

1. Do We Matter?

Wayback in 1974, Mr. Govindram was transferred from Indore plant of Takshashila Engineering Company to Bangalore plant. He was assigned to thermal sales department and given the job of handling spares and repairs orders, which was not considered a prestigious assignment.

On a Monday morning, an Executive Engineer (EE) from a major thermal power station in the eastern region came to his office and asked for getting some turbine thrust pads (a part of split bearing of large steam turbines) repaired for a 100 MW turbine. Almost half of thermal power station was shut down and repair of the items could restore 20-25% of capacity. Mr. Govindram asked him to leave the item and go back, but the EE was insisting that the work should be done immediately. Govindram was irritated (partly due to his own frustration of insignificant work assigned to him, partly because he felt he was a public sector enterprise employee and partly because he was sure that no one at workshops would accept the same as urgent work). However, after a while he agreed to try it out. On being asked he told the EE to book his return ticket for Friday.

He then visited the workshop for getting the babiting done. As expected the workshop Foreman refused to undertake the job saying that no worker would do that, because they were getting incentive (overtime) for attending to the main sets i.e., new thermal power equipments. On his suggestion to get it done in the night shift, the Foreman laughed saying night shift was not for work, they (workers) sleep. He, however, agreed to try when Govindram asked him to book overtime and get the work done at night shift. Govindram was pleasantly surprised when he visited the workshop next day as the Foreman had got the job done. He then visited the machine shop and made similar request. The trick worked and on Wednesday morning the items were ready.

Delighted with this great achievement of having got done something extraordinary, he sent the message to guest house to inform the EE that he should come and collect the item. Guest house caretaker informed that the room was locked. Later on in the evening the caretaker informed that EE was still not there although his luggage was seen in the room. Thursday also passed. Govindram got worried. Even the idea of EE's kidnapping crossed his mind. He talked to his boss and it was decided to wait that night before lodging FIR for missing the EE next day. On Friday morning, however, EE appeared in Govindram's office and asked sarcastically whether the work was done. This infuriated Goveindram and the following altercation followed.

- Govindram : "That I shall tell you later. First you tell me where have you been for the last two days?"
- EE : "That is none of your business. Give the items if they are ready."
- Govindram : "You better tell me else I will not give those items to you. Instead I shall send the same to your Chairman, requesting him to sack you. How can an Electricity Board be in profit with EE like you"
- EE : "What have I done? You asked me to come on Friday. I have come on dot."

Govindram : “What have you done? You told me that more than 50% of your thermal plant is shut down, that means more than 100 MW capacity is not available. One KW at Rs 0.50 means your electricity board lost Rs 12 in a day, i.e. Rs 24 in two days. One Megawatt (1000 KW) means Rs 24000/- loss in 2 days and 100 MW power station shut down for two days means Rs 24 lakhs lost. I am going to tell your Chairman this and request your sacking. Do you realize how much loss you have created?”

EE :”Rs. 24 lakhs”

Govindram : “(Further infuriated) Rs 24 lakhs, 100 MW is more than the requirement of Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) with several hundred crores annual turnover. Do you realize now how much loss you have created?”

EE :“(Now shocked) Over Rs. 2 Crs.”

Govindram : “Over Rs 2 Crs? Where does the steel go. BSL supplies steel for railway tracks. You have made railways lose out revenue that could have come through incremental expansions of tracks. Similar loss has occurred to other customers of BSL. Do you know how much Indian economy has lost because of you. This is what I am going to write to your Chairman. Now tell me where have you been for the last two days?”

EE : (Now apologetic) I am sorry. Indeed I did not realized the gravity of my absence. You know there is hardly any opportunity for us to come to this side. Since, you asked me to come on Friday, I thought of making use of this time to go and see Mysore, Vridavan Garden, Ooty etc. It never occurred to me that you will be able to get the work done in two days and power station could be put in service two days ahead and a huge national wastage could be avoided. I promise in future I will never do it as I can’t forget what you told me.

Govindram : “It is unfortunate. The direct loss you created is more than salary of all the staff of your plant for the whole month. Even if all your staff was given LTC the amount would have been less. OK. Now when you go back, please send me the order for spares required to keep the plant up. You know, if you had spares, you could have saved one full week, and almost 2% of annual revenue loss of your power station and its customers could have been avoided”.

EE :”Thanks. I will do it.”

Sharing the incidence with a friend later, Govindram said: “Although I was not sure that I could get the job done in two days and was furious with E.E., but honestly I myself had not realized how we mattered. Remember the way I had responded when E.E. came to me on Monday”.

Forty years later, after retirement, Govindram was wondering whether one realises how he matters to the country even today. Why else the richest industrialist chopped off gas supply of close to 17000 MW generating capacity gas based power stations for several months. How many politicians, media persons, bureaucrats, doctors, even academicians, at various levels realise how much they matter to the country. Is it a matter of could or would? Above all what needs to be done to bring this realisation?

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