

and cohesive team imbibing a new culture that is accelerating delivery.

This year's most impactful move has been motivating the team to thrive rather than to survive, which raised the bar in every sphere of action. The organisation's focus shifted on 'what we deliver' from 'how we deliver', thereby alleviating commute/travel and safety challenges. 'Tank to bank velocity' concept was conceived, and the whole organisation drove one specific aspect - cash flow – delivering pink health.

Being agile, GP Petroleums was one of the first to bring back its plant for blending, as early as in April 2020, with due Government permissions to supply to essential services sectors like Western Coalfields Ltd and Sugar Industries etc. The launch the Channel-finance through an NBFC is an example in hand which ensured 'network support,' and it released 25-30% of the company's working capital. The other example of agility worth mentioning is the Phygital approach – a hybrid of physical and digital approach - adaptation to the changing times, enabling the appointment of distributors remotely.

We did reopen the office in October with work-from-home also being an option for most. Contrary to what one would expect, everyone was keen to get back to the office, discounting the tormenting commute!

On the business front, the lubricant industry is one of the least impacted industries. Of course, there was a seismic shift – from urban to rural and from premium lubricants to value for money products. The buzzing rural markets on account of rural income uptick and least disruptions ensured disproportionate growth of Tier-2/3 towns and kept the

automotive lubricants segment growing.

Reverse migration of low-income groups moving from big cities to rural areas has improved Agri, and personal mobility (2-wheelers) linked business. Social distancing norms and also revenge tourism drove private transport over public transport, thereby increasing vehicle density on roads. Being agile and learning by the hour meant that quick decisions could be made on geography and portfolio selection. In recessionary times, the value-for-money players take a share of premium players.

While overall, the market has shrunk, the fighter brands like Ipol do not get impacted as their job is to nibble at others' share. As consumer awareness improves, products with honest price tags get picked up in place of high-priced brands. The heightened industrial activity positively impacted the industrial lubricants demand and automotive lubricants due to goods movement. The imports losing the favour resulted in a spurt in demand for tyres made in India and for Rubber Process Oils.

Work sphere is rapidly changing faster than ever. Salary levels have risen steeply. Insecurity shares a directly proportional relation with high earnings. Job security will be a thing of the past. A word of advice to the corporate citizens may not be out of place - Adaptability and multi-skilling will be necessary to keep oneself afloat. Agility in approaching the signals on changing weather and quickly altering the course will be the life jacket. Most importantly, one should learn to manage anxiety. How do you do that?

When one works with passion, work becomes a piece of art. Passion takes the place of stress as both cannot co-exist. And in passion, there is no anxiety. Anxiety is always related to the future while passion is in present time!

GP Petroleums is being reinvented with the core belief of "Play for Profits with Passion!"

It is a clear day at GP Petroleums and business-as-unusual, being in the growth phase. Hiring, salary increases, and promotions are at a normal pace to accelerate growth within the serious-fun place! 🍷

*NB: Prashanth Achar is the Chief Executive Officer of GP Petroleums Ltd. Views expressed are personal.*