

TOYOTA....REALLY?

Our work in TAO is based on the Toyota Production Systems; we pride ourselves in being one of the earliest people in India trained in Lean methodology. Norman Bodek initiated us into the wonders of Lean. He would regale us with stories about the great Shigeo Shingo and Taiichi Ohno. So I thought it was the right thing for me to do to buy a car manufactured by Toyota when I was replacing my car.

We completed the formalities and were told that the car would be ready for delivery after 48 hours. The reason was “The registration will be completed by today Saar, but fitting the number plate will take at least a day”. And then the kind salesman went on to explain why: we collect all the registration numbers and send them to our head office; they have the set for the day painted and then send it to us; it usually reaches us by the evening!

I was simply aghast. *Here is a person representing the foremost “Just in Time” system and “one piece flow” pioneers telling me that the delay was due to batch processing.* I tried to tell him that the Kirloskars factory in India that manufactures these cars is probably one of the best lean factories in the world, and that the whole car probably took less than 8 hours to be built. He had not heard of this, he took down notes. The lecture I gave him must have had an effect, “don't worry Saar, I will deliver it at your home by 6pm tomorrow.”

The car comes in the next day evening. Our salesman has called us thrice through the day to inform us about the progress of the delivery formalities, fittings and washing done and proudly says we are just sending the car it will be in your home in half an hour. The car arrives at 6pm, NO NUMBER PLATE!! So we call and we are told, “there was a communication gap Saar. I told....he told....sorry Saar, I am just coming with the numberplate it is in my hands only!” I remind him to bring the tools and the screws along ☺ *The sales and service outlet does not use check lists!!!!* The number plate was sitting in the garage from 3pm, no one noticed.

Must do Yoga Saar

Sashi and I were travelling in a taxi the other day. Our driver was an elderly gentleman, Shekar, who drove well and was particularly dignified.

More than once, we noticed that Shekar took the blatant breaking of rules and normal road courtesy by other drivers on the road quietly. One particularly bad incident took place when a hot blooded young chap on a motorcycle cut across our car forcing Shekar to swerve and brake.

No reaction, even as we were cursing the idiot on the motorcycle. We were intrigued and asked Shekar how he managed to be so serene. “I am driving every day all day, Saar. I do yoga every morning. I am able to be calm. Before I was also driving rash and was getting angry. But, Saar, my health only is getting upset. One friend told me about yoga, I am doing every day, my BP is less, and sugar is also under control. If every one does Yoga all of us will be much better.”

We could not but tell him that our main focus in life is Yoga. He was very happy to hear this, enquired into a few doubts he had. Fell silent and focused on his driving.

He is not my friend

During the recent heavy rains in Chennai, we witnessed a lot of interesting things. My colleagues and I were stuck for 8 hrs in the airport. I had to wade through knee deep water through a flooded road to get to the airport.

My shoes were spoilt, but the delay gave us time to buy a new pair at the “Pavers” outlet in the airport. So two of us went to buy a new pair. The sizes we needed had to be brought from another terminal. The person at the counter was very courteous and tried his best. He asked us to come back in 30 mins.

I started reading a lovely book “The Happiest Company To Work For” by Norman Bodek (my old friend and mentor) and Yamada. It was a very practical book emphasizing trust, camaraderie and self-management at its core themes. I was delighted to read some the examples quoted in the book.

We go back to the Pavers counter, a new guy is standing there, and the person who served us is standing beside him. “Your friend.....” I began. The gentleman (if I can call him that) was very offended. “He is not my friend saar he is my staff” was the immediate reply! We completed our transaction, with this sulking Boss.

This kind of status consciousness and feudal mind-set is the bane of India. It comes in the way of good service. It has blocked the progress of initiatives like Swatch Bharat.