

This Essay is awarded 1st Prize in Railway Minister's English Essay Competition-2010

"An image is not simply a trademark, a design, a slogan or an easily remembered picture. It is a studiously crafted personality profile of an individual, institution, corporation, product or service"...Daniel J Boorstin.

A superfast express train leaves a terminus without washed linen, a group of mighty Jawans thrash genuine passengers in a running train, failure to provide medical aid to an injured passenger, a passenger coach without Mobile/Laptop chargers, non functioning of fans in sleeper class compartments, pest nuisances inside the coaches, serving of cold and unhygienic food to the passengers, stinking toilets, water logging, easy access by beggars, eunuchs and vendors in to the reserved classes, allotment of a vacant berth by TTE to a non-bonafide traveler by ignoring RAC and wait listed passengers and many more of such common incidences draw wrath and anguish of the commuters daily and whole system is blamed immediately. The slogan "150 years of glorious service" ends with severe criticism and curses. Major incidents like derailment, collision, collapse of bridges, weak disaster management, bureaucratic attitude and unhealthy approach of the railway personnel towards general public add more fuel to the fire. Public Image of the railways is badly affected and regaining of the confidence becomes very difficult.

Indian Railways, the single largest network of public transport system in the country provide fast, easy, cheap and eco-friendly transport to millions of people. In the entire transport industry, Railways have achieved the trade mark of the most popular brand in country. The economic growth of the nation measured in the scale of GDP cannot sustain without proper and timely reaching of final products and services to the ultimate users that too without adding irrational over-head cost towards fare and freight. Railways play an important role in this direction by carrying bulk products to almost all parts of the country including port heads.

In passenger services, Indian Railways are the undisputed leaders for past one and half century. It serves all sections of the society from bread earners to politicians and from farmers to foreign tourists. Well designed services to meet the need of every common man provide the Services As You Need (SAYN) anywhere in the country. In cosmopolitan cities, irrespective of presence of series of imported sophisticated passenger cars, hi-tech luxury buses, well carved roads, railways still enjoy the first preferred mode of transport to ferry millions of people to their work places and bring them back after tiring hours, safely to their nearer and dearer ones. Railways have become the life line of almost all the Metros. Cancellation of even a single train service or a delay of 5-10 minutes during peak hours due to technical problem creates considerable chaos amongst commuters.

Journey of Indian Railways is nothing less than that of a brave soldier. Uncountable difficulties, sudden ups and downs, natural calamities, complexities in operations, managerial conflicts, laissez-faire and a plethora of other problems have never defeated the spirit of Indian Railways. Rather, the railways are well prepared to bear every brunt and march forward to serve the nation with dignity and pride.

The business idiom "past performances pay huge dividends" is not always true unless risks and opportunities are properly evaluated and defined. Goodwill is the most valuable asset of a business entity valued according to the advantage or reputation that a business has acquired during the course of its operation and existence. Public Image of an institution, organisation or individual contributes much to gain easy recognition, accreditation and goodwill in long run. The art of boosting of Public Image of a television or cine artist, sports person or politician earned through cheap publicity via print and electronic media to acquire celebrity status in the society is never same for an

entrepreneur. In the true sense of business, customer satisfaction to the maximum possible extent with an edge over the competitors is the true image of business. A little deficiency in service providing is enough to warrant public out-cries and leads to loss of faith, credibility and over all image of the organization in the eyes of the public. Public out-burst, often affect micro as well as macro functional activities of the organization and ends in loss of revenue and reputation.

Indian Railways are the role models of this country and enjoy the maximum confidence of the general public including business communities. A solid back ground with unforgettable history, huge capital, self owned assets, easy liquidable liabilities, 1.5 million strong man-power, single decision making body, a large web-like network make the Railways more special in spite of peculiarity in operations and complexities in service providing.

