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Date: 15-08-2024

“Management Learning’s from Dabbawala”

The first thought that comes to mind for a Mumbaikar when someone says dabbawala is immediately ‘home cooked food’ and very rightly the dabbawala’s fulfil the hunger of 200000 Mumbaikars by closing the gap from people’s home to their offices by providing their services and making sure people receive their dabbas with home cooked food right on time. The Dabbawala was inaugurated due to the need of a Parsi banker who desired homemade food on a regular basis from home and he hired the first dabbawalla ever. His colleagues then desired the same needs and from there began the story of whom we call the Mumbai Dabbawalas. In 1890 Mahadeo Havaji Bachche, a visionary saw this as an opportunity and started lunch delivery services with a team of 100 dabbawalas. As the city grew the demand for the services grew as well from a team of 100 dabbawalas to now 5000 dabbawalas. Most dabbawalas are related to each other and belong to the varkari sect of Maharashtra. Approximately 85% of its members are illiterate. They have a track record of making less than 1 mistake in every 16 million deliveries and have achieved a 100% customer satisfaction rate. They are one of the most efficient supply chains in the world with no investment in technology, no negative effects to the environment and the most promising organization with a six-sigma certification awarded in recognition of 99.9997% accuracy rate of deliveries.

The dabbawalla transacts 200000 customers on an average day for 6 days a week i.e.. 400000 tiffin’s a day to and fro. They not only deliver the home made food in the morning from the customers house to their offices but also deliver empty tiffin’s back to their homes from their offices. The Dabbawalas have always delivered tiffin’s irrespective of various bad weather conditions and most importantly delivered the tiffin’s right on time. The overall organizational structure makes it a strong business and they are well known all over the world for their time management. The dabbawalas have a very unique supply chain , a dabbawalla starts his day at 8.00 am spending at hour and a half collecting different tiffin’s from customers houses and assembling at the local railway station. All the dabbawalas from that locality meet and sort tiffin’s according to various destination areas. From 9.42 to 10.55 is the journey time, the dabbawalas load the wooden crates filled with tiffin’s onto the luggage or goods compartment in the train then from 11.30 to 12.30 these tiffin’s are further delivered either by cycles or the dabbawalas walk to different offices to deliver the tiffin’s to its customers. While the customers are having their home cooked lunch between 12.30 to 1.30 pm, this is also the time the Dabbawalas have their

lunch which they carry from their homes and sit as one big family and eat together. Further from 1.30 to 2.15 they go back collecting all the empty tiffin's from their customers in offices and meet again at local railway stations. Their return journey is much more relaxed as now they have satisfied their customers by providing their services on time. From 4.30 to 5.30 they then travel back to the house to deliver the empty tiffin's from where they picked up the tiffin in the morning. The dabbawalas have solved the problem of thousands of people by providing their services where customers can save a lot of money, eat healthy food prepared by their loved ones with their choice of taste and can eat at proper lunch hours.

Now the question arises about the needs and problems of these dabbawalas who have effortlessly provided their services with only one goal in mind that is to serve their customers home cooked food and most importantly food that's served on time. The dabbawalas got a lot of fame and publicity, newspaper coverage, interviews from various PhD and MBA institutes but no one ever spoke about their problems and needs. Did their lives change for the better now that they were known worldwide?

Dabbawalas still continued to face a lot of problems including low income, no loans due to absence of income proof, no health and education benefits for their family, no access to bank accounts. Keeping all these issues in mind and to bring a change in their lives - Dabbawalas enterprises private ltd was inaugurated on 7th September 2017 with the main objective of providing economical and financial benefits to all the dabbawalas. They now work as contractors in the company. They receive their salary slips and bank accounts have been opened for every dabbawalla with various other facilities provided. On the 1st of August I had the privilege to attend a session on time management with dabbawalas conducted by NL Dalmia Institute of Management Studies and Research. I also had the opportunity to meet Mr. Sandeep S Gaikar the managing director and president of dabbawalla enterprise private limited along with Mr. Sunil P Gavnde and Mr. Sharad G More ,Ceo and secretary and also our amazing speaker who took us through their journey and their achievements and also spoke about the problems faced in today's times. Looking back and thinking about the dabbawalas they are not as actively seen as they used to be in earlier times. There has been a sudden dip in the number of dabbawalas due to the lack of demand of deliveries of tiffins. Covid destroyed many lives and many even lost their lives to Covid. Dabbawalas were no exception to the brutality of covid. Schools, colleges and offices being shut and people opting for work from home became a reason for the drop in demand of dabbawalas. Once covid had passed through and everything in Mumbai got back to its normal, dabbawalla had already taken a hit in its workforce. Every school,

college and offices now provide canteen facilities and not only canteens but restaurants at every nook and corner have also become a competition to the dabbawalas. Having said this it is not convenient to have lunch from canteen and restaurants every day. Dabbawalas should get back to their core vision which was providing customers with 'Home cooked food'. In today's 21st century with all members of the family being earning individuals it gets difficult for a person to prepare tiffins for everyone and then go to offices themselves. Instead dabbawalas themselves can prepare home cooked food and provide their services. There are also many women who prepare tiffins in different localities, dabbawalas can provide their services by delivering these tiffins to different localities. This will help to not only get back the dabbawalas in Mumbai but also help to employ so many other women on a large scale. Even though people are having lunch from their canteens and restaurants daily, there will always be a craving for home cooked meals. Having these facilities easily available in their localities and having dabbawalas to deliver it to them at the right time will bring a significant change in the demand of tiffin services. Another idea that they can adapt is provide tiffin services on demand for dinner as well, with all members of the family being working individuals coming home after a tiring day and cooking for the family can get a little tiring at times. Having facilities of home cooked food will also be beneficial for the economy as well as health benefits. Dabbawalas can also adapt technology into their management. They have been working without the help of technology for years but one must change according to its surroundings. The newer generations cannot seem to live without technology and keeping this need in mind the dabbawalas can also adapt to the change. There would be a new generation of work force as well in the dabbawalla enterprise who can help with the adaptability of technology into the system for very basic needs such as placing an order and sending the order to the required destination as per their requirement. Mumbai was and will always be the city of dreams, a city where people are struggling to meet ends and reach their goals. In such a city dabbawalla can be back in action since they are much more affordable and healthier than having lunch in restaurants on a daily basis. Like mentioned in the beginning Dabbawalas are known for their hard work and dedication and most importantly known to provide home cooked meals and that at the right time to its customers. Dabbawalas have earlier proved no challenges can affect their workforce and they continue to prove it in the future. Mumbai wishes to see its men and women in white again keeping its motto of home cooked food alive, with appropriate framework and adaptability dabbawalas can be running Mumbai once again.