

THE CASE OF THE EXQUISITE BREAKFAST

I was in Kolkata on a consulting assignment with a colleague. We were charmed by the colonial heritage that is quite special to the city. True to what we expected, the guesthouse that we stayed in was set in a beautiful location and the caretakers were well groomed.

On day one it became clear to us that the cook and the caretaker were very focused on their task of offering elaborate breakfasts, lunches & dinners on fully laid out dining tables. On day 2, we needed to get to work early. So I made it a point to go over the kitchen, and explained to the cook that we needed to leave at 8.30, can he please have breakfast “ready” by 8.15 AM, and could he keep it simple. We arrived at the breakfast table at 8.15 having packed our bags and ready to go. The cook was so keen that we have hot alu paranthas that he gleefully started cooking the moment we sat on our seats!! Ready for him meant “ready to cook”. So we had hot, really hot, paranthas after a wait of 5 mins. or so and in sequence (with the one the caretaker thought was the “top cat” getting the 1st serving)!

Needless to say, he was bewildered and confused when we seemed annoyed, and asked him to “speed up”. We also had to sign off etc. and ate the exquisite paranthas in a great hurry, hardly able to savour its taste.

We ended up a little late for our morning session and had to swallow humble pie for being late. But, we had a great story about how the over focus on “job responsibility” with total oblivion as to what the “customer” wants, dissatisfies the customer. Our gourmet cook, had no interest in knowing what his “link responsibilities” were, that in fact defined his job. He did not think it is important to renegotiate “customer expectations”. He was certain that an “excellent performance” of his job would get him a very favourable “performance appraisal”. For our gourmet cook, the guest house defined his world, his reason for being was cooking great meals. He is a great craftsman no doubt, but one so oblivious to how he is part of the system that he is deaf, dumb and blind to everything other than his job responsibility.