

VALUING THE CUSTOMER

In these days when so much is being said about the customer being king, it is surprising to come across a service organisation that acts completely contrary to this.

My wife and I were going overseas and went to a travel agent who is considered very good. We were assigned to an intelligent and very willing young lady! While she was very well trained in all the superficial elements of customer interface (e.g. pleasing way of talking, smile, etc.), her product knowledge was bad. Anything beyond a straightforward query had to be referred up. We often did a search on the internet to give her information! As usual, promises were made about flight times and dates and visas, but delivered literally in the last minute. We discovered later that we did not get the best deal! My wife gets on to the plane to Bombay goes across to the international terminal to find that the visa has been stamped two days later than the booking dates on the international flight! So, in the middle of the night, with all the attendant hassels she gets back to Chennai. All kinds of frantic calls to Europe to the seminar director, rescheduling of her programme etc. She is put on a flight and told that all expenses will be reimbursed.

I go to the travel agent to make the payments. This pretty young girl gives me a sob story. "There are two costs I have been asked to bear of the return flight and the re-routing. I am picking up the higher one can you pay the lesser?" she pleaded. I put up a brave front and said "neither you nor I should pay for this, the company is at fault. They have neither trained you properly for the job nor assisted you properly." After a bit of this kind of argument, I felt sorry for the girl and decided to take up a Rs.10,000/- excess in the agreed fares. I wrote the cheque and repeated my argument that the company was exploiting both of us. "The company is here to make money", she said with a strange smile. I was really taken aback with the answer! Not only was the company exploiting its employees for its own lack of training and commitment to the customer, it had brain washed a young employee into justifying it! I was so offended by the entire emotional blackmail I had been put through by this innocent girl that I took back my cheque and refused to bear any of the extra charges. I wondered if and when any of these so-called service companies will actually value customer service!