

# Customer rebellion

Mother Earth is the ultimate customer

**T**he industrial system – what we make, buy, and use – sits within a larger system of nature. This industrial system includes, amongst others, a wide range of products such as automobiles, TVs, laptops, mobiles, buildings, power plants, and so on.

The natural world includes living regenerative resources, such as forests, croplands, and fisheries. These regenerative resources can sustain human activities indefinitely, provided we do not harvest them more than their ability to regenerate themselves.

This same natural world also includes non-regenerative resources, such as oil, coal, and minerals. The non-regenerative resources can only be depleted or extracted. Since they cannot be replenished, many start to run out. Nations that own non-regenerative resources have muscle power. Think OPEC.

In the process of extracting non-regenerative resources and harvesting regenerative resources for producing goods, as well as using goods, the industrial system generates waste. Even discarding waste generates waste! Overproduction and waste damage the natural systems. Think of the mountains of COPQ (cost of poor quality).

The industrial system also sits within a larger social system of communities, families, schools, and culture. Overproduction and waste cause inequality, anxiety and stress in our societies.

Industries are driven by expansion of production and employment – and, for the past half century, growing consumption. This consumption includes tangible consumer goods such as smartphones and jeans; and services such as air travel and music/movie/book downloads. Both categories are produced by companies using their capital equipment and facilities.

We have only focussed on the system within a system. I call this Business Myopia.

Concern for the health of the larger social and ecological system within which the industrial system sits has been confined largely to the back page, though the public concern has been growing for more than a generation.

## Tata group

In 2007, at the J.R.D. Quality Values Award Ceremony, Ratan Tata addressed the group companies: “Today, we would like to insert a new area of focus for us to look at, and that is climate change or global warming...The effects of what we do not do or what we are not sensitive to today are going



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to be the kiss of death for the next generation. I think a socially responsible group like ours should factor this into our exercise of conscious contribution to society and the model of excellence in which we do our business”.

As an approach, Tata articulated: “We should sensitise ourselves to our existing processes that emit undue carbon or emit undue emissions and pollutants...We should look at how we can go back to the back end of our processes which may be with our vendors or suppliers...We should also look at how we can conserve the use of resources in our processes, and in general, we should be sensitive to the various long term issues which are going to have a major impact on the world”. This is a lesson for all organisations operating in India.

Stated differently by the environmental activist, Bittu Sahgal, “Our national animal, the tiger, is a metaphor for all of nature... it must survive with all its constituents, if we are to survive”.

The Tata Group has always shouldered inconvenient responsibilities. I wish to share one of the first Quality Fables™ I wrote. It was inspired by Prasad Menon and Vivek Talwar, during their innings at Tata Chemicals.

## Daughter with child (reproduced as is from *Quality Fables™ Book 1*)

This is a story I love to hear, again and again, from a member of the Qimpro® Fraternity, about how the whale shark has been saved. And it is not fiction.

The whale shark is the largest fish in the world. It can grow to over 50 feet in length and weigh more than 10 tons. Each year, this gentle fish comes swimming all the way from the shores of Australia to those of Saurashtra, between September and May, to spawn in these waters. Whale sharks can live up to 150 years.

For years, its size and mellow temperament made it an easy prey to fisherman who profited from them. Until the turn of the century, these fishermen killed about 1,200 whale sharks each year. Not only was the whole fishing operation cruel, but by not allowing the fish to breed, survival of the species was in danger.

Thankfully, in 2001, the government of India banned the fishing and trading of the whale shark.

Soon after, the Managing Director of a leading chemical company in Gujarat, set a challenging goal to save the whale shark along the coast of Saurashtra. But with the condition that it must

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become a world-class conservation project. He encouraged all employees from his company to get involved.

As a result, the 'Save the Whale Shark' campaign was launched, facilitated by this chemical company. The campaign had a team of logical, but unlikely, partners. The partners included: the company, Wildlife Trust of India, the Coast Guard, the Indian Navy, and the Ministry of Environment and Reefwatch. Besides providing financial assistance, volunteers from these organizations and institutions created awareness in the fishing community.

Street plays, games, posters, inflated flotillas, postage stamps, and school art competitions became the feed for building awareness. However, as always, building awareness had its own majestic pace.

Almost miraculously, the tide changed when the spiritual leader Morari Bapu, an interpreter of indic traditions, was co-opted into the campaign. In his discourses he reminded the community of the age-old Indian tradition of welcoming a 'daughter with child' into her parents' home to give birth.

The analogy melted people's hearts, and since then, the whale shark has not just been welcomed on the shores of Saurashtra but also fiercely guarded with parent-like protectiveness.

### Lessons learned

- All life forms on our planet are vital and connected;
- Public and private organisations/institutions can seamlessly collaborate if they have the 'passion' for a common mission;
- Seek commitment first. Change in behaviour will follow;
- Customise communication for the target audience;
- Simple innovative solutions can deliver major breakthroughs;
- Define the means to hold the gains.

### Godrej group

There have been silent 'green' practitioners for numerous decades. The benchmark is the Godrej Group. Be it through policies that dictate greater thrift in the use of natural resources, or initiatives that help develop green alternatives to polluting processes. The group has always aligned itself close to nature.

Compressed air is often called the fourth utility after electricity, natural gas, and water in manufacturing companies. The process of generating compressed air involves capturing air at atmospheric pressure and converting it to the desired pressure. This air, now imbued with a potent energy is supplied from centralized or locally installed compressors and distributed thereafter. It is used for spray



painting, drills, forging and instrumentation, amongst others. A dental clinic would prefer air-operated tools rather than electric tools.

For Godrej & Boyce, compressed air utilities were draining the company. Electricity consumed by air compressors was 25 per cent of the total electrical energy consumed by the entire factory. Further, its transmission and use were leading to high energy losses and production inefficiencies. COPQ.

A project team was established with the manager responsible for energy conservation as the team leader. The solution entailed setting up a network of automated intelligent control systems for air compressors and flow control. It took six months. The results were startling. The daily average energy consumption was down by nearly 4,000 units – about ₹40 lakh per year. Decades later, the rate of energy has spiraled but the factories have kept their compressed air costs down, through a habit of continuous quality improvement.

The true impact of the project cannot be completely measured in monetary terms. Its impact on the environment is priceless. Godrej & Boyce has demonstrated that a focus on quality and environment are not mutually exclusive.

And, for the Godrej Group, the project helped reaffirm its kinship with the environment. There are numerous such projects adopted by the Group.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we need the best brains in India to come together to examine whether, and if so at what social cost, there are any other paths to economic progress that are less energy-intensive, less polluting, and with less impact on Earth's climate stability. QED.

Mother Earth is the 'ultimate customer'. We all know the consequences of a 'customer rebellion'. ♦