



Case Analysis: Baby And Bathwater



It's not the language. It is the context. It's the tone. And it is the way you use it to create comfort, bonhomie and teamwork



Photo Credit : Tarun Gupta

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Bringing up a brand is serious business. Every word, every utterance builds or breaks the brand. It is like a life script that you write today!"

So, does Taarika who spoke those words, realise that Malhar is a Photogen brand in the making, as well? Malhar, is a raw uncut stone, entering the corporate world, with dreams and values he brings with his upbringing. We get a glimpse of this, as the young lad, could have easily stuck around, eavesdropping, and listening to Taarika's tirade and her angst with the Agency, but well-mannered that he was, he quietly moved out of the sensitive moment where she was admonishing the presentation team.

His sudden wake-up call comes the next day when the screaming Taarika, welcomes him to office the very next day, hurling abuses at him rather abruptly, making him search deep, and around, whether in the real world with the experienced and comforting Father Bonaventure or Fr Bon, as he is addressed, or the virtual world with his chat-friend Redwing705, for words of wisdom that would soothe his bruised mind.

This behaviour Malhar experienced throws me back to my early days in the corporate world, and I recall here, my own young days as a greenhorn, an inexperienced, client service executive at Lintas, the ad agency that created a number of memorable campaigns. It was baptism by fire, as I moved from a small branch to the sprawling office in Bombay. But what bonded the people across branches was: 'Culture' – he word that stands most used and abused in the corporate world of today. Culture of respect? Of innovation? Of entrepreneurship? Bohemian? Frugal? High-handed? Layered? Indian? MNC? "Lala"?



But the most important aspect of that culture was 'respect' from the corner cabin to the lowly trainee, why even our tea boy Sundar – as people from the most diverse walks of life congregated to create an agency, create amazing work, create strong client relationships, and create futures.

As Fr. Bon, told Malhar, "That is how the world is today, son... see how she interacts with others how she communicates, how are those interactions different... Are you the only person or... are there in fact people she gets along well with, if so how come? Is she always like this... all this requires the capacity to observe. Use this entire fabric as a learning experience."

It reminded me of the discussion I had in the presence of my CEO, along with the biggest marketing director of that time and his distinguished brand manager. It was, by far, the agency's biggest client, and I put across the concept about how the biggest brand would handle an upstart competitor. Besides the few murmurs, my CEO stood by my side and listened.

The marketing director replied, "Navroze, we are the biggest MNC. We have market intelligence. For such quality product, the competition needs special machinery. And we keep track of each machine that comes into India." In short, the client believed that the competitor could not upstage them.

No screaming. No shouting. No abusive language, no deriding a young executive, but my query was answered with a polite lid being plonked on the question.

The following fortnight maybe, I received some production material in a carton that the printer had chosen randomly – with the brand name of a competitor, and an image of the product, the competition planned to launch!

I flew on my bike to my CEO's residence, who called the marketing director and we were at his doorstep with the damning evidence. The competition had managed to sneak through our client's most elaborate 'market intelligence' network! The client was embarrassed, but accepted the eye-opening evidence. There was a pat on my back, and within a few hours, I was on a plane to Hyderabad to monitor the launch of the competitor brand.

The brand manager of the client company, who later went on to become the MD of the company, was bewildered by the developments. But was there any bad mouthing of the agency or the carrier of the bad news? No, Taarika, no! There was, of course. shock, indignation and acceptance. Yes, there was good humoured banter, and the reincarnation of 'James Bond' at the Lintas office.

Many years later, I sent a fax request to meet the same brand manager-turned-MD. I had moved on from Lintas. Nearly 15 years had flown by, but amazingly nothing had changed at the client or with the new MD, for the unchanging substratum was: culture and respect.

The new MD was a big man and was running one of the world's largest MNC, and I was the CEO of a mid-sized advertising agency. Did that make a difference to him?

Well, to my surprise, the man himself walked out of his corner office, to welcome me with a warm hug, at the lift lobby and his trademark endearments. And he spoke in Hindi, interspersed with some Punjabi too. It is not the language. It is the context. It's the tone. And it's the way you use it to create comfort, bonhomie and teamwork. Taarika could well learn from this.

As Redwing705 told Malhar, 'You go to a workplace not just to learn brand building or quantum analysis... .. to also learn life there, in its raw form ...greed, selfishness, anger, jealousy... Money you will make, son, but grab that extra, learn life...'

For we all build people around us, and ourselves into brands, Taarika! Human beings who work for you are your greatest assets and brands.

That is what I learnt at a very early stage of my life and saw how great people went on to become greater on the back of culture and respect!

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