

Background:

Indian Railways is the largest employer, outside the Defence forces, in the world. They touch millions of people on a daily basis with their services. Indian Railways wanted to enhance citizen well being, by moving away from a product centric approach to a customer centric approach. They wanted to achieve this by making all customer interactions a positive and memorable experience.

With this intention, Indian Railways called 1999 as “year of customer” with focus on enhancing customer satisfaction. To achieve this objective, sustained efforts were made to enhance the service levels by increasing facilities provided to customers.

Indian Railways - NIS Sparta Association

The Indian Railways realized that the key to creating high customer service levels was enhanced ownership levels and attitude of the staff. With this goal in mind, Indian Railways embarked upon an initiative to bring a change in the mindset of each Railway employee. The initiative focused on enhancing positive behaviour, attitudes and customer handling skills of frontline staff.

In keeping with their ambitious mission of achieving customer orientation across all levels, zones in the Railways, the Railway Ministry floated a tender for training of the customer interfacing staff. The requirements were clear – ability to execute in vernacular across multiple Indian languages, at multiple locations simultaneously, a clear track record of having done similar work before and an experience in training railways – any where in the world.

On a competitive and technical competency basis, NIS Sparta was engaged in imparting training to the Railway employees.

Nis Sparta Ltd conducted a Concern validation Study at New Delhi railway station with a sample size of about 200 including the Customers and sample from the above mentioned roles and their supervisors at DRM/NR HQ office.

The CVS was designed to measure the level of customer satisfaction with the current services delivered through these customer interfacing staff, to understand from the role holders reasons of not been able to deliver services as per quality defined and there of suggestions to do so and

finally from the supervisors at DRM/NR HQ office to understand the gaps existing in the service standards, reasons there of and suggestion to overcome the same.

After collating the data and interviews with these stake holders (customers/ role holders/higher officials), a comprehensive CVS report was prepared along with proposed solution and training being as on of the intervention. In the report it was also recommended and shared what could be the possible ROI on the training intervention.

After presenting a draft to officers at NR HQ and having included their additional inputs a presentation was made to the railway board with the possible solutions.

Objectives of the Indian Railways – NIS Sparta Association

The objectives of this association, as stated by the Railway Board were:

- To facilitate change over from production oriented to customer oriented organisation
- To make each interaction of Railways with customers a memorable and delightful experience
- To bring about a change in the mindset of each Indian Railway employee to help achieve the above

The desired result of this association was to increase Customer Satisfaction Score through attitudinal change in staff behaviour towards customers.

Designing the Customer Goodwill Program

Before initiating the intervention NIS Sparta researched and created a concept paper to

- Identify customer interface processes.
- Identify key service parameters critical to customers.
- Identify service constraints in areas of processes, infrastructure and skills & behaviour of staff.

To enable achievement of the objectives a customer satisfaction survey was sub-contracted to M/s MORI Research Co. (U.K.), a leading research firm having an experience of working with British Rail.

Critical behaviors required by cutting edge people, frontline staff to be effective in dealing with customers were identified by M/s MORI and customer perception on these 7 critical customer goodwill parameters were measured using qualitative and quantitative tools. The parameters identified were:

1. Courtesy displayed
2. Listening
3. Language/tone used
4. Willingness to help
5. Flexibility in dealing
6. Emotional control and
7. Overall satisfaction.

The results displayed a very poor standing of IR employees on the above listed parameters.

On basis of these inputs, NIS Sparta designed a vernacular, customized, research validated module aimed at attitudinal transformation for customer excellence by using MCLA (Modular Cognitive Learning Architecture). This led to the genesis of the “Customer Goodwill” Program.

The program had key modules built around the following areas:

1. Listening
2. Communication
3. Attitude Awareness
4. Understanding others
5. Self empowerment
6. Conflict resolution
7. Cycle of life
8. Belief system
9. Controlling emotions

The program was of 5 days duration with 4.5 days of class room and half day of field work were participants visited a railway station and identified attitudes at work. The program was essentially a combination of reflective and discovery learning approaches.

The project was to train 100000 customer interfacing staff on ‘Customer Goodwill Program’, covering the following role holders:

- Reservation clerks/supervisors
- May I help you counter staff
- Enquiry clerks/supervisors
- TT/Conductors/train supdt
- Guards
- Asst station managers
- Catering staff/supervisors

As part of each program the participants also drew up the “Customer Charter of Rights”. These were to be compiled and converted into a standard document of the Indian Railways.

Bilingual training material (English and vernacular) was created and rolled out

Deploying the Intervention

The NIS Sparta intervention covered the following:

- A pilot was conducted at Delhi covering representative participants (330 in number) from all the zones, to validate the effectiveness of the programme..
- In May 1999, the Customer Care Institute (CCI) was set up in Delhi where the Customer Goodwill programmes were conducted.
- Starting October 99, these programmes were replicated at 8 zonal training centres across India.
- Parallely, the top management comprising the team from North East, Central, PREM Group and the Railway Board (Minister and the Minister of state), were taken through the programme
- The programmes were then conducted at the Divisional level (like Kanpur, Allahabad, Ambala, Lucknow) as well.

NIS Sparta quickly realized that in order to enhance the effectiveness of the involvement “Customer Goodwill” had to move from being a program to being a movement across the organization. In order to facilitate this the following additional initiatives were added

- Few model stations (Kanpur and New Delhi) and model trains (Shatabdi) were adopted by NIS Sparta, to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention. Through “Model Station Adoption Programme” focus was given to the Booking and Enquiry/Reservation windows.

- On the job coaching was given to front-line staff, which has shown immediate improvement in staffs' customer handling skills.

To facilitate continuous Customer Goodwill learning, NIS Sparta also hosted a special webpage for the duration of the intervention.

Demonstrating effectiveness

- there had been an improvement in staff customer handling skills and behaviours from 56 % to 73%. Overall impact on internal and external customers had been 84%.
- **Peer rating of Trained staff:** Trained participants were asked to rate their peers on the parameters before and after training. This data demonstrated an all round improvement from 46% to 53%. Improvements reported – positive outlook, better listening ability, patience and better handling of customers.
- Over a period of 18 months 25,500 participants spread over 23 locations including 8 ZTCs and CCI, Delhi were trained with an average programme effectiveness feedback of 4.87/5.
- To evaluate impact of training on participants, Indian Railways and customers, a comprehensive survey was conducted at 24 locations across the country. The survey was conducted on the same parameters as selected during initial research by M/s MORI. Sample size included 3851 customers, 279 trained participants and 138 supervisors across 24 stations.
- **Customer Satisfaction Score:** This survey demonstrated a visible improvement on all 7 critical parameters from 28% to 39%. The customer satisfaction score had increased from 2.62 – 2.83 to 3.47 - 3.77 on a scale of 5. Over 85% of the customers had rated the staff skills from average to excellent. This data was analyzed using statistical tools and change was found significant with 95% confidence level.