

## Learning Devotion with Mr. Murali Srinivasan



*Mr. Murali Srinivasan and Mr. Anil Kumar Mishra with Dr. Shubhajit Bhattacharyya and student managers at IMT, Nagpur*

Institute of Management Technology, Nagpur had the honour to host Mr. Murali Srinivasan and other eminent persons from Indian Oil Corporation Limited. Mr. Srinivasan has worked in the company for over 30 years at various cities on various posts. He is currently designated as the Executive Director at Indian Oil Corporation Limited, PSU of India. He addressed the student managers on the topic ‘Alchemy of Customer Devotion’.

Here are some excerpts from the interview.

**Q1.** As mentioned, deregulation came in during your tenure in Nagpur, what were the changes you saw in the Oil Industry after the Make-in-India Campaign was introduced?

**Ans.** The Make-in-India Campaign came in much later, when the current Government came into being. Deregulation was declared as a globalisation, privatisation exercise by the previous Government. At the time, private companies forayed into the petroleum business started. They set up shops on many highways and urban areas. Since we were seeing deregulation for the first time there were a lot of lessons to be learnt from these private players also. Maybe we were complacent, we had a monopolistic market and we enjoyed a huge market share. The banks like ICICI and SBI had an option, and as soon as they had an option what a customer can do, they gave us the jitters also. Then we lost market share to an extent of 14.2% in diesel, we did not lose that lesson. We understood the gaps that were

available at that point of time as far as customer service is concerned. The look and feel of retail outlets was made good, network was improved and we indulged in automation of outlets in a very big way. We learnt the lessons in terms of the existing demand of the customer. We attribute a lot of our success to them as they taught us the lesson, because now we have graduated the customer from the 'king' to the 'God' also and we work on the customer devotion model.

**Q2.** As said by you, companies that were part of the Fortune 500 list, 10 years back, 40% of those companies do not even exist anymore. What would be reasons other than customer devotion, or the lack of it, that lead to this fate of those particular companies?

**Ans.** All the reasons like radars not being kept on, not listening to the market signals, working at noises always and missing out on signals and not having a scenario building that what-if analysis like keeping in mind external forces, for example there is a tax regime that is very much increased or there is another player who comes and does business, what kind of defence mechanisms the company has in its system and what sort of vision there is to carry the company forward, or the company was very complacent with whatever they were doing. Present success was a passport to future success. These were the reasons of failure for these companies mainly. The gaps in the customer's demands were to be filled. What the customer will want 2 years from now has to be anticipated and filled today.

**Q3.** For such big companies like Indian Oil Corporations Limited, there is a tendency to shift from inspirational model to institutional model. How do you balance the thin line between the two?

**Ans.** How can there be inspiration without having an institution. Indian Oil is a learning institution. I would request you all to come and have a look around at many of our locations. You will understand that all the practices that you are learning in your school are being practiced there. How can inspiration come without having an institution? We have an institution for which we are proud of and like I said earlier in my presentation, that I have spent 32 years in this company and not thinking for one micro second also that one day I might quit the company. So even if I have another 7 births to take, I would like to work in the same Company. You have to build citadels of passion only then you can be successful.

**Q4.** Like you said that Indians lack team skills, what would be the insights you would like to give the future leaders of our country?

**Ans.** To understand this, one should go and watch 'The Jungle Book'. The strength of the wolf is the pack and the strength of the pack is the wolf. You have to respect your team's capabilities or give them tasks according to their requirements or understanding their potential or working as a team and respecting each other. In today's world if you're working in team, you will work fine but as soon as you are given a task, you begin to compete with each other. So as team mates you can work together, you can click, but then you try to defeat each other's purpose because you want to project yourself as the better player.

**Q5.** The incident that happened in Bangalore, because of which the Company was bad mouthed in another very big company, was taken care of very quickly and sorted in a span of 10 days. But prevention is always better than cure, so what are the steps that Indian Oil Corporations takes to ensure that services all over the country are uniform and at par with regard to the quality of services delivered?

**Ans.** We have a retail organisation in place at the centre. We have three different types of training schemes. The experienced and skilled people for our entire business are the customer attendants, who fill petrol into the vehicles, are treated as one group. The dealers are treated as one group and the officers who are handling the dealers are treated as another. For each group as per their capabilities, for the group of officers we have a capability building exercise which goes on. Then there is another set of dealers who are given training in big management schools to make them understand what the latest management theories are and how they should really look at customers. Even at our level, we know how important the customer is and how important customer devotion is to us. The dealer program is called '*Parivartan*'. Another program known as '*Disha*', which is for customer attendance, how they approach the customer, how they treat the customer and what are the seven steps to be implemented. So these are the training programs done on a recurring basis. Out of the customer attendants we choose the best. They are trained under professionals and then they go on to train other customer attendants.

**Q6.** How was your experience at IMT-Nagpur?

**Ans.** IMT Nagpur was great. The complaint is that the students did not make use of the opportunity to get all your doubts cleared about the market or the industry. As professionals what you have to let go of, is the shyness. There was an opportunity to learn and I was very disappointed that I could not answer many of the questions which must have been lingering in your minds.