

THE ART OF (NOT HAVING TOSAY) SAYING SORRY!

It is very painful to listen to employees of an organization one admires saying “sorry” a dozen times over a day. The “sorry” is very sincere, and the company is Toyota, and there in lies the problem! TAO earns its money largely by teaching organizations how to adopt the “Toyota Production System”. In fact some of our consultants are the earliest to be taught the method and the earliest to consult on the method. We often recommend a visit to Toyota Kirloskar, one of the best production factories in the world. One of our consultants has visited Toyota in Japan and another was involved in the early training of the people in the service infrastructure Toyota created. So, when the day starts with small and avoidable goofs it hurts. When the day continues with goofs it is embarrassing!

Day 1, 11 am: I book my Etios for service. My earlier record of servicing the car is read out, the number to call back to is reconfirmed, and since it is not the usual one the guy comments on it too. “Please come in at 9.30 am sir, we will give you back the car by 3pm”. Very impressive.

Day 2, 9.30 am: I drive in; a queuing number is placed on the car (number 2, good for me:). I am asked to sit at their servicing counter and wait. I am staring at the back of a computer monitor, the cubicles are small and each one has a monitor leaving 6 inches on either side of it. The guy on the other side is buried behind the monitor, I can do very little to attract his attention. 9.45 am a young guy comes up, leads me to my car, asks me to get in. He gets into the drivers seat and proceeds to note down a lot of details like what is there in the glove compartment etc., all of which I was asked to clean out the previous day! After sweating it out for a few mins (in Chennai heat) I ask, “are you going to test drive?”

“No sir”

“Then why am I sitting here?”

“To see what I am doing sir?” and I just sit and watch!!!

We go back to the counter; our friendly service exec is being friendly to some people around, types away at the comp. Time is 10.10am, he has not said a word to me since the ‘sit quietly and watch me’ fiasco. “Sorry sir” he says through the six-inch gap on the side of the monitor, “some thing wrong with this comp”. His supervisor comes and says sorry a few times, I am out by 10.20 with the promise, we will call you at 1pm and update you, and my phone number is reconfirmed.

No call at 1pm, no call at 2, I call back at 3pm. “Our work is over sir, we are waiting for the accessories department to complete their work sir”.

“When can I expect you to deliver the car”

“Definitely by 5pm sir”

“I need to go out for dinner, don't be late”

“No sir I will call you and keep you informed sir”

5pm, no call 6pm, no call. I call at 630: “The accessories department is delaying sir, we will just finish and send the car, don't worry sir”

Call at 645: “Sorry sir, all the drivers have left for the day, we will definitely send it tomorrow morning” followed by a dozen or so sorry sirs.

Day 3, 9.45 am: My wife who is in Bangalore for a holiday calls up “the Toyota guys are desperate, why are you not picking up your phone?”

I look up my phone there are no missed calls. I call up Toyota.

“Sorry sir, we tried your number many times sir, we even heard a caller tune”

“I have no caller tune in my phone”

“No sir it is your phone, we are sending the car, the driver will call just now” followed by another dozen sorry sir.

I repeat my number, “yes sir I will make sure we call on this number sir.”

10mins later my wife calls “please call this number, they called to get directions and sent this number to me.”

I wait and call in ten mins “is this the driver?”

“What driver? Who do you want” etc and then “I am the service manager, how can I help?”

I go through my whole story. I add my spiel about how disappointed I am that Toyota should goof like this, we make our money quoting you guys and it hurts blah! Blah! blah!

“I am sorry, I have read the books about Toyota and been to Kirloskar factory, I understand.....I will give the driver your number, I am very sorry....”

1020, the first call from the driver. “I am in your compound which lane do I take?” he is at my gate in one minute. I ask casually “so how come you did not call for directions? And how did you get the right number”

“We have delivered this car here before, I asked my friend, see sir your number is here in the service invoice” a pleasant smile!!!

Any bright kaizen ideas on how to improve service, and not have to say “I am sorry”? By the way Toyota is one of the most prominent examples in the books “Firms of Endearment” that talks about a dozen companies or so that are “loved by all its stake holders”.