

Name: Neel Thakkar

Educational Qualification: BCOM Graduate

Present Educational Status: MBA Student

Declaration/Undertaking:

I declare this essay is the work of my own creation as a part of essays competition organized by Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt Ltd. I transfer the ownership, title and rights of this essay to Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt Ltd. Dabbawala Enterprises Pvt Ltd. may use this essay content in any way it deems suitable.

Name: Neel Thakkar

Date:13.08.2024

## **Management Learning's from Dabbawalas**

Founded in 1890, Mumbai Dabbawalas are the men dressed in traditional white outfits with Gandhi caps delivering home-cooked food to Mumbai from home to office daily. They are a strong army of nearly 5,000 people who ensure that 2,00,000 people get their lunch on time at their offices. Moreover, these men in white have given lectures at different business schools. Therefore, they are six sigma compatible. With so many people belonging to different communities reaching the city of dreams and no fast-food culture being that popular back then, there was a shortage of an adequate food delivery system. While there was a rising demand, there was a supply of illiterate workers who had travelled to the city after their agriculture business failed to ensure sustenance at home. With no education to work as clerks in the homes of Britishers but with enough energy to embark on any hard work, the idea of delivering home-cooked food was born. Thus was the launch of the “Dabba Delivery System” in Mumbai.

### **How did the Mumbai Dabbawala Emerge?**

- Nearly 125 years ago, a Parsi banker working in Fort Branch wanted to have home-cooked food in his office. So, he appointed a young man who belonged from Gurgaon to get his lunch from his home every afternoon. It is how the job of 1st Dabbawala emerged. The Mumbai dabbawala price was nearly two annas at that time. Soon, the business started picking up and gaining popularity because of the visionary work of Mahadeo Havaji Bacche, who considered this a golden opportunity and decided to grow it as a business. The dabbawalas have a fantastic service record. Each day they deliver more than 1,30,000 lunchboxes all over Mumbai. It means nearly 2,60,000 transactions being done in almost 6 hours every day, six days a week, and 52 weeks a year, without a single mistake. Surprisingly, the dabbawalas have achieved that level of performance at a low cost, eco-friendly manner, without using any digital or IT platform or even mobile phones. A study conducted by the Harvard Business School rated it “Six Sigma,” which means that the dabbawalas made less than 3.4 errors per million transactions. The way the Mumbai tiffin wala works is an inspiration for all the organizations that want to grow. Companies that cannot afford to appoint stars depend on ordinary people for support. The success of dabbawalas proves that with the right system and hardworking

workers, we can achieve extraordinary results in no time. The Dabbawalas run their food delivery service on four fundamental pillars. These are the organization, management process, and culture. All these four pillars are correctly aligned and mutually supporting. It is uncommon to see such coordination in the corporate world. The Mumbai Suburban Railway, one of the most complex, vast, and mainly used urban commuter lines worldwide, plays a vital role in the Dabbawalas' operations. Its basic layout requires delivery people with cycles and handcarts to travel between the railway stations and customers' offices and homes. Every day, a Dabba reaches its destination after passing through several hands. In the morning, a dabbawalla picks it up from the customer's home and goes to the nearest railway station. Then, it is sorted and put on a wooden cart as per its destination. Once it reaches the nearest station, it is sorted and assigned to another dabbawalla, who delivers it to the office before lunchtime. Once lunchtime is over, the process runs the other way around, and the Dabba reaches the customer's home. They use a trick to avoid confusion about which Dabba (the Indian Lunchbox) belongs to. They follow a "coding system." The lids of the dabbas are labelled with numbers, letters, and symbols indicating where they came and where they should be delivered. The Mumbai Dabbawalas are famous for their punctuality. Their mission statement since the day they started operation has been "Always deliver on time." The Dabbawalas manage themselves concerning logistics, hiring, retention, and customer acquisition. First, however, governing committees fix guidelines for costs, considering factors like the distance between a customer's house and office and the distance between the office and the nearest railway station. It helps them operate the service efficiently and keep charges low and the quality high. Every Dabbawala is an entrepreneur responsible for negotiating prices with his clients. As Dabbawalas own their relationships with clients and tend to work in a similar location for several years, those relationships are usually trustworthy and long-term.

Teamwork, honesty, and discipline, ownership, time management, low-cost, customer satisfaction are the hardcore strengths of the Dabbawalas. However, one of the major constraints is that it heavily relies on the local trains for their deliveries. However, the world of Dabbawalas is challenging, showing the spirit and grit of Mumbai, a city with millions of people from different parts of the world. Many dabbawalas have had to overcome challenges like floods and railway strikes. Also, they have had

to advance their skills in recent times, like learning to speak English and embracing technology. In October 2020, an official website for the dabbawalas, [digitaldabbawala.com](http://digitaldabbawala.com), was launched. It is an official website that includes details of all the delivery organizations. In November 2020, they launched a Dabbawala app to make food delivery accessible and uncomplicated. The app helps you find food and order food from where you are. Soon, the deliverymen started growing their services from delivering lunchboxes to delivery of digital services like electronic registration of marriages and property. The idea behind these new creativities is to think outside the box and to expand the Mumbai Dabbawalas business, starting from lunch delivery to a wide range of other services.

### **Ideas:**

The Mumbai Dabbawalas can have a tie up with several other caterers in order to serve wide variety of food. They can think of going beyond India's Financial Capital: "Mumbai" and get widespread in several other metropolitan cities like Bengaluru, Pune, Indore, Chennai etc. This will lead in generation of more revenue as a whole along with earning the fame which will help them to prosper more as a unit. For further upgradation in the supply chain, the Dabbawalas can have a separate colour uniform for the central side tiffin supply and another colour for the western and harbour line respectively. This will help to reduce chaos and confusion among the dabbawalas to some extent and they will get the clarity regarding their delivery. They should get awarded for their quick and top-notch services which they render to their customers like they should get bonus, incentive, award for excellence etc to keep their morales high. This can imbibe confidence in them and they can retain them by creating sense of belonging and togetherness among them.

The grit and determination of the Mumbai Dabbawalas are resilient and praiseworthy. Indeed, their belief of working in philosophy of 'Anna Daan Maha Daan' which means donating food is the best charity and it is clearly justified by their dedication and commitment towards their work under any circumstances.

Thank You!