

EXCEEDING CUSTOMER EXPECTATIONS

We were running a rather prestigious leadership programme in a leading software consulting organisation. A new leadership centre had been established in a beautiful town in Kerala.

The food that was served was a peculiar form of Punjabi and Mughalai food that has, for some inexplicable reason, become “Indian food”. We tried telling the caterers that we would prefer good Kerala food to a badly cooked “fashionable” food.

From the next meal we found the food elaborately garnished and carefully served. Some “vegetable sculptures” were made to smile and greet us. The food however, was the same! We tried telling them again that we had no issue with the service, it was really courteous, the issue was with the food. This only made them try harder.

We later discovered that the process at the cooks end was fixed and inflexible. The cook thought he was doing a great job in any case. The only flexibility was in their service. The caterers had been taught “Customer delight” and were trying to practice it. They did not know the difference between content and process! The rigid cooking process produced bad content! No amount of effort in the serving process can change the customer experience! In fact bad content that is attempted to be masked through cosmetic processes makes the whole experience even worse.

Soon, the participants were so “fed up” with this charade that they decided to “escalate” the issue. They were confronted by a Colonel who took umbrage at the fact that a lowly Squadron Leader had been the one chosen to take the matter up to the authorities. No matter that the Squadron Leader of yesterday was now a senior person in the organization, nor did it matter that it was the “Voice of the Customer” that was being conveyed. All the lessons on “Customer is King” mean nothing when content is poor and hierarchy is paramount