

Peels & Meals

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Once upon a time officers had separate canteen facilities to that of workers. Two decades ago the Earthmoving Equipment plant of a major auto unit in South India was no exception. A large workers' canteen was operational, on a three shift basis, on the ground floor and a neat compact officers' mess was designed for the floor above. The latter was also the regular venue for entertaining national and international visitors.

So what was the problem? The staircase leading to the officers' mess was a challenge for the nasal system of the sophisticated visitors! Polite handkerchiefs partially came to the rescue. Why? The garbage containers were placed under the staircase and they chronically overflowed! Quality was certainly not a way of life in the vicinity of the canteen.

The new President of the plant, who was a quality enthusiast, questioned the volume and cost of garbage. A key piece of information was the daily rental of private dump trucks. These dump trucks cost the plant Rs. 7,000 per day. Over and above Quality (COPQ). A management team was appointed by the President to solve the problem. In order to understand the situation the team set up two types of bins; one for avoidable waste (such as cooked

food) and the other for unavoidable waste (such as peels and packaging). Avoidable waste accounted for two-thirds of the total canteen waste.

The team then embarked on a diagnostic journey, interviewing workers at meal time (remember, the plant worked three shifts). Here is a flavor of response to the question "Why do you waste food?" "We are in South India and you serve us North Indian food." "The meal break is only 30 minutes, and the lines are too long. So, I pile up food." "The ladles are too large. I could do with smaller servings" "The 'thalis' are much too large. so I pile up food."

The remedial actions involved:

1. Inviting a team of wives, by rotation, to set menu and supervise the same.
2. Scrapping the large ladles and 'thalis', and replacing them with smaller ones.
3. Investing the saved COPQ into worker welfare.

The workers canteen now doubles up as a recreation club with facilities for table tennis and carom. The walls are sparkling white and adorned with paintings done by the children of the workers. In fact they even published a calendar that showcased 12 of the best of these paintings.

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