The so called stereo type budgetary proposals and commitments like reduction in Fares and Freights, Introduction of concessional Fares for various sections, undertaking surveys for new lines, Gauge Conversions, Electrifications, increase or decrease in loadings, timely repayment of dividends towards debts and loans etc. included in Railway Budget Speech and marathon debates and discussions over the same in electronic and print media are short lived and does not bring much enthusiasm among the public. Sense of all around safety and security, a pleasant and memorable journey to destination, friendly behavior of Railway staff, Speed and Punctuality, hassle-free booking

Boosting the Images of Indian Railways in the eyes of the Public

and cancellation facility, well designed modern coaches, Cleanliness and sanitation, Hygienic catering services, high speed on-board communication facilities, better amenities at stations, better disaster management during crisis,

introduction of new services, extension of existing services and increase in frequencies are some of the measures which rather delight the common man and enhance the public perception towards the railways.

The corporate world is more interested in sound financial position of the Railways, future strategies, plans, policies and visions, freight rationalization, capacity generation and enhancement, scope of participation though Public Private Partnership (PPP) etc. for infrastructure building. Image make-over of Indian Railways largely depends on capacity generation, modernization and technological upgradation at par with the other sectors like Telecom, IT, Civil Aviation, Surface transport etc. The difficulties in mobilization of huge resources, generation of funds through public borrowing and other financial constraints are no longer excuses for non-committing to growth and development.

Image enhancement is as important as image creation. Public mind is peculiar in nature. Rumors and unverified news flashed on TV channels sometimes create panic and confusion amongst the public. Most of the time prima-facie the whole system is blamed and people associated with the system are abused and targeted. Technical or mechanical failures do not easily catch sight of the common man.

★ Paradigm Shift (PS): A Paradigm shift often refers to a major change in thinking and planning, which ultimately changes the methodology or pattern of a service. Changes in life style, economical and social changes, availability of modern technology, acute competition among service providers compels an organisation to redesign and reform itself to maintain its large customer base, market share and goodwill. The monopolistic status of Indian Railways is no more relevant in these days where plenty of alternatives are available to the ultimate consumer. It is therefore very important for railways to adapt the changes on regular basis. A smooth transition from administrative concept to management approach is the need of the hour.



System improvement (SI): Every bit of activity or unit of labour and material that goes into the process of operation needs to be critically examined at every stage. The road blocks must be identified and removed immediately. Dynamic changes in the system wherever necessary should be made. Early completion of mega projects not only saves the Railways from time over run and cost over run but also creates good public image. Lacuna in Passenger Reservation System should be critically examined and irrational allotment of Quotas, bulk and bogus booking by Rail travel agents, illegal allotment of vacant berths in the running trains to non-bonafide passengers, complicated cancellation and refund procedures etc need to be curtailed. Most of the major rail accidents are mainly due to involvement of human errors which end in casualties followed by cancellation or diversion of trains. Such failures needs to be investigated in true spirit and culprits must be brought to the books with stringent punishments so as to avoid recurrence of such incidents as well as to protect the life and property of innocent passengers.

★ **Total Quality Control (TQC):** A management approach that seeks to improve quality and performance, and thus meet or exceed customer expectations, by integrating all quality-related functions and processes throughout the organization is better known as Total Quality Management. It takes a holistic approach to managing quality design and development, quality control and maintenance, quality improvement, and quality assurance, at all level of operations. This concept and technique must be intensively extended to every sphere of activity whether carried out by Railways themselves or by their associates like IRCTC, MRVC, RVNL, DFCC, CONCOR, RITES, IRCON etc. With zero tolerance theory, non-compromise with quality, accreditations from national and international bodies with ISO certifications, railways can easily improve its efficiency and public image.

