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MANAGEMENT LEARNING'S FROM DABBAWALA

It has been 134 years since these men who are also known as the lifeline of Mumbai. Even though being operation only in Mumbai they are known all around the world. These are the famous Dabbawalas of Mumbai.

Many people have done innovation and had a name in history. Some people made strategies at that time that would change people way of thinking and working. One of these people was Mahadeo Havaji Bachche who changed how supply chain management would work around the world. But did not get the recognition it deserved at that time as India was not independent.

Today because of the same supply chain management, the Dabbawalas have become a known name around the world. News channels, politicians, celebrities and businessmen are still amazed at how in today's age of technology this old supply chain system is still working with the same efficiency and accuracy like they have been doing it for the past 134 years.

Like other visionary people we look up to for referring to things across different fields. When it comes to management, people should refer to how the Dabbawalas operate.

The Dabbawalas are currently operation only in Mumbai, India. Mumbai is known as the “Financial Capital of India” or “The city that never sleeps”. Which means that maximum tax payers of India come from Mumbai. Due to this population of Mumbai has been increasing every year leading to traffic on the roads and crowding of local trains.

India around the world is known to have healthy food because it is not only home cooked but also eaten hot and fresh. While commuting from one place to another, the food tends to get cold. This is where the Dabbawalas come in.

There are learning from how the Dabbawalas operate that people running organizations and people working can learn from.

First being that every individual should love the work they are doing. These dabbawalas are not literate and their work involves a lot of travelling everyday but they still work with the same enthusiasm while maintaining that smile on their faces. They are also paid less than we expect them to get paid but still they

do their job because they love doing it. They love to see their hard work get paid off when people get their food on time everyday.

In this age of technology and new innovations. These Dabbawalas remind us that sometimes the old systems that were set in place work the best and a huge change can bring their credibility and accuracy down. If they had changed their supply chain systems they would have lost their Six Sigma rating.

Today organizations say that the people working are their family but it is not implemented like the Dabbawalas. After delivering the lunch boxes at their respective places, they meet at a place and their lunch together. We have always been taught, "Sharing is caring" but they implement this while have their lunch.

Today organizations spend a lot of money in promoting their products or services. But these Dabbawalas let their work speak for themselves. They did not do much advertising but still became famous all around the world because of the work they are doing and how they are doing.

They have been just doing their work since so many years and have earned the love and respect it gets. They have been ethical in doing their job which has made them what they are today. It is the trust among the customers that they will get their product on time and they do not have to worry about the food getting spoiled as well.

Speaking of the work they do; an important aspect of their work is discipline and the punctuality that many organizations and individuals also fail in following. In one of the busiest cities in the world, they manage to deliver the lunch boxes on time every day. Indians in general lack in punctuality and should follow it in their daily lives.

An important aspect that any business should keep in mind is to speak the language of their target audience. The Dabbawalas operate in Mumbai, so they know Marathi as well as Hindi and that make their communication with their customers easy and understandable. Apart from language, how the people in that region live and their behaviorism. For example- You cannot go the South of India and sell tea more than coffee. The Dabbawalas understand the fast-paced life of Mumbai and to deliver the food hot they use the local trains- another lifeline of Mumbai.

Climate change is a real problem. Even though the United Nations has put up sustainability goals for countries to follow to reduce the carbon footprint.

Organizations have been trying to opt for sustainable materials or goods for their business. These Dabbawalas on the other hand, have a 0% carbon footprint. They travel by cycles and the local trains and they do not sit in an air-conditioned office to have their lunch, which reduces their carbon footprint. They also have a healthier lifestyle because it is like a workout when you carry around 60 dabbas on head or cycle to different places.

These were some of the learning from the Dabbawalas that we as individuals and as organization we head or work in can be implemented.

These Dabbawalas have stuck to the old method which has worked for them exceptionally well. But like it is said “Change is the only constant”. They need to bring a few changes in their ways of working.

They should also slowly expand their tiffin delivery systems to different cities in India. India has an amazing road and rail connectivity and expanding their business will give more employment opportunities and increase their revenue as well.

To increase the revenue, they can also increase their charges for those who can afford it. This increase in revenue will also help the existing Dabbawalas to have a good life ahead.

One of the biggest change is the advancement of technology. They should introduce basic technology in their working system. Like giving phone to the Dabbawalas and have laptops to keep a track of the customer database.

Personally, I have seen the Dabbawalas at Churchgate near Eros Cinemas in the morning when they are sorting out the lunch boxes and then also how they work with unity when loading these boxes in the train compartment. Many people like me are not aware that the Dabbawalas have a compartment for them to deliver the lunch boxes. I got to know this while travelling on the same train as them, crossing their compartment, and how they deliver these lunch boxes on time.

The Dabbawalas are truly a lifeline of Mumbai and along with the other lifeline i.e. the local trains they make sure that their customers get their food and are happy and healthy. The recognition, trust and the fame they have today are all worth it.