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“Management Learning’s from Dabbawala”

Dabbawala originating from the streets of Mumbai have a rich history where in they started in the year 1890 by a visionary leader Mr. Mahadeo Havaji Bachche who realized there was an opportunity to deliver home made fresh food to workers as it was not possible for the workers to go back home at the time of lunch.

They now stand for a fusion of modernity and history and are a representation of Mumbai's lively and hardworking character.

As during the British colonial period Mumbai kept on growing, the number of office workers increased and people migrated from different parts of the country to seek job opportunities, with this rapid growth of the city the demand for the Dabbawala’s kept on increasing.

The Dabbawalas technique is very straightforward; it combines color-coded codes with a strict procedure to guarantee accuracy. Their efficiency stems from their simplicity. Process simplification in management can improve efficiency and lower mistakes.

The organizational hierarchy that the Dabbawalas follow is very simple to understand they follow a flat organisation structure. A “Mukkadam” is placed between 15-20 Dabbawalas. Each Dabbawala can take independent decisions this reduces the delivery time as they do not have to wait for approval from their supervisors.

Dabbawalas are the co-owners of the of their systems, they are not just workers. This particular feeling of ownership makes them responsible and enhances their commitment to quality and service.

Dabbawalas are very well known for their punctual nature, it is also said that the house wives are scared of the dabbawalas because of their punctual nature they cannot afford to wait for more than a few minutes at a particular house to collect dabba as this would end up disturbing their whole schedule.

Dabbawalas in the year 2024 still rely on traditional and simple communication method using code and symbols and still there is no mistakes made by them in the transportation process. Dabbawalas have maintained the efficacy of their system by adapting to shifting conditions. Organizations can maintain their relevance and competitiveness by being flexible and receptive to new ideas.

The Dabbawalas do not charge hefty fees from their clients, they charge around Rs 500-700 per month per tiffin depending on various factors.

When it comes to the operations mechanics of the Dabbawalas,

Lunchboxes are picked up by dabbawalas early in the morning from households.

Transportation: Handcarts, bicycles, and local railroads are used to deliver the lunchboxes.

Sorting: Using a special color-coded and alphanumeric coding system, the lunchboxes are sorted at several stages.

Delivery: After that, the lunchboxes are brought to the appropriate businesses or offices.

Return: Following lunch, the empty boxes are gathered and taken back to their initial locations.

Dabbawalas deliver nearly 2,00,000 lunchboxes in a day, their monthly turnover is around 10 Cr to 12 Cr. An individual Dabbawala earns between 15-30K per month. Dabbawalas are frequently a part of a cooperative structure in which they get a portion of the total money that the delivery business makes. The

frequency of deliveries and the effectiveness of the infrastructure can affect their revenue.

Dabbawalas' general financial stability is largely attributed to their steady employment and job security. Some dabbawalas may earn health insurance or other benefits as part of their work with the cooperative, though these are not standardized.

The Dabbawalas also give high importance to social activities and welfare of the society when there is extra food left in the lunchboxes the dabbawalas provide their customers with a sticker that the customers can stick on their lunchboxes stating that there is food left so the dabbawalas will give that box to the people in need of food.

The Dabbawalas have also started with the concept of “Dabbawalis” which encourages the participation of women in their workplace.

The dabbawalas have accomplished to maintain an amazing efficient system with no to minimal technology, but integrating new age technology could further enhance their operations thereby increasing the revenue. Here are some ways the dabbawalas can integrate technology to improve their enterprise:

1) Digital Analysis and Tracking:

Analysing delivery patterns, peak times, and areas with higher demand could help optimize routes and scheduling, reducing delivery times and increasing efficiency. Data driven information can enhance and help in managing resources better and customers can receive a real time update on their lunchbox similar to what delivery platforms like Zomato and Swiggy are doing with their app.

2) Mobile and Web Applications:

Developing a mobile or web application can help increase the visibility of the Dabbawalas and bring in new customers and can provide essential information to the existing customers with the help of a dashboard. With the rise of Unified Payments Interface (UPI) developing an app can enable to users to easily make the payments to dabbawalas.

3) Rewards, Referrals and Customer Rating:

As we know how crucial time is for the dabbawalas, dabbawalas can rate customers on a scale of 5 or 10 on the tiffin being ready, customers having good rating can receive rewards. This would help dabbawalas maintain their time constraints. Referral programs can help increase the customer base and thereby generating fresh revenue.

4) Training and Development:

Providing dabbawalas with digital training modules can aid in talent development and guarantee that all staff members are knowledgeable about the most recent procedures. Organizing online conferences and workshops can help dabbawalas communicate and share knowledge more effectively.

This training methods can ensure dabbawalas are well versed with the new technology that is in place.

The Mumbai dabbawalas' straightforward, practical system teaches important lessons about efficiency and administration. Their accomplishment serves as a reminder of the value of keeping things simple and employing a clear, color-coded approach to guarantee correctness. With employees who benefit from the system's earnings, they serve as an example of the need of robust operating procedures and employee empowerment, encouraging loyalty and dependability. Their strategy not only delivers meals with remarkable punctuality but also emphasizes the need of excellent communication and a customer-centric

approach. Lastly, the fact that they are able to remain efficient in spite of conventional approaches demonstrates the necessity of adaptability for long-term success.