

ONE FOR THE ROAD

A few weeks back, I completed a workshop on standardisation, the importance of not disturbing the flow of operations but continuously eliminating non-value adding activities etc. I went through the end of the programme rituals full of warm and graceful “good byes” and smiles. Waited respectfully while the host offered me a quick cup of tea while he called for the car that would drop me at the airport. I was getting anxious but did not want to offend my friend. So I drank the tea, talked politely and as soon as I could (without offending sentiments) and took my leave. “Don’t worry yaar! My driver is great he will take you to the airport in twenty minutes”. Both of us knew that it was a 40 to 45 minutes drive. He walked me to the car and said to the driver “Paanch baja thak airport pahunchaana” and off we went.

The driver Nasir drove like one possessed. Cutting to the left, weaving to the right, driving through traffic signals just as orange turned to red etc. It was all very exciting, and heroic, edge of the seat stuff with adrenaline pumping. We finally drove into the airport a few minutes after 5. I got out of the car and started to thank Nasir “Bura math maanana sahib” he began “I am a very disciplined driver. I know you teach about quality and important things to our managers. But, Sir, I have a wife and children, driving like this makes me stressed, anxious and tired. If you could be considerate to me and come 10 or 15 minutes earlier from your workshop I will be very grateful to you”. On the entire flight back I could not help reflecting on how insensitive I had been to the driver in my attempt to be polite and not offend his manager’s sentiments. I had chosen to steal time away from an operation that has a “standard time” for its quality and traded it for maintaining appearances. The person who paid the price for it was Nasir not me!