★ **Operational Efficiency Enhancement (OEE):** Realistic Assessment of functions and services that needs to be performed, development of a conceptual ideal plan, scheduling and deployment, interface with machines and technology, matching skills with needs, reallocating of resources, incentives, rewards and recognitions are the key to operational efficiency enhancement. Reduction in travel time between two points of service, larger occupancy ratio, speed and punctuality with zero derailment and collision is largely appreciated by the general public and boosts the image of the railways. Intensive use of State of art technology, installation of high tech devices to maintain visibility during fog and bad light as well as to avoid collision, accidents etc become inescapable for railways.

★ **Organizational Reforms (OR):** Decentralization, Outsourcing, Benchmarking, Enterprise Resources Planning, Delegation of Powers are some of the processes which need to be adopted fast in the Organizational set up of Indian Railways in juxtaposition with administrative reforms. Non-core activities must be identified and segregated from core activities which are generally considered to be non-important but creates bottlenecks in smooth operation of core activities.

★ **Confidence Building Measures (CBM):** After every accident and causality, the people in general lose faith on Railways. Travelling by Rail with fear and uncertainty compels the commuter to rely more on his fate than on system. Damages, theft, careless handling of goods and consignments leads the traders to lose confidence on railways and switch over to other available alternatives. Railway's commitment



★ Shri Niketan Sahoo, Asst. Financial Advisor, Western Railway, Churchgate receiving the 1st prize of Railway Minister's English Essay Competition-2010 from Shri E. Ahmed, Hon'ble Minister of State for Railways at the 55th National Rly. Week Award Function in New Delhi held on 22 April, 2010.

towards a fearless travel (Nirbhaya Yatra) and happy journey (Sukhad Yatra) must be fulfilled with complete sense of safety and security. Nuisance in the running trains as well as in station premises must be dealt with firmly and prevented. Basic amenities must be within every body's reach. Delay in providing relief to the distressed, injured passengers as well as victims of rail accidents often blames the Railway administration. Timely despatch of well equipped Medical Vans, trained Doctors, Medicines to accident sites and immediate ferrying of victims to nearest hospitals needs to be ensured. A mock drill of such practice should be

conducted from time to time to ensure readiness and promptness of the disaster management system. Early identification of victims and prompt settlement of ex-gratia and other claims must be the priority. In cases of death or permanent incapacitation of the sole bread earner, the aggrieved family must be provided with employment.

In the recent past, Railways have become the soft target of terrorists, extremists and Maoists. Even agitations by political parties, students, farmers etc against petty local issues target Railways and cause maximum damage to Railway properties causing disruption of services and inconvenience to innocent railway passengers. Delay in restoration of services further creates furore among the rail users and worsens the situation. Building of a strong intelligence network, constant vigil of tracks and suing the political parties and organisations to compensate damages will help in curtailing such losses. Security System in Running Trains as well as on station premises must be beefed up to counter attack theft, looting and robberies. Railway security personnel must be well equipped with modern arms and ammunitions. Nexus between security personnel and anti social elements are becoming a matter of concern for the Railways. They need to be eliminated through strong measures.

★ **Customer Relations Management (CRM):** Public Relations department of Indian Railways is entrusted with the duty of sharing Railway's interest, ideas, new products and services with the common man and vice-versa. However, most of the time the true picture of Railway does not reach the common man. The views and suggestions of daily commuters, passenger welfare associations and NGOs often get a deaf ear and results in public resentment. Regular feedback from the end users is considered as a parameter to measure success of a service or product that has been put to operation. Hence views and suggestions from commuters, traders and even employees should be evaluated and considered in decision making process. A healthy discussion in Parliament over the various issues of Railways, fair debate over new projects and schemes by eminent citizens and experienced railway personnel, advertisement of new schemes and projects in print and electronic media, sound public address system, a good communication network, prompt disposal of complaints and grievances and above all "Service with a Smile" can no doubt boost the public image and morale of the Indian railways.

During the last decade, railways have achieved a lot and regained world class status and recognition through innovations, ideas and reforms. However a lot remains to be done. Vision 2020 is today's yardsticks for the railways for reshaping themselves for a better tomorrow with a healthier public image.

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