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The Value of commitment!

At a recent visit to India, I visited a branch of a fast-growing ISP (internet service provider). Their customer base grew from 5000 to 150,000 in about two years! This is the sort of growth I have seen everywhere I went in India.

I asked the branch manager what enabled this huge growth. What was working SO well that made it all happen? I was given a 'list of key success factors' - response rate, clear communication by customer service reps, service levels and good quality technology. I asked for a story that explained the growth and again received lots of data and indicators. We went around in circles for a few minutes until I asked the branch manager to tell me about a customer experience he remembered personally that was his best. This time, the story came out very easily! Another consultant who was with me (who didn't know about AI) commented that throughout the story, the key theme he heard was around commitment to the customer. The Branch manager agreed that commitment is indeed the most important contributor to his (and the branch success). He then followed on, without any prompting, sharing a story that showed his commitment to one of his employees. It was a very inspiring leadership story!

He was wondering how to apply these new insights to his 'complaint resolution process' and to growing his subscribers' base even further. I asked him: "what do you want to be committed to and what do you want your team to be committed to in that regard?", "Resolving complaints quickly and reducing the ratio of complaints to customers" was his response. I asked what outcome would be even better. He responded "having no complaints". We continued the conversations a bit further and landed a topic for inquiry - "perfect connections" - this applies at multiple levels - both the technical level of connecting a customer to the internet as well as at the customer-service rep level and between employees and managers. It of course covers his concerns around complaints. What an inspiring topic!

Later on, the branch manager asked for my advice on how to improve the payment collection process in Area X. Payments for internet services were collected by visiting each and every subscriber once a month rather than online or through credit cards/direct debits/sending a cheque as many of us are used to. The team responsible for the area was simply underperforming. Their target was 400 collections per person each week (can you imagine, visiting 400 properties every week to collect payments?).

I asked the manager if the process works well elsewhere in his part of town. He said that yes, in area Y, his collectors are very efficient. I asked what can be learned from it that would apply to area X. The branch manager responded that they have already tried to implement the best practices from area Y back to area X and that the situation still did not improve much. He provided many reasons why it didn't work (primarily because of the different geography and density of subscribers). I then asked if there was anyone in the team serving area X who is already operating at, or close to, the desired level of performance. This seemed to generate more reflection and a few new ideas. Two members of the team seemed to perform at a good level. My third and final question was around those who were deemed not to perform well. I asked the manager, if any of the underperforming team members had previously experienced a period of higher level of performance in the past? Was there a particular week when one of them performed well? Were there certain days of the week that they were able to perform particularly well? These questions seemed to create another breakthrough with my branch manager. He started coming up with lots of ideas and questions he wanted to ask the team members...