

Service - with a smile if possible

Dato' Dzul kifli Abd Razak

Article

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THE government wants the public delivery system to be drastically improved. Chief Secretary to the government Tan Sri Mohd Sidek Hassan has ordered heads of department to make unannounced visits to public counters to check out the situation.

The chief secretary believes the most important part of service is speed.

"Everyone expects to be served fast, be it at the government departments, banks or restaurants. I would rather be served fast with or without a smile rather than not be served at all. But the best and ideal service is one that is fast and with a smile," he said.

This is possible going by the examples he singled out—Subang Jaya's Municipal Council, the Employees Provident Fund office in Petaling Jaya and Immigration Department offices.

Not so long ago, "little Napoleons" were said to be the stumbling blocks to efficient and friendly service.

They were said to be bosses of their own, quite like Napoleon himself, who allegedly reckoned that it is not necessary that the truth be suppressed, as long as it can be delayed.

But Napoleon considered "speed" as an important factor. Jerry Manas (2006), in his book *Napoleon on Project Management*, lists it as one of the six primary principles advocated by the French leader.

Likening project management to a "war" (which arguably it is), Manas made his case by quoting Napoleon: "The loss of time is irreparable in war. The reasons that one gives are always poor, because operations misfire only through delays."

To reduce the delays, at least three things are vital — reducing resistance, increasing urgency and focusing on the project.

As mentioned, speed is one of six winning principles attributed to Napoleon's rise to power, as analysed by Manas.

The other five are exactitude, flexibility, simplicity, character and moral force.

Again, it is worth quoting Napoleon: "Get your principles straight. The rest is a matter of detail."

In other words, there is plenty of room for the "little Napoleons" to rise to the level of a truly brilliant general and skilful diplomat if the six winning principles are understood and put into practice.

Drawing from Napoleon's "unrivalled career" is useful. After all, when he took over as first consul, France was said to be in a devastated state of affairs.

But Napoleon turned France into one of the greatest nations of its time. In all, he led more than 50 military campaigns, most of which he successfully managed and executed, turning him into the ruler of all western Europe.

So the future of the "little Napoleons" can be quite bright if they fight their "wars" intelligently.

In fact, there are other opportunities to even out-perform the real Napoleon, given the emergence of a "new" science-based service.

Service science, Management and Engineering, or SSME, is today the multi-disciplinary approach that is incorporating content from a variety of disciplines.

Academe such as the University of California at Berkeley are among the earliest to develop a SSME programme.

Its multi-disciplinary effort has foundations in economics, computer science, engineering, law and organisational sociology.

Others taking a similar approach include University of Maryland, Arizona State University, Northern Illinois University and UC Santa Cruz.

North Carolina State University created an MBA track for services and a computer engineering degree for services as well.

A number of multinational IT giants have also adopted the SSME as an interdisciplinary initiative, drawing on ideas from existing disciplines.

Some even consider social and cognitive sciences, human resources management, marketing, operations research, as well as legal sciences.

The ultimate aim is to integrate them into a coherent whole as a prerequisite for a services-led economy. Academic SSME-based publications are also starting to appear.

Just as how the manufacturing sector uses mobilised scientific research as support, the same now applies to the services sector. Thus, more than just providing speedy service with (or without) a smile, services-led best practices demand a lot of skills.

More so when it comes to nurturing high-value services with knowledgeable persons talented in many disciplines.

"Little Napoleons", please take note!

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